

HEALTH  
EDUCATION  
ENGLAND

# Project Choice

Making a **Difference**

Key information for learners, parents and carers



  
**Ofsted**  
Good  
Provider

**NHS**

**Health Education England**

## Who Are We?

- **Project Choice** is a Specialist Post-16 College providing work experience as well as a Supported Internship to young adults with learning difficulties, disabilities and/or Autism.
- Through the Internship, 16-24 year olds gain work experience, develop independence skills and increase their employability.
- Our service is bespoke, offering tailored support to each Intern, and employment opportunities are matched to the individual's skills.
- **Project Choice** aims to empower Interns and build their confidence as individuals in the workplace, while also offering life experience beyond their home and school environments.



"I enjoyed the sense of responsibility, being in a new environment and meeting new people"  
(Former Intern)



"Project Choice has made me have hope and also it gave me an idea of what I want to do when I leave the course"  
(Former Intern)

Our priority is providing a secure, uplifting experience for our Interns, and ensuring they develop academic, work and life skills throughout the Internship.

Our staff are dedicated to the welfare of interns, providing skilled, informed support and working closely with family members and other professionals to ensure the work experience is positive and skill-enhancing.

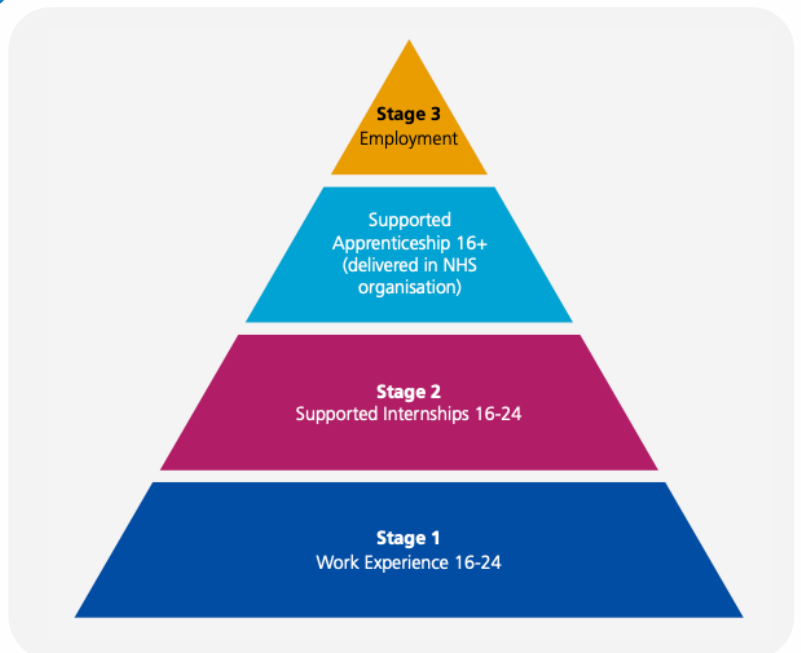
We support the interns in their journey to employment, and continue that support if needed.

## Our Approach

The **Project Choice** Supported Internship is delivered within NHS organisations, the independent sector and private business.

The programme takes a staged approach to preparation for work. Students can join at either Stage 1 or Stage 2.

Students who complete Stage 2 of the programme will leave us with an employability qualification accredited by NCFE.



### Stage 1 - Work Experience

- In liaison with local schools, Project Choice offers term time placements, usually lasting six weeks. Learners start work around 9.30am and finish at around 12.15pm (slight variations can be negotiated with the schools).
- Training is provided with the support of a mentor.
- Once each cohort of learners complete their work experience placements, they are presented with a certificate.

### Stage 2 - Supported Internships

- Up to three placements, lasting 10-12 weeks each, throughout the academic year. Four days per week are spent in work, with one day in the classroom.
- Interns are supported by a Workplace Mentor, Project Coordinator and a Project Manager.
- In the classroom, Interns learn about employment and develop employability skills, as well as having study time to improve Maths and English.

## Why Project Choice?

### Empathy, experience and commitment

**Project Choice** staff members have lived experience of learning difficulties, disabilities and/or Autism. Three of our team members are also former **Project Choice** Interns.

### Wholly tailored support

The **Project Choice** Supported Internship is a person-centred, bespoke service. We match work placements to each individual's skills, and we offer training to employers to ensure they are aware of, and able to fully support, interns' additional needs.

### Project Choice is publicly funded

We are funded by the ESFA and local authority commissioners - there is no cost to join.



### We get results

Our completion rates are exceptional, with many Interns going on to secure paid employment once their internship is complete.

### There are no academic requirements

To attend the College you will need to have a current Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in place.

"The moment he started his first placement with Project Choice, my son thrived... He is now in employment as a result of the project"  
(Parent of Former Intern)

### An award winning programme

For over a decade, **Project Choice** has consistently won awards for outstanding practice, mentoring, and commitment to inclusion and diversity in the workplace. We've been recognised by the Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, and the North East Equality Awards, among many others.

"The student we have worked with fitted into the office atmosphere with ease... It was a pleasure to see his confidence grow"  
(Employer Mentor)

## Our Success



**Project Choice** has won several awards over the years, and we are proud to say 126 of our Interns have been employed since 2017. Some of our ex-Interns are now nine years into employment, and we employ three ex-Interns within our own team.

*In fact, we can boast the following statistics from 2017-2020:*



Over 500 students supported



Over 200 placement providers sourced



83% success rate



"I feel like an adult. I have travelled to work independently, done my job and travelled home independently - just like other workers. I'm so proud of myself, I want to keep working"  
(Former Intern)

## Case Studies

Liam and Megan are just two examples of recent success stories through **Project Choice**. Read more about their journey to employment below.



Liam attended a specialist ASD school and Sixth Form before starting a Supported Internship with Project Choice in September 2019. He worked hard and excelled in both of his work placements, and during the year his confidence improved greatly, learning many valuable work and independence skills. Despite the Covid-19 restrictions and lockdown, Liam continued to receive support from Project Choice staff with applying for jobs, and his hard work paid off: he's now secured paid employment at a food manufacturer in Middlesbrough.

Megan has special education needs and disabilities including a genetic disorder called 22Q11 Deletion Syndrome (or Di George Syndrome) and ADHD. She commenced the Project Choice Internship in September 2019, and completed two placements at the The University Hospital of North Durham. Megan overcame challenges relating to self-confidence and made excellent progress on the Internship, receiving positive feedback from both placements. In February 2020, she secured a job as a domestic services assistant at ENGIE Soft Services, supporting the NHS during the Covid-19 pandemic.



## How do we measure success?

While success could be measured purely in terms of gainful employment secured, the ESFA and the College take a person-centred view.

For us, success for our Interns encompasses:

- Securing jobs
- Securing apprenticeships
- Going on to volunteering opportunities
- Pursuing further education
- Achieving increased skills for independence
- Enjoying improved mental health and wellbeing



## Our College

**Project Choice** is a Specialist Post-16 College and we deliver the Internship, employing specialist tutors directly. We have an ESFA-approved curriculum, and link into additional NCFE accredited provision.

All educational-based delivery is embedded into placement provision.

“This high-quality Supported Internship programme creates an ambitious challenge for a successful future for the interns.”  
- Ofsted Inspection Report (Jan 2020)

All of our education provision is subject to Ofsted Inspection and DFE regulations. In January 2020 **Project Choice** was awarded a Good Provider Rating by Ofsted.

## Preparing for Adulthood

Our team at Project Choice are well-versed in the Preparing for Adulthood agenda. Project Choice delivers an aspirational curriculum designed to support our Interns in making progress on all preparations outlined by the PfA programme:



- Preparing young people for higher education and / or employment
- Independent living – this means young people having choice, control and freedom over their lives and the support they have, their accommodation and living arrangements, including supported living
- Participating in society, including having friends and supportive relationships, and participating in, and contributing to, the local community
- Being as healthy as possible in adult life



**"The difference in my son is enormous; he is proud and excited to go to work. He has a purpose and it has transformed his life"**  
**(Parent of Intern)**



## Post-Internship

Our staff continue to support our Interns post completion of the Internship. Sustaining employment is key to us, and we are committed to helping Interns achieve their goals.



"This project is the best thing she has ever done. The plan is for her to do a childcare qualification at the end of this project and the nursery are keen for her to stay on with them; she is on cloud nine"  
(Parent of Intern)

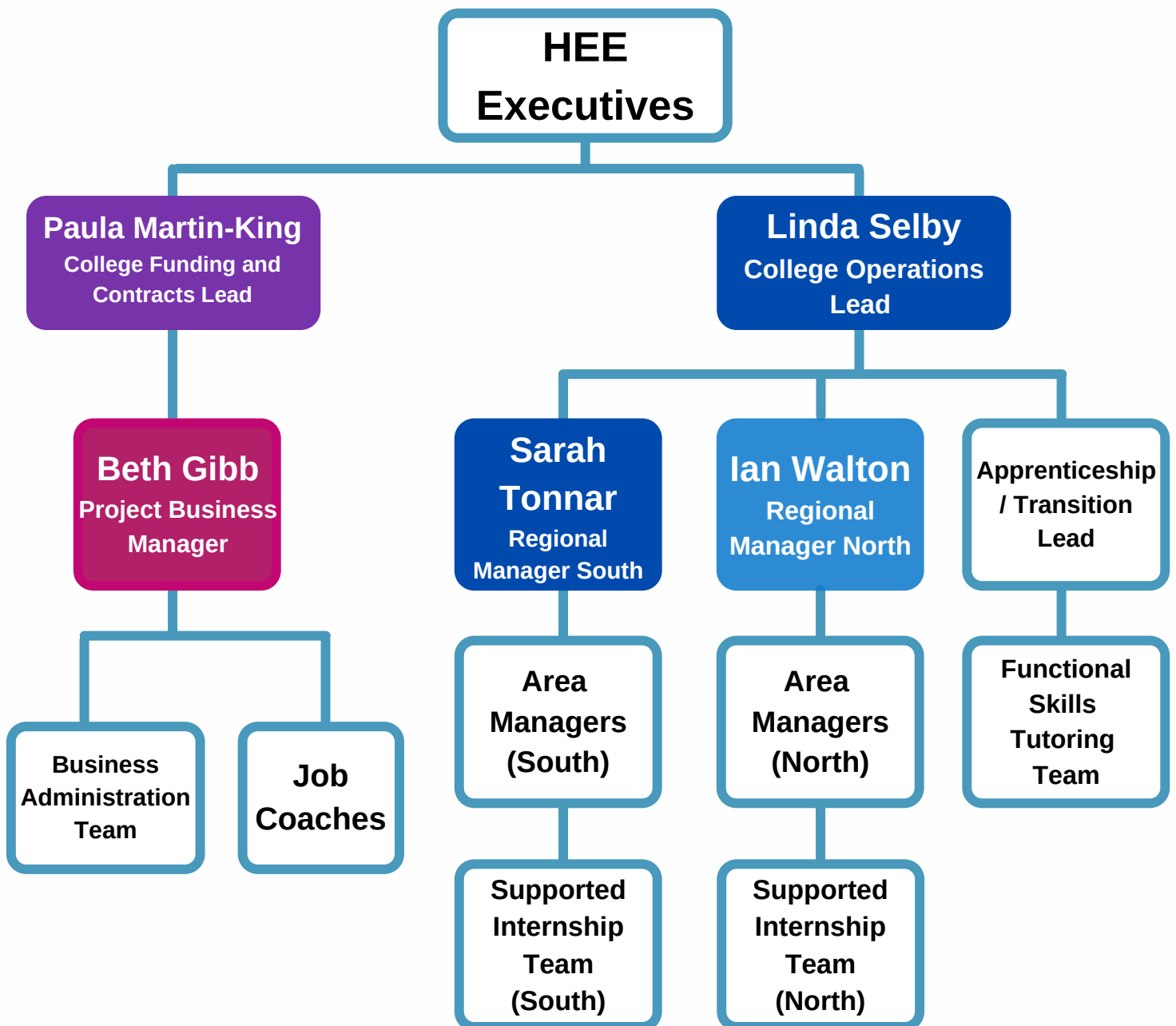
This support includes:

- Pastoral support
- Professional support in meetings, e.g. appraisals, occupational health, etc.
- Coaching preparation for progression interviews
- Offering two-way support through Project Ambassadors and Mentors for new Interns



## Our team structure

**Project Choice** is composed of a network of teams and their respective managers. Get to know some of the key members of the **Project Choice** team overleaf.



## Meet the team

Our over 40-strong team brings leading expertise in educational delivery to each and every Intern and employer Mentor we assist. Meet some of our key team members below.

### **Linda Selby** College Operations Lead

Linda has a background in biomedical science along with a BA in Further Education. In 2011, Linda was awarded an MBE for Services to Special Needs Education related to her work for Project Choice. Linda brings four decades of experience of working in the NHS, adult education and lived experience of LDD to her work.

### **Paula Martin- King** College Funding and Contracts Lead

Paula has 25+ years of special education needs experience gained across both public and private sectors. She previously worked in a Specialist College supporting adults with autism and managed ESFA funding for students with high needs within the Education Funding Agency. Paula has 12 years experience with Project Choice, working on funded project delivery while at LSC/EFA, then moving to work directly with the College in 2017.

### **Ian Walton** Regional Manager North

Ian has been working with young people and adults with learning disabilities and/or Autism for over 30 years. He's worked alongside Health, Social Care and Education agencies to ensure disabled people's voices are heard and receive equal opportunities, and has also worked with a Local Authority Statutory Assessment and Review Service in relation to the production and delivery of Education, Health and Care Plans.

**Sarah Tonnar**  
Regional  
Manager  
South

Sarah has 20 years experience working in the NHS, within sexual health and safeguarding. She has a Diploma in Learning Disability Nursing (RNMH) and a BSc (Hons) Health and Social Science, Diploma in Epilepsy Care.

**Beth Gibb**  
Project  
Business  
Manager

Beth joined Project Choice full time in 2016 as a coordinator, having previously acted as a Mentor between 2013-2016. In January 2019 she started supporting the national management side of the College which progressed to a full time business management role in Summer 2019.

**"The sense of seeing someone improve in such a short space of time is very rewarding"**  
(Employer Mentor)

**"We are very grateful to Project Choice for the very caring and down-to-earth way they have provided for our daughter"**  
(Parent of Intern)



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If you'd like further information about **Project Choice**, please get in touch with our team at the address below:



[project.choice@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:project.choice@hee.nhs.uk)

