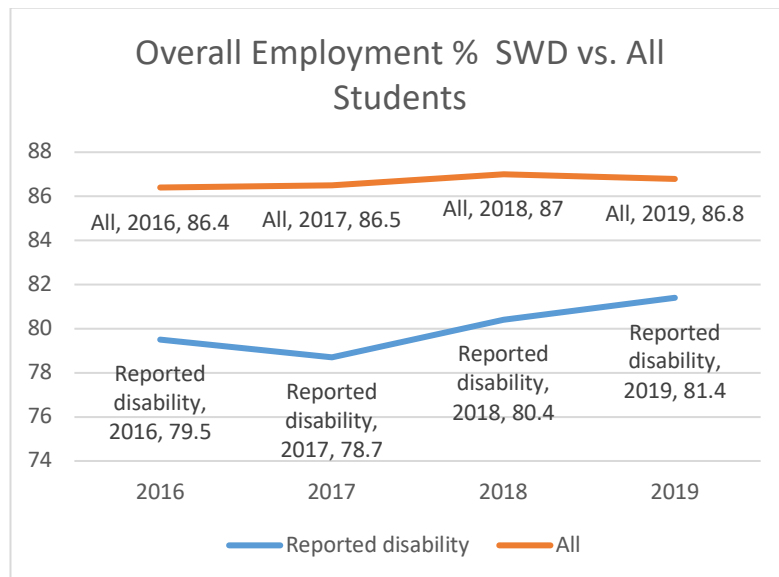


## Higher Education Employment Outcomes - Students with Disability

The Covid-19 pandemic in Australia is showing a flattening of the curve and we are cautiously starting to look toward the future. With all of this under consideration, there is a looming issue that is boiling away in the background; when the next round of students make it through graduation - what does work look like? Along with this, what will be the impacts for students with disability and what systemic innovations can we produce for this talented pool of graduates to level the field?

**Graduate Outcome Context:** Deep within the 2019 Graduate Outcomes Survey data table, tucked neatly away in “Table 15” sits the student equity data – employment outcomes<sup>1</sup>. This data didn’t make the report<sup>2</sup>, however, there was some positive news in the data tables for graduates with disability pre-Covid-19.

When you sort the results for equity groups from ‘highest to lowest’ for overall employment rates in 2019, students with disability sit in position #15 of 16. Students with disability remain the second lowest performing equity group in higher education when it comes to getting work as of 2019, and they were also the fastest growing equity group across 2013-2018, with a growth rate of 50% (all students grew by 12.6%)<sup>3</sup>. Positively though, students with disability did make a 3.8% gain in full time employment from 2018-2019 and future trends show this continuing.



<sup>1</sup> [https://www.qilt.edu.au/docs/default-source/gos-reports/2019-gos/2019-gos-national-tablesd73b8891b1e86477b58fff00006709da.xlsx?sfvrsn=ccceec3c\\_16](https://www.qilt.edu.au/docs/default-source/gos-reports/2019-gos/2019-gos-national-tablesd73b8891b1e86477b58fff00006709da.xlsx?sfvrsn=ccceec3c_16)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.qilt.edu.au/docs/default-source/gos-reports/2019-gos/2019-gos-national-report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NCSEHE-Equity-Student-Briefing-Note\\_2013-18\\_Accessible\\_Final.pdf](http://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NCSEHE-Equity-Student-Briefing-Note_2013-18_Accessible_Final.pdf)

**So what's next? Innovation and Practice.** Here are some thought-starters for graduate employers when it comes to employment of students with disability and providing advice into the future. Workforces have been forced to be more flexible overnight with a recent poll showing 88% of Australian companies have required or encouraged remote working<sup>4</sup>. This strategy may pave the way for increased opportunities for students with disability. Consider:

- Many adjustment requests from employees with disability are about flexible time and environments<sup>5</sup>. One US sample of 2,744 employer adjustments showed 58% cost nothing and was a decision only, and where there was a cost the average cost was \$500<sup>6</sup>. Is it possible to un-demonstrate flexible practices implemented during Covid-19?
- The interview, eye contact and the handshake: perhaps it is time to reconsider how we assess people to find out if they are the right fit for the role (as a whole employment strategy, not just as a reasonable adjustment). Consider assessments based on allocating a task that reflects the work produced, and asking the graduate to complete this in a way that works for them. This has been happening pre Covid-19, in some instances focusing on graduates on the autism spectrum, however the concept is actually about setting up a recruitment space where all people can bring their best self forward.
- Getting information to students: Many students will have missed out on career fairs, large meetings, and many other opportunities to connect with employers. These platforms for some students with disability may not have been the best mediums. Can we consider a Universal Design for how we share this information – multi modal – online, offline, all the time?
- Encouraging openness for a purpose: Employers, share key messaging about the types of adjustments available and how the workplace cares about what the employee produces, not where, how or when (unless of course, that is critical to your operations e.g. manufacturing).
- It is time to uncouple perceptions of movement and activity from the measurement of success or lack thereof in our employees. We should continue to hire people for their potential output, not for the appearance of somebody in an office rushing around looking busy.

It is evident that all the inclusive practices and policies you and your fellow colleagues have implemented is working, as we have seen an increase in full time employment for people with disability over the last 3 years. Well done. The University Specialist Employment Partnership (USEP) can help you ponder the above questions and assist you to continue building on your capability to increase graduates with disability in your workplace. USEP can also help you start this journey and enjoy the wide ranging benefits of a diverse workplace.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cmo.com.au/article/672072/report-most-australian-employees-work-from-home/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/sites/default/files/2.4%20Reasonable%20adjustments.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://askjan.org/topics/costs.cfm>

The University Specialist Employment Partnerships is an initiative that has been developed with and for graduates with disability. USEP is designed to improve rates of employment for students after university. The aim is to provide a free, specialised service for graduates wishing to access support while studying to obtain graduate employment. If your organisation is looking to connect early with new graduates in a wide range of discipline areas, consider the USEP initiative to find the right candidate for your workplace. USEP consultants can also help you with ideas for innovative and inclusive recruitment practices. If you want a workforce that better reflects the community you serve, you can find out more information on USEP at [www.usep.com.au](http://www.usep.com.au) and build your level of disability awareness and confidence through the free online disability awareness training at [www.disabilityawareness.com.au](http://www.disabilityawareness.com.au).