

# 'Tell Me What I Need to Know'. Students with Disabilities and Transition to Post-secondary Education

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## Introduction

Despite the recent increases in participation of students with disabilities in Higher Education, there are still significant barriers at all stages of the student journey. In the secondary school cycle these barriers continue to impede students, particularly those with physical and sensory disabilities, from transitioning successfully to Higher Education.

This research study investigates the proximal processes that take place across the transition period from senior cycle to post-secondary education, as experienced by disabled students, their parents and carers. In this way promoters and barriers to progression can be identified in each of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems. This poster presents some preliminary findings from the study.

Theoretical framework: bioecology, children's geographies

## Research questions

1. Are students with disabilities, their parents, and other stakeholders in the transition process, provided with, or have access to, disability-specific advice and guidance?
2. How useful / effective is this advice and guidance, what form does it take, and who provides it?
3. Do all stakeholders have equal access to the same quality and quantity of transition support? Is it dependent upon disability type, school type or school year?
4. Is there a need for a dedicated, transition-specific website for second level students with disabilities? Is there a need for a transition planning tool? If stakeholders believe that there is a lack of support, do the website and planning tool provide a solution?
5. What kind of information are stakeholders seeking?

## Method

Mixed methodology: concurrent-transformative-triangulation-convergent design. Surveys hosted on a dedicated transition planning website; respondents invited to submit contact details for interview.

► **Sample:** probability sample students with disabilities in second level, parents/guardians, practitioners, community groups, government agencies and departments.

### ► Measures

#### • Pre-transition Experience Survey

- Demographic data: school type, school year, disability, source of guidance / advice.
- Self-report measure (2 Likert scale items): quality of guidance / advice.
- Open-ended questions: i) efficacy of transition planning tools, ii) barriers and promoters

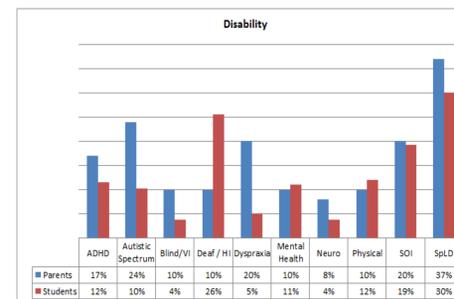
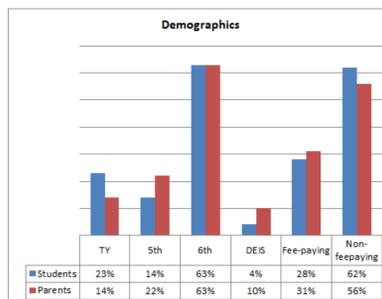
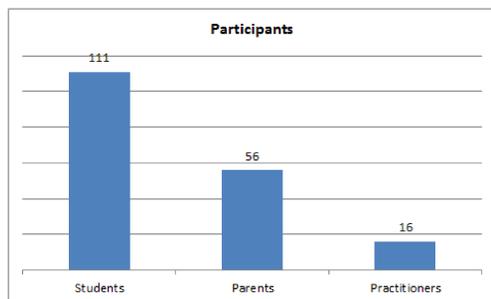
#### • Pre-transition experience semi-structured interviews

- Open-ended trigger questions: transition experience

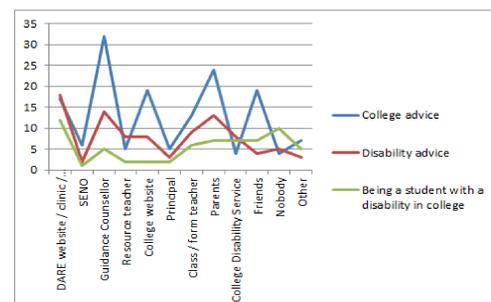
#### • Google Analytics [www.tcd.ie/pathways-to-trinity](http://www.tcd.ie/pathways-to-trinity)

- Demographic data: country / city
- Visitor frequency and engagement
- Popularity of page content
- Visitor behaviour – timeline events

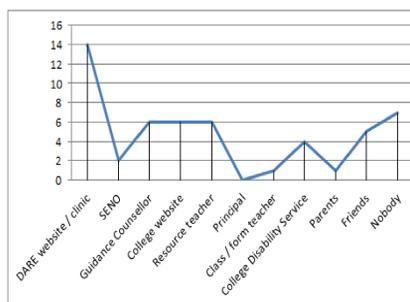
## Results



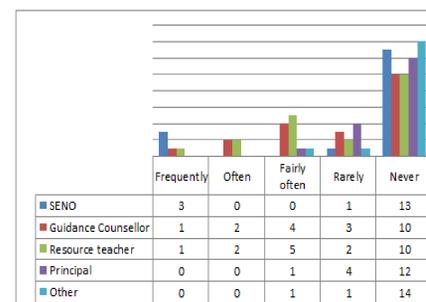
Sources of transition advice to students with a disability



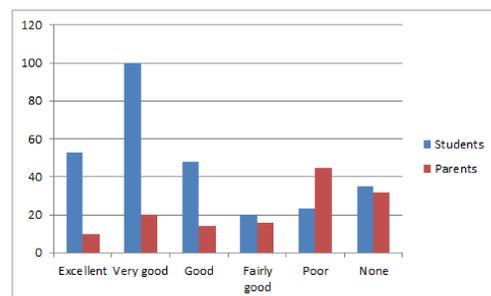
Sources of advice and guidance to parents



Frequency of IEP meetings with respect to transition



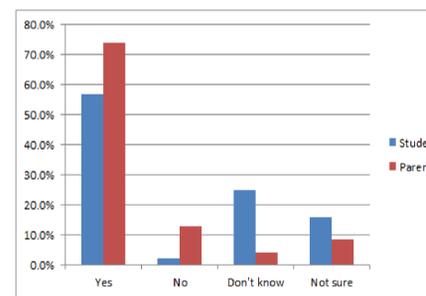
Quality of transition information and guidance



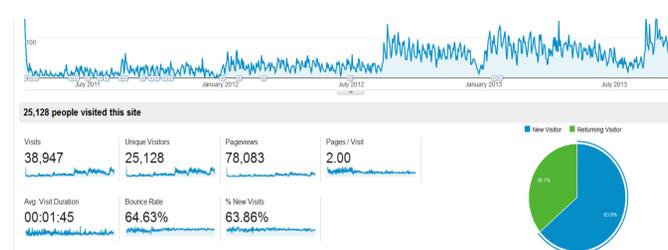
Parental views on barriers to transition

Students do not know if and what support they can apply for or are entitled to. Students do not like to discuss their disability with anybody.  
Lack of support in secondary school. Lack of proper guidance. Lack of understanding of their condition.  
The entry points system. A lot of universities offer support to disabled students once they are on site, but it is rare to find any that offer help to get the students there in the first place. The Irish DARE/HEAR systems are outstanding (and pretty much unique) in this regard.  
Lack of awareness for parents and students at second level, everything is a fight, information is not shared freely or perhaps schools are not aware. Most valuable information is from other parents/students or trawling the internet.  
I would say lack of information. Perhaps at a guess, slowness of people, especially young people to go about accessing information for a variety of reasons. Self-esteem, identity issues. Confidentiality issues. Schools unfortunately do secondary teachers approach students individually to ensure how they are getting on. This could of course be intrusive, but if perhaps there was a better balance, students would go on to college coming from better school culture.  
I'd say social issues would be the main barrier, self-esteem, one's place in 'the group', fear of rejection, 'being different', that sort of thing.  
Ignorance, lack of understanding.

Usefulness of transition planning tool from TY to 6<sup>th</sup> year



Transition website analytics: visitor traffic April 2011 – August 2013



Transition website analytics: visitor demographics top 10 visitors by city

City	Visits	Pages / Visit	Avg. Visit Duration	% New Visits
1. Dublin	2,913	1.82	00:02:09	59.11%
2. Cork	1,665	1.88	00:02:33	51.95%
3. (not set)	142	1.94	00:02:20	55.63%
4. Limerick	127	1.69	00:01:39	69.29%
5. Galway	104	1.54	00:01:24	65.38%
6. Sligo	86	1.97	00:01:56	65.12%
7. Kilkenny	46	1.60	00:02:06	62.22%
8. Drogheda	30	1.97	00:01:11	70.00%
9. London	27	1.85	00:02:09	55.56%
10. Letterkenny	26	1.69	00:01:46	84.62%

## Discussion

- i) lack of access to high quality transition information, guidance and support in second level, is a source of frustration for parents and students;
- ii) there is a significant misconception around availability of resources and information, which emphasises the 'broken link' between second and third level education systems;
- iii) students / parents from non-fee paying and DEIS schools believe that they receive less guidance than those attending fee paying schools;
- iv) 37% of respondents were enrolled in, or had students enrolled in, TY which suggests that transition is already an area of interest / concern for this age group;
- v) poor response rates from educational practitioners / stakeholders suggests an overall lack of interest in transition matters;
- vi) 74% of the parent sample and 58% of the student sample believed that the introduction of a transition planning tool in TY, would assist with managing the transition process.

## Implications

### ► Second level schools and educational practitioners

- Transition planning for students with disabilities needs to be embedded in the school curriculum from Transition Year onwards. This is of particular importance for students who have been provided with an IEP.
- Students and parents should be given access to a 'transition partner', who can assist with exploring post-secondary options and journeys.

### ► FE / HE institutions

- A dedicated transition website providing advice and guidance on progression to the FE / HE sector, will provide much needed 'sign-posting' to students, parents, community groups, and practitioners.
- DARE resources (website, materials, clinics) contribute significantly to transition knowledge and understanding. HEIs have a responsibility to ensure that this information is easily accessible and of the highest quality.

### ► Policy makers and State agencies

- Economies of funding in provision of resource allocation and Guidance Counselling, affect the number, type and quality of student journeys.
- Provision of transition guidance is specific to individual practitioners and schools, and is not always available on an equal basis, to all students with disabilities.
- Transition planning should be provided via a structured and systematic programme that develops skills in self-awareness, self-determination and self-advocacy, in addition to those identified in the NCCA Key Skills Framework for Senior Cycle Education.