“An amazing life-changing experience!”

Tracking and Evaluating Employ Autism

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This research was commissioned by Ambitious about Autism, which was only possible by the generous support of Pears Foundation, the National Lottery Community Fund and the Kusuma Trust UK who funded this work.

Ambitious about Autism's response to CRAE's research

Only 29% of autistic people are in any kind of paid employment, but we know that many autistic people want to work. Employ Autism is a programme that has been shown to improve the employment rates for autistic people, providing paid experiences of work alongside tailored training and support for the partner employers and interns.

Over three years, an independent study has been carried out to understand the programme and its impact on the interns, employers, parents and careers professionals that we have engaged with.

This valuable research has identified some best practice recommendations, both for how Employ Autism can evolve, as well as for other initiatives to consider.

AaA Pledge/commitments

Recommendation	Ambitious about Autism commitment:
1. Autism training should be part of a broader package of supports.	We have developed the Autism Confidence framework, encouraging employers to look at providing paid experiences of work as just one element of becoming more inclusive. Employers deliver on five workstreams: • Increasing understanding and acceptance • Supporting existing colleagues • Reviewing policy and practice • Recruiting and retaining talent • Creating inclusive workplaces
2. There needs to be a clearer process for requesting and implementing workplace adjustments.	We have a workplace adjustments passport in development. This will enable autistic young people to communicate their adjustment needs effectively with an employer. Training for employers in using the passports is also being designed to roll out to our employer partners.
3. Expectations of the internship must be clear and explicit.	We are committed to providing a positive experience for the autistic young people who engage in our programmes. We have been developing our offer to provide more opportunities for them to engage with our employability support services. This includes workshops, webinars and resources. The employer training and support we provide includes the reviewing of job descriptions as well as guidance in designing suitable roles for placements.
4. Employment schemes are not	We are growing our services for young people on a national scale. This includes the creation of mental health-specific

the only source of support needed for the transition to adulthood.	programmes, post-diagnostic support and development of projects to increase connections to communities and reduce isolation and loneliness. We are prioritising digital content, ensuring the materials and services we provide are accessible and relevant. We have an ambition to reduce the number of autistic young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) by 2027.
5. "Nothing about us without us"	The autistic voice and lived experience is central to all that we do. Co-producing content, programmes and services with autistic people, their parents and carers, professionals and experts is essential for us in effective delivery.

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Executive Summary

There is a concerning employment gap for autistic people: many autistic people want to work but find it hard to find and keep a job[1,2]. Such experiences can negatively impact autistic people's quality of life[3]. Schemes that provide supported work experience have been shown to improve employment rates for autistic people[3,4], but there is little evidence about how they affect the people involved, and what the long-term outcomes are.

The Research

The current report documents the findings of a 3-year evaluation of a supported employment programme offered by the UK-based charity, Ambitious about Autism. This programme, Employ Autism, partners with organisations in the UK to provide paid internships to autistic adults and offer tailored support to employers and interns throughout the process.

To understand the programme from all perspectives, our research included interns, employers, parents, and careers and employability professionals (CEPs), all of whom were involved in Employ Autism. The research involved evaluating the "Understanding Autism" training that was delivered to employers and CEPs and gathering information about the experience and impact of the Employ Autism internship process via surveys and interviews from before the scheme up to two-years after the internship.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Our evaluation demonstrated that:

1. **Employ Autism was useful and rewarding for all involved.**
   The scheme supported employers and CEPs to change their perceptions of autism, interns developed greater confidence and independence, and this was reassuring to interns' parents.

2. **Positive changes in employment metrics and skills were seen after Employ Autism.**
   Employment rates doubled from 26% before Employ Autism to 56% 12 – 24 months after an internship. Interns' practical skills also improved after the internship, but there was no change in broader measures such as mental health.

3. **Further development of the Employ Autism programme can ensure it runs as effectively as possible**.
   Setting clearer expectations of the internship will enable it to be beneficial for as many people as possible.

The evaluation of Employ Autism highlights some best practice recommendations both for future iterations of Employ Autism and other supported work experience initiatives:

1. **Autism training should be part of a broader package of supports.**
   Autism training was more effective for some people than others, and therefore should be part of a more comprehensive offering provided to help employers support autistic people in the workplace. It is important to note that training alone is not enough.

2. **There needs to be a clearer process for requesting and implementing workplace adjustments.**
   A standard process for requesting and suggesting workplace adjustments for interns and employers should be established and consistently enforced, with oversight from supported internship staff to ensure proper implementation. While many interns had their workplace adjustments implemented quickly, some did not have them implemented at all. It is important to end this inconsistency.

3. **Expectations of the internship must be clear and explicit.**
   Clear information about what the intern will get from the internship and support they can expect after the internship would help address the issue that some interns struggled with clarity regarding the expectations of the internship, and some disappointment when expectations were unmet. Internships should be a positive experience for all.

4. **Employment schemes are not the only source of support needed for the transition to adulthood.**
   Our findings suggest that supported employment initiatives like Employ Autism can help practical, applied skills, but may not affect change in wider aspects (e.g., mental health). As such, services such as pastoral, mental health, community, and educational support are essential to offer alongside employment schemes.

5. **“Nothing about us without us”[(5)].**
   Autistic people must be involved in the design, set-up, evaluation, and further development of employment programmes such as Employ Autism. The interns provided key insights about Employ Autism that were different to those contributed by

the employers and the interns' parents, and autistic involvement in the design and set-up of the training supported its overall effectiveness.

Preface

This research was commissioned by Ambitious about Autism, via the UK autism research charity, Autistica, grant number 7275. Ambitious about Autism developed and delivered the internship programme that this project evaluates, but they were not involved in data collection, analysis, or the write-up of the findings.

We would like to thank our funders, Ambitious about Autism, and all their sponsors, for the opportunity to work on such an important and innovative initiative that breaks down barriers to employment for autistic people. We also thank the staff on the Employ Autism programme for their support throughout the research process.

We are hugely grateful to everyone (and in particular the interns) who participated in this research. Participants were very generous with their time, in some cases doing interviews and surveys months, and even years, after they finished their internships.

Finally, thank you to the two consultants who provided invaluable feedback on the interview questions for interns, employers, and parents.

Background

Autism and Employment

In the United Kingdom (UK), approximately 29% of autistic[1] people are in employment compared to 76% of the general population. This is the second lowest employment rate of all disability groups[1,10]. While these employment statistics might underestimate the true number of autistic people in employment (due to those who are undiagnosed or do not disclose their diagnosis), there is a well-established gap between the 77% of autistic people who want to work and those who are employed[2]. Unemployment can have a negative impact on autistic people's quality of life and mental health, as well as their economic wellbeing[3]. As such, investigating how to reduce this employment gap is of crucial importance to autistic people and their families[11].

One route into employment is via work placements and internships, which allow autistic people to learn more about the workplace environment, their own employment preferences, and to develop important skills and experience for future employment. Such work experience programmes have been found to increase employment rates for autistic people who participate. The first hand experiences of those who take part, however, are rarely evaluated [3,4]. A more holistic consideration of work experience programmes is important to ensure the development of positive, meaningful, effective schemes for all those involved.

This report presents the findings from a research project that aimed to understand stakeholders' experiences and outcomes of a previously unevaluated work experience programme for autistic adults: *Employ Autism*.

Employ Autism

In 2019, Ambitious about Autism (AaA), the UK's education and employment autism charity, set up a supported employment programme, Employ Autism[12]. Its launch followed the

[1] In this report, we use identity-first language (i.e., describing someone as an autistic person) as opposed to person-first language (i.e., describing someone as a person with autism) because it is preferred by many autistic adults, parents of autistic children, and autistic activists[6–8] . We acknowledge, however, this preference may not apply to all, particularly with respect to those from non-English speaking countries[9].

Employ Autism campaign, run by the charity's autistic youth patrons, to emphasise employment inequalities for young people[13].

Employ Autism aims to provide autistic adults, aged 18 years and above, with work experience to build confidence in their transition into employment. This programme is offered via zero-cost partnerships with UK organisations. The organisations host paid internships of varying lengths (from a few weeks to year) for autistic adults, and Employ Autism provides tailored training and support to the employers before, during, and after the internship. The Employ Autism programme also offers personalised support to the autistic people throughout the internship process, including one-to-one help with internship applications, interview preparation, and support implementing workplace adjustments. More about Employ Autism, from its origin[14] to current process[15], can be found by following the hyperlinked text or the relevant links in the reference section.

About this Report

Employ Autism commissioned a rigorous, independent, 3-year evaluation by a team of researchers at the Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE), within the IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society. The research was led by doctoral student, Maria Ashworth, from 2020 to 2024, supervised by Professor Anna Remington, Dr Brett Heasman and Professor Laura Crane. The evaluation addressed the following aims:

1. Track and evaluate the Employ Autism programme with respect to how it facilitates effective transition from education to employment for autistic people;
2. Enhance knowledge and best practice understanding regarding how to support autistic people transitioning into employment;
3. Use the evaluation findings to develop recommendations to inform subsequent iterations of Employ Autism, and other supported employment work experience initiatives.

Who Was Involved in the Research?

To gain a holistic understanding of Employ Autism, this research involved four stakeholder groups:

1. Autistic adults, aged 18 years and older, doing Employ Autism internships (‘interns’);
2. Employers hosting an intern at their organisations (‘employers’);
3. Parents and carers of the interns (‘parents’); and,
4. Careers and employability professionals (unrelated to Employ Autism) who support autistic clients with employment outside of Employ Autism (‘CEPs’).

Everyone involved with Employ Autism between February 2021 and January 2023 was given the opportunity to take part in the research. Involvement in Employ Autism or using AaA’s services was not dependent on taking part in the research. Participants received information from the research team shared via AaA and/or the other participant groups that explained Employ Autism was being independently evaluated, what was involved, and invited them to be involved.

A total of 549 people registered their interest in the research (44 interns, 309 employers, 15 parents, and 181 CEPs), and 372 participants who completed at least one element of the research. These include 41 interns, 171 employers, 10 parents, and 150 CEPs. As participants took part in varying amounts of the research activities, specific participant numbers for each aspect are provided in the relevant section.

Depending on which group they belonged to, participants completed a unique set of questionnaires and interactions with the researcher before, during, and after the internship. See Figure 1 for a summary of the research process, and Appendix A for a detailed overview.

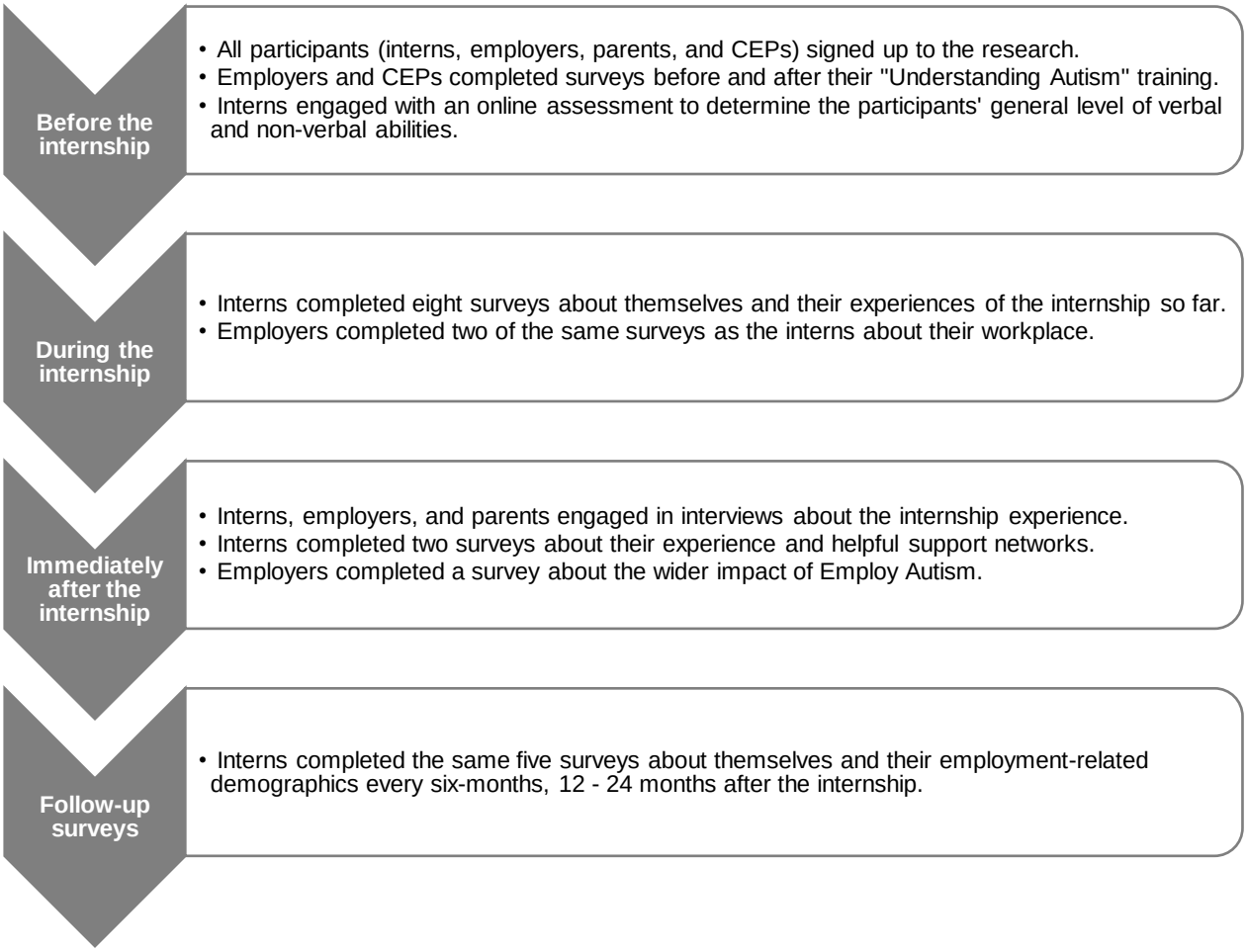

Figure 1: Summary of research process.

Interns, employers, and parents were associated with 31 internships across 28 organisations, including (but not limited to) information technology, financial services, recruitment, consulting, insurance, media and entertainment, and public sector companies. See Appendix B for an anonymised summary of the organisations involved, and a breakdown of group numbers by organisation.

The following section provides an outline of the participants' demographic information so readers have better context to understand the evaluation's findings, and how they might - or might not - apply to other people.

About the Interns

A total of 41 interns participated in the research. While varying numbers of interns took part in each task, across each time point, there were no systematic differences in demographic factors between those who did and did not take part in different elements of the research. As such, demographic information is presented for the overall group.

Most interns were men (65%), 32% were women, 5% identified as non-binary and one participant (2%) preferred to self-describe their gender as genderfaun (a form of gender fluidity that does not encompass female or feminine genders). When the interns started the research, their average age was 23 years, and the majority (93%) were between 18 – 25 years (5% were 26 – 35, and 2% were 46 – 55 years). The youngest intern was 18 years and the oldest was 51 years. Most of the interns were White British (73%) and the highest level of education reported was most commonly a bachelor's degree (37%) followed by A/AS-Levels (20%; see Appendix C for a breakdown of interns' demographics). None of the interns reported a learning disability, and this was confirmed by researcher-administered IQ assessment during the course of the study.

Fourteen interns (34%) said they claimed benefits, the main type being sickness or disability benefits (including Personal Independence Payment (PIP; 10/14 interns), universal credit (2/14 interns), unemployment benefits (1/14 interns), and employment and support allowance (excluding Disabled Person's Tax Credit); 1/14 interns).

About the Employers

A total of 171 employers participated in at least one element of the research. Most employers were women (59%) and were White British (79%), age between 26 – 45 years (60%). The most common highest level of education was a bachelor's degree (33%), followed by a master's degree (25%). The majority of the employers were from the South East of England (21%) or London (36%). See Appendix D for a breakdown of the employers' demographics.

About the Parents

A total of 10 parents (eight mothers and two fathers) of autistic people engaging with Employ Autism internships took part in an interview. Most of the parents were age 56 – 65 (70%), 90% were White British and one person was Caribbean. The most common highest level of

education was a bachelor's degree (30%), and the other parents' level of education ranged from GCSEs to a master's degree. The majority of the parents were from the South East of England (40%) or London (40%). See Appendix D for a breakdown of the parents' demographics.

About the Careers and Employability Professionals

A total of 150 CEPs participated in at least one element of the research. Most CEPs were women (82%) and were White British (81%), and the majority were aged between 36 to 55 (57%). The most common highest level of education was a bachelor's degree (27%), and the most common region was London (20%), followed by North West of England (16%), then the South West (14%). See Appendix D for a breakdown of the CEP's demographics.

Structure of the Research Project

This research project evaluates the time course of the Employ Autism process, and falls into three main studies of the beginning, middle, and end phases. The first phase looks at the "Understanding Autism" training employers and CEPs engaged with. The second phase looks at the experiences of the interns, employers, and parents on the internship. The third phase looks at the lasting impacts of the Employ Autism programme after the internships finished.

Phase 1: Evaluating Employ Autism's "Understanding Autism" Training

What we Know

People who work with autistic people in different capacities can impact autistic people's employment trajectories. For example, employers' lack of understanding about autism can be a key barrier to autistic people getting and keeping a job[16]. CEPs can be an important source of support for autistic people looking for employment by providing offer personalised guidance on finding jobs that match the candidate's skillset, making job applications, and navigating the world of work. Therefore, it is important that employers and CEPs have a good understanding of autism to help autistic people find and keep a job.

Ambitious about Autism developed "understanding autism" trainings for (a) employers hosting an Employ Autism internship, and (b) CEPs working with autistic people. The training courses are delivered online, over three – four hours, and include an interactive presentation led by trainer (an AaA employee). Both trainings were co-designed with autistic people and aimed to improve autism and neurodiversity knowledge, as well as practical ability to support autistic people in the attendees' relevant capacities (full details of the course's content can be found in Appendix E).

What we Did

As part of the Employ Autism evaluation, we wanted to see if the training helped change the employers' and CEP's autism knowledge[17]. In addition, we wanted to see if the employer training helped change employers' commitment to inclusion in the workplace[18,19], and if the CEP training helped change CEP's confidence in their ability to support autistic clients (i.e., their perceived 'self-efficacy)[20]. To measure this, the employers and CEPs completed the same survey before and after their respective trainings, and CEPs completed an additional, survey three months after the training that also asked about changes to their working practice.

What we Found in Phase 1a: "Understanding Autism in the Workplace" Training for Employers

Autism Knowledge and Commitment to Inclusion in the Workplace

This research involved 129 employers from 22 organisations (45 with an autistic trainer and 84 with a non-autistic trainer). Overall, employers' autism knowledge and commitment to inclusion in the workplace improved after training. This change happened both in the group with an autistic trainer and the group with a non-autistic trainer. This finding is encouraging and may be because the training was designed by autistic people, so both groups benefitted from autistic expertise even if their trainer did not have lived experience.

Despite the overall group change, when looking at individual performance, only 10% of employers showed a meaningful increase in their individual autism knowledge scores, and 6% showed a meaningful increase in their commitment to inclusion in the workplace scores. These results suggest the training was more effective for some people than others.

Our Conclusions for Phase 1a

This research is, to our knowledge, the first evaluation of online autism training for employers at a group and individual level. Employers who had an autistic or non-autistic trainer showed improved knowledge and commitment to inclusion in the workplace. The finding that the training was more effective for some employers than others provides evidence that supports a holistic approach to supporting employment for autistic people, whereby autism training should not be the only thing employers do to improve their knowledge and inclusion in the workplace. The research paper based on this study can be read here: https://doi.org/10.1177/27546330241249266[19].

What we Found in Phase 1b: "Understanding Autism for Careers and Employability Professionals" Training

Autism Knowledge and Self-Efficacy

Fifty CEPs completed the autism knowledge questionnaire before and after the training. Overall, results showed the group's average autism knowledge improved from before to after training. However, only 8% showed a meaningful increase in their individual autism knowledge scores from before to after training.

Thirty-six CEPs completed the confidence questionnaire before and after the training. Overall, the results showed the group's average self-efficacy in supporting autistic clients improved with training. However, only 12% showed a meaningful increase in their individual confidence scores after training.

Thirteen CEPs completed the confidence questionnaire before, immediately after, and three months after the training. The results showed that this group's average self-efficacy score also improved from before to three months after the training, but there was no change in CEPs' self-efficacy immediately after to three months after the training. Twenty-one per cent of CEPs showed a meaningful increase in their individual confidence scores from before to after training, and – despite the lack of group change – 6% showed a meaningful increase in their individual confidence scores from immediately after to three months post-training.

Changes in Practice

Before the training, 136 CEPs also answered questions about how they worked with autistic clients. Most of these CEPs had worked with autistic clients before (88%), but there was a range in CEPs' level of experience with 57% saying they were 'somewhat experienced' and 30% saying they were not very experienced (see Figure 2).

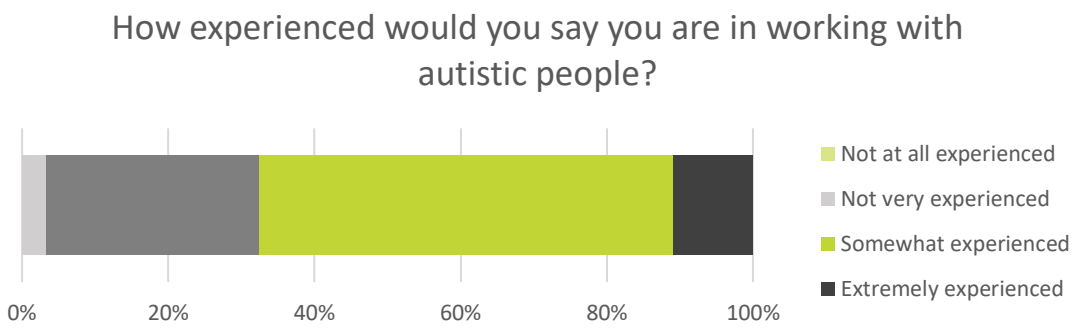

Figure 2: CEP's experience working with autistic people pre-training.

Three months after the training, 23 CEPs answered questions about whether they changed how they worked with their autistic clients. When asked about level of service delivery, responses were evenly split between those who were able to deliver more services to their autistic clients (39%), those who were not able to (26%), and those who were not sure (39%).

With respect to the nature of their practice, most CEPs reported being ‘definitely’ (70%) or ‘sort of’ (26%) able to change their practice at work in the three months following the training. This suggests the training was useful in helping CEPs adapt how they worked with their autistic clients. The changes to practice included better preparation for the autistic clients’ sessions, providing more detailed information about CEP staff and session structures, changing communication styles, and making environments more inclusive and accessible.

“I have tried to make appointments more accessible, for example by thinking about locations and distractions.”

These CEPs also responded to questions on things that might stop (‘barriers’) or help them (‘facilitators’) to change how they work with autistic clients. Most CEPs (65%) said they did not come across anything that stopped them changing their practice. Things that stopped CEPs changing their practice were often external, pragmatic aspects, including time and resources, planning and scheduling appointments around other commitments, poor communication with their client’s tutors, and no appropriate space to work with autistic clients.

Around half the CEPs (48%) said they experienced things that helped them change how they worked with autistic clients, but 35% said they did not (17% did not know). The things

that helped CEPs change how they worked with clients were motivated, cooperative, and supportive managers and colleagues, and the practical guidance provided by AaA.

Compared to before the training, CEPs were more aware of AaA's employability schemes such as Employ Autism, and most CEPs said they had heard of the schemes and were at least a little (61%) or very (22%) familiar with them (see Figure 3).

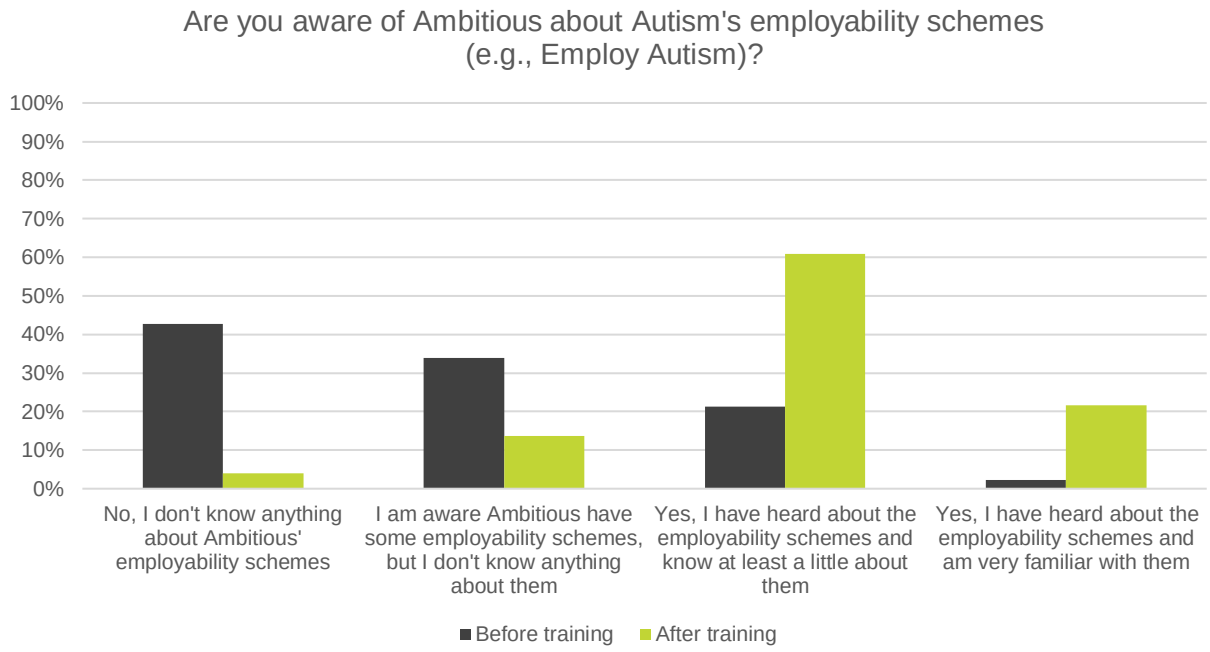

Figure 3: CEP's awareness of Ambitious about Autism's employability schemes before and after training.

Our Conclusions for Phase 1b

Overall, the Understanding Autism for CEPs training significantly improved CEPs' autism knowledge and confidence in working with autistic clients, but not every CEP showed a meaningful change in their scores, suggesting the training was more effective for some than others. Three months after the training, CEPs confirmed they were able to provide more services to their autistic clients. Most CEPs were able to change how they worked with autistic clients following what they learnt on the training, including providing more preparation material for their autistic clients and changing their communication style to allow their autistic clients to process the information adequately. Aspects such as scheduling, poor communication, and a general lack of resources, stopped some CEPs from making the changes they would like to, but supportive managers, collaboration with colleagues and practical resources from AaA helped them make appropriate changes.

Phase 2: Experiences of the Internship

What we Know

It was important to understand what the experience of the internship was like for the interns and employers. I was also important to understand the views of the interns' parents, who are often very involved in their young person's transition into adulthood and employment due to the lack of services and support elsewhere[21].

What we Did

In this phase of the research, we asked the interns and employers to complete various surveys about their experience of specific aspects in their workplace (workplace adjustments, organisational culture, workplace wellbeing, performance, and motivation). Some interns, employers, and parents also took part in interviews to explain more about their experiences and views of Employ Autism. We also asked the interns to reflect on what were helpful sources of support and what skills they learnt, and employers to reflect on any wider impact Employ Autism had on their workplace.

What we Found

Workplace Adjustments

All 41 interns answered questions about workplace adjustments on their internship. Most interns said being able to make adjustments in the workplace was “extremely” (55%) or “very” (33%) important (see Figure 4).

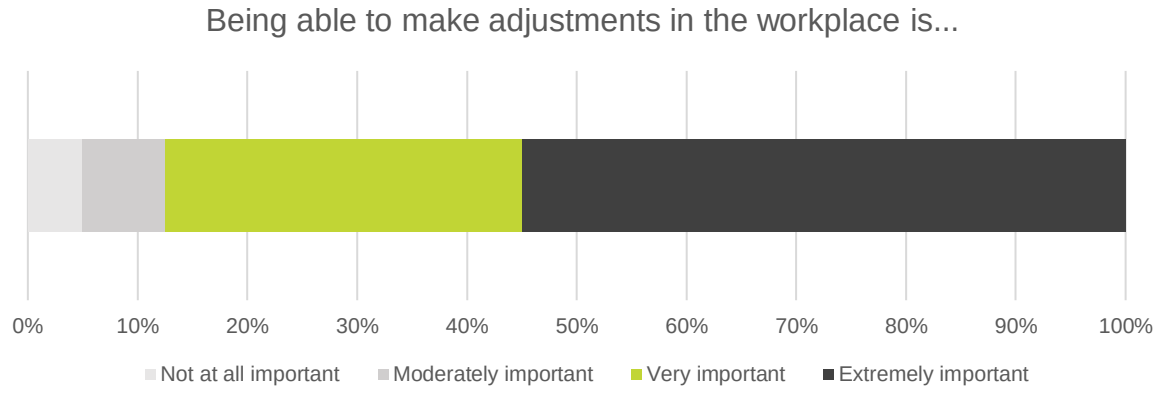

Figure 4: Interns' rating of the importance of workplace adjustments.

Over half of the interns asked for workplace adjustments (59%), and some had them suggested by their employer (12%). Encouragingly, most of those who requested or accepted workplace adjustments had them implemented properly (61%). However, a small proportion (9%) did not have their adjustments implemented in the workplace. Several interns did not feel adjustments were necessary for them (22%; see Figure 5)

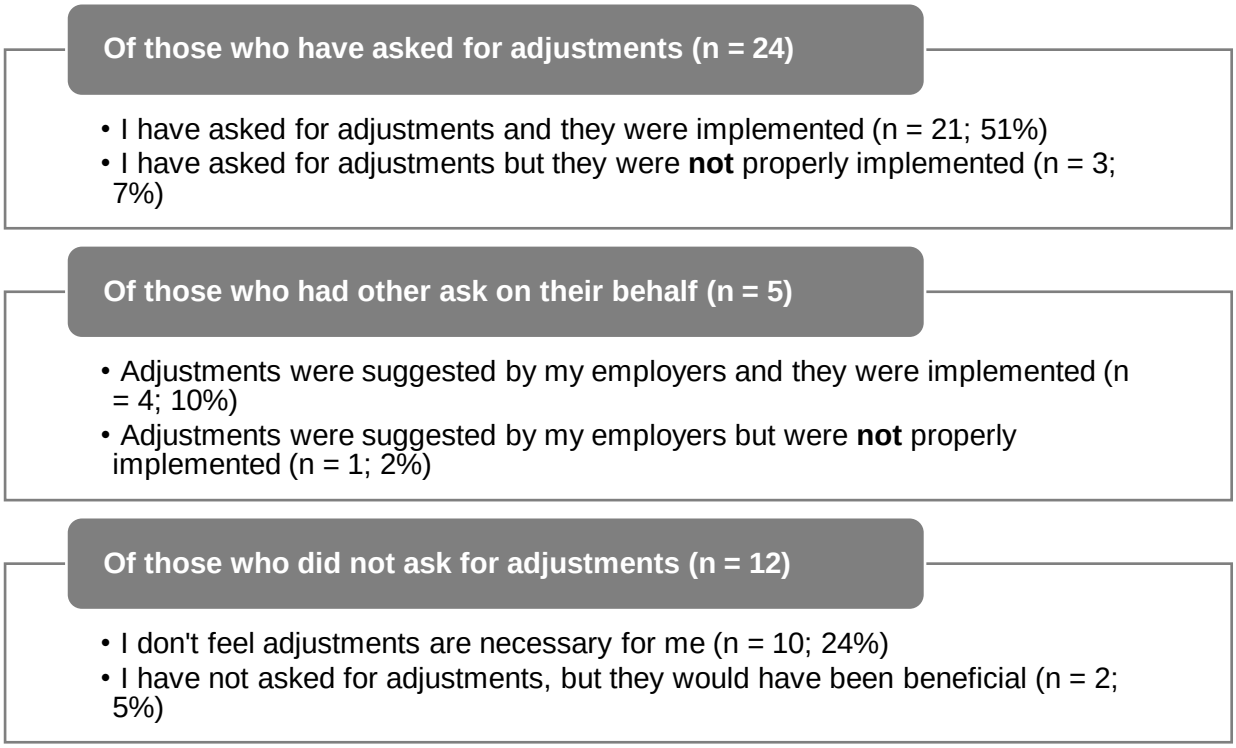

Figure 5: Summary of implementation of workplace adjustments.

Of the 29 interns who asked for or accepted suggested adjustments from employers, most had them in place immediately (79%), or 1 – 3 months after being requested (17%), but one interns' adjustment was never implemented (3%; see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Time taken to implement workplace adjustments.

The most common type of workplace adjustment was changes to working hours (32%), followed by changes to communication (27%), and changes to supports (e.g., information resources or mentors; 22%). See Figure 7 for all adjustment types.

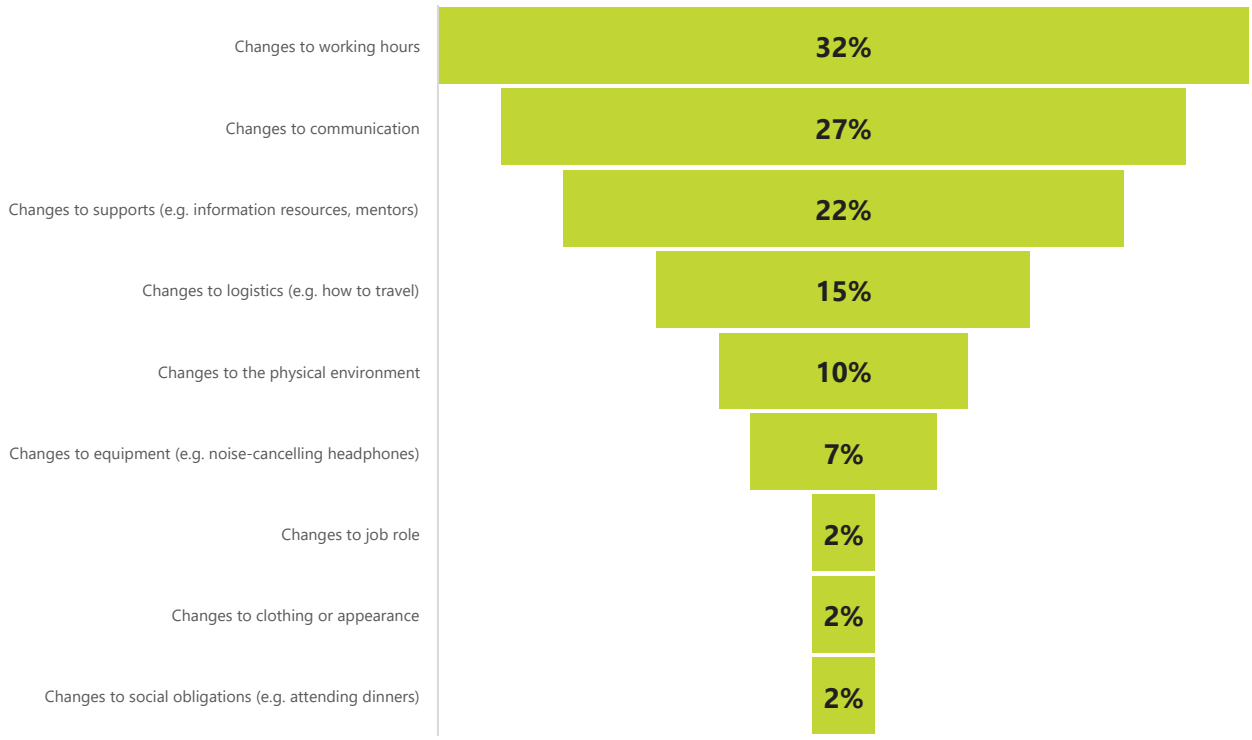

Figure 7: Percentage of workplace adjustments requested.

Examples of successful adjustments included changes to working hours to accommodate for busy commuting times, and the option for remote working:

> **"My internship employers were very flexible when it came to my commuting time. I explained that I found travelling at peak times in crammed train carriages and stations to be stressful, and they permitted me to travel into work slightly later and leave the office slightly earlier so that I could avoid this stress."**

Interns also said it was helpful to have regular catchups and contact with line managers and colleagues, and establishing certain ways of communicating:

> **"I set up a specific way to communicate - via emails or teams before calls 100% of the time."**

The interns also found it beneficial to know what to expect from the workday, including where to sit in the office, and what would come up in meetings.

> **"I was given a specific seat that I knew would be left empty for me."**

Workplace Wellbeing

At least halfway through the internship, 38 interns completed a survey about their *wellbeing* in the workplace[22,23]; the way they feel about themselves and their lives in relation to work. The workplace wellbeing survey included 31 questions about how much their workplace did different things within four areas: work satisfaction, organisational respect, employer care, and intrusion into private life. Answers to two of the most relevant questions for autistic interns from each subscale are presented here (see Figure 8 and see Appendix F for answers to all questions and subscales).

Overall, interns' workplace wellbeing was good across all four areas. Most interns said the work on the internship was fulfilling (61% responding quite a bit or extremely) and increased their sense of worth (68% responding quite a bit or extremely). All the interns felt that their employers respected their staff, were empathetic and understanding about their work concerns, and felt their transactions with their bosses were generally positive. Most interns said they did not feel stressed at all (32%) or only a little bit stressed (34%) in organising their worktime to meet the organisation's demands, and 68% said their work didn't negatively impact on their self-esteem at all.

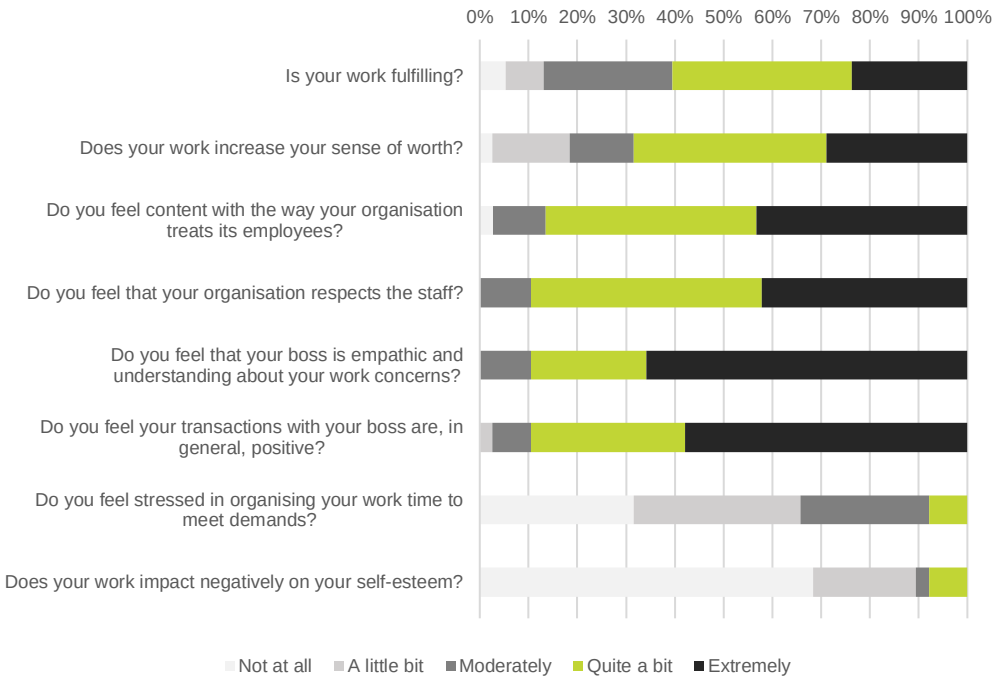

Figure 8: Selection of responses to a selection of items from the Workplace Wellbeing survey.

Organisational Culture for Interns and Employers

All 41 interns and 76 employers from 18 organisations completed a survey about the internship's *organisational culture*; the values, beliefs, attitudes, and systems that guide and inform employees' behaviour and actions (see Appendix G for full survey). Interns and employers completed the same survey so each group's answers could be compared to see where views of the workplace's organisational culture were similar or different.

The interns and employers reported similar levels of agreement for many items about the organisation's culture. For example, 98% of interns agreed that their internship employer was open to their input, compared to 91% of the employers at the internship organisation. Similar proportions of interns (68%) and employers (66%) agreed they had strong trust in their organisation and the way it communicates with them, and most interns (83%) and employers (92%) agreed they could express themselves freely in their work team. These likenesses in answers are encouraging because it suggests interns had a similar experience of the organisation to its permanent employees, so both sets of answers about what the organisational culture is like at Employ Autism internships can be viewed more reliably.

The item with the biggest difference in proportions of answers was "I have never encountered stigma in my organisation", to which 7% of interns disagreed compared to 26% of employers. This is a positive finding and suggests the Employ Autism programme facilitates a supportive and accepting environment.

Autism-specific organisational culture

There were more differences between interns' and employers' answers to items about organisational culture specifically related to autism. The interns held more positive views of autism-specific organisational culture compared to the current, permanent employees.

For example, 46% of interns agreed that the people at their internship had excellent knowledge of autism, compared to 8% of the employers. Similarly, only 2% of interns disagreed that their internship employer was proactive in making adjustments and providing autism awareness for employees, compared to 16% of employers. The majority of interns (68%) agreed the internship organisation performs better than other organisations in terms of quality of support for autistic employees, compared to half (51%) the employers. These differences in responses between interns and employers show that Employ Autism internships facilitate and provide a supportive environment that is seen and experienced by

the interns. Such changes to inclusive practice could be used as a lesson of best practice for the rest of the organisation who may not be directly involved with Employ Autism.

Under half the interns (46%) and employers (41%) agreed that it was easy to find information about supporting autistic employees, suggesting there is room for such information to be more easily available and accessible. Encouragingly, 85% of interns and employers agreed that if a new person were to disclose they were autistic, they would be well supported and understood, suggesting Employ Autism organisations have a compassionate organisational culture.

Performance and Motivation in the Workplace

As with the organisational culture survey, interns and employers completed the same performance and motivation surveys to see if there were differences in an interns' performance or motivation compared to a permanent employee at the organisation.

Performance

A total of 40 interns and 72 employers from 15 organisations completed a survey about how successful they thought they are in their current role (see Appendix H). Generally, interns said they performed well on their internships; all the interns said they were successful in solving problems at work, and that they could manage themselves well in the workplace. Employers had similar, positive views of their own performance at work, and around half of 52% of employers and interns said they were mostly successful at learning productively on the job.

There were areas of difference too. For example, more interns (28%) said they were 'completely successful' in being able to accomplish work under time and schedule constraints compared to only 13% of employers. This difference may reflect the more considered workloads for the interns over the planned internships.

Motivation

A total of 38 interns and 69 employers from 15 organisations completed a survey about how confident they were in their ability to do things in the workplace that demonstrate enthusiasm to do well at work (e.g., identifying problems and listening effectively to understand different points of view).

In this survey there were some clear differences between interns' and employers' responses (see Appendix I for full survey). Of most relevance to the present study, fewer interns said they were very (53%) or completely successful (11%) in their ability to determine what is expected of them on the job compared to employers (60% and 21%, respectively). Similarly, fewer interns felt that they were very successful (34%) in their ability to 'solve most problems with no immediate solution' compared to employers (56%). Fewer interns reported being very successful (42%) in 'understanding the behaviour appropriate to their role' compared to employers (68%). These areas of difference in the motivation survey could reflect the autistic experience and challenges that autistic people encounter. It may also reflect that, for many

interns, the internship was their first experience of that type of role. Interns and employers reported similar levels of success in learning from their mistakes (61% versus 57%).

Interns', Employers', and Parents' Views of the Internship

What we Did

We spoke to participants immediately following the end of any internships running from April 2021 – December 2021. Overall, we spoke to 19 interns, 22 employers, and 10 of the interns' parents to understand their experiences of the Employ Autism programme and its internships from a range of different perspectives.

What we Found

From these interviews, we identified three main themes shared by interns, employers, and parents (see Figure 9 for a map of the themes). The research paper based on this study can be read here: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13623613231214834[24].

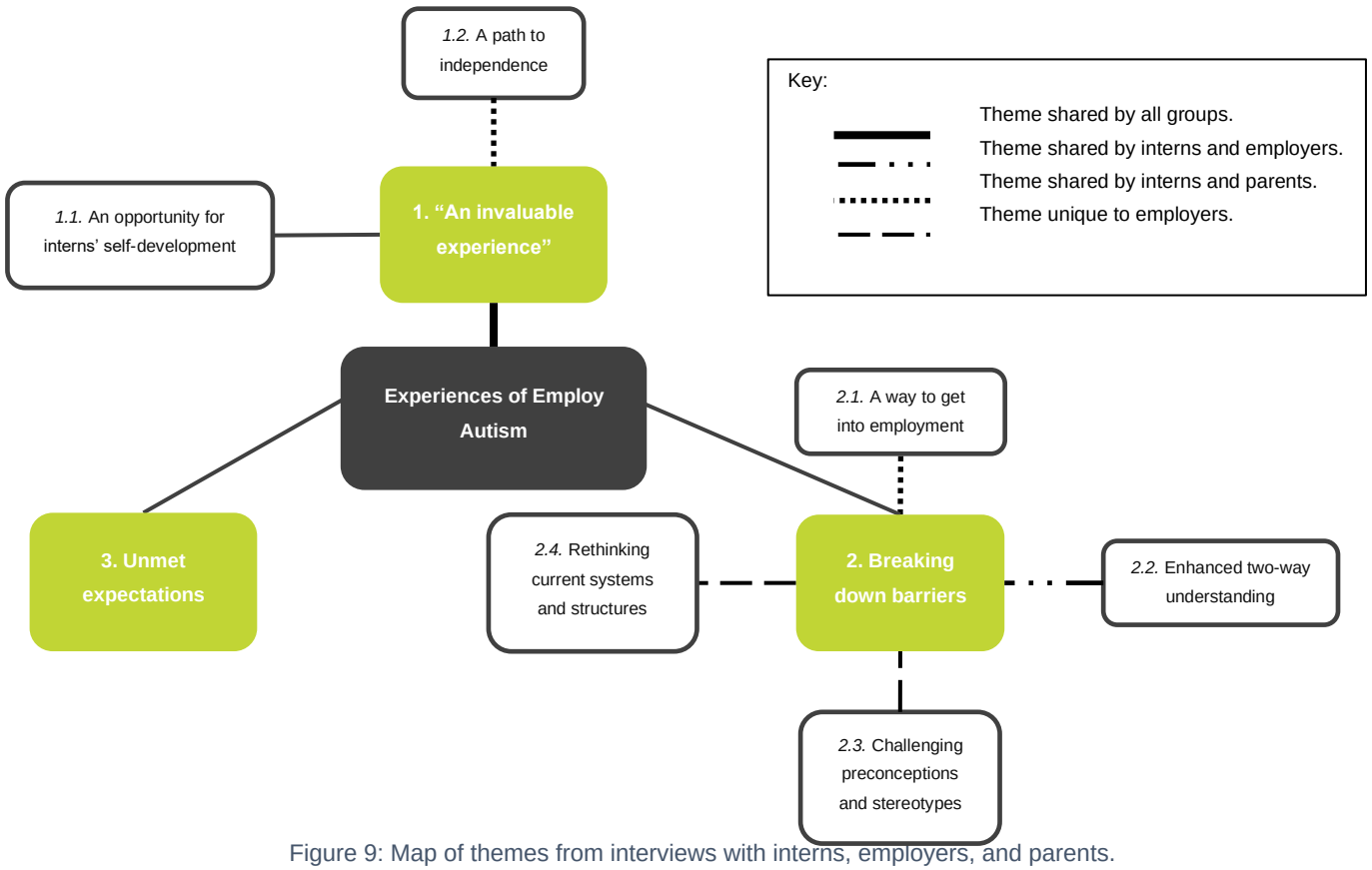

Figure 9: Map of themes from interviews with interns, employers, and parents.

Interns, employers, and parents told us that the internship was "*An invaluable experience"*. The interns and parents said the internship provided an *opportunity for the interns' self-development* professionally and personally by improving the interns' confidence in their own capabilities. The parents agreed that their intern's confidence had improved, and said the internship provided important experience of working life.

> **"I definitely feel more confident in my ability to feel like I can get things done… I think I always feel a bit afraid that I'm not capable of things… but actually most people can do most jobs and I can definitely do most stuff that is thrown at me… delivering what people want from me and expect from me." (Intern)**

Interns suggested that their improved self-confidence was because the work on the internship was meaningful and fulfilling, and they and felt valued by the employers on the internship. Employers said the interns were a "genuine asset" to their teams and the employers wanted to make the internship a positive and rewarding experience. The positive experiences on the internship led interns to wish they had benefitted from the opportunity earlier, but they also considered whether they would have been comfortable disclosing their autism diagnosis for an autism-specific internship at an earlier stage.

The interns and parents also said that the internships offered *a path to independence* for the interns' futures. The Employ Autism experience reassured parents about their young person's developing independence, and they described how "It's given me for confidence for [their] future".

> **"I eventually started doing things of my own accord… I felt that level of independence, I was getting a lot done."** **(Intern)**

Interns, employers, and parents described different ways Employ Autism was *breaking down barriers* to employment for autistic people. Interns and parents said Employ Autism was *a way to get into employment* due to the accessible and interactive nature of the Employ Autism application process and the adjustments made to the interview process.

> **"I just think it's an absolutely awesome programme… I'm glad that [my young person] had the opportunity to be able to have that experience and I think sometimes there does need to be like a conduit or a third party to be able to assist bridging that gap."** **(Parent)**

Interns and employers agreed that there was *enhanced two-way understanding* between them, and the communication "turned out to be quite effective". The employers felt that the Employ Autism internship enabled both the interns and the employers to gain something valuable, and said the interns offered a "different perspective" in the workplace. Many interns said they appreciated the internship being autism-specific and suggested that the training and support employers received may have been why they were so accommodating.

> **"Everyone there was very, very helpful and welcoming to me and very patient with me, because sometimes I take a bit of time to understand things."** **(Intern)**

The employers said the Employ Autism programme prompted them to start *challenging preconceptions and stereotypes* about autism. Before the internship, the employers said they were worried about hosting an autistic intern because they "didn't know what to expect" from the internship (e.g., would they be difficult to manage and support?), and/or had a preconception of what an autistic person might be like (e.g., "would analytical tasks suit them best?"). However, the employers said the Employ Autism training and working closely and directly with the interns helped debunk many stereotypes about autism they may have held. Yet the employers noted that some misunderstandings about autism remained and could lead some colleagues to underestimate the interns' capability.

> **"I felt some of my colleagues maybe had lower expectations and were overly hesitant… if [they] hadn't told me [they] were autistic, I wouldn't have known and we would have challenged [them]. So why shouldn't we challenge [them] just because [they're] autistic?"** **(Employer)**

The Employ Autism internship also prompted the employers to start *rethinking current systems and structures* at their workplace. The employers thought about what their organisation usually does to recruit and employ people, and they recognised some things that could prevent autistic people being employed at their organisation.

> **"[our assessment centre] isn't set up to cater for somebody on the spectrum because it's just expected that somebody's going to go and spend a whole day in a group doing different tasks… from talking to [the intern] you could tell visibly [they] wouldn't like that… [they] would be very quiet and it would probably look bad from a behavioural point of view." (Employer)**

Although the experiences of Employ Autism internships were overwhelmingly positive, there were some *unmet expectations* due to differences in what interns and employers thought the support would be like, what the interns' skills would be and finding suitable tasks, and what they would get from the internship. First, the interns felt there were some misunderstandings from employers about how much support they needed and when, which could be awkward.

> **"Once or twice, I encountered a situation where someone would want to be very nice to me, but the way they would phrase it would come off as a bit patronising." (Intern)**

Second, while some interns got what they wanted from the internship, other interns had different hopes of what their role would be, and said their skills did not always match the tasks they were given at work. Similarly, the employers said they wanted more information about their specific intern's skills before the internship so they could provide the right amount and type of support, and plan suitable tasks that matched the intern's skillset. Finally, other interns wanted clearer information about what they might get from the internship and parents also questioned whether the internship offered the interns too much support and gave "a slightly unrealistic view of what the real world of work is like".

Support Networks

Thirty-four interns rated how useful different sources of support were in relation to their Employ Autism experiences. Parents/caregivers were rated as the most useful source of social support, with 21% saying they were very helpful and 47% saying they were extremely helpful, demonstrating how important parents and caregivers are in the transition to employment and adulthood (see Figure 10).

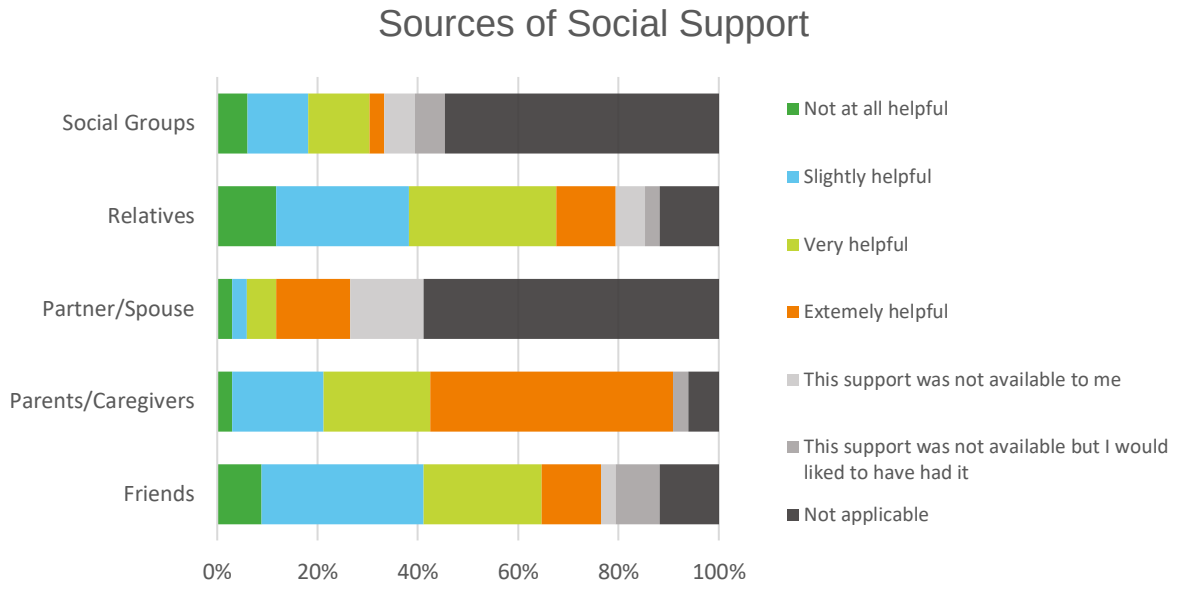

Figure 10: Usefulness of sources of social support for interns.

Encouragingly, most interns reported employers or line managers on the Employ Autism internships as ‘very’ (41%) or ‘extremely’ (34%) helpful (see Figure 11), but a small percentage of interns (6%) said they were ‘not at all helpful’. Most interns reported the Employ Autism staff were slightly helpful (24%), very helpful (38%), or extremely helpful (26%) with no one reporting they were not at all helpful.

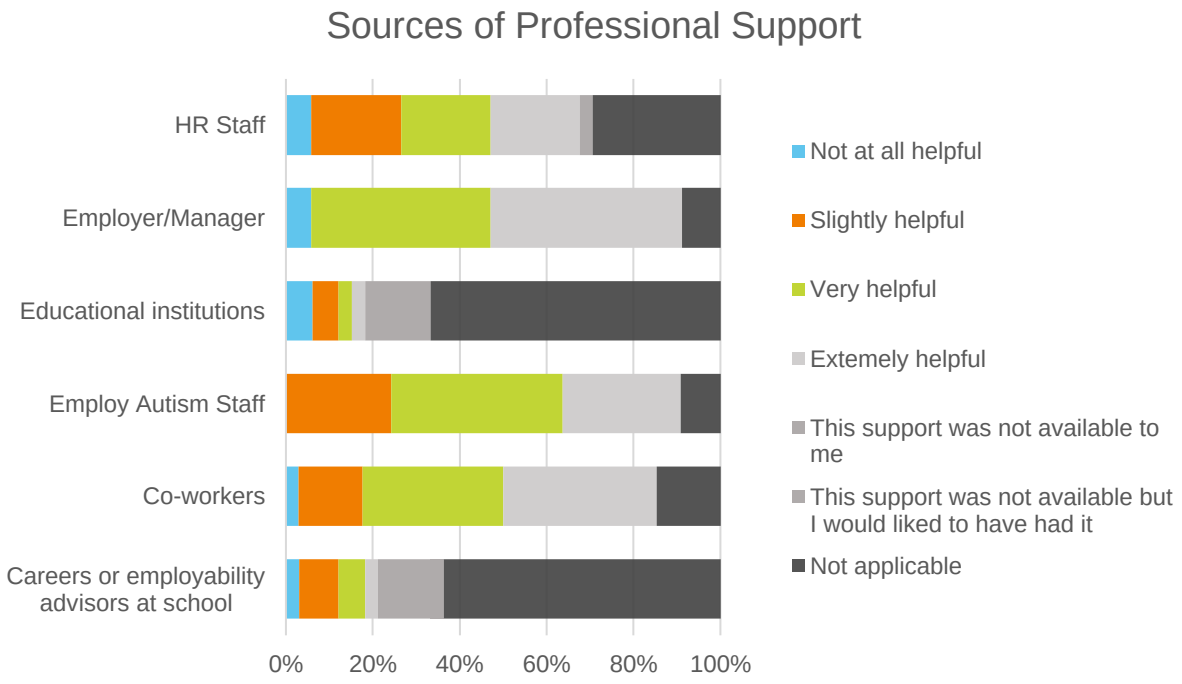

Figure 11: Usefulness of sources of professional support for interns.

Ambitious about Autism's Feedback Questionnaire

Thirty-seven interns completed a survey designed by AaA that asked the interns to reflect on what Employ Autism resources they had used and what specific skills they had learnt from their Employ Autism experience. Encouragingly, the findings were very positive and showed the interns found Employ Autism useful and they gained a lot from the experience, supporting the previous findings about the interns' experiences.

Before the internship, 43% of interns knew a moderate amount about working for an organisation. After the internship, most of the interns knew a fair amount (54%) or a great deal about working for an organisation (24%), suggesting the internship was successful in providing interns with appropriate work experience (see Figure 12).

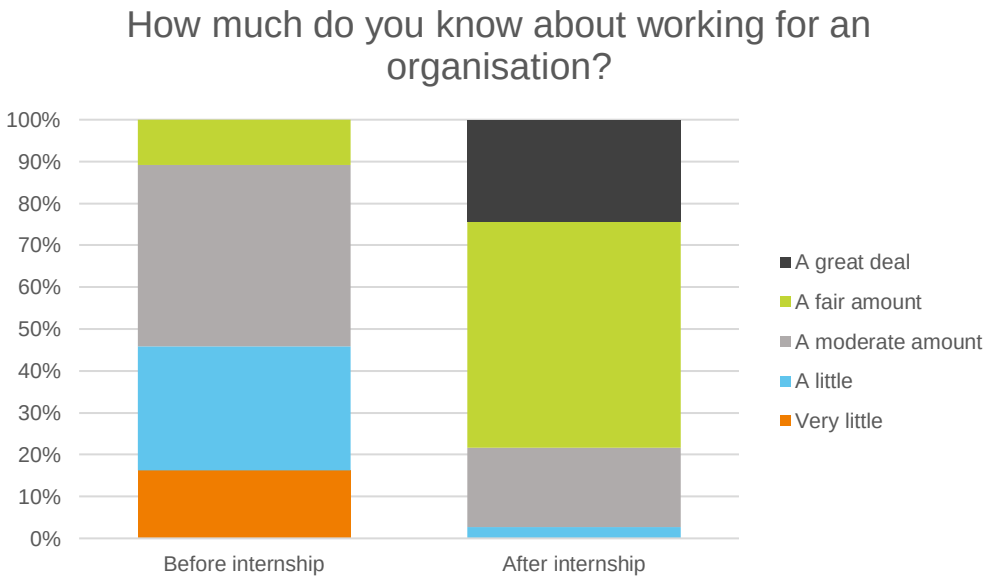

Figure 12: Interns' knowledge of working for an organisation before and after their internships.

Approximately only one quarter of interns said they used the support available from Employ Autism. For example, 27% said they used support with CV and cover letters, 27% said they used support with interview skills support, and 24% said they used support with the application. Although some interns may not have felt the support was necessary for them, there may be value in advertising the available support to a greater extent.

Before the internship, most interns had access to careers guidance (69%) and rated it as moderate quality (56%) (see Figure 13). It is hopeful, however, that most interns rated Employ Autism's careers guidance as good (41%) or very good (22%) quality, suggesting Employ Autism provides useful and appropriate careers guidance and support for autistic people.

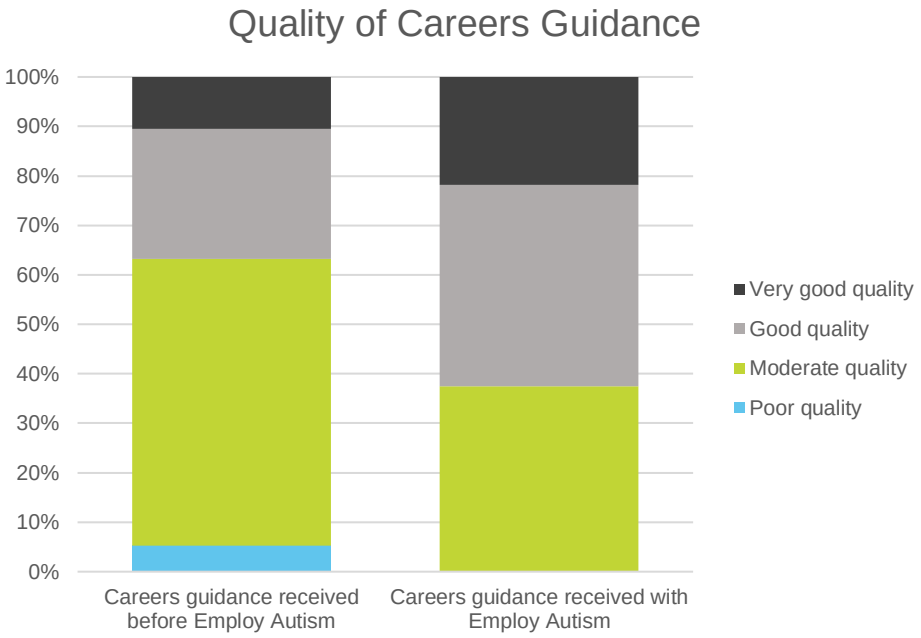

Figure 13: Interns' rating of quality of careers guidance before Employ Autism, and with Employ Autism.

The interns also answered a set of open-ended questions about whether they could apply their existing skills and knowledge on their internship, what new skills and experiences they gained, how the internship affected their view of future career options, the best and most challenging parts of the internship, and what support they were given to help with the challenging things. Selected quotes are presented here but see Appendix J for more illustrative quotes.

Many interns said they were able to use their existing skills and knowledge on their internships, including specific knowledge of software and techniques, and some instances of using broader skills gained in education or previous jobs. However, other interns were less able to apply their broader skillset on their internship outside of their knowledge of Microsoft applications. Even though interns could use skills they already had on the internship, they said they could learn new things at the same time.

> **"I used general work social skills from other work environments. I used IT skills I have gained from education and work."**

While some interns said, "I built on some skills rather than gaining new ones", other interns said they learnt new skills, some of which were very specific to the tasks that were related to their jobs, including attending to meetings, making charts and pivot tables, presentation skills, and specific analysis techniques. Some of the other skills the interns learnt were more general; about the working world and working with colleagues.

> **"I have since become more confident when it comes to the type of transferable skills needed to succeed in a professional setting."**

The interns experienced many new things on the internship. For some interns, everything was novel as they had no work experience, but for other interns, new experiences included commuting and taking part in meetings with colleagues. The internship also allowed the interns to meet lots of different people doing different jobs and at different levels. On a wider

level, some interns said the Employ Autism internship was their first experience of paid work where they felt valued, which made them feel good.

> **"It was good to take part in a paid internship. This, combined with the fact that I was travelling into London for two out of five working days per week, made me feel like I was doing a "proper job" as opposed to just voluntary work. This boosted my confidence and self-esteem."**

For some interns, Employ Autism helped them confirm that they wanted to work in a similar role or environment to their internship and there were some instances where the experience led to a permanent role at the organisation.

> **"The placement has help me know that I do want to work in this area, and I have now accepted a full-time position at the company I did my placement."**

For other interns, the experience helped confirm they might want to do something different, or work in a different environment to an office. For interns who were unsure, they said the internship experience was still helpful to think about different possibilities of employment.

Some of the best parts of Employ Autism included the people the interns worked with, learning new things, doing valued and meaningful work, and growing in confidence.

> **"The things I learnt… being given a chance even without much relevant prior experience meant I had a lot to learn but gaining this knowledge and experience from my role has become invaluable."**

Despite the overwhelmingly positive sentiments shared about Employ Autism, there were some interns who encountered struggles. Some of the more difficult parts of the internship included commuting into the office, noisy office environments, and technical issues. The interns also said that it could be difficult having lots of meetings (often with lots of people), managing the workload and amount of new information on the internship, and asking for help

when needed. Some interns also raised a challenge of a lack of clarity and structure in some parts of the internship.

Other challenges tended to centre around social and communication aspects, including wanting different levels of socialising at the workplace, understanding office etiquette, and struggling to have contact with relevant members of staff at the internship and Employ Autism.

> **"I struggled with fitting in at the office, even though everyone there was clearly knowledgeable when it comes to autism. I struggled with what the social norms are, and with what the "business casual" dress code exactly meant."**

For many challenges, different supports could be put in place to ease the difficulties. Frequent and easily accessible contact line managers, colleagues, and Employ Autism staff were noted as an important support to answer questions and provide guidance.

> **"I spoke to my line manager and one of the Employ Autism team who gave me general advice in how I could overcome these [challenges]."**

Implementing specific workplace adjustments also addressed some specific challenges such as commuting, engaging in meetings, and managing workload, and one intern who had access to a neurodiversity network at their organisation said this was a valuable source of support too.

> **"I would strongly recommend this programme."**

Overwhelmingly, the interns' reviews of the Employ Autism programme were positive. Although one intern said they didn't enjoy their time on their first internship due to an unsuited role and lack of contact with staff, they reported enjoying their second internship a

lot more. Overall, most interns said the internship was rewarding and enjoyable and recommended it to others.

Wider Impact for Employers

Sixty-three employers answered questions about the wider impact of Employ Autism at their workplace (see Appendix K1). Many employers did not know whether their organisation had changed any recruitment (45%) or general workplace (42%) policies as a result of the Employ Autism experience, but some said they were working towards change in recruitment (19%) and general workplace (22%) policies. For those whose workplace had changed or were working towards changing official workplace policies, examples of these included engaging further with Employ Autism to provide more internships, changing recruitment and hiring processes, and establishing policies of good practice.

Similarly, most employers did not know whether their organisation had hired more neurodivergent people since Employ Autism, but 17% said 1 – 4 neurodivergent people had been hired, and 3% said 5 – 10 neurodivergent people had been hired.

Soon after the internship, several employers said it was “too soon to tell” about any wider impact of the internship. Other employers emphasised general improved autism and neurodiversity awareness and acceptance, especially for those who worked directly with the interns (see Appendix K2 for more illustrative quotes of wider impact). Some employers identified more specific changes in awareness, including implementing workplace adjustments and the availability of information and support for employees. Employers also reported a particular change in how they communicate information in the workplace, the results of which could benefit non-autistic people too.

> **“It has changed the way we operate most noticeably in the way we communicate.”**

However, there were some mixed views about how much attitudes had changed in the workplace, and other employers thought the changes were “minor”, did not last, or only applied to potential neurodivergent hires. One employer acknowledged that there was still more work to be done to improve autism awareness and acceptance.

Our Conclusions

The interns, employers, and parents said the Employ Autism programme was valuable for interns' development, effectively broke down barriers to help interns get into employment, and encouraged employers to challenge their stereotypes about autism and their current systems that might unintendedly be exclusive. The interns were pleased that they found a programme that directly addressed barriers to employment for autistic people. However, some interns were not sure if they would have been comfortable disclosing earlier in their life that they were autistic for an autism-specific programme. Similarly, others experienced stigma relating to colleagues sometimes underestimating their ability and being unintentionally patronising. These findings highlight the pros and cons of autism-specific work experience initiatives and suggest there may be scope to approach work experience initiatives from a broader perspective of neurodiversity.

The interns reported that parents/carers were the most useful form of social support, and their internship line managers and the Employ Autism staff were the most helpful professional form of support. Overall, the interns were able to use their existing skills on the internship and most also learnt new skills. The Employ Autism internship experience helped the interns learn what working environments and types of roles suited (or didn't suit) them, and they enjoyed engaging with meaningful work. Some of the most challenging parts of the internship included the volume of meetings, an occasional lack of clarity and structure, and social aspects of the scheme. Good quality contact with line managers and Employ Autism staff were important in addressing these difficulties.

Many employers were not sure about whether there had been any official changes in workplace policies as a result of the Employ Autism experience. However, some employers did say there were going to do more Employ Autism internships, and work on establishing policies of inclusive practice at their workplace. There were mixed views on more general changes in attitude in the workplace; some employers did not notice a change, but others reported a general improvement in autism and neurodiversity awareness.

Phase 3: Lasting Impact

What we Know

Minimal research has examined the longer-term outcomes of work experience programmes for autistic people. Of the few studies that have considered lasting impacts, the focus has primarily been on the percentage that keep a job over a certain amount of time, and how much the person earns in their job. The impacts of employment, however, extend well beyond these factors and can affect autistic people's general wellbeing, including their quality of life and mental health. Considering this, an important part of the Employ Autism evaluation was to see what happened to the interns after their internships, including both employment-related aspects and wider, more holistic outcomes.

What we Did

A total of 27 interns involved in Employ Autism internships across seven organisations completed online surveys at three timepoints: before the internship, six months after the internship, and 12 – 24 months after the internship. These surveys not only measured employment related characteristics (e.g., employment status, number of hours worked, and income) but also addressed wider outcomes such as practical everyday skills[25], self-confidence[26], mental health[27], and quality of life[28,29].

To measure practical skills, the interns completed a survey that gives a score on three 'domains' of daily living skills, made up of subscales of assessing more specific skill areas. All these scores can also be added up to give a 'General' everyday living skills score. The Conceptual domain included three subscales that measured behaviours for (1) communicating with others, (2) applying academic skills helpful for daily, independent functioning (e.g., reading, writing, and telling the time), and (3) managing and completing tasks. The Practical domain included five subscales that measured behaviours for (1) making use of a community (e.g., recognising and using different facilities), (2) taking care of a living setting, (3) good health and safety, (4) personal care, and (5) working and keeping a job. The Social domain included two subscales that measured behaviours for (1) interacting with other people, and (2) doing and planning leisure activities.

To measure self-confidence, the interns completed a survey that assessed how confident the interns were in their ability to cope with stressful life events.

To measure mental health, the interns completed a survey that gives a score on three subscales of areas that contribute to mental health: (1) Depression (i.e., a feeling of sadness and loss of interest that stops you doing normal activities), (2) Anxiety (i.e., feeling worried, nervous, or uneasy), and (3) Stress (i.e., a state of worry or tension in response to difficult situations).

To measure quality of life, the interns completed a survey that gives a score on six subscales relating to different aspects of life for an autistic person: (1) Physical Health, (2) Psychological Health (i.e., mental health), (3) Social Relationships, (4) the Environment, (5) Autism Quality of Life (i.e., questions that are more specific to autistic people), and (6) Autistic Identity (i.e., how ‘okay’ someone is with autism as an aspect of their identity).

What we Found

Employment-Related Outcomes

Employment Rates

Before the internship, the interns were most commonly in education, with no employment. The overall employment rate (including interns in full-time or part-time employment, and education with employment) increased from 26% before the internship, to 52% six months after the internship, to 56%% 12 – 24 months after the internship (see Figure 14 and Appendix L1).

A quarter of the interns (7 of 27, 26%) accepted permanent contracts at their internship organisations. Of the 13 interns who were employed at more than one follow-up point, 85% (11 of 13) retained employment until the end of data collection.

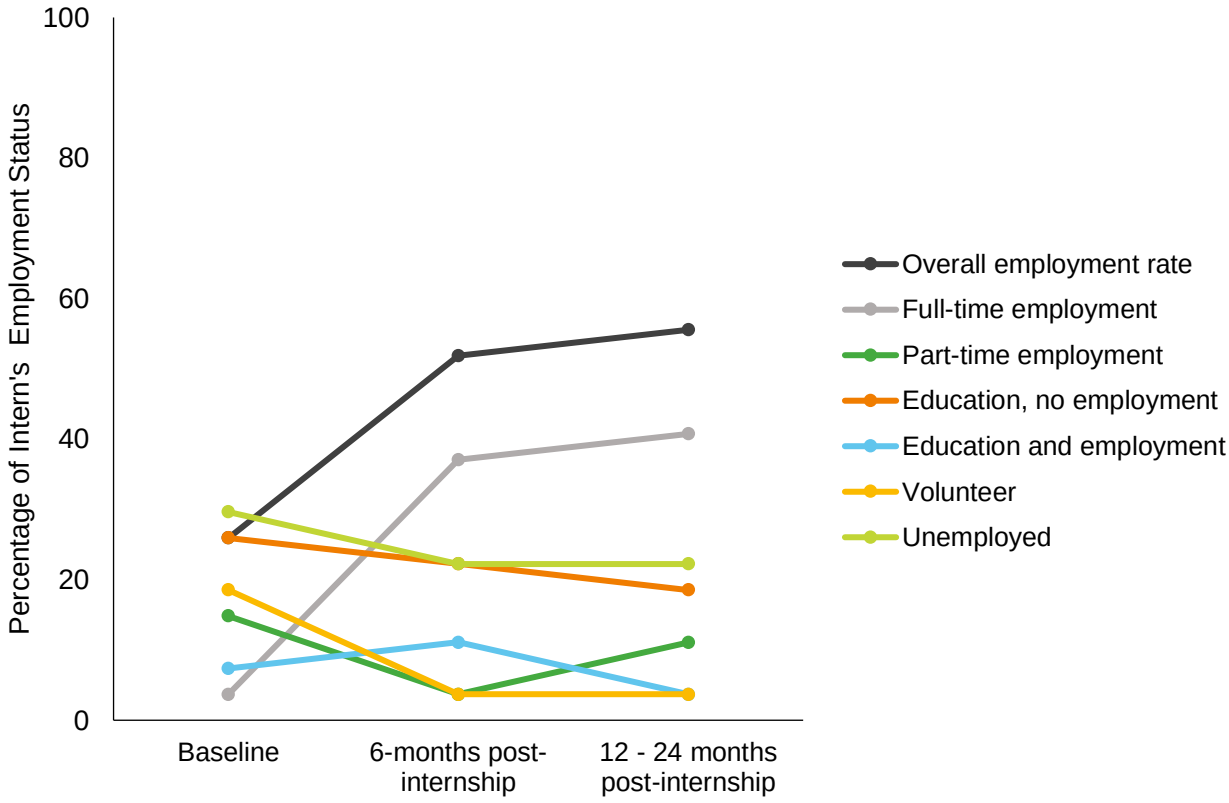

Figure 14: Interns' Employment Status before the internship (i.e., 'baseline'), 6-months, and 12 - 24 months post-internship.

Highest Level of Employment

Before the internship, most of the interns' highest level of employment was at a volunteer (25%) or apprentice/intern level (42%). After the internship, more interns said they worked at higher levels (see Figure 15). Six months after the internship, 52% reported that their highest level was apprentice or intern, while 41% had worked at an entry level or graduate-level role. Twelve to twenty-four months after the internship, approximately half (52%) the interns' highest level of employment was at an entry or graduate-level role (see Appendix L2).

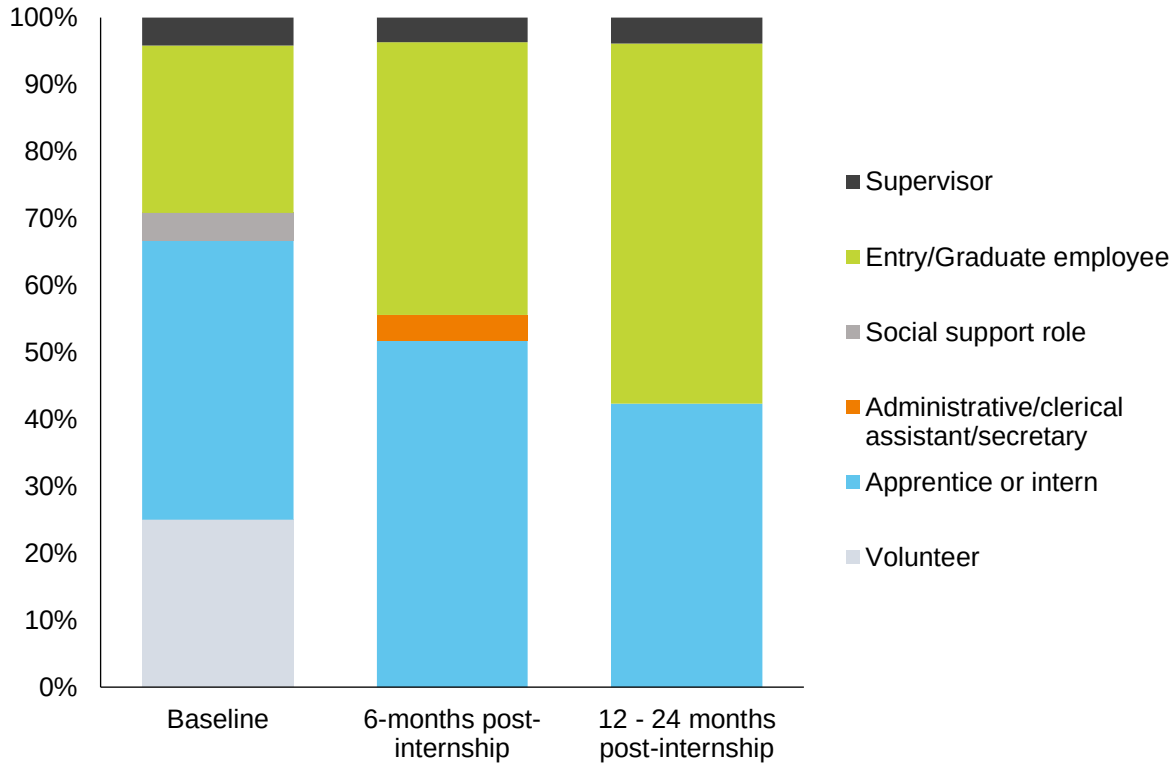

Figure 15: Interns' highest level of employment at before the internship ('baseline'), 6-months, and 12 – 24 months post-internship.

Employment Area

The most common areas of employment before and after the internship were in administration, hospitality, the public sector, and retail, but employment spanned many sectors including insurance, finance, recruitment, information technology, marketing, education and charity. See Appendix L3 for a breakdown of employment sector by time point.

Income and Hours Worked

Before the internship, 75% of interns said they earnt less than £10,000 a year. After the internship, many more interns said they earnt over £10,000 per year. For example, 6-months post-internship, 16% said they earned between £10,000 - £19,999, and 42% said they earned between £20,000 - £29,999. One intern (10%) said they earned £40,000 - £49,999 a year. Twelve to 24 months after an internship, 60% said they earned £10,000 - £19,999 a year or more (see Appendix L4).

Before the internship, interns said on average they worked 14 hours a week (ranging from 2 to 30 hours). Six months after the internship, the average hours worked increased to 29 hours (ranging from 1.5 to 40 hours). Although the average hours worked decreased to 23 hours a week 12 – 24 months post-internship, there was a broader range from 3 to 43 hours (see Appendix L5).

Wider Outcomes

Data analysis showed the interns' everyday practical skills increased significantly (i.e., in a meaningful way) from before the internship to 12 – 24 months after the internship for the Conceptual, Practical, and Social domains and the overall 'General' daily living score. Interns' scores also increased significantly for six of the domain's subscales: skills needed for (1) making use of a community, (2) taking care of a living setting, (3) good health and safety, (4) working and keeping a job, (5) applying academic skills for daily, independent functioning, and (6) doing and planning leisure activities.

In contrast, there were no meaningful group changes in the interns' average levels of self-confidence, or an any of the subscales of mental health, or quality of life across the evaluation period.

Our Conclusions

This is the first research to engage with participants of a work experience initiative for autistic adults before, after, and 12 – 24 months following the internship, measuring both employment and non-employment related aspects. Looking at the potential impact of Employ Autism on a range of different aspects of life helps us understand more about how work experience initiatives affect autistic people's employment rates, skills, and general wellbeing.

The proportion of interns in employment doubled from 26% before the internship to 56% in the two years following the internship. Increases were also seen in income and workplace seniority from before to after the internship.

We also found that the work experience initiative was helpful to develop practical skills that are useful for being able to engage successfully with work or community settings, but they do not affect all aspects of an interns' life, including quality of life and mental health.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although many autistic people want to work, some also find it difficult to find and keep a job that suits them. Supported employment initiatives that include a work experience element, have been found to increase employment for the autistic people that take part in them. However, not many of these schemes have been evaluated so there is not enough evidence about their impact on the people that use them. This report has summarised the evaluation of a new supported employment initiative for autistic adults without a learning disability, Employ Autism.

Overall, Employ Autism was useful and rewarding for all involved. For example, the internships and/or the autism training supported employers and CEPs to change their perceptions of autism, including their knowledge of autism and views of inclusive practice at the workplace. The interns developed greater confidence and independence, and their parents found this reassuring. Employ Autism was described as a way to get into work (or "a foot in the door"), and the interns reported good workplace wellbeing, said they learnt new skills, and that their line managers and Employ Autism staff were helpful and understanding.

The evaluation also found positive outcomes after the Employ Autism internships finished. For example, employment rates increased from 26% before an Employ Autism internship to 56% 12 – 24 months after an internship. Interns' highest level worked at, income, and number of hours worked per week also increased. Looking beyond the employment statistics, interns' general practical skills also improved in the two years after the internship, but there were no changes to other wider outcomes such as mental health and quality of life.

Despite many extremely positive views of Employ Autism, our findings also highlight some potential areas of improvement and learnings that could be used to further develop Employ Autism, and/or other supported employment initiatives.

We suggest five main recommendations for those wishing to implement a successful work experience programme for autistic interns:

1. Autism training should be part of a broader package of supports.

Autism training should not be the only thing used to try and improve autism knowledge, inclusion, and confidence in working with autistic people. Instead, autism training should be part of a bigger range of supports offered to people who work with, or want to work with, autistic people and support them appropriately in the workplace. Encouragingly, Employ Autism does offer wider support, and this should remain and continue to develop to educate those working with autistic people in a more practical way so they can work towards creating safe, understanding, and accepting working environments for autistic and other neurodivergent people.

2. There needs to be a clearer process for requesting and implementing workplace adjustments.

There should be an established and clear process for interns to request adjustments as well as for employers to suggest workplace adjustments to interns. Internship staff should check in on whether adjustments have been applied early and consistently throughout the internship. Workplace adjustments are an important part of providing a safe and supportive working environment, so all requested adjustments should be applied where possible and their importance should be emphasised to employers throughout the Employ Autism process.

3. Expectations of the internship must be clear and explicit.

Employ Autism should set clear expectations for the whole internship process for interns and employers (e.g., interns' skillset and what skills they will gain, as cited in this report), and there should be better planning in advance for what the internship will entail and what support is necessary post-internship.

4. **Employment schemes are not the only source of support needed for the transition to adulthood.**

Services like pastoral, mental health, community, and educational support are still essential alongside employment schemes. Supported employment initiatives like Employ Autism may result in positive changes in applied, practical skills to use in everyday work and community situations that are difficult to learn elsewhere, but wider aspects such as mental health and quality of life are less impacted by work experience schemes.

5. "Nothing about us without us"[5].

Finally, it is important that autistic people are involved in the set-up, evaluation, and further development of employment schemes such as Employ Autism. The interns involved in the scheme provided crucial understanding about the Employ Autism experience, including what worked, what did not work, and why, that could not be gained from the views of employers and parents.

Associated Publications

Further Information and Publications

Ashworth, M., Heasman, B., Crane, L., & Remington, A. (2024). Evaluating the impact of an online autism training on changing employers' autism knowledge and commitment to inclusion in the workplace. *Neurodiversity*, *2*, 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1177/27546330241249266

Ashworth, M., Heasman, B., Crane, L., & Remington, A. (2023). Evaluating a new supported employment internship programme for autistic young adults without intellectual disability. *Autism*, *0*(0), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613231214834

Conferences

Ashworth, M., Heasman, B., Crane, L., Remington, A. (May 2024). *Tracking the Long-Term Outcomes of a New Work Experience Initiative for Autistic Adults without an Intellectual Disability.* International Society for Autism Research (INSAR), Melbourne, Australia.

Ashworth, M., Heasman, B., Crane, L., Remington, A. (June 2023). *Interns', Employers', and Parents' Qualitative Experiences and Views of Employ Autism Network Internships*. Oral presentation: Psyched in Education conference, IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, London, UK.

Ashworth, M., Heasman, B., Crane, L., Remington, A. (May 2023). *Interns', Employers', and Parents' Qualitative Experiences and Views of Employ Autism Network Internships*. Poster session: International Society for Autism Research (INSAR), Stockholm, Sweden.

Ashworth, M., Crane, L., Heasman, B., Remington, A. (October 2022). *Evaluating Online Training to Enhance Employers' Autism Knowledge and Commitment to Inclusion in the Workplace.* Poster session: at the Autism Europe International Congress, Krakow, Poland.

Ashworth, M., Crane, L., Heasman, B., Remington, A. (July 2022). Evaluating Online Training by Ambitious about Autism to Change Employers' Autism Knowledge and Commitment to Inclusion in the Workplace. Paper presented online at the Autistica Research Festival 2022, UK: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwoqEVctp6k

How to Cite this Report

Ashworth, M., Heasman, B., Crane, L., Remington, A. (2024). "An amazing life-changing experience!": Tracking and Evaluating Employ Autism. London, UK: University College London.

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Declaration of Conflicting of Interests

Ambitious about Autism was one of the founding partners of CRAE, and both CRAE and Ambitious about Autism are generously supported by Pears Foundation. Ambitious about Autism developed and delivered Employ Autism, and commissioned this evaluation research, via Autistica, grant number 7275. Ambitious about Autism were not, however, involved in data analysis or write-up of the evaluation or its associated studies.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Research process and breakdown of how many participants completed each task.

Task	Interns	Employers	Parents	CEPs
Before the internship				
Sign-up	44	308	15	181
Assessment by researcher to confirm participants did not have a learning disability (i.e., an intellectual quotient score below 70)	41			
Survey before training with Ambitious about Autism		191		150
Survey after training with Ambitious about Autism		129		53
Survey three months after training with Ambitious about Autism				23
During the internship				
Daily living skills questionnaire	37			
Mental health questionnaire	37			
Self-efficacy (i.e., belief in ability to reach goals) questionnaire	35			
Quality of life questionnaire	37			
Workplace adjustments questionnaire	41			

Organisational culture questionnaire	39	76	
Workplace wellbeing questionnaire	38		
Performance and motivation questionnaire	40	72	
Immediately after the internship			
Ambitious about Autism's post-internship feeback **questionnaire**	36		
Support network questionnaire	37		
Wider impact questionnaire		63	
Interview	19	22	10
6-months after the internship			
Daily living skills questionnaire	21		
Mental health questionnaire	23		
Self-efficacy questionnaire	23		
Quality of life questionnaire	23		
Employment questionnaire	27		
12 – 24 months after the internship			
Daily living skills questionnaire	21		
Mental health questionnaire	23		
Self-efficacy questionnaire	23		

Quality of life questionnaire	23
Employment questionnaire	27

Appendix B

Breakdown of organisations involved in Employ Autism, and number of participants involved with each internship.

Organisation	Interns		Employers		Parents	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Advertising Agency	1	0.00	5	2.92	0	0.00
Aircraft Industry Company	0	0.0	4	2.34	0	0.00
Asset Management Company	1	2.44	4	2.34	0	0.00
Consultancy Company	1	2.44	5	2.92	0	0.00
Departments in the Public Sector						
First internship	19	46.34	59	34.50	7	70.00
Second internship	4	9.76	12	7.02	0	0.00
Environmental Consulting Company	2	4.88	2	1.17	0	0.00
Financial Services Company						
First internship	1	2.44	11	6.43	0	0.00
Second internship	0	0.00	2	1.17	0	0.00
Governing Body	0	0.00	6	3.51	0	0.00
Information Technology Company						
First internship	1	2.44	11	6.43	0	0.00
Second internship	1	2.44	3	1.75	0	0.00
Insurance Broker Company	0	0.00	4	2.34	0	0.00
Insurance Company 1	0	0.00	3	1.75	0	0.00
Insurance Company 2	1	2.44	1	0.58	0	0.00

Internet Service Provider Company	1	2.44	2	1.17	0	0.00
Management Consulting Company	0	0.00	1	0.58	0	0.00
Marketing Company	0	0.00	8	4.68	0	0.00
Media and Entertainment Company	1	2.44	8	4.68	0	0.00
Media Company	0	0.00	5	2.92	0	0.00
Oil Industry Company	2	4.88	0	0.00	0	0.00
Public Relations Firm	1	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Real Estate Advisors	0	0.00	3	1.75	0	0.00
Recruitment Company 1	2	4.88	4	2.34	2	20.00
Recruitment Company 2	2	4.88	1	0.58	0	0.00
Recruitment Company 3	0	0.00	1	0.58	0	0.00
Reinsurance Company	1	2.44	1	0.58	0	0.00
Software Company 1	1	2.44	1	0.58	0	0.00
Software Company 2	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	10.00
Transport Service Company	0	0.00	3	1.75	0	0.00
Water Supply Company	0	0.00	1	0.58	0	0.00
Total:	41		171		10	

Note: Two participants completed two internships throughout the course of the project; These numbers reflect the number of interns/employers/parents who contributed to the research findings (these numbers do not necessarily all the internships offered by Employ Autism, nor all the interns on the internship/s).

Appendix C

Interns' demographics.

	n	%
Gender		
Man (including trans man)	25	60.98
Woman (including trans woman)	13	31.71
Non-binary	2	4.88
Prefer to self-describe	1	2.44
Total	41	
Ethnicity		
White British	30	73.17
White Irish	2	4.88
Any other White background	2	4.88
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background	1	2.44
Indian	2	4.88
Pakistani	2	4.88
Chinese	1	2.44
Caribbean	1	2.44
Total	41	
Interns' Highest level of Education		
No formal qualifications	1	2.44
GCSEs	3	7.32
A/AS-Level	8	19.51
BTEC	5	12.20
HND	1	2.44
Foundation Degree	2	4.88
Diploma of Higher Education	1	2.44
Bachelor's Degree	15	36.59
Post Graduate Certificate	2	4.88
Master's Degree	3	7.32
Post Graduate Diploma	0	0.00
Total	41	
Education Status		
In full-time education	10	24.39
Part-time education	3	7.32

Not currently in education	28	68.29
Total	41	

Appendix D

Employers', Parents', and CEPs' demographics.

	Employers		Parents		CEPs	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender						
Man (including trans man)	64	37.43	2	20.00	19	12.67
Woman (including trans woman)	101	59.06	8	80.00	123	82.00
Non-binary	1	0.58	0	0.00	1	0.67
Prefer to self-describe	2	1.17	0	0.00	2	1.33
Missing	3	1.75	0	0.00	5	3.33
Age category						
18-25	16	9.36	0	0.00	12	8.00
26-35	58	33.92	0	0.00	35	23.33
36-45	45	26.32	1	10.00	40	26.67
46-55	39	22.81	2	20.00	45	30.00
56-65	10	5.85	7	70.00	13	8.67
Missing	3	1.75	0	0.00	5	3.33
Ethnicity						
White British	135	78.95	9	90.00	121	80.67
Irish	5	2.92	0	0.00	4	2.67
Any other White background	13	7.60	0	0.00	5	3.33
White and Black Caribbean	1	0.58	0	0.00	2	1.33
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background	2	1.17	0	0.00	1	0.67

Indian	5	2.92	0	0.00	1	0.67
Pakistani	2	1.17	0	0.00	3	2.00
Any other Asian background	1	0.58	0	0.00	2	1.33
African	1	0.58	0	0.00	3	2.00
Caribbean	2	1.17	1	10.00	2	1.33
Any other ethnic group	1	0.58	0	0.00	1	0.67
Missing	3	1.75	0	0.00	5	3.33
Highest level of Education						
No formal qualifications	1	0.58	0	0.00	0	0.00
GNVQ	2	1.17	0	0.00	3	2.00
GCSEs	15	8.77	1	10.00	2	1.33
A/AS-level	20	11.70	1	10.00	15	10.00
BTEC	3	1.75	1	10.00	5	3.33
HND	6	3.51	1	10.00	3	2.00
Foundation Degree	5	2.92	0	0.00	9	6.00
Diploma of Higher Education	2	1.17	0	0.00	4	2.67
Bachelor's Degree	57	33.33	3	30.00	41	27.33
Post-Graduate Certificate	5	2.92	1	10.00	16	10.67
Post Graduate Diploma	3	1.75	1	10.00	21	14.00
Master’s Degree	42	24.56	1	10.00	24	16.00
Doctorate	7	4.09	0	0.00	2	1.33
Missing	3	1.75	0	0.00	5	3.33
Region						
South East	36	21.05	4	40	30	20.00

London	61	35.67	4	40	11	7.33
North West	13	7.60	1	10	24	16.00
East of England	12	7.02	0	0	9	6.00
West Midlands	7	4.09	0	0	8	5.33
South West	13	7.60	0	0	21	14.00
Yorkshire and the Humber	7	4.09	0	0	7	4.67
East Midlands	4	2.34	1	10	13	8.67
North East	4	2.34	0	0	3	2.00
Scotland	7	4.09	0	0	12	8.00
Wales	4	2.34	0	0	4	2.67
Northern Ireland	0	0.00	0	0	1	0.67
Missing	3	1.75	0	0	7	4.67

Appendix E

Overall structure of Understanding Autism in the Workplace training for employers.

Training	Descriptors	
Understanding Autism in the Workplace	Audience	Line managers and colleagues recruiting, employing, and mentoring autistic professionals.
	Description	This course is for employers/individuals wanting to improve their understanding of autism and identify how to support autistic individuals within the workplace.
	Course Content	• Explore the concept of neurodiversity and how this relates to neurotypical and neurodivergent groups. • Understand how communication skills, social interaction, social imagination, and sensory processing impact on autistic individuals' lives and working environment. • Review Intersectionality and the links with good working practice for autistic employees. • Identify the talents and skill sets of autistic individuals. • Explore the importance identifying and implementing workplace adjustments to support autistic individuals. • Identify practical tips you can utilise within your day-to-day work practices to support an autistic individual.
Understanding Autism for Careers and Employability Professionals	Audience	Professionals offering careers advice or guidance for autistic clients in a range of settings.
	Description	This course is for professionals wanting to develop and adapt their careers information and guidance sessions for autistic clients.
	Course Content	• Utilise the latest Transition to Employment toolkit and related resources to adapt their practice and meet the needs of autistic clients.

	• Identify how autistic individuals experience the world around them and how autism presents itself differently in individuals through exploring the autism spectrum. • Identify the key areas of difference; communication skills, social interaction, routine, and sensory processing that need to be considered when working with autistic clients. • Explore the autistic experience, identifying strengths – the talents and skill sets autistic individuals can bring into the work environment; and challenges they may experience but can overcome through implementing workplace adjustments. • Consider the specific challenges facing autistic people in entering employment, including barriers with job finding and recruitment processes. • Explore methods and tools to adapt your information, advice, and guidance practice to meet the needs of autistic clients. • Discuss good practice and provide practical solutions to case study examples. • Reflect on Employ Autism's learning and consider adjustments to supporting autistic clients in their career search. • Receive details of the most up-to-date work placement opportunities from Employ Autism.

Appendix F

Interns' responses for the Workplace Wellbeing survey.

	Not at all		A little bit		Moderately		Quite a bit		Extremely	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Work satisfaction										
Is your work fulfilling?	2	5.26	3	7.89	10	26.32	14	36.84	9	23.68
Do your daily work activities give you a sense of direction and meaning?	1	2.63	3	7.89	14	36.84	14	36.84	6	15.79
Does your work bring a sense of satisfaction?	2	5.26	4	10.53	4	10.53	21	55.26	7	18.42
Does your work increase your sense of worth?	1	2.63	6	15.79	5	13.16	15	39.47	11	28.95
Does your job allow you to recraft your job to suit your strengths?	2	5.26	4	10.53	13	34.21	16	42.11	3	7.89
Does your work make you feel that, as a person, you are flourishing?	2	5.26	4	10.53	12	31.58	15	39.47	5	13.16
Do you feel capable and effective in your work on a day-to-day basis?	1	2.63	2	5.26	9	23.68	18	47.37	8	21.05
Does your work offer challenges to advance your skills?	0	0.00	4	10.53	10	26.32	18	47.37	6	15.79
Do you feel you have some level of independence at work?	0	0.00	3	7.89	9	23.68	14	36.84	12	31.58
Do you feel personally connected to your organisation's values?	2	5.26	5	13.16	10	26.32	15	39.47	6	15.79
Organisational Respect										

	Not at all		A little bit		Moderately		Quite a bit		Extremely	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
In general terms, do you trust the senior people in your organisation?	1	2.70	2	5.41	7	18.92	16	43.24	11	29.73
Do you believe in the principles by which your organisation operates?	1	2.63	3	7.89	8	21.05	20	52.63	6	15.79
Do you feel content with the way your organisation treats its employees?	1	2.70	0	0.00	4	10.81	16	43.24	16	43.24
Do you feel that your organisation respects the staff?	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	10.53	18	47.37	16	42.11
How satisfied are you with your organisation's value system?	0	0.00	1	2.63	8	21.05	19	50.00	10	26.32
Compared with your organisation's "ideal values", to what extent are actual work values positive?	1	2.63	2	5.26	9	23.68	17	44.74	9	23.68
Do people at your work believe in the worth of the organisation?	0	0.00	2	5.26	5	13.16	20	52.63	11	28.95
Employer Care										
At a difficult time, would your boss be willing to listen to your problems?	0	0.00	1	2.63	5	13.16	11	28.95	21	55.26
Is your boss caring?	0	0.00	1	2.63	3	7.89	11	28.95	23	60.53
Do you feel that your boss is empathic and understanding about your work concerns?	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	10.53	9	23.68	25	65.79

	Not at all		A little bit		Moderately		Quite a bit		Extremely	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Does your boss treat you like you would like to be treated?	0	0.00	2	5.26	1	2.63	12	31.58	23	60.53
Does your boss take on some of your worries about work?	1	2.63	2	5.26	5	13.16	15	39.47	15	39.47
Do you feel your transactions with your boss are, in general, positive?	0	0.00	1	2.63	3	7.89	12	31.58	22	57.89
Do you believe that your employer cares about his or her staff's wellbeing?	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	8.11	15	40.54	19	51.35
Intrusion into Private Life										
Does your work extend into your private life?	21	55.26	8	21.05	6	15.79	3	7.89	0	0.00
Do you feel stressed in organising your work time to meet demands?	12	31.58	13	34.21	10	26.32	3	7.89	0	0.00
Do you feel excessively pressured at work to meet targets?	21	55.26	12	31.58	3	7.89	2	5.26	0	0.00
After work, do you find it hard to relax?	14	36.84	12	31.58	6	15.79	3	7.89	3	7.89
Do you find yourself thinking negatively about work outside of work hours?	23	60.53	11	28.95	3	7.89	1	2.63	0	0.00
Do you feel that you can separate yourself easily from your work when you leave for the day?	3	7.89	7	18.42	8	21.05	12	31.58	8	21.05
Does your work impact negatively on your self-esteem?	26	68.42	8	21.05	1	2.63	3	7.89	0	0.00

Appendix G

Interns' and Employers' responses to the Organisational Culture survey.

		Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Organisational Culture							
My most recent employer is open to my input	Interns	0	0.00	1	2.44	40	97.56
	Employers	1	1.32	6	7.89	69	90.79
My most recent manager embodies the values of the organisation	Interns	0	0.00	3	7.32	38	92.68
	Employers	2	2.63	8	10.53	66	86.84
My most recent organisation has a high regard for my safety and wellbeing	Interns	0	0.00	2	4.88	39	95.12
	Employers	0	0.00	10	13.16	66	86.84
In my most recent team I have been able to express myself freely	Interns	1	2.44	6	14.63	34	82.93
	Employers	4	5.26	2	2.63	70	92.11
I have strong trust in my organisation and how it communicates with me	Interns	2	4.88	11	26.83	28	68.29
	Employers	8	10.53	18	23.68	50	65.79
I have never encountered stigma in my organisation	Interns	3	7.32	5	12.20	32	78.05
	Employers	20	26.32	11	14.47	45	59.21
Autism-specific Organisational Culture							
The people I work/worked with have excellent	Interns	6	14.63	16	39.02	19	46.34
	Employers	31	40.79	39	51.32	6	7.89

		Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
knowledge of autism							
The organisation I work/worked for are constantly improving their knowledge of autism	Interns	1	2.44	15	36.59	25	60.98
	Employers	12	15.79	15	19.74	49	64.47
It is easy to find information within my most recent organisation about supporting autistic employees	Interns	7	17.07	15	36.59	19	46.34
	Employers	33	43.42	12	15.79	31	40.79
My most recent employer had established pathways for autistic employees to seek advice and support for managing their daily working activities	Interns	3	7.32	16	39.02	22	53.66
	Employers	19	25.00	32	42.11	25	32.89
My most recent employer has been proactive in making adjustments and providing autism awareness training for employees	Interns	1	2.44	14	34.15	26	63.41
	Employers	12	15.79	16	21.05	48	63.16

		Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
I feel that if a new person was to join my most recent employer and the new person disclosed they were autistic, they would be well supported and understood by others	Interns	0	0.00	6	14.63	35	85.37
	Employers	4	5.26	13	17.11	59	77.63
I think the organisation performs better than other organisations in the sector in terms of quality of support for autistic employees	Interns	1	2.44	12	29.27	28	68.29
	Employers	9	11.84	28	36.84	39	51.32

Appendix H

Interns' and Employers' responses to the Performance survey.

		Not at all successful		A little		Moderate		A lot		Completely successful	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Learning productively on the job	Interns	0	0.00	1	2.50	10	25.00	21	52.50	8	20.00
	Employers	2	2.82	12	16.90	16	22.54	37	52.11	5	7.04
Solving problems at work	Interns	0	0.00	5	12.50	11	27.50	21	52.50	3	7.50
	Employers	0	0.00	5	7.04	10	14.08	46	64.79	10	14.08
Accomplishing recent work well under time and schedule constraints	Interns	2	5.00	2	5.00	6	15.00	19	47.50	11	27.50
	Employers	2	2.82	7	9.86	17	23.94	37	52.11	9	12.68
Understanding what is expected of you in your current role	Interns	0	0.00	3	7.50	15	37.50	15	37.50	7	17.50

		Not at all successful		A little		Moderate		A lot		Completely successful	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	Employers	1	1.41	2	2.82	12	16.90	43	60.56	14	19.72
Working effectively in a team environment	Interns	0	0.00	7	17.50	11	27.50	14	35.00	8	20.00
	Employers	0	0.00	0	0.00	12	16.90	43	60.56	17	23.94
Demonstrating sensitivity to others	Interns	1	2.50	3	7.50	13	32.50	17	42.50	6	15.00
	Employers	0	0.00	1	1.41	11	15.49	41	57.75	19	26.76
Recognising what the accepted practices are in your organisation	Interns	0	0.00	1	2.50	10	25.00	20	50.00	9	22.50
	Employers	1	1.41	2	2.82	15	21.13	43	60.56	11	15.49
Managing yourself well in the workplace	Interns	0	0.00	0	0.00	13	32.50	19	47.50	8	20.00

		Not at all successful		A little		Moderate		A lot		Completely successful	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	Employers	0	0.00	2	2.82	9	12.68	42	59.15	19	26.76

Appendix I

Interns' and Employers' responses to the Motivation survey.

		Not at all successful		A little		Moderately		A lot		Completely successful	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Know what is expected of you as a worker	Interns	1	2.63	1	2.63	13	34.21	17	44.74	6	15.79
	Employers	0	0.00	3	4.35	6	8.70	44	63.77	16	23.19
Help build a team as a working unit	Interns	2	5.26	9	23.68	15	39.47	7	18.42	5	13.16
	Employers	0	0.00	2	2.90	11	15.94	43	62.32	13	18.84
Determine what is expected of you on the job	Interns	0	0.00	2	5.26	12	31.58	20	52.63	4	10.53
	Employers	1	1.47	2	2.94	10	14.71	41	60.29	14	20.59
Know how things "really work" inside an	Interns	1	2.63	5	13.16	16	42.11	11	28.95	5	13.16
organisation	Employers	2	2.90	8	11.59	17	24.64	29	42.03	13	18.84
Be clear with presenting your ideas	Interns	1	2.63	4	10.53	11	28.95	18	47.37	4	10.53
	Employers	0	0.00	4	5.80	13	18.84	43	62.32	9	13.04
Work under pressure	Interns	1	2.63	5	13.16	14	36.84	15	39.47	3	7.89
	Employers	0	0.00	1	1.47	17	25.00	33	48.53	17	25.00
Master an organisation's slang and special jargon	Interns	2	5.26	12	31.58	16	42.11	6	15.79	2	5.26
	Employers	0	0.00	4	5.80	16	23.19	36	52.17	13	18.84
Manage conflict among group members	Interns	10	26.32	8	21.05	13	34.21	5	13.16	2	5.26
	Employers	0	0.00	9	13.04	31	44.93	22	31.88	7	10.14
Understand what all of the duties of your role	Interns	2	5.26	3	7.89	12	31.58	18	47.37	3	7.89
entail	Employers	1	1.45	3	4.35	12	17.39	42	60.87	11	15.94

		Not at all successful		A little		Moderately		A lot		Completely successful	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Solve new and difficult problems	Interns	0	0.00	5	13.16	15	39.47	14	36.84	4	10.53
	Employers	0	0.00	2	2.90	11	15.94	44	63.77	12	17.39
Work under extreme circumstances	Interns	5	13.16	11	28.95	15	39.47	5	13.16	2	5.26
	Employers	0	0.00	5	7.35	20	29.41	34	50.00	9	13.24
Understand the politics in the organisation	Interns	4	10.53	8	21.05	12	31.58	8	21.05	6	15.79
	Employers	3	4.35	8	11.59	22	31.88	28	40.58	8	11.59
Continue to learn once you're on the job	Interns	0	0.00	0	0.00	8	21.05	20	52.63	10	26.32
	Employers	0	0.00	3	4.35	15	21.74	39	56.52	12	17.39
Develop cooperative working relationships with others	Interns	0	0.00	2	5.26	11	28.95	14	36.84	11	28.95
	Employers	0	0.00	0	0.00	5	7.25	44	63.77	20	28.99
Invent new ways of doing things	Interns	3	7.89	10	26.32	13	34.21	9	23.68	3	7.89
	Employers	3	4.35	6	8.70	21	30.43	30	43.48	9	13.04
Solve most problems even though no solution is immediately apparent	Interns	3	7.89	3	7.89	15	39.47	13	34.21	4	10.53
	Employers	0	0.00	4	5.80	16	23.19	39	56.52	10	14.49
Find out exactly what a problem is when fist becoming aware of it	Interns	0	0.00	4	10.53	20	52.63	10	26.32	4	10.53
	Employers	0	0.00	5	7.25	22	31.88	36	52.17	6	8.70
Listen effectively to gain information	Interns	1	2.63	2	5.26	10	26.32	16	42.11	9	23.68
	Employers	0	0.00	3	4.41	12	17.65	41	60.29	12	17.65
Know an organisation's long-held traditions	Interns	3	7.89	11	28.95	10	26.32	10	26.32	4	10.53
	Employers	4	5.80	11	15.94	19	27.54	28	40.58	7	10.14

		Not at all successful		A little		Moderately		A lot		Completely successful	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Work well in situations that other people consider stressful	Interns	2	5.26	9	23.68	17	44.74	5	13.16	5	13.16
	Employers	1	1.45	3	4.35	18	26.09	35	50.72	12	17.39
Understand the behaviour appropriate to your role	Interns	0	0.00	3	7.89	8	21.05	16	42.11	11	28.95
	Employers	0	0.00	0	0.00	6	8.70	47	68.12	16	23.19
Challenge things that are done by the book	Interns	8	21.05	8	21.05	8	21.05	10	26.32	4	10.53
	Employers	2	2.94	7	10.29	21	30.88	31	45.59	7	10.29
Learn from your mistakes	Interns	1	2.63	2	5.26	8	21.05	23	60.53	4	10.53
	Employers	0	0.00	1	1.45	13	18.84	39	56.52	16	23.19
Solve problems no matter how complex	Interns	1	2.63	4	10.53	18	47.37	12	31.58	3	7.89
	Employers	0	0.00	6	8.82	24	35.29	34	50.00	4	5.88
Coordinate tasks within you work group	Interns	3	7.89	9	23.68	11	28.95	10	26.32	5	13.16
	Employers	0	0.00	2	2.90	15	21.74	40	57.97	12	17.39
Learn to improve on your past performance	Interns	0	0.00	3	7.89	11	28.95	19	50.00	5	13.16
	Employers	0	0.00	2	2.90	14	20.29	42	60.87	11	15.94
Be sensitive to other's feelings and attitudes	Interns	0	0.00	2	5.26	8	21.05	18	47.37	10	26.32
	Employers	0	0.00	0	0.00	10	14.49	43	62.32	16	23.19
Function well at work even when faced with personal difficulties	Interns	1	2.63	3	7.89	12	31.58	17	44.74	5	13.16
	Employers	0	0.00	4	5.80	19	27.54	36	52.17	10	14.49
Concentrate on what someone is saying to you even though other things could distract you	Interns	3	7.89	4	10.53	15	39.47	12	31.58	4	10.53
	Employers	1	1.45	8	11.59	22	31.88	29	42.03	9	13.04

		Not at all successful		A little		Moderately		A lot		Completely successful	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Listen effectively to understand opposing points of view	Interns	1	2.63	2	5.26	11	28.95	18	47.37	6	15.79
	Employers	1	1.45	1	1.45	13	18.84	44	63.77	10	14.49

Appendix J

Interns' quotes from Ambitious about Autism's feedback questionnaire.

Were you able to put your existing skills and knowledge to practical use at your placement?
"I used general work social skills from other work environments. I used IT skills I have gained from education and work."
"I was able to put my existing skills and knowledge to practical use. I was able to put my research skills to use and create a thorough and detailed presentation with lots of attention to detail."
"I used skills from my degree and previous jobs - analysis, organisation, understanding and processing data in large amounts."
"I had been moderately able to use my own skills and knowledge practical during the placement, though nothing pertaining to my wider abilities besides knowing how to use the various Microsoft apps."
"I learned a lot on the job but was given opportunities by the company to produce creative work and contribute on creative projects as that plays into my strengths, I think."
"A significant amount of what I had learned proved useful, although there was plenty of learning to do while working."
Did you gain any new skills from your placement?
"I improved by analytical abilities and further developed my understanding of MS Excel. Also, I was introduced and undertook training courses for different platforms, such as Google Analytics."
"[new skills I learnt included] attending to meetings, teamwork, replying to emails, making statistical charts in Excel and creating Pivot Tables. I also improved on my presentation skills. I attended many training programmes. I learnt all the aspects of data analysis and learnt Forecasting Techniques."
"I learnt how to cope and work with a corporate environment."
"I feel more organisation and communication skills improved significantly. I learnt how to work effectively across different teams. Also, my presentation skills and confidence grew as I had opportunities to present/playback my findings and research."
"Built upon networking skills. Learned about different ways of working, planning and collaboration."
What new experiences happened on your placement?
"I haven't had any work experience before so everything has been new.".

“There has, of course, also been the commute to the office which took some getting used to at first but since I take the same time trains every trip I can now do it without thinking about it which makes me worry at lot less.”
“I had to attend team meetings. That was new as I'm used to working in very small groups or independently.”
“I have had the opportunity to talk to lots of different people in the team, including more senior people.”
“The office can also be quite noisy at times which I find distracting and the technology sometimes doesn't work which is frustrating and sometimes a bit worrying if I need to be in a meeting but I can't get online.”
“I was given responsibility for important tasks.”
Did the placement help confirm that you wanted to work in that environment or do something else?
“The placement confirmed to me that I want to work in a research and insight environment. That could be market or social research, customer insight or another research-related job. I found my skills suited well to the role, especially my analytical and detailed approach to the research.”
“I already had my mind set in terms of working in a political space but this placement showed me new aspects of it and what other areas I may be proficient in. More generally, it gave me more confidence in my ability to handle the kind of work it entails.”
“It did confirm that I enjoy working in an office environment.”
“My internship on the team confirmed that’s what I’m interested in and I’m now working in the team permanently.”
“I know that I definitely want to work from home as it helps with anxiety and I also know I can go in whenever I want.”
“I loved working in the [department in the organisation’s] team but realised I wouldn’t like to do that role permanently, as you have to be in touch with journalists a lot.”
“It has made me unsure how well I would get on in an office environment. I know that it would be suitable in terms of having a good structure but personally I don't know if I would thrive in that environment and so it has made me unsure.”
“It hasn't confirmed anything for me but I feel it has broadened my horizons.”
“I am not sure. It certainly showed an entirely new field I could go into.”

“Given that I have not had much experience elsewhere and that I am open to try new things I wouldn't say that I definitely don’t want to work somewhere else. I think ultimately it is less about the job and more about the people that you work with as well as, for me personally, the opportunity to continue learning.”
What were the best parts of the programme?
“The team I worked with so very encouraging and helpful. They put me at ease.”
“I really liked that I was integrated as part of the team during my placement, attending weekly and client meetings and undertaking work alongside colleagues.”
“It was amazing getting to work in a team where I was given responsibility and able to make a difference.”
“Knowing that I successfully completed the internship, was praised for my work, and left a good impression with everyone I met was a real boost to my self-image.”
Which things in the programme did you find more challenging?
“The train journeys which could be a little challenging coming home.”
“The noise in the office was at times a bit of a challenge.”
“The main challenge was the technical issues. One day, I could not get the laptop I had on my internship started and I ended up being 15 minutes late for a meeting I had to attend. It was very stressful but I did overcome this situation in the end.”
“At times the large amount of meetings, taking minutes down for them and structuring work around it [was challenging].”
“At one point, I couldn’t follow the team training session fast enough because I needed more time to process the information, so it was very helpful when a team member sent me the training slides so I could follow at my own pace.”
“Task management, being able to keep on task, get tasks started and chip away at them without supervision [was challenging].”
“I also found it hard at times to make decisions and be confident in them.”
“Asking for help sometimes - but after working with my manger I was able to overcome this.”
“I found socialising a little difficult. We had an away day where there was an expectation to network, which isn't something I am particularly skilled in!”
“Having started the job online, I also feel that I didn't really properly know the people that I worked with until I met them face-to-face and at first it was not so easy to make proper connections. When I had a meeting we would just talk strictly about work related things and not really go off on a tangent. It wasn't really until I went into the office that I had very ordinary and personal conversations with colleagues.”

“There has been a lot of change in my buddy (line manager) who gives me day to day tasks so was kind of hard to adjust three times to people and their way of working.”
“I had completed the work set well in advance of finishing the placement. Sometimes, it was difficult to know which direction to go in or how to best use my time.”
“The programme did lack a bit of structure - my line manager became very busy unexpectedly and during the placement there were times I had little contact.”
What support were you given to help with the challenging things in the programme?
“[It was helpful I could] mute my video and audio during large meetings and it was even optional to attend or not.”
“[My manager and I] worked together to define what other work would be useful for me to complete. Once a plan was in place, I found it much easier to manage my time effectively.”
“I also had access to [my organisation’s] Neurodiversity employee network whose committee were a source of support due to their own lived experiences.”
“I had daily meetings with my line manager and some chats with my buddy. My project supervisor helped me to progress with my analytical task. Lots of team members offered their career advice and I also had a chance to do a mock interview. I had very good support and supervision.”
“[My line manager and I] worked together to define what other work would be useful for me to complete. Once a plan was in place, I found it much easier to manage my time effectively.”
“My team constantly checked in on me to make sure I was okay and see if I needed help, which was good because I often struggle to ask for help on my own.”
“Everyone at the office was clearly educated about autism and answered most of my questions in a clear manner.”
“Ambitious about Autism supported me in how to adjust to the changes and how to express myself.”
“My hours were flexible as was my lunch break, I always had someone to ask questions or ask for support, things were taught in a way I understood and, if I didn't, they were shown to me again.”
Sentence summaries
“No worry, scrutiny or judgement is made to you if you're looking to enter the world of work and need support in getting there, and that's exactly what the programme is there for - for you.”

“An inclusive, welcoming and meaningful work experience programme.”
“A vital support system for autistic people.”
“An amazing life-changing experience!”
“A valuable opportunity to get work experience at a time where entry into the job market is difficult for most and nigh impossible for neurodiverse candidates.”
“The best thing I ever did for my career!”

Appendix K1

Employers' responses for the Wider Impact survey.

	n	%
Has the workplace involved in the Employ Autism programme changed any of their recruitment policies as a result of Employ Autism?		
Yes	3	4.76
No	19	30.16
Don't know	28	44.44
Working towards change	12	19.05
Missing	1	1.59
Has the workplace involved in the Employ Autism programme changed any of their general workplace policies that apply to all employees as a result of Employ Autism?		
Yes	2	3.18
No	20	31.75
Don't know	25	39.68
Working towards change	13	20.64
Missing	3	4.76
Examples of changes to policy		
"We are looking to accept more people from diversity internship programmes internship."		
"Having worked for multiple years with Ambitious about Autism, [our organisation] has developed it's hiring policies over the course of this time."		
"We adjusted our application questionnaire to incorporate a more inclusive question surrounding disability."		
"[We were] already worked closely with a Neurodiversity network, but now we're looking to formalise the good practice in a policy document that can be widely shared."		

	n	%
To your knowledge, how many more neurodivergent people has the workplace hired since being involved in the Employ Autism programme?		
Zero	4	6.35
1 to 4	10	15.87
5 to 10	2	3.18
More than 50	1	1.59
Don't know	43	68.25
Missing	3	4.76

Appendix K2

Employers' quotes from the Wider Impact survey.

Illustrative quotes of Employ Autism's wider impact for employers and their workplaces
"I personally am more understanding as a direct result (I am the line manager). The buddy feels the same, and probably most people who interacted with the intern were more aware of others' neurodiversity as a result."
"It has raised awareness across the team of how we can work in a more inclusive way."
"I think locally, hosting an intern does change attitudes - it definitely helps to raise awareness."
"Those closely working and/ or associated to our intern have learnt a lot and t has opened their minds to working with someone who has a neuro-diverse condition."
"Very positive responses from those involved, greater enthusiasm, and understanding from all those that the interns came into contact with."
"It has changed the way we operate most noticeably in the way we communicate."
"I think that it definitely made the team consider accessibility in terms of how they delegated tasks and shared information."
"I think people are now taking more time to think about how they explain things to people instead of just assuming someone understands."
"I think people are more aware of making simple adjustments and not assuming everyone will take in information or work in the exact same way."
"I feel that the training has made our workplace more understanding to the individual needs of each person, be they neurodiverse or neurotypical."
"Nothing has changed, people are very quick to get busy and forget other's needs."
"Not towards co-workers but certainly towards potential neurodivergent individuals that may be employed in the future."
"People have a clearer understanding [of autism and neurodiversity], but it could still be better."

Appendix L1

Interns' employment rates before the internship ('baseline'), 6-months, and 12 – 24 months post-internship.

	Baseline		6-months post-internship		12 – 24 months post-internship	
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Overall employment rate	7	25.93	14	51.85	15	55.56
Full-time employment	1	3.70	10	37.04	11	40.74
Part-time employment	4	14.82	1	3.70	3	11.11
Education, no employment	7	25.93	6	22.22	5	18.52
Education and employment	2	7.41	3	11.11	1	3.70
Volunteer	5	18.52	1	3.70	1	3.70
Unemployed	8	29.63	6	22.22	6	22.22

Appendix L2

Interns' highest level of employment before the internship (baseline), 6-months and 12 – 24 months post-internship.

Level of employment	Baseline		6-months post-internship		12 – 24 months post-internship	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Volunteer	6	25.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Apprentice or intern	10	41.67	14	51.85	11	40.74
Administrative/clerical assistant/secretary	0	0.00	1	3.70	0	0.00
Social support role	1	4.17	0	0.00	0	0.00
Entry/Graduate employee	6	25.00	11	40.74	14	51.85
Supervisor	1	4.17	1	3.70	1	3.70
Missing	3	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.00

Appendix L3

Interns' area of employment before the internship (baseline), 6-months, and 12 – 24 months post-internship.

Area of Experience	Baseline		6-months post-internship		12 – 24 months post-internship	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Administration	1	4.76	4	15.38	4	16.67
Animal care	1	4.76	0	0.00	0	0.00
Banking	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.17
Catering	1	4.76	1	3.85	0	0.00
Charity	3	14.29	2	7.69	1	4.17
Construction	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.17
Creative	0	0.00	2	7.69	0	0.00
Education	2	9.52	1	3.85	1	4.17
Hospitality	5	23.81	4	15.38	3	12.50
Insurance	0	0.00	1	3.85	2	8.33
IT	0	0.00	2	7.69	1	4.17
Leisure	0	0.00	1	3.85	0	0.00
Management consultancy	0	0.00	1	3.85	1	4.17
Manufacturing	1	4.76	0	0.00	0	0.00
Marketing	1	4.76	0	0.00	0	0.00
Media	1	4.76	0	0.00	0	0.00
PR	0	0.00	1	3.85	1	4.17
Public Sector	2	9.52	2	7.69	3	12.50
Recruitment	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.17
Retail	2	9.52	3	11.54	2	8.33
Sales	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.17
Science	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.17
Social care	0	0.00	1	3.85	0	0.00
Tourism	1	4.76	0	0.00	0	0.00
Missing	6		1		3	

Appendix L4

Interns' income before the internship (baseline), 6-months, and 12 – 24 months post-internship.

	Baseline		6-months post-internship		12 – 24 months post-internship	
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Less than £10,000	12	75.00	4	33.33	4	40.00
£10,000 - £19,999	4	25.00	2	16.67	4	40.00
£20,000 - £29,999	0	0.00	5	41.67	1	10.00
£40,000 - £49,999	0	0.00	1	8.33	1	10.00
Missing	11		15		17	

Appendix L5

Hours worked per week by interns before the internship (baseline), 6-months, and 12 – 24 months post-internship.

	Baseline	6-months post-internship	12 – 24 months post-internship
Number of responses	11	15	13
Average hours worked per week	14.46	28.57	23.15
Standard Deviation (variation from the average)	8.90	12.18	14.97
Lowest number of hours worked per week	2	1.5	3
Highest number of hours worked per week	30	40	43