Career development learning for students with disability

Audit of Current Practice

January 2023

Acknowledgements

The project aimed to critically engage with existing good practice in CDL for students with disability and then develop, pilot and showcase further examples of best practice programs and resources to complement what already exists. The first stage of this process was a review of key literature and composition of this audit report.

We thank the broader project team for their contributions. The full team are:

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Contents

Introduction

This audit is one of the outputs from the project: National Career Development Learning Hub for Students with Disability. This research project was funded by the National Careers Institute (NCI) Partnership grant and aims to articulate best practices for supporting students with disability[1] in seeking employment outcomes. To achieve this overarching objective, the project has drawn upon the field of career development learning (CDL), which can be defined as:

> learning about the content and process of career development or life/career management. The content of career development learning in essence represents learning about self and learning about the world of work. (McMahon, Patton, & Tatham, 2003, p. 6)

It is important to note that CDL is quite distinct to employment services. Employment services specifically focus on providing employment opportunities to individuals, whereas CDL focuses on the career and life balance, creating learning opportunities for individuals to develop knowledge and skills about the world of work. For the audit, programs that were specific to employment services were not included as they did not represent the broader concept of CDL.

The following section discusses the methodology applied for the audit.

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[1] Note: In this report and other resources in the CDL Hub, we have opted for the "person-first" terminology of person or student "with disability" rather than identity-first language (e.g. disabled, autistic) (Young, 2022). However, we acknowledge that within the disability community there is a range of ways that people identify with disability or disabilities, which are "diverse and individualised" and that language around disability is "constantly evolving" (Young, 2022, n.p.).

Methodology

The purpose of the audit was to understand the range of CDL programs that exist across the student life cycle, focusing on programs that are specific to students with disability and that demonstrate best practice. The term "program" in this paper is used generically to define a suite of resources and activities that support CDL for students with disability. The audit consisted of obtaining the names of current CDL programs and initiatives for students with disability through three activities: (1) an online search, (2) referrals from interviews and surveys, and (3) review of the literature.

The online, desktop search initially found 53 programs. Information about the programs was located and organised into a spreadsheet to record the following information:

- Program name
- Organisation name
- Website URL
- Overview of the program
- Education level/stage
- Overview of the program objectives
- Whether the program is specific for people with disability
- Whether the program supports all disability types or a specific disability
- Comments about who the program caters for
- The type of support strategy used
- Best practice principles
- Evidence of evaluation data available for the program
- Other notes (e.g. nationwide, state specific).

This initial list of programs was further informed by referrals provided in surveys and video interviews with three groups of stakeholder participants: students with disability; parents and carers of students with disability; and key stakeholders across practice, research, advocacy and leadership. One hundred and fifty-six individuals participated in this stage and each was asked to identify any CDL programs for students with disability that they had been involved in. Twenty-six additional programs were added to the audit as a result of this process.

The final list of programs was further informed by a concurrent literature activity undertaken under the auspices of the research grant, which resulted in another 17 programs added to the audit list.

Each of these 96 programs was carefully filtered through the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1). The criteria focused on capturing CDL programs that were Australian and currently in operation, and excluded those that operated in more limited ways (e.g. as

employment services). Based on these criteria, a final list of 12 relevant programs was established for this audit report.

Table 1: Audit inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
CDL programs in Australia with disability focus	CDL programs internationally with disability focus
Reference to life/career management	Job or employment services or websites
Reference to learning about the world of work	Skills-based resources rather than learning about self and interests and career directions
University career development programs for students with disability	General websites with CDL
State education departments CDL for students with disability	
Secondary and senior secondary school programs	
Early childhood and primary school programs for students with disability, or can be adapted to students with disability	
Current programs only	

Findings

Definitions of disability are broad, and many CDL programs deliberately embrace this diversity. Equally, a number of CDL programs are specific to a form of disability or to a particular age range. This diversity and specialisation are complementary and provide for a range of approaches to meeting the CDL needs of students with disability.

Each of the final 12 programs meeting the criteria were specific to students with disability, based in Australia and in operation at the time of the audit. All of them featured CDL resources.

The programs were also categorised according target audiences. The student life cycle stage representing specific levels of schooling in the Australian education sector includes:

- early childhood and primary school
- high school and senior high school
- tertiary (vocational education [VET] and higher education).

Others were targeted to meet the needs of a specific disability, such as:

- autism specific
- mental health specific
- intellectual disability specific

Table 2 provides a summary of the programs.

Table 2: CDL program summary

Name of program	Location	School level or disability specialisation
Little Ripples career resources for parents	National	Early childhood and primary school
Victoria Department of Education and Training	Victoria	High school and senior high school
Black Mountain School	Canberra, ACT	High school and senior high school
Future Choices Virtual Transition Expo	Regional NSW and ACT	High school and senior high school
ANU EmployAbility Hub	Canberra, ACT	Tertiary
Swinburne University	Victoria	Tertiary
University Specialist Employment Partnerships	National	Tertiary
TAFE Specialist Employment Partnerships	National	Tertiary
Australian Network on Disability	National	Tertiary

Name of program	Location	School level or disability specialisation
myWAY Employability	National	Autism
Headspace	National	Mental health
Imagine More	Canberra, ACT	Intellectual disability

The following sections outline the CDL programs including key information about each and how they are underpinned by CDL principles; these emphasise the importance of work/life balance, learning about self and learning about work, as defined by McMahon, Patton and Tatham (2003).

Early childhood and primary school

Little Ripples career resources for parents

Key points: Career resources for parents of primary school aged children

Web: https://www.yourcareer.gov.au/get-career-resources/little-ripples/

Location: National, Australia

Keywords: CDL, parents, primary school

The Little Ripples career resources have been developed by the National Careers Institute and the Career Industry Council of Australia for parents of children in primary school and are available for download from the YourCareer website.

The resources include conversation cards and activity sheets. The cards promote conversations around career aspirations as well as articulating pathways to that career. Career questions include "What activities make you feel happy?" and "What is your favourite thing to do in the world and how can you keep doing this when you grow up?" The activity sheets use a visual medium to help children envision their future careers. Examples of this include drawing with coloured pencils or creating a vision board with images from the print media.

This resource is not specific to students with disability as it is a program for all students in primary school. However, it has been included as it is the only resource found that targets this age group in Australia.

CDL underpins the Little Ripples resources in guiding parents to help their children to learn more about themselves and about the world of work. A variety of video and written resources make use of stories, activities and conversation starters to appeal to children of primary school age.

High school and senior high school

Victoria Department of Education and Training

> Key points: Career education guides
>
> Web: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/Pages/disabilitypathways.aspx
>
> Location: Victoria, Australia
>
> Key words: CDL, secondary school, students with disability, teachers, parents

The Victorian State Government Department of Education and Training career education resources for students with disability site includes information about:

- preparing for workplace learning
- specific career guides
- a framework for engaging parents in career conversations
- workplace learning resources
- support services for students with disability in accessing their career.

The resources suggest that when preparing for workplace learning, early preparation and planning is important for students with disability. This planning should start from Year 7 to support life-skill development, social inclusion and career aspiration.

Career guides on the website provide advice for teachers and career practitioners, for students, and for parents and carers. These guides focus on the student creating a profile of their strengths, experiences, interests and goals. The parent guide focuses on personalised learning such as work experience, structured workplace learning, and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs).

Tools are provided to parents for engaging their child in career conversations. Likewise, career conversations are advocated for at key transition points for students, such as the transition between primary and secondary school, Year 10 to Year 11 senior school, and Year 12 and beyond. The PowerPoint presentations have targeted audiences including students with disability, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students with English as an additional language.

The workplace learning resources featured on the website are designed to assist schools to run in-house workplace learning programs and help students to prepare for work experience. Lastly, a list of support services is provided. These support services include the National Disability Insurance Scheme, National Disability Coordination Officers and Job Access.

The resources on this site provide information for students, parents and carers, teachers and career practitioners and are specific to supporting students with disability within the Australian school context.

This program reflects CDL underpinnings through its design, which uses a strengths-based approach. The resources are designed to encourage and guide students in becoming self-aware of their career aspirations. Similarly, resources are provided for others to support students in their career decision-making.

Black Mountain School

Key points: Bespoke vocational planning for students with disability

Web: https://www.bms.act.edu.au/

Location: ACT, Australia

Key words: CDL, secondary school, students with disability, learning goals, vocational skills

Black Mountain School is a school for secondary school students with disability in the Canberra area, and the CDL opportunities are specific to these students. Each student has their own Personal Futures Action Plan (PFAP) that is designed to guide them throughout their education and beyond school. The students are divided into four streams depending on their PFAP learning goals. The four streams are Engage, Link, Compass and Connect. Within the Connect stream, there is a focus on honing vocational skills in senior students, which supports post-school transition. The vocational skills include hospitality, horticulture and art. These components are supported through hands-on experience in a partner business such as a café, a nursery and an "ArtWorks" program. Additionally, students have access to a work experience program facilitated by community partnerships. Work experience includes office and clerical work as well as hospitality.

The PFAP and the work experience component supports students with disability to explore career options within a supported environment. These resources are accessible to students from Black Mountain School.

It is acknowledged that while there may be a number of other schools specific to students with disability, the limitations of the online search did not locate these nor their programs.

The programs and supports at Black Mountain School are underpinned by CDL principles through foregrounding individuals' strengths and capabilities, and providing disability-inclusive partnerships between students and the business community.

Future Choices Virtual Transition Expo

> Key points: A virtual expo for students with disability transitioning from education to employment and careers
>
> Web: https://futurechoices.vfairs.com/
>
> Location: Regional, rural and remote NSW and ACT
>
> Key words: CDL, students with disability, career expo

The Future Choices Virtual Transition Expo is an annual event conducted virtually. This event allows greater accessibility to geographically remote students in regional, rural and remote NSW and ACT, as well as those whose disability limits travel or movement, including students with sensory needs.

The Future Choices Virtual Transitions Expo is supported by more than 100 exhibitors who provide employment and careers services, education and training, disability services and community services. The careers services are tailored for students with disability who are in the senior years of secondary school, VET graduates and university graduates. The expo is also relevant for education staff who support students with disability in their transition between education and employment, and service providers who are looking for CDL information to support students transitioning to employment. The Future Choices Virtual Transition Expo provides CDL to students with disability, and to their families and carers. The expo is targeted at students who may experience geographical disadvantage.

The Future Choices Virtual Transition Expo demonstrates principles of CDL through the accessible nature of the resources that cater to students with disability from non-urban areas, as well as through its promotion of a longitudinal approach to CDL that supports career decision-making.

Tertiary (VET and university)

ANU EmployAbility Hub

> Key points: A careers and employment hub for university students with disability
>
> Web: https://www.anu.edu.au/anu-employability-hub
>
> Location: ANU University
>
> Key words: CDL, students with disability, tertiary sector

The ANU EmployAbility Hub provides support for students with disability, illness or injury as they transition from education to employment. The resources in the EmployAbility Hub include:

- GradWISE
- internships
- Neurodiversity Hub
- Careers Toolkit
- ANU CareerHub.

The ANU EmployAbility Hub partners with GradWISE to support and enhance employment for students with disability. The GradWISE program uses a one-on-one coaching method where students work with the coach to access a job that is the right fit. GradWISE also collaborates with employers to ensure that the student's placement is successful for both the employer and the student.

Similarly, the ANU EmployAbility Hub partners with the Australian Network on Disability to provide paid internships to students with disability where they gain access to employment and employability skills. This program is called Stepping Into Internship, and there are a range of positions within the government and private sector.

The Neurodiversity Hub is specifically for students with autism or other neurodiverse conditions. It is a program external to ANU. It recognises the strengths and potential of neurodivergent individuals, alongside acknowledging the challenges that this cohort experiences when seeking employment. The Neurodiversity Hub provides work experience, internships and paid employment possibilities.

The Careers Toolkit is an online medium, generic to all students and designed to build employability skills. The toolkit includes virtual lectures, modules, tips on building a CV, and interactive programs. These resources enable the student to take the initiative in their own career journey. Similarly, the ANU CareerHub is accessible to all students, and includes listings of jobs, access to career resources and a facility for booking an appointment with a career advisor.

The EmployAbility Hub has been included as it provides a large range of CDL resources for students with disability at ANU as they transition from education to employment. The EmployAbility Hub provides face-to-face services as well as online resources. The ANU EmployAbility Hub has been underpinned by disability-confident career and education practitioners, which links to individuals' strengths and capabilities.

Swinburne University AccessAbility Careers Hub

Key points: A careers and employment hub for university students with disability

Web: https://www.swinburne.edu.au/life-at-swinburne/student-support-services/accessibility-services/use-the-accessability-careers-hub/

Location: Swinburne University

Key words: CDL, students with disability, tertiary sector

[Swinburne University's AccessAbility Careers Hub](#) (2022) provides resources to students with disability to develop career management and employability skills. These resources include access to consultants who work with students with disability to identity career goals, and to network with employers.

Other resources within the AccessAbility Careers Hub include:

- workshops and events
- student community of practice
- GradWISE program at Swinburne
- student stories.

The workshops and events are held as webinars and face-to-face sessions and focus on key career management issues. In addition, there is a mid-year AccessAbility Careers Hub Panel Discussion and Expo for students with disability.

A community of practice at the AccessAbility Careers Hub is open to students with disability to provide answers to career questions. It also offers an opportunity for students to discuss career issues with peers. The community of practice was designed to be a supportive environment for students and includes engagement with prospective employers at a provided lunch.

Additionally, Swinburne University partners with GradWISE to provide casual, part-time and graduate employment opportunities. The program is external to Swinburne University but is accessible to students with disability.

Lastly, the AccessAbility Careers Hub includes student stories based on the faculty they belong to. These stories highlight the success of their placement or internship with an employer and how it has influenced their career and study.

The Swinburne University AccessAbility Careers Hub offers students with disability CDL specific to disability and employment. The range of resources and options allows students to tailor the resources to suit their situation and stage of study and career.

The CDL underpinnings for this suite of resources centre around being disability-inclusive and focusing on the strengths and capabilities of students with disability.

University Specialist Employment Partnerships

Key points: An employment and careers partnership with universities

Web: https://www.usep.com.au/

Location: National, Australia

Key words: CDL, careers, employment, university

The [University Specialist Employment Partnerships](link) (USEP) program is a collaboration between universities and local disability employment services such as Disability Employment Service (DES) and employers and industry to assist tertiary students with disability to find employment relevant to their studies. USEP consultants are located on university campuses and are accessible to students in their final year of study or following recent graduation.

USEP, in collaboration with other organisations, provides CDL to university students and graduates. This service is accessible to across university campuses nationally. Part of the CDL support includes a toolkit for USEP partnerships and contains information for students about their rights and responsibilities in the workforce, and in disclosing their support needs in the workplace.

The target audiences for USEP are students and career development practitioners in universities across Australia.

CDL underpins USEP through disability-inclusive partnerships between students, industry and educational institutions.

TAFE Specialist Employment Partnerships

Key points: An employment and careers partnership with TAFE

Web: https://www.usep.com.au/tafe/

Location: National, Australia

Key words: CDL, careers, employment, TAFE

[TAFE Specialist Employment Partnerships](link) (TSEP) acknowledges that approximately 9% of its student population have disability. Similarly, the employment rate for TAFE graduates with disability is around 49% compared to TAFE students without disability, where the employment rate is around 74%.

The purpose of the TSEP program is to identify barriers to employment for TAFE graduates with disability and to provide specialist employment support. TSEP is based on TAFE campuses and assists students with disability to articulate and achieve career goals. TSEP partners with the TAFE careers and disability services, DES, the National Disability Coordination Officer and industry.

TSEP is specific to TAFE students with disability and uses a partnership approach to provide CDL and facilitate positive employment outcomes.

CDL underpins TSEP through disability-inclusive partnerships between students, industry and educational institutions. TSEP is also led by professional career practitioners, and it leverages existing knowledge and resources.

Australian Network on Disability

> Key points: A resource hub for job seekers with disability and employers
>
> Web: https://www.and.org.au/students-jobseekers/
>
> Location: National, Australia
>
> Key words: CDL, students with disability, employment, university

The Australian Network on Disability (AND) provides services and tools to employers to create an accessible and inclusive workplace for individuals with disability. AND also provides CDL to university students with disability who are seeking employment.

One of the CDL programs is the PACE mentoring program. PACE mentoring involves the student meeting with a mentor up to eight times across a four-month period. Mentor activities include mock interviews, networking with professionals, and crafting a résumé and cover letters.

The Stepping Into Intern program is part of the CDL offered through AND for students with disability in their final year of their university course. Internships are arranged for the winter or summer semester breaks and run for four weeks as part of a paid work-experience program.

The PACE mentoring and the Stepping Into Intern programs provide students with disability opportunities to network with professionals and to gain work skills.

The AND programs are underpinned by CDL through a focus on individual strengths and capabilities, as well as the provision of disability-inclusive partnerships between industry, students and educational institutions.

Autism

myWAY Employability

> Key points: An autism-specific CDL resource
>
> Web: https://www.mywayemployability.com.au/
>
> Location: National, Australia
>
> Key words: CDL, autism, employment

myWAY Employability – part of Autism CRC, which is a Cooperative Research Centre focused on autism – is funded by the Australian Government. The resources on the myWAY Employability website are specific to autistic young people. The resources focus on the identification of strengths, interests and work aspirations; goal setting; and matching education and training with career information.

The resources include:

- harnessing interests
- self-advocacy in the workplace
- preparing for the first day of work
- Open University and online courses
- addressing stress in the workplace.

In addition, the website is designed to be accessible with variations in colour and greyscale to accommodate for reader preference.

myWAY Employability provides CDL resources specific for autistic young people. The resources are presented in accessible text, are visually appealing and are designed to support the employment outcomes of young people with autism.

myWAY Employability takes a strengths-based approach to CDL o offer inclusive and accessible career information.

Mental health

Headspace

Key points: A mental-health-specific CDL resource

Web: https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/for-young-people/what-career-suits-me/

Location: National, Australia

Key words: CDL, mental health, young people, careers

Headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, supporting young people from 12 to 25 years of age. As part of mental health support, there is a study and work focus. The study and work components focus on planning a career, finding employment or engaging with further education. To facilitate this, Headspace offers young people access to career specialists in an online environment, free of additional costs.

Career specialists at Headspace provide information on:

writing cover letters and résumés
how to prepare for job interviews
balancing mental health with work or study
exploring study options.

Other online resources from Headspace include interactive activities with a strong visual focus to engage young people. These activities provide tips on preparing for work and transitioning from education to employment.

In addition, Headspace provides a mentoring service for young people ages 18 to 25 years. The mentoring is online and personalised, offering guidance on how to access the workforce.

Lastly, there is an Individual Placement and Support Program (IPS) where young people who are accessing mental health support can connect face-to-face with a vocational specialist to discuss work and study goals. The program is strengths-based and integrated with the existing mental health support being received, and it is individualised.

Headspace is located nationally in physical locations and online. It is a resource for young people to help manage mental health, and as part of overall wellbeing it provides CDL to young people. The CDL resources are individualised, visually appealing, accessible and led by disability-confident staff.

Intellectual disability

Imagine More

Key points: Advocacy and CDL support for families with intellectual disability

Web: https://imaginemore.org.au/resources/employment-and-microenterprise/

Location: Canberra, ACT

Key words: CDL, employment, disability, microenterprise

Imagine More supports individuals with intellectual disability and their families. The aim of Imagine More is to create a community where each individual is valued, included and able to contribute in meaningful ways.

The values of Imagine More include self-direction and agency where families are encouraged to be proactive; connection where networks and relationships provide many levels of support; inclusion in society; and support in decision making.

Imagine More also provides CDL to individuals with intellectual disability. CDL includes resources on finding work in a meaningful and valued role with award wages, resources about microenterprises, and stories of lived experience from individuals with disability in meaningful employment. Additional CDL resources are in the form of webinars and a conference (held every one to two years) led by a range of speakers who share best practice, insight and personal stories.

Imagine More provides CDL to individuals with disability in the form of online resources, webinars and conferences focused on the strengths of individuals, embedded in personal perspectives of CDL success.

Discussion

While this audit activity identified 96 current CDL programs for students with disability, only 12 programs specifically aligned to the criteria for the desktop audit. The criteria included CDL programs currently in operation with a disability focus and with evidence of CDL principles. The programs that were excluded were specific to employment or jobs, or they were skill-based resources that were not broadly aligned with CDL. The audit revealed certain gaps in programs informed by principles of CDL and available to individuals with disability, as follows:

- There was a limited selection of CDL informed programs specifically targeted at different types of disabilities. While programs were identified that related to individuals with autism, mental health conditions and intellectual disability, other specific-disability programs appeared to be absent. Due to the limitations of a desktop audit, programs may indeed exist, but the programs meeting the inclusion criteria of this audit were small in number.
- Specific stages of the student life cycle were identified as gaps. There was only one program that aligned with the early childhood and primary school stage. Although this is a national program, it was not specific to individuals with disability. Research suggests that children begin to form ideas about future employment from an early age (Chambers et al., 2018; Howard & Walsh, 2010; Knight, 2015); therefore, it is important to support children at this stage to encourage thinking towards aspiring to the achievement of fulfilled lives and careers.
- There were also geographical limitations noted. Many CDL-informed programs were not targeted to students with disability in more regional, rural and remote areas (apart from

Future Choices Virtual Transition Expo). It has been noted that students from regional, rural or remote areas may be at risk of career disadvantage due to their location (Department of Education, 2018; McIlveen, Morgan, & Bimrose, 2012; National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education [NCSEHE], 2017); therefore, specific programs, ideally informed by students with disability from these areas, would be beneficial to meet the needs of these students.

Within the limitations of this desktop audit, it must be acknowledged that an online search of programs within Australia did not find every relevant CDL program for students with disability. Any oversight was unintentional. To minimise this limitation, it would be helpful to broaden the search criteria to include specific searches on students with disability. This may enable the focus to be on this defined cohort rather than the broader group of individuals with disability. Additionally, gaining access to resources within the secondary and tertiary education sectors would help to highlight the CDL programs available for students with disability.

However, the low number of programs specific to the inclusion criteria suggests that more can be done to meet the CDL needs of students with disability, particularly when it is recognised that these students are at a disadvantage when it comes to gaining and maintaining employment (Adams, 2018; Cunnah, 2015; Youth Action, 2017).

The social model of disability (Giri et al., 2022; Oliver, 2013) purports that disadvantage need not exist for students with disability if society extends the support needed to ensure that these students thrive in employment. The existing CDL programs have shown that this can occur when CDL is provided across the stages of schooling and specifically to students with disability.

In designing CDL programs for students with disability, quality programs embed CDL into the curriculum so that students experience employment and build related skills within the school and community environment. Similarly, tailored mentoring programs where students develop employability skills in a supportive environment are beneficial to students with disability.

Best practice within CDL programs recognises that disability can present additional challenges in gaining and maintaining employment. With appropriate strategies and principles of best practice in place, however, equity in CDL and the workplace can occur. A comprehensive version of Best Practice Principles for CDL for students with disability can be found here (O'Shea et al., 2022). These Best Practice Principles include:

- CDL leveraging existing knowledge and resources by professional career development practitioners
- CDL co-designed by people with disability
- CDL from a strengths-based perspective
- embedding Universal Design for Learning (UDL) within CDL activities
- taking a life-cycle approach across all life-stages.

Additional principles include partnerships across industry, education and family; promoting diversity and inclusion; and having anti-discriminatory CDL information. The Principles underpin equity, diversity and inclusion in CDL.

Conclusion

In an online search, with a predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 12 CDL programs for students with disability were found. These programs existed across educational stages, and some were specific to particular disabilities. The findings from this audit contribute to the project through a more precise understanding of what currently is occurring in practice, where the gaps are and what supports are needed.

Program resources and references

Australian National University. *ANU EmployAbility Hub* https://www.anu.edu.au/anu-employability-hub

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