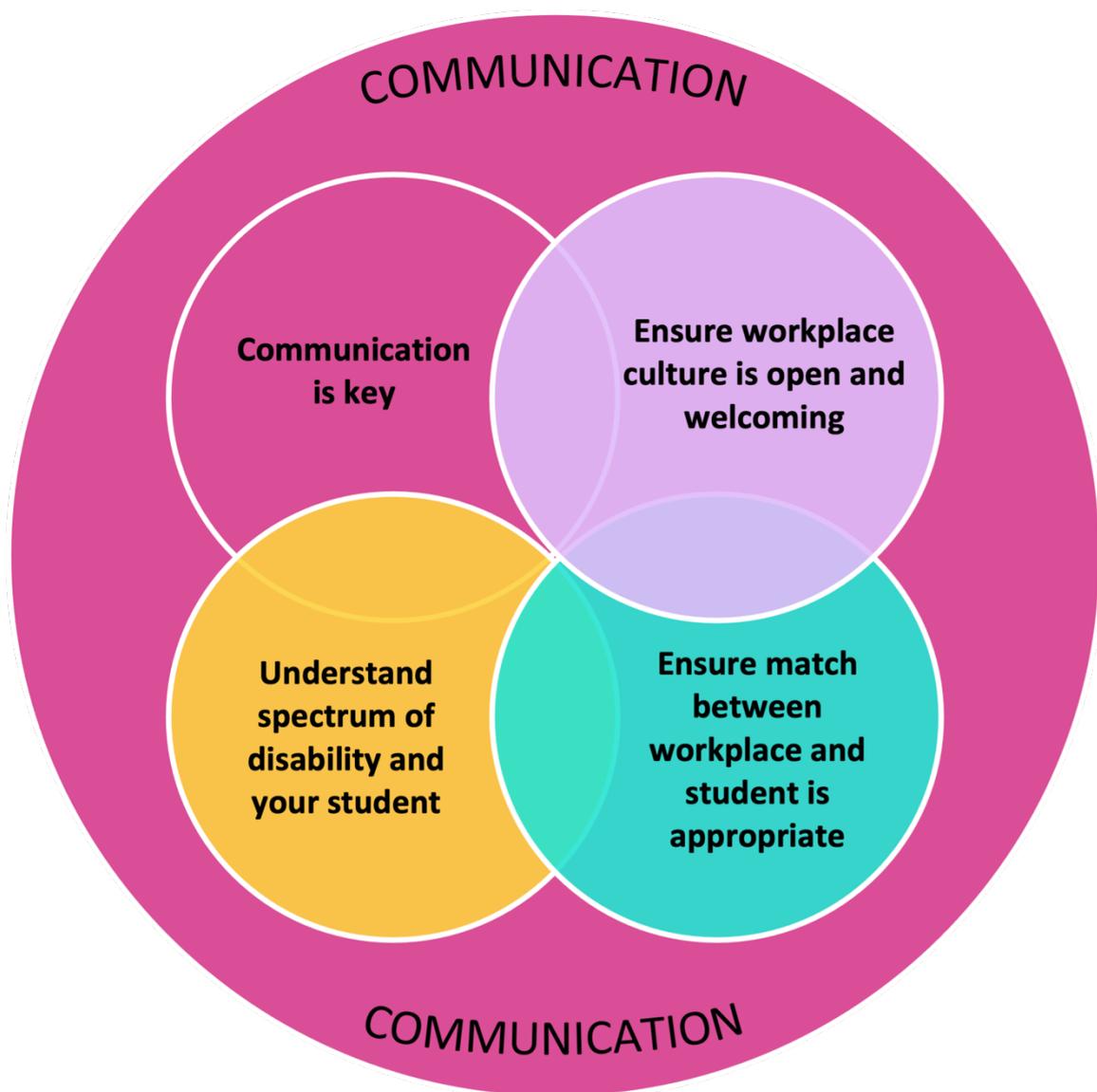


Messages from employers: Hosting students with disability in your workplace

These guidelines are based on interviews with employers who host school-based VET students with disability for work placements and their school coordinators, expert input from an Advisory Group and other literature.



COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Clear and open communication is a must! Communicate with the school, your student and your staff about the work placement.

- Ask the school if the student has disclosed any disabilities and how you can best support them.
- Ask your student if there is anything they would like you to know about them and how they think you can best support them.
- Talk with your staff about supporting the student and their needs.

When communication is flowing, it is easier to create a positive experience for all involved

These are some of the behaviours that I might exhibit that are a bit not what you would expect from a neurotypical person. So, for instance, my voice might get really flat. I might stare off into nothing. I might hunch up and start flinching. When that happens, this is what you should do, or what you can do, and what it means. I'm not mad at you. I just need a minute. And if you've got concerns, this is what you do to go around it. And then, things that you can do that help are X. – Employer

What does your best day look like and what does your worst day look like? What are some things about you that are different or what are some things about you that you'd like us to know? – Employer

Identify strengths and weaknesses and then we teach young people by example and directly how to talk about their needs and triggers and what will happen and then what other people can do to respond in that situation. – Employer

What's a normal thing that can happen in your daily life and how do we respond around that, I think would be really key. And, I think, what's your worst-case scenario, and what do we do, I think is really helpful too. For instance, when I have a seizure, you don't call an ambulance because... And making sure that that information, if there is anything complex, is easy to find. And easy to note. – Employer

ENSURE WORKPLACE CULTURE IS OPEN AND WELCOMING

An open and welcoming workplace culture contributes to successful work placements. Focus on both the social and physical/built aspects of your workplace.

“ It’s normal to have a need. It’s normal to need an [adjustment] of some description. And it’s normal to need help. – Employer ”

Social focus: relationship building

“ ...if we have [a student] come in, they’re really sort of designated to one person, with the support of another person. So, we want to make sure that they’re okay when they come in, and we’ll generally try and pick our more senior team that can work with that person, or someone that we think will relate quite well to them. – Employer ”

“ And then, we meet with the student and their caseworker prior to them coming here. And we go through all the expectations, so that we’re setting the scene before they get here. So that, when they get here, they feel comfortable already. – Employer ”

Physical focus: Accessibility for student

“ Mak[e] sure that [students are] introduced to the space prior to starting. – Employer ”

“ The other real element [is] around safety. You may have someone on the spectrum or someone that has OCD type tendencies that might like to touch things. We’ve got a young man that we’ve had to do a lot of work with around him wanting to touch. He tracks. So, if he’s going from one place to another, once he learns one way of doing it, that’s the way he goes all the time. And he’ll rub his hand along every shelf, every piece of linen, everything from point A to point B. And even if point A to B, the direct route might be five steps, but if he’s actually been the other way and it’s 50 steps, that’s the way he’ll go. – Employer ”

UNDERSTAND SPECTRUM OF DISABILITY AND YOUR STUDENT

Understanding the spectrum of disabilities and your student’s needs helps. Tasmania has the highest rate of disability in Australia at 26.8%.¹ It is very likely that there’s already someone with disability already on your staff and/or staff have some exposure around disability needs through their personal lives.

1. Premier’s Disability Advisory Council, 2020

BROAD CATEGORIES OF DISABILITY:

- Chronic medical conditions
- Mental health
- Learning disabilities
- Intellectual disabilities
- Neurological conditions
- Physical disabilities
- Sensory disabilities

For further information about each of these categories, see <https://www.adcet.edu.au/students-with-disability/disability-and-discrimination/disability-types>. This organisation also provides information about supporting people with disability.



There’s a difference between an intellectual disability and a physical disability. An opportunity for someone to go shadow a receptionist isn’t usually something that someone with a disability is given. They’re given more hands on, let’s go to the op shop. Let’s go wash clothes. Let’s go do something physical. Even sweep hair. So, I think that not narrowing the scope on disability opportunities is really key. – *Employer*



[In Tasmania] most families have some exposure and really quite profound exposure around disability needs. – *Teacher*



...everybody is different. I have employees with disability that are highly intelligent but have barriers to employment through other areas, especially if you’re talking someone that’s, say, on the spectrum. We have other students with Downs. We have others that are sitting in the intellectual disability area. Others that are within mental health. So, it really does depend on the person. So, the supports need to be appropriate to the person. – *Employer*



MAKE SURE THERE IS A GOOD MATCH BETWEEN STUDENT AND WORK PLACEMENT

You should talk with your student to design the work placement if possible. Try to meet your student ahead of time, introduce them to your workplace, and discuss goals and supports: this leads to successful experiences.

Communicate with school and student

COMMUNICATE WITH THE SCHOOL

- First, work with your school contact person on the Contract/ 4 Way Communication Agreement or similar document
- Ask the school about students with disability, reach out for help, recognising that not all students have been diagnosed or have disclosed their conditions
- Ask is there anything I should know about the student?

THINGS YOU CAN ASK YOUR STUDENT

- What does your best day look like and what does your worst day look like?
- What are some things about you that are different or what are some things about you that you'd like us to know? or What are some things about you that are different?
- What are your goals while you are here and how can we help you meet them?

Co-design work experience placement

BB ...focus on not so much what they can't do but what they can do. Capability is such a big thing.
– Employer

BB ...Sitting down together and working out what the plan is for daily tasks and how they learn, how they're going to feel comfortable and then, obviously, those things like what your goals will be while you're here and what your needs are so that we can help meet them. Co-design really means working together. The employer and the student. – Employer

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Looking to the future: Financial incentives for employers (not for work placements)

Looking beyond work placements, there are several programs in place to support employers who hire people with disability. In addition to information and training modules, the following programs offer financial support as well.

Disability Employment Australia

http://guide.disabilityemployment.org.au/resources/employer_incentives_and_financial_assistance

Department of Social Services

https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/09_2014/employers_guide_to_employing_someone_with_disability_0.pdf

JobAccess

<https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/home>

Outlook Australia

<https://www.outlookaust.org.au/outlook-incentives-and-schemes>

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

<https://www.dewr.gov.au/employment/financial-incentives-business>

Leap in!

<https://www.leapin.com.au/resources/inclusive-employment-assistance-support/>

Premier's Disability Advisory Council

Premier's Disability Advisory Council. (2020). Accessible Island: Tasmania's Disability Framework for Action 2018-2021 Annual Report on Agency Implementation. Hobart, Tasmania: Premier's Disability Advisory Council. https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/94105/PDAC-2019-Review-Implementation-Accessible-Island.pdf