

GSK: helping young people with learning difficulties find work

Project SEARCH is an international programme developed in the US city of Cincinnati that provides internships for young people with learning difficulties.

Every year since 2012, global healthcare company GSK (GlaxoSmithKline) has offered internships in the UK to 12 people (aged between 17 and 24) who receive the benefit of both workplace experience and classroom learning. The aim is that when the young people graduate from the company in June, they are ready for the world of work.

GSK provides the classroom and equipment, as well as the work experience. It works with two partners: West Thames College, which provides a full-time teacher based at GSK; and supported-employment charity Action on Disability, which provides a full-time job coach.

In 2015, GSK surveyed student mentors and supervisors about their experience of Project SEARCH. Respondents said that their disability confidence had grown and that awareness of

disability had increased in the company as a whole. They now felt more informed about learning disabilities, and had learned to think and act more flexibly at work as a result. While the survey sample was small, GSK says: "Learning directly from people with disabilities has had a positive impact on the business."

Preparing for Adulthood, a Department for Education-funded programme, spoke to two people who have taken part in Project SEARCH. One young man, Ian, demonstrated good customer service skills and was hired as an employee by GSK. He became an ambassador for Project SEARCH, mentoring new students on reception work.

Charlie worked in security and then reception, becoming an ambassador for learning disability rights. After her internship ended, Charlie gained a Passenger Assistant Training qualification and started working on school buses helping children with disabilities. She is now a classroom assistant on the GSK Project SEARCH team.



What GSK learned from Project SEARCH:

- Learning directly from people with disabilities has had a positive impact on the business
- Non-disabled colleagues and line managers build their know-how and interpersonal skills when they get the opportunity to work directly alongside disabled people
- Learning how to modify your own behaviour is as much of a vital experience as it is to make practical adjustments to accommodate people with disabilities

About business disability international



bdi

a unique, global, business-led consortium working to the mutual benefit of business, people with disabilities, and the societies and economies in which businesses operate. It was founded by Barclays, GSK and Infosys, together with Susan Scott-Parker OBE.



bdi enables its member companies to:

diagnose and address the systemic implications of disability on their business as it affects their worldwide customers, colleagues, potential colleagues and wider stakeholders

jointly fund a cost-effective, central resource with unique business-disability experience



bdi does this by asking:

“What does global HQ need to say and do, to enable national leaders to deliver the consistent best practice that, in turn, delivers both business and societal benefit?”



bdi pioneers:

practical business-to-business collaboration, learning and influence, making it easier to deliver worldwide the best practice we brand ‘disability confidence’

Learning directly from disabled people: A toolkit for global business

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