**From Apprentice to Master – Project SEARCH Graduate Owen’s Employment Journey**

From apprentice to master, Owen Griffin has moved from an intern position on the University of Aberdeen’s Project SEARCH programme to supporting others who are taking the same journey into full-time employment.

[DFN Project SEARCH](https://www.dfnprojectsearch.org/) is a UK-wide transition to employment programme for young people with a learning disability and autism or both, which has been running at the University of Aberdeen since 2013.

Each year it offers internships to up to 12 young people aged 16-24 who are supported to undertake work placements within the University and with partner organisations, covering a range of roles while studying towards the City & Guilds Certificate in Employability Skills. Upon graduation, interns receive support to enter paid employment.

Owen (23), came to Project SEARCH directly from school and the results of his involvement have been transformative. Working in various roles, Owen built up his skills and confidence before securing a position as a full time Grounds Person at the University.

Now, Owen is acting as a mentor to another Project SEARCH graduate who has secured an apprentice Grounds Person role, helping them make the same transition to full time employment.

“Project SEARCH prepared me for work by teaching me how to behave in employment, work as part of a team and improved my general attitude towards work,” Owen explained.

“Before Project SEARCH, I was shy and hesitant but it gave me the confidence to introduce myself and to learn new skills – I now have the confidence to express myself and to go for it.”

Heather Crabb, who leads the University’s contribution to Project SEARCH, said that the programme has a strong track record in helping young people into secure employment.

“Owen’s story underlines the value of Project SEARCH in preparing young people for full-time employment, enabling them to understand the social complexities of the working world while developing sought after skills.

“Upon completion of the programme, Owen and other Project SEARCH graduates have gained over 800 hours of work experience in a variety of fields and are ready to enter the workplace as confident individuals, willing and eager to make a valuable contribution.

“So far, 68% of our graduates are now in employment in the north-east of Scotland – nearly 10 times above the average employment rate for those with a learning disability who do not enter any type of post-school programme.”

 