

The Benefits of Work Experience

T Ball, F Brady, M Clark Turner, W Clementson, P Duncan, M Fernandes, J Hargreaves, S Rowe-Briggs, M B Suarez Lucero

ABSTRACT: This case study discussed the results of four surveys which were sent out to pupils, employers, parents and BeyondAutism staff regarding work experience. The surveys found that in general work experience prompts positive feelings in pupils and parent and is regarded by staff and employers as a beneficial part of pupil's lives.

Introduction

This case study will discuss the benefits of pupils attending work experience and acquiring workplace skills which will help increase their independence and self-confidence. Surveys were created for parents, pupils, staff and employers regarding the work experience placements the pupils were currently attending. The pupils in the case study are aged 16-19 years old and range from advanced vocal learners to early learners who use devices to communicate. The pupils are either 2:1 (Two tutors and one pupil) or 1:1 (One pupil and one tutor) in the community. These pupils attend work experience at the following locations: a cinema where the pupils restock shelves and make popcorn boxes; a warehouse where the pupils make product boxes for men's self-care and restock shelves; a library where the pupil's organise books and label the books, and a cafe where the pupils restock products and clean.

The work experience placements are in different parts of London: Tooting Broadway, Wimbledon, Earlsfield and Mitcham. To reach these locations the pupils take the bus. The pupils attend these work experiences once a week for 1 hour at a time. One pupil attends two work experience during the week. The pupils have targets within their Individual Education Plans (IEP) which relates to the work experience placements they attend and skills they are learning, for example staying on task for a set amount of time. The purpose of this weekly activity is to increase employment opportunity after they leave Sixth Form.

Literature Review

Being employed can increase self-esteem, happiness, build skills and improves physical and mental health (Darren Hedley, 2019). It can also create independence and financial security (Lui, 2022). Employment rates in the United Kingdom for people with autism are 22% compared to 80% of non-

disabled people and 47% of disabled people (The National Autistic Society, 2021). Of disabled people who do work, the majority work part time and are overqualified for the jobs they do have (Verywell heath, 2020).

Areas identified as why people with autism may not get a job are the application process, the interview and struggling to follow social rules (Hendricks, 2010). Areas identified as why people with autism may not be able to retain the job are sensory environment, social skills and unstructured work practices (Autism Society, 2020). Mental health is something to consider when looking at people with autism entering and staying in the workforce. Workplaces can be loud and the pressure to participate socially can cause anxiety (Mind, 2015).

Why is work experience important to getting a job in the future? Confidence is built when interacting with others, developing transferable skills and confirming interests in careers (Guidance, 2018). Attending work experience means pupils can add this to their CV, show an employer their skills and how motivated they are (Debut, 2021). Parents and carers influence their children by having a good work ethic, providing motivation and opportunities for their children (Midkent, 2022). Employers who employ people with autism are likely to get an employee who is loyal, reliable and persistent (The National Autistic Society, 2020).

Method

The class held a meeting and discussed who would be surveyed for our questionnaire about work experience. We decided upon pupils, employers, BeyondAutism staff and parents. The next step was to decide which questions should be asked on the survey. This was done by allocating tutor to surveys to construct. These were presented to the class and the questions were edited.

For the pupil's survey the questions were converted into a picture word document called Widgit so the pupils would understand the questions more easily. Then they were given either to the pupils to fill out independently or their tutors who would assist them in completing the survey. The returned surveys were inputted into a Excel file.

For the employers the questions were inputted on a word document and printed out. This document was given to all employers to complete. Once the survey was returned the data was input into a excel file.

For BeyondAutism staff the survey was emailed and they were asked to complete and return. When this did not occur a follow up online survey was sent instead. This online survey data can be converted into an Excel file which we did.

For parents we sent an email containing the survey and asked for

the completed survey to be returned. There was no need to input this into an excel file as we only had one returned survey.

Results

The Excel file below shows the results of the survey given to pupils. South Thames College has 13 pupils. Of the 9 surveyed 8 returned a survey. Four pupils do not attend work experience and were not surveyed.

Question 1: What do you do at work experience.

Three pupils attend work experience at the cinema. Two pupils attend work experience at the warehouse. Two pupils attend work experience at the café. Two pupil attends work experience at the library.

Questions 2: Do you enjoy going to work experience.

6 out of 8 pupils answered yes to this question.

Question 3: How does it make you feel going to work experience.

6 out of 8 pupils answered happy to this question while two answered that they felt anxious about the experience

Question 4: What do you like most about work experience.

Three pupils liked employee benefits. Two pupils liked the journey. Two pupils liked working with friends/people. One pupil liked meeting new people.

Question 5: What have you learnt working at your work experience.

Three pupils answered they learnt teamwork. Two pupils learnt time management. Two pupils learnt independence. One pupil learnt new skills.

Question 6: Would you like to work here.

6 out of 8 pupils answered yes to this question.

Question 7: What jobs do you like to do at work experience.

Four pupils answered making boxes. One pupil answered wrapping cutlery. One pupil answered sorting DVDs. One pupil answered restocking shelves. One pupil answered sweeping.

Pupils	What do you do for work experience	Do you enjoy going to work experience	How does it make you feel going to work experience	What do you like most about work experience	What have you learnt working at your work experience	Would you like to work here	What jobs do you like to do at work experience
Pupil 1	Cinema	No	Happy	Journey	Teamwork	Yes	making boxes
Pupil 2	Café Library	Yes	Happy	Employee benefits	New skills	Yes	Wrapping cutlery
Pupil 3	Library	Yes	Happy	Working with friends	Teamwork	Yes	Sorting DVD
Pupil 4	Cinema	Yes	Happy	Working with friends / People	Teamwork	Yes	Making boxes
Pupil 5	Café	Yes	Happy	Employee benefits	Independence	Yes	Restocking food
Pupil 6	Warehouse	Yes	Anxious	Meeting new people	Independence	Yes	Sweeping
Pupil 7							
Pupil 8	Warehouse	No	Anxious	Working employee benefits	Time management	No	Making boxes
Pupil 9							
Pupil 10							
Pupil 11	Cinema	Yes	Happy	Journey	Time management	No	Making boxes
Pupil 12							
Pupil 13							

Figure 1. Survey results - pupils

Employer

The Excel file below shows the results of the survey returned by work experience employers. Six surveys were completed.

Three surveys were returned from the cinema. Two surveys were returned from the café. One survey was return from the warehouse.

Question 1: Have you previously employed anyone with autism.

The cinema employers answered yes to this question. The café and warehouse answered no.

Question 2: Does your application processes cater, or can it be adapted for people with autism.

Five responders answered yes while one answered with Not applicable.

Question 3: Would your working environment

be able and willing to adapt to the specific needs for people with autism

All responders answered yes to this question.

Question 4: What qualifications would be needed for this role.

Five responders answered this with no qualifications. One responded with GCSE.

Question 5: Would vocational qualifications and projects be considered when applying for the role.

Four responders answered yes to this question. Two responded with no.

Question 6: Would you consider employing our pupil in a paid/volunteer part/ full time role.

All responders answered yes to this question.

Question 7: Do you feel like the work our students so (aided by tutors) is completed to a high enough standard

Four responders didn't answer this question. Two responders answered yes.

Work experiences	Have you previously employed anyone with ASD	Does your application processes cater, or can it be adapted for people with ASD	Would your working environment be able and willing to adapt to the specific needs for people with ASD	What qualifications would be needed for this role	Would vocational qualifications and projects be considered when applying for the role	Would you consider employing our pupil in a paid/volunteer part/ full time role	Do you feel like the work our students so (aided by tutors) is completed to a high enough standard
CINEMA 1	Y	N/A	Y	GCSE	Y	Y	Didn't answer
CINEMA 2	Y	Y	Y	NO QUALIFCATIONS	Y	Y	Didn't answer
CINEMA 3	Y	Y	Y	NO QUALIFCATIONS	Y	Y	Didn't answer
WAREHOUSE	N	Y	Y	NO QUALIFCATIONS	N	Y	Didn't answer
CAFÉ 1	N	Y	Y	NO QUALIFCATIONS	N	Y	Y
CAFÉ 2	N	Y	Y	NO QUALIFCATIONS	Y	Y	Y

Figure 2. Survey results - employers

BeyondAutism Staff

The Excel file below shows the results of the survey returned by BeyondAutism employees. 11 surveys were completed.

Question 1: Do you feel like we are doing enough to encourage employability skills within our pupils?

Eight of the eleven returned a positive response while 3 qualified their answer. There were no negative responses.

Question 2: Do you think we are teaching appropriate targets to help our learners have future working opportunities and/or independence in the workplace?

All response were positive.

Question 3: Is there anything more we could be providing in terms of resources or opportunities for our learners to help them towards becoming employed?

Ten of the eleven responders answered positively and made suggestions.

Question 4: Do you think we should expand on some of the roles we offer for work experience (library, cinema, warehouse, café, canteen in college) if so, what roles do you think would be beneficial?

All responders answered positively and made suggestions on what could be added.

Question 5: Do you think parents should have more input into what job skills their children are being taught in school?

There were six positive responses and one negative. The other four saw the benefits of both sides.

Do you feel like we are doing enough to encourage employability skills within our pupils?	Do you think we are teaching appropriate targets to help our learners have future working opportunities and/or independence in the workplace?	Is there anything more we could be providing in terms of resources or opportunities for our learners to help them towards becoming employed?	Do you think we should expand on some of the roles we offer for work experience (library, cinema, warehouse, café, canteen in college) if so, what roles do you think would be beneficial?	Do you think parents should have more input into what job skills their children are being taught in school?
Yes	yes	different types of employment. For the learners to start taking on more of a employee role not just doing tasks for the job.	Yes. shadow a employee and learn the tasks they do and then start doing their tasks. This requires more time at work experiences	yes and no. I think parents know there children and know what they will already like but I think learner need to try all jobs
yes, but we need to expand this to all pupils	yes	more community experiences	the farm that we used to go in the past was really good	I think the job has to be related with the pupil's interests and skills
I believe BA have done a very good job supporting and encouraging the development of employability skills. However we could always be doing more.	I do.	I believe that BA have provided a good amount of opportunities and resources resources available for our learners.	I think that is a fabulous idea! Many of our learners enjoy going to the movies and shopping. Using these businesses as potential work experience locations will be highly motivational to the young people.	I think the parent opinion is already strongly valued.
On balance, it would be a yes. We have a lot of pre-employment activities that support students to access work, i.e. communication and interaction skills, teaching skills and focused activities such as BA Cafe to understand enterprise etc.	Yes - see above. There needs to be a lot of pre-employment activities before learners will be able to access functionally and successfully a work placement.	Perhaps more opportunities to understand which opportunities might realistically be available to them, e.g. employment activities as 'simple' as filling envelopes to higher level activities such as the BA Cafe serving customers etc. We need to think more about the learner's skills and levels to determine what would be a functional work activity for that learner.	As above, I think maybe considering other practical/functional activities that our learners could genuinely use to transfer to work placements would be good.	Not sure what the current level of involvement is, but its a yes for this one for sure.
Yes, I feel that an organisation we are doing everything possible to provide to our learners and pupils the best in terms of the work experience.	Yes, all the IEP targets that I have seen so far make sense and they are functional for our learners and provide them with knowledge for future work placements.	We can potentially encourage our learners accessing the community more before they fully access a work experience environment. Arrange more school trips, walks in the park, swimming, skiing, horse riding.	Yes	Yes
Yes, however I feel there should be a clear pathway for employment to be set out and necessary support provided for employers/ support staff.	Yes, independence is an underpinning aspect of the teaching at BA.	Education for employers to help job carving and supporting our learners.	Yes, in retail, gardening, hospitality/ cleaning.	Yes, an understanding of their aspirations of the kids is important.
I feel like we are doing enough maybe a range of different work experience	I feel like every target set out for pupils are giving them a ability to live work and be independence.	No	If possible experience in all roles as pupils have different likes and dislikes	If they have jobs which allows work experience for are pupils
I believe a lot more could be done to encourage our pupils with the skills for employment. However this may not be suitable for all of our pupils.	Yes some targets are appropriate but on a whole a lot more could be done to ensure that our pupils have the employability skills geared towards the job they are capable of doing.	A lot more networking with companies and organisations for job opportunities and possibly longer periods of time spending in a work placement.	Sales Assistant (Sainsbury's) Picker /Packer, restocking shelves, Plant care (B&Q or plant nursery) Cleaning, office building. Jewellery making, Painting and decorating.	yes
Yes - Throughout their time at BeyondAutism the pupils are taught skills that will promote independent living including and working.	Yes - Skills worked on in the IEPs encourage and promote employability skills for example matching targets - the ability to match items that look the same is a skills used in some jobs such as restocking items and placing the same items together.	I think we could ask the pupil where they would like to go to work experience, and allow them to try a few places and see if they like or dislike the job/places worked in.	I think perhaps work experience in the Hospitality sector, and perhaps more retail experience opportunities.	I'm not sure how much input parents currently have in regards to targets
Yes, I do	Yes, I do	I think they should go to work experience more often so they can practice more.	I think it's also depends from the individual interest of our pupils and their ability for specific work....	Yes...
I think when pupils reach sixth form, there is a focus on going out more which is great for those that are able to do it - especially the work experience at cafes, cinema etc... However, realistically, with pupils that are early learners or have reduced abilities, they do not have any work experience, and do not go out very frequently which is a shame as they are restricted to the classroom. Or when we do not have enough staff for 2:1 pupils, or those that need more support, they do not get to go out into the community as frequently, such as shops or to other places outside of school. The kitchen facilities in Tram are great and gives good opportunity for pupils to learn how to cook or make their way around a kitchen. Unfortunately, this is lacking in college as there's only access for a short time once a week - maintained access to this would be better.	Yes I think the targets are appropriate to the ability levels of learners and what they can practically be expected to do. We do our best to encourage independence while still being aware the support that is required.	I think for early learners, or those with intense BTC it's not likely that they will gain employment and our focus is more about increasing independence. So for that it would be nice to more getting out in the community (if possible) to make choices about clothing, food etc. and the ability to interact with people/staff in community, and paying confidently.	maybe supermarkets or clothing stores could be beneficial	As tutors, we do not always have much interaction with parents, or information, in terms of their preferences in these things. So if this is not already asked of them, it would be nice to get their input of what they'd like to focus on.

Figure 3. Survey Results - BeyondAutism Staff

Parents

Out of the three surveys given one was answered. The other four parents weren't surveyed due to lack of past communication with the school.

Question 1: Do you believe there is enough awareness about autism in the workplace.

This response was negative the responder believes there is only a limited understanding of the autism spectrum disorder.

Question 2: Do you consider your child working in the future to be a possibility?

The response to the question was positive.

Question 3: Would that work be voluntary or paid?

The responder believes the pupil will work in voluntary employment.

Question 4: Do you feel the work experience currently provided is beneficial to your child?

The response to the question was positive.

Question 5: What career path possibilities would you expect to be available?

The responder made good positive suggestion about the pupil's future employment.

Question 6: Do you believe the qualifications gained will have a positive impact on your child's social life?

The response to the question was positive. The responder only saw positive outcome for the pupil through exposure to work experience.

Question 7: What would you like an employer to know about your child prior to hiring them/taking them on (likes dislikes, personality types etc.)?

The responder had some positive suggestions to enhance the pupil's interaction with any employer/colleagues.

Question 8: Are you aware of what work opportunities BA has to offer?

The response to the question was positive.

Question 9: Do you have any input in the job roles and skills your child undertakes?

The response to the question was positive.

Question 10: How involved in the job recruitment process would you like to be?

The responder sees parent involvement in the recruitment process as a positive.

Dear parents and carers,

The following questionnaire is designed to improve the general work experience of our students, as well as increasing our contribution towards their wellbeing. We also hope that a stronger collaborative approach will occur, with yourselves at the helm.

Thank you for reading, and we look forward to hearing your reply.

1. Do you believe there is enough awareness about autism in the workplace?

I think there is a lot of awareness about a top slice of higher cognitively functioning autism, those who are great with computers or data. Far less about [redacted] type of level 3 autism, often with a learning disability too. This matters, as all the current debate is about what wonderful focus and IT skills the autistic employees can bring; the issues for our more severe kids are very different for an employer.

2. Do you consider your child working in the future to be a possibility?

Yes, maybe in a café or restaurant. He is a whizz at emptying and filling a dishwasher

3. Would that work be voluntary or paid?

I think it would be voluntary, as he'd likely need a 1-to-1 as well. He is fine getting paid in diet coke and brownies!

4. Do you feel the work experience currently provided is beneficial to your child?

Very happy with his work at the church cafe

5. What career path possibilities would you expect to be available?

Cafe, or maybe he could do small tasks on a reception desk

6. Do you believe the qualifications gained will have a positive impact on your child's social life?

Yes, I do, as he can't just go swimming or mooch around for the rest of his adult life. He needs something to do that can make him feel proud

7. What would you like an employer to know about your child prior to hiring them/taking them on (likes dislikes, personality types etc.)?

That his autism is severe, that he is not safe without a 1-to-1. That he is happy and joyous most of the time but can have meltdowns. That he's not like the autism we see in the press, loves noise and lights and a dance, also sociable but only minimal language and understanding of language. [redacted]

8. Are you aware of what work opportunities BA has to offer?

Yes

9. Do you have any input in the job roles and skills your child undertakes?

Yes

10. How involved in the job recruitment process would you like to be?

I would definitely like to be involved

Figure 4 & 5. Survey Results - parents

Discussion

Pupils

Thirteen pupils attend South Thames College of those four do not have outside work experience instead they attend to chores within the school for example washing dishes and vacuuming the class. Nine attend outside work experience of those nine eight were able to complete this survey while one did not.

Overall pupils found going to work experience positive. Two of the pupils don't enjoy going to work experience with one saying she feels anxious about going. Tutors feel that these are due to change of routine and level of demands at work experience. Tutors thought that pupils labelling themselves as anxious could be due to change of environment and people.

All pupils found being at work experience being enjoyable because of the journey, opportunity to socialise and workplace incentives. Pupils recognise they are learning future skills this includes time management, independence, new skills and teamwork. Seven of the eight pupils who attend work experience would like to continue employment at their job. Pupil 8 has a correlation between her anxiety over attending work experience and her lack of desire to continue to work there.

All pupils found different parts of the job enjoyable with some liking making boxes and others restocking food.

Employers

On the whole employers were happy to have our pupils attend work experience at their business and would continue in the future to employ our pupils.

Some had had previous experience with autistic people. Most felt that qualification would be considered for employment but two felt it unnecessary. We are aware that while our pupils don't gain a GCSE they do gain many other qualifications such as Gold Level Transition Challenge and Gold Level Workright. It is unfortunate that not everyone answered the final question, but we believe this was due to it being on the back of the page.

BeyondAutism Staff

There were only 11 responses to our survey out of 250 sent and coincidentally the responders were more closely associated with the class doing the survey. All responders were positive about the efforts made to prepare pupils for work possible. However, there was also recognition that early learners were not catered for. All responders felt that the targets in the IEP were satisfying pupils needs for the present and future employment. However, there was also clear desire to expand the program to include different venues, higher frequency of work experience and more community access. Responders made suggestion about other venues such as the farm, supermarket and gardening. While responders reconsidered parents input in choosing work experience for pupils, there was also recognition in the value of the pupils voice and have a range of experience.

Parents

It was disappointing that only one parent responded to the survey. However, the responder raised some interesting points.

This responder recognised that work experience was positive and offered a future for her child in voluntary work. The parent raised the idea that being able to attend work experience gives self-esteem to pupils.

Public perception of autism is heavily influenced by limited understanding of the range of the spectrum because most people are only aware of those who can function independently in society. This responder believes the experience would be enhanced if the employer had more specific information about the pupils.

The role of parents in the ongoing employment of their children was raised here. This highlights the dependence of the pupils on their parents for life. This identifies the need for positive work experience outcome for pupils to set them up for the future. So, that they and their parents are aware of the possibility's.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our results support the benefits of our pupils accessing work experience. It is an opportunity for new skills to be learnt but also skills that can be used for voluntary or paid work.

A limitation to our study is that only one parent replied to the survey. There may be some parents with differing views or who do not support the idea of their children engaging in work.

From our pupils accessing work experience, not only are they gaining vocational skills that they can transfer to a work placement when leaving their educational provision, we are also bringing awareness to varying work placement/ employers of how our pupils can benefit them as well as how they can accommodate our pupils.

Recommendations

We recommend that the work experience program continues and that it should be expanded wherever possible to include more venue and higher frequency. We also recommend that early learners have more access to the community.

References

- Autism Society. (2020). Tips for Working with Individuals on the Autism Spectrum. Retrieved from Autism Society: <https://www.autism-society.org/living-with-autism/autism-through-the-lifespan/adulthood/employment/tips-working-individuals-autism-spectrum/>
- Darren Hedley, M. U. (2019). Positive well-being may protect against depression in people with autism. Science News.
- Debut. (2021). What to include in the work experience section of your CV. Retrieved from Debut: <https://debut.careers/insight/what-to-include-in-work-experience-section-of-cv/>
- Guidance, P. (2018). The importance of work experience. Retrieved from Parental Guidance: <https://www.parentalguidance.org.uk/gaining-skills-experience/the-importance-of-work-experience>
- Hendricks, D. (2010). Employment and adults with autism spectrum disorders: Challenges and strategies for success. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* , 125-134.
- Liu, C. (2022). 11 Reasons to accept a job you're not passionate about (because it's never that simple)
- Mind. (2015). Supporting people living with autism spectrum disorder and mental health problems. Retrieved from Mind: <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/4400/autism-guide-web-version.pdf>
- Midkent College. (2022). The role of parents in their child's career choices – Careers. Retrieved from Midkent College: <https://www.midkent.ac.uk/news/blog/the-role-of-parents-in-their-childs-career-choices/>
- The National Autistic Society. (2021, February 19). New shocking data highlights the autism employment gap. Retrieved from National Autism Society: <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/news/new-data-on-the-autism-employment-gap>
- The National Autistic Society. (2020). Employing autistic people – a guide for employers
- Verywell heath. (2020, December 2). 10 Things to Know About Autism and Employment. Retrieved from verywellheath.com: <https://www.verywellhealth.com/things-you-need-to-know-about-autism-and-employment-4159850>