



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

INCLUSIVE APPROACHES TO WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Journey from Study to Employment



career
pathways
Transition to Employment

Contributors:

Eileen Daly, Kieran Lewis, Claire Gleeson, Laura Condell, Amie Hynes Fitzpatrick, Declan Treanor, Sean Gannon, and Dr Clodagh Nolan.

Welcome

Welcome to the 'Developing Inclusive Career Approaches: **A guide for Careers and Disability Services in Higher Education**'.

This guide has been developed based upon the experiences of the Career Pathways Project, run within Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, in collaboration with other Higher Education Institutes in the greater Dublin area. The guide outlines ten approaches to developing inclusive career-focused approaches to supporting students, based upon the blog post by Hilary Whorrall on the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services Disability Task Group blog (Whorrall, 2014). The ten approaches discussed in this Resource Guide are all interlinked with each other, with the ultimate aim of enhancing services in providing support for students with disabilities in their transition to employment. It aims to provide you with tips and techniques to support you in developing inclusive approaches to working with students with disabilities throughout their student journey and in preparing them for the transition to employment.

Career Pathways is a collaboration between the Careers Advisory Service and Disability Service in Trinity and the guide has been developed as an outcome of the two year Genio-Trust funded project. The guide is divided up into ten ways to develop inclusive career-focused approaches, which range from service structures, to inclusive information, to ways of working with individual students in an inclusive manner.



Context

During the past decade in Ireland, the number of students with disabilities entering and succeeding in higher education has dramatically increased (AHEAD, 2015). This is as a result of the development of various pathways to education and the provision of a variety of supports within the educational context. However, embarking on the transition from higher education into employment can be fraught with challenges for these students (Fichten et al, 2012).

The employment levels of individuals with disabilities have remained significantly lower than their non-disabled peers (ESRI, 2015). The National Disability Authority (2014) maintains that people with disabilities are two and a half times less likely to be in work than non-disabled people. The Higher Education Authority National Access Plan (Goal 3; 3.4, p.28) highlights the need to gather data to review the progression to employment and postgraduate studies by students from target access groups. It recommends that this is done by reviewing current and potential data sources such as First Destinations Data.

This is imperative in order to develop a methodology which will track outcomes for students from target groups. Currently, there is no data available to measure further study/employment outcomes for graduates with disabilities within the Irish context. The Irish Government has recently published the 'Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024', which sets out a ten-year approach to ensuring that people with disabilities, who could and want to work, are supported and enabled to do so. One of the actions from phase one of the strategy emphasises the need to support students/graduates with disabilities in higher education to develop work related skills and experiences to support the student in their transition from college to employment.

Increase in the number of students with disabilities entering higher education

Support at 3rd Level provided = greater progression & retention

Educated Graduates seeking employment

Difficulties making the transition to employment

Need to support students/grads in building work-related skills and experiences.

Facts and Figures:

- 1 Across the European Union approximately 40 million people have a disability (Kim & Williams, 2013)
- 2 The National Disability Authority (2014) maintains that in Ireland, individuals with disabilities are two and a half times less likely to be in employment than people without disabilities.
- 3 There are almost 10,000 students with disabilities studying at higher education in Ireland (AHEAD, 2015). This generates a large pool of educated potential employee's year upon year.
- 4 Those most excluded from the labour market are often those with mental health difficulties or intellectual impairments (World Health Organisation, 2011).
- 5 Unemployment rates are three times higher for people with disabilities than their counterparts without disabilities and their experiences of unemployment are likely to be more extensive (Barnes and Mercer, 2005).
- 6 The OECD (2011) recommends higher education institutes need to be preparing young adults with disabilities for the world of work. Students with disabilities need to develop vocational experiences and skills during their time in higher education to make them more attractive candidates when applying for jobs post-graduation.
- 7 Students with disabilities are being supported at higher education but require support in making the transition from college to employment to support them being successful.

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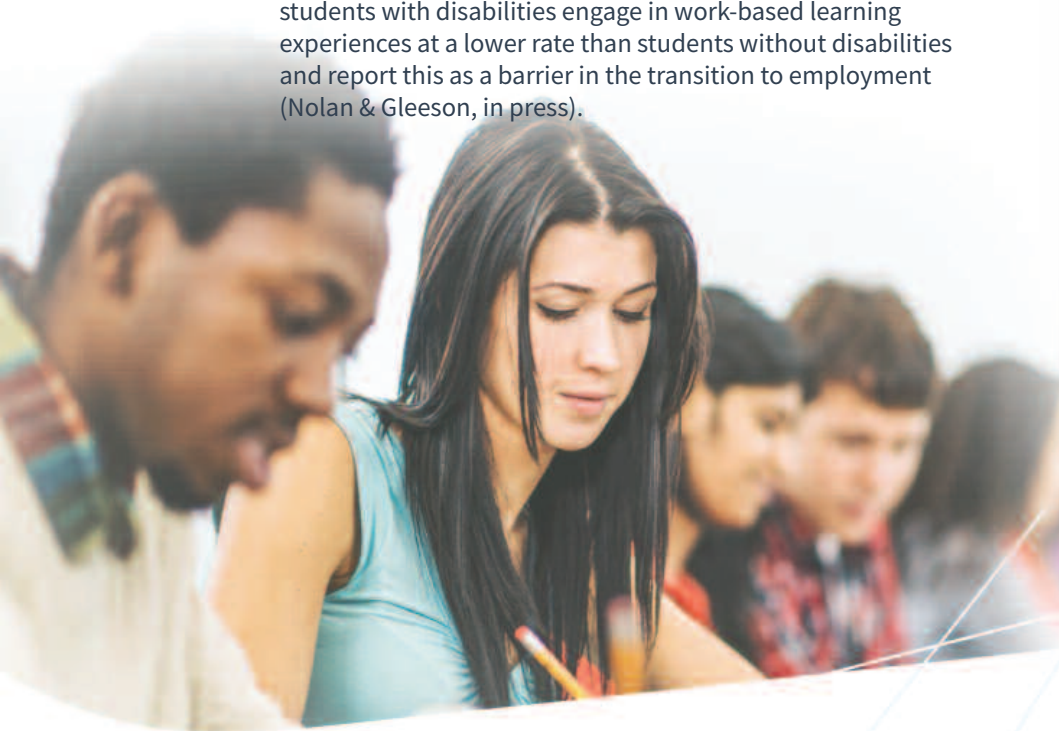
Enable Students to Build Employability Skills throughout their Student Journey

Participation in work-based learning experiences, such as internships and other educational activities, can be integral to success after graduation. All students benefit from the opportunities work-based learning affords to network with potential employers, explore career options, and apply skills learned in the classroom (Burgstahler, 2016). For students with disabilities, the benefits of work experiences may be even greater than for their peers who do not have disabilities.

Work-based learning experiences give students practice in identifying appropriate accommodations for specific situations and disclosing and discussing their disabilities as they relate to the performance of job tasks (Burgstahler, 2016). However, students with disabilities engage in work-based learning experiences at a lower rate than students without disabilities and report this as a barrier in the transition to employment (Nolan & Gleeson, in press).

Tips

- 1 A focus upon the development of work-related skills is increasingly underpinning the design of academic curricula within higher education, and should also underpin the types of supports and resources that students avail of within higher education.
- 2 Integrate a focus upon career-development from initial engagement with students upon entry to college.
- 3 Offer a range of supports to students in engaging in work-related experiences both within their course and outside it. This could take the form of internships, placements, college-society roles, and summer jobs including part-time work and voluntary work.
- 4 Promote the use of portfolios in gathering work-related experiences and reflections, either disability-related or more general.
- 5 Place a focus upon the student developing the ability to tell his / her story through supported disclosure frameworks that exist within most HEIs.
- 6 Offer work related opportunities to students as part of various college activities such as pre-entry visits, orientation, and peer support. Gathering these experiences through the use of a portfolio system could prove useful.



2

Adopt an ‘inclusive’ approach to your Meetings

Career Advisors or Disability Service staff members, already have an abundance of skills and knowledge in helping a student during their transition to employment. When it comes to students with disabilities simply focus on the person and the areas they wish to improve on moving forward. An inclusive student-centred approach to meetings involves the service meeting the needs of the student rather than the student having to fit into the service’s structures. A flexible format to meetings either through individual, group, online or peer approaches allows students to engage with services in a way that is most beneficial to them as individual learners.

Some students may require additional meetings than others, to explore their personal transition to employment. In addition, students may require information in alternative formats or other supports such as an Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpreter to meet their specific needs. If you are unable to provide such supports, what can you do to encourage students to access your services? For example, can you provide all information via email or in large print? Can you assure the student that while you will try to secure an ISL interpreter but if you are unable to do so can you both agree another plan of action? Such an approach reassures the student that you appreciate his/her individual requirements and he/she is more likely to access the service.

In thinking about inclusive meetings, consider the questions below:

- 1 What formats are offered to students in your meetings?
- 2 Are these formats related to student preferences or service design?
- 3 Are questions asked about how students like to work?
- 4 Do you have information about a student with informed consent prior to your meeting?
- 5 How do you establish any reasonable accommodations that a student may require for your meeting?
- 6 How do you facilitate disclosure prior to or in your meeting?

2

Adopt an 'inclusive' approach to your Meetings

Tips

- 1 Include a question on your appointment form on **reasonable accommodations** that the student may need for individual or group meetings. An example of text could be 'please indicate if you have any access requirements so that we can facilitate you to attend your appointment.'
- 2 **Work on the issue at hand and not the disability itself.** Focus on the person rather than the disability. If a student with a disability presents with difficulties during the transition to employment, remember that the issues may not be related to their disability. Listen carefully to the students concerns, and prioritise working with the student to overcome/manage the specific areas of difficulties during this process.
- 3 **Looking beyond the disability label.** The majority of people will make assumptions about others based upon the labels they are associated with. For example, we can project our perceived limitations onto people with disabilities without any evidence that these affect the individual. This is often unconscious but can act as a barrier to progressing your work together.
- 4 **One size does not fit all** for any demographic and one list of perceived limitations does not equate to a person's potential. Focusing on areas of interest, strengths and previous successes will guide the student on the right path.
- 5 **Challenging Assumptions.** This is an important point for both career professionals and students alike. Sometimes we may form assumptions about an individual's ability to undertake specific tasks, careers or areas of study based on a condition or diagnoses. It is important to be mindful that students with disabilities are not immune to these common assumptions and may have internalised them. These internalised assumptions may be the cause of difficulties they encounter with the transition to employment rather than the disability itself. However it is important to look beyond the condition or label and focus on the individual's strengths and previous successes to identify where best a student can succeed.
- 6 **Identify Strengths.** Students with disabilities will have developed a wealth of strengths and strategies to draw from in the transition to employment. They will have i) used strategies in the past to support them in achieving their goals, as they progressed through second/ third level and ii) use various strategies on a daily basis without being aware that they are doing so. With your support the student will be able to identify these strengths and strategies to ensure they are the best candidate for the role.
- 7 **Work with the student to take** ownership of their own transition to employment. Can they identify their strengths, and areas that need improvement? Asking open ended questions can help guide this process
- 8 **Manage Expectations.** Clarify your role with the student. The amount of support a student needs will vary for each person, irrespective of whether they have a disability or not. Encourage the student to see you as a support for helping them to realise their full career potential, and be clear on the limitations of this; for example time slots/availability. Work with the student to create realistic goals for your appointments.

3

Ensure staff are 'Disability Aware'

Ensuring staff are disability aware does not mean 'seeing' the disability label and learning the challenges associated with it. It is important for staff to see 'ability' rather than disability and not to jump to conclusions about the person based on their disability. Every student must be seen as unique with their own life skills and experiences. Staff must assess their own perceptions and assumptions in order to break down barriers which can often hinder the student's journey into employment. In considering one's thoughts about disability, staff should ask themselves:

- 1 What immediately springs to mind in hearing the word 'disability'?
- 2 Disability and employment - what are my thoughts?

Students with disabilities are often concerned about support staff having preconceived perceptions and beliefs about disability, they see this as a barrier and often tend not to engage as a result, making their transition often more arduous. Being disability aware can deconstruct these barriers leading to a much more positive experience.



Tips

- 1 Remember the motto 'there is ability in disability'.
- 2 Disability Services and Careers Advisory Services can work together to share their skills, knowledge and experience. This professional exchange and sharing can promote a more disability friendly and inclusive approach to working with and supporting students, as well as enhancing their continual professional development. Setting more biannual workshops can support each other in addressing the needs of this group of students, and developing your own working relationships.
- 3 Staff must be aware of the challenges that face students with disabilities in making the transition to employment in order to up-skill themselves in these areas. Staff must be aware of topics such as disclosure, reasonable accommodations, employment rights, supports and funding models.
- 4 Information leaflets and guides should be on hand to give to students to inform them about their rights and responsibilities as a person with a disability.
- 5 Ensure that group session formats are open to discussing and addressing topics such as disclosure.
- 6 Group sessions focusing on topics such as disclosure and managing disability in the workplace should be included in the regular career workshops calendar.
- 7 Explore the strategies the student has developed during their college journey and explore how these strategies can be adapted and applied within the workplace.
- 8 Collaborate with services that the student is using (with consent) to develop a more comprehensive and holistic support system and approach, ensuring that the student is always at the centre of the discussion to support them to achieve their own personal goals.

4

Be open to Disclosure

One of the biggest barriers to developing inclusive careers approaches, is that many students do not disclose a disability to the person that they are working with. Often students do not disclose due to the fear of the negative repercussions of the stigma associated with disabilities. Although it is the person's choice to decide whether to disclose or not, there are ways that services can enable a student to disclose in a supported way. Disclosure is a complex topic and an individual's decision to disclose their disability is influenced by a number of factors such as self-identity, personality, type of disability, context and previous experience. It presents a challenge within the recruitment process for both employers and graduates with disabilities. The decision to disclose often depends on whether the person feels they will benefit from reasonable accommodation. The purpose of reasonable accommodations in the workplace is to ensure that an employee is not disadvantaged because of their disability. For example, screen reading software facilitates an employee with a visual impairment to do his/her job, while flexi-time enables an employee with a mental health issue to ensure they have the flexibility to attend appointments which will allow them to take a more proactive approach to maintaining their health and wellbeing.

A focus should firstly be placed upon creating an open and inclusive environment to enable students with disabilities to feel comfortable enough to disclose. Students with disabilities do not always register with the Disability Service or disclose their disability throughout their college experience. The process of entering into employment may be the first time a student has felt the need to disclose to a college staff member. Remember, students who are registered with the Disability Service and/or who have disclosed their disability throughout college often still have apprehensions and fears around disclosure.

This can also be true within Careers and Disability Service appointments, as well as associated with employment. If you have personal feelings about a student's disability or whether they should disclose, try to ensure these do not affect your ability to guide the student in finding their own techniques and comfort levels with disclosure and allowing them the opportunity to explore this for themselves.



4

Be open to Disclosure

Tips

- 1 If a student discloses a disability, ensure that you provide an open dialogue. Don't jump to assumptions and focus solely on the disability, explore the student's strengths and challenges and explore any specific concerns they have regarding their transition to employment. While some concerns may relate to their disability, don't assume that all apprehensions are a direct impact of their disability.
- 2 It is important that students know that your service encourages disclosure and that it would be helpful for you to liaise with other services with their consent. Explain how disclosure will help you to support them to prepare for the transition to employment.
- 3 Give students opportunities to reflect, discuss and practice disclosure. This can be done through formats such as disclosure to academic staff through the Disability Service, **professional placement planning**, or practice interviews.
- 4 Deliver workshops on disclosure. Students usually value the opportunity to discuss and learn from the experience of their peers. Sharing experiences in a safe space reduces isolation and increases the students' confidence in their rights and their ability to advocate for themselves.
- 5 Provide on-line resources to students such as worksheets on decision making and disclosure. These can provide a framework for discussion in individual meetings.
- 6 Provide students with examples of role-models and positive stories of disclosure while encouraging them to consider how they would approach disclosure from their viewpoint.
- 7 Connect students to employers so that they can become familiar with the process of disclosure during the recruitment process and the various channels available if they want to disclose when in employment

5

Run Accessible events

People with disabilities may experience barriers which make attending or participating in College organised events difficult. It is important that organisers ensure that events are as accessible as possible. While physical access is important in organising events, accessibility is not limited to this. When organising events such as workshops; employment fairs and employer presentations, choose accessible venues if possible for all events and invite students who might require specific accommodations such as electronic copies of presentations in order to participate, to inform the service in advance.

When publicising events, ensure there is a standard accessibility contact statement on all publicity, including print ads, web pages and information flyers. An example of this statement is: 'Please indicate if you have any access requirements so that we may facilitate you in attending this event'.

Some useful resources for running events are listed below:

Techdis Good Practice Guidelines for organising events in higher Education

Trinity College Accessibility Policy

The Trinity College Disability Service Event Checker

Tips

- 1 Ask if attendees require wheelchair access and where possible ensure that there is ramped access that attendees can use independently, via the main entrance.
- 2 If an attendee requires an ISL interpreter, this service needs to be booked two weeks prior to the event.
- 3 Ask attendees if they will be accompanied by a Personal Assistant and provide seating area as required.
- 4 Provide an opportunity for attendees to outline specific dietary requirements
- 5 If an attendee is blind/visually impaired, he/she may wish to have a copy of presentations prior to the event.
- 6 Is there accessible parking available for attendees with disabilities?
- 7 Can attendees with mobility difficulties access lifts, meeting rooms, the podium, toilets & catering facilities?
- 8 Signage should be clear and printed in dark lettering on light background. Use large print, sans serif font with initial capitals and lower-case text, avoid block capitals. Signage should be displayed at a height so that wheelchair users can read it. (1400-1700mm or 55-67inches).
- 9 Do you need to ask speakers/facilitators for copies of presentations before the event so that information is available in alternative formats? If so, do they need to be informed of deadlines for submission?
- 10 Inform speakers/facilitators that they need to wear a microphone which may be attached to a loop system.
- 11 Ensure that speakers are familiar with best practice when an ISL interpreter is present. For example, always communicate directly with the deaf person.
- 12 Clarify responsibilities for implementing emergency evacuation procedures with the venue provider. Event staff should be fully briefed regarding their roles. Notify all delegates of their responsibilities in an evacuation.

6

Form Partnerships with Students

It is imperative from the outset that collaborative relationships are developed and formed with students. This means that the student knows you are there, and that you will support them to achieve their goals on their journey towards employment. Together you are moving along the journey, while being mindful that the student must also take ownership of and responsibility for their own career development.

It is useful to explain your role when you first meet, so that the student understands your remit and capabilities. This provides clarity and reassurance for the student and allows an open dialogue to explore what the student wishes to achieve in your meetings. Using open ended questions and thinking about the student journey in a holistic way enables you to explore the students' interests, skills and knowledge and will encourage the student to consider what motivates them and is important to them in life. Reframing difficult or negative experiences by asking the student what they have learned about themselves as a result of the experience, while acknowledging the experience and empathising with them is important, as it encourages them to consider the strengths and skills they have developed such as resilience and leadership. It is also important to reflect on your approach as a professional and ask yourself:

- 1 Does my approach facilitate a partnership with the student?
- 2 How do I structure and ask questions that facilitates an open discussion?

Tips

- 1 Develop a collaborative relationship with the student, ensure that the student and the staff member are moving along the career journey together.
- 2 Conducting an initial meeting where exploratory conversations take place between the staff and student will help to outline expectations. A self-report profile can be used to allow the student to identify areas on which they wish to work. This will allow for collaborative exploration on how the staff member can support the student to prepare for the transition to work. Goals can be agreed which will help you to focus and guide the way you work with the student.
- 3 It can be helpful to explore the learning style of the student as this information can be used to support and guide the way you work with the student to facilitate them to achieve their goals.
- 4 Some students will require additional support and it is important to explore what approaches the student wishes to engage in (i.e. one to one sessions, group approaches, peer support etc.) Giving the student the choice allows for better collaboration and partnership.



7

Joined up Service Provision

Most Disability Services carry out a needs assessment upon registration with the service, but this is generally focused upon meeting the academic requirements of the course. The needs assessment does not usually explicitly address the support the student requires to develop their employability skills throughout their time in college. In truth, many students with disabilities do not get the opportunity or support they may require to develop these skills. The key message in this guide is that developing Career Approaches is not just an issue for Careers Services, but for all student services, and college as a whole. There are a growing number of examples of integrated approaches between Careers Services and Disability services across Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Supporting the student to grow as a person and build a portfolio of experience is crucial. Explain how part time work, internships, volunteering or involvement in student clubs and societies helps us to make new friends, while giving them the opportunity to develop leadership skills, team work skills or communication skills.

Tips

- 1 **Have a 'Lead' within the department.** The Lead can ensure that disability and inclusion is considered as the service evolves in terms of student support, working with employers, planning events etc.
- 2 **Student Review Meetings.** Provide staff with the opportunity to meet and share/learn from one another with the student's consent.
- 3 **Continuous Professional Development.** Provide annual opportunities for CPD and ensure that working with students with disabilities is on the agenda,
- 4 Develop and agree **referral and communication pathways** between services
- 5 **Run joint events** between the Careers and Disability Service bringing together the experience and expertise of staff.

8

Build Inclusive Employer Networks

Connections to Employers is a key element of Careers Approaches within all HEIs. This is no different for students with a disability and can prove particularly useful in giving students real world perspectives and feedback about managing the workplace, and in particular in the areas of disclosure, reasonable accommodations and supports within the workplaces, diversity policies, and in a lot of instances particular pathways for diverse groups.

Tips

- 1 Ensure that the Employer Liaison Officer/ Employability Team are confident in asking about company recruitment policy in terms of encouraging applications from students/graduates with disabilities.
- 2 How does the company advertise and demonstrate that they welcome applications from students/graduates with disabilities? For example, do they provide details for a designated contact person for the applicant throughout the recruitment process?
- 3 Build strong relationships with employers and encourage them to ask questions on ways that they can encourage applications from graduates with disabilities and support them through the recruitment and interview process so that they can demonstrate their suitability and enthusiasm for the position.
- 4 Invite employers to facilitate a workshop if you are holding a specific event for students with disabilities.

9

Conduct an Annual Disability Audit of your Service

The Equal Status Act (2000 amended) states that all public services must legally make reasonable accommodation to provide inclusive access to services for people with disabilities. An audit will help you to identify where further reasonable accommodations are required. This proactive rather than reactive approach makes a service more inclusive and efficient, and could encourage more students with disabilities to access the service. The audit will demonstrate everything that you are doing well as a service, and highlight how you can provide an even better service to your students and graduates with disabilities. Student feedback should also be sought to be integrated into the overall audit process.

Some useful resources in carrying out an audit are listed below:

1. The Trinity Inclusive Curriculum Self-Evaluation Tool
2. Equal Access: Universal Design of Career Services (Burgstahler, 2016)

Preparation

Firstly, it is useful to ask colleagues in the Careers Services team & the Disability Service team if an audit has been done previously. If so, what were the recommendations and how have they been implemented. It is helpful to use an audit template.

Suggested headings on the template may include:

1. Access to the service:

- 1 Does your service mission statement state that the service endeavors to meet the needs of the diverse student population, including students with disabilities?
- 2 How accessible is the physical environment?
- 3 Is publicity material available in alternative formats?
- 4 Is signage clear and easy to follow?
- 5 What accommodations are available for students?
- 6 Do you have a designated contact person in your disability service?
- 7 How do you seek and encourage feedback from students about your service?
- 8 How are issues monitored, documented and resolved?

2. Information:

- 1 Is information available in alternative formats?
- 2 Is disability specific information included in careers service materials (i.e. disability friendly employer information, knowledge on appropriate support agencies etc.?)
- 3 Student appointments: Can you provide flexibility in terms of appointment times? Is it possible to meet the student in an alternative venue? Are you aware of the interpreting service that your HEI use when working with deaf students?

3. Careers events:

- 1 How do you ensure that you hold career events in accessible premises?
- 1 Are event materials available in accessible formats?

4. Carrying out the audit:

It is recommended that you collaborate with and/or request input from the following:

Staff:

- 1 A careers adviser.
- 2 Information officer (or equivalent).
- 3 Employer liaison officer.
- 4 A member of the Disability Service team.
- 5 A student representative.

Undertaking an audit provides you with the opportunity to identify what you are doing well and gives you the opportunity to explore and come up with solutions to issues which may arise. It is advisable to agree timescales for completion and to set a date to review progress.

10

Connect the Web Information

Your website and use of social media may often be the first impression that a student gets about your service. It is also the first opportunity to highlight that your service delivers an inclusive approach to working with students. Connecting information on the Careers Advisory Service and Disability Service websites allows students and staff to easily access pertinent disability related careers information.

Tips

- 1 Have a dedicated section for career development on the Disability Website. Have a dedicated section on the Careers website for Disability related topics.
- 2 Include specific information related to disclosure, reasonable accommodations, external organisations, funding and legislation.
- 3 Put disability specific events on the general careers events guide rather than promoting to specific groups of students. Have a joined up events calendar on the Careers and Disability websites as a “one stop shop” for students.
- 4 Ensure that the site meets accessible information policies.
- 5 Use a variety of formats on the website, such as video clips and podcasts.
- 6 It is important to advertise and communicate employment opportunities through a variety of mediums. For example, via email, social media platforms, posters throughout campus



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