Supporting the Transition from College to Employment for Students and Graduates with Disabilities

Kieran Lewis, Senior Occupational Therapist, Disability Service, TCD.
Shay Nolan, Careers Adviser, Disability Support Service, UCC.
Presentation Objectives

1. **The Transition to Employment for Students with Disabilities**
   - Work and Disability
   - An Irish Perspective: UCC and TCD Research

2. **Supporting the Transition to Employment**
   - Student Journey
   - Role for Student Services

3. **Examples of Initiatives:**
   - TCD: Career Pathways
   - UCC: Employability Projects
The Transition to Employment for Students with Disabilities
Work and Disability

- Across the EU approx. 40 million people have a disability (Kim & Williams, 2013)
- People with disabilities; 2.5 times less likely to be in work than non-disabled people within an Irish context (NDA, 2014).
- Approximately 10,000 students with disabilities are currently studying at college/university level (AHEAD, 2015).
- Lack of Vocational Experience (AHEAD, 2008).
- Health and Wellbeing (Pratt et al., 2014).
Employment Status of Graduates with Disabilities (AHEAD, 2008)

- 70% of graduate sample were employed. 59% of respondents in full-time employment whilst 18% were part-time.
- Over 50% had a specific learning disability.
- 80% of those ‘seeking employment’ do not always disclose their disability when applying for jobs.
- Most common reason for working part-time was that graduates wanted to but were unable to find a full-time job.
- Only 23% of the respondents had participated in any form of specific job-preparation training.
63.81% of graduates are currently employed.

Of the graduates that are unemployed 30.77% identified Economic Conditions as the main reason for this, with 19.23% unable to find work since graduation. 45.71% of unemployed graduates have never been in employment.

The experience of respondents in relation to disclosing their disability to employers was overwhelmingly positive.

Confidence is identified as a major area for development by respondents across all disability types.
Many respondents strongly advised current students and graduates to access as much work experience as possible. All work experience is encouraged though relevant work experience is particularly important. Some respondents noted that work experience helps individuals to learn how to work effectively with their disability. Others advise that getting involved with a club or society at organisational level is hugely valuable as work experience.

“Try and get involved in activities in a position of responsibility or leadership. This is to demonstrate that you are not limited by your disability in areas that interest you.”

“Undertake as many internships as possible during the summer months. This proves to potential employers that you are fully capable of working in a professional environment without difficulty”
TCD Research: What are the issues for students with disabilities as they prepare for transitioning to employment? (Nolan & Gleeson, 2014)

**Graduates**
- Building Personal Strategies
- Fit
- Disclosure and RA’s
- Advice for students and transition to work

**Under / Post Graduates**
- Enabling and Building your career
- Fit
- Disclosure
- Future Advice and college support
- Enabling the work environment
Supporting the Transition
Increase in the number of students with disabilities entering college

Support at 3rd Level provided = greater progression & retention

Educated Graduates seeking employment - Graduate Attributes

Difficulties making the transition to employment - Employability

Need to support students/grads
AHECS Graduate Recruitment & Employability Survey 2013:

The ability to work in a team is identified as the most important employability skill when hiring graduates, with 66% of employers noting its significance.

The top 5 employability skills sought by graduate employers are:

1. Teamwork
2. Positive Attitude
3. Communication & Literacy Skills
4. Business & Customer Awareness
5. Problem Solving

Self Management is the employability skill identified by graduate employers which needs most improvement in graduates.
OECD (2011) recommends HEIs need to be preparing young adults with disabilities for the world of work.

Strehorn and Bourke (1997) – students with disabilities did not receive same quality or amount of career counselling.

Kim and Williams (2012); Aune and Kroger (1997) – career service providers not adequately equipped to advise and support students with disabilities.
Approaches used to supporting students with disabilities in the transition to employment

- Careers Service Delivery (workshops, individual meetings, careers advisers to subject areas, employer events).
- Course Based (careers programmes integrated into courses, perhaps using graduates / alumni, employers, internships, professional placement).
- Informal support through disability service staff.
- UCC model: Careers Adviser based within the Disability Service 2 days per week.
- TCD Model: Careers Adviser based in the Careers Service with OTs within Disability Service integrating Careers Focus in student meetings.
Work Experience/Internship Programme - UCC

Pilot Projects Origins

- Employer event May 2014
- Lively debate among attending students
- Students challenged employers re: availability of work opportunities for students with disabilities
Work Experience/Internship Programme

- Get employers on board to offer students registered with the DSS the opportunity to undertake meaningful work experience with graduate employers.

- Main objective to allow students with a disability to undertake internships that will be of real value to them in their future careers.
Establishing the project

- Contact made with numerous employers
- Internship placements secured with 2 local graduate employers, namely Dell & GE Healthcare
- Information event held on 14th April to allow the employers to present to students

Supporting the project

- Project supported by key employability workshops:
  - How to present yourself well on paper
  - How to present yourself well at interview
  - Dealing with Disclosure
Work Experience/Internship Programme

Challenges
- Getting employers on board
- Specific roles vs. Broad roles
- Getting student buy-in

Mentoring
- Important that mentoring is a part of the pilot project
- Both Dell and GE Healthcare already had mentoring systems in place
- Presented to students on mentoring at the information event
Work Experience/Internship Programme

Current state of play
- Dell have offered role to their preferred candidate and the internship begins in July
- GE Healthcare are currently interviewing for a position that will begin in July

Feedback
- I will be a point of contact for both employers and students for the duration of the internships
- Feedback from employers and students via a thorough review of the programme
- Feedback will be important for the future development of the programme
Get voluntary organisations on board to offer students registered with the DSS the opportunity to undertake meaningful voluntary work experience.

Voluntary experience to be undertaken primarily during term time
Voluntary Work Experience Programme 2015/2016

The Proposal

- Get 10 organisations to offer opportunities for voluntary work experience to DSS registered students
- Work experience to be undertaken in Semester 1 at which point the opportunities become available to new interested applicants in Semester 2
- Individual voluntary opportunities to be advertised through the DSS website
- Applications by students to be made directly to the host organisation.
- Opportunities to be marketed directly to students by the DSS
Voluntary Work Experience Programme 2015/2016

The Proposal

- Application process to be supported by the DSS via employability workshops on CV writing, Interview preparation, and dealing with disclosure.
- Potentially a very important role for Occupational Therapists re: preparing students for the workplace and assessing suitability for same.
- Requirement for each participating student to work a minimum of 40 hours over the duration of the work experience.
- Further potential for the programme to run through the summer months.
- Mentoring programme to be a key component of each individual placement.
Voluntary Work Experience Programme 2015/2016

Challenges Ahead

- Get 10 organisations to offer meaningful work experience opportunities to DSS registered students.
- Getting student buy in.

The Future

- Potential for growth and increased engagement with employers, voluntary organisations, and students.
- Big challenge around resources to facilitate the programmes going forward.
- Engage students as early as possible in their college careers.
Value

- Getting students to think about their careers as early as possible in university.
- Allowing opportunities for students to develop key employability skills that will be sought by graduate employers.
- Programmes will necessitate students to think about their careers and the work place in the context of disability, suitability, required supports etc.
- Programmes can play an important role in educating employers.
- Programmes will allow students with a disability to have a more valuable and equal university experience.
Useful links


Upcoming Launch Summer 2015
Career Pathways - TCD

- Career Pathways is a flexible and individually-tailored transition planning service for students with disabilities, as they progress through college and into employment.
  - Staffed by two Occupational Therapists and a Careers Adviser.
  - 2 year funding from the Genio Trust
Project Strands

1. Development of a clearly delineated individual process comprising three stages, with access to individually tailored resources [https://www.tcd.ie/disability/career/Pathways/3stages.php](https://www.tcd.ie/disability/career/Pathways/3stages.php).

2. Development of an e-portfolio system where students can track and log their work related experiences and engagement with resources available.

3. Development of a series of peer workshops and events, involving graduates with disabilities to act as mentors to current students.

4. Connecting students to employers through employment events.

5. Providing workshops to Careers and Disability Service staff with the HEIs involved.

Key Philosophies

• A Flexible and individually tailored approach with students choosing focus and resources to use.
• Focus upon building personal and work-related skills & experiences throughout the student journey not approaching end of degree.
• Support positive work-related engagements in college.
• Facilitate the student to develop their individual narrative – perhaps reframing experiences.
• Support one year post graduation – application of learning.
• Give an opportunity to explore ways to manage disability in the workplace and transfer skills developed in college.
• Access to peer and employer networks.
Individually Tailored Process

Exploring your Career

Building Your Career

Launching your Career
Outcomes

- 120 students have availed of Career Pathways overall.
- Over 400 individual meetings have been held with students.
- 61 students are registered on the ePortfolio system, which was launched in January 2015.
- 45 students have attended workshops / 3 day boot camp.
- 14 student ambassadors have been recruited.
- 26 Disability and Careers Staff attended 2 workshops in March / April 2015.
- 16 Employers have connected with Career Pathways, with three employers hosting events.
Feedback

‘I found the mock interviews extremely helpful. The fact the service is available to graduates for one year after graduation is really brilliant. The service has given me so much help, support and encouragement – I have really grown in confidence through it.’

‘Through a series of workshops and counselling sessions, I've been able to work on my CV and interview presentation, giving me the confidence that I need to excel in the professional world. ‘

‘.... communicating with peers who are in similar situations, a sense of acceptance and openness surrounding the boot camp.’
Future

- Project Funding ending December 2015.
- Integration into existing services – designated leads in both the Disability & Careers Services with increased collaboration.
- Employment focus throughout the student journey (Placement, Internships, Summer Work, Part-time work, Volunteering).
- Individual meetings for 1 year post-graduation.
- Workshops and events around existing careers weeks / events.
- 150+ licenses remaining on the ePortfolio system for students to access.
- Dissemination of materials developed.
References


- Pebble Pad (2015). http://www.pebblepad.co.uk/


Useful Links

• AGCAS Disability Task Group Blog: https://agcasdtg.wordpress.com/

• Career Pathways- 3 Stages: https://www.tcd.ie/disability/career/Pathways/3stages.php

• Pebble Pad Website: http://www.pebblepad.co.uk/