

Start planning your future now – consider a Supported Internship for 2026

Maisy's SEND Employment Forum Newsletter – Spring 2026

Hello and welcome to my Spring edition of the SEND Employment Forum Newsletter. In this issue, you can expect to hear about:

- General tips, support & information on Supported Internships.
- Employer Spotlight: Find out about Mollies Hotel & Diner and how they approach their recruitment.
- Hear about the experiences from some of our City of Oxford Students who are currently on a Supported Internship (SI).



If you think you may have something to contribute to my next SEND Employment Forum Newsletter, send your suggestions to:
maisy.gallagherhorwood@oxfordshire.gov.uk

I have loved working on this, enjoy reading it!

Sarah's Interview Tips - Thanks to Sarah Steel, our Independent Travel Support Trainer, for sharing these helpful tips:



“ 😊 I work through the job description and job summary and predict what questions may be asked and add to the Word document I have created

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“ 😊 I check the location if it's in person and use Google Maps or City Mapper to make sure, I know where I'm going.

”



“ 😊 In my interview I have my notes on the table in front of me so that I can refer to them if I need to.

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Within Oxfordshire 60% of interns go into paid employment

The Oxfordshire Supported Internship is a partnership between:

- Activate Learning
- Abingdon and Witney College
- Oxfordshire Employment

Who Can Participate? Young people aged 16-25 with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan. Supported internships offer real work experience and skill-building, usually lasting 6-12 months, with most time spent in the workplace.

What Will You Learn?

Participants will learn job-specific skills in the workplace and demonstrate their value to employers. Traditional learning, such as English and Maths, may be included where appropriate. Check out our [Supported Internship \(SI\) info pages](#)

Pay and Qualifications:

You may be offered pay or achieve a work qualification, but every internship is personalised, and not all offer paid opportunities.

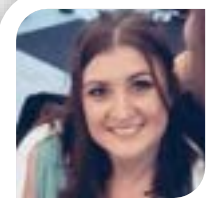
Rebecca Lester - Mollies Hotel & Diner: As People & Development Business Partner, this role champions a people-first approach - supporting staff across their journey and promoting inclusive, flexible recruitment that focuses on strengths, not interviews.

“There’s no ‘typical’ day - it’s all about people.”

“It’s less about ticking boxes and more about building real relationships.”

“Inclusivity is at the heart of who we are as a business.”

Scroll down to read the full interview with Becks from Mollies Hotel & Diner.



City Of Oxford Employee Spotlight – City Of Oxford Café and Bakery

In February, I went to city of Oxford College and had a chat with Amy, Rehan, Thomas and Charlie. We talked about a range of topics covering their role, their daily structure, transport and achievements. Here's what they have to say:

- 1. What does a typical day at work look like for you? How do you start your day?** On Mondays and Tuesdays, I work in the gardening team and on Wednesday I work in the Café. - Amy
- 2. What are some things about your job that people may not know?** The pizza oven is surprisingly huge! - Charlie
- 3. Do you have a favourite work task?** I enjoy making postal deliveries across college and serving pizza to customers. - Thomas
- 4. Tell me about some challenges you have faced in the workplace and how you overcame them.** I have grown my confidence over time. - Rehan
- 5. Have you learnt anything new or interesting about yourself since starting work? Have you surprised yourself in any way?** I've definitely become more mature. - Amy
- 6. What would you say to anyone who may be nervous to take that first step and apply for a job?** I would reassure them and wish them good luck! - Rehan
- 7. If you are finding something tricky at work, who would you go to for help?** I'd speak to my manager/job coach - Everyone
- 8. Do you prefer working independently or in a group? Would you feel comfortable in a group task with your colleagues?** I like both, it depends what mood I am in. - Thomas
- 9. How has getting the job impacted you within everyday life?** I go to the gym every day and travel my taxi independently. Rehan
- 10. How have you changed since beginning your employment journey? What's your biggest achievement so far?** I'd say I've got better at doing my job to a professional standard, without losing focus. - Amy

Maisy's Reflections: I want to start with massive thank you to all of the students for meeting me. I continue to be amazed by the young people I interview and their willingness to be completely transparent. There were many times during our conversations. where somebody would mention an occasion where they didn't listen or maybe weren't as professional as they could have been. They didn't criticise themselves, but they did acknowledge it and encourage themselves to do better. I think that's a lesson we can all learn from.

The full interview with [Mollie's Hotel & Diner](#) - Becks Lester

Describe a typical day doing your job:

I'm the People & Development Business Partner at Mollie's, part of the support team, and we're not attached to a single site so even my location changes daily! There's no "typical" day. I, along with my team, are responsible for the full employment cycle for our 300 employees, from recruitment to leavers and everything in between. Mollie's is a people-led business, so my work centers around understanding and supporting employees while ensuring the business runs smoothly from a human perspective. It's less about ticking boxes and more about building real relationships and making an impact.

What is the typical application process for someone who wants to work at Mollie's Diner?

Candidates usually find a job listing on our careers page and submit a CV. Applications are reviewed by our team, and shortlisted candidates are invited to a friendly interview, which may include scenario-based questions or discussions about their experience and teamwork.

How did you get into your role? What experience do you have?

I started working in a hotel on weekends while at school, helping with weddings as a waitress. After finishing school, the hotel offered me a full-time role on reception, which I loved. I spent 17 years in various hotel and travel roles, and at 33, I realised that what I enjoyed most was working with people. I went back to education to complete my CIPD qualification and moved into HR. My previous experiences led me to this role, and I truly love it.

What is your favourite thing about your job?

Watching people grow and develop in their roles.

What's one change you want to see to make the path for SEND individuals to find employment easier?

I'd like to see a rethink of traditional interviews as the main route into employment. Interviews often don't bring out the best in people, especially for SEND individuals. In many ways, an interview tests how good someone is at interviews, rather than how capable they are at doing the job. We should explore alternative ways for people to demonstrate their strengths and abilities in more practical, realistic settings. I'm still considering what the best replacement would look like, but it's clear that over reliance on interviews creates unnecessary barriers for many talented candidates.

Are there any particular steps you take to ensure SEND applicants are comfortable during an interview?

We avoid high-pressure interviews and want people to be at their best. We support adjustments to suit individual needs, such as allowing a support worker to attend or providing interview questions in advance.

You ask a young SEND person why they haven't had a job before. In your experience, what is most likely to be their response?

There are too many barriers at the recruitment stage that prevent them from getting started in employment.

Is there anything specific you can pinpoint that makes working at Mollie's so special for your SEND employees?

Inclusivity is at the heart of who we are as a business. In hospitality, our people are our best asset, and we recognise the value diversity brings to our team and our business.

Are there any lessons or general tips you've learned along the way about accessibility in employment?

Accessibility starts with listening. Making small adjustments, being flexible, and focusing on each person's strengths can make a huge difference. Ensuring that processes are clear, supportive, and inclusive helps all employees thrive.

Some SEND individuals require flexible hours and timetables. How would you approach that situation?

Mollie's is a 24/7 operation with peaks and troughs depending on the season, day, and time, which works perfectly for offering flexibility. We can usually find a role and schedule that suits everyone.

If I wanted to apply for a job here, what skills or qualities would stand out most on my CV?

It's hard to fully understand a person from a CV, so we focus on qualities like reliability, enthusiasm, and passion. These traits often tell us more than experience alone.

How does working in Mollie's Diner compare to working in a hotel? Are there any transferable skills or opportunities to be trained in both areas?

At Mollie's, there are both front of house and back of house roles, so the skills required can vary depending on the role. Front of house focuses on customer service and communication, while back of house involves tasks like food preparation, organisation, and teamwork. Despite the differences, skills like reliability, hard work, and passion are valuable in all areas. There are also opportunities to be trained in specific skills depending on the role, so there's something for everyone.

Maisy's Camera Roll:



For more information: [please contact the Oxfordshire Employment Team.](#)

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