


Helping disabled students move into the workforce

LINK Principles for Career and Guidance Counsellors

These principles are intended for counsellors offering advice on educational, vocational and social issues to enhance positive educational experiences and career pathways for disabled students¹. Included with each set of principles are links to resources, free online courses, or quotes from students to help the understanding of each principle.

 Resource

 Free Course

 Quote



Create an accepting and inclusive 'safe space' for students.

It is important to establish trust so that students are comfortable to share (disclose) information about their disabilities and needs openly and without fear of judgement or rejection. Keep in mind that AHEAD research suggests that 10% of the student body are disabled but not all are registered with support services. Creating a 'safe space' (either virtual or face to face) and removing barriers for students to enter it is extremely important.



[AHEAD Ireland's Guide to disclosure](#) might be helpful to see different perspectives and enable you to better facilitate students and potential employers in this area.



To gain a basic understanding of disability and inclusion AHEAD has a free course [Disability 101: Awareness, Inclusion, and Equity](#) available to all.

2

Everyone matters – acknowledge the barriers but focus on the skills and talents of disabled students.

In the efforts to support the students we may sometimes get too caught up in what barriers the student faces, often focusing more on what they cannot do rather than on what they can. Instead, try to highlight students' talents, skills, and knowledge and help them find ways to present these to employers.



The Realist Academie project from the Netherlands can serve as a nice example on how to help students best prepare for the job search and the world of work.



“I find it very frustrating when people start questioning if my personal assistant is doing the work instead of me. My assistant is there to help me, I am doing the work that the employer expects from me. My assistant is not a translator and interpreter, I am.”

– A student with visual impairment from Slovenia

3

Students must be consulted on what they need – ensure that the student voice is heard.

It is good to talk to students and inquire what strategies they are already using to overcome the environmental (physical, societal, informational, etc.) challenges they face. It is important that we do not assume that a person needs certain support based solely on their disability, as needs and adjustments differ significantly from one person to another. Similarly, it is important that we listen to and act on students' opinions and preferences, putting their voice at the centre of their career journey.



Ireland's National Student Engagement Programme is a great example of harnessing and using student voice to create positive and meaningful changes in education. NStEP | National Student Engagement Programme



“I remember that when I was being evaluated for workplace adaptations, they came up with a list of assistive aids I really didn’t think I needed. I have tried some of those already during my studies but they didn’t prove to be helpful.”

– A student with visual impairment from Slovenia

4

Provide practical tools for students throughout the student life cycle.

Learn and inform students about their disability related rights and obligations concerning their studies, work experience and future employment. Encourage them to participate in career building opportunities during their studies and help them build their student portfolio for potential employers. Similarly, gain knowledge of appropriate grants and employment schemes for disabled students and graduates and share them openly.



“Being part of the employment support group at DSIS is excellent, since I can hear experiences from those who are already employed and how they navigated this job search and disability sharing (disclosure) and workplace adaptations. It is quite a jungle to get through different websites, regulations and practices. I wish it would all be in one place.”

– A student with a hearing impairment



“The only work experience I got during studies was two weeks of practical traineeship. It was hard to find an organization who would host me. I was really grateful when DŠIS helped to find me a placement.”

– A student with mobility impairment from Slovenia

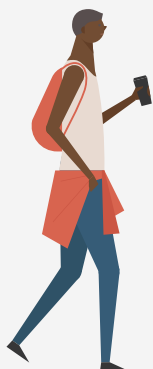


One AHEAD study cites that 65% of graduates with disabilities had never availed of any reasonable accommodation related grants, even though the funding was available to them ([AHEAD Submission on the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and Associated Grants](#)). The majority surveyed cited not being aware that these funding streams existed.



“I never knew they (funds for reasonable accommodations) existed. It would be good if there was more information on it.”

– A disabled student in Ireland



5

Foster inclusive approaches within and between organisations – university bodies, employers, municipality, etc.

Seek, develop, and harness relationships with outside organizations as well as employers to help strengthen opportunities for disabled students and graduates. Relationships like these can be mutually beneficial, but always make sure that the students' voice is the priority.



In the Netherlands, this cooperation is encouraged with the Bridge of Fame award.



In Ireland, AHEAD's WAM programme partners with hundreds of organisations to promote access to the labour market for graduates with disabilities and build the capacity of employers to integrate disability into the mainstream workplace.

6

Remember intersectionality – students have multiple facets to their identity (disability, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, etc.)

Try to understand the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantages can compound themselves and create obstacles that are often not perceived on the surface.



You can read this article on the definition of intersectionality and why it's important to keep it in mind [Intersectionality – Definition and Discussion \(thoughtco.com\)](#)



“Not many people are aware that I am a lesbian. But it is a challenge in addition to being disabled and a woman in some circumstances. I feel this stigma in higher education, that being disabled is one thing, but I could at least be ‘straight’ and not make things worse for myself. I think our culture is still not very open to homosexuals.”

– A student with mobility impairment

7

Ensure that services and information you provide are standardised, inclusive, and as accessible to all (universally designed) as possible.

Remember that each student has their own accessibility requirements and that, when possible, we should aim to provide engagement choices for the students. Things like offering additional support and adjustments to your services and ensuring the digital information published on your websites and other platforms meets the accessibility legislation standards can help a greater number of students access your services.



Learn about the [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\) Guidelines](#) from CAST, an American organisation which seeks to limit the barriers that individual encounter in learning.



“I like it that we have an option to come to the career office or have the consultation online. Sometimes just the physical effort to go someplace is tiring. Having an online video call is much more comfortable and convenient.”

– A student with mobility impairment from Slovenia



AHEAD Ireland hosts an Accessibility and Recourse Know-how hub called ARK which includes a plethora of courses designed to help you become more accessible in your practices. Included in these are short 2-hour courses in an Introduction to UDL, Disability 101, and an introduction to Digital Accessibility, amongst others. Find out more on the [ARK Platform](#).



8

Develop feedback and self-assessment mechanisms and be willing to make changes to your practices. Listen to feedback to ensure that what you do is having a positive impact on students with disabilities and paving the way for wider policy change.

Collecting certain data on student engagement, success etc. and gathering students' experiences and feedback can be beneficial to improve services and to promote change on systemic levels at university or in national policies and practice. Ensure that what you do can be used to influence positive change both individually and on a wider scale.



1. The terms “students with disabilities” and “disabled students” are used interchangeably. The LINK network recognises that different terminology is prevalent and culturally dominant in different European regions and respects the right of individuals and communities to self-determine. The term “disabled students” is recognised by many within the disability rights movement in Europe to align with the social and human rights model of disability, as it is considered to impute that people with an impairment are disabled by barriers in the environment and society. However, we also recognise that others prefer the term “students with disabilities” to impute that they are first and foremost students as human beings entitled to human rights. This reflects the language used in the UNCRPD. Finally, we recognise that some people do not identify as being disabled. The interchanging language is intended to be inclusive and respectful of all.