1. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The first cohort of Interns graduated from Project SEARCH in June 2014 and 11 gained paid employment within the Grampian area. Three Interns are employed on a full-time basis within the University. The second cohort of 12 Interns commenced the programme in September 2014.

The project has received national recognition, including being named as the foremost 'up and coming' new Project SEARCH site in Europe and receiving the 'Raising Achievement' Award at the Aberdeen Children's and Young People's Services Awards. In addition, the programme was shortlisted as a finalist in the prestigious national Green Gown Awards 2014. Significant progress has been made in enhancing links with the local business community and with influential individuals at both national and government levels.

Funding is now in place to sustain the programme for a further 3 years and it is anticipated that this will be extended thereafter. Therefore, work is underway to ensure that the appropriate plans and infrastructure are in place to continue to support Project SEARCH within the University and local community.

2. **BACKGROUND**

The Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Project SEARCH team is a collaboration between the University of Aberdeen, Inspire (Partnership Through Life) charity and the North East Scotland College, operated under a licence from the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disabilities (SCLD) and funded by Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils. The project is based on an international model which originated in the USA and is a one year Internship programme supporting young people with additional needs to gain skills and experience to go on to employment.

The project commenced within the University in September 2013 and the first cohort of Interns graduated in June 2014, with 11 of the 12 individuals gaining paid employment within the Grampian area.

3. **STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

The University's Ambition, Mission and Values Statement outlines our commitment to "the twin principles of sustainability and social responsibility". In addition, the Strategic Plan 2011-15 states that we will "ensure that the key principles of equality and diversity are embedded in all our activities". Project SEARCH contributes to the achievement of these strategic objectives.

4. **OTHER CONTEXT**

The Interns are supported to undertake 3 internships/work placements over a one year period of study. It is the normal expectation that each participant will undertake 3 or 4 placements over the course of the year. All partner organisations work together to identify work placement opportunities based on the student's experience, interests and skills assessment. The Interns are supported to attain vocational qualifications and upon the conclusion of the programme, receive support to source and sustain paid employment.

Work experience placements have been identified in the following areas:
Two new Internship opportunities became available in January 2015 (Development Trust and Hillhead/Crombie Halls of Residence) and the first external Internship has recently commenced with the Aberdeen Sports Village.

5. PROJECT SEARCH AT ABERDEEN

5.1 Achievements

The following achievements have been made in the programme to date:

5.1.1 Employment Search

Under the terms of our licence, it is expected that 60% of the Interns will enter into paid employment within 9 months of graduation. Eleven out of the twelve Interns from the first cohort of the project were in employment within the Grampian area upon graduation. Support mechanisms from both the Project SEARCH team and Council Employability Services remain in place to assist all Interns, whether they are in work or actively seeking it.

The University is not under any obligation to recruit the Interns upon graduation, however, sustainability is a key aim of the programme and three Interns are now employed within the University in the Finance, Estates and HR Sections.

5.1.2 Engagement with Local Business Community

To mark the launch of the second year of the project within the University, representatives from the local business community and influential individuals at a national level were invited to attend an inaugural ‘Meet the Interns’ event in November 2014. This event provided members of the local business community with an opportunity to meet with the Interns to find out more about the project, and to explore the possibility of establishing a mentoring relationship with one of them. The event also enabled the Project SEARCH team to identify acute areas of skills shortages facing local organisations. These areas will now be incorporated into the curriculum with a view to ensuring the development of a sustainable pool of talent for future recruitment in the region. Since the event, representatives from a number of local employers and organisations, including Entier, Sainsbury's, NHS Grampian, Wood Group, Aberdeen Football Club, Oil & Gas UK and Voluntary Services Aberdeen, have contributed to the programme in some way. This contribution has taken many different forms, including the delivery of workshops and the establishment of mentoring relationships to support the Interns.

It is particularly encouraging that individuals with an interest in youth employability at a national level, such as Ms Sylvia Halkerston (Wood Commission), attended the event. Ms Halkerston has subsequently remained in contact with members of the Project SEARCH team and has already facilitated the development of links with local organisations. In addition, she has committed to raising the profile of the Project at a national and governmental level.

It is anticipated that a follow-up event will take place in Spring 2015 to enable those employers who attended the event to see the progress made by the Interns and consider how their talents could be used within their organisations upon graduation.

5.1.3 External Awards and Recognition

Project SEARCH European Conference

Project SEARCH Aberdeen was named as the foremost ‘up and coming’ new Project SEARCH site in Europe at the European Conference which took place in Glasgow in June 2014.
Aberdeen City Council
The project received the ‘Raising Achievement’ Award at the Aberdeen Children’s and Young People’s Services Awards in June 2014 in recognition of work to raise achievement and support integrated working within the city.

Green Gown Awards 2014
In November 2014, the project was shortlisted as a finalist in the prestigious national Green Gown Awards 2014, which recognise exceptional sustainability initiatives being undertaken by universities and colleges across the UK.

Benchmark Status
The project has attracted significant interest from other organisations seeking to establish a programme and has been highlighted by Project SEARCH International as an exemplar of good practice.

5.2 Future Plans

5.2.1 Strategic Planning Process
With the support of the Project SEARCH European Co-ordinator, a strategic planning process has been undertaken and a Strategic Plan 2014-19 is now in place. Progress against this Plan is regularly monitored by the Strategic Steering Group. It is anticipated that the Plan will facilitate:

- the ongoing provision of support and identification of appropriate employment opportunities for the Interns
- the continued achievement of key targets (Critical Success Factors) in line with Project SEARCH and SCLD licence requirements and conditions of funding
- enhanced awareness of the project at a local and national level

5.2.2 Second Grampian Site
Project SEARCH and SCLD are committed to encouraging the establishment of new sites across Scotland. In this connection, a short-life working group comprising representatives of the Project SEARCH Aberdeen Strategic Steering Group started meeting in January 2015 to discuss the feasibility and implications of establishing a second project within the Grampian area.

6. Resource Implications
A commitment to fund the programme for a further 3 year period has been received and it is anticipated that, subject to the achievement of funding conditions, this will be extended by a further 2 years. Under the terms of the Collaboration Agreement, the University will be expected to continue to provide the following resources to Project SEARCH throughout this period:

- Infrastructure resources to host the project (classroom, IT facilities etc)
- 0.1FTE staff resource as Business Liaison/Employer Partner Co-ordinator
- Suitable work experience placements for the Interns
- Assistance with the internal marketing of the project

7. Risk Management
No area of significant risk has been identified.
8. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

As this project is designed to support individuals with disabilities, it will have an important positive equality impact. However, it does not require a formal Equality Impact Assessment to be undertaken.

9. **SUSTAINABILITY & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Project SEARCH makes a positive contribution to the University's Social Responsibility and Sustainability strategies.