TOOLKIT:
PROVIDING SPECIALIST CAREERS ADVICE FOR YOUR DISABLED STUDENTS

myplusstudentsclub.com
The aim of the MyPlus Universities’ Club (MPUC) toolkit is to provide information, resources and guidance to University staff who are supporting disabled students as they search for placements, internships and graduate roles.

Based on feedback we have highlighted some of the main topics raised by students during the recruitment process and created simple ‘Conversation Cards’ to be used as required, to support them in making informed choices.

The ‘Challenges’ video can be used to share information about MPSC with students or for staff training purposes, whichever way you decide to use the information we hope it will encourage more students to get into work.

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MPUC Toolkit Introduction

Why disability matters

14% of undergraduate students have a disability or health condition; this includes, but is not limited to, conditions such as poor mental health, dyslexia, Asperger’s Syndrome, hearing impairments, cancer, ADHD, speech impairments and physical impairments.

This number is set to increase and presents a challenge for both graduate recruiters, who historically have struggled to engage with disabled students, and Universities who are tasked with ensuring all students, including those who have a disability, are ready for work.

Progressive employers recognise that disability is no barrier to success, and the strengths and skills that have been developed to manage a disability on a day-to-day basis are readily transferable into the workplace; skills such as time management, resilience and problem solving. However, engagement with this talent pool remains low not least that this group of students lack the confidence to apply to such employers, believing that their disability will rule them out of the running for graduate jobs.

It is our collective responsibility to raise the aspirations of these young people and build their confidence in order that they can maximise their chances of successful employment outcomes when they graduate.

www.myplusstudentsclub.com is designed to connect talented disabled students with disability confident employers looking for the best recruits. MPSC recognises the common challenges facing disabled students entering employment and are experienced in providing practical advice and guidance to this talent pool as they search for jobs and internships and prepare for interviews.

See next page for more
Understanding Disability

Disability and long-term health conditions include, but are not limited to, visual and hearing impairments, mobility impairments, Asperger’s Syndrome, diabetes, epilepsy, dyspraxia, mental health conditions, speech impairment and major illnesses such as cancer, HIV and MS.

A person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

14% of students at UK Universities have a disability*

Concerns of disabled students about ‘being open’

See next page for more
Challenges Facing Disabled Students

Video

Disabled students face a number of challenges as they enter the world of work. To help support them to overcome these challenges, we first need to understand what these challenges are.

Our ‘Challenges’ video highlights the disability specific careers advice and resources available to disabled students at www.myplusstudentsclub.com, and provides insights which may provide a useful platform for discussion and training purposes within your teams.
The benefits of being open

The following explores both the benefits of being open, and the consequences of not informing

Benefits of being open

• Students can request in advance the adjustments/support they need enabling them to demonstrate their full potential at each stage of the application process.

Q: You are the expert of your own condition. What adjustments do you need to demonstrate your ability?

• Students can discuss their disability positively with an employer. In addition to informing an employer that they have a disability, they can talk about the strengths they have gained from managing it.

Q: What skills and strengths have you developed from managing your disability on a day-to-day basis?

• Rather than trying to hide a disability, being open allows students to be themselves throughout the application process and focus on showing the employer what they can do.

Q: In what ways do you work differently because of your disability and how might you explain this to an employer?

Finally...

Students should ask themselves why they are being open and what do they want an employer to do as a result of the information they share. If they decide to be open, they should also decide how they are going to present themselves and their disability in a positive light.

TIP

If a student informs the employer about their disability after being rejected, the employer is under no obligation to re-interview them.
How to be open

A checklist which students can use to put together their ‘openness statement’ and discuss their disability effectively with an employer

What to say – openness statement

1. This is my disability / condition
2. These are the implications for the recruitment process
3. As a consequence, this is what I require

Example:

I am a wheelchair user. I am unable to walk and use a wheelchair at all times. I require access, a toilet and a parking space.

Example:

I have an anxiety disorder. I become nervous particularly in new situations. It will be useful for me to have an orientation visit prior to my interview and for my interviewer to be aware of my condition on the day.

Example:

I have dyslexia. I have weak short-term memory and I am unable to write comprehensive notes while I am listening. I will require additional reading time and it will useful for me to have handouts in advance.

How to be open

A checklist which students can use to put together their ‘openness statement’ and discuss their disability effectively with an employer

The main reasons for being open in the recruitment process are to access the support and adjustments required to enable the applicant to demonstrate their full potential. Thus, students should provide information that will enable recruiters to understand what they need and why, early on, in order for employers to have time to prepare.

Who to speak to and when?

• Students can contact the graduate recruitment team by phone or email. Many employers provide disability contact information on www.myplusstudentsclub.com or on their careers page.

• Students may choose to discuss adjustments with a recruiter prior to applying or provide details of their disability and the support they require on the application form.

• Students should inform the recruitment team as soon as they receive an invitation to an assessment day or interview.

• If students have received a job offer and are going to need adjustments, they should discuss these prior to the start date.

Finally...

Students should tell the employer only what is relevant in terms of their providing support / implementing adjustments. They should be timely in their communication and be prepared to answer any follow up questions the employer may have about what the student requires. Applicants should supply supporting evidence where appropriate.

We strongly encourage students to be open and upfront about sharing information about a disability on the application form. This will allow us to make any necessary adjustments and ensure a fair recruitment process for all. Once candidates have informed us about their disability we will reach out via email to discuss adjustments – this can be anything from 25% extra time to installing special software for the visually impaired where written tests are involved.


myplusstudentsclub.com

See next page for more
Applying with a disability

| The following details how to account for various disability-related differences

A gap in education

- Rather than leaving any period of time unaccounted for on a CV, students should explain the gap in a short paragraph and inform the employer about their current situation including any skills / strengths they may have developed.

Example:
During my second term at university I lost 50% of my vision in a short period of time.Obviously this was a very stressful time for me, and I decided to take some time out whilst my condition continued to change and I adapted to my new situation. During the two years that I took out, I also worked part-time in a small law firm. My confidence returned during this time and I felt ready to return to university in 2011. Not only have I participated fully in university life, I have also achieved academically as my exam results show.

When completing a CV or application form, exactly the same principles apply for disabled students as they do for those without a disability. However the difference is that students may need to explain certain elements of their application that relate specifically to their disability, e.g. a gap in education, lower academics or lack of work experience.

Lack of work experience

- Students should think broadly about their experiences and highlight internship, academic or extra-curricular experiences where they have demonstrated teamwork, leadership, problem solving and communication skills.

Finally...
Where students have genuine mitigating circumstances or gaps in their education, they should state them and provide a short explanation. All students, including those who have a disability, should aim to obtain work experience; holding down a job demonstrates that they can be proactive, reliable, trustworthy and hardworking.

TIP
Students do not have to go into the details of their disability. Rather, focus on the facts and ask that the employer considers what they have achieved in the context of their disability.

Students may decide that drawing on their disability to demonstrate their strengths is the most effective way of demonstrating what is being assessed.

When I applied to Linklaters, I didn’t just explain my background, ask for special consideration, and then stop there. I spent roughly 30 seconds explaining my ‘unconventional route’, and then five minutes explaining why it made me a strong, hardworking, and creative individual that they should hire.

Trainee Solicitor at Linklaters.

See next page for more
Examples of adjustments

• Additional time to complete the assessment
• Provision of assistive technology
• Use of a sign language interpreter
• Rest breaks in between the interview/ assessment day
• Alternative forms of written, numerical tests in audio, braille and large print

A reasonable adjustment is a change to the format / conditions of the recruitment process to accommodate any disability-related needs students may have. The aim of an adjustment is not to give students an advantage but to allow them to demonstrate their full potential by competing on a level playing field with their non-disabled counterparts.

What is ‘reasonable’ to ask for?

• The key word is ‘need’, if students need the adjustment rather than want it, it is likely to be reasonable.

Q: What do you need in order to perform your best?

• Students should research the recruitment process to find out what they require at each stage.

Q: Do you require an adjustment for online testing / telephone interview / assessment centre?

• Employers will have the responsibility and resources to pay for any adjustments that students need.

Finally...

More than 14% of students have a disability or long-term health condition in the UK and, as such, employers are used to having open conversations about disability and providing support and adjustments. Students should be confident to ask for what they require and be prepared to explain why.

TIP

If your employer is limited on the resources they have to implement adjustments, you can apply for Access to Work funding.

Being up front with my disability on my CV worked out well which is why I’d recommend it to others. People were aware, they asked what they needed to do, such as getting things in large print for me, and showed me they were willing to think about reasonable adjustments.

Paul Smyth, Barclays IT Accessibility Manager.
Communicating strengths

Additional skills, strengths and competencies that have been developed through managing a disability

Examples of strengths

- Determination / resilience – to pursue academic and personal goals while managing a disability
- Problem solving / time management – to adapt to working with a disability, being able to manage my time effectively between doctors’ appointments and academic work
- Communication – to articulate what support is required in halls of residence, student support services

When it comes to disability it’s very easy for students to think about all the things they cannot do, or that they can no longer do. Instead, students should think about what additional skills, strengths and competencies they have developed as a result of their experience of managing a disability, and be able to communicate these confidently to an employer.

Communicate strengths using the ‘STAR’ technique

1. **Situation** (disability or long-term health condition, dyslexia, poor mental health, etc.)
2. **Task** (impact or challenge presented by disability)
3. **Action** (steps the student took to overcome this challenge)
4. **Result** (what was the outcome? How has the experience equipped the student with the right skills and mind set to excel in their role?)

**Example:**

During my second year of university, I was diagnosed with cancer. Despite my absence from several weeks of lectures, I coordinated with professors, tutors and peers to ensure that I did not fall behind while recovering from my illness. Managing various doctor’s appointments and study groups helped me to develop time management skills; my academic performance has not suffered due to this collaboration. The experience has revealed my strength and resilience when facing a significant challenge and demonstrated my ability to adapt to any situation.

Students ideally should only aim to have two or three strengths that are related to their disability, in addition to two or three that are not related.

All the strengths should be related to the role they are applying for; they will need to provide examples to demonstrate why each of these is a strength.

Finally...

Students should talk about their disability positively by describing the strengths and skills it has enabled them to develop. They should demonstrate to an employer that their disability has not limited their personal achievements, study or work performance.

People who are deaf will often have a real talent for reading body language and facial expressions: vital in an industry that depends on excellent, intuitive communication. More generally, we also find that people who have had to overcome barriers are more resilient and better able to empathise.

Iain Wilke, EY Partner and Co-chair Employers Stammering Network.
Accessing disability confident employers

The following are ways in which students can connect with these disability-confident employers

Attend a disability specific careers event

- Students can attend careers fairs, skills workshops and presentation evenings throughout October and November on campus. They may also attend insight days at employer offices.
- There are also disability specific careers events that students can attend to gain information about support and adjustments available to them. They will also have the opportunity to hear from employees who have a disability and how they manage this in the working environment.

Many graduate employers are moving way beyond compliance towards a disability confident culture where they are open about supporting disability and embracing the additional strengths and experiences which graduates with disabilities can bring.

Visit the employer’s website

- Students can look up disability related information and application support on an employer’s careers page.
- Many employers will list the contact information of a recruiter or disability representative who is available to address any concerns that students may have.
- Students may read case studies of disabled professionals or find information about a disability network on the employer’s website.

Join www.myplusstudentsclub.com

Who to speak to and when?

- Students can sign up for events, access disability confident employer profiles, read stories and apply for jobs through disability specific careers websites such as MyPlus Students’ Club.
- Many employers profiled on www.myplusstudentsclub.com include the contact details of their disability adviser.

To access the full version of the toolkit, please contact emma@myplusconsulting.com

Finally...

Many graduate employers are moving way beyond compliance towards a disability confident culture where they are proactively embracing disability and recognising the additional strengths and experiences which graduates with disabilities can bring.

A diverse workforce helps strengthen our business, and we want to develop the careers of people from all backgrounds. That’s why we’ve created a very open environment and made sure there are no barriers in our recruitment process.

Barclays Head of Graduate Resourcing and Development.