



abling Disability?

A Study of the Employment Context of Graduates with Disabilities in Ireland.



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Executive Summary

The number of students with disabilities attending third level education has risen dramatically. The last decade has seen student numbers rise from 450 to a current population of over 3000 students in third level education. Consequently, the number of graduates with disabilities transferring from third level education to employment is at an unprecedented level.

There are few studies relating to the status of graduates with disabilities in the Irish labour market. This lack of research is primarily due to the difficulty in collecting data as few colleges record information in relation to students with disabilities exiting third level.

In recent years both the University of Limerick and University College Cork carried out studies of the employment status of graduates with disabilities leaving those colleges. AHEAD, in collaboration with the WAM programme, decided to build on this research by conducting its own research into the employment context of graduates with disabilities in Ireland on a larger scale. This research project was assisted by the Marketing Centre for Small Business at the University of Limerick.

Some of the more significant research findings include the following:

- The most striking result from this research was that 70% of the graduate sample was employed. 59% of respondents indicated that they were in full-time employment whilst 18% were occupied in employment on a part-time basis. This finding contrasts with those of most other research reports, which usually indicate that the majority of graduates with disabilities are unemployed.
- Over 50% of the sample surveyed had a specific learning disability.
- There is no centralised database for the collection and analysis of data relating to the movement of graduates with disabilities from third level education onwards.
- It was identified that 80% of those 'seeking employment' do not always disclose their disability when applying for jobs.
- The most common reason for working part-time was that graduates wanted to but were unable to find a full-time job.

- Only 23% of the respondents had participated in any form of specific job-preparation training while over half the sample indicated that they would benefit from this type of job-preparation training at this stage.
- 83% of respondents were unaware of the full range of employment supports and grants available. Only a minority of respondents (11.9%) had actually applied for a grant.
- Survey respondents identified the three most restrictive factors affecting their search for employment as; a lack of employer assistance, restricted geographical location and a lack of work experience.
- Work experience was also noted by the entire focus group as a pivotal factor influencing the employment prospects of graduates with disabilities.
- The issue of (and relationship between) awareness, attitudes and access to reasonable accommodations emerged as primary issues within each facet of the study.

Recommendations emerging from the research include the following;

- There is a need for a greater degree of job preparation for both graduates with disabilities and their employers.
- All higher education institutions colleges should monitor the exit of students with disabilities from third level institutions. This information would provide a database on which to build an understanding of the employment status of graduates with disabilities and also to identify the key factors in accessing employment.
- There is a need for career guidance services in higher education institutions to focus on specific job preparation training for students with disabilities. This training should address issues such as disclosure, technical supports, accommodations and benefits. Training and information regarding the impact of disclosure and disability/social welfare benefits are essential for graduates with disabilities and for Career Advisors.
- Graduates with disabilities experience great difficulty in accessing work experience, a factor that limits their understanding and knowledge of the workplace. Human Resources departments, in collaboration with careers advisors in third level institutions, could provide this crucial work experience by facilitating structured work placements to graduates with disabilities.

- Reasonable accommodations enable a graduate with a disability to deal with the impact of their disability and perform their job to the required standard in the workplace. There needs to be a review, at a national level, of the range of accommodations required by people with diverse disabilities to ensure equity of provision across the range of disabilities.
- Increased emphasis is needed on the promotion and dissemination of information regarding the range of labour market grants and supports available to assist both graduates with disabilities and employers.
- There needs to be stronger links between employers and disability organisations in order to create a better understanding of the talents and abilities of graduates with disabilities.
- Recruitment procedures require a competency approach to job descriptions and job specifications, which should outline those tasks essential to the job. Employers and interviewers may need to acknowledge the various paths graduates with disabilities may have to take in their search for 'suitable and worthwhile employment, which relates to their qualification'.
- The welfare/benefits versus employment issue is still in need of analysis in order to assess whether there are sufficient incentives to ensure that graduates with disabilities who need to maintain certain disability benefits can also move into employment.
- Many graduates with disabilities can only engage with employment on a part-time basis. Employment policies need to be flexible in order to enable employers to tap into the talents of all graduates with disabilities.
- Further research is needed into the impact of disclosure of disability on the employment, retention and promotional opportunities of people with disabilities.

Setting the Scene

‘State Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities’ (*UN Convention on the Rights of Person’s with Disabilities*, 2006, Article 27: Work and Employment)

The introductory statement provided by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities appears to function on two levels. At a general level, the quote identifies the most important aspect concerning the employment of people with disabilities - the provision of ‘...a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible’. More specifically, the statement also seems to allude to the focus of this research study - graduates with disabilities, i.e. those who have the relevant skills and qualifications and also ‘...the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen...’.

Accordingly, an open and fully accessible work environment, which enables the opportunity to gain ‘freely chosen’ employment, will facilitate graduates with disabilities working in areas relevant to their qualifications, as opposed to being restricted to whatever employment is available. However, due primarily to the format and purpose of the UN document (broad statements and general guidelines), it must be pointed out that transferring this particular statement to an Irish context involves leaping forward without taking the necessary first step.

Statements and guidelines can only function on a general level and tend to deny the diversity of the contexts to which they hope to pertain. Recognition of rights differs from an application of rights and in order to apply rights it is necessary to recognize the problems. A prerequisite of recognizing and utilizing rights is ascertaining the contextual issues to which these rights are relevant. In relation to this piece of research, with the intention of ascertaining the problems that face Irish graduates with disabilities in their search for employment - a brief description of the current Irish context is required.

The IBEC/ICTU Workway Disability and Employment Guidelines state that 25% of Europeans have a family member with a disability whereas only 4% have a colleague with a disability. While noting the broad scope of this statement and the impact of differing definitions, the underlying message remains clear and precise - people with disabilities are being confronted by considerable obstacles in their path to employment.

Within the Irish context, some of these paths lead only to unemployment with the National Disability Authority asserting;

'People with disabilities are two and a half times less likely to be in work than non-disabled people' (NDA 2005 'Disability Research Series 1' document entitled: *DISABILITY AND WORK – The picture we learn from official statistics*). This statistic is even more disconcerting when the general economic boom of the last decade is taken into account. Some of the statistics produced by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in their report *Measuring Ireland's Progress (2006)* seem to emphasise this point:

- The employment rate in Ireland rose from 56.1% in 1997 to 68.1% in 2006.
- Unemployment rates in Ireland declined from 10.3% in 1997 to a low point of 3.6% in 2001.
- The long-term unemployment rate in Ireland fell in every year between 1997 and 2001. Since then it has remained just above 1%.
- In 2005, 21.6% of unemployed persons were in consistent poverty, compared with 1.7% of people at work. Almost 17.4% of ill or disabled people in Ireland were experiencing consistent poverty.

Thus the economic context appears to be one of inverse related paths - one moving towards continuous employment and expanded opportunities combined with incessantly decreasing unemployment trends, the other proceeding in the direction of endless barriers and obstacles, which provide limited opportunity for employment, and a much higher chance of unemployment. This, in turn, results in the heightened possibility of living in consistent poverty. As it turns out, the 'Celtic Tiger' might not have been accessible for all. The irrationality of this apparent detachment of people with disabilities from economic and employment expansion has also become further exacerbated by demographic trends over the last decade. The CSO (2006:55) report mentioned previously asserts:

'The proportion of the population aged 25-64 increased from 48.0% in 1997 to 53.6% in 2006. Conversely, there was a decrease in the 0-24 age group from 40.6% in 1997 to 35.3% of the population in 2006'.

Decelerating birth rates, continually improving medical capabilities, longer life expectancies and subsequently a probable reduction in the pool of available qualified workers in the years to come, mean an aging workforce in desperate need of diversity. An indication of these transitional trends, in which the graduate pool may shrink in size for a period of time, is provided by Sean Flynn in a recent article in the Irish Times which asserts that the numbers sitting the 2007 Leaving Certificate examinations are at their lowest level in two decades:

'This year, some 50,021 will sit the exam, the lowest figure since the mid-1980s. Reflecting population trends, the numbers taking the exam are expected to continue their downward spiral until 2011, after which a sharp rise is expected' (Sean Flynn May 29th 2007 in Irish Times).

Under-utilising a qualified and willing pool of ability during such periods seems entirely irrational, yet current research and statistics still point to the persistence of environmental and attitudinal barriers obstructing the path to employment for people with disabilities. Locating the position of graduates with disabilities (rather than people with disabilities in general) within this economic context has proved difficult in the past and it is from this problematic basis that the focus of this particular study originates. In order to further explain this point it seems useful to point to the educational context in Ireland.

The number of students with disabilities now going to college and graduating with 1st and 2nd class honours in subject areas such as medicine, engineering, arts, law, science, teaching and administration continues to increase. AHEAD research indicates that, in 2005 there were approximately 2,760 students with disabilities in third level education with over 1000 of these in Dublin colleges alone. The fact that the overall figure was 461 in 1994 (according to previous AHEAD research) attests to the considerable impact made by developments in educational accommodation services at second and third level. Thus more and more graduates with disabilities and, more importantly, specific skills and qualifications, are entering the Irish labour market and may be confronted by persisting environmental or attitudinal hurdles in their search for 'freely chosen' occupations and careers.

One of the fundamental difficulties of researching the position of graduates with disabilities in Ireland's labour market is that third level colleges do not keep records on students who have left college, resulting in a dearth of up-to-date data on graduates with disabilities entering the workforce. Perplexing this issue further is the fact that approximately seven million euro is spent every year on third level student support. Yet due to the lack of relevant and specific data gathering, there is no precise mechanism of measuring where this funding has been particularly effective or even an indication of the general rate of success.

Recently introduced funding regulations regarding the financial assistance received by colleges for providing support services to students with disabilities mean that this information gap could soon be a thing of the past. Third level colleges now have to record the entrance of any student registered as mature, having a disability, or from a disadvantaged socio-economic background, in order to receive the one thousand euro per student financial support. Third level colleges now have the opportunity to really assess whether supports are effective by not only monitoring entrance for funding reasons but also keeping track of students with disabilities who exit from college while also noting their first point of call after their education. In going back to the beginning of this chapter, by monitoring the exits and destinations of students with disabilities from third level education, future research may be able to pin-point the specific problems and barriers which give rise to the utilisation of the rights outlined within the UN Convention for Persons with Disabilities.

The Careers Service of University of Limerick (UL) conducted one piece of research, which attempted to examine the employment experiences of graduates with disabilities within the Irish labour market, in 2005. This report was based on the findings of two surveys conducted by the Cooperative Education & Careers Service in UL between January and March 2005, which covered 70 UL graduates with disabilities, and 120 employers in the mid-west region. While highlighting some interesting points which will be discussed further in the literature review, one of the primary recommendations of this report was the urgent need for a similar piece of research to be carried out on a nation-wide scale as the UL report was based only on the employment experiences of their own graduates.

Using the UL study as a prototype while also recognizing the lack of information regarding the first destination of graduates with disabilities, AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access and Disability), in conjunction with the Marketing Centre for Small Business at the University of Limerick decided to accept the challenge of the UL (2005) report's recommendation and undertake nation-wide research into the employment patterns of graduates with disabilities from higher education. AHEAD is an independent non-profit organisation working to promote full access to third level education for students with disabilities in Ireland. It is also concerned with what happens to these students once they have graduated from college, as they may find it more difficult to progress into fulltime employment than other graduates.

This research represents the first comprehensive step in establishing what happens to graduates with disabilities following third level education - the first step in identifying where exactly graduates with disabilities are positioned within the current Irish employment context and where exactly that seven million euro a year in financial assistance has gone. Potentially the most important outcome of this research is the identification of specific problems or barriers that are obstructing the path to employment for graduates with disabilities. As noted previously, recognition of contextual issues may lead to a more explicit recognition - and utilisation - of rights.

The overall objective of this research is to obtain accurate and current data on the employment status of graduates with disabilities. Anecdotal evidence from Get Ahead (the Graduate Forum for Students with Disabilities) indicates that graduates are experiencing greater difficulties than their peers in making the transition to employment. However, as mentioned previously, the problem is that there is no national data on the employment circumstances of these graduates. Colleges still do not record the outcomes of graduates with disabilities and most studies completed on the first destination of graduates do not differentiate between disabled and non-disabled graduates.

Subsequently there is a difficulty in measuring how successful these graduates are in making the transition to the workplace. Part of this is due to the fact that the exponential increase in students with disabilities attending higher education

has only occurred in the last decade and the corresponding increase of graduates in the labour market is a fairly new phenomenon and therefore a relatively new area of research. Consequently, if the rights outlined in the UN's introductory statement are to become more than politically correct, the obstacles that stand in the way of this recent increase of graduates with disabilities into the Irish labour market require identification and analysis.

With this study, AHEAD intends to gather information on the following:

- Graduate profile
- Usage of careers services in college
- The experiences of graduates with disabilities on leaving college, job search status and use of facilities.
- The number of graduates employed and their level of employment
- Use of grants and supports
- Career progression.
- The factors which effect the transition of graduates with disabilities into the workforce

The study also aims to provide a solid foundation from which future studies can build in order to comprehensively grasp the position of graduates with disabilities within the mainstream Irish labour market.

In order to attain these goals, the research will begin with a literature review outlining the main thematic areas of study relating to the employment of graduates with disabilities. A methodology chapter describing how the literature review influenced the quantitative and qualitative methods used will follow this. Chapter 3 will then outline, describe and analyse the findings of the research undertaken. The study will then conclude with a final chapter, which will attempt to tie all the issues together in a comprehensive manner while describing the most significant recommendations that arose as a result of the research undertaken.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

This literature review will attempt to place this piece of AHEAD research firmly within the historical current context by briefly addressing those areas regarding disability and employment in Ireland highlighted in the literature while also noting important published findings on the subject area. It is worth stating at this point that there is a relative lack of research specifically relating to graduates with disabilities entering the Irish workforce. Many of the statistics and studies published relate only to the more general population of people with disabilities in the labour market.

This chapter will be separated into general thematic areas consisting of what could be argued are some of the more specific issues that arise out of the relationship between people with disabilities and the current practices of the Irish labour market, including:

- An Impaired Context
- Obstructing Opportunity
- Breaking through Barriers

[i] An Impaired Context

The use of the term 'impaired' to classify this section functions in two ways; referring to an impaired research context regarding the specific focus of this study, and also a generally impaired working culture which seems unprepared to provide a fully accessible route to the Irish labour market for people with disabilities. Beginning with the research context, it remains the case that detailed studies into the progress of graduates with disabilities are relatively non-existent on a national scale. As noted in the introduction, the irrationality of this fact is further emphasized by the amount of funding that third level education receives in order to support students with disabilities' accommodation needs. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) produces reports annually on the first destinations of graduates yet there is no question or data that accommodates the experiences of graduates with disabilities in the Irish workforce, primarily due to the fact that colleges and universities do not record or maintain this highly significant information. However, important research has been carried out in specific colleges.

One such study, which provided the spark for this piece of research, was conducted by the University of Limerick (UL) in 2005 and entitled; *Towards Equal Outcomes: A survey of the career experiences of graduates with disabilities and employer responses to diversity*. The report essentially analysed the employment patterns of graduates with disabilities who had graduated from UL between the period 1997-2003 through surveys conducted by the Cooperative Education & Careers Service in UL between January and March 2005. The survey covered 70

UL graduates with disabilities and 120 employers in the mid-west region in order to ascertain whether the labour market is responding to recent legislation relating to equality and employment. The survey produced somewhat surprising results with a large percentage of the graduate sample in employment at the time of the survey. According to the report the employment rates of graduates with disabilities were comparable with the overall graduate population during the period under analysis. However, the difference in sample size must be highlighted here as the sample of the entire graduate population between 1997 and 2003 reaches into the thousands while the surveyed sample of graduates with disabilities is less than 50. Thus the power of such comparisons may be rendered negligent when there is such a stark contrast in sample sizes.

One of the more noticeable findings of the report is the lack of awareness among the graduates themselves and the employers in the region regarding external supports and grants that can be utilized in the employment of people with disabilities. While most employers had some awareness that there were grants available, they did not know what these grants were for or where to obtain them. It is this lack of information, which could be reinforcing fear-fuelled barriers that restrict the entry of people with qualifications and disabilities into the labour market. In noting these potentially crucial aspects the UL study has provided an example of what is required on a national scale in order to grasp the actual impact of funding at third level while also highlighting the gaps in the bridge between education and employment for students with disabilities.

A similar study was conducted by Disability Support Service of University College Cork (UCC) in 2005 entitled; *Where are they now? A review of the First destinations of UCC Graduates with Disabilities* which highlighted the tailored career supports in place for students with disabilities as well as the impact these were having with similarly high percentages of graduates with disabilities from UCC finding and keeping employment. Although, once more these statistics rely on huge divergences in sample size. In order to identify other examples of studies specifically relating to the experience of students with disabilities after graduation, it becomes necessary to look beyond the national context.

The Graduate Career Service of Australia, in their annual Graduate Destination Survey (GDS), which is similar to the HEA's First Destinations Survey, claimed that in 2002 the total fulltime employment of graduates with disabilities was 39.6% compared to 53.4% of graduates without disabilities representing a difference of 13.8%. It is this form of statistical basis that Irish research requires in order to begin to move towards the goal of making the working environment fully accessible. In a British report written by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) (2006) entitled; *What happens next? A report on the first destinations of 2004 Graduates with Disabilities*, graduates with disabilities were found to have been slightly less successful in obtaining employment when compared to those who do not have a disability. While the report was positive, it did find that as a whole, graduates with disabilities from 2004 were more likely to

be unemployed (9%) than non-disabled people (6.3%), a gap of 2.7% (but much more favourable than the Australian divergence of over 13%). The report also examined employment outcomes in terms of the different disabilities involved in the study and found that graduates with dyslexia and unseen disabilities compared most favourably to their non-disabled peers.

The significance of this finding must not be underestimated as it could be argued that it succinctly illustrates the influence of cultural mindsets - the question must be asked as to why it is that graduates with disabilities which are not visible and do not fall into the stereotyped category (usually classified by a wheelchair sign) appear to be on a par with non-disabled graduates. Further evidence from the report states that those with wheelchair/mobility issues had a full time employment figure of 32% compared to 54.9% for non-disabled graduates and wheelchair users/ those with mobility difficulties also had the highest unemployment figure (15.9%) among the disabilities outlined. Not surprisingly the category classified as 'unseen disability' had the lowest unemployment figure at 7.6%. The possible impact of disclosure or non-disclosure must not be ignored when reading these statistics. At this point the underlying message becomes obvious- people and graduates with disabilities are infinitely diverse; a person with a visual impairment does not always have a walking stick or a guide dog and a deaf person does not always have to be a lip-reader.

A fully accessible working environment cannot ignore the diversity of disability. Tom Ronayne and Tony Tyrrell in the National Disability Authority (NDA) (2005) report *Disability and Employment: What the Research Tells Us* focus on the importance of distinguishing, for research and policy purposes, the outcomes for different types and forms of disability in the labour market. They claim that within the Irish context the population of people with disabilities who are not in employment differs considerably to those with disabilities in employment with regards to type and severity of disability;

'...over 90% of people with disabilities in employment state that no assistance is provided by their employer to facilitate their work' (2005:75, data from Quarterly National Household Survey 2002).

Is this coincidence or culture? If the Irish labour market is to become proactive in enabling itself to recruit and utilise people with disabilities through mainstream methods, rather than react with add-on special circumstances for some people with certain disabilities, then a thorough examination of potential barriers is a must. This point becomes all the more relevant when noting the other aspect of this 'impaired context' which is made up of a number of different reports that all portray the same message; people (not graduates) with disabilities find it harder to obtain and retain employment when compared to those without disabilities.

The NDA report *Disability and Work* (2005) claims that people with disabilities are two and a half times less likely to be in work than non-disabled people. Elaborating further on this contemporary context regarding the employment of people with disabilities, Tom Ronayne and Tony Tyrrell (NDA 2005) confer the term 'the dynamic of deterioration', by which they identify the persistent deterioration of employment prospects for people with disabilities subsisting in an overall context of unprecedented employment growth and declining unemployment rates.

An example provided by Ronayne and Tyrrell asserts that over a 20-month period between two CSO disability surveys undertaken in 2002 and 2004, the increase in employment rates accounted for by people with disabilities stood at just 1%. Evidence for this 'dynamic of deterioration' is also provided by the 2006 NDA report *A Strategy of Engagement*, which claims that despite major economic growth (5.6% employment growth) the situation for people with disabilities has at best remained static. This report also notes that an estimated 110,000 unemployed people with disabilities have severe restrictions on the amount and type of work they can do whereas approximately 36,500 people with a disability and not in employment report no restriction on either the type or amount of work they can do.

Reports produced by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Equality Authority continually highlight the exclusion of people with disabilities from the labour market and thus the ensuing proximity to relative deprivation. Through an analysis of the data from the Living in Ireland surveys of 1995-2001, Gannon and Nolan (2006:9) state:

'The onset of disability for adults of working age in the survey was found to be associated with a decline of about 20 percentage points in the probability of being in employment...'

The same report goes on to identify the impact of persistent disability throughout the 7 years of the survey;

- 56% of those reporting a chronic illness or disability were not working during the 7 years of the survey.
- Only 18% of those not reporting a chronic illness or disability during the 7 years were not working at any survey stage.
- 13% of those reporting a chronic illness or disability for every year of the survey were working every year of the survey.
- 51% of those not reporting a chronic illness or disability were working every year of the survey.

These statistics reflect the following view:

‘...persistent disability was shown by statistical analysis to be associated with a 42 percentage point reduction in the likelihood of being in employment’ (Gannon and Nolan, 2006:35).

In a previous study Gannon and Nolan (2004) also highlighted the significant interplay between disability, educational level and employment by analysing data associated with those of working age (15-64) in the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) of 2002.

By comparing economic activity, while noting educational levels for those with and without a long standing health problem or disability, it becomes clearly evident that those reporting a long standing health problem or disability may have to rely on educational levels to secure employment. For example, of those who have a health problem or disability and none or only primary level education, only 24% are employed whereas 74% are economically inactive.

In comparing this category to those without a health problem or disability, 47% were employed and 49% inactive. Of those who have third level qualifications and a health problem or disability, 64% were employed while 34% were inactive. For those without, 85% were employed and 13% were inactive. Thus, according to Gannon and Nolan’s (2004) statistics, the interplay between disability and education can have a major impact on the employment prospects of individuals. Although in looking at Gannon and Nolan’s (2004) study, the fact that 85% of those with third level but without a health problem or disability were employed compared to 64% of those who had third level and a health problem or disability identifies the fact that there are real cultural barriers which will need to be addressed if equity of opportunity is to be arrived at. Before attempting to discover the most suitable methods to tackle cultural barriers, it is necessary to first identify the precise truth of those barriers.

[ii] Obstructing Opportunity

This section will attempt to briefly describe some of the more specific barriers or obstacles to the employment of people with disabilities that emerged throughout the review of relevant literature. With the intention of describing this information in a concise manner, the format of this discussion will be split into four of the most prevalent topics: (i) Awareness and Attitudes, (ii) Benefits, (iii) Disclosing, An Issue and (iv) Access.

Awareness and Attitudes

‘Candidates for a job with disabilities repeatedly report that negative and misinformed attitudes act as the most significant barrier to employment. Across Europe people with disabilities have traditionally been educated in isolation from their peers, and a lack of awareness and stereotyping can be prevalent’ (REHAB Group, 2003).

As this quote emphasizes, attitudinal barriers could possibly provide the most persistent barriers to people with disabilities accessing mainstream employment. If an employer has had very little experience of disabilities, then his/her perceptions are based on stereotypes of disability as a physical impairment (more often than not relating to a wheelchair). A lack of information and awareness in relation to the nature of disability as well as the accommodations that are available can lead to limited assumptions about people with disabilities. Throughout the review of the literature, a lack of awareness regarding disability issues is constantly cited as a significant cultural issue by, to name a few, the Equality Authority, Scott and Daone, SIPTU, the University of Limerick and the NDA. This lack of information and awareness fuels the assumptions and fear on the part of employers and employees.

The Get Ahead Graduate Forum (National Forum of Graduates with a Disability Inaugural Meeting) run by AHEAD identified that many employers did not see the business case for employing graduates with disabilities and regarded people with disabilities as being difficult to employ. The Get Ahead forum also stated that, in their experience, the recruitment process was hampered by attitudes and assumptions about disabled people such as the perception of disabled people as a health and safety risk. If we take on board the view according to Norton et al., that underlying assumptions drive organizational behaviour, then it is not surprising that employers are resistant to the recruitment and selection of graduates with disabilities. There is a lack of understanding of disability through ignorance rather than bias and this particularly resonates around the issue of mental health.

It is often the case that people with mental ill-health will try to hide their disability out of fear that it will limit their chances in gaining employment. This fear is validated by the persistence and strength of the stigma and language associated with illnesses such as schizophrenia or bipolar depression. John Redican, Chief Executive of the Irish Advocacy Network, asserts that it is in the everyday language that is used in association with mental illness that these stereotypes find (and reinforce) their own strength. Redican even goes on to highlight some of the language used within treatment facilities such as;

‘Patients have dance therapy, they have art therapy, they have group discussion therapy; they do not hold dances, go to art classes or gather for a social chat’

Essentially what Redican seems to be saying is that common language can drive the social misconceptions which surround mental illness with stigma, thus all people with mental ill-health are in danger of being affected by enduring misconceptions when the fact remains that:

‘Mental illness, just like any other illness, is part of the human condition’ (Redican).

It is these stigmatising perceptions (running on language and ignorance) that make up the fears and attitudinal barriers, which prevent people with mental illnesses from accessing employment. The employment prospects of people with disabilities may also be affected by a lack of awareness in relation to available accommodations.

The previously mentioned University of Limerick (UL) (2005) study also found that one of the primary concerns of graduates with disabilities entering the labour market was awareness of disability issues with the majority (27%) of the graduate sample claiming it was a significant concern. It is also worth noting that this graduate survey also found that 87% of graduates with disabilities were unaware of the labour market grants available to them. Lack of awareness as a barrier to employment applies not only to employers but also to the graduates themselves.

Within the employer survey (120 employers in the mid-west region) results indicated that there was very little general awareness of the range of grants and supports available that attempt to enable the employment of people with disabilities. Most employers had some awareness that there were grants available, but did not know what these grants were for or where to obtain them. In fact, within one of the questions on grants and supports awareness, 7 different forms of support were listed and companies were asked whether they had previously been aware of them. The highest level of awareness for one grant was 50% of the companies (relating to the Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant) with all the others falling below that figure. Thus, at best, half the companies surveyed knew one type of grant.

Another example is offered by the Manpower Skills Group survey, which asked over 500 companies in Ireland questions regarding the numbers of people with disabilities employed by them and their awareness of grants and supports. The two statistics that emerge from this study assert; 88% of the companies surveyed said that none of their employees had a disability and over half of the companies (55%) were unaware of any grants or supports that were available to them to assist them in accommodating people with disabilities. Regarding the first statistic, the question must be asked as to whether non-disclosure was taken into account while in relation to the second, we have to conclude that grants are failing due to a lack of awareness on the part of both employers and graduates with disabilities. This lack of important information and awareness perpetuates

myths and assumptions about the lack of ability of people with disabilities and is a significant barrier to employment opportunities.

An Employment - Benefit Analysis

The NDA in its 2006 report 'A Strategy of Engagement' outlines the developed current welfare entitlements situation in Ireland for people with disabilities seeking employment:

'The current dependency generating system is an inherited model that evolved in the context of high unemployment and a much less favourable economic climate than pertains today' (2006:29).

According to this claim, the context in which generous welfare benefits for people with disabilities were called for and applied has moved on and it is time for the welfare structure to catch up. Welfare systems were created to ensure a basic standard of living for those who were disadvantaged including people with disabilities. However this has in some cases led to a dependence on benefits due to the fact that if someone with a disability wishes to enter the labour market they may have to forego medical, travel or general assistance benefits that they have come to require. Subsequently, for many graduates with disabilities, the financial incentives associated with finding employment in the mainstream labour market are less important than maintaining certain benefits in order to maintain a certain standard of living.

In certain circumstances, a person with a disability who wishes to enter the labour market may face the prospect of losing important supports. In some situations, incentives to work are being eroded by the costs (i.e. loss of benefits) that come along with them. Ronayne and Tyrrell (2005:77) point to some of the international literature which seem to tell all an all too familiar story; that the failure of government social policies in relation to the employment of people with disabilities is characterised by the fact that policies have managed to 'hide away' some individuals with generous benefits and others in sheltered work programmes. Thus the actual number of job applications made by people with disabilities may be lower than it could be.

Recent Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures would appear to substantiate this claim in Ireland as the numbers receiving Disability Allowance (DA), Disability Benefit (DB) and Invalidity Pension have increased every year from 1999 to 2005. In total DA has increased from 50,431 recipients in 1999 to 79,253 in 2005 while DB has risen from 45,535 to 61,845. The often quoted yet rarely adequately addressed 'benefits trap' or 'welfare trap' can hold particular resonance in the lives of people with disabilities as they decide whether or not to enter the mainstream labour market.

A paper by the European Commission (2005) notes the fact that most people acquire disabilities at some point in their lives. This tends to interrupt their careers, often leading to a complete withdrawal from the open labour market and into a reliance on benefits. It is for this reason that an inclusive working environment must contain methods of employee retention following the onset of a health problem or disability:

‘It is important to keep in mind that most people become disabled during their working lives and yet relatively few return to work but go instead onto benefits, which constitute a substantial amount in Member States’ social budgets’

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Further evidence of the impact of the ‘benefits trap’ may also be provided by the previously discussed ESRI and Equality Authority document written by Gannon and Nolan (2006), which emphasized the impact of ‘disability onset’ in reducing the likelihood that a person will be employed. Through the analysis of survey panels for 7 consecutive years, the report highlighted the correlation between numbers of years in work and persistent chronic illness or disability with over half of those reporting an illness or disability not working in any of the years surveyed.

In order for this to occur, there must be an alternative path for this number of people to follow and it is here that we come back to Ronayne and Tyrrell’s (2005) assertion that policies have hidden away people with disabilities through generous benefits and sheltered programmes. The simple fact is; additional costs associated with having some disabilities mean that certain people do require assistance in order to cope with the financial and practical demands for them to have a basic standard of living. However, removing these supports once a person feels confident enough to move into the open labour market is an exercise in creating burdens:

‘The policy response to the employment of people with disabilities in Ireland has been and continues to be predominantly socially focused (i.e. income support) rather than employment focused (i.e. provision of supports to enter, maintain, and re-enter employment). That policy position needs to change’ (Ronayne and Tyrrell, 2005:83).

Disclosing, An Issue

Disclosure of disability remains one of the most complex issues when discussing the employment of people with disabilities. On the one hand, national legislation implies that a person is not obliged to disclose a disability. On the other, some employers are concerned about potential health and safety or liability issues involved in employing people with disabilities. Add to this the fact that people with disabilities themselves appear to be divided between disclosing in order to receive accommodations and not disclosing because of fear of discrimination and the complexity of the issue becomes clearly evident.

Disclosure is a subject that appears consistently among graduates with disabilities when referring to their employment experience. During the inaugural meeting of the National Forum of Graduates with a Disability (Get Ahead), disclosure was identified as a pivotal issue. The forum found that most graduates with disabilities are afraid to disclose throughout the whole recruitment process from CV preparation through to induction training. The group also felt that, in general, graduates do not know how to manage disclosure, and the majority choose not to disclose as it was felt it would go against them. A brief glance at some of the relevant literature identifies the same issue - disclosure is most definitely an issue for people with disabilities accessing employment.

Within the UL graduate survey (2005), disclosure came out alongside awareness as the most frequently cited (27%) concern in relation to entering the labour market;

'How and when to disclose, particularly an unseen disability, to a potential employer is the subject of a large amount of discussion...' (2005:17).

When asked whether or not they disclose their disability to a potential employer, over half (57%) said they did, 29% did not and 14% did sometimes. Disclosure of disability is therefore not something that should be presumed when a person with a disability is applying for a job, but it could be argued that disclosure represents different issues for those who have visible disabilities and those who have what could be termed hidden disabilities. Looking back to the previously mentioned British report, 'What happens next?' (2006), there was a marked difference between the employment rates of graduates with 'unseen' disabilities e.g. dyslexia and those who were wheelchair users or had mobility impairments with the latter's employment rates being lower.

One report, which addresses these particular issues, is the National Flexi-work Partnership's report 'Mental Health and Employment' (2005). The purpose of this study was to analyse the attitudes of people with mental health problems towards the working environment through a survey on work-life balance. The survey sample was recruited through AWARE (the national voluntary agency supporting people who suffer from depression) and consisted of 133 people who had experienced mental health problems. Some of the more significant statistics emerging from this report include the following:

- 74 of the 133 respondents were not employed
- 69.8% of respondents who had previously been employed said that they had very little or no flexibility in their previous jobs
- 54.8% said their mental health problems were the most significant barrier preventing them from accessing employment
- Over 70% of respondents not currently employed wanted to return to employment

- 68.1% of the total sample (59.5% of the employed and 78.1% of the previously employed) did not disclose their mental health difficulties at the interview stage.

This last finding is particularly revealing as just fewer than 70% of the total sample decided not to disclose their health problems at the interview stage of their last job application. In fact the report then goes on to state that 64.4% of the total sample said that they:

‘...”definitely” or “probably” would not disclose...’

the fact that they had had depression or other mental health problems to a new or potential employer (2005:64).

It could be argued that this is where a discrepancy occurs between the legislative rights of people with hidden disabilities not to be discriminated against and the concerns of employers in relation to health and safety and their lack of knowledge of how to manage the employment situation of people with disabilities. It could also be stated that, in many cases, the threat of equality legislation, (produced to protect people with disabilities) is actually instilling fear of court cases within companies if the employment goes wrong and they therefore opt not to employ the person with a disability.

As the National Flexi-work Partnership’s report (2005) asserts, the topic of disclosure in its current context ‘is essentially a problem of uncertainty’. As the literature highlights, disclosure of a disability will continue to remain a prominent issue for both employers and potential employees alike and often will lie at the origin of other emerging issues i.e. health and safety, reasonable accommodations, employer fears and discrimination. However the literature also stresses the impact of the diversity of disability, as it must be noted that the issue of disclosure is always coloured by the nature of the disability in question. Suffice to say at this point, that internal employment procedures and social policies need to accept that people with disabilities are not walking conditions and each decision made as to whether disclose or not is generally dependent on a number of factors- most importantly disability, identity, personality and context.

Access

In addition to the attitudinal barriers previously discussed, the literature review also identified environmental barriers, which consist of the physical environment, or facilities that deny people with disabilities equal access to the Irish labour market. Some of the environmental barriers outlined within the literature include physical buildings and facilities, inaccessible job advertisements, inaccessible interview facilities, inappropriate tests and a lack of transport. Where these facilities ultimately fall short is in their inability to accommodate the complex diversity of disability. For example, some historic buildings can accommodate

someone with who has a visual impairment but they are not wheelchair accessible. Some job advertisements may be accessible to someone who has a hearing impairment but a person with a visual impairment or visual dyslexia may not comprehend the full requirements of the advertised role.

Alan Hurst, speaking at the recent AHEAD Inclusive Education Conference (May 30th 2007), made an interesting comparison between transport capabilities and the genuine aim of inclusive education. Using the LUAS as an example, Hurst pointed out that it had been designed with diversity in mind. Wheelchair users can easily access it, as can blind or deaf people. There is no add-on equipment only to be used in certain circumstances i.e. mechanized bus ramps or portable ramps used to access DART trains. It is with this example (LUAS) in mind that employers and HR managers must begin to examine their facilities, which enable all types of people with different disabilities to access their premises, interviews and jobs.

Ironically, travel and public transport itself have also been recognized as a potential barrier for people with disabilities in accessing work. The UL (2005) graduate survey noted that a higher percentage rate of graduates with disabilities worked in and around the mid-west region when compared with the overall UL graduate percentage. This could be down to the restrictions placed by limited public transport facilities elsewhere which could mean the graduates of UL with disabilities are not comfortable in going too far from the mid-west region.

Transport to and from work can be a significant barrier for some applicants with specific physical needs. This point actually ties in with two other aspects affecting people with disabilities; benefits and accommodations. As discussed previously work can mean a loss of benefits and a specific example of this may be public transport cards which enable certain people to access work, yet can be lost when the person takes up employment. Another issue which may need resolving is whether arranged transport can be viewed as a reasonable accommodation in employing people with disabilities i.e. for the person with specific physical needs. A shortage of Personal Assistants (PAs) combined with negotiation of public transport on a daily basis can impact badly on applicants and potential employees with disabilities leaving them tired and drained. The absence of door – to – door travel for blind participants may also render them less independent. Thus travel must be considered as a potential barrier to the employment of graduates with certain disabilities.

A fully accessible work environment must view facilities for all as intrinsic to design rather than as an add-on to be used in special circumstances only.

[iii] Breaking through Barriers

'A key characteristic of current employment policy for people with disabilities is the absence of a response to (this) diversity' (Ronayne and Tyrrell, 2005:80). A review of the relevant literature reveals that those systems that are managing to eliminate barriers which exclude people with disabilities from employment are those that acknowledge and facilitate the diversity of disability. There are a number of examples of such mechanisms, the more significant of which will be briefly discussed below.

Reasonable Accommodation

Simply put; reasonable accommodations work. They recognize the impact of disability and allow the person to deal with the disadvantage through the use of additional supports or conditions. A competency approach taken to drafting job specifications, combined with a comprehensive needs assessment (this assessment may also require a disability audit of the working environment), will identify the most suitable accommodations to enable the person with a disability to go about doing their job as any other employee would. Equity requires that people are not treated the same; as in some cases it is only by applying different treatment that you can achieve equality of outcome. Reasonable accommodation, tailored to the needs of the individual while undertaking their employment roles, can often provide the path to equity.

The European Commission's paper *Disability Mainstreaming in the European Employment Strategy* (2005) states;

'This concept of reasonable accommodation is the keystone of fighting discrimination on the grounds of disability. Reasonable accommodation is not a positive action left to the discretion of public or private operators, but an obligation whose failure can constitute unfair discrimination' (2005:3).

However, as noted previously within this chapter, employers are not informed about the availability and importance of reasonable accommodations. Another issue regarding accommodations, which may need to be discussed at governmental level, is the ambiguity around what constitutes a reasonable accommodation and a disproportionate burden on the employer. The vagueness of such terms and procedures create a grey area, which affects what can potentially constitute a reasonable accommodation.

A key issue here is equity of access, treatment and outcome. In order to achieve equity people may need to be treated differently and accommodations put in place to enable them to do their jobs. But there is considerable variation in practice regarding accommodations, and there is also divergence regarding what is, or can be, an accommodation. For example, is private travel provision a

reasonable accommodation for someone who cannot utilise public transport; is time off for medical appointments throughout the year viewed as an accommodation or will these days just be deducted from annual leave? These issues need to be placed on the agenda for discussion and clarification at a national level to ensure that some people are not discriminated against.

Career Guidance and Work Experience

The importance of both career guidance and general work experience is a critical component to the employment prospects of graduates with disabilities. In order for a graduate with a disability to be fully prepared for entry into the mainstream labour force, they will need to be aware of additional issues such as what grants and supports are available and most suitable, while they may also need to make a decision on the disclosure issue prior to job application.

Career services provide support to students with disabilities and many colleges such as the University of Limerick and University College Cork have developed dedicated, specialized career services for graduates with disabilities. These developments have made a hugely positive impact on the career opportunities for graduates with disabilities, which are clear from the results of their respective reports. What is also clear is that treating all graduates the same in assisting their search for employment will not address the specific disability related information needs of graduates with disabilities.

The UL (2005) report emphasizes the effectiveness of a tailored career and disability service, which is essential to the transition of graduates with disabilities from third level education to employment. The UCC (2005) study also highlights the careers supports pioneered by the University College Cork. The goal of these services is to empower students with disabilities to:

‘achieve their academic and vocational goals and make a successful transition to employment’.

The Careers Support Program is an example of one of UCC’s new initiatives being developed to assist with the transition to employment. Employment centred supports and career guidance, such as those outlined in the UCC and UL reports are one of the contributing factors to success in securing satisfactory employment for the graduates of these institutions.

One of the more obvious barriers facing graduates with disabilities (and graduates in general) is a lack of relevant work experience. Graduates with disabilities often have not had access to any work experience. Through the Get Ahead graduate forum, many graduates with disabilities have reported finding it impossible to obtain summer work or part-time term work due to the fact that many employers may not see the benefit in assessing and acquiring accommodations if it is only going to be a short-term contract.

This gap in employment experience seriously impacts on their acquisition of core work skills and undermines the confidence and self esteem of graduates in approaching the labour market. This often results in graduates with disabilities applying for positions below what would be expected given their qualifications. Thus the lack of opportunity to gain any work experience seems to create an uneven playing field upon which graduates with disabilities must compete for positions with their non-disabled peers who have acquired the relevant work experience. Farrar and Waddelove (1998), in relation to the employment of graduates with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, identify a lack of work experience as a very real barrier to employment.

One method of levelling the work experience playing field may be that of the designated disability career services. Both UL and UCC attribute their success to the provision of tailored support services and links with local employers thus enabling students with disabilities to obtain structured work experience, internships or placements throughout college, allowing them to compete on a level playing field with their non-disabled peers. The combination of career guidance and work experience appears to have immense potential in breaching the barriers that prevent graduates with disabilities from entering the mainstream labour market.

Mentoring

Dowrick et al. (2005) claim that third level education provides confidence and marketability but does not in itself prepare students for employment. For successful employment, the graduate needs qualifications, experience and positive support. Many higher education institutions use mentoring as a positive retention measure and have implemented mentoring schemes where first year students are introduced to college life by mentors who are usually older and have more experience. This method of support functions to integrate the new student into the social environment of the institution while at the same time preventing a feeling of alienation which could eventually lead to dropping out. In the world of work many companies, particularly the larger ones, are beginning to take notice of the importance of mentoring.

In order to provide smoother integration into the workplace environment and culture, mentoring can provide the type of man-management that seems to be lacking in a modern workforce, which continually relies on task driven productivity. It is here that mentoring can provide substantial support for employees with disabilities. As we have already noted many graduates with disabilities can lack experience of the working world and mentoring can provide a type of safety net that socialises new employees with disabilities into the workplace and facilitates as they learn about the workplace culture. The literature noted that mentoring could also play a significant role in encouraging the retention of staff.

Mentoring appears to be particularly effective in relation to circumstances where there may be mental health difficulties and where flexible working policies may need to be reinforced by some form of person-centred supportive relationship. The National Flexi-work Partnership's (2005) report on mental health and employment asserts that, while formal workplace policies are vital, one of the more significant needs arising from their research appears to be the:

'...importance of having available another supportive human being in the organisation whom they could approach' (p30).

The impact of mental health on the workplace has the potential to be accommodated by developing and linking medical supports (through appropriate sick leave accommodations so that appointments can be kept) with the social support of mentoring.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

Following the introduction to the context, rationale and associated objectives of this study as well as the subsequent review of the most relevant literature on the subject area, it seems appropriate at this point to outline how these two (research objectives and literature review) have impacted on the research methodology undertaken.

In going back to the initial stages of this piece of research it is worth outlining again the main aims of the study, which are:

- Graduate profile
- Usage of careers services in college
- The experiences of graduates with disabilities on leaving college, job search status and use of facilities.
- The number of graduates employed and their level of employment
- Use of grants and supports
- Career progression.
- Examine the factors which effect the transition of graduates with disabilities into the workforce
- Provide a solid foundation from which future studies can build on in order to comprehensively grasp the situation of graduates with disabilities entering the work force.

With these aims and the literature context in mind, the research methodology undertaken needed to combine both qualitative and quantitative methods. It was decided that a focus group be held in which a number of the more significant and continually arising issues would be discussed. A graduate survey was also carried out in order to provide additional quantitative data.

Focus Group

The focus group was held in Dublin in October 2006, with volunteers invited by AHEAD to attend. The purpose of this focus group was to address some of the issues, which emerged during the review of the relevant literature in order to substantiate these issues with practical examples provided through graduates' own experience.

Other research information in relation to the focus group includes:

- A focus group topic guide was produced by AHEAD in order to keep the session moving along while touching on all the significant issues. There was also room within this schedule for attendees to highlight their own issues, which may not have been brought up.

- The focus group facilitator and note-taker was Ann Heelan, (Executive Director, AHEAD)
- The session involved 11 attendees.

Graduate Survey

Using the UL (2005) study as a basis (permission granted by UL) while noting the influence of the literature review, a graduate survey questionnaire was produced in July 2006 by the project Steering Group (see Appendix A). This group consists of those who provide career guidance in higher education institutions and also graduates with disabilities. The survey included all graduates across all third level institutions in Ireland who were registered as having a disability. This was made possible with the help and assistance of all Irish third level colleges who coordinated the survey with their graduates. The survey included graduates from years 2000-2004.

The questionnaires (800) were sent to the college career services of each university and I.T in Ireland who then liaised with their respective designated support staff such as disability and access officers. The primary purpose of this survey was to attain some general statistical figures on the profile and position of graduates with disabilities in the Irish labour market and their awareness and use of grants, guidance and supports. The most significant disadvantage of this survey was the fact that there is no central database of potential respondents from which to draw a sample. This was due to the fact that colleges don't keep track of graduates with disabilities exit from third level. As such, the survey represents a snapshot of graduates with disabilities in Ireland.

In total 143 survey responses were obtained. The small response rate of approximately 18% clearly highlights the problems associated with having no reliable college databases of graduates with disabilities. On leaving third level education, this group seems to disappear. However, it must also be emphasized that this response rate still represents the largest ever research sample for a study of graduates with disabilities to date. Therefore the significance of the research findings must not be ignored or taken lightly.

Chapter 3: Research Findings

The following chapter will present the initial research findings from both the focus group and the graduate survey before moving on to the final chapter, which will attempt to bring together the literature review and the more comprehensive research outcomes in order to outline the most prominent issues and subsequent recommendations from this AHEAD study. The purpose of this structure is to exhibit how the path of the study moved from the initial context to a more in-depth literature review to research methodology and findings, and finally on to an analysis and proposed recommendations.

Focus Group

During the focus group discussions, a number of key issues continually emerged. These common issues have been coded into the following major thematic areas:

(A) Work Experience and Mentoring

All attendees agreed that work experience was a necessity for graduates with disabilities. It is particularly important to gain experience in a work placement relevant to the occupational area of the degree in order to gain confidence and knowledge. In fact one participant stated that they would have been '*lost*' if they had gone directly into the workplace without prior work placement experience. Another attendee emphasised the point that they may not know their own limitations until they actually go on work experience.

As notified in the literature review, it is often the case that students with disabilities don't have access to short-term temporary work experience during their college years and therefore may not be fully aware of the accommodations they require or areas they need to work on. It is at this point that the focus group attendees stressed that work placements, as part of the college course, or as a transitional bridge from education to employment, can provide major learning for graduates with disabilities. One participant asserted; '*A link or bridge needs to be put in place between graduates and the workplace to eliminate fears or anxiety*'; perhaps work placements can act as this bridge.

The experience offered by work placements was considered to be the only way to safely develop the assertiveness and skills required to navigate the work environment and build the capacity to navigate the recruitment and selection process and ask for reasonable accommodations. It was felt that the experience of the work place would enable the graduate to be very clear and confident about the potential job and what supports and adaptations he/she might require. The focus group also considered that the graduate had a role to educate the employer, as he/she might not necessarily know the range of supports and

adaptations available. Therefore it is essential that the graduates themselves are well aware of the range of options available and what they require in order to do the job.

Another issue, which emerged during the literature review and also arose during the focus group, was mentoring. Again, while keeping in mind the point that many graduates with disabilities may have little or no workplace experience, a number of the attendees identified how a mentor can be a key to success, i.e. someone other than the supervisor who could steer you in the right direction and who you could make contact with about general concerns and queries. One focus group participant who had dyslexia and experienced some difficulties with form filling and paperwork during the initial stages of a work placement provided an example. It was asserted by this attendee that having a mentor in this particular situation could have helped, if only just to have someone who is not your manager but can act as a sounding board for particular problems or issues. Deriving from these discussions, it seems that the transitional bridge between education and employment for graduates with disabilities could be one that consists of work placements and mentoring.

(B) Inclusive Recruitment

'It is very disheartening that in this day and age there is still such an ordeal for an individual with a disability to obtain substantial and worthwhile employment which relates to their qualification' (Focus group participant).

All attendees agreed that this comment is indicative of the challenge of obtaining suitable employment for graduates with disabilities. It is interesting to note the similarity between the themes underlying this statement and the point made at the very beginning of this study contained within the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;

'...the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities'.

In order for a graduate with a disability to have the chance to 'gain a living by work freely chosen', there must exist a 'work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible'. The literature reviewed combined with the statement from the focus group attendee strongly suggests that, at the moment, this sort of work environment is not the norm.

The focus group agreed that more often than not, the acquisition of short-term work experience during college or summer breaks does not occur. Due to this, the group asserted that within the recruitment process, other factors on a person's CV should be taken into account. Some attendees expressed a concern

that recruiters are only interested in previous work experiences to the exclusion of all other aspects of a person's CV. The provision of information to potential recruiters on the overall achievements including other activities in their life was thus considered very important.

Both sheer persistence and word of mouth were identified by participants to be crucial for them in obtaining employment. The group also stressed that employers should have a much broader view of the person and the role they wish to fill. According to some of the participants, job advertisements sought qualities such as "dynamic or energetic" which were not in fact core requirements to the job. The language used in many job descriptions often suggests that the employer is seeking able-bodied people, which will obviously prevent graduates with certain disabilities from applying.

A competency based approach to jobs including task analysis; specific job specifications and criteria based interviews were identified as essential factors in building an inclusive approach to recruitment and selection. Inclusive recruitment requires preparation on the part of both the graduates with disabilities and employers. Attendees felt that sometimes even in the cases where graduates were fully prepared (i.e. knew their strengths, weaknesses and what supports they required) the employer was not educated on inclusive work practices thus preventing the graduate with a disability from demonstrating their skills and knowledge in a competitive situation.

(C) Myths and Attitudes:

There was a unanimous view amongst focus group participants (which included recent graduates with disabilities) that one of the most prominent barriers that graduates with disabilities have to face is that of attitudes and myths. These generally involve suspicions about whether people with disabilities are healthy or constantly prone to major illness, low expectations of productivity, queries as to why they might want to work part time only, inability to be available for overtime and concerns pertaining to the provision of grants and services (both to graduates and employers). The participants reflected the views of John Redican that lack of awareness and understanding; combined with an inappropriate use of language, conspire to reinforce assumptions and myths about people with disabilities. These assumptions direct workplace behaviour and practice thus creating a very uneven playing field and real barriers for graduates with disabilities seeking employment opportunities.

Another assumption which can undermine the search for work is the general philosophy that underpins Ireland's current social welfare model; i.e. that you are either fit to work and will work full-time or unfit for work and need rehabilitation. Some attendees claimed that Ireland is still relatively new to dealing with flexible working procedures, especially when people with disabilities are concerned. It was proposed that most people with disabilities cannot do anything to change

their condition and therefore need to engage with work on a part time basis due to their disability, either on a permanent basis or as a stepping stone to full reintegration into the workforce.

The current categories of benefits available to people with disabilities also have a significant part to play in the demand for either part-time or full-time work. An example is the Back-to-Work scheme where you have to be unemployed in order to take part. Some of the group claimed that it can be difficult to find part time work that fits with benefits available and in a lot of cases it becomes a choice of one or the other, work or benefits. As discussed in the literature review this approach creates a dilemma for many graduates with disabilities who have to choose between receiving essential benefits and supports provided through social welfare and entering the work place. There is a real fear that a change of employment status will result in a loss of essential supports. In addition to this, social welfare rules and regulations were viewed as being a 'maze' or "a minefield" as they are almost impossible to navigate.

All present agreed that there is a low level of awareness with regard to grants and services available both amongst graduates and employers. Feedback statements included

"I wasn't aware of all the services available to help me prepare for employment" and how "an inability to do overtime for any reason is still frowned upon".

Opinions on employers were that they were generally unaware of the range of grants and services available;

"I would like if a seminar could be organised for employers to give them knowledge of how to cope with people with different disabilities" and "there should be more awareness from employers and companies that people with disabilities have a lot to offer".

Preparation and awareness for both graduates and employers were claimed to be potentially successful mechanisms that could prevent the detachment of graduates with disabilities from the Irish labour market.

(D) Disclosing, An Issue

As indicated in the literature review, disclosure is a huge issue for people with disabilities entering the labour market. The group noted the complexity of this subject as graduates were unsure whether they should disclose or not. This was particularly the case for graduates with hidden disabilities. The fact is that each graduate with a disability must predict what the outcome will be of each disclosure scenario. However the group agreed that the most common perception is that disclosure will not favour them. Some of the individual

comments made by participants during this discussion clearly emphasise this point:

- *'I intentionally avoid mentioning my disability to employers'*
- *'If they knew I have a learning difficulty they would not employ me or if my employer found out that they would fire me'*
- *'It can be hidden and unfortunately in today's working environment must be to disclose would hinder my career'* (participant with dyslexia).

The participants stated that companies could send a positive message out to graduates and actively encourage disclosure. Some of the suggestions included:

- Advertising in neutral language and not stressing the importance of 'dynamic' people
- Using a question to encourage disclosure which states that the information would be used only to anticipate supports and accommodations
- Carrying out flexible assessments for the job, allowing work trials instead of psychometric tests
- The company could promise an interview to all disabled applicants if an equality statement was in place
- Companies could aim to be inclusive employers – having flexi-time and flexible work practices including family friendly work policies
- Clear and detailed job specifications
- Having a dedicated expert to deal with disability issues, a mentor or disability officer
- A disability committee on site
- Carrying out ergonomic assessments of the work site

(E) Graduate Issues

Participants considered that graduates with disabilities themselves might need to market themselves in a more positive light. In particular, they need to put a positive spin on any gaps in their CV. They also need to be very clear about why they want the job, understand the demands of the job and emphasise the positives of what they can bring to the job - preparation is key.

It was stated that graduates with disabilities often have greater self-knowledge than other graduates as they have had to deal with many barriers in life or education and may already have solved many problems in dealing with the demands of an academic course. Thus the group stressed the need for graduates to emphasise the positive attributes that they can bring to the job such

as creativity, resilience and problem solving. However, it was felt that graduates with disabilities do require training in marketing their unique skills.

Graduate Survey

While utilising the UL study as a template and noting the influence of the literature review, AHEAD also produced a questionnaire and conducted a survey on the current employment context and general issues facing graduates with disabilities in Ireland (Appendix A). A total of 143 respondents participated in the survey. In order to provide a clear and concise structure, with the initial research aims in mind, the following survey results will be split into four sections; graduate profile, employment context, supports and issues.

(i) Graduate Profile

(N.B. n = number of responses to a particular item)

This section of the report outlines the demographic profile of the respondents, including gender, college attended, qualifications and relevant disability.

- ★ Findings indicate that just over half the respondents were female (54%) while 45% of the respondents were male. 1% chose not to respond to the question.

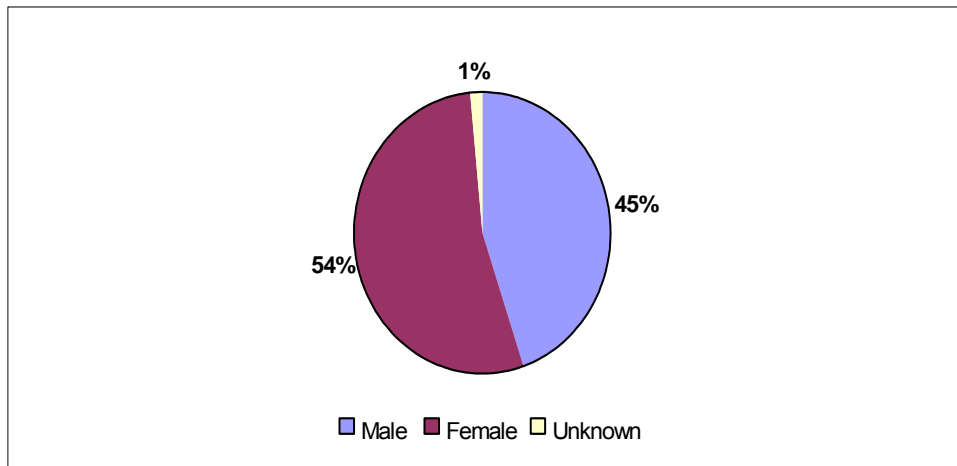


Figure 1: Gender of Respondents (N =143)

- ★ In relation to the disability profile of the survey respondents, the findings seem to mirror those of AHEAD's previous research which noted that over half of students with disabilities participating in third level education have specific learning difficulties. According to the results of this survey, the disability profile of respondents shows that just over half have specific

learning difficulties (51.1%), followed by 18.4% who have a physical disability, 12.1% who have a chronic illness, just under 10% have a sensory impairment while 5% have mental health difficulties. Thus the survey response encapsulated a broad range of disabilities.

Disability	Frequency	Valid Percent
Physical	26	18.4
Sensory	14	9.9
Mental Health	7	5.0
Chronic Illness	17	12.1
Learning Difficulties	72	51.1
Other	5	3.5
Total	141	100%

Figure 2: Disabilities of Respondents (n=141)

- ★ Survey participants were also asked to specify which third level institution they had attended. The results showed that the majority of respondents had attended University College Dublin (25.7%) followed by over 14% who attended Trinity College Dublin. In terms of institution type, 64.6% of responses were from graduates who had attended a university in Ireland while the remaining 35.4% were from institutes of technology. Just under half (49%) of the respondents to this question attended a Dublin based college.
- ★ A survey question also asked respondents to specify which year they had graduated and which courses they had studied. In relation to courses studied, the findings showed that students with disabilities undertake a range of different course subjects while attending college. A large number of courses across a range of disciplines were cited; from 'Arts' and 'Social Science' Degrees to 'Computer Systems Applications'. The results also identified that the largest cohort of respondents graduated in 2004, followed by 2005. (Figure 3) Whilst the graduation years of 2005 and 2006 were initially excluded from the framework of this study, the individual colleges who distributed the survey to their graduates appear to have included them.

Graduation Year	Frequency	Valid Percent
Pre 2000	3	1.9%
2000	6	3.8%
2001	4	2.5%
2002	13	8.3%
2003	20	12.7%
2004	60	38.2%
2005	36	22.9%
2006 onwards	15	9.6%
Total	157*	100%

* Some respondents indicated more than one year of graduation

Figure 3: Year of Graduation (n=143)

(ii) Employment Context

- ★ The present status of the respondents was examined in order to ascertain whether they were in employment, in further study or training, seeking employment or not available for employment or study.

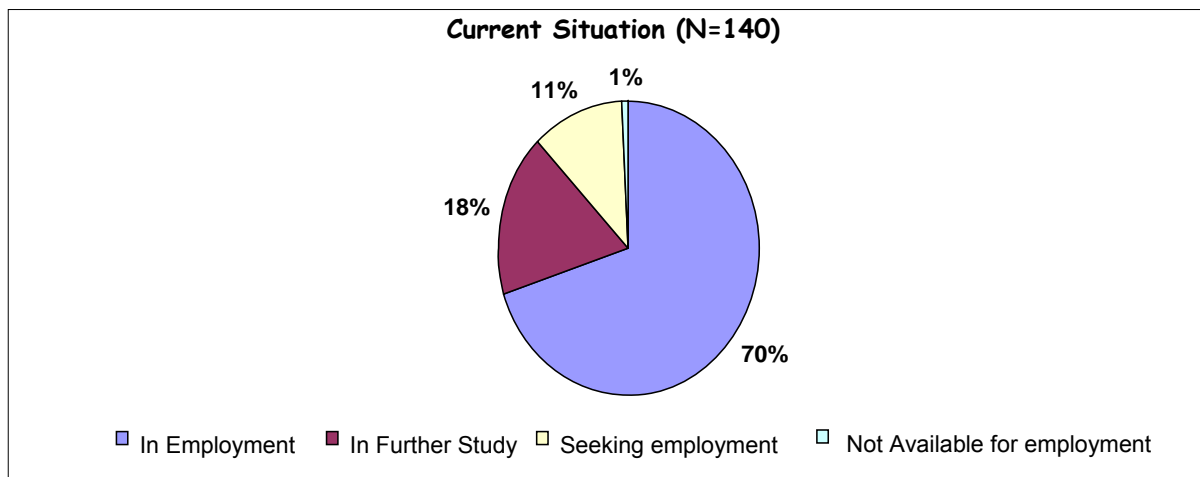


Figure 4: Present Situation

- ★ As depicted in Figure 4 above, the majority of participants were in employment, accounting for 70% of the total responses. This result seems to fall in line with the UL (2005) study which found similarly high employment rates for graduates with disabilities despite a literature and research context which claims that people with disabilities find it difficult to gain employment compared to their non-disabled peers. A further 18% of respondents were in further study, while 11% were currently seeking employment. Only a minority of the participants stated that they were not available for employment or study, accounting for 1% of the total participants surveyed. However, in order to provide further clarification of the employment context of this research sample, a further question was asked which enquired whether those in employment were working full-time or part-time. A correlating advantage of asking this question is that some people may have fallen into two of the options outlined in the previous statistic i.e. some graduates may have been 'in further study' as well as in part-time employment or others may have been in part-time employment but also seeking employment of a permanent nature. Therefore the following results indicate all those in employment and of what nature;

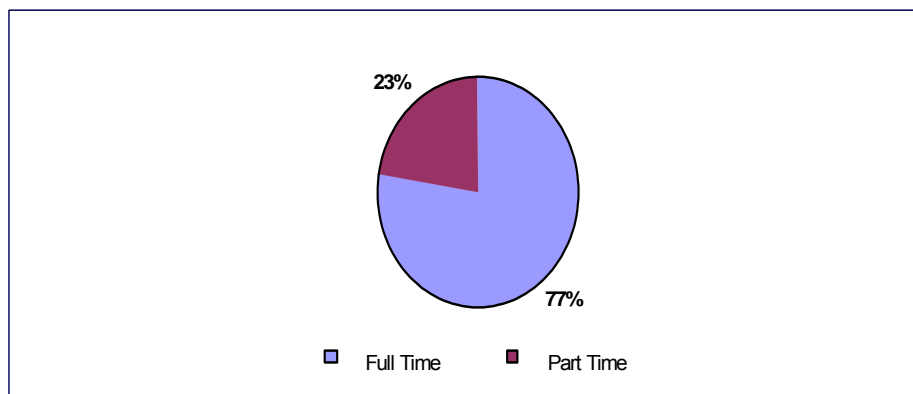


Figure 5: Employment: Full-Time and Part-Time (n=111)

- ★ The most interesting thing to note regarding this statistic is not that the vast majority work full-time, but the fact that the numbers who answered this question diverge from what is expected following the previously discussed results. For instance, in analysing the current status of the graduate sample in Figure 4 we find that 70% of the 140 people who answered the question are in employment, which amounts to approximately 98 people. However the number of people who answered the question relating to whether they work full-time or part-time is 111. In noting these variances, it could be argued that the difference is made up by those who fell into two categories when referring to their 'present situation' in Figure 4 yet were only asked to choose one option i.e. those in full-time education and some form of employment may have ticked that

they were in further study. Thus in taking the 111 graduates in some form of employment as a percentage of the entire sample, the figure in employment is approximately 78%. Furthermore the percentage of those who indicated that they were in full-time employment represents 59% of the total graduate sample surveyed, with 18% noting that they were in part-time employment.

- ★ Further analysis was carried out to ascertain the relationship between participants' current situation and their disabilities. For the purposes of clarification, these figures run in conjunction with the criteria outlined in Figure 4.

Disability	In Employment	In Further Study	Seeking Employment	Not Available for Employment	Total
Physical	21	1	2	1	25
Sensory	9	3	2	0	14
Mental Health	4	3	0	0	7
Chronic Illness	11	4	2	0	17
Learning Difficulties	50	11	10		71
Other	2	2	0	0	4
Total	97	24	16	1	138

Figure 6: Disability and Present Employment Situation (n=138)

- ★ Evidently, with the high employment rates overall in mind, these results show that the majority of respondents across all disabilities were in employment. In relation to those in employment, 84% of those with physical disabilities were in employment, followed by 70% of those who had learning difficulties. Furthermore, 11 of the 17 individuals who have a chronic illness were also in employment. The highest proportion for those in further study was that of mental health difficulties accounting for approximately 43% of the mental health difficulty sample. It is also worth noting that the highest proportion for those seeking employment were those with sensory and specific learning disabilities- both had 14% of their respective samples seeking employment. Only one of the participants (who had a physical disability) stated that they were not available for employment.

- ★ Participants were asked to identify how they had heard about their current job. Approximately 16% of individuals had heard about their current job through a newspaper advert, followed by 14% who had heard about it through work experience. 11% percent stated that they had heard about it through “other college contact”, with a further 9% stating it was through a speculative approach to employers. The least common way attributed by respondents hearing about their current job was through the “disability service”, which isn’t surprising given that it is generally not the role of this form of support. However the majority heard about their current job through alternative routes classified under “Other” which included “word of mouth”, “already working in the organisation” or “through a friend”.

How did you hear of current job?	Frequency	Valid Percent
Newspaper Advert	17	15.9
Work Experience	16	14.9
Other College Contact	12	11.2
Speculative Approach to employers	10	9.4
Internet	6	5.6
Careers Service	5	4.7
Recruitment Consultant	4	3.8
Disability Service	1	0.9
Other	36	33.6
Total	107	100.00

Figure 7: How did you hear about current job? (N=107)

- ★ In order to further examine the current employment context of this graduate sample, respondents were asked to specify the geographical location of their employment while the range of present salaries was also examined.

Location	Frequency	Valid Percent
Greater Dublin Region	49	43.7
Rest of Leinster	17	15.2
Munster	28	25
Connaught	10	8.9
Ulster	4	3.6
Other	4	3.6
Total	112	100

Figure 8: Employment Location (n=112)

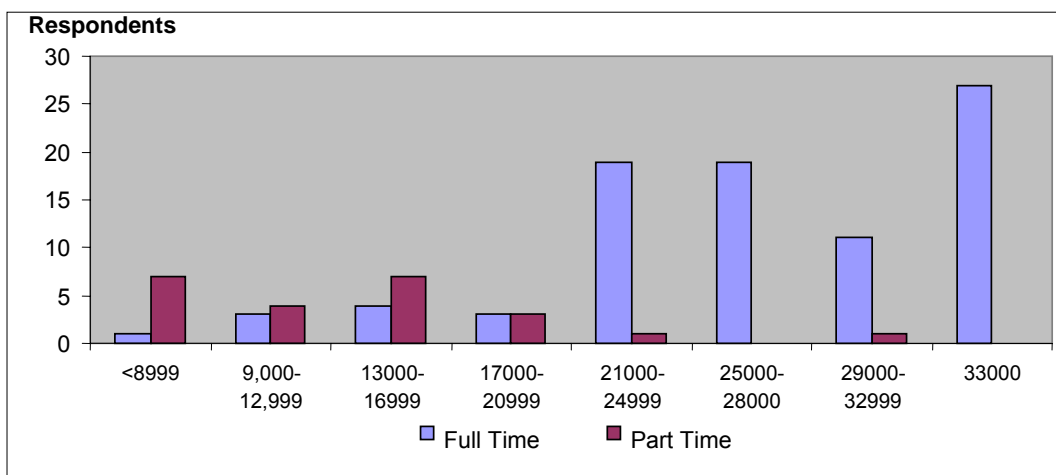
- ★ The highest number of respondents indicated that they are working in the greater Dublin area (43.7%). It must be noted that this may be a reflection of this particular sample as it has already been identified that 49% of the entire sample attended a Dublin-based college. This was followed by 25% working in the Munster region and 15% employed in the rest of Leinster. A minority of 3.6% were employed in Ulster and “other” locations respectively. “Other” locations comprised of England (3) and Worldwide (1).

Salary	Frequency	Valid Percent
Up to €8,999	8	7.2
€9,000 - €12,999	7	6.4
€13,000 - €16,999	11	10
€17,000 - €20,999	6	5.5
€21,000 - €24,999	20	18.2
€25,000 - €28,999	19	17.3
€29,000 - €32,999	12	10.9
€33,000 & Over	27	24.5
Total	110	100

Figure 9: Present Salaries (n=110)

- ★ The largest cohort of respondents indicated that they earned over €33,000 (25%). This was followed by 18% of respondents earning €21,000-€24,999 per annum and 17% earning €25,000 - €28,999. Evidently these statistics are influenced by previous findings, which highlighted that the majority of those in employment were in full-time employment, therefore the higher salaries will obviously have more representation. Thus Figure 9 may not be an accurate reflection of respondent salaries as it includes both part time and full time salaries. When part-time and full-time salaries were examined, the results identify a slightly different result.

Figure 10: Full-Time -v- Part-Time Salaries (n=110)



- ★ As this chart illustrates, the highest number of part time workers earn either up to €8,999 or €13,000-€16,999. The highest number of fulltime workers earn over €33,000. Only 11 respondents earn less that €21,000 in fulltime work while only two part-time workers earned over €21,000.
- ★ So as to further examine the situation of those in part-time employment, one survey question asked whether there were any particular reasons for working in a part-time job.

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
I want but can't find full time job	11	24.4
In education	9	20.0
I don't want a full time job	6	13.3
Consider this full time	3	6.7
Disability	3	6.7
I have another Job	3	6.7
Caring for children/Others	2	4.4
Stamina or illness related to Disability	2	4.4
No Personal Assistant	2	4.4
Access Needs	2	4.4
Other	2	4.4
Total	45	100%

Figure 11: Reasons for Working Part-Time (n=45)

- ★ Various reasons emerged for working part-time. Interestingly, despite the overall high levels of employment for this overall graduate sample, it appears that there may still be room for improvement as the most common reason for working part-time was “*I want but can't find a full time job*” with over 24% of the response rate. The next highest reason for working part time was that the respondent was “*in education or training*” (20%) followed by just over 13% who stated that they “*did not want a full time job*”. Importantly, only 3 respondents stated that they were in part-time employment due to a disability. Other reasons included “*being self employed and having flexible working hours*” and “*can't find a suitable job*”. It is also worth clarifying at this point that the large response rate for this particular question compared to the numbers who stated they were in part-time employment previously (Figure 4 and 5) may be due to the fact that respondents who were in part-time employment in the past but not currently may have answered this question also.
- ★ Before moving on to an examination of research findings regarding the subject of employment supports for graduates with disabilities, the context of that small sub-sample of graduates with disabilities seeking employment requires investigation. For respondents who stated that they were currently seeking employment, a variety of questions were asked incorporating issues such as whether they had been employed since completing their college course, the number of jobs they had applied for and how many interviews they attended.

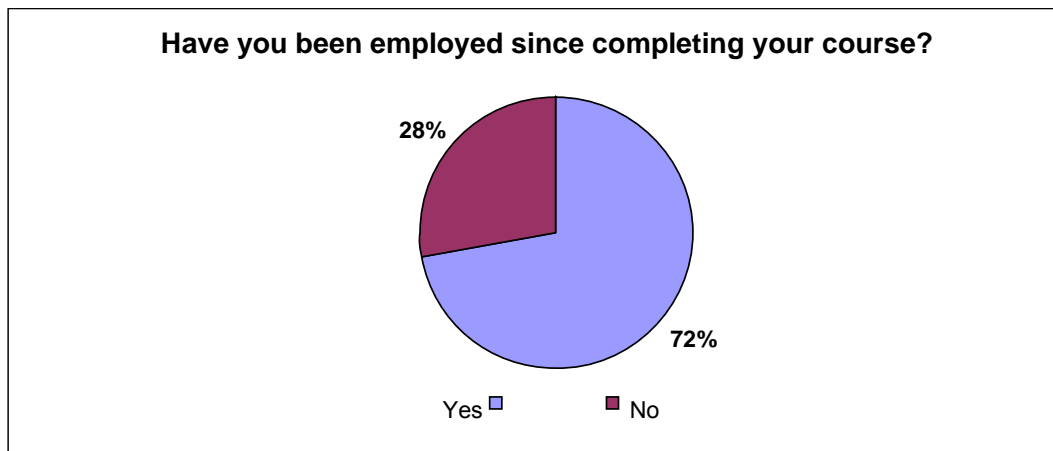


Figure 12: Employed since completing college course (n=32)

- ★ Most respondents indicated that they had been employed since completing a college course (72%) with the remaining 28% stating that they had not. Again variations in numbers are a result of people who did not state that they were in the 'seeking employment' category yet felt they should answer this question also. In clarifying this issue, further analysis was conducted to ascertain the relationship between those who stated that they were seeking employment in the 'present situation' question and whether they had been employed since they had completed their course of study. Results indicate that 75% (6 out of 8) of those seeking employment had not been employed since completing their study.
- ★ The survey also enquired about how many jobs those seeking employment had applied for.

How many jobs have you applied for?	Respondents	%
None	2	6.4
0-9	13	41.9
10-19	1	3.2
20-29	4	12.9
30-39	2	6.5
40-49	1	3.2
50+	5	16.1
Too many to count	3	9.8
Total	31	100

Figure 13: How many jobs have you applied for? (n=31)

- ★ Similar to previous outlined results, there was a wide range of responses from individuals in regard to number of jobs applied for (Figure 13), whereby the majority of respondents applied for less than 10 jobs (41.9%) but, on the other hand, some 16% of respondents had applied for over 50 jobs. In relation to the number of interviews attended (Figure 14) results ranged from one interview to over twelve. The largest proportion of respondents attended one interview, accounting for nearly 23% of those who answered this question. This was followed by 19% who had attended two interviews, with a further 12.9% having attended four interviews. Approximately 10% of individuals had attended twelve or more interviews.

How many Interviews have you attended	Respondents	%
None	4	12.9
1	7	22.6
2	6	19.3
3	3	9.7
4	4	12.9
6	1	3.2
10	3	9.7
12	2	6.5
12+	1	3.2
Total	31	100.00

Figure 14: How many interviews have you attended? (N=31)

(iii) Employment Supports

- ★ The graduate sample surveyed in this research was also asked questions in relation to the supports they may have utilised in the past in order to provide assistance in their search for employment. These included supports located within the respective colleges as well as workplace supports and grants. Initially respondents were asked which general support services they had used while in college.

Services used	Respondents	Percentage
Careers Support Service	66	56.9
Access Ability	21	18.1
FAS Disability Support Service	15	12.9
Ahead & Get Ahead Graduate Forum	14	12.1
Total	116	100%

Figure 15: Support services used while in college (n=116)

- ★ Unsurprisingly the most utilised support service while in college was the careers support service with just under 57% of respondents. This was followed by approximately 18% who has used the Access Ability, while nearly 13% has used the FAS Disability Support Service. Some respondents had used AHEAD/Get AHEAD service, accounting for 12.1% of respondents.
- ★ Participants were then asked to comment on the specific careers support services that they had used while in college from an extensive list of services provided.

Careers Service	Frequency	Percent
Careers advisor	61	42.6
Careers fair	49	34.2
CV Review clinic/Service	41	28.7
Careers Notice board	39	27.2
College Careers website	37	25.8
Email messages	33	23.1
Careers by degree Booklet	32	22.4
Postgraduate study fair	29	20.3
Job vacancy details	24	16.7
Careers guide for Final year students	24	16.8
Practice interview	19	13.3
Employer presentations	15	10.5
Practice Aptitude Tests	12	8.4
Other	8	8.4
Mentoring programs	6	4.2
Additional programs for students with disabilities	5	3.5
Total	434*	-

Figure 16: Careers services used (n=143)

* Some respondents indicated more than one careers service

- ★ Research findings indicate that the majority of respondents had used the careers advisory service, accounting for over 42% of responses, followed by the careers fair at 34.2%, the CV Review Clinic/Service and the Careers Notice board, accounting for 28.7% and 27.2% of responses respectively. Services not used by many of the respondents were 'additional programmes for students with disabilities' (3.5%) and 'mentoring programmes' (4.2%), (although it must be noted that these were only available in two colleges). Other responses included "newspaper ads" and "careers development module". What seems striking from these particular findings is that two of the most important aspects that emerged during the literature review and focus group were the influence of specifically aimed programs for students with disabilities in providing essential work experience and mentoring. Yet these are the two that relatively few graduates with disabilities availed of these options in their search for employment.
- ★ Participants were asked whether they had participated in any form of specific job preparation training while in college. Of the 141 graduates who responded to this question, only 23% had participated in this type of training while 77% had not. Therefore the majority of this group of graduates - whom the literature has already highlighted experience difficulties with regard to attitudes, discrimination and lack of awareness – have not participated in any form of job preparation training. This finding is somewhat surprising considering the levels of employment amongst the sample group.
- ★ Of those participants who participated in job preparation, results indicate that the majority (56%) felt that these were adequate while the remaining 44% did not. Furthermore, respondents were asked to comment on whether they would benefit from job preparation now, with the findings noting that just over half of respondents (51%) stated that they would. Again, this is a significant result considering the numbers within this sample group that are in employment, as it could be argued that there is a noticeable overlap between those in employment and those still feeling that they would benefit from job preparation training. Participants were also questioned on what they would require within job preparation training. Numerous responses were received, including assistance with CV preparation, interviews and applications. Another important aspect was the identification of key issues of concern amongst participants such as methods of disclosure. There was also the issue of how to go about asking for specific accommodations.
- ★ The survey also addressed the subject of supports/accommodations required or acquired while in the workplace.

Accommodations	Frequency	Percent
Flexible Working Hours	19	30.2
Assistive Technology	18	28.6
Other	14	22.2
General Access	12	19.0
Total	63	100

Figure 17: Workplace Accommodations (n=63)

- ★ As is evident in Figure 17 above, the most common workplace accommodations required by respondents were ‘flexible working hours’ and ‘assistive technology’ (accounting for 30.2% and 28.6% respectively). Adjustments associated with ‘general access’ were required by 19% of respondents to this question, while 22% indicated that they needed other special workplace arrangements - which included *“access to medical appointments during working hours”* and *“not having to use the phone”*.
- ★ Respondents were also asked whether these accommodation needs were being met by the company in which they are employed - with 43.8% stating that they are ‘always’ met, 27.1% stated that they are met ‘most of the time’ and 12.5% reporting that their needs are met ‘sometimes’. An additional 12.5% of respondents stated that their accommodation needs were ‘never’ met.
- ★ Following previous findings within different elements of this AHEAD research, an important question posed to the graduate sample asked how aware they were of the range of labour market grants and supports available for graduates with disabilities and employers.

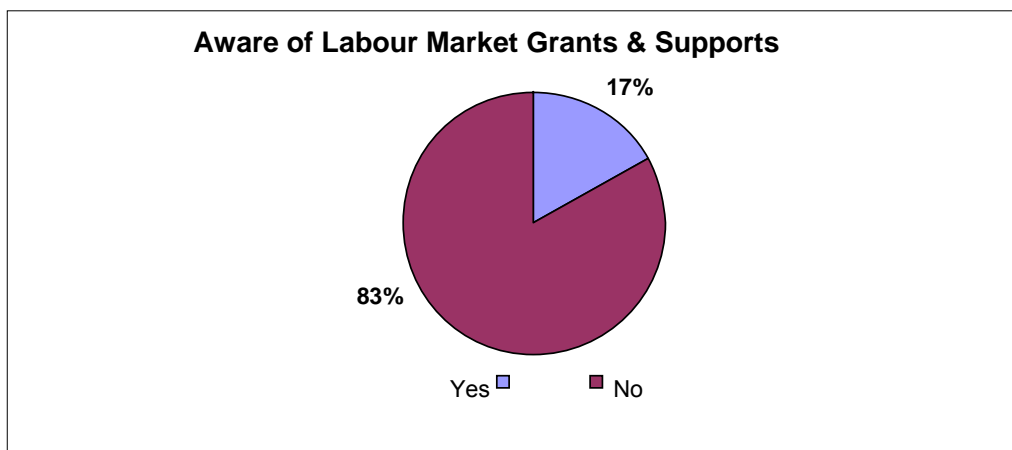


Figure 18: Awareness of Labour Market Grants & Supports (n=113)

- ★ 83% of graduates who responded to this question were not aware of the full range of labour market grants and supports that they may be entitled to. Only 17% were aware of the range of these services. As noted in the literature review and focus group, awareness of the supports available to graduates with disabilities is low considering their importance making the workplace more accessible and increasing confidence in seeking employment armed with the relevant knowledge supports available.
- ★ Respondents were also asked whether they had applied for any grants in the past. In line with Figure 18, only a minority of respondents had applied (11.9%) for a grant. The most common grants applied for were the Interview Interpreter Grant, followed by the Supported Employment Grant. Only 2 respondents had applied for the Workplace Adaptation Grant.

(iv) Employment Issues

- ★ Some of the more direct and open-ended questions in the survey were reserved for those questions, which could explicitly inquire into the most significant issues for graduates with disabilities when attempting to enter the Irish labour market. Firstly respondents were asked to identify the main issues they would have concerns about when applying for work.

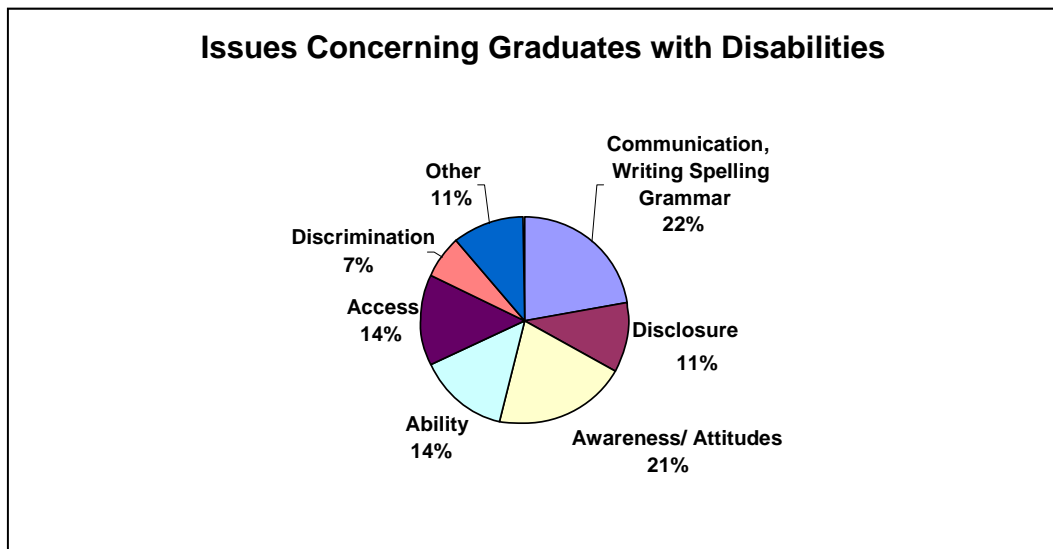


Figure 19: Issues concerning respondents when applying for work (n=143)

- ★ In terms of highest percentages, ‘communication, writing/spelling/grammar’ and ‘awareness/attitudes’ appear to be the most prevalent issues for this sample group. In noting this point, two things immediately come to mind. Firstly, ‘communication, writing/spelling/grammar’ as the most common issue may possibly be a direct result of the high numbers of graduates within this sample with specific learning disabilities (51.1%). Although as noted during the literature review, previous AHEAD research indicates that numbers for third level students with specific learning disabilities on a national scale are similar. Secondly, it is worth noting that the issue of (and relationship between) ‘awareness/attitudes’ has emerged as an issue within each facet of this study.
- ★ Other noteworthy issues include ‘access’ and ‘ability’, both with a 14% response rate, followed by ‘disclosure’ (11%) and discrimination (7%). ‘Other’ issues which accounted for 11% included ‘stress’, flexibility’ and ‘ability to find a suitable job’. Looking at Figure 19 it seems that the various and divided response highlights the diversity of issues for a diverse sample group. It is also interesting to note that the lowest outlined issue was ‘discrimination’ while all the most common issues articulated may apply particularly to the application and recruitment phase. The 14% of respondents who stated that ‘ability’ was an issue for them may emphasise a certain lack of confidence in applying for suitable jobs.
- ★ In a separate question, respondents were also asked to outline the factors that are most restrictive in their search for employment from a list of items

;

Factors	Not Restrictive	Partly Restrictive	Most Restrictive
Available transport	47.6	42.9	9.5
Available accommodation	87.5	6.3	6.3
Affordable accommodation	76.5	23.5	-
Restricted Geographical Location	57.9	5.3	36.8
Physical Access	88.9	5.6	5.6
Availability of Personal Assistant	87.5	6.3	6.3
Lack of work experience	45	25	30.0
Lack of employer assistance	31.8	22.7	45.5

* Represents the percentage for each of the individual restricting factors rated by participants

Figure 20: Restricting Factors in Seeking Employment

- ★ Looking at Figure 20 briefly in terms of highest column percentages, it appears that among our sample group ‘physical access’, ‘availability of P.A.’, ‘available accommodation’, and ‘affordable accommodation’ are not restricting factors during the search for employment. ‘Available transport’ seems to be partly restrictive while the factors with the highest percentages in the most restrictive column are ‘restricted geographical location’, ‘lack of work experience’ and ‘lack of employer assistance’. Thus from a general perspective of this graduate sample, the three most restrictive factors which effect the employment search are ‘lack of employer assistance’ (45.5%), ‘restricted geographical location’ (36.8%) and ‘lack of work experience’ (30%).
- ★ During the introduction to this AHEAD study an important clarification was made between two situations; one where graduates with disabilities are able to access jobs and the other where graduates with disabilities are able to access ‘freely chosen’ jobs that are suitable to their qualifications. With this in mind, the graduate sample was asked to state whether there was any disability-related reason for them to remain in their current job.

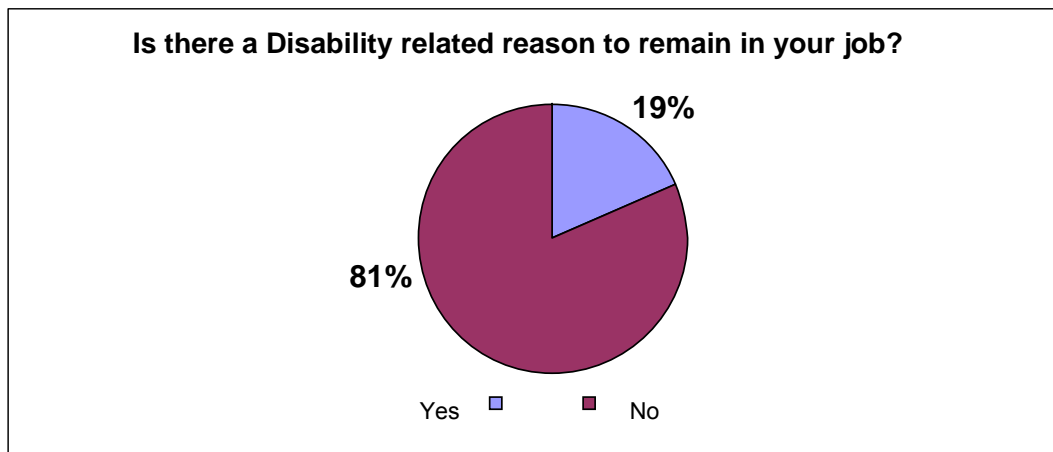


Figure 21: Is there a disability related reason to remain in your job? (N=97)

- ★ Thus the majority of respondents (81%) to this question do not remain in their current job because of a disability-related reason. Various answers emerged as to why individuals do remain in their jobs due to a disability-related reason, some of which included 'I can work from home', 'I don't have to answer the phone', 'difficulty in getting other jobs' and 'location of other jobs'.
- ★ Another issue, which continually emerged during both the literature review and focus group, was disclosure. In order to measure the impact of disclosure on employment prospects, those 'seeking employment' were asked to state whether or not they choose to disclose their disability.

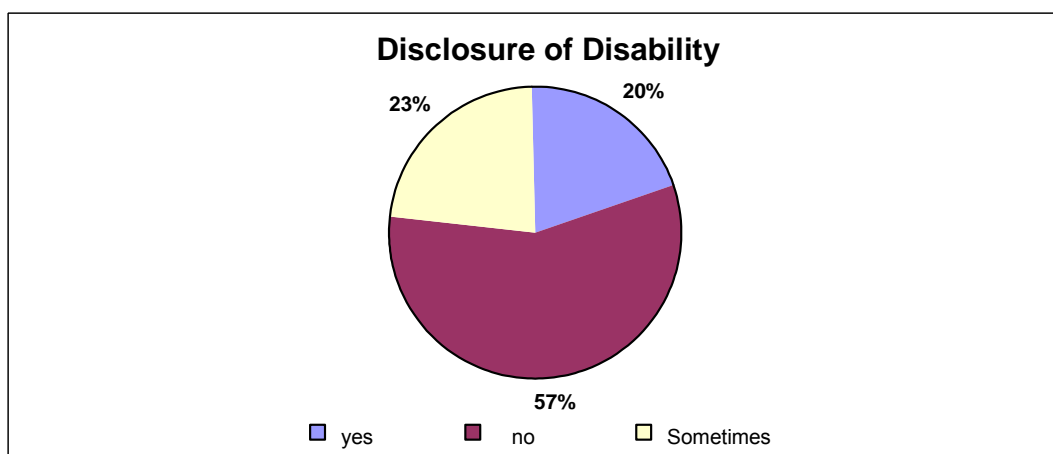


Figure 22: Disclosure of Disability (n=30)

- ★ The majority of those graduates seeking employment (57%) stated that they did not disclose their disability, in comparison to 20% who said "yes" and a further 23% saying "sometimes". It remains difficult to say whether non-disclosure impacts directly on employment prospects as there are so

many other factors involved. What can be seen from these findings (and within the literature review and focus group) is that disclosure is a complex issue often relying on a specific context rather than a simple disclosure or non-disclosure split. In relation to time of disclosure, of those respondents who stated that they do disclose their disability, 34% stated that they disclose it at the interview stage compared to 25% who disclose it at the application stage. A further 8% stated that they disclose it at the “offer” stage. It should be noted that 33% of respondents stated that it “depends”, regarding when they disclose their disability.

- ★ Having gone through both the focus group results and the survey findings, it now seems viable to move on to a concluding analysis chapter which will attempt to draw the findings from the literature review, focus group and graduate survey together in order to highlight the most significant findings and produce achievable and necessary recommendations.

Chapter 4: Research Analysis: Different Paths, Alternative Methods...Similar Ability

The following chapter will address the findings of the focus group and graduate survey under the same broad topics as those outlined within the literature review. In doing so it is intended that the key research findings and recommendations will be presented in a comprehensive and concise manner.

An Impaired Context

The graduate survey demonstrates very positive employment results with the majority of respondents in full time employment. According to survey analysis, 59% of the entire graduate sample indicated that they were in full-time employment at the time of the survey (18% in part-time employment). This success is to be celebrated and shows a real breakthrough in the employment opportunities of qualified graduates with disabilities. The survey paints a very different picture to the employment status of people with disabilities outlined in the literature review earlier and gives weight to the argument that education makes a significant difference in the employment opportunities of disabled people.

This AHEAD survey represents the largest sample of graduates with disabilities studied; yet there were considerable difficulties in accumulating a nationwide sample as some colleges had very little data and therefore no reliable method of distribution. For instance the profile of those who participated includes two revealing statistics; 49% of the sample graduated from Dublin colleges and in total 58.7% worked in Leinster (43.7% in 'Greater Dublin area and 15% in 'rest of Leinster'). Although the surveys were distributed on a nation-wide scale, due to the fact that few colleges have reliable databases of students with disabilities who have graduated, survey findings cannot claim to be representative on a national scale. However, they can claim to be representative of those institutions that collect the relevant data. The one concrete finding that emerges from this element of the study is that there is a need firstly for a more database of student exits and secondly for more specific research. The database would serve to monitor student outcomes and impact of supports.

The survey revealed a lack of substantive research in relation to the progression of graduates with disabilities. Graduates with disabilities are not included in mainstream research on graduates such as the HEA First Destinations Report making it difficult to ascertain whether work engaged in by graduates with disabilities is 'freely chosen' and 'substantial and worthwhile' or that they are simply picking up employment below their academic standard. It becomes almost

impossible to propose potentially effective solutions and give weight to legislative rights without knowing the exact employment circumstances. Two of the universities that have designated disability officers in their careers offices (UL and UCC) have, according to their recent reports, achieved good results. The most important point remains that these are two of the very few third level institutions that can provide reliable data on the situation of their graduates with disabilities. Consequently, while having designated career support might not always equal achieving positive outcomes - it does mean that the appropriate data to analyse the situation thoroughly and choose the most appropriate methods to attain those good results is available.



By monitoring the exit of students with disabilities from third level education, future research may have a reliable database from which it can begin to understand the employment situation of graduates with disabilities and identify the key factors in accessing employment.

As noted within the initial stages of the introduction at the beginning of this study, the UN statement on the rights of persons with disabilities specifies two necessary conditions; one ‘...the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen...’ and two ‘...[a] work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities’. The inclusive work environment is a prerequisite of having the right to gain ‘freely chosen’ work. Yet, the unanimous view expressed during the focus group was that an inclusive work environment does not yet exist for graduates with disabilities in Ireland and opportunities for gaining ‘substantial and worthwhile employment’ are described as ‘disheartening’. These views illustrate the difference between recognizing rights and recognizing contexts in order to bring these rights into effect.

‘It is very disheartening that in this day and age there is still such an ordeal for an individual with a disability to obtain substantial and worthwhile employment which relates to their qualification’ (Focus group participant).

In spite of the positive results, more complex findings also emerged from the survey. For example, the most common response to the question regarding reasons for working part-time was; *‘I want but can’t find a full-time job’*. It is also worth highlighting the apparent contrast between the generally positive employment rates of the survey compared to the ‘disheartening’ experiences described during the focus group. It could be argued that this disparity emphasises the need for a more detailed research context in which the issues for graduates with disabilities can be studied in a comprehensive manner.

In looking solely at the employment context findings of this research, it becomes apparent that the relatively high employment rates emanating from the survey do not paint the whole picture. The literature review and the outcomes of the focus group provide us with a more detailed and comprehensive account of the experience of accessing employment by graduates with disability.

Obstructing Opportunity

The greatest barrier to employment for graduates with disabilities is attitudinal. Running through this study is the significance of misinformed attitudes and myths regarding people with disabilities in general. The literature review noted that stereotypes formed through a lack of information and awareness regarding disabilities are primarily based on ignorance rather than prejudice. Some focus group participants noted how a lack of experience with disabilities, combined with the naïve use of perception-laden language, could result in employers having suspicions about prospective employees with disabilities, such as low productivity expectations or a proneness to illness.

Further evidence is provided by the graduate survey where 21% of respondents claimed that 'awareness/attitudes' was the main issue when applying for employment. It is also interesting to note that only 7% felt that discrimination was the main issue, which, perhaps, supports the literature review finding that problematic perceptions are based on a lack of awareness rather than discrimination.

If recruitment procedures are to be inclusive of graduates with disabilities then recruitment staff needs to be aware of their own attitudes and myths about disability and need to be informed about inclusive practice. During the focus group it was noted that job descriptions could be a barrier when they are not standardised i.e. rigidly based on skills that are not essential to the job and use language (such as 'seeking a dynamic person' or 'work hard, play hard'), which is irrelevant to the personal skills required to fulfil the role.

Focus group participants also claimed that work experience seems to be the only thing that employers look at on a CV, thus denying the relevance or existence of the **different paths** that graduates with disabilities may have to take in order to find employment, particularly in relation to a situation where work experience is very difficult to acquire. Essentially rigid job descriptions, misinformed perceptions and an over reliance on previous work as a predictor of future performance can be off-putting for the potential applicant with a disability and can often result in graduates with disabilities viewing a job as 'not for them'. An open and inclusive work environment acknowledges different paths from education to employment and practices a competency-based approach to job descriptions and selection methods.

Disclosure of a disability represents one of the most complex yet pressing issues for graduates with disabilities entering the Irish labour market. As noted during the focus group, graduates do not know whether (or when) they should disclose. The general perception among the focus group participants was that it would not be in their interests to disclose their disability.

'It can be hidden and unfortunately in today's working environment must be to disclose would hinder my career' (participant with dyslexia).

The disclosure dilemma often involves a choice between disclosing in order to receive appropriate accommodations or not disclosing for fear of not getting the job or being treated differently if employed already. One graduate stated;

"at the interview I kept thinking will I tell them or won't I , I didn't know what to do and it affected my whole interview".

The impact of the disclosure issue, even when it doesn't occur, is thus considerable. It is even further complicated for graduates with 'hidden' disabilities who have unique issues and problems. There are myths and fears around 'hidden' disabilities partially due to the stigma applied to people with mental health difficulties and the uninformed use of stereotypical language. Considering that over half of the graduate survey sample had a specific learning disability (which may not be visible), misinformed perceptions and fear could make a significant impact on the employment chances of a large section of graduates with disabilities.

It is also worth noting that, within the survey analysis, 80% of those respondents 'seeking employment' said they do not always disclose their disability when applying for employment. This is highly significant as elsewhere in the survey 63 respondents revealed that they required accommodations on the job and over 50% still feel that they require job-preparation training. If there are a high number of graduates with hidden disabilities not disclosing their disability to the employer, and not getting the accommodations they need to perform well on the job, the crucial question then becomes; how will this impact on the retention rates of those who do secure employment? Graduates need to be made aware of the implications of disclosure decisions as well as their rights and employer obligations, while employers need to be able to enquire about any necessary accommodations while also being prepared to deal with non-disclosure in a fair and equitable manner.

Another noted barrier is the lack of awareness among employers and graduates in relation to the range of grants and supports available to assist in the employment of people with disabilities. While the UL (2005) and Manpower (2003) surveys discussed during the literature review display the lack of awareness among employers, the graduate survey utilised as part of this study found that 83% of the sample were not aware of the full range of labour market grants and supports that they may be entitled to. One focus group participant stated; *'I wasn't aware of all the services available to help me prepare for employment'*. Additionally, only 11.9% of the sample surveyed had applied for a labour market grant in the past. These statistics are very low considering their importance in making the workplace more accessible and providing increased



confidence for people with disabilities to seek employment armed with the relevant knowledge of what assistance is available.

The lack of preparation of both graduate and employers is a barrier to employment. Further evidence for this is provided by both the graduate survey and the focus group; as the factor viewed as 'most restricting in the search for employment' by the graduate sample was 'lack of employer assistance' (45.5%). Conversely, there was agreement among the focus group that graduates with disabilities need to be able to market their unique talents in a more positive manner i.e. emphasizing their own self-awareness and ability to deal with barriers and difficulties through the use of creative solutions.

Disability/welfare benefits also seem to represent an obstacle to the employment for graduates with disabilities. Focus group participants agreed that the current social welfare system in Ireland, described as '*a minefield*', appears to identify people as either fit to work full-time or unfit for full-time employment and therefore in need of rehabilitation and benefits. It is only in recent years that the Irish workforce has come to see the benefits of the flexible working environment. Nonetheless, the much discussed welfare/benefit trap affects the choices of some graduates with disabilities, as they consider whether or not to move into the labour market.

Some focus group participants stated that it could be very difficult to find part-time work that allows them to maintain their benefits. It is in these types of cases, also described during the literature review, that it almost becomes a choice between holding on to full benefits and losing them completely in order to enter the workforce. As noted previously, this situation essentially provides graduates with disabilities with the benefits and supports that enable them to move into the labour market. Yet making that move may cause graduates to lose those important and necessary supports.

A simple analogy is building a house; in order to build a house, foundations (supports) must be put in place first so that the house has a stable base. The situation facing many graduates who require supports and want to enter the labour market resembles the building of foundations in order to create a solid footing, then, just as the house is about to be erected taking the foundations away from underneath it.

-  ***Increased emphasis on the promotion and dissemination of information regarding the range of labour market grants and supports available to assist both graduates with disabilities and employers is essential.***
-  ***There is a need to include issues such as disclosure within career guidance and to adequately prepare graduates with disabilities for employment. Training and information dissemination regarding the impacts***

of disclosure and disability/social welfare benefits are essential for graduates and Career Advisors.

- ➔ *Inclusive recruitment procedures require a competency approach to job specifications outlining core tasks, competency based interviews and an acknowledgement of the different paths graduates with disabilities may have to take in their search for 'suitable and worthwhile employment, which relates to their qualification'.***
- ➔ *Although not a new subject, the welfare/benefits trap is still in need of an employment / benefit analysis in order to assess whether there are sufficient incentives to encourage the progression from benefits into employment.***
- ➔ *Many graduates with disabilities, due to the impact of their disability, can only engage with employment on a part-time basis. Employment policies need to be flexible in order to enable employers to tap into the talents of all graduates with disabilities.***

Breaking through Barriers

It is apparent from the literature review, graduate survey and focus group findings, that in order for a graduate with a disability to be fully prepared for entry into the mainstream labour force, they will need to be aware of additional issues such as available supports and grants, implications of disclosure or non-disclosure, disability legislation and the impact of employment on benefit entitlements. The lack of dedicated provision within career guidance for graduates with disabilities assumes there is an even playing field once the student has completed college and this is evidently not the case.

The graduate survey produced some interesting results in terms of career guidance, indicating that 56.9% of graduates with disabilities use the careers services while in college. However only 23% of the sample surveyed have participated in specific job preparation training, 44% of those who had participated felt it was inadequate and 51% of the total sample stated that they would benefit from job preparation training now (a stark statistic considering 78% of the entire sample was in some form of employment when surveyed). These survey findings would suggest that standard career guidance training which doesn't address disability specific issues is failing to equip students and graduates with disabilities with the knowledge and awareness of issues that they require in order to seek 'freely chosen' employment.

It would appear that graduates with disabilities leave college unprepared to deal with the work environment thus the lack of specific job preparation training is of

some concern. It has been outlined in the literature review and focus group that unlike other graduates, graduates with disabilities have to, not only deal with the disadvantages of their disability, but must also advocate on their own behalf for supports while at the same time persuade employers of their ability to do the job.

Not forgetting that all this is played out in an employment culture with no history of employing graduates with disabilities, with little understanding or expertise of how to include them in the workplace, little knowledge of the grants available, nor of the simple adjustments/accommodations that can be made to enable the disabled person to be as productive as other colleagues. The importance of the dedicated supports offered by designated careers officers within third level careers offices becomes all the more apparent when comparing the situation with both UL and UCC who provide dedicated career supports and maintain data on graduates with disabilities in order to identify what is required in terms of training and preparation for future students with disabilities. These dedicated supports also have the advantage of providing a path to work experience for students with disabilities whilst in college.

According to the focus group, work experience is a crucial element in assisting the transition to employment. The unique education to employment routes taken by students with disabilities often result in CV's which lack not only relevant work experience but any employment experience at all and it is this factor that often hinders employment prospects. Graduates therefore cannot be aware of what the world of work requires and what they require to enter into it. 30% of respondents in the graduate survey highlighted a 'lack of work experience' as one of the top three most restricting factors in the search for employment. In attempting to propose solutions to this issue, some focus group attendees stressed that work placements (as part of the college course, or acting as the transitional bridge from education to employment) could provide major learning and beneficial experience for both graduates and students with disabilities. One attendee stated that they would have been 'lost' if they had gone directly into the workplace without prior work placement experience. Focus group participants also stressed the importance of mentors in assisting with the social integration into workplace culture as this mechanism may fill the knowledge gap left by relatively little previous work experience.

'A link or bridge needs to be put in place between graduates and the workplace to eliminate fears or anxiety' (focus group participant).

The building of a bridge that will ease the transition from education to employment for graduates with disabilities could potentially involve a number of different players, in particular the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, employers, careers advisors and graduates themselves. However, in keeping with the construction analogy, the foundations of this bridge must be built by career guidance in third level. Evidently, career guidance and work experience are possibly the two most pivotal factors in students and graduates'

with disabilities preparation for employment. An innovative approach could be to combine the two with work placements (possibly within the college itself) facilitated by designated careers offices. Under the Disability Act 2005, colleges are obliged to fill their 3% quota of staff with people with disabilities. This approach could therefore utilise the colleges' students and graduates with disabilities to reach this figure through the facilitation of work placements within the respective colleges.

Reasonable accommodations can also have a huge impact on the employment prospects of graduates with disabilities. The simple point to be made here is that reasonable accommodations work, particularly in cases where specialised equipment or assistive technology provides the required assistance so that a person with a disability can get on with doing the job. One of the advantages for a company introducing reasonable accommodations to their workplace is that they can benefit all staff. For example, creating a flexible work environment or ethos. Another advantage of reasonable accommodations is that they can influence other recruitment procedures such as job specifications through highlighting a fact noted during the focus group; jobs and tasks can be done in a number of ways through **alternative methods**.


According to the graduate survey 'flexible working hours' and 'assistive technology' were the two most common accommodations amongst the graduate sample. However, the provision of reasonable accommodations in their current format still present considerable obstacles for graduates with disabilities accessing the mainstream labour market, especially in relation to three specific aspects; mental health accommodations, language and a lack of equity in policy, practice and provision.


These three interrelated aspects are briefly outlined below:


- ★ Graduates with mental health difficulties face unique obstacles in their search for meaningful employment in that there is no standardised accommodation (i.e. workplace equipment or assistive technology) response for employers to attain - each case must be analysed individually. Thus, due to the resilience of myths and stereotypes surrounding hidden disabilities (outlined in the literature review and focus group), compounded by the fact that there is no standardised accommodation response providing once-off solutions, employers may fear that they do not have the expertise to adequately accommodate graduates with mental health difficulties. This may result in greater exclusion from the workplace for people with hidden disabilities while also potentially placing more emphasis on the importance and impact (and stress) of the disclosure decision.
- ★ The use of vague language in legislation (i.e. reasonable, disproportionate burden) has resulted in ambiguity around what can be termed an

accommodation. This form of indefinite language has resulted in a lack of clarity and subsequently a lack of equity.

- ★ There appears to be an immediate acceptance of the idea of assistive technology as a reasonable accommodation. Yet problems arise for graduates with specific health or mobility issues who require privately arranged transport as an accommodation, as these travel arrangements are not considered by the FAS grant system as a reasonable accommodation. This point becomes even more evident when noting that one of the findings from the survey found that 'restricted geographical location' (36.8%) was one of the other most restricting factors in the search for employment. In taking a broader view, it appears that there is inherent inequality inbuilt into the current grants system for reasonable accommodations as it clearly favours those who require equipment or technology rather than other forms of support such as transport. It seems that the current framework of grants and reasonable accommodations, established to support those who need assistance to access the mainstream workforce, is more focused on the provision of equipment and technology in order to ensure productivity than actually providing the broad range of supports that may be required. Clarification is needed at policy level in order to address an issue that may be regarded as a lack of equity in terms of the provision of reasonable accommodations.

 ***The importance of designated disability support within career guidance offices cannot be stressed enough as this is the first necessary step to being able to grasp the situation of graduates with disabilities from each college. These dedicated supports could also have a role to play in facilitating work placements, which offer the crucial experience of the workplace that is often lacking when referring to the different education to employment paths of graduates with disabilities.***

 ***Standard career guidance services are not enough to fully equip students and graduates with disabilities for the labour market. More funding and flexibility is required so that these students and graduates can receive adequate preparation for the workforce in terms of specific job preparation training, which could address issues such as disclosure, accommodations and benefits.***

 ***Preparation for both graduates with disabilities and employers is the most important aspect in building that transitional bridge between education and employment. With this preparation comes an increase in knowledge and awareness of the primary issues and hopefully one final realization; that graduates with disabilities in Ireland can take different paths from education to employment, may use alternative methods to undertake tasks, but ultimately have the same talent and ability as any other graduate.***

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(Permanent or temporary)
including employment schemes
(please answer Section 3 and Section 8)

(please answer Section 3, Section 5 and
Section 8)

Seeking employment
(please answer Section 3, Section 6 and
Section 8)

Not available for employment
or study
(please answer Section 3, Section 7 and
Section 8)

Section 3. College Services Used

Q.2. Which of the following services have you used?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Careers Support Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Get Ahead Graduate Forum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAS Disability Support Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Ahead |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Access Ability | |

Q.3.a. While attending College, did you participate in the Job preparation?

Yes No

Q4.b. If yes, were these adequate?

Yes No

Q4.c. Would you benefit from job preparation now?

Yes No

What would you require:.....

Q.5. Did you use Careers services while in College? (Tick all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appointment with Careers Advisor | <input type="checkbox"/> Practice Aptitude Tests |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Careers Fair | <input type="checkbox"/> College Careers Website |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Additional career programs for students with disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> Email messages about career events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job Vacancy Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring programs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate Study Fair | <input type="checkbox"/> Careers by Degrees booklet |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Careers Guide for Final Year students |

- Employer Presentations
- CV Review
- Practice Interviews
- Careers Notice Board
- Other (Please specify)
.....

Section 4. CURRENT EMPLOYMENT

Q.6. Are you currently working full time or part time? Full Time Part-Time

Q.7. *If working full time, how many hours per week?*

30 or less 31-35 hours 36-40 hours over 40 hours per week

Q.8.a. What is your present Job Title?

Q.8.b. Geographical location of employment (in Ireland please give county, if overseas please give country)
.....

Q.8.c. Business/Activity of your employer:.....

Q.8.d Present Salary (per annum)

up to €8,999	€9,000-€12,999	€13,000-€16,999	€17,000-20,999	
€1,000-€4,999	€5,000-€8,999		€29,000-€32,999	€33,000

Q.9.a. *If working part time how many hours per week?*

5 or less 6-12 hours 13-19 hours over 20 hours per week

Q.9.b. If working part time, please specify your reason (please tick all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> In education or training | <input type="checkbox"/> I consider this a full time job |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caring for children/others | <input type="checkbox"/> Stamina related illness or disability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disability | <input type="checkbox"/> Available transport/parking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I want but can't find a full time job | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Assistant not available |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have another job | <input type="checkbox"/> Access needs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I do not want a full time job | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
..... |

Q.10. Has your choice of employment been influenced by any of the following? (tick all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Available Transport | <input type="checkbox"/> Support network |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Available Adapted | <input type="checkbox"/> General access |

Accommodation

- Affordable Adapted Accommodation
- Geographical location
- Other (please specify)

Q.11.a. Is there any disability related reason why you remain in this job?

Yes No

Q.11.b. Please explain your answer to Q.11.a

.....

Q.12.a. Do you require any special workplace arrangements? (tick all that apply)

- Assistive Technology
- General Access
- Flexible Working Hours
- Other (Please specify)

Q.12.b. Are these needs met?

Always Most of the time Sometimes Rarely Never

Q.13. Are you aware of labour market grants and services available to graduates with disabilities?

Yes No

Q.14. Have you applied for any of the following? (please tick all that apply)

- Work Place Equipment Adaptation Grant
- Employment Support Scheme
- Personal Reader Grant
- Job Interview Interpreter Grant
- Supported Employment

Q.15. Do you know if your employer applied for any disability related grants?

Yes No

If yes please tick all that you are aware of

- Work Place Equipment Adaptation Grant
- Employment Support Scheme
- Personal Reader Grant
- Job Interview Interpreter Grant
- Supported Employment

Q.16. As a graduate with a disability, can you list three key issues that concerned you when applying for work

1.
2.
3.

Q.17. How did you hear about your current job?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> College Careers Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper advert |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work experience/ Placement | <input type="checkbox"/> Recruitment consultant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other College contact | <input type="checkbox"/> Internet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speculative approach to employers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disability Service | |

Section 5. CURRENT FURTHER STUDY OR TRAINING

Q18: What are you studying?.....

Q19: Why did you choose this?.....

Section 6. SEEKING EMPLOYMENT

If you are currently seeking employment please complete this section

Q.20. Have you been employed at any time since completing your course?

Yes No

Q.21. Approximately how many jobs did you apply for?

Q.22. Approximately how many interviews did you attend?

Q.23a. When seeking employment do you disclose your disability to an employer?

Yes No Sometimes

Q.23.b. If yes to Q31a, when do you disclose?

At application stage

At interview stage

At offer stage

Q.24. If you are currently seeking employment but are restricted by any of the following factors, please rate not restrictive, partly restrictive, most restrictive

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Rating</i>		
	Not Restrictive	Partly Restrictive	Most Restrictive
<i>Available transport</i>			
<i>Available adapted accommodation</i>			
<i>Affordable adapted accommodation</i>			
<i>Restricted geographical location</i>			
<i>Physical access</i>			
<i>Availability of Personal Assistant</i>			
<i>Lack of Work Experience</i>			
<i>Lack of employer Awareness</i>			

Q. 25. If there is another reason why you think that you have not yet secured employment please specify

.....
.....

Section 7. NOT AVAILABLE FOR EMPLOYMENT

If you are not currently available for employment please answer the following question:

Q.26. What is your main reason for not seeking work?

.....
.....

SECTION 8

Q.27. Would you be willing to participate in a once off focus group to discuss issues concerning graduates with disabilities?

Yes No

Q.28. Any final comments?

.....
.....

Thank you very much for participating in this survey
All responses are in strictest confidence.