

Building Diversity - Understanding your talent pool

The graduate outcome survey released in January 2019 shows employment outcomes for students with disability still sit persistently below that of students who do not identify as having a disability (Quality Indicators for Teaching and Learning, 2019).

We know that graduate employers are seeking graduates with disability to build strong, adaptive and diverse organisations that are reflective of their customer base. We also know that graduates with a disability want to work for you!

However, evidence shows that a high proportion of graduates with disability will not share their disability status with employers on job applications or are unsure if they should. In fact, only 54.24% of 2017 AAGE student survey respondents said that they would tell a prospective graduate employer about their disability. The rest were unsure, or said they would not share this information at all. This can be for a number of reasons and is a universal issue.

From Government data we know that 63,717 (6.03%) students in Australian universities have identified as having a disability and this is increasing annually (Department of Education & Training, 2016).

With this cohort of students increasing in number each year, why do graduates still feel reluctant to be open about their disability with employers?

Helen Cooke from MyPlus UK told us in the recent Evening webinar Masterclass* that graduates:

- Fear discrimination
- Don't want to cause a fuss or be a hassle
- Don't want to appear 'different' in front of other candidates
- Feel ashamed or embarrassed
- Don't see their condition as a disability
- Don't require any adjustments
- Fear of favourable treatment

*You can watch the full webinar for free at (<http://www.stepsndco.com.au/webinars>)

Students linked with a University Specialist Employment Partnership (USEP) consultant have raised an additional barrier – that they have had limited or no direct work experience in their chosen discipline. This valuable hands on work placement allows the graduate to be more informed of organisations diversity practices, and start to build their confidence to share relevant information about their disability to employers.

So how do practitioners and employers work toward closing this divide?

A research project in the UK (MyPlus Consulting 2015) was specifically undertaken to help identify why graduates with disability are so reluctant to inform employers about their disability during the recruitment process. It found that 75% respondents believed they would be discriminated against.

The report highlighted that employers would benefit from embracing an 'open' approach. The top key findings suggested employers:

- market themselves effectively as a 'disability confident' employer – articulating the importance of recruiting graduates with disability

- showcase supports available and examples of adjustments previously made
- profile current employees who have been open about their disability and the support they were able to gain
- promote the benefits about being open through relevant messaging using channels such as their website, careers brochure, university talks and
- be upfront on how information obtained about their disability was used

The National Disability Coordination Officer Program will be looking at avenues to enable graduate employers to communicate what they offer regarding recruitment 'openness' practices. Findings will be shared with AAGE members.

The National Disability Coordination Officer Program is a partner in the University Specialist Employment Partnership (USEP) - find out more: www.usep.com.au