Work Experience Programmes for People with Disabilities: Evidence for Effectiveness and Best Practice

The Disability Employment Forum and the Ministry of Social Development

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# Key Findings

### Views from New Zealand interviews

In interviews conducted for this report, the interviewees identified a number of avenues for people with disabilities in New Zealand to access work experience, including supported employment consultants and transition specialists. A wide range of organisations offer work experience opportunities, including public and private sector employers, disability service providers, education institutions, transition services and supported employment agencies. Work experience is seen as benefiting both the employee and the employer.

Among the people interviewed, barriers were seen as existing largely with employers’ attitudes and beliefs around people with disabilities posing health and safety risks, and not being able to work effectively. Ways of overcoming these barriers include building relationships with prospective employers, providing support throughout programmes, and encouraging natural support for people with disabilities from work colleagues.

### Evidence for employment outcomes

Paid or unpaid work experience is one of the most substantiated best practices for secondary transition. A moderate level of evidence supports work experience improving employment outcomes. Students with work experience, paid employment or work study were up to five times more likely to be in employment or education after secondary school. Secondary and post-secondary work experience results in different skill gains. Longer duration work experience placements improve outcomes. A six week placement is more effective than a placement of a few days.

A structured internship experience is beneficial across demographic characteristics and disability factors. People who complete internships have a high rate of employment, up to 80 to 90 per cent in two of the programmes studied. Internships are beneficial for employers, and assist with staff recruitment. Two significant barriers for internships are meeting academic requirements, and the issue of disclosure of impairments to employers. In New Zealand, internships are uncommon, and only two internships for people with disabilities were found in New Zealand during this research.

While the bulk of the literature reviewed had positive findings about work experience, this was not a universal outcome. In some cases, specific groups of young people with disabilities, such as women, ethnic minorities and students from rural locations, had poor employment outcomes. One reason for this was that these groups struggled to get the same work experience opportunities available to other groups.

### Best practice for work experience and internship programmes

New Zealand has good practice information on secondary transition and work experience, developed within the disability sector, and adapted for use by the Ministry of Education. This information reflects lessons learned from international information and domestic experience.

For promoting employment outcomes, it is important to establish and maintain good relationships with employers. It helps to speak the same language as employers, identifying their needs, and what the return to the employer is from the work experience or internship placement. Employers may need assistance with making workplace accommodations for the initial placement, and ongoing support throughout the programme.

The literature for internships is not as well developed, but the needs of tertiary students will differ from those of secondary students. As internship placements are for longer durations more care is needed in setting them up. Internships should not be “place and forget”, the intern will need support and feedback throughout the programme.

Mental health impairments can be assisted with early interventions that integrate clinical care with employment assistance. Employment is unlikely to cause a mental health impairment to deteriorate further.

### Analysis – implications for New Zealand

Expectations of employment have increased, both among people with disabilities and in the wider community. Transition practices aimed at improving employment outcomes have been developed, implemented, and evaluated.

Work experience is a transition practice that improves employment outcomes. Access to work experience is not universal, but generally improves outcomes when available. Other transition practices, along with the funding to implement them, can also contribute to successful transition outcomes. Best practice for work experience should include:

* tailored training of both soft skills and job-specific skills
* building relationships and collaboration among all parties
* clear communication of expectations and responsibilities
* matching jobs to student interest, and having a range of available jobs
* on-going support, feedback, and mentoring
* longer duration placements allow for more learning and for natural supports to develop among work colleagues
* consideration of employer perspective and needs, and support for accommodations.

Work experience helps young people avoid the trap of not having the “real world” experience employers want in job candidates. More work can possibly be done in New Zealand to foster opportunities for internships, and to overcome employer barriers.

### Conclusions and recommendations

The benefits of work experience for young people with disabilities include an improved work ethic and improved prospects for gaining permanent employment. These benefits apply to all types of disability where access to work experience can be gained. Engaging in work experience gives a person more understanding of the accommodations they need to function effectively in the workplace, and can help with career planning and development.

Employers also benefit from offering placements to young people with disabilities, through the enrichment afforded to the organisation by engaging someone that can bring a disability angle to work projects, improving work practices that allow better engagement with clients and customers with disabilities, and through other employers gaining new experiences and skills from working alongside people with disabilities. Internships also act as a screening tool for future employees.

The following recommendations are offered to improve work experience and internship programmes for young people with disabilities in New Zealand:

*Promoting work experience and internship programmes*

1. promote work experience and internship programmes using word-of-mouth, employer testimonies, and community networks
2. produce best practice guides for internship and work experience programmes that cover the needs of transitional students, families/whanau, education staff, employers, and employment agencies
3. adapt overseas work experience and internship programmes that have been successful at placing young people with disabilities into employment, such as Project SEARCH, for use in New Zealand
4. establish clear guidelines for what work experience is, highlighting that to avoid exploitation, work experience should ideally include:
   * real pay for real work
   * an intentional learning component
   * a reasonable duration, sufficient for learning, but not overly long

*Funding work experience and internship opportunities*

1. for funding opportunities to participate in work experience and internships it would be helpful to:
   * ensure access to and flexibility of existing funding sources and help (such as Gateway, career advisors, Ongoing Resourcing Scheme funding and mainstream services)
   * use the Enabling Good Lives demonstration project in Christchurch to contribute to better work experience and internship opportunities
   * target additional funding to emphasise groups that are disproportionately disadvantaged (such as people with mental illness or sensory impairments, or people with disabilities in remote or rural areas)
   * extend in-school support funding to a wider group of people with disabilities

*Improving outcomes for transition to employment*

1. improve school transition for young people with disabilities by:
   * tapping into community networks for work experience opportunities
   * improving qualifications attainment by people with disabilities
   * identifying who should be responsible for arranging work experience opportunities for young people with disabilities while at school
   * setting up work experience programmes to feed into supported employment programmes
2. improve recruitment of people with disabilities through mainstream employment agencies, which could involve:
   * training about what job-related “reasonable accommodation” is
   * providing information around where equipment to enable people with disabilities to work can be found
   * training about interviewing people with disabilities
   * training about discrimination on the basis of disability

*Support for people with disabilities when placed in work*

1. young people with disabilities participating in work experience and internships need support for the placement (such as sign language interpreters or accommodations in the workplace for their disability) and feedback on their performance
2. build relationships with employers and support employers throughout the selection and employment process for a work experience or internship placement
3. recognise and promote good employers, and individuals who act as mentors for people on work experience and internship programmes.

# Background

### Why the report was commissioned

In May 2012, the Ministerial Committee on Disability Issues agreed that the Disability Action Plan for 2012-2014 (DAP) would include work to increase the number of disabled people in employment. This work is being shared across government agencies.

The Disability Employment Forum (DEF) and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) are working together on initiatives aimed at connecting disabled youth with the labour market. One of these initiatives is to promote work experience for disabled people who have not previously been employed.

Before proposing new approaches to promoting work experience proposed, DEF and MSD wanted to conduct research on the effectiveness of work experience and internship programmes aimed at young disabled people. This included programmes from both New Zealand and overseas countries. During this research, evidence was sought about:

* how work experience affects employment outcomes for young people with disabilities
* the best way to implement work experience and internship programmes.

One part of the research was a literature review of published information on work experience and internship programmes for disabled people.

The other part of the research was selected interviews with a mix of people working in the disability sector, and people with disabilities. From the interviews, we identified current work experience and internship programmes for people with disabilities in New Zealand, the experiences of people with these programmes, the factors that were associated with success, and ways the programmes could be improved.

A summary of the work experience and internship programmes identified in the course of this research can be found in Appendix I. The methodology used for the research is outlined in Appendix II.

### What do we mean by disability?

In this report the phrase “people with disabilities” is used, and our definition of disability is based on the social model of disability used in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which includes people with mental health conditions.[[1]](#footnote-1) In the reviewed literature, a wide range of expressions have been used, or may have used definitions based on pre-UNCRPD language, and direct quotations will use the original phrasing.

### What do we mean by work experience?

At the start of this research, what we expected to find was that work experience programmes would be characterised as being largely short in duration (under three months), unpaid, informal and occurring mainly while a person was at secondary school. Examples of work experience include summer holiday jobs, part-time jobs, volunteer work, youth-run business, school-based enterprises, workplace tours, and community service projects. Personal development from work experience is mostly in the area of basic work skills.

Alternate names for work experience that we encountered while conducting the research included job shadowing, job sampling, job training, job auditioning, work trial and work placement.

### What do we mean by internships?

Internships are programmes of longer duration (three to 24 months), more formal, with an intentional learning component, and usually in paid positions. Typically they take place during tertiary education, or shortly after graduation. Personal development from internships is mostly in the area of specific skills needed for a particular job or occupation.

Alternate names for internships included cooperative education (where the classroom experience takes place in an employment setting), field experience, practicum, community service learning, externship, cadet or cadetship, and apprenticeship. Some internships involve rotating the intern through multiple job assignments, either with one large employer, or several employers, giving the opportunity to learn different jobs and to develop a broader range of skills.

### The distinction between work experience and internship is not always clear

The distinction between work experience and internships is not always clear. The terms overlap, and are used interchangeably in some of our sources. It was also the case for New Zealand sources that, while work experience was a common term, internship was rarely used. This report will therefore refer to work experience as including both work experience and internships, unless specific mention of internships is required for clarity.

### Number of people with disabilities in New Zealand

In 2006, an estimated 660,300 New Zealanders reported a disability, representing 17 per cent of the total population (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). The Christchurch earthquake delayed the 2011 Census until February 2013, and results will not be released until December 2013. The Disability Survey 2013 is being conducted from July-October 2013 and results from this will be released in mid-2014.

Twelve per cent of adults aged 15 years and over had a physical disability (an estimated 383,500 adults). This was the most common disability type for adults, affecting two-thirds of adults with disability. Sensory disabilities (hearing and/or seeing disabilities) were the second most common disability type for adults, affecting eight per cent of adults (42 per cent of adults with disability, or 239,000 adults). Seven per cent of adults (39 per cent of adults with disability, 224,500 adults) reported having other types of disability, such as difficulty speaking, learning, remembering or doing everyday activities.

### People with disabilities have a lower labour force participation rate

People with disabilities have a lower rate of labour force participation and employment than the rest of the working age population. Labour force participation provides an indication of both the desire to perform paid work and the ability to obtain such work. Based on 2006 Census information, for people aged 15-64 years old in New Zealand, labour force participation for disabled people was 64 per cent, compared to 84 per cent for non-disabled people (Statistics New Zealand, 2008).

*People with disabilities have a higher unemployment rate*

In 2006, the unemployment rate for disabled men was five per cent, compared with three per cent for non-disabled men. For women the comparable rates were nine per cent and five per cent, respectively. Like their non-disabled counterparts, disabled people are most likely to be unemployed at the younger working ages. Fourteen per cent of disabled women and nine per cent of disabled men aged 15–44 were unemployed and seeking work in 2006. These rates were approximately double those of non-disabled people.

New Zealand experienced a recession in 2008-2009 and late 2010 following the global financial crisis of 2007-2008. Youth unemployment increased during the recession, from 9.2 per cent in December 2007 to a peak of 19 per cent in December 2009 (Department of Labour, 2011). While disaggregated employment data for young people with disabilities during the recession in New Zealand does not exist, their employment outcomes are unlikely to have been better than the general population.

### Qualifications improve the employability of people with disabilities

Having a post-school qualification significantly reduces the chance of being unemployed. In 2006, three per cent of disabled people in New Zealand with a post-school qualification were unemployed, compared with nine per cent of those with a school qualification and eight per cent of those with no qualifications. People with disabilities can experience interruptions to their education, making it harder to complete qualifications. Because disabled members of the labour force are less likely than others to have post-school qualifications (38 per cent compared with 46 per cent), they are at higher risk of unemployment (Statistics New Zealand, 2008).

Getting paid work increases a disabled person's independence, increases their social networks, and improves their financial security and sense of self-worth. It promotes respect from others and contributes to leading an ordinary life. Unemployment is also a risk factor for developing mental health conditions.

### Barriers to work experience for young people with disabilities in New Zealand

Young people with disabilities face barriers to gaining the work experience opportunities that are often easily accessed by members of the general population; from chores at home and in the neighbourhood, to after-school and summer holiday jobs, through to formal work experience opportunities.

Young people with disabilities become eligible for the Supported Living Payment (SLP) benefit at age 16. This payment is currently set at $208.58 a week, and allows annual earnings of up to $5,200 before abatement. People receiving the SLP are not required to seek work, but will be supported by MSD if they choose to seek work. Receipt of a benefit can act as a barrier for young people with disabilities to engage in formal, paid employment opportunities (Killackey et. al., 2008).

Other barriers that young people with disabilities face in gaining access to work experience opportunities include:

* family expectations may not support the young person trying work experience
* lack of funding for support to assist a young person with disabilities with the transition to a work environment
* communication problems between family, school, government, support agencies and employers – a lack of collaboration
* difficulty in finding an opportunity for work experience that is close to school or that matches the young person’s career aspirations
* starting the transition process too late and a lack of preparation for the transition process
* cost and provision of transport, including public transport, can prevent access to work experience (Cleland and Smith, 2010).

The onset of a mental health impairment in adolescence can create unanticipated barriers to transition. At a critical life stage for completing secondary education and acquiring work experience, a young person and their family can struggle to deal with the time required for treatment, the sedative effect of medication, and how to disclose their impairment to potential employers.

### Approaches to overcoming barriers in New Zealand

In the interviews conducted as part of this research, providers of work experience programmes discussed the following barriers:

* employer perceptions about specific impairments, health and safety concerns
* lack of genuine opportunity to learn from the work experience
* entrenched welfare dependency
* prioritising family over employment
* cycles of unpaid work experience that do not lead to employment
* students ending up overqualified and lacking work experience.

*Over the years of my experience, employers will pull out the Health and Safety card rather than give a person with a disability an opportunity* (Disability services provider)*.*

Interviews with people who had participated in work experience programmes in New Zealand did not report any barriers to obtaining placements or discrimination in the workplace. One interviewee commented on how support and communication from their supported employment consultant addressed barriers effectively. Interviews with providers of work experience highlighted employers’ obligations to address attitudinal barriers that make it difficult for people with disabilities to get employment.

*The key message from our perspective is that for work experience or internships to be worthwhile for Deaf people is that interpreters need to be provided from the interview stage, right through induction, training, staff meetings, and exit stages. Deaf awareness training would also be helpful for staff from the host organisation* (email from a Disabled Persons’ Organisation head).

The attitudes of other employees in the workplace are also important. Co-workers can provide natural support to people with disabilities in the workplace, assisting with accommodations, mentoring, and every-day tasks. When co-workers have low expectations, this can be a barrier to a successful work placement.

Technological change has removed some barriers, by increasing independence and productivity for people with disabilities, but it has also eliminated many of the low-skill jobs that people with disabilities used to perform. Even in a recession, employers can struggle to find the right staff with the right skills for the jobs they offer, so there are opportunities for people with disabilities if they can gain the right skills.

### Work experience is popular …

Work experience is popular with New Zealand students with disabilities, but some students wondered what skills they were learning, and some students felt they were being exploited (Cleland et al., 2008). Staff at schools noted that some work experience was boring, unsuccessful for health and safety reasons, some employers were not prepared for students with disabilities, and that some work experience was good while supported, but when the support was removed it could fail.

### … but not always easy to obtain

Similar barriers exist in other countries. Students with disabilities are less likely to have work experiences than students without disabilities (Wagner et. al. 2005). One explanation for this is that the primary focus of schools is on academic achievement, and schools are not always able to devote the time and funding required to support students with work experience (Landmark et al., 2010). Students are often unaware of the high value that employers place on practical experience (Burgstahler and Bellman, 2009).

### Legal context for the employment of people with disabilities

Internationally and in New Zealand, studies have consistently shown that people with disabilities are disadvantaged in the labour market (OECD 2010). This is recognised in UNCRPD, which came into force on 4 May 2008, and was ratified by New Zealand on   
26 September 2008. The New Zealand government is obligated to implement and monitor the UNCRPD. Article 27 of the UNCRPD, which is about work and employment, states that:

*States parties recognize the rights of people 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.*

In New Zealand, a range of legislation, strategies and initiatives have been put in place in recent years to remove barriers to the participation of disabled people in paid work. Some examples include the Human Rights Act 1993 (sections 22 [Employment] and 21(1)(h) [Prohibited grounds of discrimination]), and the 2007 repeal of the Disabled Persons Employment Promotion Act 1960. These have aimed to maximise employment opportunities for disabled people by ensuring that they have the same rights, responsibilities and protections of other workers.

Under the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000, the Minister for Disability Issues is required to have a New Zealand Disability Strategy (the Strategy). The Government recognises that a lot of work is required to remove the barriers to participation faced by disabled people and create a fully inclusive society. As part of the Strategy, 15 Objectives and detailed Actions to achieve this have been developed. Objective 4 focuses on providing employment and economic opportunities for disabled people. The Minister for Disability Issues reports to Parliament annually on progress in implementing the Strategy.

The Disability Action Plan complements the Strategy.

### Other related Government initiatives

The Better Public Services goals include two on boosting skills and employment:

* increase the proportion of 18 year-olds with an NCEA Level 2 or equivalent qualification to 85 per cent by 2017 (from 77.2 per cent in 2012)
* increase the proportion of 25 to 34 year-olds with advanced trade qualifications, degrees or diplomas to 55 per cent in 2017 (from 52.6 per cent in 2012).

Improving qualification completion outcomes for people with disabilities should improve their employment outcomes.

The Enabling Good Lives (EGL) demonstration project for Christchurch was announced on 17 July 2013. It will run for three years and is a new way of supporting disabled people. It offers greater choice and control over the supports people receive and the lives they lead. EGL is a cross-agency approach involving the Ministries of Education, Health and Social Development, who will also be working with ACC. The demonstration will be jointly designed with disabled people, families and service providers in the city.

One of the principles of EGL is ordinary life outcomes:disabled people are supported to live an everyday life in everyday places; and are regarded as citizens with opportunities for learning, employment, having a home and family, and social participation - like others at similar stages of life.

# Summary of views from New Zealand interviews

### There are many ways work experience can be accessed

In interviews conducted for this report, the interviewees identified a number of avenues for people with disabilities in New Zealand to access work experience, including supported employment consultants and transition specialists. A wide range of organisations offer work experience opportunities, including public and private sector employers, disability service providers, education institutions, transition services and supported employment agencies. Work experience is seen as benefiting both the employee and the employer.

Among the people interviewed, barriers were seen as existing largely with employers’ attitudes and beliefs around people with disabilities posing health and safety risks, and not being able to work effectively. Ways of overcoming these barriers include building relationships with prospective employers, providing support throughout programmes, and encouraging natural support for people with disabilities from work colleagues.

Disabled people who participated in work experience and/ or internship programmes accessed these schemes through a number of avenues. Participants described support from supported employment consultants and transition specialists who have broad networks of potential employers of disabled people. Supported employment consultants and transition specialists assisted disabled people pre-employment and on-the-job.

The participants did not report barriers to getting placements. Nor did they report workplace discrimination.

Providers of work experience and/ or internship placements for people with disabilities came from varying backgrounds, including private sector companies, State sector organisations, disability services providers, supported employment agencies, transition services, and tertiary institutions.

### Benefits of work experience to individuals and employers

They illustrated the variability of participants’ disabilities, roles and pay. They described a number of positive outcomes from providing work experience and/ or internship programmes to people with impairments. A commonly cited benefit to providers was the enrichment afforded to an organisation by engaging a disabled person in a work experience and/ or internship placement. Improved work ethics and improved prospects for getting permanent, paid employment were highlighted as the main positive outcomes for disabled people participating in work experience and/ or internships.

### Barriers identified by work experience providers

Providers discussed barriers to disabled people obtaining work experience and/ or internships. The providers said they believe that barriers stem from employers’ erroneous beliefs about disabled people posing health and safety risks and being unable to work effectively. They pointed out that employers may be overly and unfairly risk averse, which is to the detriment of disabled people’s employment prospects. Although it was also noted that some barriers come from within the disability sector, respondents attributed most obstacles to employers’ attitudes and beliefs.

### Ways of overcoming barriers identified

Suggestions were made about overcoming hurdles. Again, the respondents’ comments suggest the onus is on employers to break down barriers. Some interviewees said the responsibility also lies with supported employment consultants, transition specialists and disabled people to build relationships with prospective employers, and to ensure that employers are supported through the pre-employment stage and throughout a participant’s tenure.

Work experience and internship programmes were discussed. Based on responses, it is clear that the concept of internships is not entrenched in New Zealand culture; some providers were uncertain about what constitutes an internship. It was suggested that for work experience and internship programmes to work, participants and the employers have to be equally committed to placements. The importance of support for employers and disabled participants from supported employment consultants, transition specialists, and natural supports, such as colleagues, was emphasised.

*Ways to promote work experience and internship programmes*

To promote work experience and/ or internship programmes, providers suggested using mechanisms such as word-of-mouth recommendations, employer testimonials, and networks within communities. Providers expressed a preference for disabled people to get “real work for real pay”, rather than unpaid work experience.

# Evidence for employment outcomes

Paid or unpaid work experience is one of the most substantiated best practices for secondary transition. A moderate level of evidence supports work experience improving employment outcomes. Students with work experience, paid employment or work study were up to five times more likely to be in employment or education after secondary school. Secondary and post-secondary work experience results in different skill gains. Longer duration work experience placements improve outcomes. A six week placement is more effective than a placement of a few days.

A structured internship experience is beneficial across demographic characteristics and disability factors. People who complete internships have a high rate of employment, up to 80 to 90 per cent in two of the programmes studied. Internships are beneficial for employers, and assist with staff recruitment. Two significant barriers for internships are meeting academic requirements, and the issue of disclosure of impairments to employers. In New Zealand, internships are uncommon, and only two internships for people with disabilities were found in New Zealand during this research.

While the bulk of the literature reviewed had positive findings about work experience, this was not a universal outcome. In some cases, specific groups of young people with disabilities, such as women, ethnic minorities and students from rural locations, had poor employment outcomes. One reason for this was that these groups struggled to get the same work experience opportunities available to other groups.

### Work experience identified as a best practice for transition

In 1993, Kohler published a seminal review of substantiated and implied best practices in transition. Spanning the years 1985 to 1991, it examined 49 documents. Most of the practices were implied rather than empirically substantiated. Three practices were cited in over half of the documents analysed – vocational training, parent involvement, and inter-agency collaboration and service delivery. The practices that were deemed substantiated included:

* vocational training
* parental involvement
* social skills training
* paid work experience
* follow-up employment services
* employer input during transition planning
* integration in the mainstream education curriculum
* daily living skills training
* employability skills training.

Morningstar (1997), made five recommendations for transition in general: consider the developmental nature of career preparation across the lifespan (i.e. many decisions are not finalised until later 20s early 30s); provide opportunities for young people with disabilities to develop the skills necessary for career maturity; provide meaningful work experiences; encourage family participation; and encourage student involvement.

Collet-Klingenberg (1998) noted the importance of school-based and community-based transition teams for a smooth introduction of a school-wide work experience programme, with a broader implication of actively involving all participants in the planning and implementation of the transition process.

Subsequent reviews and studies extended the list of best practices to include family involvement in career decisions and self-determination training. In 2010, Landmark published an updated review of transition best practices, covering 29 documents that focused on empirical studies. Based on the number of articles that supported each practice, the most-to-least substantiated practices were:

* paid or unpaid work experience
* employment preparation
* family involvement
* general education inclusion
* social skills training
* daily living skills training
* self-determination skills training
* community or agency collaboration.

Just because some practices have a greater number of studies supporting them does not necessarily mean that those practices are more effective. What it shows is that some practices have been researched and published more often than other practices. So ranking by number of publications does not necessarily support a ranking of effectiveness.

Paid or unpaid work experience and employment preparation programme participation were the most frequently substantiated practices, based on the number of studies supporting these practices.

Test, Fowler, et al. (August 2009) in a review of 63 experimental studies, found 32 secondary transition practices. Several of these studies determined that student development in the form of employment preparation (such as teaching employment skills, job-related social communication skills, and self-management for employment skills) was supported by a moderate level of evidence.

Test, Mazzotti et al. (December 2009) reviewed 22 secondary transition correlational studies that had to meet quality indicator criteria. They found 16 predictors of post-secondary school outcomes in the areas of education, employment and independent living. The four predictors that had moderate levels of evidence for improving employment outcomes were:

* inclusion in general education
* paid employment/work experience
* vocational education
* work-study.

## Evidence for employment outcomes from work experience programmes

In 1993, Kohler identified paid work experience during secondary school as a substantiated transition practice. This finding continues to be substantiated in the literature:

* Fourqurean, Meisgeier, Swank and Williams (1991) found that employment during secondary school was a predictor of post school employment as evidenced by post school job stability
* if vocational education included work experience, the likelihood of employment was 14 per cent higher than for students who had not been engaged in work experience (Wagner 1991 cited in Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell 1997). While difficult to separate the effects from vocational education programmes, there were other positive outcomes, such as a lower dropout rate
* Burgstahler (2001) found that work experience increased motivation to work toward a career, learning for both job-specific skills and workplace skills, and for developing strategies for accommodating their disability in the workplace
* Rabren, Dunn and Chambers (2002) found that having a job when exiting secondary school was a predictor of having a job one year later, 87 per cent of students working at exit from secondary school were also working one year later, 3.8 times greater than for those who did not have work when exiting school
* Benz, Yovanoff and Doren (1997); Fabian (2007); and McDonnall and Crudden (2009) have all found that having multiple work experiences during secondary school was related to future employment
* Fabian (2007) found that students with prior paid vocational experience were 35 per cent more likely to secure jobs
* Estrada-Hernandez et al. (2008) looked at the congruence between interest and job matching among senior secondary school students who had paid work experience before exiting school, and found 50.4 per cent had a strong match with their final job placement and 37.4 per cent had a moderate match with their final job placement
* Beyer and Kaehne (2008) found that while individual factors had weak effects, the combination of well-structured work awareness training provided by schools, and supported work experiences provided by external employment agencies, had some impact on the likelihood of employment (19.2 per cent)
* Joshi et al. (2012) found that both paid work experience (5.7 times) and school-sponsored work experience (3.5 times) were statistically significant predictors of employment for students with mild intellectual disabilities
* Carter at al. (2012) found that for young people with severe disabilities, both paid school-sponsored work and paid community work were associated with employment after secondary school, but unpaid school-sponsored work was not, and actual, hands-on work experience – rather than preparatory or indirect experience – was the most prominent employment factor.

*Unpaid work experience can improve employment outcomes*

Unpaid work experience during secondary school has also been linked to successful employment outcomes. Colley and Jamison (1998) noticed an association between paid and unpaid work experiences during secondary school and successful post school employment, 52 per cent of participants with work experience were in employment, compared to 30 per cent of participants without work experience. Participants with work experience were also more likely to be earning more, to have benefits, and to be happy with their job.

### Students with work experience are up to five times more likely to be in employment

Test et al. (2009) found a moderate level of evidence in five studies of paid employment and/or work experience leading to improved employment outcomes. As these studies met a rigorous set of correlational quality indicators, they argued that the secondary transition field now has a set of evidence-based predictors of post-secondary school success in the employment area. While 16 predictors predicted improved employment outcomes, only four predictors (inclusion in general education, paid employment/work experience, vocational education, and work study) were assessed as having moderate levels of evidence. Students with work experience, paid employment or work study were up to five times more likely to be in employment or education after secondary school. The other 12 predictors had only potential levels of evidence.

### Secondary and post-secondary work experience results in different skill gains

Burgstahler and Bellman (2005 and 2009) found a difference between secondary and post-secondary work experience, in that secondary students perceived more gains regarding working and communicating with supervisors (e.g. receiving instruction and feedback on how to finish a work task), while post-secondary students perceived more gains in the area of learning complex job tasks.

### Longer duration work experience placements improve outcomes

Longer work experience placements may also produce better outcomes. Students also commented that longer work experience placements, six weeks or more, have more impact than short experiences such as job shadowing. Wagner and Blackorby (1996) found that secondary students with disabilities who took concentrated vocational education courses had better employment and wage outcomes than students who took short survey courses. Work experience was positively associated with employment outcomes for young people with physical disabilities.

*If work experience happens it can be one of the best things and can lead to paid work, depending on how it is set up* (DPO head).

## Evidence for employment outcomes from internship programmes

A structured internship experience is beneficial across demographic characteristics and disability factors (Luecking and Fabian 2000). Internship programmes provide a critical link between the academic setting and the work environment. (Briel et al. 2001). Georgiou et al. (2011) found that participants in work placements as part of a degree course perceived “gaining experience/knowledge” and “learning/improving skills” as the foremost benefits of the work placement experience.

Madaus (2006) found internships gave experience of real-life situations in which strategies must be developed and implemented, and the results of the choices evaluated. This experience allows students to develop additional skills and gain long-term benefits. Some students who struggle academically can perform well when doing internships. An internship experience early during tertiary education can help students with career planning.

### People who complete internship programmes have a high rate of employment

Analysis of the Bridges Program, which offered a highly structured, school-based internship, found that of the 76 per cent who completed their internship placement, 71 per cent accepted a job offer after the internship, and over 80 per cent of those contacted six months later were competitively employed or in education (Fabian et al. 1998). Most of the job offers came from students’ internship employers, which highlights the importance of structured opportunity. Similar outcomes were reported in subsequent analysis of this programme (Luecking and Fabian 2000, Fabian 2007). Luecking and Fabian (2000) commented that the high rate of job offers from employers demonstrates that the internship had convinced them that the young person with disabilities was worth hiring.

For the EDGE apprenticeships and traineeships for people with disabilities in Western Australia, 90.1 per cent of programme completers and 73.4 per cent of non-completers were employed when surveyed nine months after exit from the course (Lewis et al. 2011b).

### Internships offer benefits for employers

Internships can benefit employers by reducing the turn-over of entry-level employees and allowing the employer to positively influence future employees. An internship is a screening tool for prospective employees. Internships also offer mentoring opportunities to employees. In addition to the completion of work tasks, internships can improve an employer’s ability to work with people with disabilities, through improved understanding of workplace accommodations and other disability-related issues (Kramer et al. 2009).

In Canada, a literature review on recruitment of people with disabilities found that recruitment could be fostered by providing internships to students with disabilities, including summer employment, to enable the students to gain valuable work experience (Public Service Commission of Canada, 2011).

### Barriers to completing internships

Briel et al. (2001) identified two issues facing disabled students on internships: meeting academic and technical standards for a programme; and disclosing their disabilities and requesting accommodations. Tertiary students with disabilities often lack work experience, or do not recognise how their disability will affect them on the job. Internship experiences can be helpful in confirming career choice, learning the difficulties that will be encountered in accommodating their impairment in the workplace, and provide work experience before graduation. The lack of prior work experience can make completion of an internship more difficult.

Madaus (2008) found that for graduates with learning disabilities, only 55 per cent reported self-disclosure of their impairment and only 12 per cent requested accommodation. Newman et al. (2011) found 26 per cent of employers were aware of disabilities and seven per cent had made employment accommodations.

*I have not heard anyone tell me yet about an internship. It’s a really American concept, it’s not really a great New Zealand concept. I see that on Government Jobs Online that they have a category called internships, which has never got any in it, so they’re not hugely available for anyone, but I don’t know of anyone yet who has come up with any for disabled people* (DPO head).

## Not all programmes led to positive employment outcomes

While the bulk of the literature reviewed had positive findings about work experience, this was not a universal outcome. In some cases, specific groups of young people with disabilities, such as women, ethnic minorities and students from rural locations, had poor employment outcomes.

Lindstrom et al. (2011) and Wagner and Blackorby (1996) noted the current emphasis on academic results and promoting access to the general curriculum may have the unintended consequence of reducing the opportunities for students with disabilities from engaging in work experience and other career-related activities.

### Negative employment outcomes from work experience

Hasazi et al. (1985) found that while part-time jobs in secondary school led to students being more likely to find work after graduation, work experience participants were not, and their wages were lower after graduation. In the interviews for this research, some respondents emphasised the value of short-term, unpaid placements in the bigger picture of disabled people’s employability, whereas others expressed doubt about the likelihood of unpaid work leading to paid employment.

*I can’t think of one situation in which work experience led to paid employment* (School transition service).

Heal and Rusch (1995) found that once student and family characteristics were considered (i.e. gender, ethnicity, living and academic skills), school vocational programmes had a negligible effect on employment outcomes. Only on-the-job training appeared to improve employment rates.

### Negative gender outcomes from work experience

Some of the studies examined for this research found little difference in gender outcomes (Luecking and Fabian 2000), but other studies found that women with disabilities had lower employment outcomes than men with disabilities:

* Rabren et al. (2002) noted the odds of getting a job for a student with disabilities were 2.3 times greater for males than females
* Fabian (2007) found that males were more likely (69 per cent) to gain jobs than females (63 per cent)
* Carter (2012) found that males with severe disabilities had nearly twice the odds of working than females
* Doren and Benz (1998) examined the NLTS-1 data and found that female students did not receive the same type or quantity of vocational education as male students. Young women were more likely than young men to have parenting responsibilities within two years of leaving school (12 per cent versus four per cent respectively). While significantly fewer women (47 per cent) than men (72 per cent) with disabilities were competitively employed one year out of school, both males and females who had two or more jobs in school were approximately twice as likely to be competitively employed than students who did not have jobs.

### Mixed ethnicity outcomes from work experience

Fabian (2007) found that for people with disabilities in six United States cities, those of Asian ethnicity were more likely (70 per cent) to gain jobs than those with Latino ethnicity (65 per cent).

### Negative rural outcomes from work experience

Joshi et al. (2012) found that students in urban settings were six times more likely to experience paid employment while in school than those living rurally. Rabren et al. (2002) noted the odds of getting a job for a student with disabilities in an urban setting was 2.5 times greater than for those in rural settings.

### Disability specific outcomes from work experience

Wagner and Blackorby (1996) found that while work experience was beneficial for students with physical and mild disabilities, it was not for students with sensory or severe disabilities.

Burgstahler and Bellman (2009) found students with visible disabilities (especially mobility disabilities) appeared to be more comfortable with discussing accommodations with supervisors, while students with invisible disabilities (learning disability, mental health impairment, brain injury) did not. This research also suggests that students with vision impairments felt they gained less from work experience, while students with hearing impairments were more likely to feel that they had gained from the work experience.

McDonnall and Crudden (2009), McDonnall (2011), and Giesen and Cavenaugh (2012) found that for students with visual impairments, work experience was important to becoming employed, and that having multiple work experience placements would increase the odds of employment.

Fabian (2007) found that orthopaedic impairment had the lowest employment outcome (45 per cent) compared to most other forms of impairment (in the 64 – 70 per cent range).

Lewis et al. (2011b) found that for EDGE apprenticeship and traineeship completions, brain injury (67 per cent) and sensory disabilities (63 per cent) were much higher than for participants with psychiatric disabilities (33 per cent) and the aggregated completion rate (51 per cent). When surveyed nine months later, 90.1 per cent of completers were employed, compared to 73.4 per cent of non-completers.

Estrada-Hernandez et al. (2008) noted that severity of disability has a significant effect on monthly wages of participants, with the mean income of participants with less severe disabilities (US$1,227.42) being greater than for those with more severe disabilities (US$975.73).

Joshi et al. (2012) noted that schools with a higher proportion of students with disabilities found it harder to find work experience placements for all of their students.

For mental health impairments, the literature reviewed had a focus on supported employment or individual placement and support (IPS) programmes, rather than work experience programmes. Burke-Miller et. al. (2012) found a strong relationship between high future work expectations and attaining work, with high expectations being associated with at least twice the likelihood of obtaining work. Killackey et. al. (2008) in a study of 41 people with first-episode psychosis, 65 per cent of participants in supported employment found work, compared to ten per cent of participants without supported employment assistance. Rinaldi et. al. (2012) in a study of IPS found that 69 per cent of young people with first-episode psychosis could gain education or employment compared with 35 per cent of controls.

# Best practice for work experience and internship programmes

New Zealand has good practice information on secondary transition and work experience, developed within the disability sector, and adapted for use by the Ministry of Education. This information reflects lessons learned from international information and domestic experience.

For promoting employment outcomes, it is important to establish and maintain good relationships with employers. It helps to speak the same language as employers, identifying their needs, and what the return to the employer is from the work experience or internship placement. Employers may need assistance with making workplace accommodations for the initial placement, and ongoing support throughout the programme.

The literature for internships is not as well developed, but the needs of tertiary students will differ from those of secondary students. As internship placements are for longer durations more care is needed in setting them up. Internships should not be “place and forget”, the intern will need support and feedback throughout the programme.

Mental health impairments can be assisted with early interventions that integrate clinical care with employment assistance. Employment is unlikely to cause a mental health impairment to deteriorate further.

### Best practice for work experience in New Zealand

Bennie (2005) gave an overview of New Zealand educational activities which appeared to enhance the likelihood of employment outcomes for young people with intellectual disabilities. These practices included: partnerships between schools, supported employment agencies and other post-school support services; beginning transition planning around age 14; including parents in transition planning; inclusion in career and work experience opportunities; and individualised transition plans.

Cleland and Gladstone (2008), developed a ten point best practice framework for the Wayne Francis Charitable Trust (WFCT), on the transition of disabled students in   
New Zealand:

* transition starts to occur no later than age 14 and is part of a specific transition planning process that aims to develop academic potential as well as functional transition skills
* this process is driven by the student/whanau and the student is actively engaged in determining/implementing their future
* partnerships between the school and community supports are developed at least two years before the young person leaves school
* the transition programme is integrated within the structure of general education rather than as a separate and parallel programme
* the process identifies and overcomes barriers to the disabled student’s learning and support
* the students/whanau are offered information and support that opens doors to a wider range of inclusive community based options
* a clear distinction is made between the transition needs of the young person and those of their family
* functional transition skills are in the curriculum and practised at home
* those at school after 18 years old receive services in adult settings
* the outcomes of the transition planning process are regularly evaluated.

These practices have been adapted for use by the Ministry of Education and are being used in Christchurch for the Lead School Transition Service project. Cleland and Smith (2010) pulled together some material on successful work transitions for young people with disabilities, in support of the WFCT best practice framework:

* better job matching occurred when transition staff and students had effective transition training, and supervised work experience was an essential part of this process
* work experience should match students’ career interests
* transferrable skills should be identified that will educate towards employment or training
* employers may need assistance to recognise what support disabled workers need in order to work productively
* young people with disabilities, especially in their first job, may be unsure of what support they will need in the workplace, and how to ask for assistance
* local work experience makes transport easier
* individual placements are better for building up natural supports from co-workers
* a full-time placement lasting a few weeks is better than a few hours once a week scattered over a term, as you build relationships with staff and really get to know the job.

### International best practice for work experience

Luecking and Mooney (2002), in discussing effective engagement with employers for offering work experience opportunities, stressed the importance of presenting the need for accommodation in such a way that the employer sees the benefit more easily than they see the disability. Techniques for doing this include:

* identify return on investment for employers who participate in work experience programmes and hire young people with disabilities
* identify employer needs and market students that complement these needs
* help manage changes occurring from introducing workplace support and accommodations for the employee with disabilities
* help employer to identify ways of improving operational and organisational process
* make employer participation easy through good process
* interacting with employers and speaking their language.

Luecking and Gramlich (2003) summarised the characteristics of good work experience programmes, as including:

* clear program goals
* clear roles and responsibilities for supervisors, mentors, teachers, support personnel, and other partners
* tailored training plans
* links between students, schools and employers
* on-the-job learning objectives
* a range of work-based learning opportunities
* mentors at the work site
* clear expectations and feedback to assess progress towards goals
* assessment to identify skills, interests and support needs at the work site
* reinforcement of work-based learning outside of work
* appropriate academic, social, and administrative support for students, employers and partners.

In Queensland, the Office of the Public Advocate (2004) identified components of good practice that help overcome barriers: early intervention; partnerships with families and informal networks; cross-sector and whole-of-government collaboration. Luecking and Certo (2003) argued that supporting people with disability into employment is labour intensive and one benefit of collaboration is sharing this workload.

Brown (2009) outlined the customised model of the Individualized Career Planning Model developed in Montana for students with disabilities. This included work experience towards the goal of paid employment, driven by the individual’s interests, support needs, strengths and contributions. This model incorporated some specific best practices for mental health needs:

* include person-centred planning (where trusted people help an individual to articulate and plan a life vision)
* follow-along supports (on-going or as needed)
* integrated employment and treatment services.

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, asked programmes identified as having innovative strategies for tools to promote work experience for a Practice Brief (2011). Across the programmes, six trends emerged for engaging young people with disabilities in work experience:

* preparing youth for work experience through training guidance in soft skills (such as communication and decision-making skills), this can be a regular training activity through the year, or a specific pre-employment training activity
* preparing youth for work experience through training in technical or hard skills needed for specific career pathways or work settings
* programme staff devote significant time to developing and maintaining relationships with employers
* clearly communicate what is expected of employers, young people, and families before the start of work experience, this can be done through written agreements
* carefully match young people to work experience opportunities based on interests and skills, as this increases the motivation for young people to participate
* provide on-going support to young people and employers throughout the work experience, with a minimum of three site visits (start, mid, and end-points of the work experience), regular feedback, and immediate contact if problems arise.

Doren, Yan and Tu (2013), identified a set of key programme features based on 12 peer reviewed research articles from 1985-2012. These features included having a youth-centred approach, engaging in professional collaborations, and establishing a relationship between young people with disabilities and a close, caring professional. Their recommendations for best practice included:

*Youth-centred*

* conduct planning meetings in which youth take an active role and a youth’s vision of the future is the basis of the plan
* provide services and support based on youth’s need, strengths, and goals
* school and community-based personnel use planning meetings to ensure that they are working on a youth’s behalf

*Professional collaboration*

* provide school personnel with information on available adult community agencies and services
* establish relationships with employers
* establish relationships with people within agencies who are knowledgeable about transition issues facing youth with disabilities
* conduct workshops to provide schools, parents, and youth with information on accessing and effectively using appropriate services

*Close, caring professional*

* match youth with a professional who can provide one-on-one support
* provide opportunities for youth and the matched professional to meet regularly
* establish the matched professional as the “go to” person for the youth.

### International best practice for internships

The literature for internships for young people with disabilities does appear not as well developed as the evidence for work experience for young people with disabilities. Georgiou et al. (2012) indicated that for students with disabilities, preparation for work placement may need to include personal development skills such as coping styles, social interaction, negotiation skills, effective decision-making and self-appraisal. These skills will improve confidence and resilience. Burgstahler (2005) argued for practice to reflect the different needs of secondary and tertiary students, with secondary students generally requiring more time and support to acquire the independent social skills of the workplace, while tertiary students are more focused on learning specific work skills and the advocacy skills needed to secure accommodations.

Briel et al. (2001) outlined the best practice for supporting tertiary education internships through the Virginia Commonwealth University:

* access to the support necessary to attain long-term career goals
* support for placement and work site selection
* early disclosure of disability to support on-site accommodations
* early feedback on internship progress
* providing extra instruction for skill acquisition for students with more significant disabilities
* one-on-one coaching
* collaboration with community agencies.

Madaus (2006) suggests the following practices for tertiary programmes:

* career service offices should have the ability to work with students with disabilities
* career programmes should be integrated (i.e. people with and without disabilities should use the same programme)
* career counsellors should take a leadership role
* collaborate to share information about legal rights, disability self-disclosure and discrimination
* inform senior year secondary students about the opportunities available at college for students with disabilities.

In Kramer et al. (2009) the following best practices were outlined for general internship programmes:

* have clear goals that meet the expectations of the organisation
* commitment from management
* programme plan detailing intern’s responsibilities, criteria for candidates, supervision of the intern and pay rate
* allow three to four months for recruitment
* create a positive experience for the intern
* provide feedback to the intern
* match the amount and level of work to the intern
* give the intern opportunities to grow professionally.

In Lewis (2011a), for apprenticeships involving young people with disabilities, three steps to place and train apprentices with disabilities were identified: suitable jobs to match candidates, matching with the right employer, and on-site and off-site support for the duration of the course. Partnerships between organisations with complementary expertise and resources can also help.

### Best practice for mental health impairments

For mental health impairments, early intervention is a protective factor. The peak level of disability develops during the early phases of psychotic illness, and efforts made in these phases can ameliorate if not prevent disability. Employment does not increase the risk of the mental impairment deteriorating further. Early intervention can also prevent someone from becoming embedded in medical and welfare systems, where their condition can continue to decline. Elements of successful intervention can include:

* accurate diagnosis and correct medical treatment
* challenging low expectations of education and employment achievement
* integrating employment interventions with clinical work
* supported employment or IPS programmes
* support with transitional housing
* support from friends and family.

# Analysis

Expectations of employment have increased, both among people with disabilities and in the wider community. Transition practices aimed at improving employment outcomes have been developed, implemented, and evaluated.

Work experience is a transition practice that improves employment outcomes. Access to work experience is not universal, but generally improves outcomes when available. Other transition practices, along with the funding to implement them, can also contribute to successful transition outcomes. Best practice for work experience should include:

* tailored training of both soft skills and job-specific skills
* building relationships and collaboration among all parties
* clear communication of expectations and responsibilities
* matching jobs to student interest, and having a range of available jobs
* on-going support, feedback, and mentoring
* longer duration placements allow for more learning and for natural supports to develop among work colleagues
* consideration of employer perspective and needs, and support for accommodations.

Work experience helps young people avoid the trap of not having the “real world” experience employers want in job candidates. More work can possibly be done in New Zealand to foster opportunities for internships, and to overcome employer barriers.

### Expectations of employment have increased for people with disabilities

People with disabilities have historically had low levels of employment. Attitudes to the employment of people with disabilities have been steadily changing since the 1970s, and many countries have adopted legal and policy frameworks supporting the rights of people with disabilities to work. Expectations of employment have increased, but people with disabilities still struggle to achieve comparable employment outcomes to the wider population.

### Evidence based best practice is being identified

In parallel with social developments, research has engaged with the topics of employment for people with disabilities, and the transition of young people with disabilities to an adulthood that includes all the markers of independence, including employment. The extent of the problem has been measured, various transition practices have been developed and implemented, and the evaluation studies of these programmes have been published.

The evolution of transition practice is still not complete. The field of special education transition is shifting from identifying best practices to identifying evidence based best practices (Landmark 2010).

### Work experience is a practice that improves employment outcomes

In the field of transition research, there are conflicting results for some practices, but work experience has been consistently related to better post-secondary school employment outcomes. Other factors remain important, for example one study found that family expectations that someone would get a job, or be self-supporting, increased the employment outcomes by five times and three times respectively (Carter et al. 2012).

While women, ethnic minorities, and people located outside urban areas with disabilities often experienced poorer employment outcomes, the research suggests that access to work experience opportunities remains important for improving employment outcomes for these groups.

### For specific impairments the evidence is unclear

For specific types of impairments, the evidence base examined is not comprehensive enough to draw strong conclusions. While the studies largely agree that people with severe disabilities, or multiple disabilities, find it harder to gain employment than people with mild or moderate disabilities, it is not clear whether work experience mitigates or exacerbates this difference.

### Funding and other factors also contribute to employment outcomes

Improved employment outcomes for students with disabilities who participated in work experience programmes have been reported by many researchers. Despite this evidence, the continuing poor employment outcomes for young people with disabilities, suggests that knowledge of interventions that can help transition remains inadequate, or that funding to enable this access is insufficient. Work experience is perhaps a necessary, but not sufficient, factor in predicting subsequent employment.

In the transition space, work experience is just one of the predictors that can lead to employment outcomes, and the other markers of an independent adult life. Many of the articles examined included analysis of more predictors than just work experience. Given the focus of this research on work experience, discussion of most of the other factors has been omitted, except where they have been directly linked in the sources. Vocational education training in schools is the most common predictor that this happens with.

In focusing on employment outcomes, two general caveats should be noted. Firstly, for young people, completing education is an important element of transition for successful employment outcomes later in life. Tertiary education can take years to complete, and employment outcomes may not occur within the timespan of a study. Secondly, labour market participation patterns for young people differ from older populations, in that they can involve intermittent employment across a number of different employers, and a snapshot survey may not reflect actual employment experience.

## Implications for New Zealand best practice and policy

Work experience is identified as a best practice for transition for young people with disabilities. The best practice for work experience for a specific individual’s transition will vary according to that individual’s strengths and weaknesses. There are many different ways of structuring a transition programme, but approaches that are strengths-based and youth-focused are more likely to succeed. There are consistent recurring themes in the literature reviewed for this research as to what the components of best practice should include:

* tailored training of both soft skills and job-specific skills
* building relationships and collaboration among all parties
* clear communication of expectations and responsibilities
* matching jobs to student interest, and having a range of available jobs
* on-going support, feedback, and mentoring
* longer duration placements allow for more learning and for natural supports to develop among work colleagues
* consideration of employer perspective and needs, and support for accommodations.

### Work experience prevents the overqualified with no “real world” experience trap

Work experience appears to be valuable for young people with disabilities precisely because they are less likely to access work experience than the general population. Work experience appears to improve employment outcomes across impairment types and despite other factors, as long as work experience can be accessed. This suggests that policy efforts should be directed at expanding access to work experience as part of a secondary transition plan, and to enable tertiary graduates with disabilities to avoid the trap of being over qualified with no “real world” work experience.

*If you’ve got a young person with a disability enrolled in a mainstream school, then potentially you’ve got literally hundreds and hundreds of different potential work experience sites just based on the number of parents that you have going to that school* (PhD student with a speciality in inclusion of disabled students in education)*.*

There is no guarantee of this practice working in all cases, but replicating practices with a strong or moderate evidence base should produce similar effects with New Zealand students with disabilities. One risk with work experience is that, if a person with disabilities is placed into work without support, they can be marginalised in the workplace, and learn little from the experience. Programmes supporting young people may need to focus more on follow-along job supports, and maintaining a relationship with the employer, than on the initial transaction of securing a job placement.

There do not appear to be major gaps between best practices for secondary transition that have been adopted in New Zealand, and best practices used in other countries. There is a good degree of congruence in local practice guides and international practice guides. The New Zealand materials examined for this stocktake are more focused on the secondary transition space, and make a stronger call for early intervention around age 14, although the international literature does suggest starting before the final year of secondary school.

Implementation of best practice knowledge, however, is not consistent throughout   
New Zealand, and people with disabilities in remote or rural areas can have difficulty accessing the support they need, such as access to New Zealand Sign Language interpreters.

### Work experience should last up to four to six weeks in duration

What may be needed in New Zealand is guidance around the duration of work experience, its expected learning outcomes, and clarity around the distinctions between work experience, volunteering, supported employment, and 90 day trials. People with disabilities can feel exploited if work experience is of too long duration, unpaid, lacks learning components, or if the outcome is more work experience placements rather than a chance at permanent employment. The duration of current work experience varies from four to 13 weeks, but the majority of learning gained from a work experience placement occurs within four to six weeks.

### More could be done to develop internship opportunities

Best practice in the tertiary or graduate space is less clearly established in New Zealand, with only a small number of internships and limited awareness of their availability. In the interviews, it was clear that the internship model is not yet embedded in New Zealand culture, especially for certain subgroups within the disability sector. A difficulty with targeting internships at graduates is the low proportion of people with disabilities completing tertiary studies. There is some interest in the New Zealand disability sector, in the approach taken in Project SEARCH, of training into employment based on work rotations.

*For blind people work experience and internships are just not heard of* (DPO head).

### More could be done to overcome employer barriers

The largest set of barriers to participating in work experience programmes are attributed to employers. Some barriers do come from within the disability sector. Some employers hold beliefs about people with disabilities posing health and safety risks and being unable to work effectively, or that the offer of work experience will require the employer to make an offer of employment. This aversion to risk is to the detriment of employment prospects for people with disabilities.

*More good news stories shared by employers to help other employers overcome their fear of the expectation that the work placement needs to lead to employment* (Disability services provider).

Building relationships with employers and ensuring support for the employers through the pre-employment stage and through a work experience programme participant’s tenure are two ways of overcoming these barriers. In interviews it was also mentioned that employers do not know where to go to hire people with disabilities, so creating opportunities for people with disabilities through mainstream employment agencies could help.

Both employers and participants need to be committed to making a work experience or internship placement work. If either party is unwilling, the placement is likely to fail to deliver good outcomes.

# Conclusions

The benefits of work experience for young people with disabilities include an improved work ethic and improved prospects for gaining permanent employment. These benefits apply to all types of disability where access to work experience can be gained. Engaging in work experience gives a person more understanding of the accommodations they need to function effectively in the workplace, and can help with career planning and development.

Employers also benefit from offering placements to young people with disabilities, through the enrichment afforded to the organisation by engaging someone that can bring a disability angle to work projects, improving work practices that allow better engagement with clients and customers with disabilities, and through other employers gaining new experiences and skills from working alongside people with disabilities. Internships also act as a screening tool for future employees.

### Suggestions for future research

If new work experience or internship programmes are started in New Zealand, analysis of outcomes would be improved by collecting data on participants about specific impairments, severity of disability, and prior work experience or employment.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to improve work experience and internship programmes for young people with disabilities in New Zealand:

*Promoting work experience and internship programmes*

1. promote work experience and internship programmes using word-of-mouth, employer testimonies, and community networks
2. produce best practice guides for internship and work experience programmes that cover the needs of transitional students, families/whanau, education staff, employers, and employment agencies
3. adapt overseas work experience and internship programmes that have been successful at placing young people with disabilities into employment, such as Project SEARCH, for use in New Zealand
4. establish clear guidelines for what work experience is, highlighting that to avoid exploitation, work experience should ideally include:
   * real pay for real work
   * an intentional learning component
   * a reasonable duration, sufficient for learning, but not overly long

*Funding work experience and internship opportunities*

1. for funding opportunities to participate in work experience and internships it would be helpful to:
   * ensure access to and flexibility of existing funding sources and help (such as Gateway, career advisors, Ongoing Resourcing Scheme funding and mainstream services)
   * use the Enabling Good Lives demonstration project in Christchurch to contribute to better work experience and internship opportunities
   * target additional funding to emphasise groups that are disproportionately disadvantaged (such as people with mental illness or sensory impairments, or people with disabilities in remote or rural areas)
   * extend in-school support funding to a wider group of people with disabilities

*Improving outcomes for transition to employment*

1. improve school transition for young people with disabilities by:
   * tapping into community networks for work experience opportunities
   * improving qualifications attainment by people with disabilities
   * identifying who should be responsible for arranging work experience opportunities for young people with disabilities while at school
   * setting up work experience programmes to feed into supported employment programmes
2. improve recruitment of people with disabilities through mainstream employment agencies, which could involve:
   * training about what job-related “reasonable accommodation” is
   * providing information around where equipment to enable people with disabilities to work can be found
   * training about interviewing people with disabilities
   * training about discrimination on the basis of disability

*Support for people with disabilities when placed in work*

1. young people with disabilities participating in work experience and internships need support for the placement (such as sign language interpreters or accommodations in the workplace for their disability) and feedback on their performance
2. build relationships with employers and support employers throughout the selection and employment process for a work experience or internship placement
3. recognise and promote good employers, and individuals who act as mentors for people on work experience and internship programmes.

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# Appendix I – Work Experience and Internship Programmes

1. These examples of work experience and internship programmes for people with disabilities are not exhaustive. The information available on the programmes does not usually allow analysis of outcomes data.

### Work Experience Programmes

1. Marriot Foundation’s *Bridges from School to Work*, assists youth with disabilities to obtain unsubsidised work in their local community. An employer representative works with each client to help them with job matching.
2. *Lead School Transition Service* in Christchurch delivers employment related courses and training opportunities to assist with gaining work experience and employment.
3. Government of South Australia’s *State Transition Programme* includes a week of work preparation, work experience and vocational training for final year secondary school students with disabilities.
4. *Youthworx* in Melbourne, Australia, training and work experience provided to 50 people. Five people employed. Nearly all participants reported improved health and wellbeing.
5. In Canada, the cost of funding disability employment programmes is shared between the Federal government and the individual provinces through *Labour Market Agreements*:

* British Columbia – supported work placements include work experience and other supports.
* Manitoba – supported employment programme includes work experience. In 2009/10, these agencies provided support and services to 423 participants and of those, 262 obtained employment. Of those employed, 73 participants met the supported employment definition of employment of 15 hours or more per week, at minimum wage or higher, for three consecutive months or longer.
* New Brunswick – Workforce Expansion programme, wage subsidy for post-secondary graduates, 33 participants in 2009/2010, all maintained employment.
* Newfoundland-Labrador – work experience programme has a targeted wage subsidy, up to a year, 20 participants, with 15 completions in 2011/12.

### Internship Programmes

1. In New Zealand, a 2012 survey of Employer Disability Network employers found that Attitude TV and the Auckland City Council had specific internship initiatives, and that Westpac were considering one.
2. There has been interest in New Zealand in *Project SEARCH*.This is an internship programme focusing on secondary transition, placing students with disabilities with a large employer. During the year of the programme the students rotate through three ten week work placements. Project SERACH has been implemented in over 140 locations in the United States and the United Kingdom. About half of placements result in successful placements in long-term jobs, O’Day (2009).
3. The *Integration of Youth with Disabilities* project ran from 2000-2002 in Canada, placing 16 candidates in government agencies for at least one year. Marketing the candidates was difficult.
4. *Ability Edge Internships* provides paid six, nine or 12 month internships to graduates with disabilities in Canada.
5. *IBM Lime Connect Canada Scholarship & Internship programme for Students with Disabilities*, for third year university students pursuing degrees in computer science, software engineering or other IT disciplines.
6. In Manitoba, Canada, there is a *Career Assistance Programme for People with Disabilities* that recruits for government departments. The programme is for a specific term of employment (a period of time, completion of a job, or occurrence of an event).
7. Maryland sponsors the governor’s *Quality Understanding Excellence Success and Training* (QUEST) internship for persons with disabilities. This is a three month placement within state agencies. From 2001-2008 more than 160 interns have participated, 83 per cent of whom subsequently obtained employment. QUEST interns receive a stipend to cover work-related expenses such as transportation and meals.
8. *High School/High Tech* (HS/HT) is a United States national programme that is state and locally operated. HS/HT provides youth the opportunity to explore jobs and further education in technology-related fields through a mix of job shadowing and internships. In Florida, more than 90 per cent of HS/HT graduates have enrolled in post-secondary education or training.
9. *Disabilities, Opportunities, Internet-working, and Technology* (DO-IT) is based at the University of Washington in Seattle and provides paid and unpaid work experience and internship opportunities to both secondary school and university students.
10. *Stepping into Programme* has been offered by the Australian Employers’ Network from ~2005. It is a pre-graduation programme. It publishes information aimed at employers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and facilitates paid internships for university students with disabilities. Programmes run for four weeks in the summer or winter breaks. Placements are for a minimum of 150 hours. Hours can be worked consecutively or flexibly over a semester.
11. *EDGE Employment Solutions* in Western Australia aims to place ten per cent of its clients in apprenticeships (three to four year courses) and traineeships (one to two year courses). While employment rates were similar to people without disabilities, completion rates were lower (50 per cent to 56.7 per cent).
12. In South Australia, cadetships are usually for young people aged 17-24 years old, but the age restriction is dropped for people with a disability. Cadetships are usually 18-24 month duration paid work placements (with a minimum of three months).
13. In Australia, the National Disability Insurance Scheme Transition Launch Agency is taking part in programs to increase opportunities for employment of people with disability in the Australian Public Service. These include:

* the Department of Families Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Intellectual Disability Traineeship Program
* a pilot Internship and Graduate Employment program for people with disabilities.

# Appendix II Research Methodology

### Information search

The initial information search was conducted in April-May 2013. The keywords used in various combinations for this search were:

* young\* OR teen\* OR adolescen\* OR youth
* disab\* OR retard\* OR impair\* OR autist\* OR mental\*
* intern\* OR interns OR internship OR postschool\* OR placement\* OR preparation\* OR transition\* OR career\* OR program\* or apprentice OR vocation\* OR training OR initiative\* OR labor OR labour\* or employ\*
* best practice OR good practice
* evaluation OR systematic OR review OR effective\*.

The databases used for this search were: Social Care, EbscoHost Research Databases, eBooks, Informit, and the Internet. Only English language sources were examined. The majority of the sources involved research or publications in Australia, Canada,   
New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The discovered sources were refined with the following methods:

* preference was given for articles available online, with a number of interloans targeted at sources considered seminal in the wider literature
* articles evaluating programmes with a small number of participants (less than ten people) were usually excluded
* articles that lacked evidence for employment outcomes were usually excluded
* articles published more than twenty years ago were usually excluded, unless more recent sources cited it extensively.

Although the DAP work has a youth focus, because of changing work expectations for people with disabilities of all ages, information about work experience or internship programmes targeted at older people was not excluded. The bulk of the evidence discovered, however, was for work experience programmes in the secondary education transition space, with a smaller number of articles on programmes in the tertiary education space.

After the initial draft, stakeholder feedback asked for more information on mental health to be included, which was completed in August 2013.

### Interview process

A limited number of targeted interviews were conducted with 25 people in May-June 2013. People who participated in a work experience or internship programme were interviewed, along with providers of work experience or internship programmes. The heads of four disabled peoples’ organisations (DPOs) were interviewed, in their capacity as leaders in the disability sector, rather than as programme providers.

Different sets of questions were asked of participants and providers, with interviews being conducted in an informal manner. A limitation of the interviews was the lack of response from Mäori disability organisations. The small number of people interviewed means that the qualitative information gained is illustrative rather than comprehensive.

The interview summary can be found on pages 12-13 of this report, and the main recommendations arising from the interview report have been incorporated into this report’s recommendations.

### Overview of Sources

The sources used have been categorised as follows:

* twenty articles published about outcomes and lessons learned from one programme
* sixteen articles published about outcomes and lessons learned from multiple programmes
* documents analysing the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS-2) data in the United States
* eleven literature review or systematic review documents focused on transition and employment outcomes for people with disabilities
* twenty-two articles and documents focused on best practice for transition and employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

A large number of documents describing work experience programmes targeted at people with disabilities, but without outcomes data or other evaluative information, were also found during the research. These documents do provide contextual information about programmes, but care has been taken not to rely on their conclusions.

The number of articles covered in the literature and systematic review documents makes it clear that this literature review has only been able to access part of the available literature in the time available for research.

Coverage of specific disabilities was uneven, with the majority of the work experience studies found being on visual impairments or mild intellectual disabilities, with only one study on severe disabilities (where severe disabilities was defined to include severe intellectual disabilities, autism, and/or multiple disabilities).

### Limitations of the research

Much of the academic literature on transition practices is descriptive rather than experimental. This also applies to many official publications about transition programs, which are long on aspirational goals and short on outcomes data. The academic literature is changing, but there are still many practices that need to be empirically studied. Test, et al. (2010) outlined what we still need to know about secondary evidence-based practices and predictors of post-school success. This includes high quality group and/or single-subject experimental research, and high-quality multivariate correlational research that:

* collects longitudinal data on the effects of secondary transition practices on in-school and post-school outcomes
* builds the level of evidence from potential or moderate to strong
* disaggregates data by disability category to identify predictors of success for specific disability groups
* provides a more comprehensive understanding of in-school predictors of post-school success for students with disabilities
* determines if identified predictor variables hold up over multiple points in time.

There do not appear to be any gold standard randomised clinical trials with control groups reporting on outcomes for people with disabilities that have completed a work experience or internship programme. So, while the available evidence strongly indicates work experience is good practice, this may change down the track if further research is done on other predictors.

The exact form or source of work experience is not always identified in the literature. So we are not able to say if self-sourced, school-sourced, community-sourced or agency-sourced work experience is better or worse for transition outcomes.

There is a shortfall in research across gender, ethnicity, types of impairment and programme location.

Measures of employment do not always measure income, so measures of employment status alone can mislead, as some people with disabilities are employed in low-paying jobs. Some people discard their disabled identities when applying for work, which makes it harder to track employment outcomes and career progress (Riddell et al., 2010).

Employment is only one measure of transition, other markers of adulthood such as marriage and independent living, are also important, but have not been covered in this research. Young people may well choose to focus on non-employment transition markers when they leave secondary school (Janus 2009). This can affect outcomes data, as these are often collected in a snapshot survey a few months to a couple of years after exit from the education system.

# Appendix III Interview Documents

# Work Experience and Internship Stocktake Interview Questions

1. Participants should receive a background information document and a consent form along with this set of questions, prior to the interview session.
2. The consent form must be completed before the interview begins.
3. The intended tone of the interviews is a relaxed conversational style.
4. Interviews should take under an hour to complete.

**Questions for someone being interviewed because they participated in a work experience and/or internship programme**

Background information:

* age
* gender
* ethnicity
* type of impairment
* level of education (highest qualification obtained)
* location (city, town, rural)

What opportunities were there for you to participate in a work experience or internship programme?

How did you find out about this opportunity?

What support did you receive in applying for this opportunity?

Did you have to wait for long before starting?

**Questions about a specific programme**

Where was the programme offered/located?

What employer(s) were you placed with?

How long did your work placement(s) last?

For each placement ask:

* What kind of work did you do?
* At what level(s) of work were placements made (entry level, graduate level, senior level, management level)?
* Was the work full or part-time?
* Was the work paid or unpaid?
* Did you enjoy the work?

How were any barriers you had to taking part in the programme dealt with?

What support was provided by other parties to you and your employer?

What features of the programme helped make it successful?

What could have been done to make your work experience placement better?

**Programme Outcomes**

Did you successfully complete the programme?

Are you in a job now? (alternately, may be in education/study)

* Hours of work?
* Wages?
* Is it with an employer you met on the programme?

Are you getting any benefit payments from the government?

What other outcomes did you gain from taking part in the programme?

* Job hunting skills?
* Employment skills?
* Work related training?
* Completed qualifications?
* Improved self-confidence or other personal qualities?

**Other Questions**

Did you have any experience of discrimination on the work placement?

What was the extent of your family involvement and support?

What were your family’s expectations?

What accommodations were needed for the job?

Were there any difficulties in implementing the necessary accommodations?

**Questions for someone being interviewed because they provided a work experience and/or internship programme**

Can you tell us a little about how you came to be involved with this programme?

**Questions about the specific programme**

Where is/was the programme offered/located?

When did the programme start? (year)

What employer(s) were/are involved with the programme?

How many people took part in the programme?

How long do the work placements usually last for?

At what level(s) of work were placements made (entry level, graduate level, senior level, management level)?

Is the work usually full or part-time?

Is the work usually paid or unpaid?

How was the programme funded? (no funding, private funding, Government funding, mixture)?

Is the programme still being offered?

**Programme Outcomes**

What benefits did employers gain from the programme?

Do employers continue to support the programme?

What is the completion rate like?

What outcomes do the programme participants gain:

* ongoing work
* employment skills
* training or qualifications
* self-confidence or other personal qualities?

Do you follow up with programme participants to see how they are doing? If so, what do you find?

**Other Questions**

What support is offered to overcome barriers to participation?

How were any problems with the programme resolved?

What did the programme do that worked well?

Did participants have any problems with discrimination on their work placement?

What was the extent of your family involvement and support?

What were the family’s expectations?

What accommodations were needed for the job?

Were there any difficulties in implementing the necessary accommodations?

If you were starting a new programme, what would you do differently?

**Questions for someone being interviewed because of their expertise with work experience and/or internship programmes**

Can you tell us a little about your background in this area?

What work experience and/or internship programmes for people with disabilities are you aware of in New Zealand?

* location
* number of participants
* employers

What are the strengths and weaknesses of these programmes?

What are the barriers to people with disabilities participating in work experience placements?

How could these barriers be overcome?

What do you know about the outcomes from these programmes?

What steps do you think could be taken to increase work experience opportunities for people with disabilities?

What do you think best practice for a work experience programme targeting people with disabilities would look like?

# Work Experience and Internships for People with Disabilities

# Background Information – why we are doing this

People with disabilities have a lower rate of employment than the rest of the working age population. Based on 2006 Census information, for people aged 15-64 years old in New Zealand, labour force participation for disabled people was 64 per cent, compared to 84 per cent for non-disabled people.

In May 2012, the Ministerial Committee on Disability Issues agreed that the Disability Action Plan for 2012-2014 would include work to increase the number of disabled people in employment. This work is being shared across government agencies.

The Disability Employment Forum (DEF) and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) are working together on initiatives aimed at connecting disabled youth with the labour market. One of these initiatives is to promote work experience for disabled people who have not previously been employed.

# Research Project – what we are doing

Before we can trial new approaches to promoting work experience, we are doing research on the effectiveness of work experience and internship programmes aimed at young disabled people. This includes programmes from both New Zealand and overseas countries. From this research we hope to find evidence about:

* how work experience affects employment outcomes for disabled youth
* the best way to implement work experience and internship programmes.

One part of the research is a literature review of published information on work experience and internship programmes for disabled people.

The other part of this research is selected interviews with people in New Zealand. From the interviews we hope to identify current work experience and internship programmes for disabled people in New Zealand, the experiences of people with these programmes, the factors that helped success, and how the programmes could be improved.

# Research Report – what the information will be used for

Information from the interviews will be included in the final research report, along with information from the literature review. Interview participants will not be identified in the report. The report is intended to be completed by the end of June 2013.

The report will be used to develop a paper for Ministers, that gives options for a possible trial of work experience and internship programmes aimed at disabled young people.

Enquires about the report and interviews can be directed to:

Dr Dillon Burke, Policy Analyst

Youth and Employment Policy

Ministry of Social Development

Email: Dillon.Burke003@msd.govt.nz

Phone: 04 916 3077

# Consent to Participation in Research

## Work Experience and Internship Programmes for Disabled Youth

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project (before data information and analysis is complete) without having to give reasons or without penalty of any sort.

I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the interviewer, the person who transcribes the recordings of the interview, the report writers, and their manager at the Ministry of Social Development.

I understand that the published results will not use my name, and no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me.

I understand that the recordings of the interviews will be electronically wiped at the end of the project unless I indicate that I would like them returned to me. The project is expected to end in December 2013.

Tick the boxes you agree with:

* I agree to take part in this research.
* I would like the recordings of my interview returned to me at the conclusion of the project.
* I would like to check my interview transcript before the research report is finished.
* I understand that the information I provide will not be used for any other purpose or released to others without my written consent.
* I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

……………………………………………………………………… …………………………...

Your name Telephone number

……………………………………………………………………… …………………………...

Your signature Date (day/month/year)

………………………………………………………………………

Parent’s/caregiver’s signature (if under 18 years)

**Thank you for participating in this research.**

1. Disability is not something individuals have. What individuals have are impairments. They may be physical, sensory, neurological, psychiatric, intellectual or other impairments. Disability is the process which happens when one group of people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have (Ministry of Health, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)