Final Report:
Evaluation of Employment Outcomes of Project Search UK

Dr Axel Kaehne

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SWEI
south west employment institute

Commission

The South West Employment Institute (SWEI) commissioned an evaluation of employment outcomes of Project SEARCH (PS) UK in May 2013. Funding was provided by the outgoing South West Regional Health Authority as it had provided some pump priming monies to spread awareness of and to underpin project work for Project SEARCH in the South West in 2011-12. The commission was endorsed by the Programme Specialist Europe of Project SEARCH UK, Anne O'Bryan and carried out by Axel Kaehne after a tendering process.

The commission outlined two tasks: to obtain and analyse data on employment outcomes for all cohorts of graduates of all Project SEARCH sites in the UK and to verify the outcomes through a sample of families selected for each site.

The evaluation method was developed and approved by members of the SWEI Board in June 2013 and the project commenced in the same month. Data collection and data analysis stage lasted until end of August 2013, when sampling of families and family interviews for the verification phase began. The following report contains the method and approach for the evaluation (1), the results and findings of the analysis (2) and some recommendations for future evaluations. A detailed explanation of PS, its place in the field of supported employment for people with learning disabilities is contained in an academic paper, a further product specified in the commissioning brief.

Acknowledgements

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The Programme Specialist Europe, Anne O'Bryan, also provided valuable help by facilitating contacts with all participating sites in the UK and commenting on the final report.

This evaluation would not have been possible without the help from the Project SEARCH team at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center (CCHMC). Project SEARCH was devised and developed by Erin Riehle and Susie Rutkowski at the CCHMC.

Background

Project SEARCH started at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center in Ohio USA. The idea was to develop placements for people with intellectual disabilities in the hospital which could be utilised as springboards for lasting employment opportunities. The programme was developed in co-operation with a local school and vocational training provider, Cincinnati Children's Hospital. The host agreed to supply internships for people while they were undergoing training in the workplace. Some additional work fitness training was also provided. The central idea was to develop placements that would allow interns to gradually increase their skill set, their work experience and to provide them with transferable marketable skills. The host employer would then hire the intern at the end of the internship, or terminate the work placement.

The central idea was that host employers would benefit from the increased diversity of their workforce, develop a reliable workforce, and provide additional training for potential employees as well as their existing workforce. Internships, as a first step towards employment, were thus thought to be ideal to identify and train potential employees with intellectual disabilities in a similar way to nurses who receive training in hospital settings. The programme was successfully rolled out in the US and was piloted in the UK in 2010. UK sites are licensees of the US programme and, upon purchase of the license, benefit from a package of materials and personal support through the UK Programme Specialist Europe.

The main parameters of the US programme model are: PS is a business led programme where participants 'learn relevant marketable skills while immersed in the business'[1]. The programme is delivered by a consortium of partners that is formed between vocational training providers, colleges or special schools (depending on age of participant), the business itself, and support agencies. Where relevant, careers development agencies are also involved. A successful outcome for participants is defined as:

- employment in an integrated setting
- year round work of 20 hours per week or more[2]
- paid at minimum wage or higher [3]

As of July 2013 the UK had 17 active sites. In all cases, the sites are run by a collaboration or partnership between the host employer, an education provider or vocational training organisation, and a supported employment agency.

Internships consist of training in the workplace, fitness for work training, and supported employment in a variety of placements within the host employers departments. Interns try out at least three different placements in the host environment. At the end of the internship, interns graduate from the programme with a certificate of completion issued by Project SEARCH. The host employer then either takes on the intern as a paid employee or terminates the internship without converting it into paid employment. All internships are

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[1] http://www.projectsearch.us/OurPROGRAM/ProgramModel.aspx accessed on 21 Nov 2013

[2] In the UK, paid employment for 16 hours per week or more is defined as full time work.

[3] Project Search Website at http://www.projectsearch.us/OurPROGRAM/ProgramModel.aspx (accessed on 21 Nov 2013)

unpaid, although interns may be in receipt of some governmental financial support or welfare benefits as they are usually in their final year of formal education. All components of the programme are delivered in the workplace which means that participants spend at least 6 hours per day in the lead business of the site.

In the UK, if interns do not successfully move into paid employment at the end of the programme, supported employment agencies are expected to provide ongoing support to secure employment for them. The timeframe for this engagement post-graduation is not specified. Assessing model fidelity, i.e. the match between the service provided by the sites and the PS model as prescribed was not part of this evaluation.

Method

The evaluation method was framed by the commissioning brief. The central task was to ascertain the employment outcomes of Project SEARCH sites in the UK since inception of the programme and to verify them through interviews with families of people enrolling on PS.

An evaluation method was designed as part of the commissioning process and slightly revised upon confirmation of the commission in discussion with SWEI. The evaluation was to be conducted in two phases. Phase one focused on obtaining all relevant data on graduates of PS UK for all sites. Three sources were available to obtain this data: first, the individual site records; second, the annual reports collated by the mother site in Cincinnati; third, aggregated data collated by the Programme Specialist Europe. All sources were approached and asked for anonymised data sets for all graduates that had completed the PS UK programme since inception.

The 2013 cohort was to be included, with some caveats as some new programmes had not delivered a full cycle of provision during the research period. Since graduation for this cohort was planned to take place in July 2013, data transfer for the last cohort had to take place after graduation. Individual data collected by Cincinnati on final outcome was collated in May following any July graduation. The third data source was data collected from sites by the Programme Specialist Europe in May after graduation, but on an aggregate level for the purpose of programme monitoring. All data was made available to the current evaluation.

Phase Two of the evaluation included verification of the employment outcome data obtained in the first phase. A number of families for each site were selected and site leads were asked to facilitate consent for interviews. An interview schedule was designed and agreed with the evaluation commissioners. The main purpose of this phase was to triangulate existing data with information from families where individuals had secured jobs. The purposive sample contained only people whose record in the original data set was marked ‘employed’, either full time or part time. Four families per site were selected for interview. Where more than four people had gained employment, a randomisation procedure was utilised to select further potential respondents.

Following consent from the families, site leads forwarded the contact details of selected families to the researcher and interviews commenced in July 2013. Where site leads were not able to notify some of the families or obtain consent from them alternative families were chosen for interviews from the anonymised data set.

Interviews were conducted by telephone. They were not audio taped. Responses were simultaneously entered into a data set for subsequent analysis. Respondents were asked to verify some basic factual information about the internships, give their opinions on the support received from the Project SEARCH team and to state whether or not the PS participant was currently in employment, unemployed, actively looking for work or none of the above. Where PS interns had secured paid employment, respondents were asked to specify the length of the contract, the number of hours per week, and whether the pay would be minimum wage or more. Respondents were also given the opportunity to make any additional comments. No graduates were interviewed for this evaluation.

Analysis

The evaluation contained two separate analysis tasks. Anonymised site data on employment outcomes for each graduate for all cohorts required cleaning and subsequent analysis, focusing on employment outcomes, as well as exploring any significant correlations between employment outcome and other characteristics. All analysis tasks in this first round were carried out using a software package: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

As mentioned, three potential data sources were available to the evaluation. There were differences between them because of the time in the year that data was collected, and the purpose they were collected for. The first was Cincinnati Children's Hospital's database, obtained on 16th August 2014 and it provided anonymised data by PS site in the UK. These data contained descriptions of the PS students entering the programme at the beginning of the previous academic year, with a census of the employment outcomes in July each year. The data recorded jobs (and employment rates) post-graduation. There was no further follow-up on this data.

The second data source was data collected on an aggregate basis for each site by the Programme Specialist Europe in May following their graduation in July of the previous academic year. This excluded students who exited the PS programme before the end of their first academic half term on the basis that they had not received the intervention at this point. Any students exiting the PS programme after the first half term were recorded. Usually these were recorded as 'no employment outcome'.

The third data source was a census conducted by this evaluation at July/August 2013. This provided a snapshot of those known to be in employment at this point from graduate cohorts up to and including 2013 graduates. The results were likely to differ from the previous two sources as it had some level of uncertainty in employment retention from previous years as contact with graduates was necessarily reduced over time. Data was included from sites that started in 2013. Those were, necessarily, fledgling services in their first year of operation, with outcomes measured at graduation point rather than at the following May census point. We therefore requested interim, first year, outcomes and these have been separated out in the subsequent analysis.

The evaluation revealed some inconsistencies in the data between the three data sources (options for improving consistency are discussed in conclusions and recommendations). In the evaluation, the census data provided to Cincinnati Children's Hospital in May 2013 proved to be the most inconsistent, due to a lack of adjustment for early exit. As a result, data from this survey were analysed using frequencies and cross tabulations exploring the influence of the following variables on outcomes: gender, age, type of disability, ethnicity.

The second analysis task related to the family interview data. These data contained two types of information: data that could assist in verification of data provided by sites, and some additional data on employment type, pay, duration and weekly hours worked. This data was not contained in site data and hence represented additional information that could identify strengths and weaknesses of the programme for a sample of participants.

Results

The Programme Specialist Europe of PS UK provided contact details of all UK sites. At time of the evaluation (June to Oct 2013) there were 17 active sites in the UK. The operating times of these sites ranged from 1 academic year to 5 years. PS UK has subsequently recruited additional sites, increasing the number of sites to 24 in 2013-14 and to 31 sites altogether in September 2014.

Annual Report Data

All licensed PS sites report some outcome data to the licensee, Cincinnati Project SEARCH. The annual returns are logged after the graduation of students in July or August each year and the evaluation requested anonymised data returns for all sites and all past and present cohorts for live UK sites from Cincinnati. The data set was received in August 2013 and contained information on 177 students.

Because personal identifiers were not used consistently across the annual reports and the other data sets submitted to the evaluation, the data sets could not be used for cross referencing and data gaps could not be filled systematically. This demonstrates some of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing reporting structure. The discussion section will return to this issue. It is significant in this context that where no data is entered in the annual reports, outcomes cannot be known. This may or may not mean that any outcomes have been achieved.

The Programme Specialist Europe for the UK also collates outcome data from each site. These data were available to the evaluation. The spreadsheet contained information up to and including the 2012 cohort as it is based on a census in the May of the following year after graduation. It does record the total number of graduates and the total number of young people who have obtained employment per site for the previous cohorts (2010/11 and 2011/12). A comparison exercise between these aggregated data and the data reported annually to Cincinnati however shows that sites appear to be at times under-reporting the number of graduates.

This has an impact on the overall outcome figures as the number of young people in work at the time of data collection in the May of the year following graduation are then higher. In other instances, the number of young people in employment is lower in the annual report to Cincinnati. There are significant differences between the two data sets in terms of aggregated outcomes and because of the lack of detail in the data it is impossible to identify the exact cause of these variations.

It seems that discrepancies lay mainly in the reporting practice for the annual reports (which occur immediately after graduation) and in the overall outcome figures that are collected by the Programme Specialist Europe in May the following year. Clearly, the latter set of data may plausibly contain additional outcomes that may have been achieved post-graduation for some students. Also, work is done in the May survey to consistently remove from the figures any students who left the programme before the first half term break, and to ensure that they are included if they leave later in the programme. Since the data set from the Programme Specialist Europe does not contain information for each individual student but only overall figures and relevant percentages, it is difficult to conclude the exact reason for any difference.

Because of inconsistent use of personal identifiers differences between data sets could not be reconciled and the data sets could not be merged by individual entry. This has implications for the usefulness of the various data collection strategies for the UK programme as well as for the annual reporting that takes place after graduation (see Discussion section).

Site data

Descriptive characteristics

Data from sites was obtained through written request from July to October 2013. The request explicitly asked sites to include information on the most recent cohort of graduates (2013). Sixteen sites sent their relevant data. One site asked to go through the consent procedure with full briefing and consents for all participants. All relevant briefing documents were sent but data was not produced for this site. This site (5) only began operating in 2012 and so the loss of data is limited to one group of graduates (likely to be less than 8 students). One site sent data only on the most recent 2013 cohort but could not access data for previous cohorts. The records indicate that the loss amounts to data from 17 graduates. All other data was received from active sites in the UK.

All sites were furnished with a spreadsheet which contained categories for each individual, such as gender, age, type of disability, level of disability, and outcome related data such as: full time employment, part time employment, where employed and alternative options such as volunteering or actively seeking work. The spreadsheet also provided a space for additional comments for each student. Site leads were also given the opportunity to simply send their own anonymised spreadsheets where available and if convenient. All sites, however, used the Excel sheet provided.

Most site leads provided full details on each individual for all cohorts. Many site leads also made effective use of additional comments to note employment circumstances or personal circumstances where relevant to employment. The additional notes were converted through the data cleaning process into nominal and numeric data that could be fed into SPSS where appropriate. One site struggled to provide sufficient detail on their graduates for reasons out of their control (all data was apparently archived and not accessible). The site lead still provided some useful data on many graduates, but some serious gaps in information remained.

The descriptive results will be first presented below for the categories gender, age, ethnicity, disability level, type of disability through simple frequency tables. Then some cross tabulations for disability levels and type will be presented. The numbers per site are small so no significant conclusions should be drawn from the findings. Following the descriptive results, the report will present the employment outcomes in aggregated form and per site. In total, information on 315 students was captured through the data exercise. This is substantially more than those reported to Cincinnati (n=117) through annual reports.

Data for gender aggregated for all sites (Table 2) show a prevalence of male over female participants. Given that the prevalence rate of people with intellectual disabilities in the population is weighted toward males, this may mirror the normal distribution of learning disabilities across genders.

Table 1: Total number of graduates by gender

Gender	Number of students	Percentage
Female	120	38.1
Male	195	61.9
Total	315	100.0

Table 2 shows the breakdown of graduates across the sites along with the year they began operating. This shows an incremental growth in the PS programme since 2009, shifting from 1 site in 2009 to 10 by 2011 and to 17 in 2013.

Table 2: Total number of graduates by site

Site Number	Year site began operating	Total Students enrolled
1	2010	25
2	2010	7
3	2012	7
4	2011	5
5	2012	12
6	2012	8
7	2010	28
8	2012	9
9	2008	53
10	2009	37
11	2010	25
12	2010	24
13	2012	11
14	2009	37
15	2012	5
16	2012	11
17	2010	23

Site Number	Year site began operating	Total Students enrolled
Total Graduates from PS		**327***

* Data available on 315 clients. Site 5 did not provide data to this evaluation.

Table 3 shows that the disability levels are normally distributed across the spectrum of low and high functioning individuals with the majority of participants falling into the moderate category. This is encouraging given that employment support work with young people with mild disabilities is often easier than with those of higher support needs. One caveat in this context is the relatively high number of individuals for whom no disability level was provided by the sites (26.1%). Many of those may have a mild learning disability or be diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder that may skew this finding.

Table 3. Disability levels of students in the programme

Disability Level	Frequency	Percent
Missing data	82	26.1
Mild	79	25.1
Moderate	119	37.8
Severe	27	8.6
Profound	8	2.5
Total	315	100.0

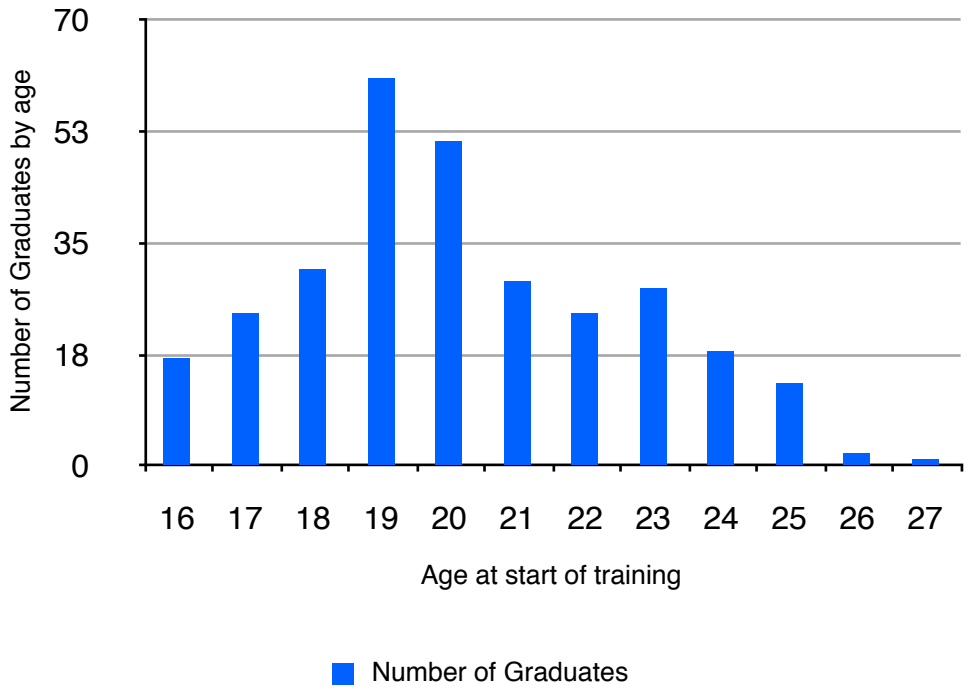
Disability types are as specified in the table below.

Table 4. Disability type of graduates by frequency and percent

	Frequency	Percent
Acquired Brain Injury	3	1.0
ADHD	3	1.0
ASD	25	8.2
Aspergers Syndrome	32	10.5
Cerebal Palsy / Learning Disability	1	.3
Dyspraxia	2	.7
Fragile X	1	.3
Learning Difficulty	1	.3
Learning Disability	228	75.0
No info	8	2.6
Total	304	100.0

Table 5 shows that recruitment seems to target all age groups, with participants as young as 16 at the start of the internship, and some as old as 27. Chart 1 shows the distribution by age of all graduates where information is available.

Chart 1. Total number of graduates by age for all sites



The mean age of participants was 20 (SD=2.5). This may reflect individual needs and different employment pathways. A cross tabulation did not highlight any significant correlations between age and levels of disabilities, but the numbers may simply be too small to draw any meaningful conclusions as to whether early recruitment is more likely for people with high adaptive functioning.

Table 5. Age of students in the programme

Age at start of PS	Number of students	Percentage
16	17	5.4
17	24	7.6
18	31	9.8
19	61	19.3
20	51	16.1
21	29	9.2
22	24	7.6
23	28	8.9
24	18	5.7
25	13	4.1
26	2	.6
27	1	.3
Total	**299**	**94.9**
Missing	16	5.1
Total	**315**	**100.0**

Employment outcomes

Table 6 shows data from the current survey on the numbers graduating in the July of years 2009 to 2013, along with full and part-time jobs found. Data are retrospective and reported by PS sites. Total number of graduates had been adjusted to take account of any revised numbers due to first term exits based on the May census each year. Figures for 2013 should be treated as interim as they are close to July graduation in 2013, and are not comparable to the other years which reflect the position at census date in May following graduation. The rate of students entering paid employment on a part-time or full-time basis ranged between 45% and 60%.

For 2013, 33% of students had been found employment at graduation, a full 9 months before the census date of the official May 2014. As 2013 data is interim in nature, a mean percentage of employed was calculated for 2009-2012 (weighted by number of graduates in the year) and this was 50.0%. The ratio between full- time and part-time jobs (full-time defined as work for 16 hours per week or more) varied over the course of the project. With small numbers, data for 2009 showed 100% of jobs found to be full-time. As numbers of students rose the percentage employed full-time was 67% (2010), 87% (2011), 82% (2012). Interim figures for 2013 showed 68% of jobs found to be full time at the graduation point..

Table 6: Graduating students and jobs obtained at May following July graduation in previous year

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*	Total
Part time jobs	0	6	5	6	*13*	30
Full time jobs	4	12	35	28	*28*	107
Total number of graduates	8	30	78	76	*123*	315
Jobs as % of graduates	50.0%	60.0%	51.3%	44.7%	*33.3%*	
Mean % employed				**51.5%**		

* July/August 2013 interim figures only, awaiting finalisation in May 2014.

Data on sites that began operation before 2013 provided part-time and full-time employment rates to date. This shows that employment rates ranged from 60% to 44.7% from their year of start up until 2012.

The current survey had no data on employment type. The Cincinnati Children's Hospital data set offers some insights into the location of placements post-graduation (Table 7). Sites only report whether or not any graduate who has employment obtains this within or without the host employer (the lead business), yet it may provide some indication about follow-up support. Young people who are not taken on by the host employer require additional assistance to find work, and good employment outcomes outside the host employer may indicate good post-graduation support for those who have not been successful yet.

Table 7: Job title for students entering employment*

Job Category	Number of students	Percentage
Administrative	1	1.2
Food Service	2	2.6
Government	4	5.1
Healthcare	35	44.9
Maintenance	3	3.8
Manufacturing	2	2.6
Other	5	6.4
Retail	2	2.6
Missing	24	30.8
Total	**78**	**100.0**

* 78 students identified as employed for this data

Data on individual job types were also recorded in the Cincinnati Children's Hospital data (Table 8). Where appropriate, some of the job descriptions were subsumed under similar categories.

Table 8. Job title for students employed

Student Job Title	Frequency	Percent
Accommodation assistant	1	1.3
Admin Assistant/ Clerical	8	10.3
Assistant Technical Officer	1	1.3
Cleaner	6	7.7
Carer Assistant	2	2.6
Catering Assistant	2	2.6
Crew member	1	1.3
Data Input	2	2.6
Domestic Assistant	8	10.3
Finance Apprentice	1	1.3
Laboratory Assistant	1	1.3
Patient Support Assistant	4	5.1
Medical Records Library Assistant	1	1.3
Porter	11	6
Pharmacy assistant	1	1.3
Retail assistant	2	2.6
Sewing Machine Operative	1	1.3
Trainee Receptionist	1	1.3
Ward Clerk	1	1.3
Missing	23	29.5
Total	**78**	**100.0**

The results clearly reflect the fact that the overwhelming majority of sites in the UK are hospital environments. Overall the quality of reporting is, however, too patchy to draw any firm conclusions about the job categories for those who have obtained jobs through PS. As

the Cincinnati data set also contains some information on disability type, gender, and age, it may be possible to cross tabulate these characteristics by site. This could reveal some insights into recruitment patterns but the numbers in the data set are too small at present for most sites to yield much useful information. Once the annual reports have accumulated over time, this may be a helpful way of identifying recruitment patterns for each site.

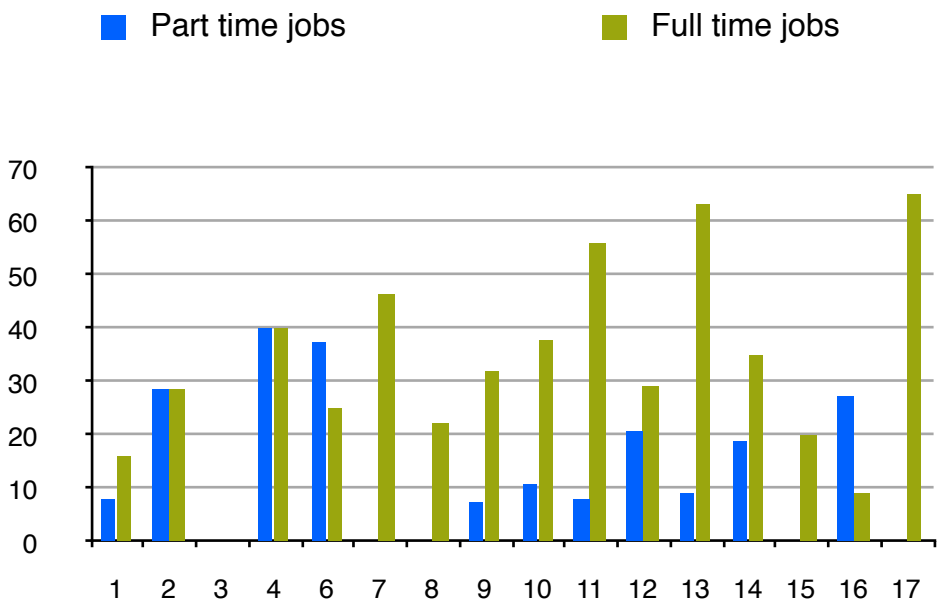
Jobs outcome data was contained in the Cincinnati Annual Report Data for some individuals. The spreadsheet contained information for 40 of the 78 graduates recorded as gaining paid employment (51%) about their wage and hours worked per week for 55 of those in work (71%). From this Annual Report Data it appears that the average wage earned by graduates was £7.68 (range £5.85 to £11.50) and the average hours worked was 23.9 hours (range 6 to 38 hours).

In summary, aggregated outcomes for full and part time employment reveal some encouraging results. About 36% of all participants have found full time paid employment (defined as more than 16 hours per week). This amounts to 114 individuals out of 316 participants. Another 35 individuals have found part time paid employment (less than 16 hours per week), which amounts to about 11%. However, these global figures hide significant differences across the sites.

Chart 2 lists the relevant percentage of successful outcomes by site (defined as part time or full time employment) as contained in the data obtained directly from sites. These are aggregated figures for all cohorts. The chart indicates that part and full time employment outcomes are achieved to a different extent in the various sites. There appears to be a strong emphasis on obtaining full time employment in some sites, even to the exclusion of part time employment outcomes. This may have implications for developing employment opportunities or may simply reflect preferences of participants.

The chances of gaining employment also differed across the sites in the UK. One site achieved an 80% chance of employment for participants (site 4) and another four sites (6, 11,13,17) achieved employment outcomes that rated at or above the employment rates prescribed by the PS model (60%). If full time employment is taken as the benchmark, only two sites achieved rates above 60% (sites 13 and 17). As these data reflect census data that may contain individuals who have left the programme early, the results may under-report actual employment outcomes for graduates.

Chart 2. Full-time and part-time employment outcomes by site in percent of total graduates*



* Note that sites 3, 5, 6, 8, 14, 15, 16, are July graduation and therefore interim results only.

The available data permit tests for distributional probability of variables. The evaluation investigated the strength of the distributional possibility between disability and full time employment, as well as age and gender and full time employment outcomes. Full time employment is taken as the dependent variable (DV), whilst the other variables are treated as independent variables (IV). In effect, this means that if a positive association between IV and DV is identified, a test would indicate that people who possess characteristics relating to IV may be more likely to be in full time employment.

Pearson chi-square is the preferred test for categorical unpaired data. Chi-square tests assess the likelihood that the distribution of one variable differs from an expected distribution by chance. As the test can be used with unpaired data (i.e. where variables denote events that are discrete) it was ideal to investigate the relationship between programme outcomes (employment) and personal characteristics of graduates. The results are shown below in Table 9a-c.

The degrees of freedom (df) determine the chi-square distribution probability. For a chi-square value of 90 and a degree of freedom of 15 (see Table 9a), the probability that employment outcomes occur by chance alone is very high ($p>0.05$). This means that any difference in distribution of employment outcomes appear in the data by chance. Pearson chi-square tests for age and gender equally showed no probability that the distribution of the employment variable (jobs obtained or not obtained) were influenced by any other factor than chance. For the sample in the evaluation data, employment outcomes were thus not likely to be influenced by either disability level, gender or age.

Table 9a. Association between level of disability and full time employment outcomes

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	90.973	15	.000
Likelihood Ratio	1010.672	15	.000
N of Valid Cases	315		

Table 9b. Association between level of age and full time employment outcomes

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	29.731	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	38.062	9	.000
N of Valid Cases	315		

Table 9c. Association between gender and full time employment outcomes

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	0.960	3	.811
Likelihood Ratio	0.963	3	.810
N of Valid Cases	315		

Programme Specialist Europe data

The Programme Specialist Europe also collected data on employment outcomes since 2011. The currently available data captures the cohort of students who graduated in 2012 in an aggregated way for each site. The data set does not contain data on individuals. The point of data capture was May 2013 which allowed the Programme Specialist Europe to take into account variations in attrition at the beginning and throughout the academic year. Whilst there are some minor differences between these data and the data provided by the sites to this evaluation, there is overall agreement on larger trends for employment outcomes.

Table 10: Employment outcomes as recorded by Programme Specialist Europe

Site Number	Number of graduates for 2011 cohort	Employment obtained in number of graduates	Employment outcome for cohort in percent	Number of graduates for 2012 cohort	Employment obtained in number of graduates	Employment outcome for cohort in percent
1	5	4	80.0	7	5	71.4
2	10	4	40.0	7	3	42.9
4				3	2	66.6

Site Number	Number of graduates for 2011 cohort	Employment obtained in number of graduates	Employment outcome for cohort in percent	Number of graduates for 2012 cohort	Employment obtained in number of graduates	Employment outcome for cohort in percent
7	8	6	75.0	10	5	50.0
9	12	2	16.6	10	5	50.0
10	10	6	60.0	9	3	33.3
11	8	7	87.5	9	6	66.6
12	8	5	62.5	8	6	75.0
14	8	4	50.0	6	4	66.6
17	8	8	100.0	7	5	71.4
Total	**77**	**46**	**59.7**	**76**	**44**	**57.9**

Family interviews

The evaluation plan provided for a second phase to verify the employment outcomes for graduates in each site. The verification strategy was to select four graduates in each site who had achieved part or full time employment. Site leads were then contacted to obtain consent from all selected families for brief phone interviews. Interviews were only conducted over the telephone, lasted about 15 minutes and families were informed that respondents would only be carers or parents.

Young people with learning disabilities were not interviewed at any stage. Where consent was granted, contact details were obtained from site leads for each family and interviews were conducted in August and September. The target number of respondents was 3 interviews per site, which would have given the evaluation a data set containing 45 interviews. However, some families declined to be interviewed, or contact could not be made through the site leads so that alternative respondents were selected in a second round. Overall, 26 interviews were conducted. The table below indicates the number of interviews conducted per site.

Table 11. Number of Family interviews by site

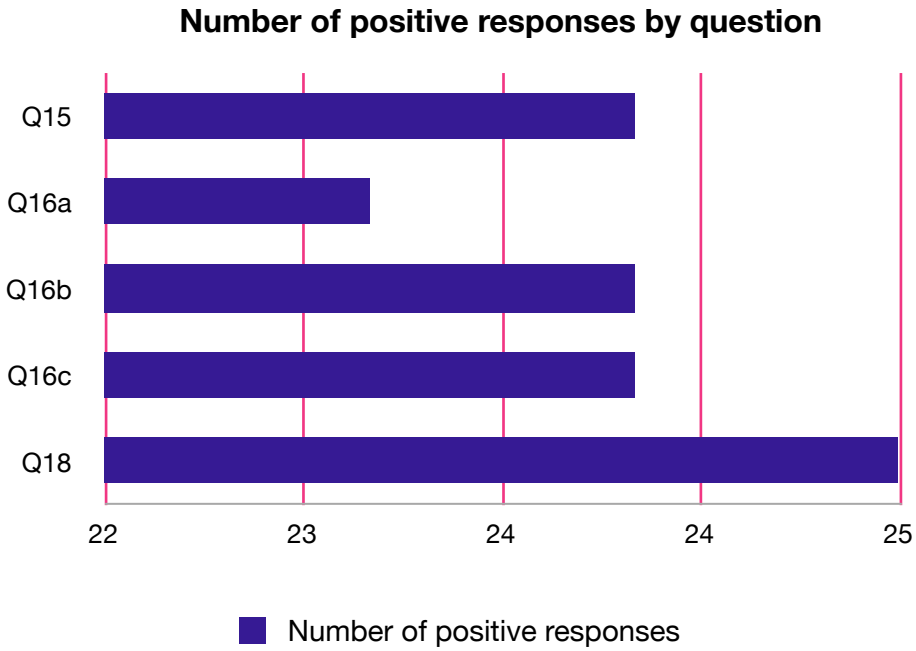
Site number	Number of interviews
1	2
2	4
4	3
6	2
7	1
8	1
9	2
10	2
14	1

Site number	Number of interviews
15	1
16	1
16	2
17	4
Total	**26**

During the interview respondents were asked to detail the types of work the graduate had done during the internship, whether they were in employment currently, and if so, what type of job they had. If their son or daughter was employed, respondents were also asked how many hours they worked and what their hourly wage was. They were also asked whether they thought that the internship had increased the confidence, self-esteem and the skills of their young people.

The results show that, with three exceptions, all young people who were reported by sites to have obtained employment were still in their jobs. Three young people had graduated from the programme but were not taken on by the host employer. All three were still actively looking for work. Most respondents either refused to reveal the hourly wage of their son or daughter or did not remember. In those cases it was asked whether they were at least receiving the minimum wage and all respondents confirmed this. With respect to the effects of the internships on graduates in terms of confidence, skills and self-esteem, respondents were almost unanimously positive about the impact it had on their young people. The aggregated results for those questions measuring the impact of programme participation on personal characteristics are given in Chart 3 below.

Chart 3. Interview responses to questions on outcomes for young people



Question 15 Do you think s/he is more employable now compared to before the internship?

Question 16a Did s/he gain through the internship in independence?

Question 16b Did s/he gain through the internship in confidence?
Question 16c Did s/he gain through the internship in self-esteem?
Question 18 Has s/he gained in skills through the internship?

Respondents were also asked about the type and place of work if their young person was currently employed. The table below provides the relevant data in aggregated form.

Table 12: Types of work obtained as verified through interviews

Type of work	Number of young people
Porter	3
Data input	2
Catering assistant	5
Domestic help/cleaning	3
Clerical assistant	2
Library assistant	2
Laboratory assistant	1
Caretaker	1
Manufacturing	1
Total	**21**

Finally, respondents provided some information on the wage their son or daughter received if currently employed and the hours they worked per week. As mentioned previously, the information could not be cross checked with the Cincinnati annual report data. Seventeen respondents (n=17) said that their young person earned the minimum wage, one respondent thought their young person earned £7.45 per hour or more than the minimum wage, and one respondent each indicated that their son or daughter earned an annual wage commensurate with grade 2 and grade 3 respectively, whilst one respondent said that his or her wage was approximately £15,000 per annum.

The national minimum wage rate stands currently (November 2013) at £6.31 per hour for people above 21 years of age, and £5.03 for people between 18 and 20 years of age. No young person in our sample was younger than 18. Grade 2 wage in the UK is set between £13,552 and 15,353 per annum (£7.17 to £8.12 per hour) and a grade 3 wage amounts to between £15,001 and £17,677 per annum (£7.94 to £9.35 per hour) (as of November 2013). These figures relate to pay scales used in the public sector in the UK and are subject to industry specific variation outside the public sector. However, most of the host employers of graduates from Project SEARCH UK are in the public sector.

The average number of hours worked per week in our sample was 23.5. Seventeen young people in our sample worked full time (16 hours per week or more), five young people

worked part time (less than 16 hours per week) and three young people were not in work. These figures are not representative of the employment outcomes for all Project SEARCH UK cohorts in all sites since a purposive sample was used for family interviews.

Discussion

The following section of the report will focus on the reporting practice for the UK sites and some of the implications for any future evaluations, recruitment of participants as reflected in the descriptive analysis of participant characteristics, and the issue of employment outcomes.

Two data sets contained useful information on individual participants and could give an insight into recruitment practices and employment outcomes. The Annual Report data set from Cincinnati however seemed to contain only previous cohorts and the reporting deadlines may have led to underreporting of some outcomes as some participants may gain employment later than anticipated. The resulting gaps in the Annual Report data could not be filled through analysis of the data obtained directly from the sites because individual entries did not use personal identifiers consistently across the data sets. However, rectifying this would require only simple changes to the data sets and this would allow any future evaluation to link them. There are several ways to operate on shared identifiers that would safeguard the identity of participants and maintain confidentiality in any future analysis.

Another problematic aspect with implications for the quality of data relates to reporting deadlines. At the moment, it is not clear whether data is regularly updated to capture follow up activity and subsequent employment outcomes for participants. More frequent and regular reporting after graduation may capture employment outcomes more consistently for those who gain employment 6 or 12 months after graduation. It would also allow site leads to frequently review whether graduates sustain their employment in the long term. This would accord with the model as prescribed by the programme developers who advocate follow up support.

The data received directly from the sites was of better quality, if only because all site leads who reported made considerable efforts to include the most recent cohort (2013). Almost all site leads also provided additional information about specific circumstances of participants (where relevant to employment outcomes) which could be converted into numeric data for the analysis. This demonstrates that all sites routinely collect a reasonable amount of data on all participants and that requesting data directly from the sites is probably the most useful approach for future evaluations.

Data received from the sites also contained updates (at time of reporting) which indicates that a significant amount of follow up work is on going in the sites. It may be worthwhile to explore the feasibility of collecting comprehensive outcome data for all UK sites in the UK directly if reporting practice to Cincinnati cannot be improved. It would also assist in mutual learning of good practice if these data could be collected in the UK and presented regularly to all site leads at feedback meetings. There are some notable variations in outcomes between sites which indicates that there is some potential for shared learning to bring all practices up to those of the most successful sites.

Characteristics of participants reveal some significant differences across sites in recruitment practices. Without detailed analysis of actual practices and recruiting preferences on the ground however it is difficult to say whether these are of structural nature or emerged by chance. The age of participants seems to indicate that the large majority of participants enter the programme at the two points of (potential) transition, at

age 16 and age 21 or 22. This is consistent with the prevalent educational and vocational pathways in the UK for the learning disability population.

There is a prevalence of males in the programme but, again, without detailed analysis of recruitment practices on the ground, it is difficult to draw any conclusions as to the reasons for this apart from the higher probability of recruiting males due to their higher prevalence rates in the learning disability population. There appears to be no imbalance in the numbers obtaining jobs by gender.

There is also some concern about the type and level of disability. The model prescribes the recruitment of 'at least 75% of each class' in the category of 'young adults with learning disabilities and autism spectrum conditions'. The data indicate that, whilst the aggregated figures for all sites show that the programme as a whole meets this requirement, there is a large number of participants (26.1%) for whom no disability is reported. This may simply be because some young people with autism spectrum disorder may not have received a statement or formal diagnosis, but it is difficult to say on the basis of the data provided if this is the main cause. Improved reporting can make a significant difference in assessing the model fidelity of the implementation in this respect.

The data on employment outcomes are the last aspect that requires some discussion in the context of the evaluation. Overall, the numbers of young people obtaining employment may fall short of the target figure of 60% (as stated in the model fidelity) but if part and full time employment outcomes are combined, the numbers are coming close and certainly represent good achievements compared to other supported employment programmes. The relevant cumulative figure across all sites and cohorts stands at 51.5 percent, with some variation across years ranging from 45% to 60%. There are variations between the sites in terms of part time and full time employment outcomes, as well as in the overall success of particular sites.

This may reveal some excellent opportunities for shared learning events, which may usefully focus on the role of part time employment as a potential step towards full time employment and the views of site staff on this. The model prescribes full time employment for all who obtain jobs, but some sites clearly focus more on obtaining part time jobs. It would also be useful to analyse in more detail which other factors may contribute to successful outcomes such as age, level of disability or type of work placements during the internship.

The types of jobs obtained appear to indicate that site staff utilise a good range of opportunities in the host employer organisation. This is corroborated by the family interviews where respondents consistently identified at least three work placements that were taken up during the internship as prescribed by the model. This clearly resonates with the need of young people with learning disabilities to develop preferences and skills through direct experience of work environments and work practices.

It may also be a critical factor contributing to the very high satisfaction expressed by the families with the programme during the interviews. The interview responses reveal a high amount of confidence by the families that the programme consistently increased the self-esteem and skills of participants. These data however cannot be treated as representative for all cohorts since only a purposive sample of families was interviewed. The criteria for selection were that the young people had achieved employment which may have positively influenced their views of the effectiveness of the programme.

Conclusion

Although data collection practices varied across the various data sources, the available data reveal some good employment outcomes for participants, well above the national level of employment of people with learning disabililties.

About 36% of all participants have found full time paid employment (defined as more than 16 hours per week). This amounts to 114 individuals out of 316 participants. Another 35 individuals have found part time paid employment (less than 16 hours per week), which amounts to about 11%. Although, these global figures hide significant differences across the sites, the overall results are encouraging with an average employment rate of 51.5% across all cohorts, with a range from 45% to 60% for individual sites for 2009 to 2012. Data reported by the Programme Specialist Europe, at a different May census date, shows an average employment rate of 59.7% in 2011 and 57.9% in 2012, with a wider range of rates for sites than the current study.

Some sites may not reach the Project SEARCH target of 60% employment for participants because they are in an early stage of implementation or it may mean that the sites are not adhering sufficiently closely to the Project SEARCH model. Critical to its success may be an improved shared learning process for all sites that is grounded in detailed outcome and good practice analysis.

As the programme expands swiftly, it appears important that existing sites gradually move to better model fidelity. Although assessing model fidelity was not part of this evaluation, varying working practices seemed to indicate some differences in the sites which may make it difficult to attribute outcomes to intrinsic programme factors . Achieving good employment rates for the learning disability population is clearly set within a highly complex context where multiple factors may contribute to successful outcomes. Greater model fidelity may make identification of contributory factors easier.

In the UK, the programme has been developed within the context of transition for young people with learning disabilities, and ultimately, a comprehensive assessment of its success should take into account recruitment practices, the transition pathways involved and the links that Project SEARCH has with the statutory transition process. Future evaluations may benefit from comparative methodologies, contrasting PS UK with other supported employment programmes for young people of similar age and characteristics in the UK.

Appendix

Project SEARCH model fidelity components

Core Model Fidelity Components
The outcome of the programme is integrated employment for each participant.
60% to 100 % of each graduating class has achieved competitive employment.
1.2 Employment occurs in integrated work settings.
1.3 Employees are directly employed by a business and earn the prevailing wage for a given job.
1.4 Employees work a minimum of 16 hours per week with the goal of full time employment.
1.5 Employees generally work the same schedule and hours as co-workers in similar posts.
1.6 Internships and paid jobs involve complex and systematic work.
1.7 Interns may leave the programme early if they are offered an appropriate job.
2. Collaboration: Project SEARCH is a partnership with support and resources from Education, the Local Authority, a Supported Employment Provider, the host business, and family members.
2.1 Roles and responsibilities of steering committee members are clearly defined and agreed upon by the team.
2.2 Partners meet on a regular basis to drive and monitor progress. Meetings should be at least monthly during the planning phase and the first year of programme implementation. Partners should meet at least quarterly after the second year.
2.3 The steering committee has a strategic plan for continuous improvement. Goals and dates are specified.
3. The programme is business led.
3.1 The business participates in the programme without subsidy.
3.2 There is a strong business liaison involved in crucial decisions such as intern selection, internship site development, active internal marketing of the programme throughout the business, assistance with and promotion of internal recruitment of qualified candidates.
3.3 The programme is based in a large, high quality business with a minimum of 200 employees, offering a variety of internships.
3.4 The business provides an on-site training room for the interns and workspace for the instructor and job coach(es).
4. The partners provide a full-time instructor and dedicated, consistent job coaches at the host business during the academic year and as needed by graduates and the host business during holidays.

4.1 The on-site programme team and key representatives of each partner organisation have received orientation and training on Project SEARCH.
4.2 The programme uses material from the Project SEARCH Resource Guide.
4.3 The instructor and job coaches have received training and actively use their skills and experience in job coaching, systematic instruction, job analysis and task analysis.
5. The programme focus is on serving young adults with learning disabilities and autistic spectrum conditions who can benefit from intensive, personalised support in preparing for and finding work. At least 75% of each class falls in this category.
6. Pooled funding is in place among the non-business partners.
6.1 Funding is a reallocation of existing resources.
6.2 Funding is sustainable.
6.3 After start-up, the programme operates without the need for grant funding.
6.4 Class size is sufficient to create cost-effective resource allocation for all partners.
7. There is total immersion of interns and/or employees at the host business.
7.1 Interns are on site at the business each day for a minimum of six hours, for an entire academic year.
7.2 Interns train in real work settings. The programme teaches competitive, marketable, transferable skills. Interns are not doing the work of volunteers. Interns participate in the internships 20 to 25 hours per week. Additional skills are added as more basic skills are mastered, so that the interns acquire cascading skills. At least one hour a day is dedicated to an employability skills curriculum.
7.3 Employment planning meetings are held to discuss progress on skill development with interns, instructor, job coach/job developer, family members, social worker and other appropriate team members. The instructor leads the meetings at the beginning of the year. The intern leads the meetings by mid-year. Meetings are held at least twice per internship.
7.4 Interns and on-site staff abide by the host business's policies and procedures.

8. A designated partner representative enters the following programme data into the Project SEARCH data base in October and May: Number of interns who began the programme. Number of interns who completed three internships and/or gained employment. Number of interns who gained competitive employment within 10 months of graduation. Descriptions of jobs. Wages earned. Hours worked per week. Benefits received from employer (e.g. discounts, pension). Education, supported employment, other key partner contact information. Other data as requested.
9. A majority of Project SEARCH interns achieve eligibility for long-term follow-along services before the programme begins or early in the Project SEARCH programme year.
9.1 Project SEARCH graduates receive long-term follow-along services to retain employment.
9.2 Long-term follow-along services that occur at the host business are provided by a single Supported Employment Provider/Person. Ideally that agency should be the same one that provides job coaching/job development, during the Project SEARCH year.
9.3 Eligibility for ongoing job development is made for graduates who do not get a job within 10 months of graduation from Project SEARCH.
10. The programme site has a current licensing agreement signed with Project SEARCH Cincinnati through Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. All required licensing fees have been paid to CCHMC's Project SEARCH programme.
11. Getting a job is more important than completing the Project SEARCH year.
11.1 The model is sufficiently flexible to allow interns to leave the programme at any time during the academic year when a suitable job opportunity arises.