

# Career planning for students on the autism spectrum



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For school leavers on the autism spectrum, regardless of academic ability, the rates of successful participation in post-secondary education or further training are only half that of students without disability, and only one-quarter that of all other students. Likewise, unemployment and under-employment of autistic individuals of working age are double that of those with disability and four times that of non-autistic individuals. This paper aims to provide information about evidence-based resources available for educators to support students on the autism spectrum in transition planning, build their employability, and maximise their potential.

There were 106,600 young people aged between 5 and 20 years old attending school or another educational institution in 2018. Many require additional support to achieve educational outcomes, especially those who experience learning difficulties or have challenges with communication; however, many educators are not confident in using evidence-based practices to support these students.

### Educators are in an ideal position to facilitate transition planning and career development

Because the rate of participation in work among autistic individuals of working age is considerably poorer than for non-autistic individuals and those living with disability, school-based support should extend beyond educational outcomes to include employment outcomes, with transition planning integral to students' individual education plans (IEPs). However, there is variability in the confidence of educators to fulfil this role, and also the quality of content in students' IEPs related to best-practice recommendations. Ad hoc approaches to transition planning between individual educators, school, or educational systems can create inconsistencies or gaps in support for students on the spectrum as they move through year groups at school, or transfer to other schools or educational jurisdictions.

Our research has shown that by applying five inter-related and evidence-based **employability principles**, educators can help build self-determination among students on the autism spectrum to plan and prepare for what they will do after school.

#### The five employability principles



- **Encourage big dreams:** support students to explore their future options without limitations to open new possibilities.
- **Start transition planning early:** in high school — ideally around Year 9 — when many other Australian students begin exploring post-school pathways to further education, training, and employment opportunities.

- **Adolescent-centred planning:** actively engage the student in the transition planning process to help them build self-determination to plan and prepare for their future. *A truly student-centred approach can be challenging for some teachers to implement.*
- **Focus on the big picture about work:** many autistic individuals have challenges understanding the benefits of work that are beyond receiving a paycheck, such as having a place in society and a sense of belonging. Real-world opportunities like work experience or volunteering can help them develop this understanding.
- **Have a champion on the transition planning team** who encourages a strength-based approach and ensures the transition planning process keeps moving forward. Many students develop trusting relationships with supportive educators who may be well-placed to take on this role.

## Autism CRC's career planning guide

Beginning the transition planning process can be challenging for educators, as all students have their own unique support needs. In response to the diversity of support needs, Autism CRC launched myWAY Employability — an online career exploration and goal setting resource. Underpinned by the five employability principles and using a strength-based approach, myWAY Employability was co-designed with young autistic individuals aged 14 years and above to help them and the people who support them plan and prepare for life after school.

Users of myWAY Employability are guided to:

- explore and rate their **interest in different types of everyday activities** that are linked to six vocational personalities: Realistic (practical); Investigative (analytical); Artistic (creative); Social (helping); Enterprising (managing, influencing); and Conventional (organising)
- identify their **personal strengths**
- consider the types of **physical, sensory, and social environments** they prefer
- identify how they **prefer to learn** new information or skills
- highlight their **capabilities or needs in performing pre-vocational life skills**, including getting about in the community, self-care, and domestic activities
- consider their interests in participating in **post-secondary education and training pathways**.

Information entered on the site is used to create a vocational profile summary that is matched to possible jobs for further exploration. Users are prompted to create a 'big sky dream', set goals related to this big dream, and create a team of people to support them in achieving their goals. Informative articles written in plain language and from the perspectives of autistic individuals are available to download. They cover a range of topics, including getting work experience, creating a resume, applying for a job, preparing for the first day of work, getting about in the community, and managing anxiety in the workplace.

## A conversation starter

When the young person reads and responds to the questions in each section of the website alongside a supporter — such as a parent or teacher — it helps them to start conversations about planning for the future, which some autistic individuals often consider to be too challenging or anxiety-provoking.

## Professional learning for educators

Educators play a critical role in changing the post-school outcomes for students on the autism spectrum. Delivering a comprehensive post-school transition curriculum that is both evidence-based and responsive to diverse needs is challenging.

Autism CRC has developed teacher and student resources that will prime students to use the activities on the myWAY Employability website and support educators to promote student success. The myWAY Employability Educator resources are available on the inclusionED professional learning platform. Co-designed with educators for educators, and in consultation with national education partners, inclusionED translates research findings as a series of teaching practices to support diverse learners in inclusive classrooms.

Educators are supported to implement these practices within a cycle of professional learning and embedded within a community of practice. Through the inclusionED practices, educators gain access to a range of free 'How to' guides, instructional videos, printable tip sheets, templates and handouts, and research reports and articles.

## Impacts

myWAY Educator resources and practices can facilitate career planning with your students by:

- **Starting challenging conversations about the future:** individual and group activities can assist students to begin thinking about their future and to discuss the possibilities with their peers, teachers, and family.
- **Identifying personal strengths, interests, and sensory preferences:** a strength-based approach helps students to leverage their individual abilities and passions to guide career exploration, finding suitable work experiences, and making decisions about further training or education.
- **Providing a just right challenge:** lesson plans with scaffolded activities linked to career exploration are designed to engage students with diverse learning needs.
- **Building self-determination:** young people are encouraged to take a greater role in planning for their futures. This can help develop their self-advocacy skills to let people know what they do and don't want in life.

## myfuture

Find resources to support students' career development and exploration on the myfuture website. Visit: [myfuture.edu.au/assist-others#teaching-resources](https://myfuture.edu.au/assist-others#teaching-resources)

To download this paper and explore other papers in the Insights series, visit [www.myfuture.edu.au/assist-others/insights](http://www.myfuture.edu.au/assist-others/insights)

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