Pathways to Trinity
The Disabled Student Journey

The Disability Service
Strategic Outreach, Transition, Retention and Progression Plan 2011 – 2014

January 2012
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Introduction

Disabled students experience significant changes in their learning environment, teaching approaches and peer and social networks when they progress to higher education (HE). These changes continue throughout their College career and into the world of work. The experience is fraught with additional challenges which include issues related to concise, transparent and easily accessible information about course choice and access routes, and supports provided in College and into employment.

Supplementary admission routes such as the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE), which discriminate positively towards disabled students, are raising awareness amongst students and their families. There has been a steady increase in those gaining places via this route in Trinity College Dublin (TCD) (35 in 2009, 45 in 2010, 72 in 2011) in addition to disabled students entering first year on merit (108 in 2009, 88 in 2010, 75 in 2011). There is a lack of data on the completion of Leaving Certificate and progression to HE for specific target groups, and the reasons for low uptake in these groups have not been documented.

Table 1 (Data Analysis Section) presents combined data from the National Disability Survey 2006 (CSO, 2006) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE, 2009a and 2009b). Whilst this data indicates the potential number of students with physical and sensory disabilities applying to HE, the actual number of applications is seven times less than non-disabled school leavers. The NCSE reports indicate specifically that students with sensory impairments experience significant educational disadvantage at primary and secondary level as a result of their disability. This explains why so few are applying through the CAO for places in Higher Education.

It is recognised that while all students find the transition from school to college a complex process, disabled students have particular pressures. Transition assessment and planning is legislated across all states in the USA via the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004, 2006) and is increasingly the focus of longitudinal studies in the UK such as Aston et al. (2005). However, no equivalent initiatives are provided currently at a national level in Ireland. For disabled students the transition to HE is a complex process and there is a systemic ‘disconnect’ between the levels of education, and no clear transition planning takes place. Cohen and Spenciner (1996) point out that in many cases the transition programme is considered to be a ‘once off, one-time’ event, rather than an on-going process. This is reflective of the current framework within Irish schools, where Transition Year is seen as a defined, stand-alone period occurring before the beginning of the senior cycle, with little or no measurable progression of development across the senior cycle to the point of transition into HE.

The NCCA / ESRI study on transition from primary to post primary education (Smyth et al., 2004) proffered a number of key factors in smooth transition which could equally be applied to the second / third level transition process.
• Pre-entry contact between service providers in the HEI, incoming students and – where necessary – parents to address any anxieties and concerns.
• Information from the secondary school to the HEI service providers concerning academic achievement, learning style, adaptive strategies such as assistive technology.
• Positive role models in the form of student mentors, buddy systems and student ‘stories’.
• An environment and ethos in school that actively encourages students to apply to HE.
• Careful monitoring of student progress during the first year of transition to ensure that supports are provided in an effective and timely manner.

Preliminary research conducted by TCD Disability Service (DS) indicates that the number of students in the Higher Education Authority (HEA) target groups (HEA, 2008) has not increased significantly (Table 2), and that the transition process for disabled students spans their entire academic life. Aligning this research with College and national policies, the DS has developed a transition plan – the Student Journey. This involves three distinct phases of academic life:
• Pre-entry.
• Progression through college.
• Progression into employment.

Each stage is outlined in this document and includes a research element, service activity and provision of relevant supports and feedback from stakeholders, most importantly, the student. A transition planning tool will be developed for each stage of the journey, and a unique website has been developed to support this new initiative: Pathways to Trinity http://www.tcd.ie/pathways-to-trinity/.

Aims and Objectives

1. Develop effective transition initiatives in order to promote TCD as a first choice option for students with disabilities.

2. Increase the numbers of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities in higher education as stated in the College Access & Strategic Plan 2009-2013 and the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008 -2013.

3. Engage students and their families, expert bodies, community agencies and practitioners in pre and post-entry activities in preparation for the transition to College and the promotion and development of clear routes of progression from College to employment for students with a disability.

4. Identify factors that function as either promoters or barriers for students with disabilities applying to higher education, including mature applicants and students applying with FETAC qualifications.

5. Ensure support systems in College are fit for purpose by conducting evidence based research to determine needs and supports for specific user groups, and to monitor performance and delivery of those supports.

6. Identify transferable skills across the College experience which will promote and encourage independence, self-determination, self-advocacy and employability.
Data Analysis

TCD is recognised as having the highest number of disabled students in HE in Ireland (AHEAD, 2009, 2010), and Figure 1 illustrates the dramatic increase in student numbers between 2007 and 2011. HEA and TCD strategic targets for 2013 are to double the numbers of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities with corresponding levels of support. However participation by these target groups has diminished from 18.7% in 2006, to 15.8% in 2010. While the actual numbers of students is increasing, proportionately they continue to be under-represented compared to other disability cohorts (Figure 1).

![Figure 1 TCD student registrations 2007/08 to 2010/11.](image)

While most groups have doubled in numbers over a four year period, the rate of increase for Deaf / Hard of Hearing and physical disabilities has only increased marginally. Over the next two to three years DS will actively engage with community organisations and action groups such as the Irish Deaf Society, National Council for the Blind Ireland, Irish Wheelchair Association and Enable Ireland. In addition, the DS will identify strategic partners in the Visiting Teachers Service to focus on communicating with students to raise awareness of supports in TCD and to increase the educational expectations of school leavers. The DS3 project is a good example of what can be achieved to support prospective and current students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Similar initiatives are being developed for students with physical disabilities and those who are Blind or Visually Impaired.

Table 1 illustrates the numbers and age groups of people with sensory and physical disabilities nationally, those applying through the CAO, and those disclosing a disability through the DARE process. In 2010 the total number of people in Ireland with a sensory
or physical disability was 292,200, and of these 1,189 were aged 18 (of school leaving age). A further 5,483 (19 to 22 years) would most likely have left school but were not yet old enough to apply to HE as mature students, whilst 72,115 (23 to 54 years) represent potential mature applicants. The ratio of 1 to 57 is the number of school leavers to those aged 23 to 54. The average incidence per 1,000 of the population for either a sensory or physical disability ranges between 2.58 and 2.98. The incidence can be used as a baseline to predict the occurrence of these categories in CAO applications. In 2010 there were 70,000 applications which would predict applicants from those with physical or sensory disabilities as being between 542 and 625; the actual number was 168. Of these 119 met the criteria for DARE eligibility; 49 did not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Ages 18</th>
<th>Aged 19 to 22</th>
<th>Aged 23 to 54</th>
<th>Ratio of school leavers to those ages 23 to 54</th>
<th>Incidence per 1,000</th>
<th>Predicted number of applicants via CAO (70,000) in 2010</th>
<th>Actual number of applicants</th>
<th>Eligible / ineligible as per DARE criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blind or visually impaired</td>
<td>50,600</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>12,250</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>1.60-2.40</td>
<td>122-168</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf or hard of hearing</td>
<td>57,600</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>848</td>
<td>12,200</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>1.65-2.05</td>
<td>115-148</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>47/23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Disability</td>
<td>184,999</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>3,635</td>
<td>47,665</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>52/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (for average*)</td>
<td>292,000</td>
<td>1,189</td>
<td>5,483</td>
<td>72,115</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>2.58-2.98*</td>
<td>542-626</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>119/49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1 National statistics for target groups 2010**

Students registered with the DS in these groups have been consistently low since the service began. Despite small increases in these groups since 2007, the rapid increases in other disability groups over the same period means that, proportionately, the number of students with sensory and physical disabilities has been declining. The averaged total of these three groups from 2003 to 2010 is 92. The target for 2013 is to double the collective baseline from 74 in 2007 to 148 (Table 2). Similarly, the cohort for Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Attention Deficit Disorder are significantly under-represented, given incidence within the general population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Disability</th>
<th>03/04</th>
<th>04/05</th>
<th>05/06</th>
<th>06/07</th>
<th>07/08</th>
<th>08/09</th>
<th>09/10</th>
<th>10/11</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blind / VI</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf / HoH</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>MH</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>119</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2 TCD statistics for target groups 2003 - 2010**
There is a significant mismatch between the number of second level students with disabilities leaving school, and those entering further and HE. More significantly, no data exists to explain or describe what happens to these students when they leave formal education. The World Health Organization / World Bank Report on Disability (2011, p. 277) specifically recommends the following action points with respect to education:

- Involve the broader community in activities related to the education of children with disabilities. This is likely to be more successful than policy decisions handed down from above.

- Develop links between educational services and community-based rehabilitation and other rehabilitation services, where they exist. In this way, scarce resources can be used more efficiently, and education, health care, and social services can be properly integrated.

- Encourage adults with disabilities and disabled people’s organizations to become more involved in promoting access to education for children with disabilities.

As part of its Operational Plan 2011, DS will be initiating a programme of community-linked events to meet these recommendations.

Retention of students with disabilities in TCD

The ‘Pathways to Education’ report (2010) tracked the progress of students with disabilities in nine HEIs in 2005. Findings indicated that students with disabilities - similar to their non-disabled peers - were most likely to leave in the first year, and, compared to their non-disabled peers, they are more likely to graduate and more likely to take longer doing so.

The retention rate of students with a disability entering TCD in 2005 is 93% (Pathways to Education, 2010). This corresponds closely with cumulative figures since 2005. Tables 3 to 6 indicate the overall retention rates for 1,303 students registered with the DS during the period January 2007 to June 2011, detailing the progression of supplementary entry, mature entry and merit entry students. Across these three sub-groups the withdrawal rate varies only between 6.28% for supplementary entry and 7.29% for mature entry. However, it is important to point out that over 60% of these 1,303 are current students who disclosed post entry. The high proportion of current students is the result of a significant increase in students who registered in 2009 and 2010.
Policy Background

The Office of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2011) completed its final review of international policy and practice for students with disabilities engaging in higher education and/or post-secondary activities, or employment. Details of this and national policy, primarily the HEA National Access Plan 2008-2013, are available in the Appendices. The main College policy documents which set out objectives in relation to widening participation of disabled students are:

Trinity College Access Plan 2009-13

Trinity College Dublin Strategic Plan 2009-14

‘Trinity College Dublin is committed to developing the diversity and inclusiveness of its student body. The College facilitates access to its programmes by students from under-represented groups, and by mature students, through its outreach activities, its foundation courses, and through its operation of alternative admissions routes. The College maintains a range of student services so as to support students appropriately during their academic careers, and to aid them in the successful completion of their course.’

Appendix A, Trinity College’s Access Policy, Trinity College Access Plan 2009 - 13, p.5.

In May 2009 the University Council considered the Access Plan 2009 - 2013 and approved the following targets for under-represented groups, subject to government action plans made in the National Plan for Equity of Access and the adequate resourcing of student support services:
• 22% entrance rates according to key access criteria.
• 13% new entrance rates by under-represented socio-economic groups.
• 11% new entrants in Engineering, Mathematics and Science.
• 10% increase in students with a disability (excluding specific learning difficulties).

This commitment to increasing the participation rates of students from under-represented groups is reflected in the Trinity College Dublin Strategic Plan 2009 - 2014, published in November 2009. In particular:

‘Implement College’s Access Plan, 2009 – 13: We will continue to work with appropriate government agencies and other third-level institutions to understand and define the under-representation of certain social groups in higher education more accurately. The further development of existing pre-entry activities and alternative entry routes for students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, as well as for mature students and students with a disability, will increase the participation of these groups in the student body. By incorporating access issues into staff development and training, and by including access as an area of responsibility at School administration level, we will ensure a heightened awareness of diversity as a dimension of College life…’ (Education, Action 2.7, p.9)

‘Outreach in education and research: … Specific goals relating to our education outreach activities include a strong commitment to a further significant increase in the participation of students from non-traditional backgrounds, for which the pioneering work of the Trinity Access Programme (TAP) will be broadened, and providing new opportunities to broad sections of the population for continuous professional development and life-long learning.’ (Engagement with Society, p.30)

The Strategic Plan also contains actions related to:

➢ Reviewing and updating the life-long learning policy (Education, Action 2.15, p.11).
➢ Increasing flexibility for progression in undergraduate studies (Education, Action 2.16, p.11).
➢ Increasing the flexibility and modularisation of educational provision, and the facilitation of recognition of achievement (Education, Action 2.17, p.11).
➢ Enhancing and extending student support services (Student Experience, Action 4.7, p.26).
➢ Provision of learning support (Student Experience, Action 4.8, p.26).

Other approved policy documents which recognise the increasing diversity of the staff and student population include:

• Code of practice – students with disabilities
  (http://www.tcd.ie/disability/links/forms_and_documents.php)
• Accessible Information Policy and Guidelines
  (http://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/accessible-info-policy.php)
• Fitness to Practice Policy
  (http://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/fitness-to-practice-policy.php)
• Code of Practice Applying to the employment of staff with disabilities
  (http://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/employment_of_people_with_disabilities.php)
• Assessment and Examination - Procedures Guidelines for students and staff on the modification of examination and assessment arrangements for students with disabilities
• Student Charter
  (http://www.tcd.ie/students/assets/documents/student-charter-2009.pdf)
• Mental Health Policy and Guidelines
  (http://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/mental_health.php)
The Disability Service model of support

The DS philosophy in TCD has evolved over the last ten years and now firmly belongs within a 'social model' of disability - with the premise that people with disabilities have a right to actively participate in, and contribute to College, as equals. The social model recognises that people with disabilities are prevented from achieving their full potential by the attitude of society, as well as environmental obstacles such as restrictions in their access to public transport, entertainment and public places, and in education and employment.

The focus is not on rehabilitating the individual with a disability but in making the College environment accessible and creating inclusion for the person with a disability as a consumer rather than as a charity case. It is recognised that the real experts, when it comes to designing services, are those with the closest possible experiences of the issues - people with disabilities themselves.

Service delivery follows a multi-disciplinary approach. The team is made up of three Disability Officers, three Occupational Therapists and one Assistive Technologist who aim to offer a full service based on individual needs as identified by the student/staff member in a needs assessment process. In order to implement this new transition model of service delivery the service is building capacity and supporting good practice. College has put in place a professional development programme (PMDS) for all staff working in the Disability Service following the PMDS programme. DS staff has clearly defined strategic and service objectives

http://www.tcd.ie/disability/projects/index.php and have identified continued professional development activities as key in the provision of quality supports to disabled students. Examples of CPD include research Masters, PhD and an academic journal club.

The three stages of this model will be clearly defined in advance of the next academic year (2011-12) and all staff will define their service and strategic objectives against each stage of this transition model. These will be reported on our web page at: http://www.tcd.ie/disability/projects/index.php and key performance indicators will outline success towards increasing the numbers of students progressing through each stage via our KPI in our annual report.

The dominant model of provision at play in the DS is the occupational P-E-O model as outlined below:
Figure 2, Baum & Christiansen, 2005

According to Baum and Christiansen (2005) the three aspects of the Person-Environment-Occupation model are:

- Person factors – those that relate to psychological, emotional, behavioural, cognitive and physiological factors of the individual.
- Environmental factors – aspects of the environment that include the social context of the individual, associated social networks, attitudes and expectations, norms, and the physical environment that may promote or constrain the achievements of an individual.
- Occupations – long-term goals or aspirations that can be de-constructed into smaller, more manageable tasks.

The process of negotiating the transition from formal education to adulthood falls within the parameters of such occupations. Given the highly competitive nature of entrance to third level education in the Republic of Ireland, juxtaposed with the unique circumstance of disability from a personal, environmental, occupation and performance perspective, using an occupational approach to enable students with disabilities to achieve their goals makes sense. In an ideal world this is the strategy that should be used by parents, school staff and guidance counsellors as ‘enablers’ in the transition process.

Research, dialogue and new initiatives

The DS engages in evidence-based research to enhance service provision and ensure that it is meeting the changing needs of a diverse student population. Examples of recent research and development include the Trinity Inclusive Curriculum (TIC) project, the Accessible Information policy and the development of a College Fitness to Practice Policy. The DS was asked by the HEA to participate in an OECD study ‘Pathways for Disabled Students to Tertiary education and Employment’in 2010. The resulting report ‘Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Tertiary Education and Employment’ (OECD, 2011) provides significant new knowledge and insight into effective policies and practice to support people with disabilities as they move from school into post-secondary education or employment. The DS Strategic Plan includes key objectives identified in this report in all three phases of the Student Journey.

Each phase of the the DS strategic plan will include a detailed evidence-based research to ensure that objectives are being measured and critiqued. It is intended that annual reporting will include presentations of on-going findings at relevant conferences and fora.
Appendix 1: Disability Service Strategic Operational Plan

Phase 1: Pre-entry, admission and the first year experience – Project Lead: Alison Doyle

TCD Strategic Action: 2.7 Implement College’s Access Plan, 2009-13, 4.7 Enhance and extend student support services

Overview

Outreach: Increase the numbers of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities in higher education, as stated in the College Access Plan and the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013.

Recruitment: Identify factors that function as either promoters or barriers for students with disabilities applying to higher education, including mature applicants and students applying with FETAC qualifications.

Transition: Engage students in pre and post-entry activities in preparation for the transition to College including provision of resources and advice to assist with the application and admissions process.
## Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The student journey</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outreach:</strong> (defined as an opportunity to engage with potential students)</td>
<td><strong>Pathways Outreach Project (POP)</strong></td>
<td>Pilot POP to parents of students with disabilities who are College staff. Parent and student workshops October 2011 – June 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend and engage with target student groups at specific events including but not limited to:</td>
<td>Better Options College Open Day</td>
<td>Prepare and present TCD and DS literature to students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARE clinics</td>
<td>Community group initiatives</td>
<td>Raise awareness of outreach objectives and changes to admissions policy for students with disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School workshops and TY events</td>
<td></td>
<td>Respond to queries and provide guidance to potential students with disabilities on DARE and supports at TCD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Forge stronger links with practitioners such as the Visiting Teacher Service and the Social Inclusion Unit (DES)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recruitment:</strong> (defined as policies, procedures and activities which have a direct impact on admissions)</td>
<td><strong>Review the application process for disabled applicants, including forms, disclosure and arrangements for accommodations including aptitude test and interviews; review DARE process and monitor statistics.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Activate the new admissions process 2011; applicants with physical and sensory disabilities will be prioritised above those with SLDs (agreed procedure with TCD admissions officer and the Senior lecturer)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase access quota to 22% as per the Access Plan (18% - 2011-12)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Monitor the entry route for mature students with disabilities to ensure equity of access and report back to the mature student officer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The student journey</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition:</strong> (defined as designing and implementing activities that enhance the first year experience)</td>
<td>Engage students in pre and post entry preparation for the transition to College via: Pathways to Trinity website <a href="http://www.tcd.ie/pathways-to-trinity">www.tcd.ie/pathways-to-trinity</a></td>
<td>Research scholarly writing around the subject area of widening participation, international and national access schemes, transition assessment and planning, and communities of practice. Design online surveys to students, parents and secondary schools. Collate qualitative and quantitative data to inform future practices. Design and maintain website for students with disabilities at second level, as part of a strategy for supporting transition from 2nd to 3rd level. The website should function as a community of practice promoting Trinity as a positive option. Respond to queries and requests for new content. Activate linked social networking vehicles. Collate user relevant content from current students and academic staff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Pathways Assessment Toolkit (PAT) | Communicate and publicize research ethos and website to key members of College community, second level students and key stakeholders. Design, develop and publish paper and electronic versions of the toolkit for use by students, parents, practitioners independently and as a part of the IEP and needs assessment process. | |
Linked OECD recommendations

- Mobilise stakeholders and systems around the future of young adults with disabilities and prevent them from being irremediably marginalised by discontinuities.
- Empower young adults with disabilities and their families to meet the demands of the transition to adulthood and of tertiary education and employment.
- Make systems and stakeholders capable of satisfying the requirements imposed by the definition and implementation of transition processes.
- Provide the mechanisms and tools necessary for planning policies and monitoring transition processes.
- Provide young adults with disabilities with the same knowledge and skills as other young adults to the fullest extent possible.
- Ensure that the support offered acts as an incentive for tertiary education and access to employment.
- Develop bridges between stakeholders that foster continuity and coherent paths between educational levels and sectors.
- Train actors in the educational system involved in the transition process in order to better prepare young people with disabilities to cope with the demands of tertiary education.

Research

Students experience significant changes in their learning environment, teaching approaches, and peer and social networks when they progress to further or higher education. For students with disabilities, this experience is fraught with additional challenges and there are particular issues with respect to obtaining concise, transparent and easily accessible information regarding course choice and access routes (McGuckin et al, 2011).

Transition assessment and planning is legislated for across all states in the USA via IDEA (2006), and is increasingly the focus of longitudinal studies in the UK such as Aston et al. (2005). However no equivalent initiatives are currently provided at a national level in Ireland. Whilst there is a dearth of knowledge regarding the human experience of transition for second level students with disability, Project IRIS (Inclusive Research in Irish Schools) is a three-year longitudinal study commissioned by the National Council for Special Education. It includes a study of access and progression experiences of students with special educational needs moving from compulsory education to further and higher education.

The Equality Challenge Unit UK (Felsinger & Byford, 2010) identified pre-entry activities as a reasonable adjustment for students with disabilities and found that ‘the most commonly cited mechanism of communicating disability ...is the institution’s website’. The research also recommended that strategic actions should include public dissemination of information on requesting reasonable accommodations, entitlements and supports.

This research examines a web-based strategy to facilitate transition planning for second level students, parents and others critical in the transition process. The study will employ a mixed method concurrent-triangulation-transformative-convergent design. Data will be collated from web-based surveys and discussion forum content hosted on a dedicated transition website ‘Pathway to Trinity’. It addresses key questions such as:
- Are transition initiatives / practices working for students with disabilities?
- What lessons can be learned from listening to the student voice?
- How should the ‘system’ respond?
Phase 2: Building and maintaining a college career  
– Project Lead: Declan Reilly

TCD Strategic Action: 2.7 Implement College’s Access Plan, 2009-13, 4.7 Enhance and extend student support services

Overview

Independence
Identify and promote transferable skills across the college experience which will promote and encourage independence, self-determination and self-advocacy.

Support
Ensure support systems in College are fit for purpose by conducting evidence based research to determine needs and supports, and to monitor performance and delivery of those supports.

Retention
Identify factors that function as either promoters or barriers to student retention; enable and enhance the student experience through academic and social interaction.

Activities

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The student journey</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independence: (defined as greater self autonomy in decisions which affect a student)</td>
<td>Identify transferable skills across the college experience which will promote and encourage independence, self-determination and self-advocacy.</td>
<td>Target the specific cohorts identified in this plan and promote specific activities both within and external to College which will stimulate student self-development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage students with disabilities to participate more actively in clubs and societies in College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actively engage with students to ensure they utilise student services and attend relevant workshops and training.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Activities

**The student journey**

**Support:**  
(defined as policies and practices of reasonable accommodations at individual, course and College levels)

Adapt and improve student supports within the DS and College and encourage their use.

Connect support with student independence in the student life cycle by ensuring support is appropriate and increases greater self-sufficiency.

Ensure academics are made aware of student needs and that they take responsibility for implementing reasonable accommodations.

Continue to promote the TIC (inclusive curriculum) tool and principles to encourage greater inclusivity in teaching practice throughout College.

Continue to review the support provided through the Unilink Service for students with mental health and physical difficulties.

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**Retention & progression:**  
(defined as factors affecting retention and progression through college to graduation)

Monitor retention across disability and entry groups.

Create initiatives to retain target groups from undergraduate to post graduate study.

Enhance the student experience through academic and social interaction.

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**Objectives**

Adapt and improve student supports within the DS and College and encourage their use.

Connect support with student independence in the student life cycle by ensuring support is appropriate and increases greater self-sufficiency.

Ensure academics are made aware of student needs and that they take responsibility for implementing reasonable accommodations.

Continue to promote the TIC (inclusive curriculum) tool and principles to encourage greater inclusivity in teaching practice throughout College.

Continue to review the support provided through the Unilink Service for students with mental health and physical difficulties.

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**Tasks**

Review and monitor disability and other student services offered annually to ensure feedback is leading to relevant supports. Accommodation and examinations in 2011-12.

Review individual supports offered and determine if appropriate to increased self-determination and employability.

Streamline the distribution of LENS reports to ensure the needs of students at school, department and course level are more efficiently communicated. Review annually to ensure fit for purpose.

Find mechanisms to promote the use of the TIC tool.

Review annually the service provided and the numbers of students utilising the service and the outcomes. Furthermore explore the identification of needs within the service and act accordingly.

Benchmark retention, withdrawal and progression rates, with UCC and QUB. Analyse progression and retention rates to identify at risk groups.

Identify barriers to retention and target additional supports.

Increase the level of academic and social involvement of students with disabilities in at risk groups through early intervention and regular contact.

Monitor supports to ensure they are encouraging independence and progression through College towards the world of work or further study.
Linked OECD recommendations

- Furnish students, on the same basis as other young adults, with qualifications recognised by tertiary education institutions and the labour market.
- Ensure that practices are anchored in reliable indicators and statistical data for analysis and evaluation.
- Make available reliable and comparable statistics for effective planning and monitoring of policies and processes.
- Develop the services and tools needed to steer transition processes or counter the ineffectiveness of existing ones.
- Provide support to young adults with disabilities throughout the process.
- Strengthen their links with their environment.
- Endeavour to ensure that students with disabilities are capable of making the best possible use of the support provided and of taking charge of their future.
- Take an educational approach to disability rather than a diagnostic approach.
- Ensure the institutions have at their disposal the skills, tools and methodologies needed for assessing, systematically and accurately, the educational needs of students with disabilities and providing high-quality support.

Research

The student journey approach views transition as an ongoing process across 3 phases, including progression and retention within third level and the move to further study and / or employment. The DS in TCD seeks to develop clear and effective support systems at all transition phases in this journey. Integral to these developments are action research projects which seek to establish strong evidence based evaluations and solutions. The overall aim of such research is to widen participation of people with disabilities both in HE and into employment.

Within the context of the student journey, this research will focus on the support needs of students with disabilities during their time in third level education. The relevant research question at this phase seeks to establish how the provision of supports and accommodations for students with disabilities impacts on rates of progression and retention, compared to non-disabled peers.

Initial findings indicate that students with disabilities are more likely to complete degree courses in TCD compared with non-disabled peers. Factors influencing retention and progression have not been adequately researched in the Republic of Ireland. Baird (2001) reported that available research literature is dominated by US and UK studies. Research conducted within the Irish context has focused on retention across the general student population, attributing student withdrawal (in TCD) to responses given to surveys and exit interviews. However, the increasing diversity of the student population means there will inevitably be a greater diversity of influencing factors. The purpose of this research study is to identify patterns associated with specific groups of students.
### Overview

**Progression**
- Identify a range of activities that assist disabled student progress into employment

**Completion**
- Provide assistance in the preparation for transition to further study or entry to employment

**Outcome**
- Monitor the outcome of the student journey as an evaluation of the service and College culture and ethos,

### Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progressing through college to employment</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Progression:</strong> (defined as graduation and exit from College)</td>
<td>Monitor progression across disability and entry groups. Identify the issues that prevent career access for graduates with disabilities and what strategies are being used to address this.</td>
<td>Benchmark admissions, withdrawals, progression rates, continuing grades, graduation and employment with UCC and QUB. Research issues preventing employment of disabled graduates.</td>
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## Activities

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<tr>
<td><strong>Progression:</strong> (defined as graduation and exit from College)</td>
<td>Develop a range of initiatives that are targeted specifically at assisting disabled students transition into postgraduate employment. Plan and prepare students in the use of the transitioning to work planning tool in the senior years of college.</td>
<td>Run professional development workshop for Career Guidance Office in disability related career/employment issues; Run disabled graduate workshops to increase awareness of opportunities and barriers towards employment; Development of web resources on material relevant to disabled employment; Link with external agencies and employers annually to promote the employment of disabled graduates; Interview employers and agencies responsible for policy in this area to determine what are effective strategies that can be developed to increase employment opportunities for disabled graduates. Pilot the tool with JS/SS students and blend with the Leonardo project tool developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completion:</strong> (defined as provision of assistance to transition to further study or employment)</td>
<td>Participate in the Leonardo Project as a model of future practice for improving employment outcomes for disabled students. The main aim is to develop a support and guidance methodology for students with disabilities allowing for combining success in higher education and access to employment. Ensure all Aims and objectives of Leonardo Employ acted upon - <a href="http://www.tcd.ie/disability/projects/Leonardo.php">http://www.tcd.ie/disability/projects/Leonardo.php</a></td>
<td>Research the effectiveness of the transition to employment tool by interviewing all stakeholders involved in the process. Meet with JS and SS students to focus attention on a career or further studies and identify possible barriers to progression.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employment:</strong> (defined as achieving successful employment opportunities)</td>
<td>Monitor the outcome of the student journey as an evaluation of the service.</td>
<td>Liaise with the Careers Advisory Service and Ahead to receive feedback on 1st destinations of graduates with disabilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linked OECD recommendations

- Promote synergies between systems and stakeholders involved in the transition process to ensure continuity and coherence in the career path.
- The vocational education and training initiatives undertaken in secondary education to optimise the employability of young adults with disabilities offer a real educational alternative.
- Tertiary education institutions attach the same importance to the professional future of students with disabilities as they do for other students.
- Tertiary education institutions create sufficiently deep-rooted and formalised links with the economic sphere and the actors involved in active employment policies to be able to make full use of initiatives to encourage firms to recruit workers with disabilities.
- Prevent them from being more exposed than other young adults to being neither in employment nor in education or training.
- Offer them the same chances of access to the same quality of employment as young adults without disabilities and give them equal opportunities in terms of the length and quality of transition.
- Admissions and support services for students with disabilities give greater attention to access to employment in their strategies and work more closely with agencies that assist with job searches for persons with disabilities or job placement agencies.
- Provide education systems with financial and methodological incentives to improve transition strategies and strengthen linkages with their environment, particularly with employers and career services;

Research

Due to national and university strategies the number of disabled students participating in third level education has grown significantly. The last decade has seen student numbers rise from four hundred and fifty in 2000 to over six thousand in 2010. According to the unpublished AHEAD survey of participation rates of disabled students (2009, 2010) TCD has the highest numbers of disabled students in third level education. Consequently the number of disabled graduates entering the labour market is at unprecedented levels. There are few studies relating to the status of graduates with disabilities in the Irish labour market and there is no data through the HEA First Destination Survey (HEA 2010) to give us an indication of the employment levels of disabled graduates.

The focus of this research will be an investigation into the experiences of disabled students as they transition into employment. It will examine personal, occupational and environmental issues that disabled students deal with as they prepare for participation in the labour market. It will pilot and evaluate the final stage of the TCD transition tool developed within the DS to assist disabled students through each stage of transition, pre-entry, within College, and into the world of work. Finally it will identify employer issues that arise in the employment of disabled students. Three main objectives are:

1. To investigate the experiences of disabled students in transitioning into employment.
2. To evaluate the transition to employment tool to determine if it will work in a university to employment setting.
3. To critique employer issues with the employment of disabled graduated and determine what national policy issues need to be implemented to allow for greater employment.
Appendix 2 – Policy direction influencing the Disability Service strategic direction.

National policy


Key priorities and actions relating to disabled students are identified here:

The following high-level targets are set:

• The evidence base and relevant data collection systems will be enhanced.
• Institutions will develop and implement access plans and processes for evaluation.
• Flexible/part-time provision will increase to 17 per cent by 2013 (7 per cent in 2006).
• Non-standard entry routes to higher education will be developed so that they account for 30 per cent of all entrants by 2013 (estimated at 24 per cent in 2006).
• The number of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities in higher education will be doubled by 20.

The following disability specific targets are set:

29. Reasonable accommodations
   Higher-education institutions will work to ensure that:
   • Course materials will be available electronically or in an accessible format to learners with disabilities.
   • Course assessments are flexible in relation to students with disabilities; and training in inclusive teaching and institutional practice is available to all staff through induction and professional development programmes.

30. Support for part-time higher education
   • The Higher Education Authority will work with the Department of Education and Science to ensure that learners with disabilities who return to or continue with education through the part-time course route have access to supports.

31. Funding to support students with disabilities
   • The National Access Office will initiate a review of the Fund for Students with Disabilities. The review will include consideration of the appropriateness of the balance between individualised and institutional funding for disability support.

32. Coherence between different levels of education
   • The Department of Education and Science will work with all relevant educational agencies to ensure greater coherence in diagnostic assessments and in the provision of learning supports across the different levels of education.
33. Participation in an international study

- The Higher Education Authority will work with the Department of Education and Science in producing an Irish country report on students with disabilities for a forthcoming OECD study Pathways for Disabled Students to Tertiary Education and Employment, thus advancing our understanding of strategies to promote participation in higher education in other countries.

34. Alternate format

- The National Access Office will commission research on the provision of academic material in alternate format across the higher-education sector. Recommendations will be made and next steps outlined in the context of creating a model of good practice for the provision of alternative format.

Mid-term review of the National Access Plan (December 2010)
http://www.hea.ie/files/files/file/Access/NationalPlanofEquityAccess2008-2013.pdf shows progress has been made in a number of areas; these include:

- A rise in numbers of students with sensory disabilities participating in higher education (Number of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities: 2006, 466; 2010, 668; 2013, 932; The 2010 target was 699 students).
- A disability officer in place in all higher education institutions.
- A Charter for inclusive teaching and learning, and good practice guidelines being disseminated.
- An improved allocation model for the Fund for Students with Disabilities introduced.
- Irish contribution to OECD study Pathways for Disabled Students to Tertiary Education and Employment completed.

Actions for 2011-2013 -

- To build on work completed over the past two years.
- To aim for further progress on the goal to establish equity of access as an integral part of higher education policy and practice.

New action points, that supplement those published in 2008, are marked with an asterisk *.

Institution-wide approaches to access

- The HEA works with higher education institutions to ensure that integrated access plans are in place and are being implemented. The plans include detailed quantitative and qualitative targets and outcomes that each institution is working towards, as well as mechanisms for annual evaluation of progress.
- Following the 2010 audit of Equal Access data, work continues to enhance further the quality and comprehensiveness of the information gathered, supplemented by additional work on national targets.
- A research network for access and lifelong learning is established with assistance from the national networks of access officers, humanities, social science and other interested schools/departments in higher education institutions, as well as other research-based organisations.
*Reports on Equal Access data are completed annually and a composite report with analysis of Equal Access data 2007-2011 (five years) is published in 2012.  
*Professional development initiatives continue, to include a review of the numbers, skillbase and expertise of access personnel (including disability officers, mature student officers, staff working on inclusive teaching and learning).  
*An international conference on equality of access and lifelong learning in Ireland is hosted in 2012.

Enhancing access through lifelong learning

* All higher education institutions are contributing to labour market activation. Progress draws on a clear strategy that maintains focus on traditional underrepresented groups while also contributing to economic recovery. Comprehensive data collection and monitoring are an integral part of the approach.

Investment in widening participation in higher education

* Access funding is provided to all institutions as part of their core grant, informed by Equal Access data. The development is accompanied by agreements between the HEA and institutions on outcomes and targets to be achieved and regular evaluation of progress.

Widening participation in higher education for people with disabilities

* Disability targets for 2013 are reviewed to ensure that they are sufficiently ambitious and reflect the overall increase in numbers of students with disabilities in higher education.  
* Ongoing work is undertaken to ensure that the Fund for Students with Disabilities is used as progressively as possible to support students, including those participating in part-time education.  
* The Teaching Council is assisted in developing a new policy for students with disabilities to access teacher education, to include a quantitative participation target for people with disabilities in the teaching profession.  
* The National Access Office works with the Department of Education and Skills and further education and training providers to set disability targets in further education and training.  
* The AHEAD Charter for inclusive teaching and learning, as well as initiatives on alternate formats, continue to be disseminated and supported.  
* Work continues on improving coherence between different levels of the education system for students with disabilities.

International policy

The OECD (2011) completed its final review of international policy and practice for students with disabilities engaging in higher education and / or employment activities post-secondary school. This project extended a previous review of disability in education (OECD, 2003), which identified the lack of data on opportunities and inclusionary practices which in itself constituted a barrier for students with disabilities (2011, pg 3). The 2011 review examined examples of transition policy and practices in the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Ireland, Norway and the United States.
In their conclusions and recommendations the OECD identifies a number of areas requiring development which are critical to successful transition and which in themselves may constitute barriers:

- Easier access to tertiary education.
- Inclusion policies that increase acceptance of disability.
- Mobilising financial means to promote inclusion.
- Promoting equity as a responsibility of educational institutions.
- Empowering second level students and schools to ensure inclusion.
- Promoting an education system that focuses on every student’s success.
- The move towards integrated transition systems.
- The difficult transition from education to employment.
- Strengthening linkages between upper secondary school and the labour market.

The final recommendations of the OECD report have been integrated into each of the three phases of the Student Journey to ensure an evidence-based practice, and are specified in the Operational Plan (Appendix 1).

References


Disability Service
Seirbhís do dhaoine faoi mhíchumas

http://www.tcd.ie/disability/