

Limited guidance offered to children with intellectual disabilities as they prepare to leave school – TCD research finds

Research published by Trinity College Dublin today (**Tuesday 23 February 2021**), ‘Post-School Transitions for Students with Intellectual Disabilities’ has found that there is limited guidance for children with intellectual disabilities in Ireland as they prepare to leave school, contributing to a significant underrepresentation within the workforce and further and higher education in the State.

The research, conducted by the Trinity School of Education and the Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities, found that there are a number of contributing factors, including the lack of a consistent approach in schools and concerns that there are not enough appropriate supports in further/higher education to support students with intellectual disabilities. Policy recommendations include the implementation of a whole-school approach to guidance provision and an expansion of post-school options from traditional health-based settings to further and higher education.

Des Aston, Co-Author of the research and National and Schools Coordinator, Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities said:

“We hope this research will highlight the importance of a whole-school approach to inclusion. Inclusive education isn’t just about accessing an academic curriculum, albeit an integral part. We need to make sure that inclusive education encapsulates everything that a school experience should include - from the social life to guidance for adult life. Access to appropriate guidance and information, coupled with inclusive leadership and strong student support teams are some of the steps needed at school level. While further and higher education providers also have a duty to ensure equity of access and supports are made available to support seamless post-school pathways.”

Research has consistently highlighted the importance of formal career guidance and transition planning for students, as they prepare to leave post-primary education and enter further or higher education, training, employment, and adult life.

Jennifer McKenzie, Director of the National Centre for Guidance in Education said:

“It is incumbent on those of us in the provision of education, training and guidance supports to carefully reflect on the recommendations of this report and consider their implications for future policy and the provision of more suitable progression options for these young people, so that they too, just like their school friends, can aspire to achieve their own life goals.

“The one key message threaded throughout this report is the genuine concern of school management, personnel and parents to support young people with Intellectual Disabilities to make suitable transitions which will allow them achieve their potential. Realistically however, the report indicates a recognition and acknowledgment by relevant personnel that school policies and further professional development are required to ensure that school management, guidance counsellors and special education needs coordinators have the appropriate knowledge and competences required to work collaboratively to provide transition and progression planning and supports and for students with Intellectual Disabilities.”

The research was conducted by Mr Des Aston, Dr Joanna Banks and Professor Michael Shevlin and the findings are based on a national survey of Irish post-primary school principals and qualitative interviews with school personnel responsible for the transition planning and guidance provision for students with disabilities in their school.

Read the full report here: <http://hdl.handle.net/2262/94978>

(Embargo set until 23rd Feb. 2021. Please contact astond@tcd.ie for the full report prior to this date.)

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Notes to Editors

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Key Findings:

1. Limited Career Guidance for Students with Intellectual Disabilities:

- a. Guidance and transition planning for students with ID is limited compared to their non-disabled peers.
- b. Lack of appropriate provision for students with ID in mainstream setting.
- c. Ambiguity among school staff of who is responsible for their transition planning. This responsibility varies between SENCO and Guidance Counsellors.

2. Barriers and Enablers to Successful Transition:

- a. School staff fear there is a lack of appropriate supports in further/higher education to support students with ID.
- b. A mismatch of expectations between schools and parents around the availability of places in FE/HE or the most appropriate placement (HSE/Vocational).
- c. Other barriers include a lack of access to relevant information and awareness of post-school options among teachers, SENCOs and school Guidance Counsellors.

3. The Importance of an Inclusive School Ethos:

- a. Attitudes of school principals towards inclusive education impact the extent to which appropriate guidance and transition planning is taking place.
- b. Schools with a whole-school approach to inclusion had greater levels of cooperation amongst staff towards coherent post-school transition plans for students with intellectual disabilities.

4. The Impact of the Covid-19 School Closures:

- a. Concerns of remote learning and the lack of face-to-face contact impacting on students' mental health and wellbeing.
- b. Over-emphasis on guidance and transition planning for students whose post-school pathways depended on the Leaving Certificate (LC) results.
- c. Students with intellectual disabilities, whose post-school placements were often already decided [HSE/Vocational], were overlooked during this period.

Policy Implications:

5. Implement a Whole-school Approach to Guidance Provision

- a. The findings suggest the need for a whole-school approach to guidance provision, which will involve greater coordination between Guidance Counsellors and SENCOs.

- 6. Expand Post-school Options from Traditional Health-based Settings to Further and Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities**
 - a. The report highlights how students with intellectual disabilities rarely make the transition to further or higher education when they leave school.
 - 7. Broaden the Scope of Guidance beyond Preparing Students for the Leaving Certificate and College Entry**
 - a. The report highlights concerns, during the Covid-19 school closures, around student outcomes, following the cancellation of the Leaving Certificate (LC) exam
 - 8. Ensure continuity of provision at Senior Cycle**
 - a. The report shows the importance of L1L2 programmes at Junior Cycle for students with intellectual disabilities but highlights the need for continuity of programme provision as students' progress into Senior Cycle.
 - 9. Improve Access and Retention in Further and Higher Education**
 - a. The findings of this report highlight concerns expressed by teachers and parents of students with disabilities around a loss of supports if these students were to move to a new educational setting.
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