

ADDE



Australians for Disability
and Diversity Employment
(ADDE) Inc.

Ready for Work – Graduates with Disabilities

Research Report: Julie Farthing and Mark Glascodine, September 2013



DIVERSITY RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
INTRODUCTION	4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	5
SCOPE	5
BACKGROUND	6
PREVALENCE OF DISABILITY IN POPULATIONS AND THE WORKFORCE	6
RELATED RESEARCH ACTIVITIES	6
TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES INTO GRADUATE ROLES – PROHIBITIVE FACTORS	7
FINDINGS FROM STAKEHOLDER GROUPS.....	9
UNIVERSITY AND TAFE STAFF	9
STUDENTS	13
GRADUATES	15
EMPLOYERS	16
AUSTRALIAN NETWORK ON DISABILITY CONFERENCE 2013: RAISING THE BAR	17
DISABILITY ORGANISATIONS	18
CONCLUSIONS	20
RECOMMENDATIONS	22
GLOSSARY.....	27
TERMINOLOGY.....	27
EXTERNALLY OFFERED NATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.....	28
REFERENCES	29
APPENDICES	30
APPENDIX A: KEY FINDINGS FROM BREAKFAST SEMINAR 11 OCTOBER, 2012.....	30
APPENDIX B: CAREER SERVICES SURVEY QUESTIONS	33
APPENDIX C: QUALITATIVE QUESTIONS FOR CURRENT STUDENTS	34

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia needs a skilled workforce; our economic viability depends on maximising the contribution that each individual can make. A great deal of money and time is invested in educating our people so that they have the skills and knowledge they need for the future.

What a pity it is, then, that a significant number of graduates fail to convert their years of training and education into meaningful employment. For many Australians with disabilities, the end of their university course does not, in fact, lie in work, but in ongoing dependence on the welfare system.

Of course, the social consequences of this are as great as the economic ones.

Our research has provided us with proof that, as a group, graduates with disabilities are not achieving their full potential in the workplace: in the hours they work, in the type of work they do, in terms of the extent to which they realise their career potential, and, in fact, whether they work at all. This unlikely to be related to a lack of capability or the availability of roles; rather, these graduates are the casualties of a cumbersome and inefficient recruitment process, if in fact they are alert to opportunities in the first place.

Moves are afoot to improve this dire situation and we know much more can be achieved. Employers and recruiters are becoming increasingly interested in redressing the imbalance in their recruitment practices. University and TAFE Careers Services and Disability Liaison Units (DLUs) are developing stronger working links and coming up with ways to assist their students with disabilities to achieve better employment outcomes. However, despite the genuine interest of all these stakeholders, progress has been slow and requires greater overall coordination.

Our project aim was, therefore, to identify what is standing in the way of graduates with disabilities gaining work, and to make recommendations for working to improve outcomes.

Between January and June 2013, we spoke with employers, students, graduates, universities and a number of speciality disability organisations, primarily in Victoria, with the help of funding from ANZ Trustees and sponsors; we also ran workshops in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth which were supported by a range of sponsors and through an arrangement with the Australian Network on Disability (AND).

Our work to date has resulted in uncovering the core prohibitive factors, some best practice ideas and ways to move forward. Without a concentrated and multi-pronged intervention, many students with disabilities will continue to miss out on the important job search and career-related support they need, and, of course, the jobs they deserve.

Further research across Australia is necessary to better understand the nature of the cohort, and to harness and better utilise learnings from overseas (particularly the UK and USA). Allied to this is the importance of building a strong mechanism for communication between stakeholders, especially those not geographically linked, and for the dissemination of information and ideas.

This report provides information about our activities, the conclusions we have drawn, and recommendations for further research and practical actions. Our recommendations are summarised on the following page. Each recommendation builds on and supports the others and that it is imperative that they be acted on simultaneously.

Recommendations:

1. Conduct focused, valid, reliable research around Australia to better understand the 'problem'. A full picture, incorporating the size, characteristics and career needs of the cohort, is a necessary precursor/accompaniment to further work. Also, research into good practices and what is already working will provide guideposts for the development of better programs into the future.
2. Continue to hold seminars, workshops and forums in capital cities and regional centres that can be attended by members of all stakeholder groups. People have appreciated being able to connect with others to share information and to develop new ideas.
3. Improve inclusiveness on university and TAFE campuses for students with disabilities. This will require a multi-pronged strategy to build awareness and confidence, as well as reducing the stigma that surrounds the notion of 'disability', so that students are able to access the right programs and services.
4. Provide tailored support services to university and TAFE staff assisting students with disabilities who have career development and work-related issues. Careers Services and DLUs lack specialist knowledge about specific disabilities, the time or resources to develop effective ways of working with these students all on their own. They also need support to identify suitable work roles for graduates with disabilities and to ensure they apply effectively.
5. Develop a coordinated cross-institutional approach for program development. Time pressures for university and TAFE staff are great, especially when working with a relatively small student cohort that is nonetheless highly reliant on personalised, intensive services, making it sensible to consider a cross-institutional approach to program management which also forges strong links with employers and other stakeholder groups. This minimises the number of 'links in the chain' and also reduces the likelihood of duplication and the requirement for everyone to be the keeper of all wisdom.
6. Employers to become more inclusive in terms of their recruitment and selection processes. Some employers already have good programs on offer for students with disabilities, while others are still at the 'thinking' stage. There is strong evidence, however, that employers at all stages are seeking ways to enhance and refine their practices that would benefit from stronger overall coordination.
7. Increase the number of students with disabilities undertaking work-related experience, knowledge and employability skills *prior to completing their course*. Most graduate positions are filled long before students complete their studies, and it is the mentoring, work experience and other employer-based programs that facilitate these outcomes. Increasing the number and variety of opportunities is essential, but as graduates with disabilities are less likely to know about, and take up, these opportunities, an accompanied focused and well-delivered marketing campaign is also necessary.
8. Universities and TAFEs to more effectively communicate with students with disabilities regarding suitable positions, work experience opportunities, and job-related events. This will most probably require some modification of privacy practices, which we have found do not work in the student's best interests.
9. Improve job search/application support for students with disabilities. Universities and TAFEs already provide these services but students with disabilities tend to be less aware of them. Targeted programs are required as well as modifications to existing mainstream programs.

For further information about our research and related activities contact info@diversityrecruit-train.com.au .

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge our sponsoring organisation, Australians for Disability and Diversity Employment (ADDE) Inc. for successfully applying for a grant from ANZ Trustees, which allowed this project to commence. Special thanks to Geoff Crawford, Operations Manager ADDE Inc. for administrative support.

ADDE's website is www.adde.org.au

Our sincere thanks go to ANZ Trustees and the Trustees of Percy and Ruby Haddy for their generous financial support of the Victorian workshops and the research component.

We would also like to thank our sponsors and supporters; this added considerable value to our research as well as providing around 110 university and TAFE staff, 85 employers and key stakeholders with valuable learning and networking opportunities:

- Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Diversity Recruitment and Training
- The Institute of Safety Compensation and Recovery Research (ISCRR)
- WorkFocus
- Bravo Consulting Group

A forum and workshop series was also made possible in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth thanks to the following host organisations:

- Australian Network on Disability/Sparke Helmore Lawyers
- ANZ Global Headquarters (particular thanks to Rob Crestani)
- Curtin University
- RMIT University
- University of Sydney
- Victoria University

INTRODUCTION

This research project was based on the contention that Australia is currently experiencing challenges in the facilitation of students with disabilities into graduate roles. The evidence base is, to date, largely anecdotal, as data collection methods have been unreliable and irregular, and results inconclusive.

We know that:

- Around one in five Australians experience disability at any point in time.¹ This represents approximately four million people.
- Australia ranks low (21st out of 29²) in comparison with other OECD countries in the employment of people with disabilities.
- ‘The employment outcomes of graduates with disabilities are much lower than able bodied graduates’: 16.9 per cent of graduates with disabilities were still seeking work 6 months after graduation, compared with 8.5 per cent of students without disability.³
- Graduates with disabilities are less likely to be in full-time work five years after graduating (57 per cent in work compared with 76 per cent of those without disabilities).⁴

Obtaining useful data related to students and graduates with disabilities has been extremely difficult. The most recent Graduate Destination Survey⁵ report shows that 30.7 per cent of graduates who declared a disability were still seeking work six months after completing their undergraduate degree, compared with 23.9 per cent of the total number of respondents. The actual number or percentage of students with disabilities (i.e. compared to students without disabilities) entering higher education remains elusive, as many do not disclose. In the United Kingdom, where there is an incentive to disclose, around 10 per cent of university students have a declared disability⁶; we imagine the actual figure would be similar in Australia. Arguably, this figure is still ‘light’ as students with disabilities who may benefit from extra assistance in both countries, fail to disclose out of embarrassment, fear of prejudice, or simply because they don’t see the need. In summary, the ‘problem’ is most likely greater and more complex than we are able to determine statistically at this time, especially as this appears to result in a lack of access to available work opportunities.

It is no surprise, therefore, that data collection regarding graduate employment outcomes for students with disabilities has been similarly irregular and piecemeal. Accurate figures may never truly be known, because at the root of the problem are systemic issues that are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Notwithstanding the need for government support (financial, moral and practical), a robust research project that focuses on gathering more precise information about the cohort and employment outcomes is an essential precursor to further meaningful work.

¹ <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbytitle/49BEE5774F0FB1B1CA256E8B00830DF6?OpenDocument>

² <http://www.pwc.com.au/industry/government/assets/disability-in-australia.pdf>

³ GCCA, 2004.

⁴ Coates & Edwards, 2009.

⁵ http://www.graduatematters.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/GCA-GradStats-2012_FINAL1.pdf

⁶ [In the academic year 2009/2010, 282,335 UK and other EU domiciled students graduated from UK universities with a first degree, obtained through a full-time mode of study 2. Approximately six months later these graduates were contacted by their respective universities to complete the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education \(DLHE\) survey, the results of which are published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\). This report is based on analysis of data from the 213,390 leavers that responded to the survey, of this number 9.6% \(20,450\) identified themselves, during the period of their studies, as having either a disability or learning difficulty. \(Tunnah & Leacy, 2012\)](#)

In terms of our project, the brief was not to find out ‘how many’ graduates have ‘what kind’ of disabilities and what the individual impact was on employment outcomes. Rather, we aimed to identify what is standing in the way of graduates with disabilities gaining employment, and to make recommendations to improve their employment outcomes. In order to achieve this, we developed a range of strategies to obtain data from key stakeholder groups, including the target group of students and graduates, in terms of their opinions and lived experiences, to identify the core issues, what *has been* done, what *is being* done and what *might be* done to facilitate students with disabilities into graduate roles. Our findings are outlined in this report and provide the basis of a schema on which to build further research and to inform activities into the future.

Primarily, graduate employment relates to university graduates; however, there was strong interest from the TAFE sector and this report also reflects the views of members of TAFE services.

Specifically, we wanted to learn:

1. What can be done to assist students with disabilities to get a good position on graduation?
2. While they are at university (or TAFE), what can these students do to improve their employment prospects?

The intended outcomes of the research were to:

1. Identify and document the core issues and concerns through the experience and perceptions of different stakeholder groups.
2. Discover what is already being done to address and overcome these issues and concerns, and what success had been achieved (appreciative inquiry).
3. Recommend specific strategies to improve outcomes for graduates with disabilities.
4. Inform further research in order to better understand the situation and the key issues.

Acquittal requirements: Funding from ANZ Trustees provided us with the opportunity to undertake research in Victoria. Part of this report relates to the requirements of this funding.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In line with our brief and the funding requirements, our research was qualitative in nature, adopting a ‘breadth’ rather than ‘depth’ approach in order to represent the various stakeholder groups, involving face-to-face interactions with individuals and stakeholder groups, as well as a survey of Victorian university career services.

SCOPE

Our primary funding brief limited our core research to Victoria. This project, therefore, aimed to:

- better understand the context in Victoria for employment issues facing graduates with disabilities and how these issues are being addressed by governments, universities, TAFEs, employers and graduates with disabilities
- identify current practice and areas for improvement
- identify best practice for students with disabilities in tertiary education institutions in terms of how they are being prepared for employment
- investigate how Careers Services and Disability Liaison Units (DLUs) cooperate to achieve the best employment outcomes for graduates with disabilities.

The work we undertook in Sydney and Perth added an extra dimension to this work and also informed this report.

BACKGROUND

PREVALENCE OF DISABILITY IN POPULATIONS AND THE WORKFORCE

*Across all OECD countries, disability is reported at around 20 per cent of the population; this is on the rise as our population ages. Further, people with disabilities who are unemployed or underemployed are likely to be living in poverty.*⁷

*Australians with disabilities generally experience disadvantage in the areas of education and employment. Australia is ranked at a low 21 out of 29 OECD countries for employment of people with disability.*⁸

*Fifty-four per cent of Australians with disabilities aged between 15 and 64 and 'living in households' were in the labour force compared with 83 per cent of people without disability.*⁹

*The employment outcomes of graduates with disabilities are much lower than able bodied graduates: 16.9 per cent of graduates with disabilities were still seeking work 6 months after graduation, compared with 8.5 per cent of students without disability.*¹⁰

*Graduates with disabilities are less likely to be working five years after graduating (57 per cent compared with 76 per cent of those without disabilities working in full-time roles).*¹¹

RELATED RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Over recent years Australian organisations and individuals have engaged in research activities around issues that support an argument for smoothing the pathway into, through, and out of post-secondary education into job roles that provide meaning for individuals and which also allow for people with disabilities to develop their leadership capacity. The foundation of this is generally seen as a Bachelor's degree. In each of these reports, a key element is the need for partnerships and collaborative effort across stakeholder groups.

- The *National Disability Strategy Consultation Report*¹² identified that young people with disabilities were less likely to participate in higher education, training and employment and were unable to access the support required to successfully make this transition.
- In *Leading from the Front*¹³ and *Disability Employment in Australia: The way up*¹⁴, ADDE concludes that employment of people with disabilities is essential for our economy and international standing.

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/health/mental_health/eu_compass/reports_studies/disability_synthesis_2010_en.pdf;
<http://www.oecd.org/els/emp/42699911.pdf>

⁸ PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011.

⁹ ABS, 2011.

¹⁰ GCA, 2004.

¹¹ Coates & Edwards, 2009.

¹² FaHCSIA, 2009

¹³ ADDE, 2007.

¹⁴ ADDE, 2013

These papers also present a sound argument for increasing the number of people with disabilities at the higher levels of business and government as role-models so that graduates with disabilities will be encouraged to see themselves as potential leaders.

- In 2011, Mark Glascodine undertook a Churchill Fellowship research project in the United Kingdom to investigate issues surrounding the employment of graduates with disabilities as well as programs that had been put into place to assist them into employment.¹⁵ This project found that the UK was further advanced than Australia in both its understanding of the issues and in the development of programs. The range of activities offered in the UK was investigated as part of the current project to determine their suitability for the Australian market, primarily through the workshops facilitated by Helen Cooke – Director, My Plus Consulting in the UK, which are based on her work in this area.
- In 2012, Helen Cooke produced a report on work commissioned by Lloyds Banking Group to discover how graduates with disabilities go about looking for work.¹⁶ Among the findings from this report, the importance of strong connections between the Careers Services, DLUs and students was stressed. For example, students were more confident about applying for roles recommended by their Careers Services, if the employer showed they were ‘disability friendly’ and if the possibility for a face-to-face discussion was made available (rather than disclosure from a distance – on paper, in an email, in an online form etc.).
- Also in 2012, Kylee Bates travelled to the USA, the UK, Ireland and Denmark on a Churchill Fellowship to examine the effectiveness of employer-led and third party initiatives to assist people with disabilities into employment. A key theme in this report was the importance of proactivity by government (in the form of investment) and leadership by recruiters and other parties.¹⁷
- In October 2012 a breakfast seminar was held to ‘start the conversation’ in Australia and to provide an evidence base to direct further investigation. This was hosted by ANZ Global Headquarters in Melbourne (in line with that organisation’s proactive strategy to increase its employment of graduates with disabilities) and was coordinated by Julie Farthing and Mark Glascodine with support from Effie Kapsalos (IMVC-NDCO). Forty people attended, representing a range of stakeholder groups including university and TAFE staff, students and graduates, employers, professional associations and other key stakeholders. This seminar provided a forum for rich discussion and a number of key issues were identified, which provided the basis for this research project. (See APPENDIX A for key findings.)

TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES INTO GRADUATE ROLES – PROHIBITIVE FACTORS

Prior research in Australia and overseas found that:

- Many graduate employers have identified positions and/or attempted to facilitate the movement of students with disabilities into employment, but students with disabilities were not applying for these roles, or else not successfully placed.
- In general, despite there often being a geographic proximity between the services, traditionally only loose connections have existed between career services and DLUs at universities, with Disability

¹⁵ Glascodine M., 2011.

¹⁶ Cooke, H., 2012.

¹⁷ Bates, K., 2012.

Liaison Officers (DLOs) generally lacking career development knowledge and the time or incentive to acquire it. (As this is not part of their role, they are not trained in career development, the burden for ensuring students with disabilities are prepared for work should not be placed on their shoulders.) In any case, there are knowledgeable and experienced career development practitioners in all universities and TAFEs who are employed to do this work. However, despite this, there has been a tendency for students with disabilities to rely on the DLOs for all their support needs; thus these students have often failed to develop career awareness, an adequate understanding of the availability of positions, knowledge of the graduate recruitment processes, timelines, and the skills to apply for these, during the critical final year of their studies. This heavy reliance on the DLOs to meet all their needs raises questions about the services currently provided by the tertiary sector and how these can be improved so graduate outcome for students with disabilities are not the collateral damage.

- Many students with disabilities are ‘invisible’. This is partly due to the low number of students identifying as having a disability at enrolment (in fact, the percentage of students who do declare a disability is estimated to be between 2 per cent and 5 per cent of the total student population, depending on who you ask). Further, of those who do declare, many will not access their DLU or career services throughout their course, and with strict privacy rules preventing the possibility of contacting them without their express permission, the task of providing valuable assistance becomes complex and problematic. Given that one in five people are estimated to have a disability at any one time, to say that 10 per cent of students have a disability is a conservative estimate.
- ‘Disability’ itself is a problematic term, encompassing a wide range of conditions and impairments and the severity/impact of these on individuals cannot be easily predicted. Many people with disabilities (according to prevailing definitions) prefer not to use the term at all, or at least they do not apply it personally. Anxious to avoid the stigma of being negatively labelled (and possibly victimised or refused access to a service or activity through unfair prejudice), students often prefer to minimise their disability, or keep silent about it. The reluctance to use the term ‘disabled’ is more evident in some cohorts, including those experiencing mental illness.
- Students with disabilities (declared or undeclared) are generally less likely to become ‘work-ready’ because they tend to prioritise their course work over what can be seen as ‘optional extra’ activities (such as working part-time and taking up industry placements while studying), and are also less likely to develop theoretical employment, career and job search skills, which diminishes their ability to compete for roles.
- Large employers who conduct yearly graduate recruitment programs do not have a consistent approach to hiring students with disabilities. While some have created targeted positions and others have developed mechanisms aimed at being inclusive, others are not, apparently, disability-confident and do not have any processes in place. Some of the employers we contacted prior to the start of this project openly acknowledged that they are only focused on gender equity in their recruitment programs; no doubt this has more than a little to do with their current requirement to report on this to the government.
- Many employers who are not currently hiring graduates (including not-for-profits and SMEs) would benefit from harnessing the skills and knowledge students with disabilities can bring, but do not know how to develop an appropriate recruitment and career development program.

In summary, we can assume that work can and should be done to enhance the transition of tertiary sector graduates with disabilities into employment, but there are a number of systemic and operational barriers that need to be addressed in order to make significant progress.

FINDINGS FROM STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

UNIVERSITY AND TAFE STAFF

Our interactions with university and TAFE staff included:

1. a forum held in Melbourne
2. six workshops in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth
3. a survey of university career services

1. Forum

The forum was organised in the early stages of the project and was held at the City Flinders Campus of Victoria University. University and TAFE career Services and DLU staff from around Victoria were invited. There were 22 people in attendance. This group assisted us to appropriately plan our activities for the rest of the project. The forum had four main aims:

1. To outline the project and summarise work done so far.
2. To develop a list of strategies: Which interventions were considered the most effective in assisting towards the employment outcomes for students with disabilities?
3. To establish a set of problems, preventative issues and concerns (in light of above) with regard to assisting students with disabilities to achieve outcomes on graduation.
4. To determine the most effective method for engaging with students.

Recommended strategies ranked in order from 'most important' to 'least important':

1. Industry support (internships/Work Integrated Learning or 'WIL')
2. Specialised job readiness/preparation programs
3. Industry support (create/expand mentoring programs)
4. Presentation and negotiation skills development
5. Industry support (targeted jobs – before and after graduation)
6. Consultation services offered by external experts
7. Advocacy/reverse marketing of identified students
8. Specialist training for Careers Service and DLU staff
9. Improved links between university staff (Careers Services, DLUs, other)
10. Targeted jobs (paid part-time roles for students) provided on campus
11. Assisting students to link with employers (for example, through targeted events)

Issues and concerns raised in regard to implementing these, ranked in order of need:

1. Lack of resources
2. Lack of time/competing priorities
3. Lack of penetration – access to students with disabilities
4. Lack of coordination between Careers Services and DLU staff (although many were already taking steps to address this).

On the subject of interviewing students and graduates with disabilities, two key messages were elicited from discussions:

1. 'Our students do not like sitting in a room with other students with disabilities.' Participants at the meeting recommended that face-to-face interviews with students and graduates would be more effective (rather than focus groups, for example), as their experience indicated that students with disabilities would probably not welcome the idea of being grouped artificially with other students with disabilities (and with whom they would quite probably have little in common) – it was felt that this may impact on students' willingness to attend meetings and to divulge potentially sensitive information.
2. 'We don't use the medical model to categorise students with disabilities – it is demeaning. We use the social model.' Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the idea of using the prevailing methods of identification of people with disabilities for the purposes of their work – these are all based on the medical model, such as the *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers* (SDAC)¹⁸, which categorises people by disability type and level (e.g. mild, moderate, severe, profound). In a learning setting, and arguably an employment setting, these categorisations are not useful and may have a damaging effect on notions of work effectiveness, capability and perceptions (self and other) about the individual's ability to undertake a work role. In a tertiary setting, emphasis is placed on the impact of a disability and on the kind of support required, such as assistive technology or site modification.

These two clear statements informed our research activities and guided the way we gathered information from students and graduates.

2. Workshops

Helen Cooke has been working successfully to improve outcomes for graduates with disabilities in the UK since 2009, collaborating with universities, employers and graduates. Mark Glascodine met with Helen in the UK in 2011 during his Churchill Fellowship research tour investigating what university careers advisory services were doing for students with disabilities. Helen's business is www.myplusconsulting.com.

The *Helen Cooke Downunder* tour took place over two weeks in May 2013 in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. See the website (<http://helencookedownunder.com>) for more information about the tour.

- In Sydney, the University of Sydney hosted a workshop for university and TAFE Careers Service and DLU staff, while the Australian Network on Disability hosted a workshop for employers.
- In Melbourne, RMIT University hosted a university/TAFE workshop and ANZ hosted the employer workshop.
- In Perth, Curtin University hosted both workshops

All workshops were well received, over 110 university staff and around 85 employers attended overall. Helen shared her UK experience in the attraction and recruitment of graduates with disabilities, and supplied time for discussion and actual case studies to enable participants to explore possible activities in their individual working contexts.

Feedback was received and these workshops were found to be beneficial on the basis of:

- knowledge sharing
- conversation generation

¹⁸ <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0>

- exploring the issues in groups
- ideas for further research and activities.

Key messages elicited from the workshops:

1. It is essential that Careers Services and DLUs work together in order to effectively connect students with disabilities to the range of careers support available at various stages during their course, and after completion. In New South Wales the Careers Services and DLUs have developed a strong collaborative network, Victoria has started a network; other states could benefit from learning about these.
2. Given the complexity of needs, extra support is required for students with disabilities from the start of their course right through to the year following graduation, to ensure they are not left behind.
3. Employers can get more involved in sponsoring and attending disability events at universities and in their own settings (such as awareness weeks and workshops for students), and conducting specialised induction programs once graduates have commenced.
4. Employers can make more effort to show they are disability-confident, e.g. providing support and adjustments to employees, showing a clear willingness to make reasonable adjustments on their websites, and providing profiles of successful candidates and existing (especially long-serving and high-profile) employees with disabilities.
5. A talent-driven recruitment process in a demand-driven environment provides a solid business case for employing people with disabilities. This moves the process away from a corporate social responsibility model to mainstream business operation. This will ensure employers get the right candidates and that graduates know they are being selected on merit, on a level playing field.
6. Employers reported that they faced significant barriers in gaining access to students with disabilities, which has often lessened their ability to recruit to capacity: 'We want to employ graduates with disabilities, but we can't find them. Who do we talk to?' was the prevailing question from employers who already have inclusive recruitment programs in place.
7. The characteristics of a particular disability (such as the 'type' or 'level' does not necessarily correlate with career success. (This needs further research and investigation, as we believe people with 'severe' and 'profound' disabilities may indeed be more significantly disadvantaged.) Other factors like high self-esteem, success in a life endeavour, family support and encouragement, mentoring experiences and positive encouragement from teachers and others are likely to have an overriding influence on a person's expectations, and the individual's ability to make career decisions and to actively participate in employment.
8. The importance of showcasing people with disabilities who have progressed in their careers cannot be underestimated; this will encourage young people with disabilities to aim high and to raise their expectations of what is personally and professionally possible, and cannot be underestimated.

3. Survey of Careers Services

In June we sent surveys to all nine Victorian university Careers Services, asking them about their work with students with disabilities (see APPENDIX B for survey questions).

We received responses from eight Careers Services; some wished to remain anonymous so we have not published any names.

Summary points from this include:

- Of the seven Careers Services, three had zero staff members engaged in work with students with disabilities; two had one staff member; two had more than one. This highlights a wide discrepancy between institutions in the attention students with disabilities receive. Most responses indicated that less than 5 hours per week in total was allocated for this work, although three responded that between 5 and 15 hours per week was allocated. Most of the work done was 'career counselling', with one service also offering 'job search assistance', although it appears that this was not in the form of individualised attention.
- The level of importance that was given to working with students with disabilities was also wide-ranging, with responses varying from 'important, but not a priority' to 'high priority'.
- Liaison with the DLU, which we have established is imperative in working effectively with students with disabilities was occurring in all cases; half of the respondents indicated they 'liaised regularly', and most services had begun to hold regular meetings with the DLU and were working on ways to help make students aware of the services. This was encouraging, as in 2011 and 2012, few universities reported that any collaboration was occurring.
- We asked respondents to provide a self-assessment of how well their institution was currently working to assist students with disabilities into employment: all were doing this 'to some extent', two reported 'adequately'. From this we can deduce that a sharing of 'best practices' would be indicated, to support those who wish to improve their offerings.

Some of the activities that are/have been provided or made available to students with disabilities include:

- access to special programs for students with disabilities: Willing and Able Mentoring (WAM), Stepping Into and PACE (Positive Action towards Career Engagement)*
- confidential access to online career resources
- supporting externally organised activities and coordinating special events for employers to come on campus and speak with students with disabilities about their programs
- a targeted special cross-institution 'Diversity' event that has coordinated by a different university each year since 2011 in Victoria, students with disabilities from all universities are invited to attend.

*These are fantastic initiatives, but only available to a handful of students around Australia each year. Many of the respondents indicated they were proactively investigating funding avenues (e.g. HEPPP – Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program) to support targeted activities into the future.

Key recommendations from respondents were to:

- generate statistics and related information on graduate outcomes within this cohort that can be used to influence decision makers
- develop a coordinated information bulletin that brings together employment, internship and other work opportunities for the cohort, as well as programs for improving employment outcomes and grants to apply for funding
- engage additional staff/specialist staff to assist with student load; a careers counselling role that is dedicated to working with students with disabilities
- create a 'one-stop-shop' website, providing basic information and referrals to support services
- display marketing materials (pamphlets or brochures) and a regular calendar of events and support services around campus,
- make information regarding government subsidies and support more accessible for employers
- conduct regular briefing sessions with AAGE members to assist with education

- introduce a 'Disability Café' (similar to that provided by Helen Cooke in the UK)
- introduce external, targeted services providing specialist support to students in a relaxed environment
- have an external/separate organisation providing regular updates on what is available in the market place and providing support services and opportunities (such as social enterprises)
- develop a sponsored work experience program for students with disabilities, to be funded and fully insured by the government when it is not a compulsory course component
- acquire more resourcing to place students through WAM
- provide extra financial resources to employ a specialist staff member to find employment opportunities.
- develop more direct relationship between university/TAFE staff and Disability Employment Services (DES) providers
- *Graduate Opportunities* and similar publications to contain information about opportunities for students with disabilities or disability-friendly organisations
- introduce training for careers staff on how to encourage students to disclose their needs at the right time.

STUDENTS

We contacted the Careers Services at eight Victorian metropolitan-based universities, and of these, held face-to-face interviews with 11 current university students:

- Deakin University (one student)
- University of Melbourne (two students)
- RMIT University (one student)
- Victoria University (seven students)

Of these, eight students identified as having a disability, two did not identify as having a disability, and one was not sure (but mentioned three separate conditions which require some attention, so for the purposes of this report agreed that he was in the 'with disability' category). All were in their final or penultimate year of undergraduate study. The students with disabilities ranged in age from 21 to 56, with a median age of 27; those without disabilities had a median age of 23.5. Disabilities declared included Asperger's Syndrome (Autism Spectrum Disorder), depression, spinal injury, diabetes, asthma, hemiplegia, learning difficulties, schizophrenia, anxiety and arthritis. A wide range of courses was represented, including Biomedical Science, Education, Applied Science, Arts/Law, Nursing, and Media/Communications.

The interviews were around 45 minutes, and were based on a set of qualitative questions (see APPENDIX C) aimed at determining the students' knowledge of graduate roles and how to apply, the preparation for work activities they have undertaken or are undertaking, their use of Careers Services and career resources, and their career aspirations.

In summary, while this was an extremely small sample group (due to time and resource constraints), from the information supplied by the students we were able to identify a number of common themes:

1. **Course completion time:** Most of the students with disabilities took longer to complete their course than students without disabilities (this was gleaned from conversations and was also reflected in the higher median age of students with disabilities). Those without disabilities who transferred to part-time study were combining study with work or other activities, while those who took time off had generally spent time travelling overseas. Those with disabilities had taken time off studying or gone part-time to better manage study workloads and were less likely to be engaged in other activities

outside university (there were one or two exceptions to this). Several of the students with disabilities commented that they found it hard to keep up with the demands of study and would find it difficult to manage other activities as well.

2. **Course change:** Most of the students with disabilities had stayed in the same course; those without disabilities had changed courses at least once. This may indicate that students with disabilities feel less confident about changing courses; the students without disabilities both mentioned that they had learned things about themselves after starting their first course and they proactively set about finding a course that was a better fit with their changing self-concept. Given what we know about young people under the age of 25 and their general lack of self-awareness prior to this age, this difference is sufficiently significant to recommend further research as to how students with disabilities perceive their course and to what extent their confidence (or lack thereof) causes them to persevere with a course (and potential career) that is unsuitable. This may also have a direct correlation with their lower employment outcomes, so should not be ignored.
3. **Awareness of career services on campus:** Most of the students with and without disabilities were aware of the Careers Services; most of those with disabilities also had some kind of relationship with the DLU; however, as these interviews were advertised via the Careers Services/DLUs, this may not be truly representative, as others would not have known about the opportunity. A focused research activity would provide more accurate information.
4. **Awareness of graduate programs:** The students with disabilities tended to be unaware of graduate programs or graduate roles; in comparison, one of the students without disabilities was familiar with these while one was not. Again, further research is indicated.
5. **Preparation for work:** Work readiness can be developed in a number of ways, including part-time jobs, volunteer roles, internships, job shadowing, and having an industry mentor. There were too many variables among our interviewees to find any discernible patterns of work preparation activities; however, what appeared to matter most was whether these activities were course-driven. For example, those studying in nursing and education programs had benefited noticeably from participating in the required industry placements (and registered the highest level of confidence about their future), while those in less 'industry-controlled' courses (i.e. those without inbuilt career development programs) had less structured, and arguably less successful experiences. This applies whether a student has a disability or not; however, in general, the students with disabilities were more likely to find reasons not to engage in work-related activities than their non-disabled counterparts, and this leads to increased disadvantage in the open job market.
6. **Current work situation:** As reflected in point 5 above, both of the students without disabilities were currently working in jobs that ranged between 10 and 20 hours a week, while only one of the nine students with disabilities was currently working between one and two hours per week.
7. **Confidence regarding future career:** Interviewees were asked to rate themselves out of 10 to reflect their confidence in their ability to have a 'good job' once they completed university. Responses were again wide-ranging, with no discernible pattern related to having a disability, and the knowledge of opportunities and activities already undertaken by students did not necessarily equate to the level of confidence regarding their future careers. The most confident student with a disability (self-scoring a high 10/10) had a very clear career pathway into work through his Bachelor of Nursing qualification; this is a profession that provides a great deal of support for the transition of students into employment; while the least confident (with a rating of 3) was an Arts/Law student who did not feel there was a clear pathway to employment - this appeared to be impacting on their sense of security about the future. Neither of the two students without disability had developed a clear career path, nonetheless both rated themselves as confident (8 and 9). Many students with disability projected concerns about how employers would perceive them; one said 'Why would an employer choose me,

I can't work full time with my condition?', and another said 'I can't travel long distances. Why wouldn't they just take someone who is less trouble for them?' These limiting statements are clear indicators of a lack of confidence in the future, but studies in the UK have shown that that one's self-perception and worldview are the best attribute a graduate can possess. Confidence can be developed in a number of practical ways, but this needs to occur from the beginning of the course, before negative self-perception becomes the overriding factor.

Other comments:

- There was a general lack of confidence in government/DES to assist with career development.
- Students with disabilities do not wish to be seen as 'special cases'; rather, they want to be considered for roles on merit.
- On the whole, students did not believe they should be required to disclose a disability too early and impersonally (such as on a questionnaire); they felt this would lead to automatic elimination (even though we know that many employers would actually view this positively, their lifetime experience usually tells them otherwise). Most often, they would prefer to wait until they were talking to someone, preferably face to face. This concurs with UK findings. An independent advocate could smooth this path, and current recruitment practices should be modified so that there is opportunity for potential candidates to have discussions with recruiters much earlier in the process than are generally available.

GRADUATES

We put out requests to interview graduates with disabilities through NDCOs, the Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS), and our employer contacts. As a result, we conducted five face-to-face interviews with former students from these institutions:

- Swinburne University (regional campus)
- University of Melbourne
- Holmesglen TAFE
- Swinburne/Deakin University
- VU (TAFE)/RMIT University

Of these, all students identified as having a disability. They were aged between 24 and 42 years; four males, one female. All had obtained work after graduation, and changed jobs at least once. Two of these had postgraduate qualifications. Disabilities declared included cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, dyslexia, and a neurological condition. Their course backgrounds included IT, Human Resources and Social Work.

During the interviews we asked a number of qualitative questions to determine the graduates' perceptions about their experience at university/TAFE and how it prepared them for work.

In summary, while this was a small sample group (due to time, access and resource constraints), from the information supplied by the graduates we were able to identify a number of common themes:

1. **Job readiness:** Interviewees who had not been successful in obtaining work at first, but who returned to study at postgraduate level, appeared to have a much better understanding of the difficulties in relation to gaining employment than they did after their first course, and were more likely to actively use their time effectively to gain employability skills.
2. **Views on employment:** All interviewees valued their employment highly, as it was 'hard won' (difficult to obtain). All expressed some concern about the prospect of losing their job and worried about their ability to find another if they needed to.

3. **Awareness of career services on campus:** Interviewees were aware of the Careers Services on campus, but most had not used these services, or used them only for resume/interview skills, not for career direction or building self-advocacy skills.
4. **Barriers to employment:** Interviewees all expressed that they now realised that a lack of early work experience had made them less competitive in the job market, and that they did not develop confidence to find work while they were students; this came much later, after they had graduated.
5. **Confidence regarding future career:** Interviewees felt their confidence had improved since they started their courses, but believed it would always take longer to find work, and the process would be more problematic for people with disabilities.
6. **Other comments:** Interviewees expressed a general lack of confidence in the government providers (Disability Employment Services) to assist them, in terms of getting a job as well as in helping them to develop a career plan. One was highly critical of the service and did not feel people working in it had any understanding of graduates or the graduate job market.

EMPLOYERS

Information from employers about what needs to be done to attract students with disabilities was gleaned informally, through one-to-one conversations and information gathered during the Helen Cooke workshops for employers in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. In total, we had interaction with approximately 100 employers over the six-month period of the project.

Key issues raised:

- The lack of response by students to targeted job advertisements, and universities did not seem to be assisting: 'How do we advertise jobs to increase the number of applicants?'
- There did not appear to be anyone to talk to in universities: 'Who cares about this? Who can we get to help us?'
- It was not really worthwhile coming on campus; not many students came to talks, but they all felt this was a good way for them to 'sell' their organisations, if the take-up rate could be improved.
- Some smaller and not-for-profit organisations were inexperienced in employing students and graduates with disabilities, but keen to start a program. 'How do we start a targeted graduate recruitment program (for students with disabilities)?' 'Is it going to cost a lot of money?'
- Some were concerned about the processes and costs of modifying workplaces to accommodate students and graduates with disabilities: 'This is something we are prepared to do, but we need to know how.'
- An issue related to this was that many students did not disclose a disability, possibly out of fear of prejudice: 'How do we get students to disclose a disability so we know how to make our workplace fit their needs?'
- Those employers who had well-established recruitment programs indicated a reluctance to make changes: 'Why should we alter our recruitment process? We have invested a lot of time and money and it seems to be working.'
- Some employers felt there was a need to focus on one 'special group' at a time, rather than building a more generally inclusive program. More than one employer gave us feedback that 'We are focusing on gender equity in our current recruitment program.'

The workshops elicited a number of strategies for streamlining recruitment processes and enhancing outcomes with regard to students with disabilities; many of these came from the participants themselves and some were already being practised:

- Building a closer relationship with just one or two universities, rather than attempting to do a 'broad sweep'.
- Working in collaboration with other stakeholders, e.g. specialist recruiters/brokers and disability associations.
- Targeting events at universities in a way that rather than signposting them as 'for' students with disabilities which may generate a negative response, excludes students without disabilities (e.g. the registration process asks questions that students without disabilities cannot answer and, therefore, cannot complete the registration process).
- Modifying recruitment processes: allowing students with disabilities to enter at a later stage (some indicated they were already doing this, others said they were prepared to eliminate the psychometric testing/online application stage), and encouraging students to request modifications (for example, at assessment centres, indicating a need to sit close to the front in order to read or hear instructions).

Conclusions that can be drawn from our interactions with employers are:

1. Many have already structured, or wish to structure, their programs in a way that gives students with disabilities a good chance of success in their recruitment programs. Most programs have, however, been predicated on the need for students to declare a disability. Given the reluctance of students to declare, and their general reluctance to be recruited for targeted roles and/or be seen as 'special needs', this is a significant dilemma that needs to be addressed. These problems can be addressed by employers establishing a more 'inclusive' recruitment process in a demand-driven environment.
2. It appears that many graduate employers are gradually shifting their focus from employing graduates with disabilities as a way of meeting their corporate social responsibility to the basis of a business case to include all the 'right' people in their recruitment processes. This follows what has been happening over the past five years in the UK, where it has been found that some of the prime candidates are, in fact, students with disabilities.

AUSTRALIAN NETWORK ON DISABILITY CONFERENCE 2013: RAISING THE BAR

In addition to the six workshops she conducted as part of this project, Helen Cooke was invited to present a keynote at the Australian Network on Disability (AND) annual conference. Mark and Julie were also invited to attend.

The conference objectives were to:

- 'examine current and future trends in relation to disability and business, assisting delegates to gain a greater understanding of how disability impacts on their business
- equip employers with the skills and knowledge required to proactively attract, recruit and retain people with disability
- enhance awareness of disability as a business issue and ensure it remains on the agenda during challenging economic times
- provide members and potential members with the opportunity to network, share best practice and build relationships with others interested in disability'¹⁹.

¹⁹ www.and.org.au/conference2013

As well as having the opportunity to network with a wide range of stakeholders, we heard from several high-profile speakers at the conference who provided evidence that people with mild to profound disabilities are capable of undertaking specialist, senior executive and community leadership roles – but someone has to give them a start.

DISABILITY ORGANISATIONS

Invitations were sent to three organisations; two responded, and one face-to-face interview resulted, with Murray Dawson-Smith, CEO of Amaze (formerly Autism Victoria). Amaze has not been directly involved with graduate programs; however, their own recruitment experiences and their interactions with young people on the Autism Spectrum and their families provide insights that are relevant, arguably, to the employment of people with all ‘types’ of disability, including graduates.

One in 100 Australians is on the Autism Spectrum, many with the characteristics of ‘Asperger’s Syndrome’ (which, since July 2013 is no longer an official psychological category, but is still widely used). There is a lack of general awareness about this condition; therefore myths prevail about the perceived problems and barriers associated with employment. As a result, many of these individuals possess high levels of specialist knowledge and expertise, and can bring enormous value to a workplace; yet they often find themselves excluded.

Amaze does not collect data on graduates on the Autism Spectrum in relation to finding employment; however, they do have significant experience in dealing with AS people of all ages (they have contact with around 25,000 people a year, including families of AS people, educators and employers) and a keen awareness the problems they face entering and remaining in work. Our conversation indicated that disability organisations can play a pivotal role in disseminating information to their communities.

Key issues:

- **‘The whole process disadvantages our people, especially interviews’:** There is a general lack of awareness in the employer community about how to enable graduates on ‘the Spectrum’ to apply for roles; this is partly due to a lack of understanding about the condition itself, and also how it manifests.
- **‘Then there are the social rules and hidden agendas’:** People on the Spectrum who have trouble settling into a strange new workplace are too quickly labelled as ‘problematic’ or ‘troublemakers’ and these negative perceptions become the prevailing paradigm which makes employers wary of the whole group. This is at least partly due to students on the Spectrum being less likely to develop the ‘soft’ (i.e. employability) skills, such as teamwork, self-management, and interpersonal communication, because these are generally learned through observation and interaction, which come less naturally to this cohort.
- **‘They are not all IT’ (information technology):** There is a tendency to pigeonhole all people on the Spectrum as ‘IT nerds’ – this is far from the truth and fails to recognise all the skills and high-level knowledge across all industries and occupations (including those that are more creative) shared by the total AS community.
- **‘It’s about creating careers for people’:** Denied the opportunity to advance because of a lack of creative, less traditional career progression mechanisms means that these people are left too long in jobs that become boring. Frustration may lead to more pronounced idiosyncratic behaviours and

they may be labelled as ‘troublemakers’ or ‘lacking loyalty’ when this is actually far from the truth. On occasions, they are perceived as being too good at doing their current job to be moved on or tried somewhere else. Or, they may have been placed in a direct supervisory role that was unsuitable, but, are prevented from advancing higher (to a role which may involve less day-to-day supervision) which would, in fact, be more suitable (with less time spent managing direct reports). Often, though, they are simply forgotten, because they have not engaged with typical social interactions that would bring them to management’s notice.

- **‘Who is looking after them once they leave university?’:** People on the Spectrum are likely to miss vital opportunities to undertake career development activities at university, such as working part-time, being involved in community, voluntary or leadership programs, and attending sessions run by the Careers Services (including workshops on interview skills, and having career counselling to ensure they have a career plan). Once they finish university, they lose access to these services and are, largely, on their own.
- **‘Sheltered workshop mentality’ of government-funded programs:** This does not assist the economy or help individuals to lead meaningful and rewarding lives. There should be more social enterprises or pathways to employment that are not ‘dead ends’ (i.e. they actually lead to real jobs in the open employment market). Creating effective social enterprises that assist graduates with disabilities not immediately employed can play a vital role in building employability skills and preparing them for the workplace.

Elements of an effective transition to work for AS graduates would include:

- Developing a comprehensive workplace-based program for those not employed immediately on graduation, which provides real work (e.g. other companies would outsource work) to help them gain an understanding of workplace culture and to ‘understand the hidden workplace agenda’. This would also provide a favourable environment to ‘make mistakes without losing your job over them’ and generally make the workplace less alien and threatening.
- Assisting employers to develop more appropriate selection processes, with fewer behavioural and formal interviews, and more informal, strengths-based approaches. Particular strategies include providing questions in advance and being very clear about why these are being asked, not assuming that the person being interviewed will understand the rationale behind particular questions.
- Help navigating the workplace, understanding the protocols and rituals, ensuring that inductions are carried out thoroughly and effectively, taking into account things like when to take breaks and for how long, knowing when to leave work, and how to communicate with people at different levels of the organisation.
- Also, as part of the induction program, allocating a mentor or buddy who they can ‘check in’ with for the first year (to avoid making career-ending mistakes).
- Providing non-traditional career progression opportunities (e.g. assisting people on the Spectrum to become a specialist or mentor to newer/younger staff).

CONCLUSIONS

Australia needs a skilled workforce, and this can only be achieved by making the best use of all graduates. Likewise, our economic viability into the future depends on more people contributing, as workers and as business owners, and, as a result, being less dependent on the welfare system. Recent activities, including those conducted as part of this project, have led to a higher level of awareness of the issues for all stakeholders regarding employment of graduates with disabilities and this information can be used to overcome imbalances in work outcomes for this cohort.

While acknowledging that good work is already being done, we can say with confidence that graduates with disabilities are not achieving their full potential in the workplace, in the hours they work, the type of work they do, the extent to which they realise their career potential, and whether, in fact, they work at all, compared with graduates without disabilities. This imbalance is unlikely to be related to a lack of capability; rather, they fail to progress through the various stages of the recruitment process, or, worse still, are not alert to opportunities in the first place.

Employers and recruiters are becoming increasingly interested in recruiting graduates with disabilities; some have created targeted roles and adapted their recruitment processes, while others are keen to see more talented graduates with disabilities applying generally. It makes good business sense to have access to the full range of available talent in an inclusive recruitment program. Many university staff and employers are already engaged in a range of activities in preparation for future recruitment programs, armed with great ideas that have been developed during and following the workshops.

University and TAFE Careers Service and DLU staff are developing stronger working links and working positively to come up with ways to create better employment outcomes for their students with disabilities. Independently, but in a timely alignment with our project, in May 2013 the inaugural combined Victorian NAGCAS-SHEDN (Careers Service and DLU staff) meeting discussed ways to facilitate working together.

For this to work, however, those in the target group – students with disabilities – need to avail themselves of opportunities. As previously discussed, students are not declaring their disabilities, nor are they currently accessing services available to them in sufficient numbers. The history behind this is long and complex, but there is an element of truth to the belief that disclosure will make them vulnerable; social stigma and prejudice are very real. Attention to this is required so that those with disabilities are not made more vulnerable, and that they are truly advantaged in the future.

Building strong alliances between stakeholders is a key to success. A partnership approach requires strong initial coordination to build and maintain strong partnerships that involve government (policy makers and service providers), university staff, employers and third parties (including graduate recruiters and disability organisations) and is an essential precursor to action. In Australia, good work started by the Australian Network on Disability (AND) 'PACE' and 'Stepping Into' programs and the 'Willing and Able Mentoring' (WAM) programs all provide worthwhile opportunities for students with disabilities to prepare for work. These programs all have the capacity to be adapted and extended, and there is also scope for the development of other creative solutions.

In addition to the issues related to gathering data, assisting students with disabilities into graduate roles has problematic elements. This project has gone some way to uncovering and opening up discussion of these elements and in supplying some recommendations for further work. Key elements (which are interrelated) that need to be considered in all future endeavours are:

- **The issue of disclosure:** Currently, if students choose not to disclose a disability, they do not 'count' and miss out on specialist assistance and employment opportunities. Questions we need to address include: How much do others need to know? What are the reasonable limits to disclosure? What is the best way, and when is the best time to disclose a disability?
- **Letting students with disabilities know support is available and encouraging them to access it:** Adequate preparation for work has become a victim of the respect for privacy. It is difficult to specifically target students with declared disabilities and to provide them with important information. The very people who would most benefit from assistance are even further removed by this protective 'cocoon'. The authors of this report were told of an employer wanting to come on campus to talk to students with disabilities, but these students could not be sent an email unless they had specifically requested contact; thus, there was no effective means of contacting them. Similarly, Careers Services have attempted to run targeted work preparation activities and to advertise specific positions, but they were unable to reach the students.
- **The focus on 'disability' rather than ability:** Students with disabilities have often developed a wide range of strategies to cope with life and have developed skills in problem solving, overcoming obstacles, even managing and interacting with carers and others. They have done a great deal to make sure their disability 'does not matter'; they do not wish to be labelled, but may still need to request assistance in the workplace.
- **Developing resilience:** How do we ensure students with disabilities develop the necessary level of confidence to drive their working lives? Confidence is an essential precursor to the development of the high-level employability skills required of graduates. They will also need confidence to become resilient in the face of rejection, to take on leadership, community and work roles while still studying, and to be able to assimilate into the workplace after they have finished their courses.
- **Reducing the role of stigma and prejudice:** Bullying and the stigmatisation of difference is, unfortunately, endemic in our society. Some people with disabilities have been able to overcome this, many through becoming elite sportspeople or prominent in another field of endeavour (there are many high-profile actors and comedians with disabilities). Many, though, lack the wherewithal to combat bullying and other forms of discrimination. An ongoing campaign is required to reduce both discrimination and its effects.

In reality, a great deal of work remains to be done. Without a concentrated and multi-pronged intervention, many students with disabilities will fail to access the important job search and career-related support they need until it is too late, if ever. Once they have graduated, former students lose contact with their institution and are even less likely to access any support. Disability Employment Services are, currently, not allowed to assist current students to develop job search or career planning skills, and most are not equipped to prepare graduates for work (to our knowledge, EDGE²⁰ in Western Australia is the only DES in Australia that does this).

²⁰ [Professional EDGE is managed by EDGE's Corporate Marketing team, which keeps in regular contact with more than 200 major employers \(public and private sector\) who use EDGE's services – and who are most likely to have the professional positions that graduates are seeking.](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this project, and as a culmination of work undertaken over recent years, we have identified several areas for further work:

Recommendation 1: Conduct focused, valid, reliable research around Australia to better understand the 'problem'.

In order to more fully understand the depth and breadth of the cohort and the specific career and work-related needs of those in it, a focused research project should be coordinated on a national level. A great deal of research has been conducted overseas (particularly the UK and USA); understanding the extent of the problem in Australia, and what is actually working is a necessary precursor/accompaniment to any further work. Our preliminary research tells us that there is a 'poverty of aspiration' amongst this cohort (which may be traced back to experiences at school or home), and while some people with disabilities have become prominent in their fields of endeavour, for a significant number the destination lies in unemployment or underemployment, possibly for the rest of their lives.

Suggested strategies

1. Develop a comprehensive quantitative analysis of current students, to identify:
 - the number of students in the target group, including demographics, the courses they are studying and their career aspirations
 - the level of need, and the range of need levels: the criteria for this would need to be established, as prevailing ways of categorising people with disabilities (using the medical model) are not considered relevant for this purpose.
2. Find out where students with disabilities end up after their courses, through a comprehensive study of:
 - destinations (work, further study, welfare dependence) of students with disabilities compared with those without disabilities, and in particular, comparing students who have participated in preparatory programs with those who did not
 - the career progression over a five year period of students with disabilities in comparison to those without disabilities.
3. Develop comprehensive 360 degree data detailing employer, stakeholder and community expectations, ideas and views, in order to analyse and report on the level and manifestations of stigma and discrimination that may exist, prior to establishing further awareness campaigns and programs.

Recommendation 2: Continue to hold seminars, workshops and forums in capital cities and regional centres that can be attended by members of all stakeholder groups.

Facilitating the transition of students with disabilities to work requires collaborative input from people and groups with specialist knowledge and skills using a multi-pronged approach:

- Universities and TAFE college career services and DLUs, who connect with students with disabilities
- Government – for policy development and funding inputs
- Employers – to increase employment opportunities and the marketing of these to graduates with disabilities
- Students/graduates with disabilities – to research the issues that will build awareness, attitude and confidence to find, and compete for suitable roles
- Other stakeholders – including the Australian Network on Disability, Disability Employment Australia (including NDRC and DES providers), disability organisations and peak employer bodies.

The work has begun in Australia to create strong working links between stakeholders, and the feedback we have received is that this needs to continue. Participants at face-to-face events over the past year have noted the value of meeting and talking directly with other interested parties.

Suggested strategies:

1. Implement ongoing seminars, forums and workshops in capital cities and regional centres that can be attended by members of all stakeholder groups. Online or web-conferencing activities may support face-to-face events, but should not replace them.
2. Provide tips and best practice information in publications such as *Graduate Opportunities* and *Unigrad*, and on graduate recruitment websites.
3. Develop a centralised website (like greatwithdisability.com in the UK) for employers to advertise their interest in engaging graduates with disabilities generally, as well as targeted roles.

Recommendation 3: Improve inclusiveness on university and TAFE campuses for students with disabilities

Increased inclusiveness on university campuses for students with disabilities will lead to more students taking advantage of these services, including career services. This will require a multi-pronged strategy to build awareness and confidence as well as reducing the stigma that surrounds the notion of 'disability'.

Suggested strategies:

1. Undertake focused research to identify how students with disabilities perceive themselves and their work-readiness, and also how they are perceived by students without disabilities (and perhaps academic and general staff).
2. Develop a marketing campaign based on overcoming stigma and prejudice.
3. Encourage students with disabilities to take on leadership, community and work roles on campus to heighten their visibility.
4. Introduce a 'Disability Awareness Week' to demystify disability and improve collegiality on campus.

Recommendation 4: Provide tailored support services to university and TAFE staff assisting students with disabilities with career development and work-related issues.

Many of the university and TAFE Careers service staff commented that they felt under-skilled and lacking in specialist knowledge when interacting with students with disabilities.

Situations that can cause staff to feel less equipped include conducting individual career counselling sessions, and giving advice about graduate roles and other work. To our knowledge there are currently no university or TAFE staff members who act as a 'go to' person if students with disabilities need an advocate or mediator for employment-related activities. Besides the more obvious issues of communication and access,

individual staff members have mentioned concerns about a lack of knowledge about particular disabilities, how to organise appropriate supports, and duty of care issues. They have indicated they are willing to do what they can but are also time-poor, find it difficult to keep up to date with new knowledge, lack the necessary resources, and are not able to provide the intensive support required by these students.

Suggested strategies:

1. Practical support can be provided by specialist external providers for:
 - Career counselling and job search support delivered by external specialists to students and graduates.
 - Coaching for careers staff via email or phone.
 - Higher-level training for dedicated 'disability' career counsellors/advisors.
 - Training for DLU staff so that they identify work and career-related needs while they are talking with students, and to refer to the Careers Service as appropriate.
2. Given the current lack of employment support, and the knowledge that within two years after course completion one's 'graduate' status is lost, timely assistance is imperative. Graduates not placed soon after graduation are likely to become long-term dependents on government assistance. Systemic improvements can be made by harnessing the government-funded Disability Employment Service (DES) program; specifically:
 - Changing the focus of one (or more) DES in each capital city to servicing the employment needs of students and graduates. Not only would this provide university and TAFE staff with a permanent partner/resource, and students with an external link/advocate, but, if done effectively, this will ultimately lead to a reduction of welfare recipients.
 - DES should also be able to assist customers not currently on an allowance, so as not to increase the number of welfare recipients.

These actions would require changes to the way DES operates, including the removal of current constraints and issues that prevent DES and NDRC working with and on behalf of current students as they progress through their course. (This would mean the course would become an 'activity', rather than an 'outcome' and would need to be funded separately).

Recommendation 5: Develop a coordinated cross-institutional approach for program development.

Time pressures for university and TAFE staff are great, especially when working with a relatively small student cohort that is nonetheless highly reliant on personalised, intensive services, making it sensible to consider a cross-institutional approach which also forges strong links with employers and other stakeholder groups. Sharing resources across institutions also minimises the number of 'links in the chain', as well as reducing the likelihood of duplication and the requirement for everyone to be the keeper of all wisdom.

Current program offerings (including WAM, PACE and 'Stepping Into') are already offered cross-institutionally, which makes a great deal of sense when considering the complexity of the cohort, workload issues and a lack of specialist knowledge of those working in Careers Services and DLUs. The best way to progress is via an externally coordinated approach.

Suggested strategies:

1. Establish sector groups (e.g. banking and finance/public sector/retail) or interest groups (e.g. for development of tools and resources that can be shared).

2. Advertise vacancies and events in a special location on university employment boards ('Careerhub' or similar) and conduct a marketing campaign to alert students with disabilities that this is available.
3. Coordinate cross-institutional events; this is already being done in Sydney and Melbourne with Diversity Seminars for students and could be expanded.
4. Coordinate training and education activities centrally for different stakeholder groups.
5. Increase the number of mentoring and internship opportunities to students with disabilities in all disciplines, and include not-for-profits and SMEs to increase the number and variety of opportunities.

Recommendation 6: Employers to become more inclusive in terms of their recruitment and selection processes.

Employing organisations differ markedly in their confidence levels regarding the recruitment of graduates with disabilities. Some already have established programs, while others are just beginning to recruit graduates. There is also a developing understanding that creating targeted positions for graduates with disabilities does not make strategic sense: It is likely that those employed through targeted programs may not be an ideal fit for the organisation and there may not actually be a suitable role for them into the future; this erodes the confidence and self-esteem of the graduate and creates an unexpected liability for the organisation.

Suggested strategies:

1. With a dual focus on 'inclusivity' and 'demand-driven' roles, employers can attract and recruit from the total available talent pool. This will involve taking a good look at their current recruitment practices to see how these may be non-inclusive (and making the relevant changes), and also revisiting the kinds of graduate opportunities they provide, in relation to their current and future business needs.
2. Introduce more effective marketing of inclusive positions and employers, using inclusive language and information, and case study examples on employer websites to show that graduates with disabilities have been successful in their organisation.
3. Employers who are not currently recruiting graduates could be encouraged to develop programs; this would increase the kinds of roles on offer, and would attract students from all disciplines. These employers include SMEs and not-for-profit organisations.
4. Job advertisements could be channelled via a centralised website that students can access freely and confidentially.

Recommendation 7: Increase the number of students with disabilities undertaking work-related experience, knowledge and employability skills prior to completing their course.

It is clear that many students with disabilities are seriously disadvantaged when it comes to looking for work. There are two main reasons for this: they lack work experience; and they lack the skills required to compete for jobs. A proactive approach is required from the first year of their university course (most programs are only available for students who are approaching the end of the course). A program that can develop incrementally and could be applied flexibly to cater for individual needs could include:

1. Development of employability skills through a range of activities, including leadership roles on campus
2. Workplace orientation (e.g. being matched with a mentor, work shadowing)
3. Workplace experiences (e.g. part-time work roles – ideally on campus or close to home, course-related internships)

4. General work preparation activities (including independence, self-reliance, risk-taking etc.) to develop employability skills; and creating social firms to act as a transition year between university and work for those who would otherwise 'fall off the radar'.

Recommendation 8: Universities and TAFEs to more effectively communicate with students with disabilities regarding suitable positions and job-related events.

It is notoriously difficult for universities to get information to students. Emails are disregarded, flyers and posters are easily missed, and even talks in classes are quickly forgotten. For students with disabilities, this problem is exacerbated through a lack of time and privacy provisions that constrain communication, yet students have told us that they actually do want to receive useful information. Creative techniques are required to overcome the practical barriers without impinging on the students' right to privacy.

Suggested strategies:

1. DLU and Careers Services staff to meet jointly with new students with disabilities to develop a career plan, or DLU staff direct students to a contact in the Careers Services.
2. Use social media (Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare etc.) to extend communication and engagement mechanisms.
3. Enlist specially-trained peer mentors (who could be either students with or without disabilities) who can provide first-level assistance to students with disabilities on demand.
4. Adapt e-learning resources to particularly target students with disabilities.
5. Harness disability associations (e.g. Vision Australia, Amaze) to reach students and their families.
6. Use 'personalities' with disabilities (e.g. presenters, comedians) to engage students and provide role models.
7. Involve university student unions, alumni and other institution-based groups to develop awareness campaigns with a focus on student with disabilities.
8. Provide an external website that students can tap into anonymously.

Recommendation 9: Improve job search/application support for students with disabilities.

Applying for graduate roles requires a high level of skill and confidence, which can take several years to develop. Many students with disabilities have little or no knowledge of these important skills until it is too late. A range of learning strategies should be applied to ensure students have access to these skill development opportunities.

Many universities and TAFEs already provide these services, but students with disabilities tend to be unaware that they can access them. Targeted programs may include modifications to existing mainstream programs as well as the introduction of new and specialised programs.

Suggested strategies:

1. Develop online learning tools that include virtual applications to advertised roles (alongside 'real' applications), recruiters providing feedback to students.
2. Disability associations to develop the skills and knowledge to impart to students and their families, making use of the adaptive technologies and learned strategies related to their disability focus.
3. Introduce short quizzes and competitions on campus that teach students communication microskills (e.g. a lunchtime interview practice competition conducted by a disability association where students with and without disabilities interact and learn about each other).

GLOSSARY

TERMINOLOGY

Career Services: Universities and TAFES all have at least one person who is qualified and experienced in Career Development. Most universities have whole departments of 10-20 staff. Throughout this document we have used the generic terms 'Career Services' and 'Career Service staff' to describe the structure and people working in these units, however the names of these vary from institution to institution.

Disability: This is a socially-derived term that is applied differently in different contexts. In an overarching sense, the Australian Disability Discrimination Act 2006 protects the rights of people with disabilities by making all forms of discrimination illegal and by ensuring that all government and community sectors in Australia have inclusive practices in place. There are many different ways of classifying people with disabilities; the debate as to how students with disabilities should be classified has not been resolved. Many individuals and groups do not embrace the term, due to its negative connotations. UK studies have shown that the characteristics of a particular disability (such as the 'type' or 'level' does not necessarily correlate with career success – this has more to do with an individual's level of confidence and support.

DLO/DLU: Disability Liaison Officers/Disability Liaison Units in universities and TAFES. The role of the DLU is to ensure that students with a disability who want to, can be actively and positively included in all aspects of RMIT life. DLOs undertake a range of activities, including providing tools and technologies the students require, and liaising with academic and general staff to create the right learning environment for these students in classrooms, during private study, for completing assignments and attending examinations. They do not provide career advice or offer counselling to students.

Graduate: This term is used by graduate recruiters to describe students who are in the final year of their course as well as those who have recently completed. It can also refer to those working towards a TAFE award, especially if they intending to articulate into a degree. Depending on the context 'student' and 'graduate' are sometimes used interchangeably and for simplicity, the term 'graduate' is used generically.

Graduate roles: officially, this usually refers to positions offered by the 400+ Australian-based organisations who are members of the Australian Association of Graduate Employers (www.aage.com.au); more broadly it may include graduate positions offered by those who are not members (which tend to be less 'visible'), and indeed any meaningful work role taken by a graduate in an area that is congruent with their studies.

NAGCAS (National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (www.nagcas.org.au): The professional association for university and TAFE careers staff in Australia.

National Disability Recruitment Coordinator (NDRC): The goal of the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator (NDRC) service is to increase employment rates of people with disabilities nationally, by promoting the benefits to large employers of hiring candidates with disabilities. The service acts as a conduit between large employers and Disability Employment Services.

People with disability/disabilities: While the use of the singular 'disability' appears to be becoming the more common version to mean to a person or people with one or more disabilities, for the purpose of this report we have retained the plural form, which is consistent with the term used throughout this project.

SHEDN: Higher Education Disability Network (cross-institutional association for DLU members).

University: a generic term that can, at times, include all tertiary students, including those at TAFE. There is an increased blending of the sectors as TAFEs offer more undergraduate courses and as more students articulate from TAFE studies to universities. As evidence suggests that more students with disabilities are likely to choose TAFE over university, it is important to include this sector in developing a strong research base.

Work: may refer to specific graduate roles as well as any other meaningful work roles related to their area of study before or after graduation. For many students, working life starts prior to graduation (e.g. through an internship or vacation role that becomes permanent), so this term is intended to be used to encompass the full range of possibilities that would make for a successful career start.

EXTERNALLY OFFERED NATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Willing and Able Mentoring Program (WAM)²¹: The WAM Program matches job seekers or tertiary students who have a disability with mentors in leading organisations in the job seekers or students' field of interest for around eight meetings. The WAM Program was established in 2000 through a collaboration between Deakin University and the University of Melbourne. WAM is available across Australia for any job seeker or tertiary student who has a disability on a fee-for-service basis.

Stepping Into²²: Stepping Into is a paid internship program designed specifically for university students with disabilities. Students benefit significantly through gaining experience of the job application and interview process, developing a network of contacts within a professional organisation, and gaining valuable paid work experience which they can include on their resumes, and having the opportunity to showcase their skills and knowledge.

PACE²³ (**Positive Action towards Career Engagement**): Coordinated by the Australian Network on Disability, provides a three month program which takes place twice a year. Mentors and mentees meet six to eight times.

²¹ <http://www.deakin.edu.au/current-students/services/careers/plan/wam.php>

²² <http://www.and.org.au/pages/stepping-into...-programs.html>

²³ <http://www.and.org.au/pages/mentoring.html>

REFERENCES

- Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011. *One in five Australians with a disability*. Media Release.
- Australians for Disability and Diversity Employment, 2007. *Leading from the Front* (available at www.adde.org.au).
- Australians for Disability and Diversity Employment, 2013. *Disability Employment in Australia: The way up*. (available at www.adde.org.au).
- Bates, K., 2012. *To examine employer-led initiatives for increasing the employment participation of people with disabilities and the role of third parties in facilitating these*. Report for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia.
- Coates, H., & Edwards, D., 2009. *Graduate Pathways Survey, Graduates' education and employment outcomes five years after completion of a bachelor degree at an Australian university*. Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Report to DEEWR.
- Cooke, H., 2012. *Graduate Recruitment: Understanding how disabled graduates look for jobs* (available at www.myplusconsulting.com).
- FaHCSIA, 2009. *SHUT OUT: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia: National Disability Strategy Consultation Report*. Prepared by the National People with Disabilities and Carer Council, Commonwealth of Australia.
- Farthing, J., 2012. *Accessing Graduate Talent in 2013*. Seminar Report.
- Glascodine, M., 2011. *A review of careers advisory services (CAS) at universities in the United Kingdom for students with disabilities*. Report for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia.
- Graduate Careers Australia, 2012. *GradStats: Employment and Salary outcomes of Recent Higher Education Graduates*.
- Graduate Careers Council of Australia, 2004. *Graduate Destination Survey*. Parkville, Victoria.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010. *Sickness, disability and work: Improving social and labour-market integration of people with disability*.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010. *Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barrier: A synthesis of findings across OECD countries*
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009. *Sickness, Disability and Work: Keeping on Track in the Economic Downturn*. Background Paper. High-Level Forum, Stockholm, 14–15 May 2009.
- PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011. *Disability Expectations – Investing in a better life, a stronger Australia: Achieving better outcomes for people with a disability and their families*.
- Tunnah, E., & Leacy, A., 2012. *What Happens Next? A Report on the First Destinations of 2009/2010 Disabled Graduates*. AGCAS Disability Task Group.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: KEY FINDINGS FROM BREAKFAST SEMINAR 11 OCTOBER, 2012

Problems

- Advertised and available targeted roles (mainly by large corporate and government organizations) not being filled
- In relation to mainstream graduate opportunities, lack of awareness/understanding as to how to integrate graduates with disabilities into the workforce preventing them from being seen as suitable candidates
- Students with disabilities are unaware of available positions and how/when to apply for them
- Students with disabilities not as well prepared to handle the rigours of the recruitment process as mainstream students

Barriers to progress include

- Many stakeholders but without effective communication mechanisms
- Lack of work experience, job search skills and career awareness for students with disabilities
- Issues around disclosure – when to, when not to, how to
- Problems with online applications and with other aspects of graduate recruitment process not being conducive to the abilities/restrictions of students with disabilities
- Lack of coordination, need to ensure information travels between recruiters and students in an effective and timely way, including Careers Services and DLU staff in universities

Key outcomes – summary points

- The discussion with, and hearing from students/graduates with disabilities was really appreciated, particularly by employers
- Good discussion/ideas were generated about how to align employers' desire/intent to get graduates with disabilities with university systems to both prepare and connect graduates to companies
- Good to hear/talk to graduates about the real issues that worry them about the workplace, e.g. how to be supportive to people with disabilities and how would support be provided
- How do companies get to students to attract them to apply, let alone go through the process?
- In order for employers to become more confident recruiters, more information is required on legal requirements; different disability type issues; disclosure etc.

Solutions raised during round table/open forum discussions

- More awareness education around disability
- Better linkage and collaboration between graduates and employers
- Website containing tips for students with disabilities, education on aspects of employment; including regular online publication with job opportunities/updates, and good news stories
- education for students on importance of disclosure for targeted roles
- DES (Disability Employment Service) for graduates
- Should there be more development of support?
- Guidelines developed (AAGE, other peak body?) on how to recruit
- Build stronger links between DLUs and Careers Services
- Create/expand mentoring programs – effective, low cost option
- Targeted WIL programs
- Greater connections with NDCO – have local linkages, can facilitate pathways

What can we do now? Recommendations for moving forward

- Develop coordinated linkages to ensure job opportunities are seen in time
- Identify students who would benefit from mentoring, source suitable mentors
- Develop a central website for employers, university staff and students
- Begin training as soon as possible on graduate recruitment processes, how to apply, overcoming problems with application processes, tips on disclosure
- Build an advocacy and support network

Key outcomes – summary points

- The discussion with, and hearing from students/graduates with disabilities was really appreciated, particularly by employers
- Good discussion/ideas were generated about how to align employers' desire/intent to get graduates with disabilities with university systems to both prepare and connect grads to companies
- Good to hear/talk to graduates about the real issues that worry them about the workplace e.g. how to be supportive to people with a disability and how would support be provided.
- How do companies get through to students to attract them to apply, let alone go through the process?
- In order for employers to become more confident recruiters, more information is required around legal requirements, different disability type issues, disclosure etc.

General insights/discussions (key points)

- Support of faculty is crucial
- Corporates could play a part in relaying benefits of disclosure
- Traditionally disclosure is a negative thing – how to turn this around?
- Employers noting that they encourage PWD to apply – it's not so difficult to disclose
- Need more exposure in society of what disability is and the broad range of disability
- A lot more work experience for students to demonstrate what they can do
- Link between DLUs and Careers Services and employers needs to be greater
- Start with students at a much lower level
- Employers need to know impact of disability
- Links and resources needed
- Getting whole organisation to understand issue, not just graduate recruiters/HR people
- Systems and timing of information to students is crucial
- Work experience (any capacity) essential
- More ambassador/awareness/education programs
- More realistic timelines for recruiting grads with disabilities (start at the beginning of university)
- Make announcements about targeted positions earlier in the year (or late the year before) to allow time to develop applications etc.
- Education – more people involved (DLUs can play pivotal role)
- Greater collaboration/communication between stakeholders – key relationship should be developed between Careers Services and DLUs
- Peak bodies setting guidelines and targets/timeframes – 2 ticks
- Clear information needs to go out regularly
- Large employers to mentor smaller companies/organisations to develop inclusive practices
- Need more good news stories
- Improve the relationships/knowledge between employers and DLUs and academics and graduates
- Market the advantage of disclosure i.e. if applying to ANZ you cannot be eliminated in the first automated screening
- Advertisements to include 'people with disabilities' encouraged to apply
- More exposure to society as to what disability is

- More work experience and mentoring
- More timely spreading of information to students by the universities
- Improve communication.

Issues raised during round table/open forum discussions

- There are not jobs for everyone - there are always more applicants than vacancies.
- Takes a good year after graduation for a PwD to get employment. If no work after a year, likely to remain so for lengthy period/life
- Perceptions of employers as to the scope and limitations 'How will you get to work if you don't drive?')
- Not enough good news stories (too much negative media coverage)
- Not knowing what each other wants (DLUs, career people, etc.)
- Lack of breadth of education (courses, extracurricular activities)
- Students with disabilities lack confidence in employers: Will they be supportive?
- There is a missing service: disability employment service for graduates – specialised services needed, specialist skills required
- Currently there is not enough being done to ensure outcomes – what measures are in place?
- Students don't know about options, e.g. WAM, Stepping Into, other local programs
- Different/special treatment required for equal participation – how well is this understood? Danger of too much/not enough support rather than the 'right' support
- Barrier – stigma of disability
- Only large employers on board – need more SMEs
- Lack of confidence in employers so PwD don't apply
- Individuality – need to be treated as individuals, not just 'part of a group'
- In universities a lot of the academics are unaware of what is available to PwD i.e. Disability Liaison Officer (DLO), also about job opportunities for PwDs
- No support currently available after a student has finished university – crucial time for PwDs

Solutions raised during round table/open forum discussions

- More awareness education around disability
- Better linkage and collaboration between graduates and employers
- Website containing tips for students with disabilities, education on aspects of employment; including regular online publication with job opportunities/updates, and good news stories
- Education for students on importance of disclosure for targeted roles
- DES (Disability Employment Service) for graduates
- Should there be more development of support?
- Guidelines developed (AAGE, other peak body?) on how to recruit
- Build stronger links between DLUs and careers
- Create/expand mentoring programs – effective, low cost option
- Targeted WIL programs
- Greater connections with NDCO – have local linkages, can facilitate pathways

What can we do now? Recommendations for moving forward

- Develop coordinated linkages to ensure job opportunities are seen in time
- Identify students who would benefit from mentoring during application stage, source suitable mentors
- Develop a central website for employers, university staff and students
- Begin training as soon as possible on graduate recruitment processes, how to apply, overcoming problems with application processes, tips on disclosure
- Build an advocacy and support network

APPENDIX B: CAREER SERVICES SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Does your Career Service have one or more people dedicated to working with students with disabilities?

- ☐ Yes, just one ☐ Yes, more than one ☐ No

2. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 1, how many hours would you estimate this person or people spend/s in this type of work over a year?

- ☐ Less than 5 hours per week ☐ Between 5 and 15 hours a week ☐ Between 15 and 25 hours a week
☐ 25 hours + per week

3. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 1, what is/are the main function/s of their role/s in this regard? Check all that apply

- ☐ Career counselling ☐ Job search assistance ☐ Employer liaison ☐ Mentoring or other programs ☐
 Work experience, internships etc.

4. Does your service liaise with the DLU towards achieving work-related outcomes for students with disabilities?

- ☐ Yes, regularly ☐ From time to time ☐ Hardly ever ☐ Never

5. Does your service, and/or another area of your institution (if known) currently provide access to any specialist services or programs to students with disabilities to facilitate work outcomes on graduation? (e.g. externally-operated programs such as WAM, Stepping Into, PACE, or those you have initiated internally). Use this space to describe any relevant activities.

6. Which of the following statements best fits with your current priorities.

Providing specialised services and programs to assist students with disabilities to obtain work roles on graduation is ...

- ☐ a high priority ☐ important, but not a priority ☐ a low priority

7. Independent of your response to Question 6, how well do you feel your institution is currently addressing the needs of students with disabilities in relation to graduate outcomes?

- ☐ Adequately ☐ Somewhat ☐ A little ☐ Not at all

8. In the coming 12 months, are you likely to be implementing any specialist services or programs to assist students with disabilities to obtain graduate roles? Please describe - if left blank, we will presume you have no current plans.

9. If you feel that the needs of students with disabilities are not adequately being addressed in your institution, what are the key issues that your service faces with regard to these needs?

10. If you feel that more can be done to better help students with disabilities to obtain meaningful work roles, what extra support/resources/information would assist you best?

11. Do you have any 'best practice' examples or good news stories to share about work you have done to assist students with disabilities into graduate roles?

APPENDIX C: QUALITATIVE QUESTIONS FOR CURRENT STUDENTS

Part 1: About you (* for students with disability only)

Course:

Year level or completed:

Do you identify as having a disability?

If Yes to above, please describe your disability in your own words and/or how you feel it may impact on a work role*

Would you say that your disability limits or enhances your opportunities?*

What is the positive/negative impact on:

- Study experience to date, including internships, WIL, IBL etc.:
- Work experience to date (independent of that required as part of a course):

How do you know these things? E.g. course advisors, DLU, parents, friends?

Part 2: Career aspirations

Describe what you see as your key abilities, what you can offer a future employer?

What are your hopes/expectations as at 6 months after completing studies?

What are your hopes /expectations as at 12 months after completing studies?

What are your hopes /expectations as at 5 years after completing studies?

What are your other career/life plans (e.g. another course, work overseas, long vacation, play sport etc.)?

Part 3: Services knowledge and experience

Are you aware of your university Career Service and what services it provides Do you know where it is physically located, how to access non-face to face services etc.? Have you used any of these services?

If you have used the university Careers Service, for what purpose have you used it?

If you have had WIL/Internship experience, how has this assisted you to prepare for a graduate role?

Have you been matched with an industry mentor? How was the experience?

Job search skills:

- Do you have a resume? Has it been checked by your Career Service or another professional?
- Have you had interview skills training? A mock interview? A real job interview?

Part 4: Usage of other job and Career Services

What is your awareness of other services available to help you with your career on or after graduation?

Which disability-specific services have you used or might you use?*

Do you have any course-related work experience – WIL (paid/unpaid), volunteer/community work)?

Have you undertaken an internship? E.g. Stepping Into, course-based?

Part 5: Knowledge of graduate positions; confidence to apply for roles and interest in doing so

Do you know how to apply for graduate roles?

Do you know when most graduate positions are advertised and filled?

Have you attempted real or practice a)online applications b)psychometric tests c)assessment centres d)behavioural interviews?

Part 6: Confidence in the outcome of efforts to find work

Are you currently employed? If yes, is this position one that reflects your course learning?

If not currently working in an area related to your study, on a scale of 1 – 10, (1 being low and 10 being high), rate your level of confidence in obtaining your ideal career goal at 6 months/12 months/5 years.

Do you consider that your disability affects your confidence level in any way?*

What could your university services and other services do or provide (or have done/provided) to assist you to gain a good role on graduation?