Advancing the inclusion of STEM students with disabilities through a residential internship programme

Authors: Geneviève Guinot, Ioanna Koutava

CERN Diversity Office - March 2017

Aim

The aim of the project is to contribute to the academic and professional development of undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities while assisting the HEP community to increase the diversity of its talent pool.

Objective

The main objective is to introduce earmarked positions and budgeting for candidates with disability in CERN student programmes.

Background

Statistics\(^1\) show that unemployment among people of working age with disability is far higher than for working-age individuals in the population. Statistics also show longer periods of unemployment for people with disabilities.

*Disability is a development issue, because of its bidirectional link to poverty: disability may increase the risk of poverty, and poverty may increase the risk of disability.*

Research in the US show great education and employment outcomes disparities for youth with disabilities\(^3\), whether in terms of educational attainment or employment status for a same age range. Reasons for this lower level of employment vary between countries, but include lack of information on work opportunities; lack of awareness among employers of needs and abilities of persons with disabilities; discouragement due to experiences of failure in obtaining jobs and/or internalized negative images; and inadequate technical/personal supports.

The productivity of persons with disabilities is often associated with the perception of abilities and not with the real abilities to perform on a job once the necessary adjustments or accommodations have been put in place, such as, for example, assistive technologies\(^4\).

Among the successful employer initiatives for the employment of people with disabilities, Professor Susanne Bruyere, Professor of Disability Studies and Director of the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability (Cornell University)\(^5\), recommends the creation of summer residential internship programmes.

\(^1\) Managing disability in the workplace – International Labour Office – Geneva - 2002


\(^3\) University – Industry Collaborations – Prof. Susanne Bruyère – Cornell University - ILR School – Talk at ILO

\(^4\) GBDN meeting – Geneva – October 2016

\(^5\) Maria Cabañas Rodriguez: « L’inclusion des personnes handicapées dans l’emploi : le cas de l’organisation européenne pour la recherche nucléaire (CERN) » (Master in socio-economics - University of Geneva - 2016)

\(^5\) https://www.ilr.cornell.edu/people/susanne-bruyere
The project

- **Expected outcome**
  The outcome of the project is a study that will establish the optimal characteristics of a disability-specific internship programme at CERN and enlighten actions needed to improve inclusiveness in the work environment. The findings would be made available to the HEP community and beneficial for the public in the future.

- **Main activity**
  CERN has a long tradition of residential student programmes from short-term internships, to summer student and technical student programmes, all with various durations\(^6\). Internships help students build skills, demonstrate those skills to employers and gain working experience. A disability-specific internship programme would in addition have the virtuous effect of helping the employer the Organization to improve its inclusiveness practices.

  The study will build on the existing expertise to shape the specific programme. Among others, the following aspects will be assessed under the angle of what to do and how to do it:
  - Communicating the positions; reaching out to potential candidates;
  - Carrying out interviews with students with disabilities;
  - Addressing accessibility (work and accommodation facilities, and assistive technologies);
  - Preparing the work environment (people and material) for a successful integration;
  - Following up / providing support throughout the internship;
  - Monitoring the internship and collecting feedback on both parties’ experience (intern and manager);
  - Mentoring the students for their future academic and professional career.

- **Partners**
  The research and study should be carried out by experts of employment of people with disability.
  The CERN Diversity Office has connections with the *Global Business and Disability Network (GBDN)*, facilitated by the *International Labour Organization in Geneva (ILO)*\(^7\), and with the *K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability of Cornell University*.

- **Target audience**
  Undergraduate and graduate students in STEM still enrolled at a University.

- **Timeline**
  Subject to the availability of expert, the study will be carried out between May and December 2017. The programme should be implemented in summer 2018.

---


\(^7\) The GBDN is a worldwide network of companies, organisations, business networks and disabled people’s organizations (DPOs) working in collaboration to promote disability inclusion in the workplace