

Creating a more inclusive university and scientific world

The PROMI project for doctoral students with disabilities

Jana F. Bauer, Susanne Groth & Mathilde Niehaus

University of Cologne, Chair of Labour and Vocational Rehabilitation

University graduates with disabilities have rarely been the focus of research or practice projects so far, although a pilot study from Germany (Niehaus & Bauer, 2013) suggests that they – despite their high level of education – face various barriers at the transition to the labour market. Funded by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the PROMI project provides 45 additional part-time jobs for severely disabled doctoral students, who prior to this have been unemployed. The formative and participatory evaluation of the project helps to identify barriers as well as best practices and to develop sustainable and transferable solutions for university graduates with disabilities.



Background & objectives

- Ph.D. as one option after university graduation that promotes subsequent career opportunities
- admission to doctoral studies should be accessible for graduates with disabilities
- BUT: there is no systematic data on the actual accessibility and German universities have not yet engaged in the analysis and reduction of barriers or the promotion of equal opportunities for their scientific staff with disabilities
- thus the objectives of the PROMI project are to:
 1. provide accessible Ph.D. positions for university graduates with disabilities
 2. identify barriers and best practices to establish sustainable structures and new access opportunities for students and staff with disabilities at the participating universities
 3. challenge prejudices and stereotypes and reduce (mental) barriers
 4. gain empirical insights into the situation of doctoral students with disabilities

Concept

- 21 cooperating universities nationwide
- 45 additional part-time jobs for doctoral students with disabilities (3+2 years contract)
- diverse types of disabilities and fields of study
- project management, coordination and evaluation at the University of Cologne

Past experience

- very positive media coverage
- wide interest of universities as well as university graduates with disabilities to participate in the project → “inclusive university” seems to be an upcoming topic that is promoted by the requirements of the UN-CRPD
- as a key element of the project the Ph.D. positions incorporate a legal entitlement to reasonable accommodations by the social funding agencies
- BUT: the plurality of funding agencies and contact persons in combination with a lot of bureaucracy causes delays in the implementation of required workplace accommodations which turns out to be a main barrier → nearly all doctoral students have lost precious time for working on their thesis
- on the university level a good cooperation of the relevant stakeholders is an important enabler → some of the cooperating universities have already been inspired by the PROMI project to establish their own advisory board on inclusion

