

INTERN TESTIMONY: NILAY BALKAN

The interesting project (and the impact of that project)

My Internship at Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is to conduct a literature review which will assess neurodiversity within a workplace and learning context, and to evaluate the barriers and opportunities presented by the various strengths and weakness of the neurodiverse spectrum for work-based learning.

This was particularly interesting for me as it's very different to my PhD (which looks at social media usage in small firms!). This is one of the great things about the SGSSS internships; they look for your qualities and what you can bring to the internship, rather than what subject knowledge you have.

My project at SDS is in a relatively new area. Whilst there is research on learning requirements and Human Resources practises to accommodate neurodiverse needs, there is limited information about widening work-based learning for neurodiverse individuals. It's been interesting to compare how policy makers and academics respond to new research areas.

Of course, there is still more work to be done given my project is in a developing topic. My project at SDS has been mostly explorative, reviewing the current literature regarding neurodiverse skills and employment and offering recommendations for both management practises and further research. However, it makes me proud to think my work will guide the direction for SDS' own research and future projects – all of which assist in policy-making decisions. This is the most exciting thing about my project. Although I am only at SDS for a short duration, my work will be one of the many building blocks towards a bigger impact for society!

The impact of this project isn't just on a policy-level. As someone who wishes to stay in academia and continue lecturing after my PhD, having the chance to develop my understanding of neurodiversity has been incredibly valuable. I have a better understanding of neurodiverse student needs and more confidence in delivering effective lessons. Moreover, I'll be giving my PhD colleagues at Glasgow Caledonian University a talk about what I've learnt and how to implement effective learning strategies. Having the new generation of academics understand neurodiversity can only be a good thing for the students entering further and higher education.