



# Careers for

**Graduates with Disability** 





### The Australian Employers' Network on Disability

Employers Making A Difference

The Australian Employers' Network on Disability is a not for profit organisation funded by our members to take a leadership role in advancing employment opportunities for people with disability.

We assist organisations to build skills and confidence in relation to people with disability as employees and customers.

# INTERNSHIP PROGRAMMES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

A critical component of the Employers' Network products and services is the "**Stepping into...**" work experience series; a paid internship programme for tertiary students with disability.

Opportunities are available within most disciplines and sectors, including:

- → Banking; Investment and Retail
- → Law; International, Copyright, Litigation, Commercial and Criminal
- → Information Technology
- Marketing
- → Australian Public Sector

The "Stepping into..." work experience series is mutually beneficial, providing practical, hands-on work experience for students, and assisting organisations to develop "Disability Confident" recruitment practices.

For information about how to become involved in the "Stepping into..." internship programme please contact the Australian Employers' Network on Disability on

Freecall 1300 363 645

or visit our website at www.aend.org.au

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### Introduction

Graduating from university is an exciting time in your life, as you prepare to embark on your chosen career. However the job seeking process can sometimes feel confusing, frustrating and complex for all graduates, including those with disability. There are decisions to be made about career goals and pathways, work experience opportunities, competition for positions and new skills to be learned in résumé writing and job interviews.

Graduates with disabilities may find the process easier if they are able to effectively and confidently deal with issues related to disclosing disability, negotiating work place adjustments and flexible work practices with an employer and having a broad knowledge of anti-discrimination legislation covering disability employment.

Careers for Graduates with Disability will address these topics and guide you in entering, staying and succeeding in the work force. You may find this guide helpful if you or someone you know has a disability and is a university student about to graduate, a recent graduate or a person with tertiary qualifications who is seeking to re-enter employment.

#### NOTE:

Wherever you see this icon please go to **www.graduatecareers.com.au**>>What Job For You>>Career Profiles>>Disability>>More Information for continued discussion and/or useful websites on that subject.

### A study conducted on behalf of Telstra Australia in 1999 found that:

Over a 15-month period, people with disability had 11.8 days absent, compared to all other staff who had 19.24 days absent; and there were no significant differences when comparing people in the areas of performance, productivity and sales. (*Source:* Noble, J. (1999) Entrepreneurial Research Project, Telstra

Australia)

### //Statistics//

Over 90 per cent of employers who had recently employed a person with disability said they would be happy to continue to employ them.

78 per cent of employers described the match between their employee with disability and the job as good.

In relation to the cost benefit of workplace accommodations for employees with disability, 65 per cent of employers rated the financial effect to be cost neutral and 20 per cent identified an overall financial benefit.

The average cost of employing someone with disability was 13 per cent of the average cost of employing someone without disability. (This statistic covers the entire tenure of the staff member at an organisation, and was based on factors such as recruitment and training, rates of absenteeism and retention.)

Employees with disability averaged one-sixth the recorded occupational health and safety incidents of other employees.

90 per cent of employees with disability record productivity rates equal or greater than other workers.

98 per cent have average or superior safety records.

86 per cent have average or superior attendance records.

(**Source:** Australian Employers Network on Disability, 'Fact Sheet - Business Benefits of Employing People with Disability' – Graffam, J, Shinkfield, A, Smith, K, Polzin, U (1998). *Making it Work; Employer Outcomes When Employing a Person With a Disability*. Melbourne; Institute of Disability Studies, Deakin University. – **www.aend.org.au**)

### Graduates with Disabilities vain the Work Force - Employers Need You!

People with disability now represent a significant minority of both the Australian population and work force. Yet studies have shown graduates with disability experience a greater level of unemployment than those without. In addition they are more likely to be under-employed or in an area outside their desired career, be working part-time or self employed. The good news is evidence suggests that once in employment, they are equally if not more productive, take fewer sick days and remain in the job longer than their able-bodied colleagues. This contradicts many negative stereotypes about disability in employment and shows there is a strong business case for employing graduates with disability.

### Getting Started

You will be most successful in finding and holding down that rewarding job if you begin the search process as early as possible. Take the time to:

- understand yourself and what career suits you
- research the industry and occupation you have chosen
- find out what jobs are available and what they require of you
- organise your life so you are ready and supported to work.

### Which Job?

Some graduates have a clear idea of what job they want or have a specialist degree, while others may have a generalist degree and are uncertain as to what job they want.

All graduates benefit from a process of career planning. Ideally this should begin while you are still studying; however it is never too late and it is something you should think about regularly, throughout your career.

Make an appointment or call in to visit your university Careers Office. As well as being able to meet and talk with you, they have resources such as brochures, websites, videos and DVDs to assist you.

### Some things to think about during your job search

- Future job prospects
- Salaries
- Required education and skill levels
- Actual tasks involved in the job
- Work hours
- Working environment
- Whether you can safely perform the tasks or inherent requirements of the role
- Workplace support you may need to perform that role

In today's workplace people with disability are successful in a whole range of careers, from lawyers, social workers, architects, managers and scientists to outdoor jobs in nurseries or on construction sites. What you decide to do will depend on your skills and abilities, interests, education, training, preferences on issues such as work type, location and hours. As such, disability should not be the main focus of your initial career planning and job search process.



# Self Assessment: Understanding Yourself

Self assessment is the first stage of the job search process for all graduates. It is an opportunity to raise awareness about you, your skills, interests, values and motivations. It may also highlight skills you still need to acquire and further learning opportunities. This will assist you in selecting a suitable industry and job options and in putting together job applications. While completing this task, think about skills you have acquired through your disability, such as using adaptive technology, or any lobbying and advocacy you have done which you can add to your résumé. Also think about the lifestyle you lead and how much of it is related to your disability. For example, if your disability means you take three hours getting ready each morning you may wish to look for a role which allows you to work an afternoon shift.

#### **Self assessment resources**

- Your university Careers Service can provide information on self assessment and career planning. They can also take you through a self assessment process if you request a one on one session.
- A useful resource is Graduate Careers Australia's publication Your Career & You – this self assessment guide reflects graduate employers' contemporary work practices and will help you to consider your goals, values, attributes and skills as a basis for career exploration. Your Career & You is available through your Careers Service or can be ordered online from GCA's website: www.graduatecareers.com.au.
- You may wish to engage a private careers advisor who specialises in career planning to assist you. A fee will apply for this service.

//Some graduates have a clear idea of what job they want..., while others may have a generalist degree and are uncertain as to what job they want//

#### Research

### To begin an effective and targeted job hunt you need to know:

- the major employers and organisations you may wish to work for
- where jobs are located
- how many graduate level positions are available
- which employers have policies on disability employment
- any leaders in the field
- possible mentors
- industry specific conferences/publications/ networking events
- where jobs are advertised
- career paths and options
- people you can contact.

Keep an eye out for statements welcoming diversity, or stating the organisation is an equal opportunity employer. These statements indicate programs may already be in place to assist employees with disability.

# Can't I Just Start Applying for a Job?

Rushing ahead of these steps to look for job advertisements and applying for positions can often lead to disappointments. Unprepared job seekers may end up in positions which are unsuitable for them, or fail to secure a job and find a great deal of time and energy has been wasted. The more you know about yourself, the job and the industry, the better your job applications and interview performance.

### Are You Ready to Work?

While starting to work can be exciting and rewarding, it can also take a lot of time and energy. It is important that other aspects of your life are stable so they won't interfere with your ability to work or to do your job.

#### Some things to think about

- Are you mentally and physically prepared for the requirements of the position you have in mind, taking into account any reasonable adjustments which you might need?
- Does your home meet your needs, is it permanent or will you be moving soon?
- Can you access transport to meet your needs?
- Do you have a good routine, eg. with support workers, if required?
- If you need to move for your employment, can you access housing and support, and how long will it take for you to trial this and 'settle in'?
- Do you need to devote more time to training or to learning new skills?

It can be well worth taking the time to manage these issues so that you can approach your new job with energy and confidence, and do not have to face the disappointment of any complications that may arise. Many employment services can help you work through issues such as these which impact on your employment. You may wish to do this at the same time as you undertake the self assessment and career planning process.

### Starting Your Own Business

Many people with disability set up their own small business and find it rewarding. You may enjoy being your own boss, prefer working alone or with a small number of employees and/or working in a setting that suits any disability-specific needs, such as working from home or at different hours of the day.

Before starting your own business there are a number of resources available that can help.

- You can take a short course in starting a small business at TAFE.
- There are also many resources on the web.
   Search under 'starting your own business' or 'working from home'.

Starting a small business and making it a success does mean a lot of responsibility, hard work, focus and commitment. It's best to start out small to see how you feel about being your own boss, and find out if your idea is working for you.

#### Where do I Start - Market research

You will need to begin by thinking about the kind of business you want to start, and whether it will be viable.

Ask yourself:

- who will be your competitors, what do they offer and what can you offer that is different or better
- can I compete in this market or is it already cornered
- is there a market for my product or service, what is this market and how do I reach them
- what does my target market think of my product or service idea
- how much will the market pay
- how can I best promote my products or services to this target market?

### **Business plan**

Once you decide on a viable business option, you must develop a business plan. This document should cover everything you need to start and run your business, including answers to the questions above.

It may also include an executive summary, market analysis, management plan, advertising/marketing plan and financial plan. Do some research on writing a business plan; there are many free resources online.

### **Business registrations**

To operate a business in Australia you need to register a business name and obtain an Australian Business Number (ABN). 
You must also understand your taxation and legal obligations. Making an appointment with an accountant can ensure you address these issues early.

#### What else will I need to do

- Open a bank account for your business.
- Set up a phone account and website so clients can contact you.
- Set up your office/workplace. If you are starting a home-based business find out about council approval, zoning regulations and insurance.

#### Where can I get help

The New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) is designed to help unemployed people to become self-employed by setting up their own small business. The Scheme provides:

- small business skills training (including help to develop a business plan)
- an allowance for up to 52 weeks
- on-going advice and support during the first year of your business.

### Know Your Rights

Understanding your rights and responsibilities in employment under disability legislation is important. Ideally you should do this is before you start looking for a job so that you can:

- be aware if you are being treated in a discriminatory way by an employer or recruitment agency
- be informed about the processes that should occur to implement the work-related adjustments you require in the workplace
- negotiate work-related adjustments with an employer
- be reasonable in negotiating necessary adjustments.

It is unlawful under federal and state law to discriminate against someone on the basis of their disability. The federal *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)* covers a range of areas including employment, education and access to services, facilities and public areas. The *DDA* also requires employers to provide reasonable adjustments or work-

related adjustments so that you can perform the inherent requirements of the job, provided these will not cause hardship to the employer (such as costing too much). Harassment because of disability is also against the law in employment.

The definition of 'disability' used in the *DDA* includes disabilities that are:

- physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory and neurological
- medical conditions, work-related injuries and temporary disabilities
- learning difficulties, physical disfigurement and the presence in the body of disease carrying organisms past, present or future disabilities.

The Act also covers relatives, friends, carers and co-workers if they face discrimination because of their relationship with a person who has a disability.

(Source: www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol\_act/dda1992264)

### What to Do If You Think You Are Being Discriminated Against

Make a complaint to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). Your first step should be to call the Complaint Infoline to determine if you have a case and how to proceed. This service has TTY and interpreters available.

Complaints must be made in writing (including email) by the person who is being discriminated against or by someone like a friend or parent on behalf of the person. If you have any difficulty, contact the Complaints Infoline and they will help you put your complaint into writing.

### What Will Happen

HREOC will write to the other party and a process of conciliation will generally be undertaken, where a trained conciliator works

//It is unlawful under
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with both parties to negotiate an outcome that is acceptable to both.

This may include an apology, changes to work practices or conditions, employment, financial compensation or undertakings for future action. If this process cannot resolve the issue, the complaint will be finalised and you can then decide whether to take your complaint to the Federal Court and have it determine whether you were discriminated against.

**Disclaimer:** This resource is a guide only and not intended as legal advice. While the author has made every attempt to ensure the information is accurate, current and reliable, you should seek legal advice if required.

### Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)

HREOC is an independent statutory organisation established under Commonwealth legislation. It administers a number of federal anti-discrimination Acts and provides information on the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)* covering:

- recruitment processes
- hiring decisions
- terms and conditions of employment
- promotion, transfer, training or other benefits
- termination, demotion or retrenchment.

HREOC also provides information and practical case studies on:

- employers' obligations
- definitions and examples of direct and indirect discrimination and harassment
- questions employers and recruitment agencies may ask about a person's disability, and examples of reasonable adjustment and unjustifiable hardship
- OH&S requirements under the DDA
- recruitment processes
- voluntary work.

If you think you have been discriminated against and want to lodge a complaint, HREOC provides a flexible and informal complaint handling process and generally tries to resolve complaints through conciliation. Many complaints lodged with HREOC are resolved in this way. If a complaint can not be resolved through conciliation HREOC will finalise the complaint and you will then have the option of talking the matter to the Federal Court of Australia or the Federal Magistrates Service and having the court determine whether discrimination has occurred.

### State-based anti-discrimination boards

State boards promote anti-discrimination and equal opportunity principles and policies. They handle complaints and provide an enquiry service for people who want to know about their rights or responsibilities.

The boards also educate people about their rights and responsibilities under anti-discrimination laws through consultations, education programs, seminars, talks and community functions.

### Thinking About Disclosure

The term disclosure relates to your decision to tell an employer about your disability. This is an area of great consternation for graduate job seekers, who grapple with the questions of if, when and how disclosure should occur. Ultimately it is an individual decision, depending on the circumstances, context, disability and the personal comfort zone of the job seeker.

You are not legally obliged to disclose your disability to an employer unless it will affect your ability to meet the inherent requirements of the job, to work safely or ensure the safety of colleagues.

Inherent requirements are defined as 'essential activities' of the job. For example, a telephonist must be able to communicate by telephone, but it is not an 'inherent requirement' to hold the phone in the hand

You should investigate the requirements for the role that you are interested in and decide whether you will be able to meet them. It is not disability discrimination when a person cannot meet the inherent requirements of a job. If you have the skills and abilities to do the work, you may feel that it shouldn't matter whether you happen to have a disability. However, it is worth remembering that many potential employers have little or no experience with disability, and do not know you or your abilities. Because they can be unaware of the services and adjustments available to reduce the effect of disability in the workplace, initially they may be unsure how you would complete the job as well as another person. In this situation, it may be beneficial to disclose your disability at a time when you can inform the potential employer of the ways in which you might overcome any minor obstacles, and discuss their concerns.



### Visible Disability

If your disability is visible, disclosure is usually inevitable. Being up front about it can clear up any concerns or misconceptions your employer may have. It also allows you to inform them of ways you may overcome any hindrances.

### Non-visible Disability

Graduates whose disability is not immediately obvious have greater choice as to whether or not to disclose. If your disability will not affect job performance, you may decide not to disclose it at all. In particular, many people with mental illness are unwilling to disclose as they are concerned about being stigmatised and discriminated against.

In making the decision, both the advantages and disadvantages should be considered, as well as the timing. The most important thing is that when disclosure does occur, it is done in a positive and open manner with an emphasis on skills and abilities.

### Why I Might Disclose My Disability to an Employer

- If you need to request reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process (such as interview arrangements).
- To talk about necessary workplace adjustments, such as modified equipment or flexible working arrangements that will enable you to do the job.
- To engender trust and an open relationship with your employer.
- So your employer already knows about your disability, in case there is a crisis related to your disability in the future. If you have not disclosed your disability it may be difficult to implement work-related adjustments quickly.
- So your employer doesn't think you are performing poorly if your disability impacts on your job.

//The most important thing is that when disclosure does occur, it is done in a positive and open manner with an emphasis on skills and abilities.//

- To meet your obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, if there is a chance your disability could reasonably be seen to cause a health and safety risk for other people in the workplace.
- Many organisations are committed to equal opportunity policies and have non-prejudicial recruitment and employment procedures in place.
- Some organisations welcome employees with disability.
- If you feel your disability is relevant to the position, and your experience may help you get the job. For example, if you are applying to work in the disability sector and also have the relevant qualifications.

# Why I Might Choose Not to Disclose My Disability

- Your disability may have no affect on your ability to do the job.
- Concern that it may lead to discrimination, provoke unnecessary curiosity, insensitive questions and lead to you being treated differently in the workplace. In this case you may wish to consider whether this is the type of organisation you would want to work for in the first place.
- Concern employers may have preset ideas about disability and see you as a liability through time off or what they perceive will be costly workplace adjustments.
- You may feel uncomfortable discussing your disability with a stranger.

# Your Rights and Responsibilities in Disclosing

#### You have the right to:

- the confidential and respectful treatment of information about your disability
- access information about an organisation's equity policies, practices and strategies
- request information from an employer about the collection of your personal details, including your disability, and how it is used by the organisation
- choose whether to disclose disability at any point while looking for work.

### You also have the following responsibilities in relation to disclosure

- Disclosure prior to commencement does not remove your responsibility to disclose any changes in your condition once you are employed which may impact on your ability to perform the inherent requirements of the job. Especially if you will require further work-related adjustments.
- You need to be able to perform the essential requirements of an advertised position.

### Employer Responsibilities

Once you have disclosed a disability to your employer, they are obligated under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)* to:

- treat you no less favourably than a person without disability in the same circumstances
- make reasonable adjustments for you where required
- protect you from harassment.

### Privacy

Any information you provide to your employer about your disability may involve sensitive personal information and they must treat it accordingly.

Before your employer shares information about your disability with other people (eg. the Human Resources department), they must get your written consent. You may need to inform your employer regarding this as the organisation may possibly be unaware of its obligations in this area.

The *Privacy Act 1988* provides for the protection of personal information held by Commonwealth and ACT agencies and some private sector organisations. The Act regulates the collection, use and disclosure, quality and security of personal information.

### In addition, the *Privacy Act* gives you the right to:

- know for what purpose your personal information is being collected
- know whether the collection of your personal info-rmation is required or authorised by or under law
- know to whom your personal information is usually disclosed
- access a record containing your personal information
- make amendments to your personal information to ensure it is accurate.

### Deciding When to Disclose

Once you have decided what to disclose, you need to think about the most appropriate time to do so. There are many opportunities, and no right or wrong answer, however it is important that you feel comfortable with the decision you make. It may help to discuss this with another person with disability, the career advisor or disability officer at your university.

Think about other times when you have told someone about your disability. What worked well, and how did you feel most comfortable? Put yourself in the employer's shoes, what

would best convince them you are the best person for the job?

You may find that it is generally more appropriate to discuss workplace adjustments during the interview than in a résumé or application, unless you require reasonable adjustments for the interview.

There are a variety of opportunities to disclose your disability during the recruitment process. The following section outlines the benefits of disclosing disability at different stages of your employment.

### Letter of application & résumé

Use your discretion to determine if it is appropriate at this stage, considering factors such as the type of employer you are approaching and your individual circumstances. It is not standard practice unless your disability is relevant to the job; however sometimes your disability may be implied in the way you describe your experience and community involvement. It is your decision and you do not have to disclose at this point. Remember, the disadvantage is that you are not there in person to emphasise your skills and abilities, or dispel any concerns they may have.

### You may wish to mention your disability if it is:

- appropriate to demonstrating your skills, eg. if you have been involved in advocacy or sport
- relevant to the job, such as if you have are applying to work in a disability organisation.

### **Application forms**

If you consider your life experiences and disability relate to your ability to do the job, you may wish to mention your disability when describing your suitability for the position. Some forms may also ask questions about disability, and if you feel it is appropriate you can give details. You may also choose to ignore the disability-specific questions or write 'Not Applicable'. You are not legally obliged to disclose your disability unless safety is a concern. While it may not be illegal for organisations to collect such information, it is illegal for this information to be used for discriminatory purposes. This means, for example, that an employer can ask about your disability but cannot refuse you an interview or withdraw an offer of employment based on this information, unless they can prove you are incapable of fulfilling the inherent requirements of the job.

### **Medical questionnaires**

You may be asked to complete a questionnaire about disability, as well as answering questions about general health at any stage of the recruitment process. Answer truthfully.

Once again, it may not be illegal for organisations to collect such information, but it is illegal for this information to be used for discriminatory purposes.

### **Equal opportunity monitoring forms**

At organisations where these forms are used all applicants are required to complete them; the purpose behind these forms is to see if the total mix of applicants represents society as a whole and meets any equal opportunity targets the organisation may have. These are usually separate from the application form and are not used in the selection process; in fact, they are created by the Human Resources department. The selection panel does not see them at all.

#### Before an interview

If you will require reasonable adjustments for the interview, eg. sign language interpreter or accessible venue (including toilets and parking), speak directly to the appropriate person. You may wish to put this in writing (email, fax or letter) and ask them to confirm the arrangements with you prior to the day. Keep a copy yourself.

### **Advantages**

It can help you decide whether you want to work at the organisation; by finding out about its employment equity strategies, support structures for employees with disability and the organisation's workplace adjustment schemes.

//You may be asked to
complete a questionnaire
about disability... Answer
truthfully.//

- You can have a frank conversation with the employer about disability issues in relation to the inherent requirements of the job.
   This discussion can help determine whether work-related adjustments are required and/or whether support services are needed.
- This strategy also eliminates any surprises or awkwardness when meeting the employer.

#### **During an interview**

If your disability cannot be concealed and you have not previously disclosed it, you have to decide how to manage disclosure at the interview. (See the 'Deciding How to Disclose' and interview sections of this booklet.)

### **Advantages**

- You can discuss workplace accommodations that are necessary to do the job.
- Highlights your life experiences and how they may be relevant to the position.
- Provides the employer with evidence of your skills, abilities and ways for overcoming any implications of a disability.
- Enables you to obtain information about an organisation's employment equity strategies, support structures for employees with disability and workplace adjustment schemes.
- Explains any disability-related breaks in your employment history which appear on your résumé.
- Demonstrates problem solving skills.

#### On offer of employment

If you disclose after an offer of employment, you can feel certain that you have not been discriminated against because of disability during recruitment.

#### **Advantages**

- Secures workplace accommodations that are necessary for you to do the job.
- Increases the responsiveness of employers and co-workers to your needs.
- Allows you to obtain information about an organisation's support structures for employees with disability.
- Provides an opportunity to obtain information about an organisation's workplace adjustment schemes.
- Increases access to appropriate employment supports.
- Provides access to appropriate supports increasing the likelihood of job retention.
- Enables you to obtain information about an organisation's employment equity strategies, support structures for employees with disability and workplace adjustment schemes.

### Deciding How to Disclose

You should have a plan about how you would like to disclose before you talk to your employer about it, so you feel in control.

Disclosure will be most successful if you have knowledge about your disability, and can effectively communicate your disability-related needs while emphasising your skills.

### When disclosing disability to your employer:

- be open about why you are disclosing and the outcome you aim for
- be knowledgeable about your disability
- provide some options and strategies for workplace adjustment. (See 'Negotiating Workplace Adjustments with Employers'.)

The way you talk to potential employers about disability can have a big impact. Be skills and solution focused and use positive language.

### For example, say:

"I am skilled in using voice recognition software."

#### Rather than:

"I can't read so voice recognition software helps me."

Remember, the purpose of recruitment is to exchange information to determine if you are suitable for the position. Likewise, disclosure is not admitting a weakness, but about displaying the skills you have developed to manage the situation. If you feel confident you can do the job, they will be to.

If your disability is visible you may wish to anticipate concerns and answer those specifically. One strategy is to do this at the beginning of the interview, so that the interviewer is not distracted and the focus turns to your skills and suitability to do the job. Alternatively, you may wish to bring it up during the interview when you feel it is warranted.

For example: "We have not discussed my disability, or how it might impact on the role. I notice that it involves driving and some overnight travel. I have my own car with hand controls, and frequently travel by myself. So this won't be a worry."

### Tips

- Remember not to assume that an employer will view your disability negatively.
- Make decisions on the basis of career opportunities themselves, rather than restricting yourself to employers who already have positive disability practices.
- You may find it helpful to ask yourself what your life experience with disability has taught you. Write it down on one side of a page, and then beside it write how this skill could be transferred to the workplace. Use this list when you disclose your disability.
- You may also wish to rehearse with family, friends or a career advisor.



### Getting the Job

For graduates with disability, the actual process of finding and keeping work is usually no different than it is for anyone else. You need to locate a suitable position and employer and convince them you are the best person for the job, keeping in mind your own special requirements.

To do this you need to present a professional 'package'; in the way you act, speak, dress, handle telephone calls and emails, the same applies to how you present your résumé, cover letter and portfolio.

### Work Experience and Volunteering

Knowing what it is like to work is an important part of being job ready, and work experience or voluntary work can be valued just as highly as paid jobs.

Many people who have had a disability since childhood may never have worked. Alternatively, this may be your first job since acquiring your disability or unsure whether you are able to do the type of work that interests you.

If this is your situation, work experience and/or volunteering are excellent avenues to experience the work environment. They also help to develop the kind of employable skills you need to promote in your résumé, and will help you to feel more comfortable once you start your paid job.

Speak to your university Careers Service about work experience opportunities, or how to go about approaching businesses. Also, ask around your networks if someone knows a business where you could work or, possibly, recommend you for work experience.

The Australian Employers Network on Disability works with industry to provide opportunities

//You will be...successful if you anticipate questions and have concise, well thought out answers prepared. Make sure to take the time to have practise interviews...//

for job seekers with disability. They also coordinate paid four-week work experience programs annually for final year Law and Commerce students during the university break. The programs are titled:

- Stepping into Banking
- Stepping into Law
- Stepping into Telstra.

# Services and Organisations That Can Help

You may choose to look for work independently, through a Job Network employment agency or seek the assistance of a Disability Employment Service. This will depend on the profession you wish to enter, your job seeking skills and how confident you feel in managing and disclosing your disability at work. If you are receiving assistance through an agency, it is important that you still contribute to the job search process and not rely solely on the consultant working with you. This section provides information which may assist you with each option.

#### Centrelink

Centrelink is an excellent place to start, even if you are not receiving benefits. Centrelink can point you in the direction of specific services and organisations that can assist you with your job search.

### **Disability Employment Services**

Disability Employment Services provide specialised employment help for people with disability, injury or illness. A person does not always have to be receiving, or be eligible to receive, a payment from Centrelink to use Disability Employment Services. In most cases a person must be assessed by a Job Capacity Assessment Provider before they can access these services.

#### Jobs in Jeopardy

Disability Employment Services can assist people who are employed but whose jobs are in jeopardy because of work problems related to their illness, injury or disability. These services are intended to assist workers to maintain their employment.

### Wage subsidy

Money is paid by a Disability Employment Network Provider to subsidise wages for people with disability entering the workplace.

#### **Vocational rehabilitation services**

Assistance is provided to job seekers to manage the effects of their disability so they can get or keep a job in the open labour market.

### **Recruitment agencies**

Recruitment agencies are contracted by businesses and organisations to fill positions on their behalf. They are very different from Disability Employment Services or Job Network Providers in that they are not government funded and operate as businesses. On successful placement of a job seeker, they will take a fee from the employer, their services for job seekers are usually free.

Some recruitment agencies specialise in particular industries and roles, while some may focus on temporary or 'blue colour' jobs.

#### **Your university Careers Service**

All Australian and New Zealand universities provide free support and assistance for students and graduates. They can assist you through personal career counselling, job search strategies, resources, videos and workshops. Most job applications require a covering letter and résumé, however some will also ask you to address selection criteria. There is a range of excellent resources for preparing your job applications to be found online, but don't forget to check out how your university Careers Service can assist you through appointments, workshops or handouts.

You should be able to find information about their services through your university website, student services departments and disability units.

### Job Interviews

There is a lot of information available about doing well in job interviews which you can access, so this section will focus on additional things you may need to think about as a job seeker with disability. You may wish to make appointments with your university Careers Service to practise interview skills and to get some tips and advice.

### Before your interview – arrange adjustments if required

If you will require reasonable adjustments for the interview, eg. sign language interpreter or accessible venue (including toilets and parking), it is best to discuss these after the interview has been arranged. This ensures that the interview has been secured before any discussions or negotiation of any adjustments to the interview process is made. Speak directly to the appropriate person. The most appropriate person to disclose a disability is the convener of the interview panel or a member of the panel; this will not necessarily be the person responsible for organising the appointment.

You may wish to put this in writing (email, fax or letter), also ask them to confirm the arrangements with you prior to the day. Keep a copy.

You have a right to fair and equitable treatment in the selection process, so don't be afraid to ask. Ask how the interview will be conducted, will there be only one interviewer or a panel. This will help you to prepare for the interview and you will know what to expect and what you may need.

Be informed on how the adjustments you require can be organised.

### **Dealing with nerves**

It's normal to feel nervous at a job interview and about disclosing disability, but you will feel more in control if you are prepared.

#### Inspect the venue

Often it is a good idea to trial arriving at the building at the time of the interview before the appointment. If you plan to take public transport, you will see how long it takes to get there and where you will be dropped off, or if you are driving you can find out about parking. It also gives you a chance to see that the building really is accessible.

#### **Dress**

Make sure you always have one outfit suitable for a job interview in your chosen field. You can wear it once you start work while you build up a wardrobe.

Custom made corporate clothing and shoes may help if you have a physical disability which makes it hard to wear clothes 'off the rack'. Sometimes it may be difficult to wear what everyone else does, in these cases make every effort to be neat and presentable.

A general rule for interview outfits is to keep it simple and professional, and avoid too many colours, patterns and accessories. It is a good idea to take along a professional looking folder with your résumé and job application in case you need to refer to it yourself. A pen and notepad makes you look prepared and organised.

### Putting the interviewer at ease with your disability

Just as you may be nervous about disclosure, your interviewer may also be nervous, particularly if they are have little experience of disability. If the interviewer seems nervous or uncomfortable or unsure how to react to your disability, quickly take the lead and politely but confidently:

- offer your hand for a handshake
- if you are unable to shake hands, smile warmly and maintain eye contact
- ask for seating arrangements to be rearranged, and don't apologise if, for example, you are a wheelchair user and a chair needs to be moved to make space
- ask the interviewer to speak more slowly
- maintain high energy levels and a positive outlook.

This not only avoids an awkward silence, but puts the interviewer in a more relaxed frame of mind for the interview. They feel happy to have done something positive to help, and you have also demonstrated your excellent communication skills.

### What questions can I be asked about my disability?

It is unlawful to ask questions about a person's disability unless it relates to the inherent requirements of the job. Examples include:

- adjustments required to ensure a fair and equitable interview/selection process
- if or how the disability may impact on some aspects of the inherent requirements of a job
- any adjustments that may be required to complete the inherent requirements of the job.

//It is unlawful to ask
questions about a person's
disability unless it relates
to the inherent requirements
of the job.//

Any other questions about an individual's disability are inappropriate, including:

- how the individual acquired their disability
- specific or personal details of the individual's disability.

If you are asked a question you think is inappropriate, it is best not to get angry, as it can often be a genuine mistake on the interviewer's behalf, and not intended to discriminate. Try politely asking why the interviewer wants to know that information and how it is relevant to the job.

### Anticipate questions and practise

You will be most successful if you anticipate questions and have concise, well thought out answers prepared. Make sure to take the time to have practise interviews with your university's Careers Service advisers, family and/or friends.

#### Be ready to talk about:

- your qualifications and knowledge of the field
- your skills, experience and insights into the industry
- your motivation for the job and reasons for applying
- your disability and how it may affect your ability to do the job
- how will you perform tasks with your disability
- workplace adjustments related to your disability
   what you require, where it can be acquired, how much they cost and what assistance is available. Give specific examples to make it easier for the employer to understand
- work experience it is much easier to convince a sceptical interviewer with examples and clear descriptions of how you have performed successfully in your working past
- negatives prepare to turn them into positives, eg. "While I haven't been employed in this industry before, I have three months of work experience where I undertook all the functions required in this position."

### How to explain gaps in your employment history

If you have gaps in your employment history, here are some ways you can respond to questions about them.

- Point out any study, volunteer work or other activities you completed during this period.
- Put it in a positive light, eg. "After my accident I took some time off to reassess and develop the skills and abilities that would allow me to continue to be successful in the workplace."

### What do employers say...

IBM and Westpac are members of the Employers Network on Disability and welcome applicants with disability.

### Westpac

- Be yourself but be your best self.
- Smile. Be friendly, sincere and enthusiastic.
- Regard every interaction with the company or their agency as part of the interview process. Every telephone call, every email and every 'come in for a chat' adds to their picture of you.
- Consider whether you should disclose your disability or not. You may choose not to if your disability has no effect on your ability to do the job, or if it may provoke unnecessary curiosity. Alternatively, disclosure can generate trust and openness or avoid possible risks for other people in the workplace. Be clear about any adjustments you need for the interview to make it equitable and any modifications in the workplace.
- Make it easy for the interviewer. Talk in specifics about what you have done and indicate how it is relevant to the role.
- End negatives with a positive. If you haven't had a particular experience, refer to something similar and say how you are able to learn new skills. Think 'No but yes'.
- Ask questions that reflect preparation and logical thinking, and help you make an informed decision. You might want to find out about learning opportunities, career development, corporate responsibility, employment conditions, the organisation's culture and a 'typical day' are areas you might want to find out about.

### IBM

Tips to help you along: Before the interview - Assess, Prepare, Rehearse.

Assess – Study the position for which you've applied. What strengths will make you effective on the job? Do you have an understanding of your weaknesses?

Prepare - Research IBM and the business units you might want to join. The IBM website is a great place to start. Think about questions you might want to ask during the interview. And don't forget the outfit: choose something that presents you well and reflects the position you hope to fill. Make sure to take a note of details about the interviewing venue (date, time) and the interviewer (eg. name and job role), so that you can prepare suitably. We will usually have a copy of your résumé but bring one with you, just in case.

Rehearse – Run through a mock interview session with a trusted friend. We'll want to learn more about you, so be prepared to share some information about yourself and your career. Questions will range from the objective (eg. how many people did you manage) to the subjective (eg. how could you add value to IBM if you got this job).

### The day of the interview - Rest, Arrive, Perform.

**Rest** – Interviews can be nerve wrecking, but make sure you get enough rest the night before. You'll want to be mentally alert.

Arrive – Plan to be at the interviewing venue at least 15 minutes ahead of time. This will allow you to collect your thoughts and appear cool and confident in front of us.

**Perform** – You can now put all that practise and preparation to work. We're looking for people who can think well in a high-stress situation (like an interview!). Take your time to answer and don't be afraid to ask the interviewer to repeat a question. A pause between thoughts is better than a garbled response.

Above all, relax and be calmly confident of your abilities. It's all right to be nervous, but we hope your personality and passion will still shine through. This is a time to connect with us and show why you're the right fit for IBM.

Visit the IBM Human Ability and Accessibility website at www-03.ibm.com/able



### **Employment tests**

Sometimes tests are part of the recruitment process. Sometimes these may need to be adapted so you have an equal opportunity to display your abilities. You will usually be informed of the type of interview structure on invitation, so your university Careers Service should be able to help you prepare with examples or videos.

### After your interview

It helps to spend some time reflecting on the interview process, the types of questions and the way you answered them. This can be great preparation for future interviews.

Specifically, think about how you disclosed your disability and conducted yourself. What went well and how can you improve next time?

### What to Do if at First You Are Not Successful

If you are not offered a position immediately, don't let it undermine your confidence. Perhaps there were genuinely thousands of applicants. Politely asking the employer for feedback can give you some great insight into areas you can improve, but also provides an opportunity to further your discussion with them and express your interest in upcoming roles. Use the time while you are job hunting to work on these things.

Most importantly, if you feel you are not getting anywhere with your job search, seek assistance from your career advisor or disability employment service worker.

### Here are some suggestions of skills to develop Job search skills:

- résumé presentation
- appropriate responses to interview questions
- disclosing your disability.

//Any necessary adjustments
should be made prior to
commencing work, or soon
after.//

#### Work skills:

- try work experience or volunteering sometimes a period of work experience will help you feel more confident, and give you new skills
- further training in areas such as software use or business administration skills is useful for any university graduate new to the work force
- read industry journals and newsletters to keep abreast of issues.

#### Life skills:

- making effective phone calls
- starting a new job
- grooming
- skills auditing
- taking short courses
- networking
- greeting people and making introductions
- public speaking/making presentations.

### Starting Your New Job

Beginning a new job is always exciting, especially if you are taking your first step towards your dream career after university. However it can also be daunting. For the new employee with disability the first few weeks will be a time of adjustment, where you figure out whether the workplace modifications you have made are appropriate and devise strategies to overcome any minor obstacles you encounter.

Any necessary adjustments should be made prior to commencing work, or soon after. Below are some hints to get you through the first few months.

### Dealing With Nerves

- It is normal to feel nervous as well as excited, as there is a lot to take in, but you probably already have many of the skills needed to settle into the workplace from your university and life experience of disability.
- Confirm your start day and time with your employer, and ask where the best place to park your car will be.
- It is a good idea to do a 'trial run' investigating factors like transport and parking so that you will not be late and rushing on your first day.
- Remember, work is very different to university life, but you will settle in with time – just like you settled into study.

#### Your First Day

- Arrive on time.
- Smile and be polite to everyone.
- Be prepared for people to offer you assistance, and be polite whether you are accepting or declining their offer. People like to help a new person, and you may even have a staff member assigned to help you settle in and find your way around. This may be a standard practice whether you have a disability or not.
- If you have a visible disability, this is the time to let your colleagues know what, if anything they can help you with. It is also time to deal with 'what happened to you' type of questions.

### Your First Week

- Ask about everything and make notes of the answers. Remember, people will be more willing to help a 'newbie' settle in when you start, rather than four months later. Asking how the photocopier works, for example, is a great icebreaker for meeting colleagues.
- Write a seating plan with people's names.
- Use peoples' names immediately so you remember them. It will help them feel more comfortable with you.
- Make a time to meet with your supervisor to go over your role and their expectations, and to discuss if you need further adjustments or support.
- If you have a carer accompanying or visiting you in the workplace, think about how you will introduce them to the work environment and your colleagues.

### Adapting to Work Routines

- Starting anything new is tiring, and sometimes frustrating. If this is your first job, you will be dealing not only with new tasks, but a whole new world of experiences such as staff meetings and dealing with colleagues.
- Stick it out, and after a few months it will become routine. Keep focussed on the positives, and reward yourself along the way. Perhaps treat yourself to a meal out or a movie to celebrate milestones such as the end of your first week.
- You may wish to consider easing into work gradually, for example starting just a few days a week and building up to full-time.
- Make sure you get enough sleep and adequate food.

### Negotiating Workplace Adjustments with Employers

You may need to negotiate with your prospective or current employer about making some changes to accommodate your disability. These changes, called 'reasonable adjustments' or 'work-related adjustments', may be required for your job interview (eg. interview questions to be provided in an alternative format, an accessible room or via a sign language interpreter), and/or once you are in the job. Workplace adjustments generally fall into two categories:

- physical modifications (such as building ramps, purchasing software)
- adjusting work practices (working from home, taking more frequent breaks, etc.).

Whether you have a disability or not, negotiation is a vital life skill, think of this as an opportunity to demonstrate your ability to communicate to the employer while refining your skills.



### Examples of Workplace Adjustments

- Later starting/finishing times for an employee, whose medication causes drowsiness or lack of coordination in the morning which means they cannot drive and find it hard to concentrate.
   Team meetings can be scheduled for later in the day so all employees may attend.
- Telecommuting, or working from home: your work phone can be redirected to home. Answer in a professional manner during work hours. Ask to be included in staff meetings via teleconferencing. Ask for access to the staff intranet at home. Schedule regular phone or email contact with your supervisor so you stay 'in the loop'.
- Adapting interview procedures (eg. making the interview questions available in different formats: plain English; electronic; large print).
- Adapting the work environment (eg. making the work areas and facilities accessible to a worker in a wheelchair).
- Changes to job design, work schedules or other work practices (eg. allowing a hearing impaired worker to swap telephone duties with another employee and complete filing duties instead).
- Changes to equipment (eg. installing visual fire alarms for deaf workers).
- Providing training or other help (eg. extending training time for workers with a learning or intellectual disability, ensuring adequate support during training and induction).
- Changing communication systems or information provided (eg. having information available in written form and not just spoken at meetings).

# Who Pays for Workplace Adjustments?

The Workplace Modifications Scheme will pay for the costs involved in modifying the workplace or purchasing adaptive equipment for eligible employees with disability up to the cost of \$10,000.

//Employers don't want to discriminate; they need you to tell them what needs to be done so that you can get on with your job.//

# How do You Negotiate Adjustments with an Employer?

If you need to negotiate work-related adjustments, doing some research and planning is advisable before you speak to your employer. This will help you determine the type of work-related adjustments you may need and when you may need them: in the job interview; initial work period; and/or once in the job.

This section covers what you need to research, and provides tips on talking to employers.

# Know what work-related adjustments you may need in the workplace

As a person with disability you have already made adjustments to get where you are in your education and personal life, it is simply a matter of re-focusing them into a work environment. Your employer, on the other hand, may not have had any experience. Employers don't want to discriminate; they need you to tell them what needs to be done so that you can get on with your job.

You are the expert in living with yourself, and therefore the best person to identify what work-related adjustments you may need. This is your responsibility.

If you are not sure what your needs are in a workplace, spend some time thinking about it.

- List adjustments which suited you at school/ university and during any work experience or voluntary placements.
- List adjustments that have not worked and why.
   Consider whether they may work under different circumstances.
- Read about work-related adjustments and how people with disabilities successfully negotiated the changes to the workplace.
- Talk with other people with similar disabilities to find out what type of adjustments work for them. Perhaps you could visit them on the job?
- Meet with people who have helped in your life so far, eg. lecturers/tutors and/or university disability officers, to discuss what work-related adjustments you may need. They may be able to refer back to your experiences at home, school and university.
- Talk with disability employment service providers and disability community and advocacy services. These people are experienced in identifying and negotiating work-related adjustments on behalf of people with disability.
- Visit a company working in this field so you can visualise how the job is done.
- Contact someone who has a similar job for an 'informational interview'.

### Write down what you need

- Prepare a list of your preferred work-related adjustments, such as a ramp, hardware solutions, office furniture, as well as a number of alternative options.
- Get an estimate cost for the adjustments you require. Where possible consider cheaper or alternative options.
- Identify funding sources which may cover the cost of implementing these adjustments and the process for accessing these funds. The Workplace Modifications and Technology Assistance Schemes are two examples of government funding. You may discover other resources by approaching disability advocacy groups or even through community groups such as a local Lions or Rotary club.
- Consider what is 'reasonable' for your employer as well as you. For example, if you need to schedule a medical appointment during work hours, perhaps you could work later that day to make it up.

### Creating a plan to negotiate adjustments

You need to be prepared about what you want to say to an employer if you require work-related adjustments, so use the information gathered in step two to develop a plan.

### It is helpful to an employer if you can:

- provide a clear statement about your disability
- explain why you have chosen to disclose your disability
- demonstrate how your disability may impact on your ability to do the job
- provide information about work-related adjustments and supports you may need
- outline how work-related adjustments would assist you to demonstrate your skills in the interview and/or on the job
- provide alternative work-related options to demonstrate flexibility and ability to negotiate
- give examples of how work-related adjustments have benefited you in previous positions of employment, education environment and/or other experiences
- present information in a clear and concise way and make sure that the information is relevant to the role.

### **Talking to your employer**

When discussing adjustments, always use clear statements which focus on your ability first; an assertive approach works well, whether you are discussing something tangible such as access, or personal matters such as toileting and hygiene.

### Some examples of what you may wish to say:

"I have some personal needs, these are..."

"To ensure my safety and the safety of others it is important that..."

"I work most effectively when..."

"I am skilled in training someone to assist me to..."

"I have systems in place that enable me to..."

### Identify the correct person with whom to negotiate work-related adjustments

It is important to identify the right person in the business or organisation with whom to negotiate work-related adjustments. The most appropriate person may be the convener of a job interview panel, a member of that panel, your employer or supervisor or the Human Resources department. Some organisations may have support services, such as equal employment opportunity or equity/social justice units or employee support staff that can provide advice, support and assistance in identifying and implementing adjustments. External supports such as union organisations, disability-specific programs and/or friends may assist you to identify the best person. Work colleagues may also assist with this.

### Plan when you are going to say it

When to negotiate work-related adjustments is dependent on when you need them to be implemented.

- Adjustments for a job interview: Negotiate this after the interview has been confirmed but before it is due to take place.
- Job offer: After you have accepted.
- When you have been employed (accepted the offer and signed a contract): Negotiate either before you start the job or soon after. Make sure you give the employer enough time to implement any changes you will need immediately.
- On the job: Negotiate if and when you think it is appropriate. Be sure to give your employer sufficient time to instigate changes.
- If you are at risk of losing your job: Discussing your disability and adjustments which may help can form part of discussions about poor performance, and should only occur with the person who highlighted that performance, usually this would be your supervisor. Appropriate times may include disciplinary meetings or performance appraisals. Once you have raised the issue, your employer has a responsibility to implement negotiated changes as part of a plan to improve your work performance. Of course, it is always better to negotiate adjustments earlier to prevent your job being at risk.

(Source: Education to employment – http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/rdlo/employment/uni/info/negchangesworkplace.htm)

### Record the plan

It is a good idea to keep a written copy of the agreement you make with your employer about which adjustments will be implemented. This can be as simple as an email saying: "Thank you for the meeting yesterday and agreeing to make the following changes to my workplace: [List]. I understand/look forward to starting my new job and working with you."

# Difficulties in Negotiating Workplace Adjustments

If you have asked for work-related adjustments to be made and these have been refused with no reasonable alternatives proposed, you have a number of options.

- Ask the relevant person to reconsider and remind them of their responsibilities under disability legislation.
- Find out what complaints processes exist in the organisation, such as an appropriate person located in areas such as the Human Resource department, or equity-related departments such as the Equal Employment Opportunity, Equity and Diversity Centre.
- Make a complaint about discrimination to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

### Flexible Work Arrangements

A flexible work environment is one in which employers and employees jointly decide on hours, location and the way work is carried out. Decisions are based on achieving outcomes which benefit the business while allowing the employee to better balance their personal and professional lives. This practice benefits all employees, not only employees with disability. For example, parents with caring responsibilities or mature age workers who

//You are your own expert
on disability and as such,
will be the most important
resource for your workplace.
Be proactive in finding
solutions or improvements//

wish to phase into retirement gradually. This is generally something you would negotiate once you have secured the position.

# Why You Might Consider Flexible Work Arrangements

### If you:

- need to attend regular medical appointments
- need to fit in with your carer's timetable
- need to work irregular hours or take frequent breaks
- have fluctuating periods of health
- find it easier to work in your home environment
- need to reduce travel
- decide not to disclose information about a disability to your employer or co-workers.

### Examples of Flexible Job Structures

#### **Teleworkers**

Employees work from home, either all the time or on certain days, communicating with the office via email, phone and fax. Staff with disability benefit through the flexibility of working in their home environment, and having a greater freedom with time frames on scheduled projects.

#### Job-share

Two or more employees share the responsibilities of one full-time job. The two employees may divide tasks between them, or work interchangeably. While this requires communication, coordination and well suited partners, it can achieve excellent results without disrupting clients or co-workers.

### How to Negotiate a Flexible Work Environment

The best way to get your employer to approve your request for flexible work arrangements is to present a proposal detailing how your work will get done under the new arrangement.

- Research flexible work and job structure options online.
- List what would be suitable for you and any alternative options.
- Ask around your network for ideas; they may know someone you can talk to who has experience with negotiating or with organising flexible working arrangements.
- Ask your career advisor or job network officer for help with your request.
- Identify who in your organisation can authorise flexible arrangements, and how to set up a meeting with them.

 Devise a plan for the meeting; decide what outcome you want and what compromises you may consider. Make notes to take to the meeting. (See 'How to conduct the meeting with your employer' below.)

# Managing Your Disability in the Workplace

When an issue arises you may wonder whether it is because you are new, or because of your disability. You may wish to discuss this with your career advisor, disability employment officer, supervisor or a friend, or you may find that everything becomes clearer with time. Here are some common scenarios and tips for settling in.

### Colleagues

Your colleagues may or may not have worked with a person with disability before, and in the workplace you are likely to find all the various attitudes and approaches to disability you encounter in the community.

### If you experience ongoing difficulty with a colleague

Try talking to them in private, making sure to use 'l' language. For example, "I feel hurt when you make jokes about people with disability."

If you are not comfortable with this approach, or it doesn't work, speak to your supervisor about your options. If it is your supervisor who you are having trouble with, you may wish to speak to a more senior person such as your supervisor's manager, a member of the HR team or a union representative (if you are a member), or consult the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. It is important that any issues are addressed *immediately*.



### //How to conduct the meeting with your employer//

Start with the easy things.

Thank your employer for taking time to talk to you.

Present the facts of your case for flexible hours, including why you want to make the change and possible options you have identified. Be sure to highlight benefits for the business, eg. reduced running costs, your desk and office space will be available for other staff.

Offer to have a 'trial period' to determine whether it is working.

Ask you employer whether they see any solutions/problems you haven't though of.

Discuss when/how logistics will be organised, and who needs to be informed of the new arrangement, eg. colleagues.

Follow up with a written record of the meeting, even if it is an email saying:

"Thank you so much for taking the time to discuss flexible working arrangements with me yesterday and agreeing to the following: [List/outline]. I understand there will be a three-month trial period, and that we will review my progress at a meeting in one month's time. I am very motivated and excited about making this work."

 $(\textit{Source:} \ \texttt{JobAccess} - \textbf{www.jobaccess.gov.au/JOAC/Jobseekers/How+to+guides/howtonegotiateaflexiblewo.htm})$ 

### Get Involved in the Workplace

Initiating conversation or inviting colleagues to lunch is a great way to break the ice or engage with those who seem nervous about working with someone who has a disability. Become actively involved in workplace social activities, from parties to after work drinks.

### Learn to be assertive - politely

If you need to decline offers of assistance or refuse to respond to questions you don't want to answer, do so firmly but politely. Continue some conversation or make some other remark to show there are no hard feelings.

### Have a sense of humour

Most things can be overcome with a sense of humour, and many allies can be made. Just think of your everyday life outside of work.

### **Build a support network**

Friends, colleagues and friends with disabilities make a great sounding board.

### Keep it in perspective

Developing your career and professional identity is a life long process, and no one expects you to be perfect in your first weeks or month. Everyone in your office was new once too!

#### Remember

- Work colleagues are a valuable resource when considering task modifications and inherent job requirements. Brainstorming opportunities can assist with this process, particularly if the modifications have the potential to impact on them.
- Everyone has had different degrees of exposure to people with disability. Disability awareness training may assist work colleagues by providing information on myths and facts, research and tips for communication and accommodations.
- You are your own expert on disability and as such, will be the most important resource for your workplace. Be proactive in finding solutions or improvements.

(**Source:** Flinders University, University of Adelaide, University of South Australia, 'Employability: an employment resource guide for students with a disability')

### GRADUATE PROFILES



//The attitude I have taken with me during my employment and other personal activities such as sailing, is that if you take the time to educate yourself, think and experiment with solutions to overcome any obstacles you face, there should be no reason why you can't achieve what you want to do with your life.//

### Andrew Vikstrom

Bachelor of Architecture (Honours)

I have recently become a registered Architect and I'm currently working for one of Australia's largest architectural practices, WoodsBagot. After becoming a quadriplegic in a diving accident, I returned to high school to finish my senior years. The encouragement and acceptance from the school and my classmates along with minor physical adaptations allowed me to achieve the marks required to apply to university.

As a result, I was lucky enough to receive a place at the University of Queensland to study Architecture. During my time at university I faced a number of issues around campus access, general acceptance and the fact my course was focused on the ability to visually present ideas through sketching and modelling. To overcome my initial inability to

hand sketch I went to TAFE at night to learn Computer Aided Drafting (CAD).

Upon completing my degree, I applied and was accepted to take part in a new Queensland Government initiative to provide six young graduates with the opportunity and resources to establish and run there very own architecture practice. The Architectural Practice Academy (APA) gave me many great opportunities to experience the entire architectural profession, from dealing directly with clients and budgets through to negotiating the hazards of nails and tyre punctures on building sites. One of my most memorable projects was the renovation and fit out of the practice's office space. Being project leader enabled me to be involved in ensuring the office was fully accessible.

I have recently sat and passed the Architectural registration process and moved onto a new job. The change of jobs was very daunting and stressful, because in the past I have struggled to find accessible architecture firms anywhere outside of the CBD. To gain full-time employment and reduce the travel time to work, I have had to move into an accessible unit closer to the city so that I can be nearer to the available opportunities.

To gain more independence I have purchased a powered chair so I can walk to work, eliminating the need to spend time waiting for taxis.

Additionally, I have adapted my manual chair so I can tow it behind the powdered chair to and from work, where my colleagues assist me to transfer. Within the office environment the main modifications have been to ensure I have a clear path of travel throughout the office.

The attitude I have taken with me during my employment and other personal activities such as sailing, is that if you take the time to educate yourself, think and experiment with solutions to overcome any obstacles you face, there should be no reason why you can't achieve what you want to do with your life.

### Marayke Jonkers

 Bachelor of Communications (Journalism and Public Relations) and Bachelor of Social Science



//Since becoming a paraplegic in a car accident at eight months of age, I have been 'run off my wheels' chasing after my dreams to be the fastest swimmer in the world, travel and be a television presenter//

I am a Communications graduate from the University of the Sunshine Coast and hold a Bachelor of Social Science degree. In recent years I have also competed as a paralympic swimmer, been an aspiring journalist and was honoured to be awarded 2005 Queensland Young Achiever of the Year.

Since becoming a paraplegic in a car accident at eight months of age, I have been 'run off my wheels' chasing after my dreams to be the fastest swimmer in the world, travel and be a television presenter.

I was always a keen student, receiving high distinctions for all my subjects at university. During my studies I completed an internship at ABC Online and the ABC television program *Stateline*. There were always extra things to think about, like when doing a television interview I needed to ask the other person to sit down so our eye level is the same for the camera. I also needed to find out whether the venues we would be filming at have access, and communicate my needs to the camera person and crew.

I have also written a number of stories for my local newspaper, *The Sunshine Coast Daily*, and a feature article for *The Weekender* magazine about life at the Athens Paralympic Games. I also worked part-time visiting schools across regional Queensland, conducting sport workshops and disability awareness activities. In these positions the key factors were being organised and forward planning. For example, I would call schools in advance to ask about disabled parking and for the wheelchair toilet to be unlocked. It was easy to ask a group of students to carry the bag of sporting equipment for me.

Aside from my university study, I am an elite athlete, competing in the Athens Paralympics and winning two bronze medals for the 50 metre breaststroke and the 150 metre individual medley. I was also a member of the Sydney 2000 team and, at the time of writing, was in training for Beijing 2008.

During my 12 years on the Australian Paralympic swimming team I have broken over 70 Australian records in breaststroke, butterfly, freestyle and individual medley; training 576 kilometres a year, 6 days a week.

Based in my accessible unit in Maroochydore on the Queensland Sunshine Coast, I also have an ambition to visit every continent in the world. I am well on my way; having backpacked around Europe, ridden a camel to the pyramids in Egypt and swum at competitions in 13 countries.

On top of my already busy schedule, I have launched a career as a motivational speaker. I have had plenty of experience at this; the first being at the age of nine in front of a corporate audience at a state conference. I am receiving

excellent feedback from my new clients. Being a busy elite athlete, and because I often need rest or am in pain, nine to five just doesn't suit. I needed to be creative in the way I use my skills and earn an income. Public speaking and writing from home are perfect.

I believe in a whole of life approach to preparing for employment, and that you need to start developing skills in disclosing your disability and discussing your needs during school, or as soon as you acquire a disability. Confidence, lateral thinking, knowing what you need and being able to ask for it are some of the keys to succeeding in life and in your career with disability.

We all develop these skills in different ways, often not related to work. For me it was travelling alone, especially overseas where I had to either be self-sufficient or ask for help and articulate my needs, sometimes to people who barely spoke English.

Although I never mention my disability in job applications, it is implied in my résumé which mentions that I am a Paralympian and have been involved in advocacy and as a volunteer. I consider these to be strengths and experiences which will assist me professionally in the Communications industry, particularly the experience I have had dealing with the media as an athlete.

Make the most of the fact that you are different and stand out. Getting interviewers to remember you is a major hurdle, now you have their attention you just have to wow them with your personality, skills and abilities! I hope my recent experience as author of this booklet and as a university student with disability will help students facing similar challenges to pursue higher education and enter the work force.

//Initiating conversation or inviting colleagues to lunch is a great way to break the iceor engage with those who seem nervous about working with someone who has a disability.//

# Mark Bagshaw

 Bachelor of Psychology (Marketing) & Master in International Marketing



There are about one billion people with disabilities worldwide. They are taking part in the work force at only half the rate of the general population...1.2 million extra Australians could be working and want to work.

I hold the position of Business Development Executive for IBM Australia and New Zealand, and I'm a tireless proponent of the business case for employing people with disability. There are about one billion people with disabilities worldwide. They are taking part in the work force at only half the rate of the general population: 17 million extra Americans; two million extra Britons; and 1.2 million extra Australians could be working and want to work. If you assign a productivity factor of \$US21,000 for each of them and factor in savings on welfare payments, you get a net benefit of \$US900 billion that's not flowing into the US, UK and Australian economies. I became quadriplegic in a diving accident at

In my roll with IBM I make 50 trips a year in Australia, New Zealand, Asia and abroad. In addition, I am an active, vocal advocate in the Australian community for people with disability and travel the country speaking on behalf of this cause. I say it is the physical challenges of navigating in a world not designed for a wheelchair that poses most problems.

the age of 16.

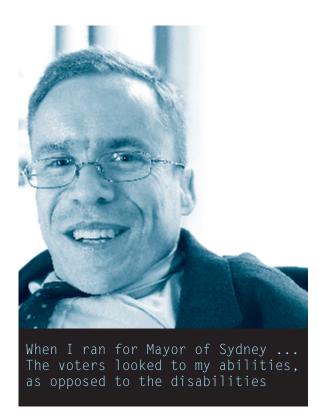
Even with the well-developed process I have when I travel, there are barriers to public transportation and hotel rooms. It is these barriers that are, in part, standing in the way of integrating people with disability into the community and the work force. As an advocate of change, my message is simple and effective: It makes good economic sense for every country to tap the talents of people with disability. The compelling reason for doing this is improving the economic bottom line. During my career with IBM, accommodations have helped to make me more productive and my job easier. IBM has offered me fantastic support – the hardware I need and software like IBM's voice recognition product, ViaVoice. IBM supplied my power wheelchair to help me move around the office quickly and efficiently. The accommodations have always been made readily without a problem.

I have my own van with hand controls which I can drive in my wheelchair, and a fully accessible unit in Sydney equipped with home automation technology which enables me to live independently. I feel it's my responsibility to make people I meet feel comfortable with me. People may not have direct experience with someone who has a disability. So it's up to me to put them at ease. I find that usually doesn't take long at all.

There's no one solution to getting people with disability into the work force. We need to treat disability as a 'whole of life' issue. We need to remove the infrastructure problem areas faced by people with disability, empower them with hope and the knowledge to deal with their disability and we need to lift the community's expectations of them. My proposal is for three, closely-linked 'strategic interventions' involving engaging the business sector in producing products and services that remove infrastructure barriers, a lifelong learning approach to empowering people with disability and a community-wide marketing program to lift community expectations.

### Matt Laffan

Bachelor of Arts & Bachelor of Laws



As a solicitor with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in NSW, I don't make a big deal about disability when it comes to employment, and don't see why anyone else should either. I appear regularly in court using my electric wheelchair, which I need as a result of failed spinal surgery I had after being born with a rare genetic disorder, Diastrophic Dyspasia.

In my dealings with police, lawyers from the defence, witnesses and victims of crime I have never been worried about how they might react to what they might perceive to be my disabilities. The fact that I am in a wheelchair

//Of course I was concerned
about simple things...
little obstacles....
However, with planning and
a positive attitude, these
things were overcome...//

Matt Laffan, Bachelor of Arts & Bachelor of Laws

and have a few physical challenges does not detrimentally influence the way in which I deal with them in court. The only reaction I could be said to have is when I have built up a relationship over the phone and then meet them for the first time, having not at first pre-warned them that I am'the bloke in the wheelchair' because often they are expecting someone taller and more robust looking. I got my first job through networking, while seeking a summer clerkship during my final year of university. An initial interview led to the opportunity to work as a clerk, and after two years I went on to full-time employment as a lawyer. It began with a friend initiating an opportunity that I was able to make the most of and turn into a career move. When it came to negotiating workplace adjustments, I found no resistance to these changes and it was simply a matter of creating awareness. I required ramps to be built into two courts and my desk to be altered in such a way that it was high enough for me to use effectively. It took some negotiating in that the powers that be just needed to be made aware of how essential they were, to not only ensure my ability to realise my full potential in the workplace but also to ensure that there was true equality before the law.

At the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (NSW) I have never felt that I did not belong. At the beginning I was nervous, and in part that can be put down to the feeling that I did not want to make a mistake and jeopardise the opportunity I had been given. Whenever any of us are put into a new situation with people and expectations there can be sense of nervousness, which if channelled positively goes a long way to fuelling our efforts to make a strong contribution.

Of course I was concerned about simple things, such as ease of access to a toilet and the way in which I would deal with unexpected little obstacles, such as requiring colleagues to fax or photocopy something for me without wanting to be a burden. However, with planning and a positive attitude, these things were overcome and the nervousness I felt gave way to a feeling of relief and delight.

When I ran for Mayor of Sydney I saw a wonderful example of attitudes changing towards disability when I missed out on a position on Council by little more than perhaps 500 votes. The voters looked to my abilities, as opposed to the disabilities, which says more about the people who cast the vote and about this city than it does about me. It is easy for me to believe in myself, that is my way. But for others to believe in me takes something else, it takes a conscious decision to believe I am up to the task and that is a mighty thing to put into practice.

I was also featured on the ABC television program *Australian Story*.

When applying for jobs in the past I disclosed my disability in the application but I'm increasingly of the opinion it might be better to leave that until one has secured an interview opportunity. I do not think there are any hard and fast rules as to which approach is best, and perhaps it is a matter for the individual and dependent upon what sort of job is being sought.

The major challenge for we graduates with disability is finding the opportunity to get into work after university qualifications have been reached. This can be put down to a number of things, but the most critical are infrastructure and perceptions. Depending upon one's needs,

a lack of infrastructure in the workplace, or between home and the workplace, to meet those needs can create obstacles that pose some effort to overcome. Perceptions by prospective employers that these needs in some way mean our abilities are not equal to or superior to fellow employees can be just as challenging. Some of these things we can solve ourselves and others require the collective effort of government, the community and industry.

The trick is to keep up the determination to meet those challenges even when it seems all is lost. We need to knock loudly on employers' doors so that if someone comes along with a disability, they don't see the disability, they see the ability of the person.



### Nick McNair

- Bachelor of Social Work

I was disappointed in myself for not being able to cope with life's challenges the way I expected I should.

I find things are looking bright these days. I've finished my Social Work degree and have my mind set on one day working in social research. But it's been a challenging and scary ride at times. I have suffered a long-term battle with depression. I've seen periods of extreme highs and severe lows, which has made it hard for me to find a balance in life. During university, I struggled with a lot of social barriers.

I had abysmal self-esteem, which would set off the anxiety. I suffered some paranoia and would over analyse interactions with people, thinking they were making fun of me or didn't like me. Eventually I just isolated myself from any social setting that made me feel like that. I have experienced dark hours, some of which are due to the difficulty finding the right medication. One of the scarier periods fresh in my mind was just after graduation.

Leaving university and having to find work was stressful and frustrating, and I constantly questioned where I was heading. I had no purpose or self-esteem. I felt like I was stuck in a trench. I was disappointed in myself for not being able to cope with life's challenges the way I expected I should. The longer I was unemployed, the deeper my depression, which eventually led to suicidal thoughts. I felt like I was plummeting fast and was scared about what I might do, so I took myself down to the

//CRS Australia has taught
me how to focus and allowed
me to find a purpose in
life.//

Nick McNair, Bachelor of Social Work

mental health services to get professional help. This eventually led me to having a Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) to help determine the most appropriate employment assistance for me. Following the assessment, I was referred to CRS Australia for help.

It was here that I met my CRS Australia vocational rehabilitation consultant Helene, who worked with me to address my barriers to employment and set a goal to work towards. I participated in a vocational program to help me explore where my job interests lie. Having a job goal has given me direction and a focus, something I have lacked in the past. I am actively searching for suitable jobs and doing volunteer work, which is helpful to put some of the skills I'm learning with Helene into practice. CRS Australia has taught me how to focus and allowed me to find a purpose in life. I'm feeling as good as I've ever felt and I'm looking forward to what's ahead.

# Rania Saab

 Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Journalism) & Bachelor of Laws

It wasn't until I reached university that I realised that my disability was a problem...

I am a lawyer and was born with moderate to severe hearing loss, and I hope to see courtrooms better equipped for lawyers and citizens with disability in the future.

I can't hear very well in the courtroom as many courts don't have a hearing loop. I would like to try court work one day as I have not done much of that; however, that all depends on how supportive the court system is to lawyers with disability. I am mustering up the courage to take that leap of faith and apply for solicitor positions that encompass court work because that will be my biggest challenge to date. At the end of the day, the courtroom should be equipped so people from all walks of life have easy access but, from my perspective, it isn't. Depending on how that goes, I may actively get involved in advocating for changes to ensure that people with disability have access to the legal system that is equal to their nondisabled counterparts. It is not a path that I

would ordinarily have chosen, but to date I feel that I have had to be an advocate as change needs to happen and it is something that I am passionate about and enjoy.

I began my legal career working as a paralegal, then as a junior solicitor for a small law firm. I was there for 15 months until I realised I wasn't satisfied working for a firm where the aim was to make money as opposed to helping people. I left and obtained a job with the Legal Aid Commission, first in an administrative capacity as a grants officer, then as a solicitor. I was also a participant in the Australian Employer Networks' program 'Stepping into Law 2005'. My disability presents two challenges in the workplace: firstly, I find it difficult to hear on the telephone, so I use a telephone amplifier; and, secondly, I cannot hear very well in the courtroom. At the moment, I do behind the desk work, which means contact with clients and solicitors occurs via email and telephone. In my prior employment, I attended court on a few occasions which were very, very nerve racking, as it is very difficult to hear in the courtroom. I have had to bring attention to my hearing impairment to the court and its inhabitants (which is mortifying and should not be necessary), stand right in front of witnesses in the witness box and sit right next to the other party's solicitor.

Although I now have a job I love, I readily admit it hasn't been an easy road. It wasn't until I reached university that I realised that my disability was a problem. Prior to university, I didn't have many problems in terms of my disability – I had supportive teachers who went out of their way to ensure that I was not excluded by virtue of my hearing impairment. While the Humanities faculty went out of its way to assist me in any way possible, the Law faculty, which was more important to me as I'd always intended to become a solicitor, didn't.

I tried to change the learning environment to ensure that students with disability had the same access to the learning environment as their non-disabled counterparts, but did not have much success. Sometimes, I considered dropping out of uni, but I persevered. However, I left uni with a dearth of self-confidence. Thanks to hard work, perseverance and determination to be a lawyer the future looks bright. I know I have a lot to offer the world, and that includes my profession. If anything, I am the one who can pick and choose who I want to work for and in what capacity; it is not up to employers to feel that they are doing me a favour by giving me a chance. I am not a charity case – I am just as good as the next person.



### Where to Find Help

# Australian Employers Network on Disability

The Australian Employers Network on Disability (www.aend.org.au) is a not-for-profit organisation funded by its members to take a leadership role in advancing employment opportunities for people with disability. Its members have made a commitment to becoming 'disability confident' organisations and genuinely seek to recruit and retain talented people with disability.

With Australia's growing skills shortage and ageing population, it has never been more essential to proactively recruit graduates with disability. In order to meet this objective, the Australian Employers Network on Disability facilitates several graduate employment programs in conjunction with its member organisations, including the Deakin University Willing & Able Mentoring (WAM) program, and the 'Stepping into...' work experience series.

### 'Stepping into...' work experience series

The 'Stepping into...' series provides university students with disability four weeks' paid work experience within an organisation in their field of study.

The program commenced in Sydney in 2005 with 'Stepping into Law', and has expanded with the addition of 'Stepping into Banking' and 'Stepping into Employment Advisor' along with the inclusion of Queensland, Victoria and the ACT in the scheme.

The program offers fantastic work placement opportunities to students who may otherwise find it difficult to gain practical experience due to their disability.

Organisations involved in the program have included law firms: Freehills, Baker & McKenzie; Sparke Helmore; and Henry Davis York, retail and investment banking organisations such as: UBS; Merrill Lynch; and Westpac, and government agencies including: the NSW Attorney General's Department; and the Australian Taxation Office. Telstra also participated for the first time in 2007.

### Willing & Able Mentoring (WAM)

The Willing & Able Mentoring (WAM) program matches students with disability to a mentor currently employed in the student's field of interest.

The program involves eight face to face meetings over a three-month period, with a graduation ceremony upon completion of the program.

### Focus of sessions:

- exploration of the industry or career path the student is interested in
- interview skills and strategies to increase employment opportunities
- workplace culture
- improving presentation skills and projecting a confident image
- disclosure of disability
- disability awareness in the workplace
- reasonable adjustments/accommodations in the workplace.

WAM can assist students to develop personal and professional strategies to assist in career progression, as well as increase confidence in a professional environment. The program also provides students with a better understanding of their chosen field and allows them to ascertain how (or if) their disability will affect their future careers.

# CRS Australia - Helping People Back Into Work!

CRS Australia is the largest provider of vocational rehabilitation in Australia. They assist job seekers to build on their abilities and manage the effects of their disability so they can get or keep a job. If your disability, injury or health condition is affecting your ability to get or keep a job, CRS Australia can help.

#### Who can they help?

CRS Australia has experience helping people manage a wide range of conditions, such as:

- muscular or joint conditions, eg. lower back pain
- mental health conditions, eg. anxiety, depression, psychosis
- hearing or vision loss
- medical conditions, eg. diabetes, chronic fatigue syndrome.

### How do they help?

A CRS Australia job seeker receives individual support from a professionally trained rehabilitation consultant. The consultant helps the job seeker to:

- identify their abilities and their goals
- identify services to address barriers caused by their condition
- prepare a plan of activities, including job seeking, to help manage the effects of their condition
- prepare for work and seek suitable jobs
- settle into their job, with support given for up to six months following a job placement.

Services are at no cost to people on income support from Centrelink. Eligibility criteria do apply.

#### How do I access their service?

If you have barriers to employment, you are required to have a Job Capacity Assessment (JCA). You can register for a JCA by calling CRS Australia. A JCA will determine the most appropriate employment assistance program for you. Where the assessment determines a need for vocational rehabilitation, you can request to be referred to CRS Australia.

### Regional Disability Liaison Officers (RDLO) and Disability Coordination Officers (DCO)

The RDLO and DCO programs are Australiawide and aim to facilitate the transition of people with disability from school or the community into post-secondary education and training, and then onto subsequent employment.

The programs operate as one network of local officers who can provide:

- information and advice on post-secondary education and training options, supports and services in your region
- assistance in understanding the transition to post-secondary education and training and employment
- links with appropriate people in your region to help you plan for and make a successful entry into further study and employment
- advocacy to improve your region's services.

# National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Program

The aim of the new NDCO program is to overcome the barriers that people with disability experience in gaining access to, and successfully completing, university study or vocational education, especially in regional, rural and remote Australia.

The program will fund a comprehensive national network consisting of 31 coordination officers. These officers will offer information, coordination and referral services for people with a disability who are interested in, or enrolled in, post-school education and training. At the time of writing the program was due to commence operation on 1 January 2008.



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This booklet is one of a series produced by GCA and intended for use by Careers Advisory Services in Higher Education in Australia. The booklets will also be of interest to secondary students and others considering further study. A full list of titles is available on the GCA website –

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Our graduates are treated like employees and their opinions count from day one. We believe in mentoring, training, a healthy work-life balance and we offer competitive salaries.

Graduates can choose between two programs. The Generalist Program will give you a taste of different business areas to see what suits you and our Specialist Program lets you focus on your chosen field. If you do have a disability that you want to tell us about,

please refer to this on your application so that we can support your specific needs.

Whichever program you choose, you'll get the support to go further, sooner.

For more info and to apply for Westpac graduate opportunities please visit westpac.com.au/graduates

Your future is our future