

NCSEHE research findings: supporting mental health, academic success and employability of students with disability

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NCSEHE

National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University

Today's plan: Snapshots from three NCSEHE Equity Fellows

- “Mental health conditions and/or disability: students’ perceptions, identification, and implications for support provision”
Nicole Crawford (NCSEHE)
- “Meaningful jobs for graduates with disability: From luck to business as usual”
David Eckstein (Swinburne University)
- “Disability support in higher education”
Tim Pitman (Curtin University)

Mental health conditions and/or disability: students' perceptions, identification, and implications for support provision

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Research topic

Investigate proactive approaches to support the mental wellbeing of mature-aged undergraduate university students in/from regional and remote Australia



Illustration: Kombi & free wifi by Morag Porteous

Mixed methods

1. Australian Government: Department of Education, Skills and Employment data request in 2019
2. Student Survey (n=2,401) administered at universities around Australia (in Oct/Nov 2019)
3. Student Interviews (n=51): in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one (in Feb, 2020)

Table 1.

2018 Domestic Undergraduate Participation: proportion of students by geographical location and age (21+ commencers and all students, by first address

	All areas	Metro	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote / very remote
Disability (%), all ages	7.3	7.1	8.5	7.0	5.7
Disability (%), 21+	8.3	8.3	9.3	7.5	4.8

Table 2:
Study Survey

Question: Do you have a disability?	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	216	12.1
No	1535	86.0
Prefer not to answer	34	1.9
Total	1785	100
Question: Do you have a diagnosed medical condition?	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	522	29.2
No	1225	68.6
Prefer not to answer	38	2.1
Total	1785	100
Question: Do you have a diagnosed mental health condition?	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	554	31.0
No	1180	66.0
Prefer not to answer	53	3.0
Total	1787	100

Quote from research participant: Andrea (Interview 27)

And so I was just lucky enough to run into my English tutor, who I built a really lovely rapport with, and she just happened to say to me, you know, “Is everything okay today?” and I was, like, “No, it’s not”... And then she was the one that steered me towards ... the coordinator of disabilities, and I remember saying to my tutor “Oh, but I don’t have a disability,” and she goes, “Well, you kind of do but it’s a mental health one.” ... that’s when uni life became a bit more doable for me...

Quote from research participant: Ursula (Interview 33)

[A staff member at the regional campus] said, “You need to contact the student wellbeing people and you need to get an access plan,” I’m going, “Whoa, whoa, what is all this?” That actually led to me being ... recognised I had a condition that was impacting on my study, ... So yeah, but those six months were definitely impacting on my studies, you could see it on my grades. But then again, [the University] was quite helpful. I’d never heard about this student wellbeing access centre, had no idea. That was really awesome of them to do that.

What does this mean? What can we do? Take a whole-of-institution approach?

1. Promote our universities' Student Support Services
2. Importance of small actions from staff
 - a. Don't forget the impact of your actions – it's the little, kind, human things that really matter!
3. Support provision is complex and multi-faceted
 - a. Disability/Accessibility Services and Counselling Services can't do it all!
4. We all have a role to play – large or small:
 - a. Inclusive teaching practices; UDL; flexibility
 - b. Teaching and professional staff – guide/refer students to our university's Student Support Services
 - c. Teaching and professional staff – proactive approaches

Meaningful jobs for graduates with disability: From luck to business as usual

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Meaningful jobs for graduates with disability

From luck to business as usual

Service silos – a barrier to providing targeted careers support

Some improvement – but are we caught in a muddle?

Best sources of support – ALL STAFF

In your opinion, what are the best sources of support that help students with disability get the work they want after university?

ALL STAFF RESPONSES

Responses	%
University careers office	68.0%
Industry contact	56.0%
University disability support office	53.3%
University placement or internship office	51.3%
Friends/Peers	39.3%
Family	37.3%
Academic/teaching staff	36.0%

Best sources of support – STAFF RESPONSES BY ROLE

In your opinion, what are the best sources of support that help students with disability get the work they want after university?

STAFF RESPONSES BY ROLE

	Career staff	Disability staff	Other professional staff	Academic and teaching staff
University careers office	92.10%	77.80%	68.00%	36.10%
University disability support office	59.50%	33.30%	66.00%	44.40%
University placement or internship office	48.60%	77.80%	52.00%	33.30%
Academic/teaching staff	43.20%	22.20%	36.00%	38.90%
Friends/Peers	54.10%	25.90%	44.00%	27.80%
Family	43.20%	37.00%	36.00%	33.30%
Industry contact	54.10%	66.70%	56.00%	50.0%
Not sure	5.30%	7.40%	24.00%	19.40%

Best sources of support – STUDENT RESPONSES

In your opinion, what are the best sources of support for getting the work you want after university?

STUDENT
RESPONSES

Industry contact	43.30%
Academic/teaching staff	36.00%
University placement or internship office	35.20%
Not sure	32.70%
Friends/Peers	32.40%
University careers office	31.40%
University disability support office	29.40%
Family	21.40%

Careers and Disability – complementary professions

The careers theory foundation aligns with social models of disability

Work with psycho-social notions of professional identity

Develop students' professional self-sufficiency via their

- Personal motivation, meaning and choice
- Deep engagement with their core discipline
- View of the world and how they want to fit themselves into it

Both career and disability professionals support student

- engagement
- agency

Disability support in higher education

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About the survey

- Over 1,700 students with disability completed the survey.
- Students rated the disability support they received from their institutions.
- Students were also asked about the impact COVID-19 had on support

Key findings 1

- Universities rate better in respect of:
 - Attitudes (how they respond, act, behave).
 - Their processes for ensuring students with disability know what their rights are and what support they can receive.

Key findings 2

- Universities rate so-so in respect of:
 - The physical or built environment (access, room layout, lighting, furniture, etc.)
 - Technology – software and hardware support both for their own technology and the technology students with disability bring with them.

Key findings 3

- Universities rate worse in respect of:
 - Social inclusion (feeling included, a part of university life, etc.)
 - Communication (how information, teaching and learning is imparted)

The impact of COVID-19

- COVID-19 has negatively affected disability support.
- This impact has worsened as the pandemic dragged on.
- However, some students found options (e.g. being able to study online) that were not available until the pandemic forced universities to respond.

Regional students with disability: key issues

1. Access to specialist services.
2. The digital divide.
3. Support services at regional universities.

Recommendations

1. Greater adoption of Universal Design Learning principles is required.
2. Mandatory disability awareness training for all staff.

Thank you!

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