

Discussing Disability Supports with Students

# **Supporting students to share information about their disability with employers**

There is no legal obligation for an applicant or employee to disclose their disability unless it is likely to affect their performance to meet the requirements of the job or impacts on health and safety in the workplace. It is essential that your students have the dignity of choice. It is up to the student to decide what information they would like to share with university staff and employers. Many people choose only to share what adjustments they need, rather than their diagnosis, as this can be more meaningful and practical.

# **Some reasons for sharing information about disability**

* Sharing personal information can generate trust and an open relationship with an employer and allows the employee to discuss effective workplace adjustment strategies.
* Work-related adjustments can be implemented quickly should a need arise.
* If disability could reasonably be seen to cause a health and safety risk for other people in the workplace, failing to disclose could be a breach of obligations under work health and safety legislation.

Sometimes an employer may need help understanding specific requirements or adjustments. Asking for reasonable adjustments in the workplace can enable an employee to do the job to the best of their ability. An adjustment is considered ‘reasonable’ if it meets the needs of the employee with disability without impacting too much on other employees or causing excessive hardship to the employer.

# **Some reasons for not sharing information about disability**

* The disability may have no effect on performing the requirements of the job.
* Sharing information about disability may provoke unnecessary curiosity, concern and insensitive questions
* The employee may fear that sharing personal information will result in discrimination.
* Support structures external to the workplace may be in place and may negate the need to disclose disability in the workplace.

Where an employee has not disclosed a disability or the adjustments they may need, employers are not responsible for providing employment-related adjustments. It is not the responsibility of employers to justify why no employment-related adjustments were provided during the period when the employee had not shared information about their disability or adjustment needs.

There are a number of additional resources that may assist your students to think through how to share information about their disability such as:

* Australian Network on Disability Jobseeker Toolkit:

<https://www.and.org.au/students-jobseekers/jobseeker-toolkit/>

* Choosing Your Path

<https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/choosingyourpath>

It is important for the University Specialist Employment Partnerships (USEP) consultant to work collaboratively to identify how to promote to employers the benefits of recruiting graduates with disability.

Work proactively with employers to promote USEP, highlighting the benefits of hiring graduates with disability and utilising inclusive recruitment practices to attract skilled graduates with disability. This will help graduates to apply for graduate roles and address their fears regarding sharing information about their disability.

In a 2020 National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) fellowship research study, approximately one-third of current students with disability indicated they feel confident to share their disability information with employers. This is comparable with a UK study where 81% of surveyed students were concerned about having this conversation. The UK study conducted by MyPlus Consulting highlighted:

* 76% of student respondents were concerned about informing a potential employer about their health condition.
* 81% of students said they would be more likely to share the information if their careers advisor told them an employer would be disability confident.

The National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Program article for GradConnection, *Ten steps to improving your attraction and retention of graduates with disability*, provides a range of strategies that can support employers to feel ‘disability confident’ and to utilise inclusive recruitment practices.

<https://au.gradconnection.com/blog/employers/post/ten-steps-to-improving-your-attraction-and-retention-of-graduates-with-disability/>

The USEP consultant is a valuable resource for the university careers consultants. Outcomes for graduates with disability will improve when there is collaboration and information sharing between the careers team, university staff and the USEP consultant. This includes information regarding employer networks, graduate roles and how to support student’s career needs. This can include attending worksites with the USEP consultant to strengthen opportunities for recruitment of graduates with disability.

# **How to start the conversation with students regarding USEP**

Many students with disability seeking careers services may not wish to discuss their disability. It is important, however, for careers staff to have an awareness of the specialised support that is available through USEP, which also includes support for students with undiagnosed mental health conditions. It is also important that careers staff are confident in how to talk about the USEP initiative with students who do not wish to discuss disability. Careers staff may approach the conversation by articulating that they work across the university with other teams such as equity teams and use this as an opportunity to talk about USEP as a specialist employment recruitment service.

Examples of conversations you may like to have with students:

*If you would like additional careers support either for yourself or a friend, there are services here at the university that you or someone you know may benefit from. One initiative is the University Specialist Employment Partnership, which provides students with disability, or chronic health conditions with specialist recruitment services on campus. USEP also supports students with undiagnosed mental health conditions. The careers team speak to many students who become impacted by mental health during the course of their study, so if any time in the future you or another student you know are experiencing things like anxiety or depression, which may affect your ability to gain employment, you might like to reach out to the USEP consultant here on campus.*

or:

*We have a specialist employment consultant on campus today, and they provide additional recruitment support and information for students about types of support and adjustments in the workplace. Would you like to meet this consultant?*

# **What are some other strategies to support my students?**

As mentioned, many people choose to focus on the adjustments they need, rather than their diagnosis. It can be helpful for students to think about what support or adjustments they might need and to provide an employer with a list of strategies. It is also important to remind students of the strengths and contributions they can bring to the workplace.

Talking with an employer about a workplace adjustment is not asking them for a favour – it is asking them to provide the tools needed to enable their employee to perform their job and maximise productivity. Discuss with the student the benefits of disclosing their disability to their disability-confident employer.

Information on discussing disability is also available for the USEP Disability Employment Services (DES) consultant in the DES Consultant Handbook