

‘Sometimes you just need someone to take a chance on you’



Find out more and support us at www.autistica.org.uk

Registered with the Charity Commission in England No. 1107350 Company No. 5184164

St Saviour's House, 39–41 Union St, London SE1 1SD United Kingdom.

T: +44 (0)20 3857 4340 E: info@autistica.org.uk

An Internship Programme for Autistic Graduates at Deutsche Bank, UK

Dr Anna Remington and Prof Liz Pellicano

Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE), UCL Institute of Education, University College London



AUTISTICA
Building brighter futures through autism research



The challenge

There is a well-established employment gap in autism, where autistic people are often willing and able to work, but struggle to find and maintain employment.

The consequences of this gap are far reaching; not only economically, but also with respect to the wellbeing and quality of life of autistic individuals who are not able to secure or retain employment.

There is almost no research conducted on the most effective ways of getting autistic people into work, but the small number of studies that exist have identified work placements as an important step in this process. There remains a lack of knowledge, however, about the real-life experiences of those involved in such schemes.



There is almost no research conducted on the most effective ways of getting autistic people into work.

Key findings and recommendations

A positive, meaningful experience was reported for the majority of those involved in the scheme, with five interns retained for an additional period of employment.

For the most part, the interns reported feeling accepted within the workplace and were well supported by their managers, buddies and colleagues. Many interns also reported growing in confidence, and all gained practical experience and contributed to their teams: “the most useful thing that I’ve learned is that I am very able and it’s made me realise that I can do anything” [Intern].

Managers and colleagues described several benefits, including better knowledge of autism and diversity, reflecting on their own management styles, and growth on a personal level.



Our research

The current study looked at one work placement scheme in the UK: a three-month internship for eight autistic graduates at the London offices of Deutsche Bank.

To understand the programme from all perspectives, four groups were interviewed: the interns; their hiring managers; the team members who worked alongside the interns; and their buddies (each intern was assigned a mentor from outside their own team, for the duration of the internship). Interns and hiring managers were interviewed at two time-points: before the internship began and during the final week of the programme.

Team members and buddies were only interviewed at the second time-point.

“The most useful thing that I’ve learned is that I am very able and it’s made me realise that I can do anything.”

The process, however, was not necessarily straightforward for all of those involved, all of the time.

Participants also identified, with remarkable agreement, a number of challenges that they encountered throughout the duration of the internship. Some interns reported elevated anxiety, difficulties in judging communication in the office environment and some confusion regarding office rules.

Our Report shows that Deutsche Bank’s autistic graduate internship programme is a very promising strategy to turn around autistic people’s exclusion from the labour market. To build on this initial success, the findings in our report highlight four key ways in which the scheme’s promise might be even more effectively realised.

1



Be clear and always be committed

All groups highlighted the importance of providing clear expectations about the programme from the outset and sticking to those expectations throughout. Similarly, those interacting with the interns should be clear in their use of language and sincere in what they offer – say what you mean and mean what you say. Wherever possible, promises should be kept, deadlines met, and offers fulfilled.

2



Treat people as individuals

Autism varies widely from person to person – even in individuals who are clever and articulate, like the interns described herein. With this in mind, it is important to avoid making assumptions. As the saying goes:

“If you’ve met one person on the autism spectrum, you’ve met one person on the autism spectrum.”

3



Provide widespread training on autism

Many of those we spoke to suggested that there should be more widespread training for all those who will interact with the interns (i.e. all team members, staff in Human Resources). Managers should also be provided with ongoing professional support during the internship. This could take the form of a helpline or regular meeting with a job coach with expertise in autism to allow managers or colleagues to seek guidance.

4



Create a point-person for autistic interns and their managers

Several of those involved in the internship – from the interns themselves to hiring managers, buddies and team members – spoke about difficulties in communicating concerns, especially when potential disagreements between interns and managers emerged. Future cohorts would benefit from the establishment of a neutral point-person, who could facilitate discussion between different parties in the event of disagreement and could also be available as a source of advice.

With these amendments in place, the Deutsche Bank programme could well become a beacon of good practice for other employers across the world, ensuring that...

“...candidates of untapped talent will be given the opportunities that they deserve.”