

THE “WHAT”, “WHERE” AND “WHO” OF GUIDANCE AND TRANSITION PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN IRELAND - A LITERATURE REVIEW

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“What” - Human Right to an Inclusive Education

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) is the “first legally binding international treaty that provides a comprehensive portfolio of disability rights” (Lang *et al.*, 2011, p.208). It goes beyond the capabilities of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) in its focus on the right to inclusive education throughout the education system, up to and including access to further and higher education (Heyer, 2021). It frames the right to inclusive education as a cornerstone, acting as a “multiplier” (Heyer, 2021, p.47) by facilitating access to other rights such as employment. The UNCRPD, ratified in Ireland in 2018, places obligations on state parties and education providers, to ensure that the rights to an inclusive education are upheld, specifically through Article 1 (remove barriers to full participation); Article 24(5) (equal access to tertiary education) and Article 27 (d) (access to vocational training). However, Ireland is consistently failing to uphold these rights. Ireland’s lack of full implementation of the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) particularly Individual Education Plans (IEP’s) which are essential for transition planning for students with SEN, pales in comparison with other developed nations, with transition planning being legislated for and enacted in both the USA and England decades ago (Scanlon *et al.*, 2019). Ireland’s slow progress in facilitating access to employment for people with disabilities is demonstrated by the latest ESRI (2021) figures showing only 6% of those with an ID having a third level qualification and 14.7% of those with ID in employment (Kelly and Maître, 2021).

“Where” - Inclusive Curricula and Inclusive Pathways

Growing numbers of people with ID in Ireland (Census, 2016), including increased numbers of children with mild ID attending special schools in recent years (McConkey *et al.*, 2016) demands a more inclusive education system in Ireland. Currently, many students with ID are transferring from mainstream primary to special schools at the post-primary age (McConkey *et al.*, 2016), and this may be attributed to an increase in curricular demands associated with post-primary education (Buchner *et al.*, 2021). The introduction of the Junior Cycle Framework (2015) was a momentous shift towards inclusion, formalising and recognising achievement at the first three levels of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Notwithstanding this progressive shift, the lack of a similar curriculum at Senior Cycle continues to be a major barrier (Aston *et al.*, 2021). The current Senior Cycle is overly focused towards higher education entry and does not provide alternative pathways for those with SEN (Smyth, McCoy and Banks, 2019) with little options available to students to bridge qualifications gaps (Scanlon and Doyle, 2018).

“Who” - Guidance and planning for post school options

Nationally and internationally, parents have echoed the same barriers to successful post-school transitions for their child with SEN over the past few decades, despite progressions in global and domestic legislation such as the UNCRPD (2006) and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (2015) in Ireland. Lack of transition planning and parental involvement in the process are dominant barriers (Gillan and Coughlan, 2010; Mello *et al.*, 2021). In the UK and US, transition planning is mandated in legislation and policy to occur from age 13 and 14 respectively (Scanlon *et al.*, 2019). In Ireland, post school pathways for students with SEN are currently dominated by health funded day services, with transitions generally coordinated by an Occupational Guidance Officer of the Health Service Executive (HSE) with most of this planning not occurring until the final year of schooling. There are low levels of parental awareness of alternative options to health funded services (McConkey *et al.*, 2017; Gillian and Coughlan, 2010) with a particular fear of loss of financial supports (Scanlon & Doyle, 2018) should students opt for an alternative, that is, mainstream option. Low levels of expectation and aspiration for their child (Gillian and Coughlan, 2010) are further compounded by the lack of career guidance for students in special schools, despite provisions for it in the EPSEN Act (2004) Section 9(c). Students with SEN attending a mainstream school are in receipt

of some form of guidance, either from the schools guidance counsellor or the SENCO (Aston *et al.* 2020) while students in special schools have no access to guidance counsellors. The lack of guidance counselling for this cohort of students has been highlighted in a governmental review, with recommendations for enhanced career guidance support for teachers in special schools (Indecon, 2019). My research intends to explore that recommendation, the role of the teacher and to identify their needs in order to fulfill this role.

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