

Finding a Place in the Market: Marrying School Programme with Market Needs and Trends – Transition from School to Sustainable Employment

Desmond Aw Zheng Hong

Lisa Loi Lai San

Siow Wei Qi

Tay Hsu Li

Abstract

This study addressed the interrelationship between the expectations of prospective employers and the profiles (skills, knowledge, interests and preferences) of students at Association for Persons with Special Needs Delta Senior School (APSN DSS), a vocational special education school in Singapore for students with mild intellectual disability, aged 17 to 21. The successful transition of persons with disabilities from school to work was one of the key agendas outlined in recent government initiatives to support inclusiveness in society. In line with this aim, the present study sought to explore strategies within the Work Experience Programme (WEP) at APSN DSS to increase the success rate of matching students to future jobs that promote their sustainability in open employment. This study looked at two sets of data for this purpose. The first was a survey to better understand the expectations of employers of students from APSN DSS who are placed on work attachments with them. Analysis of the feedback obtained through interviews with 28 employers from four different sectors (hospitality, food and beverage, horticulture and retail) in Singapore highlighted the importance of aligning the vocational training of students to the requirements of each industry to prepare them for future challenges at the workplace. The second set of data comprised inputs gathered from school staff (trainers, teachers and job coaches) about students through a comprehensive profiling exercise that included an evaluation of their performance in a simulated job interview. This process provided insights into students' task capabilities as well as proficiency in soft skills and the extent to which they are able to meet the current expectations of the employers/ industries that they would eventually be going into upon graduation from school. This paper presents the preliminary findings of the study that are discussed in light of plans by APSN DSS to harness the strengths of students, bridge the gaps in training programmes, maximise the opportunities offered by employers and address the concerns they surfaced to allow for a smoother transition from school to work.