TRANSITION FROM POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Patricia O'Brien
Stephanie Fitzgerald
Ciara Brennan
Joan Murphy
Philip Curry
Derek Murphy
Edurne Garcia
Darren Chadwick
Niamh Lally
Leone Mitchell

National Institute for Intellectual Disability
School of Social Work and Social Policy
Trinity College Dublin

2011

This research received funding support from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) through the NCSE Special Education Research Initiative (SERI) 2006. Responsibility for the research (including any errors or omissions) remains with the authors. The views and opinions contained in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the NCSE.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team would like to acknowledge the openness with which students with intellectual disabilities, family members, teachers, school principals and representatives of related organisations responded to the invitation to participate in the study. Their readiness to participate in this project is warmly appreciated.

We would also like to thank our colleagues at the National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID), Trinity College Dublin, for their interest in the project as well as their timely advice.

James Curry and Sarah Jones provided excellent technical support.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Dr. Seamus Hegarty, Marie Curie Research Fellow, NIID, for his expertise and guidance in the final update of this report.

Jennifer Doran (Head of Research) and Clare Farrell from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) generously provided support and advice during the setting up of the project and in gaining access to schools.
**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAIDD</td>
<td>American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADA</td>
<td>Americans with Disabilities Act (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAO</td>
<td>Central Applications Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDA</td>
<td>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPSEN</td>
<td>Education for Persons with Special Education Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FÁS</td>
<td>(Foras Áiseanna Saothair) Training and Employment Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FETAC</td>
<td>The Further Education and Training Awards Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEA</td>
<td>Higher Education Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSE</td>
<td>Health Services Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>Individual Education Programme/Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Institute of Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAN</td>
<td>Job Accommodation Network (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCA</td>
<td>Leaving Certificate Applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCSE</td>
<td>National Council for Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIID</td>
<td>National Institute for Intellectual Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLN</td>
<td>National Learning Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLTS2</td>
<td>National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTN</td>
<td>National Thematic Networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC course</td>
<td>Post Leaving Certificate course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWI</td>
<td>Projects with Industry Programmes (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special Education Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENCO</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENO</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs Organiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSA</td>
<td>Social Security Administration (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SESS</td>
<td>Special Education Support Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSDI</td>
<td>Social Security Disability Insurance (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSI</td>
<td>Supplement Security Income (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STOWA</td>
<td>School to Work Opportunities Act (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWWIIA</td>
<td>Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Act (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCD</td>
<td>University College Dublin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VEC</td>
<td>Vocational Education Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIA</td>
<td>Workforce Investment Act (US)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Age and degree of intellectual disabilities* ........................................ 29
Table 3.1 Expert panel ......................................................................................... 62
Table 3.2 Breakdown of number of students at focus groups ......................... 67
Table 3.3 Breakdown of number of parents/carers at focus groups .................. 67
Table 3.4 Breakdown of number of teaching staff at focus groups ................... 68
Table 3.5 Number of post-primary schools in Ireland by county ..................... 73
Table 3.6 Number of special schools in Ireland by county ............................... 74
Table 3.7 Breakdown of schools’ responses to survey by school type ............... 75
Table 3.8 Breakdown of special schools responding to the survey ................. 76
Table 3.9 Locations of the different types of schools which responded to the survey .................................................................................................................. 76
Table 4.1 At what stage did participants see the transition planning from compulsory schooling beginning? ..................................................... 82
Table 4.2 What options were open to students with intellectual disabilities when transitioning from school? ............................................................. 84
Table 4.3 What would students and parents/carers like included in the transition process? .................................................................................. 87
Table 4.4 What challenges get in the way of successful transition? ............ 89
Table 4.5 Recommendations for the future development of transition planning and programming in the school based setting .................................. 92
Table 4.6 How can transition planning increase opportunities for future employability? ................................................................. 94
Table 4.7 Combinations of the transition support options across the different types of schools ................................................................................. 99
Table 4.8 Types and level of transition options offered to students across school type .................................................................................. 103
Table 4.9 Types and level of transition options offered to students across geographical location ................................................................. 104
Table 4.10 Stage at which transition planning begins in post-primary schools by school type .................................................................................. 105
Table 4.11 Stage at which transition planning begins in post-primary schools by location .................................................................................. 106
Table 4.12 Most common predicted destinations on leaving school across type of school ................................................................................. 107
Table 4.13 Most common predicted destinations on leaving School across geographical location ........................................................................ 108
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.1</td>
<td>Principal school service per age group</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1</td>
<td>Triangulation of phases</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.1</td>
<td>The overall percentage for the different types of schools offering the</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>different transition support options to students with intellectual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.2</td>
<td>Themes arising from thematic analysis of additional survey comments...</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................... 2
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .................................................... 3
LIST OF TABLES ................................................................. 5
LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................. 6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .......................................................... 10

CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION .................................................... 17

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .......................................... 20
  2.1 Transition ........................................................................ 20
  2.2 Transition planning ....................................................... 22
  2.3 Challenges to transition planning ....................................... 25
  2.4 Defining intellectual disability ........................................... 27
  2.4 Transition in Ireland ....................................................... 28
  2.5 Legislation ....................................................................... 32
    2.5.1 The Disability Act 2005 .............................................. 32
    2.5.2 Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 ................................................... 33
    2.5.3 National Disability Strategy ........................................ 34
    2.5.4 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ............................................. 35
  2.6 Transition practices in Ireland ............................................ 37
  2.7 Transition planning and practices outside Ireland .............. 38
    2.7.1 United Kingdom (UK) ............................................... 38
    2.7.2 United States (US) .................................................... 41
    2.7.3 Australia ............................................................... 46
  2.8 Review of literature on successful transition outcomes and predictors ......................................................... 48
  2.9 Role of families in successful employment ........................ 53
  2.10 University options for students with intellectual disabilities ................................................................. 57
  2.11 Conclusion .................................................................... 58

CHAPTER 3  METHODOLOGY .................................................... 60
  3.1 Introduction .................................................................... 60
  3.2 Research design ............................................................. 61
  3.3 Logistics of study ............................................................ 61
    3.3.1 Geographical area .................................................... 61
    3.3.2 Expert panel .......................................................... 62
    3.3.3 Survey questionnaire ................................................. 62
    3.3.4 Survey population .................................................... 63
    3.3.5 Analysis .................................................................. 63
  3.4 Phase One: Stakeholder focus groups ............................... 64
    3.4.1 Focus group participants .......................................... 64
    3.4.2 Focus group implementation ...................................... 65
    3.4.3 Focus group data analysis ........................................ 69
    3.4.4 Limitations of focus groups ....................................... 70
    3.4.5 Validating the focus group data through an expert panel .... 71
3.5 Phase Two: Staff survey .......................... 72
  3.5.1 Implementation of survey .......................... 72
  3.5.2 The survey sample .................................. 75
  3.5.3 Data analysis for survey .......................... 77
  3.5.4 Thematic analysis of additional comments ........ 77
3.6 Limitations of the survey ................................ 77

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS ............................................. 80
  4.1 Introduction ............................................. 80
  4.2 Expert panel responses ................................ 95
  4.3 School Survey ........................................... 98
    4.3.1 General provision for students with intellectual disabilities ... 98
    4.3.2 Specific transition plans for students .................. 110
    4.3.3 When transition planning begins ....................... 117
    4.3.4 Likely student destinations upon leaving school ....... 118
    4.3.5 Thematic analysis of additional qualitative comments ... 120
  4.4 Summary of findings .................................. 129

CHAPTER 5 Discussion ......................................... 131
  5.1 Introduction ............................................. 131
  5.2 Understanding transition ................................ 131
    5.2.1 Student, Parent/carer Aspirations .................... 132
    5.2.2 Student and family involvement ....................... 134
    5.2.3 Collaboration in planning and IEPs ................... 135
    5.2.4 Variety in preparation and planning ................... 137
    5.2.5 School-based transition ............................. 140
    5.2.6 Student-centred planning ............................ 141
    5.2.7 Career guidance and work experience ................ 142
    5.2.8 Assessments and individual profiles/plans .......... 144
    5.2.9 Specific, formal programme with training and support ... 146
    5.2.10 External support .................................... 147
    5.2.11 Link person and collaboration ....................... 148
    5.2.12 Post-school opportunities and options ............. 150

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ............ 153
  6.1 Conclusion ................................................ 153
  6.2 Recommendations ........................................ 153
    6.2.1 Equal access to suitable transition planning ........ 153
    6.2.2 Including students with intellectual disability in preparing Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) ......... 154
    6.2.3 Further teacher training ............................. 154
    6.2.4 Clarification of the role of the SENO ................. 155
    6.2.5 Promote external linkages ........................... 155
    6.2.6 Post-school options .................................. 156
    6.2.7 Research on best practice ............................ 156

REFERENCES ..................................................... 157
STATUTES AND ACTS ........................................... 169
APPENDICES ..................................................... 171
Appendix 1  Principal Day Service by Category of Persons Availing of Day Service NIDD Database 2008..........................172
Appendix 2  Full Text of Section 15 - Education for Persons with Special Needs Act, 2004 ..................................................174
Appendix 3  Full Text of Article 24-UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.............................................175
Appendix 4  Information letters..........................................................178
Appendix 5  Consent form .................................................................185
Appendix 6  Interview questions.......................................................188
Appendix 7  Questionnaire ...............................................................193
Appendix 8  Discussion Paper provided to Expert Panel..............197
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction / Background

This project was undertaken to identify existing practices for preparing students with intellectual disabilities between the ages of 16 – 18 years for transition from post-primary schooling to post school options. The project was funded by the National Council for Special Education and the aims of the study were to identify:

1. What schools and primary stakeholders understand by transition
2. What planning processes are used as part of transition
3. The types of school based transition programmes that are being implemented
4. What options are open to students with intellectual disabilities when transitioning from school
5. What students and families would like included in the transition process
6. What challenges get in the way of successful transition
7. What possibilities there might be for the future development of transition planning and programming in school based settings
8. How transition and potential future employment opportunities can be configured
9. Where students with intellectual disabilities, aged 16-18 years, are located in the school system in terms of placement and programmes.

Methodology

A mixed method design was implemented across two phases of the study.

In Phase One, an interpretative approach was used to capture the reality of what was happening in school based locations across a geographic
spread. This occurred through a series of separate focus groups for students, family members and teachers. Seventy-four participants took part in 21 focus groups. These findings were discussed and verified by an expert panel of ten experts including educators, school principals, teacher unions and advocacy group representatives.

In Phase Two, a national survey of schools on transition planning was conducted. A total of 310 schools responded including second level mainstream schools, schools with special units, special schools and colleges of further education.

**Main findings**

1. Most students were unfamiliar with the concept of transition, when asked what they understood by this term. Parents/carers viewed it as a change and a challenge, whilst teachers had a broader understanding of transition. The wide range of responses reflected the complex nature and varied transition plans on offer. Formal outlines of transition plans are reported to be more common in special schools. Only ten (4 per cent) mainstream schools, including those with a special unit, had developed specific transition plans, while 47 (86 per cent) of special schools reported having a specific transition plan developed within the school.

2. All schools reported that the majority of transition planning was undertaken in the last two years of schooling. However, a far higher proportion of special schools (88 per cent) reported transition planning in both years than did mainstream schools (54 per cent). In addition, some planning for transition was reported to take place during the transition year programme in all mainstream schools (12% of schools). However, many parents reported that they were thinking about transition well in advance of this.

More special schools had transition plans than mainstream schools did, including those with a special unit. Plans ranged from fully developed programmes to meetings or visits. Some schools, teachers and expert
stakeholders were highly critical of what they perceived to be un-standardised processes and ‘ad hoc’ transition planning.

3. Although most schools reported that they had some transition planning in place, this was not systematic and varied according to the type of school and, to a lesser degree, geographical location. Career guidance, work experience and visits to post-school options were commonly reported as methods that schools used to support their students with intellectual disabilities. Career guidance was more common in mainstream schools whilst visits to post-school options were the most common form of support provided in special schools and those situated in rural locations. Whilst only 1.3 per cent of the schools surveyed offered no transition programme support, students and parents displayed very little knowledge of existing school-based transition programmes.

4. The most likely destinations identified as further education options included FETAC, National Learning Network or third level courses in a minority of cases. Upon leaving school, some people with intellectual disabilities were reported to do additional training and courses, or they would go to a rehabilitation centre. Very few people were likely to obtain paid employment in the workforce though some went on to supported employment options. Students from special schools were much more likely to go on to vocational training centres or to other post-school options compared to the students with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools. A number of students went from school to segregated day centres or sheltered employment, and it was reported that some people ended up at home with no opportunity to engage in meaningful day pursuits.

5. Parents favoured a focus on social development, independence and self-esteem building. They felt that alternative methods of grading and rewarding students for their capabilities would address the challenge posed by the points system. Some students would like to see more access to information on transition options. A total of 37 students had the pre-requisitioned verbal communication skills to participate in this study and to fully engage in focus group discussions. However, the vast
majority of students did not respond to the question about transition and appeared to have little understanding of the term transition, transition plans or transition options. It was clear that this gap in knowledge is an area that needs to be addressed urgently if students are to have successful transitions. On the other hand, questions regarding aspirations for their futures evoked responses from most students. Their core responses were career orientated. Participants wanted to work in a variety of mainstream employment settings; some wished to work with animals, others wanted to work in childcare while others wished to complete an apprenticeship, amongst other choices.

6. It was reported that a lack of resources, funding, staffing, special needs training and guidance by schools and teachers were challenges to transition planning. The centrality of the points system and traditional subjects in Irish education were seen as a barrier to a successful transition by students, parent/carers and teachers alike.

7. There was a strong consensus that students should have their needs and strengths assessed as part of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process. Teachers, parents and students require more guidance and expert advice on transition planning. A Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) with national responsibility for transition planning would be beneficial and would support standardisation of opportunities for students. It would also be helpful to have a designated SENCO post in each school which is an integral part of the UK education system. This may require an overarching structure such as the NCSE provides to the SENO.

8. Some schools and education professionals felt inter-agency links would be beneficial. Career guidance and vocational training were considered important by stakeholders. Whilst the Leaving Certificate Applied programme was generally considered a positive alternative to the traditional Leaving Certificate and points system it was also considered to have a stigmatising effect.
Recommendations

1. **Equal access to suitable transition planning**
   Students with intellectual disability across the secondary school system should have equal access to suitable transition planning which includes:

   - A person-centred planning alliance
   - A planning process which is organic, building to transition as the student moves through the stages of his/her school life
   - A shared understanding among all stakeholders that transition is not a process that only occurs in the last two years of the students' schooling.

2. **Including Transition Programme in Individualised Education Plans**
   A dedicated Individualised Education Plan (IEP) with a focus on transition to post-school options should be developed for each student prior to entering the last two years of their schooling. To facilitate this:

   - Students with intellectual disabilities should be trained in decision making skills to allow them to fully participate in IEPs and be involved in the decision making process, as much as possible, about their futures.
   - Additional resources should be made available for staff to assist students in the development of their IEP prior to the final two years of schooling. Ideally, resources should be in place for regular reviews of IEPs as the student progresses through school. The role of the SENCO would be pivotal in identifying the needs and resource requirements for each student prior to and during the transition phase. This would include the additional personnel and outside agencies that may need to be included in the process.

3. **Further teacher training**
   A training programme should be developed for school staff on what constitutes transition education, types of transition programmes, use of resources and how to develop/collaborate with different government departments and community agencies. It would be desirable to provide this training in line with a ‘whole school approach’ that involves all school
staff, as each member has a potential contribution to make to this process. This should involve the following:

- Basic principles and practices of working with students with special needs should be introduced into initial teacher training
- A certificate in transition education approved by FETAC should be developed in collaboration with schools and SESS, DES, FÁS to cover academic, social, vocational and life skills in order to equip students for a successful transition from school to their chosen post-school options
- A central source of easily assessable information should be developed for teachers, parents and students.

4. Promote external linkages
Schools should be encouraged to develop inter-agency links such as mainstream schools linked directly with special schools and post-school agencies, and to set up inter-agency programmes as part of their transition education programme.

The development of transition education programmes should ideally involve co-ordination between different government and community agencies, such as the Department of Education and Skills (DES), FÁS, VEC, HSE, institutes of technology and universities.

A recognised and designated SENCO should be present within each school to co-ordinate the transition process. They would have overarching responsibility for the training and support of the teachers in this post. SENCOs would have responsibility for transition planning and support equal access and standardisation of opportunities for students.

5. Enhance post-school options
Although this was not a specific focus of this research we did get a strong sense that post-school options for students with an intellectual disability were perceived to be very limited. Development of opportunities in this area would be beneficial.
6. Research on best practice
Further research is needed to identify best practice in the area of transition planning and programmes for students with intellectual disability and to explore ways in which this might be implemented in an Irish context. A longitudinal study to track students’ progress after they leave school would highlight which processes in transition planning and training are most successful, as well as changes that need to be incorporated.
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a study conducted in Ireland between 2008 and 2009 to determine what transition practices were in place for students with intellectual disabilities, aged 16 to 18 years of age, as they prepared to leave mainstream and special schools. The purpose of the study was to document what was happening for these students prior to, and upon leaving, post-primary school, with a view to identifying best practice, gaps in transition practices and recommendations to overcome those gaps.

In the last decade Ireland has come to place great emphasis on meeting the individual needs of people with disabilities as mandated in the Disability Act 2005, the Education for Persons with Special Needs Act 2004 and the National Disability Strategy (see Section 11C). More recently Ireland has become a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which promotes full participation at all societal levels for people with disabilities. This study was therefore very timely as transition from second level is a crucial point at which full participation in society can be planned for and adequately resourced. Within this context the specific aims and objectives of this study were to identify:

1. What schools and primary stakeholders understand by transition
2. What planning processes are used as part of transition
3. The types of school-based transition programmes being implemented
4. What options are open to students with intellectual disabilities when transitioning from school
5. What students and families would like to be included in the transition process
6. What challenges get in the way of successful transition
7. What possibilities there might be for the future development of transition planning and programming in school based settings
8. How transition and potential future employment opportunities can be configured
9. Where students with intellectual disabilities, aged 16-18 years, are located in the school system in terms of placement and programmes.

The remaining chapters in this report are as follows:

**Chapter 2** is a review of international literature on transition planning and practices, including post-school options and how this relates to current Irish legislation.

**Chapter 3** outlines the design and methodology of the study, the two main phases being data collection through focus groups and a survey.

**Chapters 4** outlines the findings of this study: those of the focus groups as verified by an expert panel and the survey findings. Findings from the focus groups are presented around a series of themes that cover the current transition process, options open to transitioning students; challenges encountered during this process; and recommendations for the future. The findings of the survey relate to the use of transition planning in schools.
Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the major themes and relates them back to the original literature review, covering concepts and strategies associated with preparation and planning, career guidance, transition assessments, individual profile plans, development of external support and link options for the student in transition.

Chapter 6 concludes with recommendations for the future development of transition planning and practice as a collaborative venture between schools and a range of government and community agencies including students, teachers and families.

The appendices include:

1. Principal day service by category of persons availing of day service
2. Full text of Section 15 from the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004
3. Full text of Article 24 of UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
4. Information letters
5. Consent form
6. Interview questions
7. Survey questionnaire
8. Discussion paper provided to expert panel
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a detailed definition of intellectual disability. We then move on to look at transition in Ireland, including relevant data on the position of students with ID within the transition process, transition-related legislation and practices. We then present transition legislation from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. Finally, we review the scientific literature identifying predictors of successful transition to post-school options.

A detailed review of literature was undertaken regarding transition practices for students with intellectual disabilities as they prepare to leave school. The review sourced information both within the Irish context and internationally and focused on the period covering the last five years, using the following indexes: British Education Index; Education Resources Information Center (ERIC); Australian Education Index as well as books and book chapters from Trinity College Catalogue which has extensive holdings. Literature was reviewed with the overall research questions in mind.

Transition, transition planning and intellectual disability

2.1 Transition

Transition is a term which has been in use in the field of ID research and practice for at least twenty years. Transition may be defined as the life changes, adjustments and cumulative experiences that occur in the lives of young adults as they move from school environments to independent living and work environments. Successful transitions increase success,
confidence and competence in one’s work skills (Benz, Lindstorm and Yovanoff, 2000; Halpern, 1994).

There are a number of different ways of theorising the transition to adulthood but the literature has predominantly focused on two areas: models based on life phases (child to adult) and models based on institutional status transition. In terms of institutional status transition, three specific transitions are usually highlighted:

- school to work
- housing (moving out of the family home)
- domestic (movement from ‘family of origin’ to ‘family of destination’) (Mitchell, 1999).

Post-school transitions are divided into academic, vocational and occupational (or work-based) pathways (Raffe, Biggart, Fairgrieve, Howieson and Rodger, 1997). The main focus of this report is on school-based planning and preparation to support young people with ID in reaching post-school destinations. In 2010, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a review of vocational education and training in Ireland. The review outlined the need for vocational training to meet the needs of employers. According to an OECD thematic review in the UK, transition begins ‘at 14 years when young people enter the final stage of compulsory schooling, and extends until they have achieved relatively stable positions in the labour market’ (Raffe, et al., 1997).

While the transition from school to post-school options can be difficult for all young people, each of these three transitions can prove more
challenging to achieve or even elusive for young adults with intellectual disabilities. For young people with intellectual disabilities, the experience of transition can be qualitatively different from that experienced by other people; this is due, in part, to additional transitions in their lifetime such as the diagnosis of co-existent medical conditions (Barron, Violet and Hassiotis, 2007).

This research focuses specifically on the first type of institutional status transition in Mitchell’s (1999) classification: school to post-school options. Wehman (2006) gives a classic definition of this kind of transition:

...the life changes that occur in the lives of young adults as they move from school environments to independent living and work environments.

In this report, the term ‘transition’ will be used in this sense. The term ‘transition in Ireland’ will be used to specifically refer to transitions made by students leaving Irish mainstream or special post-primary schools.

2.2 Transition planning

Transition planning involves all activities in which the school engages, in order to prepare a young person for the transition out of mainstream or special post-primary education. Transition planning may take many forms but will often involve such activities as work placements, individual meetings with career guidance counsellors and attending classes about post-school options. Watts (2009) distinguishes between three types of career guidance:
Career counselling is conducted on a one-to-one basis or in small groups, in which attention is focused on the distinctive career issues faced by individuals.

Career education is part of the curriculum in which the attention is paid to helping groups of individuals to develop the competences required for managing their career development.

Career information can be provided in various different formats (increasingly web-based). It is concerned with information on courses, occupations and career paths including labour market information.

Transition planning occurs at a critical stage for the young person and their family. The young person is reaching the age of maturity and the family is dealing with the change in perception of their son or daughter from child to adult. Transition planning at this juncture is critical because it assists and supports the young person’s move from the school environment into adult roles within their community.

Students with intellectual disabilities will often require greater support during the transition planning process. To give us a clearer idea about the possible range and nature of such supports, the following brief discussion focuses on models of best practice rather than on what is typically available. The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) (AAIDD 2009) provides a description of what they see as the ideal form of transition planning:

Transition planning is an outcome oriented process which creates an important link between school and community and provides opportunities for students with
disabilities to discuss their hopes and dreams for their future.

This definition may of course tell us more about what transition planning should be rather than what it often entails. The US Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Act defines transition services as:

A coordinated set of activities designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.

Further recommendations for best practice in including people with intellectual disabilities in the transition planning process include the development of a formal, individualised transition plan (Wehman, Kregel and Barcus, 1985). Transition planning incorporates a focus on post-school activities including employment, recreation, post-secondary education, self-determination, community living and participation (Thoma, Rogan, and Baker, 2001). One of the challenges of transition planning for young people with intellectual disabilities is the development of continuity in assessment, review and programme planning in order to prepare them for a valued and productive adult life (Russell, 1995).
### 2.3 Challenges to transition planning

Transition planning should ideally take into account student views, preferences and interests. This process can involve the students themselves, as well as their teachers/educators, career advisors and parents. Indeed, research suggests that transition is likely to be more successful if those concerned are able to contribute meaningfully, exercise a degree of control over the transition and have support readily available during the process itself (Kobasa, Maddi, and Kahn, 1982). However, studies have shown that student and/or parent participation does not always occur (Thoma et al., 2001). One study revealed that students spoke for just 3 per cent of the time during their transition planning meetings, despite the perception of teachers directing the meeting who reported students making greater contributions (Martin, VanDyke, Greene, Gardner, Christensen and Woods, 2006).

One of the challenges of including students with intellectual disabilities in transition planning, as reported by service providers, is communication with the student. It is common for social services and education departments to assume that communication impairment precludes the possibility of a student giving an opinion (Morris, 1999). To counter this, methods may be developed which do not rely solely on holding meetings or on verbal and written communications in order to facilitate full student participation; video, photographs, drawings, and objects of reference can also be employed to ensure that the student’s voice is heard (Carnaby, Lewis, Martin, Naylor, and Stewart, 2003). Carnaby et al. make the following recommendations to maximise student participation.
First, visual aids such as video, photographs, objects of reference, scrapbooks and other personalised documents should be used to ensure the discussion is always meaningful for the student. Second, health issues should be discussed before the meetings with key outcomes and recommendations fed into the transition process. Third, meetings should be scheduled to meet parent and carer needs and should not clash with student activities. Fourth, the student should have contact with outside professionals prior to the transition review meeting. It is no longer considered acceptable for students at the school to enter the room for their transition review meeting without having met all of the participants beforehand on at least one occasion. Fifth, the role of friendships during transition must be acknowledged. Friendships and relationships are an important topic for discussion, as the student is encouraged to think about their social network and how they might seek support during the time ahead.

Student-led transition planning has also been proposed to overcome challenges to participation. There is a growing body of research in this area (Martin et al., 2006) which shows that students can learn effective leadership and the skills necessary to be actively involved in their own Individualised Education Programme (IEP) meetings. Without specific IEP meeting instruction, students attending meetings often do not know what their role in the exercise is, do not understand the purpose of the meeting or what is being said, and may feel as if none of the adult participants listen to them when they talk. One study revealed that, compared with teacher-directed programmes, students with an IEP attended significantly more meetings, had significantly higher levels of involvement in these meetings, and could identify significantly more goals after the meetings ended (Sweeney, 1997).
Throughout the remainder of this report we will use the term ‘transition planning’ to refer to the activities of schools which assist and support a young person with intellectual disabilities as they leave mainstream or special post-primary school.

2.4 Defining intellectual disability

The term ‘intellectual disability’ applies to a wide range of people with complex and individual needs. The challenges in meeting the needs of students with mild, moderate, severe or profound intellectual disabilities may differ significantly.

According to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) (AAIDD 2009a) ‘intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical skills originating before age 18 years’.

The AAIDD incorporates the following assumptions within this definition (AAIDD 2009b): ‘(1) limitations in present functioning must be considered within the context of community environments typical of the individual’s age peers and culture; (2) valid assessment considers cultural and linguistic diversity as well as differences in communication, sensory, motor, and behavioural factors; (3) within an individual, limitations often coexist with strengths; (4) an important purpose of describing limitations is to develop a profile of needed supports; and (5) with appropriate personalized supports over a sustained period, the life
functioning of the person with intellectual disability generally will improve.’

Regarding the relationship between intellectual disability and ‘mental retardation’, the AAIDD explains, ‘the term intellectual disability covers the same population of individuals who were diagnosed previously with mental retardation in number, kind, level, type, and duration of the disability, and the need of people with this disability for individualised services and supports. Furthermore, every individual who is or was eligible for a diagnosis of mental retardation is eligible for a diagnosis of intellectual disability,’ (AAIDD 2009a).

Despite an increasing use of the term ‘intellectual disability’ within international legislation and scientific literature, ‘learning disabilities’ is the term used in the UK by adult services to refer to those with severe and complex needs, while in the US it is used to refer to students with specific learning difficulties or dyslexia. Finally, some special schools have particular cohort designations (e.g., for students with emotional disturbance). In this report, the working definition of intellectual disability coincides with that provided by the AAIDD and the definition attached to ‘learning disabilities’ in the UK.

### 2.4 Transition in Ireland

The National Intellectual Disability Database (NIDD) is a central database detailing the numbers of people in Ireland with intellectual disabilities. According to the most recent report published in April 2007, there were 25,613 people registered, representing a prevalence rate of
6.04 per 1,000 population\(^1\) (Annual Report of the National Intellectual Disability Database Committee, 2007). Of those registered, 24,898 people were in receipt of services, representing 97 per cent of the total population registered on the NIDD.

Examination of the age profile of people with intellectual disabilities shows that there were 2,828 people in the 15 – 19 age band (see Table 2.1). These individuals were at the stage where they should either be preparing for transition from school or have already moved on to the next phase of their life. It is important to stress that this profile represents a prevalence rate of 9.74 per 1,000 population which is greater than the average prevalence rate given previously.

### Table 2.1  Age and degree of intellectual disabilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Not verified</th>
<th>Mild</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Severe</th>
<th>Profound</th>
<th>All levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–4</td>
<td>904</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2,468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>1,113</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2,519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–19</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1,474</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–34</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>2,170</td>
<td>2,813</td>
<td>1,053</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>6,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–54</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>2,015</td>
<td>3,127</td>
<td>1,507</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>7,387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and over</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>1,293</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>2,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ages</td>
<td>2,556</td>
<td>8,320</td>
<td>9,742</td>
<td>3,967</td>
<td>1,028</td>
<td>25,613</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Table 2.2 of the NIDD, 2007 report – adaptation, p. 23.

\(^1\) The NCSE Implementation Report (2006) noted that given the way data is collected, the NIDD provides accurate data on the prevalence of moderate, severe, and profound intellectual disabilities in Ireland, but is not regarded by its authors as an accurate guide to the prevalence of mild intellectual disabilities (see NCSE 2006).
The NIDD also reported the educational routes undertaken by children and young adults with intellectual disabilities. The data is represented in graphical form below (see Figure 2.1).

It is important to note that the majority of students (63 per cent) were in special schools, with 18 per cent in mainstream schools (see Appendix 1 for the full table of data).

**Figure 1.1 Principal school service per age group**

![Graph showing education routes](image)

*Source: NIDD 2007, p. 50*

According to the NIDD, in 2007 16,259 people in this cohort were aged over 18 years. Of those, 27 per cent (4,459) were in sheltered employment, 9 per cent (1,527) were in rehabilitative training, 6 per cent (957) were in supported employment, 2 per cent (368) were in vocational training, and 0.9 per cent (157) had left school and entered the world of work. None were pursuing further education. The remainder of people registered – 8,811 of 16,259 which is 54 per cent – were primarily in a
day service. The Irish National Training and Employment Authority (FÁS)\(^1\) has responsibility for vocational training and employment needs of people with disabilities and training is accessible through the National Learning Network.\(^2\)

The NIDD reported that the total number of people with moderate, severe, and profound intellectual disabilities has increased by 21 per cent since the first ‘census of mental handicap in the Republic of Ireland’ was carried out in 1974. One of the factors contributing to this increase in numbers is general population growth over this period. The number of people with moderate, severe, or profound intellectual disabilities aged 35 years and over has increased from 29 per cent in 1974 to 38 per cent in 1996, and to 48 per cent in 2007. This reflects an increase in the lifespan of people with intellectual disabilities. This changing age profile observed in the data since the 1970s has major implications for service planning and helps explain the ongoing demand for additional resources in this sector. It has produced an ongoing high level of demand for fulltime residential services, and a growing need for support services for ageing caregivers; and for services designed specifically to meet the needs of older people with intellectual disabilities. This development also underlines the need for access to lifelong learning, including the need for transition planning across life-span stages which ensure the best quality of life for all people with intellectual disabilities.

---

\(^1\) FÁS enhances the skills and competencies of individuals and enterprises in order for Ireland to further develop as a competitive, inclusive, knowledge-based economy. It strives to do this through the provision of tailored training and employment programmes that suit everyone’s needs.

\(^2\) The National Learning Network (NLN) is Ireland’s largest non-government training organisation with centres in almost every county in Ireland offering over 40 different vocational programmes which carry nationally and internationally recognised certification and are designed to lead directly to jobs or progression to further education. The NLN also provides continuous professional development courses; assessment services for children, adolescents and adults with specific learning difficulties; and a disability support service for VEC colleges in Dublin.
2.5 Legislation

Under the terms of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, mandatory school-going age is between six and 16 years in the Republic of Ireland. However, the Act also specifies that students can remain in school up to the age of 18 years. Whilst the initial purpose of this research was to explore transition from compulsory schooling, it was soon realised that it was necessary to expand the extent of the investigations to include post-primary schooling, in order to encompass all students up to the age of 18 years.

Since the mid 1990s, dramatic changes have occurred in disability policy in Ireland. One of the first indicators of change was the publication in 1996 of the report *A Strategy for Equality* concerning the Status of People with Disabilities which set the basis for developing further legislation. Two important pieces of legislation have been since passed in Ireland, the Disability Act (2005) and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004). At the international level, Ireland is a signatory to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities of 2006 which emphasises the participation of people with disabilities in all decisions that impact upon their lives.

2.5.1 The Disability Act 2005

The Disability Act 2005 was a positive measure designed to advance and underpin participation by people with disabilities in everyday life by establishing a statutory basis for mainstreaming students. Mainstreaming students places an obligation on public service providers to support access to services and facilities for people with disabilities to the greatest practical extent. The Act provided a statutory basis for an independent assessment of individual health and education needs and a
related service statement. It enshrined in law the right of people with disabilities to an assessment of their disability-related health, personal social service and education needs. The Act also provided a statutory basis for accessible public services. Sections 26, 27 and 28 placed obligations on public bodies to make their services and information accessible to people with disabilities. Such commitments are crucial, especially in terms of mainstreaming for people with disabilities and for bringing disability policy into line with other legalisation. The Act should ensure coherence throughout all elements of policy although it may prove challenging for all the departments and agencies involved, both statutory and voluntary, to ensure that it is followed through in, for example, the National Development Plan and the National Spatial Strategy (Disability Federation of Ireland, 2006).

2.5.2 Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 made provision for education plans for students with special educational needs (SEN) and detailed statutory requirements for educational planning as it impacts on students, parents, schools and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). Under this Act, children with SEN will be educated ‘in an inclusive environment with children who do not have SEN’, unless this should be inconsistent either with the best interest of the child, or with effective provision for the other children. The full text of Section 15, Planning for Future Education Needs, is given in Appendix 2. The importance of including individual education planning in this Act cannot be over-stated.
In the 2008 Budget statement, it was announced that implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 was being postponed (see *Relate*, November 2008). The provisions of the Disability Act 2005 in relation to assessment of need are being implemented with respect to children aged under five years. By the end of November 2008, over 3,500 applications for such an assessment of needs had been received. It was originally intended for the EPSEN Act to be fully implemented by 2010, for the Disability Act to be implemented in respect of five to 18 year olds at this same juncture, with provisions in relation to adults being implemented in 2011. However, it was decided to defer implementation of both the EPSEN Act and the assessment of needs provision in the Disability Act, including elements referring to the IEPs (Citizens Information Board, 2009). Other countries have enacted legislation covering individual education planning for up to two decades. The US passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990 which mandated transition services to be included in a student’s IEP. In the UK, the official duty to undertake transition planning was set out in the Education Act 1993. In Australia, individual states began to enact education policy on transition planning in the 1970s whilst New Zealand pursued a similar strategy in the 1990s.

### 2.5.3 National Disability Strategy

The National Disability Strategy was launched in 2004. This strategy included the Disability Bill 2004 and bill amendments later passed into law as the Disability Act 2005. The purpose of this package is to provide funding, develop sectoral plans for government departments, and
facilitate independent advocacy services. As summarised by then Minister of State, Willie O’Dea:

The National Disability Strategy will build on the existing strong legislative and infrastructural framework for equality. The Strategy adds to that framework of new supports for people with disabilities and establishes rights to assessments and services in the health and education sectors. The Strategy also gives statutory effect to the policy of mainstreaming public service provision for people with disabilities - a policy launched by An Taoiseach on an administrative basis four years ago in June, 2000.

2.5.4 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

A third piece of relevant protocol with international legal standing is The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006, and its Optional Protocol. This is the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the twenty-first century and is the first human rights convention to be opened for signature by member states of the United Nations. It marks a paradigm shift in attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities since, traditionally, people with disabilities have been looked at from a medical perspective in which the disability is considered a problem of the individual who needs to be rehabilitated. The United Nations Convention is written within a new framework which considers disability as a social concept and focuses on the human rights of people with disabilities rather than on their rehabilitation.
The Convention is a human rights instrument with an explicit social development dimension. It adopts a broad categorisation of persons with disabilities and reaffirms that persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It clarifies and qualifies how these rights apply to all categories of people with disabilities, and identifies areas where adaptations must be made in order for persons with disabilities to effectively exercise these rights and where protection of these rights must be reinforced.

Article 24 of the Convention, devoted to education, declares that states should ensure equal access to primary and secondary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning for all people with a disability. Furthermore, education systems should utilise appropriate materials, techniques and forms of communication. Pupils with support needs should receive appropriate support measures, and students who are blind, deaf and deaf-blind should receive their education via the most appropriate modes of communication from teachers who are fluent in sign language and Braille. In addition, the education of persons with disabilities should foster their participation in society, their sense of dignity and self worth and the development of their personality, abilities and creativity.

Most importantly, however, from the perspective of this review, is the fact that Article 24 indicates that states should ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, it states that parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided for persons with
disabilities (see Appendix 3 for the full text of Article 24). The Convention was signed by Ireland on March 30th, 2007. As of September 28th, 2010, there were 146 signatories to the Convention, 90 signatories to the Optional Protocol, 90 ratifications of the Convention and 58 ratifications of the Optional Protocol. The Convention entered into force on the thirtieth day after the twentieth ratification or accession. Ratification of the Convention by Ireland is still pending.

2.6 Transition practices in Ireland

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) of 2004 included guidelines on transition planning for students with disabilities. Although these have no legal standing, the guidelines state that every student should have an IEP which takes into consideration the future of students as they prepare to leave secondary school. To facilitate preparation of the IEP, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) published a detailed resource document, ‘Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process’ (NCSE, 2006), as a guide to good practice in relation to preparation, implementation and review of IEPs. These guidelines recognise that a student will experience many transitions during their time in education, including pre-school to primary school or special educational setting, primary to post-primary school or special educational setting and, finally, the transition as students leave school.

3By signing the Convention or Optional Protocol, States indicate their intention to take steps to be bound by the treaty at a later date. Signing also creates an obligation, in the period between signing and ratification, to refrain from acts that would defeat the object and purpose of the treaty. Ratification is a more concrete action signalling the States’ intention to undertake legal rights and obligations contained in the Convention or the Optional Protocol.
For the earlier transition of primary to post-primary, the Special Education Support Service (SESS) offers advice on the best ways to assist students with this transition. For school leavers, the NCSE guidelines (2006) recommend the following:

1) final steps for transition planning should take place one year in advance of the young person leaving school. The young person should be involved in making these plans and the views of parents and/or advocates should also be taken into consideration
2) transitions should involve working in a multidisciplinary partnership
3) there is a variety of pathways that young people might follow upon leaving school and there are professionals with responsibility to assist them along these pathways which include leaving school and entering the world of work; pursuing further education; vocational training; rehabilitative training; sheltered employment; and supported employment.

2.7 Transition planning and practices outside Ireland

2.7.1 United Kingdom (UK)

In the UK, the local authority is responsible for organising a meeting to make plans for the future when a person with special education needs reaches Year 9 (approximately 14 years) of secondary school (Crown Copyright, 2001). Despite the existence of legislative guidance about transition in the UK, there continues to be marked variation in the transition arrangements available to young people. A study in 2003 found that one in five young people with learning disabilities who had already left school had done so without any transition planning (Ward,
Mallett, Heslop, & Simmons, 2003). Furthermore, the same study reported that only two thirds of the students who were still at school had a transition plan. A longitudinal study for the Department for Education and Skills highlighted the complex nature of the transition process for students with special needs. It found that the level of transition provision, support and multi agency provision often depended on the so called visibility of impairment (Dewson, Aston, Bates, Ritchie, and Dyson, 2008).

Another large study was carried out by the Home Farm Trust and the Norah Fry Research Centre in 2002 which aimed to ascertain the level of compliance with legislation and guidance regarding transition for young people with intellectual disabilities, namely Valuing People, the Education Act 1993 and associated Code of Practice (Heslop, Mallett, Simmoons, & Ward, 2002). This study conducted a survey of 283 families, as well as in depth interviews with 27 young people and 27 parent/carers across England. The results showed that approximately one fifth of young people with intellectual disabilities had left school without a transition plan. The authors also found that almost half of the young people surveyed had little or no involvement in planning for their future and that lack of planning had led to uncertainty and stress for some families. Findings of the study indicated that the quality of transition planning varied widely, in some cases being ad hoc, confused and uncoordinated. In addition, the topics covered in transition planning were often quite different from those identified as being important by families and young people themselves. Key issues such as the transfer to adult health or social service provision had still not been addressed by the time they left school. Concerns raised by the young people and their
families which inhibited greater independence focused on personal safety and risk, money matters (including benefits) and transport.

Regarding transition outcomes, whether or not young people had received transition planning appeared to make little difference to what happened to them after leaving school. Furthermore, there appeared to be few post-school options available to young people with learning disabilities, particularly in relation to housing and employment; and a lack of easily accessible information for parents and young people about what future possibilities might be available. Post-school outcomes are not determined solely by transition planning or a lack thereof.

The lack of information regarding the transition process was also raised by parents in a UK research study (Tarleton, 2004). In England, the Connexions Service (Hughes, 2005) operates as a facility dedicated to 13 – 19 year olds, offering information and advice on all aspects of life. It also provides support up to the age of 25 for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities (or both). The service is managed locally by one of 47 local ‘Connexions Service’ offices, which brings together all of the key youth support services. While information on transition is available, it is often available from a single source, can be difficult to obtain, and varies in format and detail, from fact sheets to publications in excess of 200 pages (Watson, 2004). Transition information should be presented in a way that is relevant and appropriate to interested parties.

The draft National Service Framework for Children in England (Russell, 2003) has proposed the development of multi-agency protocols which would actively promote a multi-agency approach although it is recognised that this is a daunting task and would require a level of
collaboration and sophistication that has not previously been achieved (Russell, 2003). The draft National Service Framework for Wales (National Assembly for Wales, 2004) proposes the development of one multi-agency plan for each young person, covering all aspects of the young person’s life, as well as access to a transition key worker and opportunities for work experience as part of the transition planning process.

2.7.2 United States (US)

In the US, transition programmes and services start in school and are mandated under several federal laws. Congress enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975, which was re-enacted as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), in 2004. IDEA emphasises the need for specific strategies to effect successful transitions from school and mandates the Individual Education Programme (IEP), which formally establishes a service management framework to assist young people and allows for transition planning beginning at 14 years.

Transition services under IDEA comprise a coordinated set of activities for students with disability. They promote movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation. They are based on student’s individual needs, preferences, and interests. Transition services include instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and functional
vocational evaluation. In some cases, they also include the acquisition of daily living skills and where appropriate are underpinned by a statement on interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages (National Centre on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004).

There are, however, various challenges to the implementation of the federal transition requirements of the IDEA Amendments of 2004 which must be addressed (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002). These include:

1 **Accessibility of the mainstream curriculum.** There is a need to promote high expectations for student achievement and learning, to make systematic and appropriate use of assessment and instructional accommodations, and to ensure that students have access to the full range of secondary education curricula and programmes.

2 **High school education planning based on students’ learning skills.** It is necessary to promote the use of alternative assessments to support graduation decisions, to clarify the implications of developing and granting alternative diploma options for students with disabilities, and to clarify the implications of different diploma options for continued special education services.

3 **Accessibility of, and full participation in, post-secondary education, employment and independent living opportunities.** It has to be ensured that community service agency participation systematically occurs in the development of post-school transition plans, engages integrated service planning, provides information to parents on essential health and income maintenance programmes, promotes
collaborative employer engagement and establishes partnerships with workforce development entities.

4 Support of student and family participation. This involves support of the students in the development of decision-making, communication and self-advocacy skills necessary to assume a leadership role in their transition/IEP meetings and to ensure that parents are supported in the IEP and transition planning process.

5 Inter-agency collaboration and system linkages at all levels. There is a need to establish cross-agency evaluation and accountability systems, develop innovative interagency financing strategies, and staff development programmes.

During the post-school period, there is a general set of programmes providing funding or services to individuals with disabilities focusing on training employment and rehabilitation. However, at present, provision of these services is not always co-ordinated and substantial differences exist between the experience of young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who continue receiving services, and those with specific learning disabilities who are not automatically eligible for support (Wittenburg, Golding & Fishman, 2002). The Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation programme provides an array of services (including medical and therapeutic services, education, training, work-related placement assistance, etc.) to prepare people with disabilities for work. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) (P.L. 105-220) mandates state-wide and local workforce investment to increase participation in employment, job retention, and earnings of participants. It focuses both on low-income individuals and on young people with disabilities. Youth programmes which fall under the remit of this law must promote preparation for post-primary educational opportunities or
unsubsidised employment as appropriate, facilitate strong links between academic and occupational learning, and develop effective connections to intermediaries with strong connections within the job market (Cohen, Timmons and Fesko, 2005). The School to Work Opportunities Act 1994 (STWOA) (P.L. 103-239) was enacted in order to develop school-to-work systems which prepare all students for entry into the workforce. The underlying assumption behind this measure is that all students would be better prepared if they were exposed to work experiences before they made the transition to post-secondary education or work.

Although administered and funded by the US Department of Education and the Department of Labor, these funds are allocated through partnerships between schools, local service agencies and businesses based on the linkage between job skills required in the work place and school learning. The Projects with Industry Programmes (PWI) are supported locally by Centres for Independent Living which are federally funded. These promote employment for people with disabilities in the community and focus on training. Finally, the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a service which provides information on job accommodations for people with disabilities, compliance requirements for employers and services related to employment of people with disabilities.

As stated above, post-school services are not necessarily connected and can in fact impede each other’s successful functioning. For example, the co-existence of Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Act 1999 (TWWIIA) (P.L. 106-170) and the Social Security Administration’s programmes, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are noteworthy. Cash benefits for persons
with severe disabilities are provided through SSDI and SSI. SSDI is a social insurance programme with the eligibility of workers with disabilities based on prior social security covered employment. However, prior work experience is not required under SSI (Ozawa, 2002). The main purpose of TWWIA is to motivate people with disabilities to work by providing them with health care and employment support services which reduce their dependency on cash disability benefits from the SSA. It provides more choices for beneficiaries with regard to vocational rehabilitation services and offers expanded health care for individuals who are no longer eligible for cash benefits due to being in employment.

Where young people with disabilities are competitively employed, the Rehabilitation Act 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 regulate the accommodations to which individuals with disabilities are entitled. Sections 501 and 503 of the Rehabilitation Act require federal agencies to develop and implement annual affirmative action plans for the hiring, placement and advancement of persons with disabilities. Section 504 prohibits discrimination against qualified persons with disabilities in federally funded programmes, and in the provision of services including education, health, loans and grants among others. The ADA prohibits discrimination based on disability and encourages employers to provide reasonable accommodations.

A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment used to:

1. allow for equal access to the job application and interview process
2. change the work environment or the way things are customarily done
3. enable the employee to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment.
Examples of accommodations are: assistive devices, alternative and augmentative communication strategies, architectural modifications, telecommuting, re-structured job assignments, mentors and coaches, flexi-time, other scheduling accommodations, employee assistance and other employer human resource management programmes.

In a US national longitudinal study of 12,000 young people in special education (2001 – 2011 data reported in 2005), only 60 per cent of students with intellectual disabilities had started their transition planning at 14 years of age. Furthermore, students with intellectual disabilities were less involved in their transition planning (about 10 per cent did not participate at all), were less likely to provide input (less than half of those participating), and more likely to report no progress towards transition goals than other students. An additional finding was that only a small proportion of students with intellectual disabilities had post-primary education as a transition goal, with a larger number having sheltered and supported employment as a transition goal.

2.7.3 Australia

The Australian system operates bilateral agreements between the federal government and individual states. In 2008, AUD$901 million was offered at federal level to states to help pay for the transfer of responsibilities regarding ‘targeted support’ and ‘transition support’. For example, the purpose of the bilateral agreement between the state of Western Australia and the Commonwealth is to provide a framework for the parties to work collaboratively in order to develop and implement
strategies which improve the social and economic participation of people with disabilities in the community, and to provide access to appropriate support which best meets their needs and abilities. One of the areas of mutual concern in the bilateral agreement is the transition of young people from school to appropriate employment and day options, as well as planning for appropriate service provision. In order to ensure employment and day options services, the state and the Commonwealth work towards assisting people to access the most appropriate post-school opportunities.

In the Australian context, post-school programmes for people with intellectual disabilities are funded for a two year period, after students leave school at 18 years. State provisions may include funding for individual clients and/or funding of services. However, the Australian Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) has less of an impact on employment than it has on transportation or education. Small companies have the highest number of disability discrimination claims, and government organisations the second highest (O’Connor, Espiner, and Senescall, 2005). According to Australia’s Productivity Commission (2004), and similar to the situation in the US, an Australian person with a disability is less likely to finish school, to have a post-school qualification, or to have a job than the general population. Legislation is not always effective, and both small businesses and government continue to discriminate against people with disabilities. Service funding operates on the assumption of less competency for people with disabilities and denies flexibility of funding for service providers and users.

experiences, and improving access to employment and lifelong learning (O’Connor, *et al.*, 2005). In addition, Laragy (2004) recommends starting transition planning some years before leaving school, similar to the US model for transition.

### 2.8 Review of literature on successful transition outcomes and predictors

A longitudinal study of young people with special educational needs conducted in the UK in 2004 revealed that transitions were deferred for many young people with special educational needs. Those with less severe disabilities had left education and were seeking to enter the bottom end of the labour market. For groups with less visible impairments, the issues still revolve around appropriate transition pathways and support (Dewson *et al.*, 2004). In fact, one study warned that ‘employment is not universally considered to be a viable option for these young people by all professionals involved in transition planning’ (Beyer, Kaehne, Gray, Sheppard, and Meek, 2008). According to the authors of this study, there are many barriers for young people with learning disabilities in terms of achieving employment, which could be overcome via work experience, individually tailored flexible working time, and appropriate support. Several studies have been conducted with the objective of describing the post-primary outcomes of young people with disabilities and finding predictors of better transition outcomes. In the following pages, we present an overview of the literature focusing on predictors of successful transitions for young people with intellectual disabilities.
Doren and Benz (1998) conducted a study to examine the factors associated with better employment outcomes for both young women and men with disabilities, as well as those factors specifically associated with better outcomes for young women. Using a logistic regression model to explore the relationship between predictor variables and outcome variables, they found that young people who held two or more jobs during their school years were twice as likely to be competitively employed as young people with less experience of formal employment. They also found that the use of the ‘self-family-friend’ network to find a job was a positive predictor of post-school employment. Higher family income and greater self-esteem increases the young person’s chances of being employed. In another study, Rojewski (1999) examined the occupational and educational aspirations and attainment of young adults with or without learning disabilities two years after high school graduation. He concluded that men with learning disabilities were more likely to aspire to occupy positions of ‘moderate prestige’ rather than positions of ‘high prestige’ than their peers who did not have a disability, identifying this factor as a powerful predictor of future job outcomes. However, these men had an employment rate that was similar to their peers without disabilities, and higher than women with learning disabilities who also had a lower participation in post-secondary education.

A 2003 study by Nuehring and Sitlington examined the transition of three adolescents on the autistic spectrum disorder, from high school to vocational rehabilitation services. The authors highlight some components of successful transitions:

- The choices available to students with disabilities
• Access to a transition specialist who can assist students and their families
• A working relationship between schools and vocational rehabilitation adult service agencies
• Vocational assessment when matching the consumer to prospective jobs.

The study identified some factors which could be improved, including:
• specialised education for high school teachers
• the inclusion of effective vocational assessment procedures in the transition process
• better communication between the individual, his or her family, the school, and the adult provider
• co-ordinated programming between the school and the adult provider.

Jacobsen (2003), in a study about predictors of employment outcomes for people with learning disabilities, found similar results. He identified the following key factors for the successful development of the transition to work provision: support from senior managers, recognition that employment is a realistic goal for people with learning difficulties, training packages to suit the individual learner, and finding out at the start of the course what area of employment the learner was interested in and what employment opportunities were locally available. Other elements for the development of an effective transition were working partnerships, stable funding, and clear and accurate information on how the individuals’ benefits were affected.
According to Jacobsen (2003), having access to specialists’ advice and clear information about benefits was a determining factor in the success of the transition to work provision.

Furthermore, research has supported the view that self-determination and empowerment are related to positive transition outcomes. According to Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997), self-determination is a concept reflecting the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives. Students who have self-determination skills have a greater chance of being successful in making the transition to adulthood, including employment and independence. However, according to Bremer, Kachgal, and Schoeller (2003), in order to direct their own futures, young people need to understand their own disability. One’s sense of empowerment is also important. As defined by Fawcett, Fawcett, White, Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, Mathews, and Paine (1994), empowerment is ‘the process by which people gain some control over valued events, outcomes, and resources of importance to an individual or group’ (p. 472). All these skills might be learned in school if young people with disabilities are provided with the opportunities to try, to fail and to try again with a different strategy or level of intensity. For families, teachers and other adults, supporting self-determination requires being open to new possibilities and taking young people’s dreams for the future seriously.

Regarding the perspective of the supported employee, Wistow and Schneider (2003) conducted a qualitative study in the UK to explore the perceptions of people with learning difficulties in relation to work and employment support. They found that the types of support offered through employment agencies were those which assisted the
participants in finding a job, choosing a job and keeping it. The most frequent types of support received were task-based training and moral support. This study also found that participants’ felt a broad level of satisfaction with the support received and the supporter (including direct and indirect), with 80 per cent of supporters being in ready contact with them; availability was the distinctive element of satisfaction. Furthermore, the study also revealed that most of the participants expressed the feeling of being valued when the employer thought they were doing a good job. There were also common changes sought in employment, such as more work hours or more income.

Freedman and Lynch (1996) also examined perspectives on work among young people with significant disabilities and their families. Their study found that for young people, compensation and benefits were important job outcomes. For example, they identified recent pay, regular pay checks, steady hours, flexible work schedules, and employee benefits such as free meals, transportation vouchers and company holiday parties as important. It was also found that the families considered having the opportunity to interact and socialise at work with customers, co-workers, and employers contributed heavily to their family members’ feelings of job satisfaction and importance. Young people with disabilities considered limited job coaching as a potential source of anxiety when it was not available for problem solving. Both young people and family members expressed the view that work was an important factor in the development of positive self-esteem and that it also contributed to the young people’s sense of being part of society.
2.9 Role of families in successful employment

Dixon and Reddacliff (2001) conducted a study examining the perspectives of young adults with mild intellectual disabilities regarding the family contribution to their employment success. They found that participants considered their families to be an important source of support in gaining and maintaining employment. It was also reported that families contributed to positive job outcomes by providing practical assistance, moral support, motivation, a strong work ethic, protection and cohesion. Dixon and Reddacliff concluded their study by recommending that, in the provision of services, families should be fully acknowledged as a relevant support resource.

Helsop et al. (2002) summarised best transition practices as those that focus on open communication between agencies and families including independent advocacy support for young people. Coordination of inter-agency work was identified as being critical to the provision of joint training initiatives and joint assessment procedures. According to Helsop et al., the transition plan should be formulated so that it is appropriate to the individual’s characteristics (e.g. race and disability). They also recommend that transition plans become part of a process that is supported by key workers and in which a range of options are available for the young people. Finally, the authors identified choice as a key element in the transition process, advocating that families and young people with intellectual disabilities should have appropriate information on options regarding housing and employment, and be meaningfully involved in making those decisions.
Summary of successful transitions

- Work experience within school (Beyer *et al*., 2008; Doren and Benz, 1998)
- Interagency work (Helsop *et al*., 2002; Jacobsen, 2003; Nuehring and Sitlington, 2003)
- Family support (Doren and Benz, 1998; Dixon and Reddacliff, 2001)
- Support from senior managers (Jacobsen, 2003)
- Students’ educational and occupational aspirations (Rojewsky, 1999)
- Choices for students’ work interests (Jacobsen, 2003; Nuehring and Sitlington, 2003)
- Access to appropriate information (Jacobsen, 2003; Helsop *et al*., 2002)
- Access to transition specialists (Helsop *et al*., 2002; Nuehring and Sitlington, 2003),
- Having employment as a realistic goal for students with disabilities, and training packages (Jacobsen, 2003).

Employment is an important aspect of successful transition. Young people with intellectual disabilities identified compensation and benefits as positive outcomes (Freedman and Lynch, 1996) and socialising within work settings led to job satisfaction, increased self-esteem and a greater feeling of being part of society (Freedman and Lynch, 1996). A study by Beyer and Kaehne (2008) found that professionals often favour further education pathways over employment options, as this is a more funded and tested route with a clearer destination.
Many of these predictors of successful transitions for young adults have been identified, by the Beach Centre on Families and Disability at Kansas University, as quality indicators of transition programmes. Morningstar, Turnbull and Turnbull (1995) have provided a list of seven ‘quality indicators of exemplary transition programmes’ that can be used to assess current transition services as well as to develop action plans to refine and enhance existing programmes.

The seven quality indicators are:-

1 Transition planning
Transition planning should begin early in the student’s education process, and should use a person-centred approach based on the student’s and his or her family needs, preferences and choices. The planning should involve collaboration of all the agencies involved, should be coordinated by a specialist and should be appropriately documented.

2 Interagency collaboration
This collaboration should be developed by all the needed agencies in each community, including an equal distribution of administrators, direct service staff, and families and consumers. The collaboration should identify roles and responsibilities regarding the service coordination. Resources and communication should be shared among agencies and be available to students and families.

3 and 4 Families and students’ involvement
Families and students should regularly attend all the meetings, should be listened to and respected, and be involved in all the
decisions made. The appropriate accommodations to ensure their participation should be provided.

5  The curriculum
Students should be taught decision making, social/interpersonal, leisure and recreational skills and be provided with opportunities to learn about and/or directly experience an array of community options (e.g. different jobs in the community) and to engage in independent living. The curriculum should be taught in natural environments aimed at real life outcomes for the students.

6  Inclusion in school programmes
The instructional programmes on transition should be tailored to the individual needs and interests and not based on disability category. Teachers in regular academic and vocational courses should be provided with assistance from special education teachers to adapt their instruction and curriculum to meet the diverse needs of students. The Beach Centre on Families and Disability at the University of Kansas has published a fact sheet, *Quality Components of Exemplary Transition Programs*, which identifies the seven quality indicators of effective transition for students with special needs (Beach Centre, 2002).

7  Adult services and community involvement
Services should be available and accessible to all students exiting school in the areas of post-secondary education, employment, living, leisure/social, health care, and transportation.
2.10 University options for students with intellectual disabilities

In addition to further training or work, one of the exciting new options emerging in recent times for students with intellectual disabilities is university education. In Ireland, students may participate in the Certificate in Contemporary Living (CCL) course at Trinity College Dublin, although for some reason these students do not appear on the NIDD as pursuing further education. In the US and Canada, there are also post-secondary education programmes available; in the US, there are 131 registered programmes in 34 states, which fall into one of the three different models for post secondary education (Grigal and Dwyre, 2008). These models are as follows:

2.10.1 Mixed/hybrid model
Students participate in social activities and/or academic classes with students without disabilities (for audit or credit) and also participate in classes with other students with disabilities (sometimes referred to as ‘life skills’ or ‘transition classes). This model typically provides students with employment experience on or off the college campus.

2.10.2 Substantially separate model
Students only participate in classes with other students with disabilities (sometimes referred to as a ‘life skills’ or transition programme). Students may have the opportunity to participate in generic social activities on campus and may be offered employment experience, often through a rotation of pre-established employment slots on- or off-campus.
2.10.3 Inclusive individual support model

Students receive individualised services (e.g., educational coach, tutor, technology, natural supports) in college courses, certificate programmes, and/or degree programmes. The individual student’s vision and career goals drive services. There is no programme base on campus. The focus is on establishing a student-identified career goal which directs the course of study and employment experiences such as internships, apprenticeships or work-based learning. This is done by building on a collaborative approach, via an interagency team involving adult service agencies, generic community services, and the college’s disability support office. Agencies identify a flexible range of services and share costs.

Of the 131 programmes registered in the US, the majority (51 per cent), use the mixed model, 29 per cent use the substantially separate model and 20 per cent use the inclusive individual support model. It should be noted that the majority of these programmes (74 per cent) support students with dual enrolment in high school and college. In Canada, six colleges and/or universities have post-secondary initiatives in and five other institutions are considering establishing such initiatives as well.

2.11 Conclusion

In this literature review, we have outlined the background of the phenomenon of transition for young people with intellectual disabilities from school to post-school options. We have used the definition of transition provided by the AAIDD which focuses on planning as a key aspect of the process. We have provided general information on the transition situation for young people with disabilities in Ireland, including
the policy context in which transition is framed and operated. The literature review also addressed international legislation and practices focusing on three other countries that have a longer tradition than Ireland in developing legislation, practices, and research and in analysing transition outcomes: the UK, the US and Australia. The literature review concluded with a general overview of empirical studies which identify predictors of successful transition outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities and quality indicators of transition programmes.
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we describe the methodology used to explore the aims outlined below and to determine what was happening within Ireland for students with intellectual disabilities who were in their transition years from second level school programmes, as well as special schools.

The aims of the study were to identify:

1. What schools and primary stakeholders understand by transition
2. What planning processes are used as part of transition
3. The types of school-based transition programmes being implemented
4. What options are open to students with intellectual disabilities when transitioning from school
5. What students and families would like included in the transition process
6. What challenges get in the way of successful transition
7. What possibilities there might be for the future development of transition planning and programming in school based settings
8. How transition and potential future employment opportunities can be configured
9. Where students with intellectual disabilities, aged 16-18 years, are located in the school system in terms of placement and programmes.
3.2 Research design

A mixed methods approach (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) was taken which incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The study consisted of two phases:

- Focus groups with key stakeholders. The findings from these focus groups were presented to an expert panel for feedback.

- A national survey of school staff working with in post-primary schools and special schools with students with intellectual disabilities.

3.3 Logistics of study

The study obtained ethical approval from the School of Social Work and Social Policy Research Ethical Approval Committee in Trinity College Dublin.

3.3.1 Geographical area

Focus groups were set up to ensure that a cross-section of opinion was gained from major stakeholder groups, students, families and teachers across three distinct geographical locations. The locations broadly accorded with census classifications, including the greater Dublin area, Cork (one of the other four major cities), and a rural location with a population of less than 10,000 in Connaught. Due to the study’s time
constraints, the choice of schools in Cork were limited and included two from a rural setting and one from Cork city.

3.3.2 Expert panel

Thirty representative groups were identified, contacted and invited to be represented on the expert panel. Ten representatives responded positively and participated in the expert panel (see Table No 3.1).

Table 3.1 Expert Panel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representative Group</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational support services</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/Teacher trade unions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second level management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates/parents groups</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.3 Survey questionnaire

The questionnaire for the survey involved multiple-choice questions to ensure that participants could complete it quickly and easily. The questions hoped to identify the number of students with intellectual disabilities in the last two years of schooling, types of school setting and programmes students are involved in, specific transition programmes and options available for students upon transition (See Appendix 4, p. 179).
3.3.4 Survey population

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) supported the NIID in obtaining contact details for schools. Both mainstream post primary schools and special schools were included in the survey. Five special schools for children on the autistic spectrum disorder were not included in the survey as intellectual disability was not their primary diagnosis, and this group was not considered as falling within the scope of this project.

3.3.5 Analysis

The results were entered into SPSS and analysed with a view to describing the conditions and options available to students with intellectual disabilities. Multivariate analysis was used to determine demographic and school predictors of such conditions and options.

Focus groups and the expert panel outcomes were interpretative in design and aimed to understand the phenomenon of transition by collecting the views of a variety of different groups (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Primary stakeholders in focus groups included students with intellectual disabilities, parents/carers, teachers and other professionals within schools. Findings from focus groups and the expert panel were triangulated with those of the questionnaire. As a means of ensuring that the phenomenon of transition was not interpreted from only one angle, the multiple sources of understanding arising from the focus groups, survey and expert panel were compared and contrasted (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Figure 3.1 shows the relationship between the two phases of the study.
Figure 3.1 *Triangulation of phases*

Phase 1a: Focus groups

Phase 1b: Expert panel

Phase 2: Survey

3.4 **Phase One: Stakeholder focus groups**

Within each of the three geographical locations, a random selection of schools were contacted and asked if they had students with intellectual disability attending between the ages of 16-18 years. The principals of the schools were asked to identify students in their school, explain the study to them and invite them to participate in the focus groups.

The first phase of this study collected data through a series of focus groups on what students, parents/carers and teaching staff in both mainstream and special school settings said about the transition process for students leaving second level school. According to Kitzinger (1994: 103) ‘*focus groups are group discussions organised to explore people’s views and experiences on a specific set of issues*’. It has been argued that similar information may be derived from individual semi-structured interviews (Taylor and Armour, 2000) although the group approach benefits from interactions between participants and a less formal environment (Kaplowitz and Hoehn, 2001). Hebbler and Gerlach-Downie (2002) argue that focus groups can be used to gain clarity on the way
people experience a programme. Group interaction can simulate participant ideas which might not have been available on an individual basis.

3.4.1 Focus group participants

In order for the reality of the transition process to be captured, a quota sample (Newman, 2000; Patton, 2002) sought to ensure that a cross-section of opinion was gained from major stakeholder groups, students, families and teachers across three distinct geographical locations. These locations broadly accorded with census classifications, including the greater Dublin area, Cork, and a rural location with a population of less than 10,000 in Connaught.

A sampling frame for stakeholder focus groups was drawn up to reflect the demographic characteristics of schools, as found in the school information obtained from the NCSE. Students with intellectual disabilities were purposefully selected based on the following characteristics:

- Aged between 16-18 years
- Representative of different types of school setting (mainstream, special school, and mainstream with a special unit)
- Able to verbally participate in focus groups
- Parent and key teacher available to participate in a focus group; this was requested and adhered to in most focus groups, although it should be noted that in some focus groups parents were unable to attend on the day planned.
Table 3.2 shows the number of students at focus groups, by gender. Table 3.3. shows the number of parents/carers at focus groups and Table 3.4 shows the number of teaching staff at focus groups.
Table 3.2  Number of students at focus groups, by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dublin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Mainstream school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Special school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connaught</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Mainstream school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mainstream (special unit)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Special school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cork</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Mainstream school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mainstream (special unit)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Special school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Of a total of 74 focus group participants

Table 3.3  Breakdown of number of parents/carers at focus groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dublin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Mainstream school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Special school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connaught</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Mainstream</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mainstream (special unit)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Special school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cork</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Mainstream</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mainstream (special unit)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Special school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Of a total of 74 focus group participants
Table 3.4  Breakdown of number of teaching staff at focus groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dublin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.Mainstream school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Special school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connaught</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.Mainstream school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Mainstream (special unit)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.Special school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cork</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.Mainstream school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Mainstream (special unit)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.Special school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Of a total of 74 focus group participants

Seventy-four participants took part in 21 focus groups, and schools were selected using the names and address labels supplied by the NCSE. Schools were approached until the researchers were satisfied that the sampling quota was reached.

Thirty-seven students with intellectual disabilities agreed to participate in the project. Their ages ranged from 15 to 19 years. In terms of gender, there were 22 male and 15 female students. The level of disability ranged from mild to moderate intellectual disabilities (See Table 2.1, p.27). With regards to education level, the students ranged from third year to their final year at secondary school.

Twenty key teaching staff participated, six were male and fourteen were female. Eight came from mainstream schools, four from special units,
and six from special schools. Staff members were purposively selected to meet the criterion of being a staff member who worked with students with intellectual disabilities to prepare them to leave school, and included career guidance teachers, special needs co-ordinators and learning support teachers. Seventeen family members participated in five focus groups and in total included 12 mothers, four fathers and one aunt (carer).

3.4.2 Focus group implementation

Separate focus group sessions were facilitated for each type of participant group, students with intellectual disabilities, their family members, and teaching staff within each school across the different geographic areas. The focus groups were conducted within the respective schools during school hours.

A letter inviting the school to take part in the study was posted to the Principal of the school who was asked to distribute it the relevant key staff and family members. In order to ensure informed consent, all participants were given an information sheet before signing a consent form. Schools were asked to approach students and explain the purpose the project and students were asked to read an accessible information sheet and then to sign a consent form (see Appendices 4, 5 and 6 for the respective information letters, consent forms and interview schedules).

The focus groups were conducted by two facilitators from the National Institute of Intellectual Disabilities (NIID). All focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.
3.4.3 Focus group data analysis

Transcriptions of focus group sessions were coded using open, axial and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Each set of data, namely student, parent/carer, and teacher responses, was analysed independently to identify emerging themes which in turn were compared and contrasted with one another as a form of triangulation. Themes were grouped based on how they related to the research questions. In chapter four, these themes are reported with a selection of quotes from across the various data sources. Tables in the focus group results section demonstrate how each stakeholder group answered the research questions. By doing so, we can compare and contrast the stakeholder data, adding a comparative element to the focus group analysis.

3.4.4 Limitations of focus groups

All participants had to have sufficient verbal communication skills to participate in the focus groups. This set a limitation on the study, excluding students with no verbal communication skills. The issue of verbal communication did arise within focus groups when some students chose not to participate in the discussions. In such instances, the numbers participating in focus groups may be misleading as some students did not contribute verbally to every question within the focus group. Focus group facilitators tried to ensure that all students felt empowered to speak if they so wished.

It should be noted that three of the planned focus groups were in fact one-to-one interviews, reflecting a limitation in the recruitment and
scheduling of participants. Numbers varied across the groups. The student and staff focus groups were less varied than family member focus groups. This related to the fact that for students and staff, the focus groups were built into their daily timetables whereas for family members/carers, identifying a date where the maximum number possible could attend required considerable planning and was more successful on some occasions than on others. The focus groups were held at the end of the school year. The timing had implications for the recruitment of students and teachers, as this is a busy time in the school calendar. There was a gender imbalance in focus groups, with females outnumbering males in staff and parent/career groups, and males outnumbering females in student focus groups.

3.4.5 Validating the focus group data through an expert panel

Following a thematic analysis of the focus group data, a discussion paper\textsuperscript{4} outlining the main themes which emerged from the data was drafted and distributed to five stakeholder groups. These groups included representatives from;

- Education support services
- School/teachers’ unions and associations
- Second level management
- Disability advocates
- Parents’ groups.

\textsuperscript{4} The full text of this discussion paper is available in Appendix 8
Representatives from each of the groups agreed to take part in a working discussion to respond to the preliminary results of the study and to verify the findings.

At the meeting, an NIID researcher introduced six key themes from the discussion paper and then facilitated a discussion on each theme with the participants. The six themes represented findings from the focus groups that required further verification. A second researcher recorded the major points on a flip chart, before these points were fed back to the group for verification. At the same time, a third researcher made a contemporaneous record of the discussions. These points were compared and contrasted with the findings of the focus groups and incorporated into the narrative of the findings.

### 3.5 Phase Two: Staff survey

A simple eight-item questionnaire was administered to gain an overview of the transition planning processes currently employed by second-level mainstream and special schools across the country. The main aim of this survey was to validate the findings from the focus groups with a wider and more representative sample of school-based personnel. Data was collected over spring and summer 2009.

#### 3.5.1 Implementation of survey

A short questionnaire was constructed based on the main research themes which emerged from the thematic analysis of focus group transcripts. It was posted to 730 mainstream post-primary schools which included mainstream schools with special units (See Table 3.5).
Table 3.5  Number of post-primary schools in Ireland, by county

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Vocational</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork County</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork County Borough</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway County and Borough</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kildare</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilkenny</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leitrim Secondary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick County and Borough</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louth</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayo</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meath</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaghan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipperary N.R.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipperary S.R.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford County and Borough</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wexford</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicklow</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>730</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In addition, all special schools were approached by a letter, which included information about the upcoming study and an invitation for staff to become involved. Each school that responded was contacted by
phone by members of the research team. It should be clear that the NCSE did not provide any information relating to individual students, their names or contact details. (see Table 3.6 for an overview of special schools in Ireland).

### Table 3.6  Number of special schools in Ireland, by county

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Totals</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Louth</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mayo</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Meath</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Roscommon</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sligo</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tipperary</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kildare</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Waterford</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilkenny</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wexford</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wicklow</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Special Schools</strong></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedures for this part of the study were based on Dillman’s (1978, 2000) tailored methods for telephone and mail surveys. These procedures involve carefully worded cover letters and meticulous questionnaire design (see Appendix 7 for a copy of the letter and questionnaire).

The postal questionnaire was addressed to the school principal and a request was made for the principal to identify a relevant person to complete the consent form and attached survey. The relevant person in
the school was described as the person who deals with the area of special needs or the preparation of students with intellectual disabilities who are leaving school; this included career guidance teachers, special needs co-ordinators and learning support teachers. For special schools, it was typically the principal who completed the questionnaire.

3.5.2 The survey sample

Questionnaires were sent to 730 post-primary schools, including schools with special units, and 70 special schools, making a total of 800 participating schools. Three hundred and ten responded, of which the majority (223) were from mainstream post-primary schools, with 32 from mainstream schools with special units and 55 from special schools (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.7 Responses to survey, by school type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Responses N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream</td>
<td>223 (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream with special unit</td>
<td>32 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special school</td>
<td>55 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>310 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the schools that identified themselves as special schools, 25 (45.5 per cent) were for students with mild disabilities, 25 (45.5 per cent) were for students with moderate disabilities, four (7.3 per cent) for those with profound/severe disabilities and one (1.8 per cent) catered for students with multiple intellectual disabilities.
Table 3.8  Breakdown of special schools responding to the survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School type</th>
<th>N=</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profound/Severe</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A majority of 211 of the schools taking part (68.1 per cent) were mixed gender, with 58 (18.7 per cent) girls only and 41 (13.2 per cent) boys only schools. All of the special schools were mixed. In describing the location of their school the modal\(^5\) response, for 125 schools (40.3 per cent), was ‘rural’ with 117 (37.7 per cent) of the schools describing their location as ‘urban’ and 65 (21.0 per cent) as ‘suburban’. Three schools did not respond to this question.

Table 3.9  Locations of the different types of schools which responded to the survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of School</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream with a special unit</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special school</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total*</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Three schools did not answer this question on location

\(^5\) The mode is the response given most often.
There was no significant relationship between the type of school (special or mainstream) and geographical location \(p>0.05\), although a larger proportion of special schools were situated in urban locations.

3.5.3 Data analysis for survey

The responses from the seven closed questions were descriptively analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Some simple comparisons across type and geographical location of the schools were also made using chi-square tests.

3.5.4 Thematic analysis of additional comments

In addition to the quantitative survey data, the questionnaire invited schools to add qualitative comments on what their transition plan involved and if they had any other comments/recommendations. The comments from the survey were analysed thematically (Patton, 2002). The comments yielded a rich amount of qualitative data and a number of themes emerged from the analysis, all of which are explored in the results section.

3.6 Limitations of the survey

It has long been established that surveys, like many forms of social research, can be prone to social desirability bias. When participants respond to surveys, they can tend to over-report behaviour which they believe will make them appear in a positive light and under-report behaviour which they believe shows them in a negative light. For
example, it is now well established that members of the general public typically over-report participation in elections. This effect has proved impervious to numerous attempts to induce people to report their voting behaviour more accurately (Abelson, Loftus and Greenwald, 1994).

Social desirability effects are a common feature of surveys and do not necessarily invalidate them, but they do mediate how we interpret them. In the present case, there does seem to be an element of social desirably bias present, with schools tending to over-report the amount of provision for transition preparation that they provide. For example, in response to the question ‘*Is there a specific transition plan that has been developed within the school to guide students with intellectual disabilities through the transition stage?*’, respondents of ten mainstream/mainstream with a special unit schools and 45 special schools ticked ‘yes’. However, when their descriptions of these plans were examined more closely, it appeared that they did not have specific transition plans aimed at students with intellectual disabilities to guide them through the transition process. We need to be aware that schools may naturally over-report the level of transition planning which they provide. This could also account for the more positive reporting of transition processes from the survey findings when compared to the analysis of the focus groups which indicated a less robust approach.

With regard to the actual sample of respondents, there was a large disparity in response rates between the different schools. Many more of the special schools approached responded, which perhaps reflects the fact that they cater solely for the student cohort of this study. The lower response rate from mainstream schools may further indicate a response bias. It is possible that the schools that replied were those that had
more interest in transition issues and who therefore may have put more thought, planning and effort into this process for their students. Therefore, we need to be mindful of this potential limitation when interpreting the conclusions from the survey and generalising them.

Finally, in order to encourage a high response rate, the questionnaire was designed simply, to allow for speedy completion. This created other limitations. First, data about the actual destinations for students with disabilities were not gathered from the schools, and therefore, we are relying here on the likely destinations of students. Moreover, it is unclear whether this information would have been available, if requested; whether or not student destinations are routinely recorded, or whether initiatives to increase and improved transition options for such students exist. Due to the brevity of the survey, it is possible that people did not give full details of the activities and stakeholders involved in their transition processes in the open-ended responses. Therefore, we may need to be cautious about conclusions regarding the involvement of students with intellectual disabilities in transition planning and about the transition support provided by schools.
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Focus group and expert panel results

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the results of the views and experiences of the students, teaching staff and carers are explored in detail. The purpose of this section is to signal and highlight the themes that have emerged from an analysis of focus group material, and the subsequent review by the expert panel. Themes that corresponded with the research questions were extracted from the data. Quotations were selected to represent stakeholder voices, some individual views, and the general consensus. The structure of the focus groups is detailed in Tables 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 on page 63.

A total of 37 students with intellectual disabilities (22 males and 15 females) participated in the focus groups in three different sites Dublin (eight students, four male and four female), Connaught (17 students, ten males and seven females), and Cork (12 students, five male and seven female).

Student participants outweighed the number of parents/carers and teaching staff. However, the following section reveals how despite the larger numbers, students spoke least about transition throughout the interviews.

Focus groups facilitators felt that, when asked what they understood by transition, students were unfamiliar with the concept. For some it
seemed as though it was the first time they had been questioned on the topic. By far, the least amount of focus group data was collected from students. Student answers varied a great deal. Worryingly, there seemed to be a high level of confusion, with some students stating that they ‘didn’t know’, whilst others understood transition to be ‘less pressure’ or a ‘doss year’. A minority of students understood transition as ‘entering the real world’ or getting a job.

In contrast, teachers voiced more views in the focus group interviews. General consensus among them was that students are ‘moving from one place to another’ and that this represented change and challenges for students. Most parents/carers also viewed it as a change, and a challenge.

_Uprooting. It’s going to change, his pals will probably drift in different directions and I think that they have been very much part of life here, that will change greatly if that doesn’t, if that part of the change changes, you know, if it doesn’t stay, if certain things don’t stay the same._ (Parent/carer, mainstream school, urban)
Table 4.1 At what stage did participants see the transition planning from compulsory schooling beginning?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students (N=37)</th>
<th>Parents/carers (N=17)</th>
<th>Teachers (N=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. After the Junior Cert for the last two years</td>
<td>1. Long term process</td>
<td>1. Last two years of school (majority)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Planning began prior to the Junior Cert</td>
<td>2. Last two years of School</td>
<td>2. Long term process (small minority)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Worry, try not to think about it (one parent/carer)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the students who responded, the majority (five out of six) felt that transition began after the Junior Certificate, and was a two year process. Only one student indicated that they began thinking about transition prior to this timeframe.

**Interviewer:** Did you do anything in Junior cert or first or second year?

**Student:** I don’t think so; it was more focused on the Junior cert then
(female student, mainstream school with special unit, rural)

The majority of teachers concurred with this, perceiving that the transition planning process began in the final two years of second level. Very few viewed it as a long term process.
From my experience in watching them, that the vast majority of them, they start thinking about it when they are in sixth year. At the eleventh hour really (Teacher 4, mainstream school, urban)

In contrast, many parents/carers viewed transition as a longer term process although some believed it to begin in the last two years of school. One parent tried ‘not to think about it and hope it works out’.

I would have to say it started for me when I realised that he was going to school, because it was obvious he was different, and things that made him different are the things that are going to affect him most when he goes, when he leaves here.

(Parent/carer, special school, urban)

There was a huge variation in the level of knowledge of school-based transition programmes held by the three stakeholder groups. A range of programmes were discussed by teachers. Transition programmes varied from school to school, with most offering a variety of transition practices. There was no evidence of a standardised transition programme across all schools. Instead, transition programmes could be broadly divided into the following categories:

1. Vocational education or placement (21/72)
2. Education and life skills training (10/72)
3. Career guidance (7/72)
4. Liaising with parents/carers (6/72)
5. Field trips (5/72)
When we have the regular meetings with parents in school initially and we plan small steps that they’re going to start in September, they’ll be sampling. And parents go and visit the place they’re going to sample, so they see it as the pupil sees it and they’re kind of more informed and then it’s teased out as time goes on. Now there are still issues that still would not be resolved at the end of [the]year because nobody can be guaranteed a place until funding becomes available.

(Teacher, special school, rural)

Table 4.2  What options were open to students with intellectual disabilities when transitioning from school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students (n. 37)</th>
<th>Parents/carers (n.17)</th>
<th>Teachers (n.20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Career-orientated goals and aspirations in mainstream employment e.g. working with animals (6), the Gardaí (1)</td>
<td>1. Mainstream career goals</td>
<td>1. Employment and training within the special needs sector; in services; (sheltered employment and rehab).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Further education and training.</td>
<td>2. Further education and training</td>
<td>2. Further vocation training; (FETAC, FAS and Fáilte Ireland).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Uncertainty and indecision.</td>
<td>3. Uncertainty, or ‘absolutely no idea’</td>
<td>3. Third level options in UCD, Trinity and institutes of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Special needs sector employment (rehab, workshop, service-based).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were striking contrasts between students, parents/carers and teachers in their perceptions of the post school options available to students. Of the students who responded, most expressed a range of
career goals and aspirations, all of which were based in mainstream employment and education. There was a sense that students had the same transition goals as could be expected from students without special needs. Students expressed interest in a wide variety of jobs and professions, including; working with animals (6), trades and apprenticeships (5), working in the hospitality and service industry (9). A minority of students hoped to move on to further education. College courses, institutes of technology, Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, and FÁS programmes were mentioned by students (10).

*I would do a job working in the cinema...give out tickets, give out tickets, give them the popcorn and clean up and stuff afterwards....I'd love it.*

(Male student, special school, rural)

*I don't have a clue...I'm only 17 like.*

(Female Student, special school, rural)

*Probably getting a job and going to college and doing a degree or something....doing like, doing engineering or whatever you are interested in.*

(Male Student, mainstream school, urban)

On the contrary, many teachers (13) spoke of transition options within the special needs sector, sheltered employment and services. Others viewed mainstream education programmes and vocational training as options available to students. While most students were career-
orientated, teachers generally spoke of further training and education transition options. These typically included the following:

- National Learning Network (NLN)
- PLC courses in areas such as childcare and Home Help
- FETAC Courses
- FÁS apprenticeships
- Sheltered training workshops attached to intellectual disability service providers.

[Regional Employment Agency] will pick them up, they go directly into employment into the crèches and shops and buildings as labourers, really they are usually not able for apprenticeships if they will take the kids on at their pace that provides them I think with additional social skills. And would provide them with at least some degree of protection … in a training environment.

(Teacher, mainstream school, urban)
Throughout the focus groups, the few students who spoke displayed a desire for a more career-orientated transition plan. Some wanted more information on career and education options (books, internet, job exhibitions, career guidance), while others felt that more work experience would be beneficial.

Some students indicated that the role of teachers as an important element of the transition process. A need for more time to plan was also expressed.

**Interviewer:** How do you think transition should be handled, so when you’re moving from school to outside?

### Table 4.3 What would students and parents/carers like included in the transition process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students (n.37)</th>
<th>Parents/carers (n.20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. More information on career and education options (books, internet, job exhibitions, career guidance)</td>
<td>1. Self-esteem building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. More work experience</td>
<td>2. Self-development, independence and life skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. More planning</td>
<td>3. Alternative methods of grading and rewarding students for their capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. More variety and options</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Student:** They should give you at least a few months work so you can get on your feet. (Male Student, Mainstream, urban)

Many parents/carers participating in focus groups shared an overwhelming sense of worry and concern. The parent/carer group indicated that they would like a school-based focus on building student’s self esteem. Related to this was the desire for more self-development and alternative methods of grading and rewarding students for their capabilities.

*It’s just self-esteem and confidence, and if they do not have self-esteem and confidence it’s very hard for them to stand on their own two feet. They are shy and quiet. They might have the ability alright, to be able to work on their own sometimes, but they need the backup as well and it’s very important to know where we are going.*

(Parent, mainstream school with special unit, rural)
Table 4.4  What challenges get in the way of successful transition?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents/carers</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Points system</td>
<td>1. Worry and uncertainty</td>
<td>1. Under-resourced transition process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Uncertainty and lack of guidance</td>
<td>2. The points system</td>
<td>2. Inadequacy of the traditional education system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Exclusion from the decision making process</td>
<td>4. Lack of options available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most striking challenge, for those who answered this question, was the points system. For many, the current system was a barrier to their career hopes and aspirations. Some were acutely aware of the inflexibility of the system, and expressed feelings of marginalisation, and hopelessness. Throughout all the focus groups, students expressed a great amount of uncertainty, while others displayed an acute awareness of the barriers to transition within the education system. Others felt that their preferred career or further education might be too stressful or difficult.

Well, see I love sport like, I always wanted to be a PE teacher but you need very high marks for that….But the stress of college…..Or the Gardaí I wanted to do - but you need a lot for that as well. (Male student, special school, rural)
Exclusion from the decision making process was indirectly raised by students. Some indicated that they were not the primary decision maker regarding their transition. Teachers (3) and parents/carers (2) were listed as decision makers by some students.

Many parents/carers expressed a great deal of worry and uncertainty regarding the student’s future prospects. One parent described it as a ‘big black hole after second level’ (15). Like students, parents/carers viewed the points system and the challenging curriculum as major barriers; this emerged in three of the focus group discussions.

*I feel that if she got into a course that she really enjoys, she may not need all the support that she has now because she’s doing something she loves. She doesn’t have all these other things, Irish, maths and biology and everything else to cope with.*

(Parent/carer, mainstream school with special unit, rural)

*That’s probably something that we all share if your child has a learning disability, it’s that you do not know, you can’t plan, you can’t plan any kid’s future, but it is much less clear.*

(Parent/carer, mainstream school, urban)

Teachers felt that a lack of resources limited the transition process. Some teachers believed lack of government support and financing was a challenge facing transition. Some felt that teachers needed further training to cope with the challenges they faced.
Well I don’t know if it’s available in the current year, but certainly up until very recently there was no special needs training.

(Teacher, mainstream school, urban)

Some teachers felt that the lack of a formal plan impeded transition outcomes. For example, one teacher reported that post-school placements are ‘uncoordinated, .....it’s kind of hit and miss’(Teacher, mainstream school, rural).

Others described what they perceived as the inadequacy of the traditional education system. They felt the traditional examination and teaching methods did not cater for students with special needs, resulting in students becoming excluded and isolated from mainstream education.

A minority of teachers believed that unrealistic student and parental expectations caused students to set goals too high. A small number felt that attitudes and stigma associated with the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme put pressure on students to take the traditional Leaving Certificate.

They (the students) have an idea of what they want, which is of course a fantastic job that is going to pay about €50,000 a year immediately, they are just going to walk in and it’s going to be real, real exciting all the time. (Teacher, special school, urban)
Table 4.5  Recommendations for the future development of transition planning and programming in the school based setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents/carer</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Access to information regarding transition options: (career guidance, internet access, books, and talks on transition).</td>
<td>1. Focus on social development and independence.</td>
<td>2. Personal skills development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Supports and development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some students mentioned the need for access to information regarding transition options, through sources such as career guidance, the internet, books, talks on transition and career exhibitions. Others hoped that more options would be made available for transitioning students. Some students recommended more preparation. Supportive relationships with teachers and parents were important for some students.

*I suppose more work experience would come in handy so it would. I can’t say the word…..variety….variety.*

(Male Student, mainstream school, rural)

*I think they should give more talks about like preparing you for what’s going to happen to you….like they have to know*

(Male Student, mainstream school, rural)
Teachers raised the issue of accreditation. They recognised the importance of FETAC and the LCA for providing qualifications to students with special needs.

*Every child wants to leave school with a certificate of some sort. So like we will have that in place.* (Teacher, mainstream school with special unit, rural)

Some teachers recommended creating links with other schools, and a more standardised transition programme across schools nationally. Similarly, some expressed a desire for more guidance and standardisation of transition programmes and planning.

*I suppose a transition programme, a formal transition programme that would be nationally accessible... for all schools, and that it would be a certified course, maybe. To give them recognition for it.*

(Teacher, special school, rural)

Others wanted a greater emphasis on personal and life skills development amongst students. For some teachers this involved very basic skills like crossing the road and handling money.

*I mean we take them downtown shopping, and the fact that _____ can decipher whether it is chocolate or something, or cocoa, that’s a very big bonus to him.*

(Teacher, mainstream school with special unit, rural)
Many parents/carers expressed a desire for more school-based supports, transition planning and vocational training in schools. Communication and support from teachers was another issue that arose in parent/carer focus groups. Some wanted more options, and more information on what options are available. Others desired a focus on employability and employment skills and school links with employers.

**Table 4.6 How can transition planning increase opportunities for future employability?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents/carer</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Career-focused planning</td>
<td>1. Social development</td>
<td>1. Further education and training after graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Self-esteem building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Independence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of students who spoke in the focus groups indicated they were career-orientated. Some expressed a desire for more career guidance, and information on the available options.

Teachers valued further education and training in accessing employment. Some recommended a programme between second level and employment to bridge the gap and build on vocational and life skills. Many of their recommendations would require increased funding. Teachers were extremely critical of what they perceived to be inadequate funding and resources allocated for transition planning. Some felt that more preparation and training in schools would benefit students. Professional supports (psychologists, social workers) were identified as links between transition and employment. A small number
believed that more realistic employment goals were needed, and that stigma attached to various training centres and the LCA programme needed to be addressed.

Many parents/carers favoured a greater focus on social development and independence.

Well I’d like to see him to have a good job, that’s important now, to me. I’d like to see him have a good job and good experience for himself. (Parent/carer, special school, rural)

4.2 Expert panel responses

Following the focus groups, representatives from a diverse range of stakeholder groups were contacted and asked to participate in a panel discussion. Education support services, teachers union representatives, second level management, disability advocates and parents groups, and educators were invited to share their views on a number of key themes that arose from the focus group interviews. Ten expert stakeholders participated in the expert panel.

A small number of themes were extracted from the focus group data. These themes reflected the opinions of teachers, students and parents/carers expressed in focus groups. An outline of these themes was distributed to, and discussed amongst, an expert panel. The expert panel offered further insights into and clarification of these themes. The six themes are listed below, along with expert panel commentary on each one.
Theme 1. *Transition planning*

**Expert panel verification**
There was strong agreement that planning was ad hoc and that there needed to be clear national specification for educational providers as to the nature of transition planning, if the needs of the students were to be met and aligned with their abilities. In line with this it was considered that the skills and abilities of students with intellectual disabilities were often underestimated. Training in special education was considered necessary if transition education was to be successfully implemented. Change was needed within schools to meet the needs of students with intellectual disabilities and this was considered to be a leadership issue within schools that require a whole school approach.

**Theme 2. Transition options**

**Expert panel verification**
Additional options that were identified included: Rehabilitative Training and Guidance Services (HSE) and the NCCA three year Leaving Certificate Transition Module Programme. In relation to third level options there was strong support for further development in this area. It was emphasised, however, that this may require flexibility in relationship to the HEA expectation that their level on the National Framework be compatible with levels five and over, which relate to undergraduate diploma and degree status. Collaboration between agencies was strongly recommended and referred to as inter-agency linking.
Theme 3. **Deficits in supports, training and resources**

**Expert panel verification**

There was general agreement that transition programming for students with intellectual disabilities was under-resourced, as it related to appropriate curriculum, and training for specialist staff. Within this context the lack of training in special needs within initial teacher training was also seen to create a gap in teacher skill acquisition. A cultural or administrative adaptation of school systems was recommended to enable funding for students to continue beyond their eighteenth birthday, to bridge the transition between school and work and /or further education. This may require a policy change at government level. The employment of dedicated staff to work between schools and work and third-level transition options was strongly recommended.

Theme 4. **Timeframe for successful transition**

**Expert panel verification**

It was agreed that transition should be seen as a lifelong process and that all staff should receive in–service training on transition for students with special needs. Special Education Support Service (SESS) was seen as being well positioned to provide such training, including ongoing carer consultation, after students left school.
Theme 5. Profiling of student needs and strengths as a basis of an individual plan

Expert panel verification
It was agreed that such profiling should create a link between schools and post-school providers of further education, work opportunities and/or day programme options.

Theme 6. The importance of work experience and career guidance.

Expert panel verification
There was support for a closer working relationship between schools and service providers, with school-based activities being broadened to include ‘bridge to work’ and/or further education activities.

4.3 School Survey

A survey of schools was undertaken, to verify the findings of the focus groups at a national level. The survey yielded quantitative data as well as a rich qualitative data in the form of additional comments provided by respondents.

4.3.1 General provision for students with intellectual disabilities

The vast majority of schools taking part reported that they provided some forms of support for transition; of the 310 participating schools, only four said that they provided no support and six did not answer this question.
However, the picture that emerged of the supports provided was initially quite complex. Respondents were free to choose any of four types of support and to indicate other forms of support through an open question. Participants could indicate as many of these types of supports as applied to their school.

As can be seen from Table 4.5, a wide variety of combinations were indicated by respondents.

**Table 4.7 Combinations of the transition support options across the different types of schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mainstream school</th>
<th>Mainstream with a special unit</th>
<th>Special school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N  %</td>
<td>N  %</td>
<td>N  %</td>
<td>N  %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career guidance</td>
<td>11  4</td>
<td>10  5</td>
<td>1  3</td>
<td>0  0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>0  0</td>
<td>0  0</td>
<td>0  0</td>
<td>0  0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits to potential post-school options</td>
<td>19  6</td>
<td>2  1</td>
<td>3  9</td>
<td>14  26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Other’</td>
<td>4  1</td>
<td>2  1</td>
<td>1  3</td>
<td>1  2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career guidance and work experience</td>
<td>27  9</td>
<td>23  11</td>
<td>3  9</td>
<td>1  2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career guidance and visits</td>
<td>26  9</td>
<td>23  11</td>
<td>2  6</td>
<td>1  2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career guidance and ‘other’</td>
<td>5  1</td>
<td>4  2</td>
<td>1  3</td>
<td>0  0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience and visits</td>
<td>13  4</td>
<td>4  2</td>
<td>1  3</td>
<td>8  15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits and ‘other’</td>
<td>3  1</td>
<td>0  0</td>
<td>0  0</td>
<td>3  6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career guidance, work experience and visits</td>
<td>116 38</td>
<td>101 46</td>
<td>8  25</td>
<td>7  13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Types and levels of transition options offered to students across school type and geographical region varied. Figure 4.1 and Tables 4.6 to 4.11 illustrate the level of transition options available across the different school types and geographically.

**Figure 4.1 Transition support options provided for students with intellectual disabilities, by school type**

- The most typical form of support was a combination of career guidance, work experience and visits to post-school options, which was provided by 116 (38 per cent) schools. In addition, 50 (16.4 per cent) schools provided this combination alongside additional forms of support, giving a total of 54.4 per cent.

- Career guidance is the backbone of support to facilitate transition from mainstream schools, provided by 91 per cent), but is much less prevalent in special schools (40 per cent) (see Table 4.8).
Visits to potential post-school options (96.4 per cent) and work experience (60 per cent) are the most common types of provision provided within special schools (see Table 4.8).

Chi-square tests were conducted to explore differences in the transition options offered across the three school types. Career guidance was offered significantly more often by mainstream schools (more than 80 per cent), including those with a special unit, than it was in the special schools (40 per cent) \( [\chi^2(2)=75.0, \ p=0.001] \). Provision of work experience during the transition period did not significantly differ across the three school types (\( p>0.05 \)). Visits to potential post-school options was a much more common component of the transition process in the special schools (>95 per cent) than in the two types of mainstream school (76 per cent and 81 per cent) \( [\chi^2 (2)=11.77, \ p=0.003] \). Other transition options were reported significantly more often by mainstream schools with a special unit and the special schools than they were by mainstream schools \( [\chi^2 (2)=9.14,p=0.01] \).

\[ ^7 \text{The chi square formula is used to test for statistical significance.} \]
Tables 4.8 to 4.13 illustrate the enormous variety in the options, timeframe and destinations offered across different school types. This strengthens the finding that emerged from the focus groups that provisions to facilitate transition from school can be somewhat variable, with some schools making extensive provisions and some providing very little.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of transition options</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mainstream school</th>
<th>Mainstream school with a special unit</th>
<th>Special school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career guidance*</td>
<td>249 (80.3)</td>
<td>199 (91.3)</td>
<td>26 (81.2)</td>
<td>22 (40.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>222 (71.6)</td>
<td>163 (74.8)</td>
<td>23 (71.9)</td>
<td>33 (60.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits to potential post-school options</td>
<td>246 (79.4)</td>
<td>165 (75.7)</td>
<td>26 (81.2)</td>
<td>53 (96.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>4 (1.3)</td>
<td>4 (1.8)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
<td>84 (27.1)</td>
<td>45 (20.6)</td>
<td>14 (43.8)</td>
<td>24 (43.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two options or less</td>
<td>110 (37.2)</td>
<td>72 (34.0)</td>
<td>12 (37.5)</td>
<td>28 (50.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three options or more</td>
<td>186 (62.8)</td>
<td>140 (66.0)</td>
<td>20 (62.5)</td>
<td>27 (49.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant difference across school type p<0.01
**Other (See page 107 for further details)
Table 4.9  Types and levels of transition options offered to students, by geographical location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition options</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career guidance*</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>(75.2)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>(67.3)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits to potential post-school options</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>(73.5)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(1.8)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>(22.1)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two options or less</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>(37.2)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three options or more</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>(62.8)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant difference across geographical region
**Other (See page 107 for further details)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition Planning</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Mainstream school</th>
<th>Mainstream school with special unit</th>
<th>Special School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before the end of primary school</td>
<td>20 (6.5)</td>
<td>16 (7.3)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before the Junior Certificate cycle finishes</td>
<td>55 (17.7)</td>
<td>49 (22.5)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the transition year programme</td>
<td>38 (12.3)</td>
<td>33 (15.1)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two years prior to leaving second-level school</td>
<td>99 (31.9)</td>
<td>64 (29.4)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the final year</td>
<td>70 (22.6)</td>
<td>40 (18.3)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19 (6.7)</td>
<td>13 (6.0)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>301 (97.1)</td>
<td>215 (98.7)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Responses</td>
<td>9 (2.9)</td>
<td>3 (1.3)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.11 Stage at which transition planning begins in post-primary schools, by geographic location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition planning</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th></th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th></th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before the end of primary school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(6.8)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(4.6)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(7.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before the Junior Certificate cycle Finishes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(9.4)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(18.5)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>(25.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the transition year programme</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(17.1)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(9.2)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Years Prior to leaving second level</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>(35.0)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>(32.3)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>(29.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the final Year</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>(20.5)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>(26.2)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>(21.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(6.0)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(6.2)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(6.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>(94.9)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>(96.9)</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>(99.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Responses</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(5.1)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(3.1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(0.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.12 Most common predicted destinations on leaving school across type of school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices of students on leaving school</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Mainstream schools</th>
<th>Mainstream schools with special unit</th>
<th>Special schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional courses</td>
<td>167 (54.8)</td>
<td>133 (61)</td>
<td>17 (53.1)</td>
<td>17 (30.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training centre</td>
<td>61 (20.0)</td>
<td>33 (15.1)</td>
<td>8 (25.0)</td>
<td>20 (36.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>29 (9.5)</td>
<td>27 (12.4)</td>
<td>2 (6.2)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19 (6.2)</td>
<td>2 (0.9)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>17 (30.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>276 (90.5)</td>
<td>195 (89.4)</td>
<td>27 (84.4)</td>
<td>54 (98.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No responses</td>
<td>29 (9.5)</td>
<td>23 (10.6)</td>
<td>5 (15.6)</td>
<td>1 (1.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.13 Most common predicted destinations on leaving school, by geographical location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices of students on leaving school</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional courses</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>(50.4)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training centre</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>(18.6)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(10.6)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(10.6)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>(90.3)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response to Q</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(9.7)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The prevalence of career guidance and work experience within schools did not vary systematically with geographical region [p>0.05]. However, visits to potential post-school options were operated more frequently by rural schools compared to those in urban locations [$\chi^2(2)=6.31$, p=0.04] (see Table 4.9 on page 99).

Comparisons were also conducted of the level of provision of transition options. For ease of analysis schools were divided into those that provided two options or less (n.110; 37.2 per cent), and those that provided three options or more (n.186; 62.8 per cent). No difference was found between mainstream schools, schools with special units or special schools in their level of provision [p>0.05]. There was however, varying levels and types of provision, with mainstream schools more likely to offer career guidance and special schools more likely to offer visits (see Table 4.8). Overall, as can be seen from Table 4.9, rural schools were more likely to provide a greater range of options to their students than urban and suburban schools [$\chi^2(2)=7.63$, p=0.02].

In the ‘Other’ category, respondents’ detailed additional school-based training and/or teaching which was provided to prepare people for transition, prior to, during or following their final school year. Such training included special transitional programmes, and was sometimes mentioned as being conducted in association with FETAC. In addition, multidisciplinary meetings were often mentioned which involved external agencies and advisors, such as those from the HSE, occupational guidance and placement officers, and also included active parental and family involvement. These meetings were typically described as geared towards identifying options for students, providing information and guidance towards
the optimum available placements and the development of individualised education plans (IEPs).

4.3.2 Specific transition plans for students

In addition to the quantitative data collected in the survey, some schools provided rich qualitative data on their specific plans.

(a) Mainstream schools

Of the mainstream schools, including those with a special unit, only ten (4.2 per cent) of the schools had developed specific plans to guide students with intellectual disabilities through the transition process, while 230 (95.8 per cent) had not. These transition plans all involved developing a focused plan for the individual student and usually involved a team of people working together.

Of the ten schools that provided specific transition plans, two were mainstream schools with special units and eight were regular mainstream schools. Six were in rural locations, three in suburban areas and one was in an urban location. Two schools gave detailed accounts of the transitions plans they implemented:

*Whatever resources or help students may require in the transition are identified and sought. We suggest that parents allow us release reports that may assist the next placement to prepare for students arrival. Occupational therapists, physiotherapists and experts in technological aids are contacted as necessary. We follow up on all students to check that transition has been made and*
students have adjusted well. Suggestion: Contact Access and AHEAD officers at Third Level to check number of students with intellectual disabilities and services offered to them. Ditto for disability officers.

(Mainstream mixed school, rural)

Whilst there is no formal transition programme in place in our school, a number of informal procedures are in place: 1) Liaison between student and Career Guidance dept., 2) Liaison between parent and Career Guidance dept., 3) Liaison between Special Education Needs Dept. and student/parent.

(Mainstream mixed school, urban)

(b) Special schools
Of the special schools, 47 (85.5 per cent) reported having a specific transition plan developed within the school. This was many more than in the mainstream schools, as such schools only admit students with intellectual disabilities. Only seven of the special schools surveyed did not have a transition plan, and one respondent commented that transition planning was ‘impossible as we are not informed about potential placements’ (special mixed school, urban).

The responses given by those who did have a transition plan were varied in terms of the detail provided and the nature of the plans described. Again this corroborates the finding from the focus groups and expert panel about the variable nature of transition planning. Despite this, thematic analysis indicated that transition planning appeared to comprise three key activities in special schools:

i. programmes
ii. Meetings
iii. visits

i. Programmes incorporated skill development, courses, assessments, work placements and exchange of information from school to the new placement. Programmes also included meetings and visits and involved greater transition planning over time. Information exchange here referred to ensuring that reports about the individual were used, rather than information about potential placement or employment options. Some schools attached additional details of their transition process which outlined the steps taken in the programme of transition. For example, one school provided a sheet of additional information and a leaflet about the ‘Bridge Project’, as described in the box below.

| 1) Address student's needs- priority needs (social skills, vocational skills and independent living skills main focus); |
| 2) Individualised planning involves choosing from a comprehensive 'menu' of skills included in eight learning areas (units are listed); |
| 3) Strong emphasis on personal development and social skills training. Students encouraged to take responsibility for many key aspects of their lives; |
| 4) A well planned work experience programme is introduced as soon as students are mature and ready to enter the 'world of work' - lots of preparation for this with staff coaching; |
| 5) Transition facilitators are from ______ (a human services agency)[; they] work closely with school and students and families to make decisions on after school placement; |
6) Students in transition are taught to manage their leisure time and access community amenities and facilities. Participation in transition is by voluntary participation of students and parents, high commitment is expected. (Special mixed school, suburban)

Another school gave a more detailed sheet about the programme of transition that they offered:-

Consultation with parents, support from psychology/social work, work experience, visits to post school options.

1) Parents, school principal and class teacher meet to discuss recommendations regarding future placement and other related issues;
2) School organises visits to _____(human services agency) and ______ (human services agency) or other relevant centre for pupils and their parents;
3) Follow up meeting with principal, teachers, parents and relevant multidisciplinary team members to discuss placement as per 1 above;
4) Parents make application to training centre of their choice as soon as possible after meeting at 3 above;
5) School organises students to go on work placement to the relevant centres during school day;
6) Relevant documents forwarded to relevant centre;
7) Graduation day for school leavers (each step had an attached time frame). (Special mixed school, suburban)
The meetings involved the development of a focused plan for the individual student by a team of people working together. The meetings were integral parts of the programmes described above but some schools mentioned meetings as the only aspect of transition planning. Often they included external agencies, potential service providers, health and education professionals, and parents. At these meetings, advice was given, post-school options were identified and discussed, the needs of the individual student were identified, and a plan of action was decided upon. Meetings also varied in the extent to which different groups were involved. Some meetings involved many different groups, including health and educational professionals, external agencies, and family members, whilst others involved only one or a few of such bodies. Some examples of the meetings held can be seen above, in the additional notes provided by some schools, and also in the quotes below:

*Occupational guidance advisor meets with teachers, parents and pupils to discuss suitable post-school placement in the pupil's final year.* (Special mixed school, suburban)

*Meet with Health Services Executive vocational advisor, who then meets with student and parents. Visits and work experience placement.* (Special mixed school, suburban)

Visits were often mentioned in association with the staged transition from school to different post-school options, such as work placements and day centres. These visits had various aims and involved different people. When the person with intellectual disabilities visited such sites,
these visits often seemed aimed at acclimatising the person to their new surroundings, typically a day centre. One school reported their transition process involved:

*Gradual introduction of the person to the new building, new staff – meet first in our building then progress to visit new building. Short stays increase over time. Return visit when students have moved fully.* (special mixed school, rural)

On occasion though, they did appear to be aimed at giving the person the opportunity to try out different post-school options.

*In final school year, students experience programmes available at adult services [for] block periods or one day per week within service provider. Training in independence skills (including travelling to/from the adult centre) is also provided. IEPs, programmes’ relevant information is [sic] also exchanged.* (Special School, Mixed, Urban)

In some instances, it was the professionals rather than the student with intellectual disabilities who undertook visits to potential post-school options, returning with information about different placement possibilities.

*The placement officer visits the school, meets the students, visits the home and outlines options.* (Special mixed school, suburban)
It is a matter of concern that students with intellectual disabilities were rarely mentioned as being supported in choosing where they wanted to move onto. In fact, the descriptions given tended to focus on the professional-parental partnership, and their role in making decisions about transitions. This is illustrated by the following quotation:

*The senior class teacher meets with parents and students. Local HSE staff also meet. Options are discussed and parents are brought to visit various options. Students go on various placements and decisions are made by parents following placements.* (Special mixed school, rural)

Some respondents also stated that there was very little meaningful choice available to people with intellectual disabilities in terms of post-school options.

*Visits to placements are available but they have very few choices.* (Special mixed school, urban)

As noted earlier, the activities around transition reported by the special schools tended to occur in the final year or the final few months of the final year of school.

*Introduction to unit head and staff members at the training workshop or new placement. Weekly visits during the last term of school to the training workshop.* (Special mixed school, suburban)
Placements also appeared to be very dependent upon the availability of resources and funding. For example, one school described the process as follows:

*The multidisciplinary team agrees with parents about the most suitable placement. School reports and all other reports are part of the referral, the student visits the placement – a report is completed by the placement manager and a place is offered depending on factors such as finance and staffing.* (Special mixed school, urban)

### 4.3.3 When transition planning begins

Among surveyed institutions, the modal response (n.99, 31.9 per cent) for when transition planning began was two years prior to leaving school. In total, 70.4 per cent of participants reported that transition planning in their institution began two years prior to leaving school, or earlier. However, almost one quarter of the schools surveyed, 22.6 per cent, reported that their transition planning began in the final year of school (see Table 4.810 on page 100).

Mainstream schools often began transition planning earlier than the special schools did. There was a significant difference in when transition planning began according to the type of school; special schools were significantly more likely to begin transition planning during the final year of secondary school, at 43.6 per cent, than the mainstream schools and mainstream schools with special units (both < 20%) \( \chi^2(2)=17.74, p=0.001 \). The stage
at which transition planning began did not differ significantly according to geographical location [p>0.05].

The participants indicating ‘other’ to this question mainly mentioned more specific details about when their planning process began. Some also pointed out that the time when transition planning starts will vary depending to some extent on the student, their academic progress, and their specific support needs. One respondent stated that special schools do not typically run the fourth year/transition year programme, and some respondents from special schools noted that transition planning for children with intellectual disabilities should begin earlier than it did at present within their institutions.

4.3.4 Likely student destinations upon leaving school

Participants were asked to rank what they thought were the most likely destinations for students with intellectual disabilities upon leaving school. By far the most likely destination (54.8 per cent) identified was further education, including FETAC, National Learning Network or third level courses (see Table 4.12 on page 102). However, going on to vocational training centres was a more likely destination for students from special schools.

Rankings of most likely first destination was not related to the geographical location of the school [p>0.05]. However, likely post-school destinations did significantly differ according to the type of school [$\chi^2(2)=26.6$, p=0.001]. As can be seen in Table 4.12, students from special schools were much more likely to go on to vocational training centres or to other post-school options compared to the students with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools.
Mainstream school respondents predicted more students to progress on to employment and additional training courses than those from special schools (see Table 4.12). Further study needs to be taken to ascertain the actual post-school destinations of students with intellectual disabilities; unfortunately this area of investigation was beyond the scope of this survey.

As respondents from the special schools often reported alternative post-school options for their students (n.37, 67.3 per cent), these were explored further. The most common alternative mentioned by participating schools was attending a day centre (n.16, 29 per cent). This included activation centres, which were often seen as an option for students with more moderate to profound intellectual disabilities. It was felt by some that additional training and employment were not appropriate for some people.

*The only option is activation type day service, our students are not suitable for training or employment because they have severe to profound intellectual disability and autism.*  
(Special mixed school, urban)

The other most commonly reported alternatives were rehabilitation programmes aimed at skill development (n.7, 12.7 per cent), sheltered employment and workshops (n.6, 10.9 per cent), and staying at home (n.6, 10.9 per cent). Instances of students staying at home were reported, which some respondents of the survey ascribed to funding issues. This was seen as being highly detrimental to young people with intellectual disabilities, resulting in an absence of meaningful activity and engagement during their daily lives.
This year has seen an increase in children sitting at home due to the decrease in funding. (Special mixed school, urban)

They do nothing and remain at home. (Special mixed school, Urban)

For the mainstream schools and those with a special unit, participants also reported that many of their students with intellectual disabilities gain apprenticeships or enter local sheltered work places. Also, as mentioned by some respondents from special schools, some participants from mainstream institutions commented that students with intellectual disabilities ‘may end up doing nothing’.

All of our special needs students are encouraged to further education. On leaving us all would have a course to attend but many leave these courses and end up doing nothing. (Mainstream girls school with a special unit, suburban)

4.3.5 Thematic analysis of additional qualitative comments

Schools participating in the survey were invited to add further comments by means of an open ended question. Approximately 41 per cent (n.127) took the opportunity to do so, yielding rich qualitative data, which was themed and analysed. The main theme related to factors which impact on the quality of transition planning and experiences. The findings that emerged from this analysis are listed below. Quotations are used to illustrate individual views, views of schools and general consensus issues.
Variability

One of the consistent observations throughout this research has been that the support through transition can vary quite significantly both across and within the types of school surveyed. A number of participants suggested factors on which this variability may depend; these include student numbers, the characteristics of the individual students and their family, as well as the availability of guidance, in-house courses and facilities that impact on the transition process.

As our school has a small group of final year students, approximately 40, students receive a lot of individual attention from both the guidance counsellor, SEN department, and subject teachers, so each students' needs can be accommodated.

(Mainstream boys school with a special unit, urban)
The students own capabilities and / or the families' ability to cope will often determine the transition. (Mainstream girls’ school, suburban)

Quite a few schools commented that their transition programmes were still being developed. In many cases this was because the school has had limited experience with students with intellectual disabilities or had only been founded recently. In other cases, however, it was clear that lack of capacity was the problem.

We would benefit from more analysis of this transition and more reflection on it but time is our greatest enemy. (Mainstream mixed school, suburban)

The availability and quality of post-school options

Again this theme confirmed the focus group finding. A number of survey participants expressed a viewpoint that, in reality there is little choice available. This was attributed to the limited options and lack of placements available for their students with disabilities when they graduate. Comments were made regarding students having insufficient guidance following school, no real choice over where they went, with few opportunities for further education or training.

Students with intellectual disabilities are left with very little guidance when they leave school.

(Mainstream mixed school, rural)
For school leavers the choices are EXTREMELY limited.
(Mainstream mixed school with a special unit, rural)

There was a call for more post-school options for pupils with disabilities. Specifically, the need to provide Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses for students with intellectual disabilities.

We feel that PLCs need to begin to offer the same support to students with learning difficulties as do the universities and ITs [institutes of technology] in the context of SLD [Specific Learning Difficulty] students. (Mainstream girls’ school, urban)

In some cases participants added that they believed that the limited options available were related to geographical isolation; this issue was also mentioned by members of the focus groups.

It is very difficult for students in rural areas to travel to larger towns and cities. Accommodation with special needs assistants or [a] ‘buddy’ system would be beneficial. (Mainstream mixed school, rural)

Some schools felt that more time to prepare students for post-school options was desirable.

I would prefer if we could have a longer transition period and were able to identify adult placement earlier. (Special mixed school, rural)
Additional support for transitioning students with disabilities

Quite a number of participating schools expressed a strong desire for clearer guidance and supports from the Department of Education and Skills, to facilitate them in working with pupils with intellectual disabilities. Some offered suggestions about the kinds of support they would like to see in place. These formed a number of sub-themes. Additional professional support and guidance was desired by some schools. Other suggestions included ex-trainees coming to describe their experiences after school, external agencies helping to plan with the pupil and teaching staff, and designated disability officers to provide advice on options and to act on behalf of the students with intellectual disabilities.

*It would be useful to have access to a disability officer to advise female students in particular of suitable job placements/training*

(Mainstream mixed school, rural)

*MOST of LCAs [Leaving Certificate Applied students] are left on dole - they need to be individually placed.........One person needs the responsibility for this.* (Mainstream mixed school, suburban)

Some schools expressed a need for the following:

- Best practice guidelines
- Information on employment, education and training options available to students
- General guidance on how to implement transition planning and preparation for students.
We would like to share the best experiences / practice from other schools collected in your research. (Mainstream mixed school with a special unit, rural)

One school raised an interesting point in regards to the need for more training for staff working in post-school destinations. This highlights the need for expertise at all levels of transition support.

People who work in adult training centres don't have an educational background. It can fall flat for the students and they can encounter difficulties. (Special mixed school, suburban)

Lack of funding resources and staffing issues

Some schools identified the lack of school resources and funding as a barrier to successful transition outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities. The long waiting period for families to learn if services were available to them was also raised as a cause of concern. This was identified as a considerable source of tension and stress, impacting negatively on the family and the school’s ability to provide a person-centred transition that focuses on the needs of the individual. This finding relates to the lack of resources for planning noted in other sections of the survey findings and focus group findings.

As funding is a serious problem, we cannot transition our students who require skills development/activation. These students may not know until August/September each year if they have a place. This is [a] very stressful time for parents. (Special mixed school, urban)
Extra staffing in the final term (or during July education) would help greatly to enable the child to be accompanied to their new centre without impacting negatively on the other pupils in the school. (Special mixed school, urban)

For a number of schools, the economic recession and proposed budgetary educational cutbacks seem to pose a particular threat to successful transition. Some schools were extremely critical of the current government’s policy.

The current downturn in the economy allied to the savage cuts in the education sector announced in the budget [referring to the budget in April 2009] will have a severely negative effect on the most vulnerable in our schools. (Mainstream mixed school, rural)

A number of respondents from special schools commented on the poor quality of services that were available to their students after school.

Services for children with disabilities is abysmal, awful, especially children with psychiatric problems are neglected. We fail them and they end up through the courts. (Special mixed school, urban)

The need for the government to provide additional supports to schools in the form of a formal post for a Special Needs Educational Co Ordinator (SENCOs) was suggested by one participant as a potential solution in supporting the transition of students leaving school.

Please use any influence you may have to lobby Government for the provision of a SENCO. (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator)

---

A special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) is a teacher who is responsible for special educational needs within schools. All schools in the UK have a SENCO and they work with other teachers and with parents to ensure that the needs of pupils, who are identified as having special educational needs, are met within the school. SENCOs are available in UK (Source: www.surreycc.gov.uk/.../Special+ needs+co-ordinator+, educational+ Accessed September 24th 2010).
This will solve the problem of transition and significantly reduce pressure on the management of our schools. (Mainstream boys' school, rural)

The importance of personalised transition

A number of schools drew attention to the importance of personalised transition guidance and planning being tailored to and suiting the pupil with disabilities. This involved both the pupil and their family and involved consideration of the strengths and support needs of the individual pupil and their choices and wishes. However, there was some variation in the degree to which this was being implemented on a school to school basis.

Each student is worked with individually. No two students are the same. We try to identify their strengths and abilities and try to work on raising self-esteem and ability to be independent. (Mainstream, mixed school with a special unit, suburban)

We work individually with students and parents if they attend parent-teacher meetings. (Mainstream, mixed school, suburban)
The perceived impact of the level of intellectual disability on transition

Findings from the focus groups suggested that the traditional education system and curriculum have failed to recognise the individual needs of students with intellectual disabilities. Responding schools also mentioned the cognitive level of the person with intellectual disability as a factor that affects transition. They commented on how this can have an impact on the extent to which people are included in the transition process, on the post-school options available and on the best ways of handling the transition process.

*Transition to employment / training depends on the severity and form of intellectual disabilities. Special needs co-ordinator and learning support as well as guidance would be involved and decisions are often made on a case by case basis.* (Mainstream, mixed school, rural)

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Special Needs Assistants

Participants generally discussed the LCA in a very positive light. Those that commented on it noted that it prepared students well for leaving school, provided support and work placement opportunities, and, those that did not already offer it this programmesaid that they would like to. This finding contrasts with the finding from the focus groups, that students with disabilities and their families felt negatively labelled by the LCA. This suggests that the teachers appear to be more positive about the LCA than the families and students. A number of teachers in focus groups highlighted what they perceived as stigma or social undesirability attached to the LCA.
The LCA programme is very supportive towards students with disabilities. I would love to see it offered in more schools. (Mainstream mixed school, suburban)

Similarly, when participants discussed the role of Special Needs Assistants it was generally in a very positive fashion.

Also, I would like to emphasise that without the huge input from Special Needs Assistants, none of our success would have happened. (Mainstream mixed school, suburban)

4.4 Summary of findings

It appears that most of the responding schools provide some support in the transition of their students with intellectual disabilities, although the quality, type and amount of this support varied greatly. The survey findings confirm that there is no standardised approach to transition planning and implementation. The way transition processes operate appears to vary according to the type of school and, to a lesser degree, its geographical location.

Career guidance, work experience and visits to possible post-school sites were commonly reported as methods that schools use to support their students with intellectual disabilities through the process. Career guidance was more common in mainstream schools whilst visits to possible post-school sites were the most common form of support provided in special schools and those situated in rural locations.
The majority of transition planning occurred over the last two years of schooling, except in the case of the special schools where it tended to occur during the final year.

More special schools had specific, formal transition plans than the mainstream schools, including those with a special unit. Plans varied substantially, ranging from full programmes to meetings or visits only.

Upon leaving school, schools reported that some people with intellectual disabilities go on to do additional training and courses or attend a rehabilitation centre to develop their skills. Very few people were reported to move into paid employment, though some went on to supported employment options. A number of people were reported as having moved on to segregated day centres or sheltered employment, and potentially more limiting still, it was reported that some school leavers with disabilities were now at home with no meaningful pursuits.
CHAPTER 5  Discussion

5.1  Introduction

This report presents the findings of a study conducted in Ireland between 2008 and 2009 to determine what transition practices were in place for students with intellectual disabilities, aged 16 to 18 years of age, as they prepared to leave mainstream and special secondary schools. The purpose of the study was to document what was happening for these students prior to, and upon leaving, secondary school, with a view to documenting best practice, gaps in transition practices and recommendations to overcome those gaps. In addition, this study aimed to investigate the options that students have available to them during and beyond the transition process and to review satisfaction levels with current transition arrangements and transition programmes.

5.2  Understanding transition

As part of the focus group process, it was considered important to gain an insight into the participants’ understanding of the term ‘transition’ before exploring transition for students with intellectual disabilities leaving school. The results that emerged indicated that there was some confusion around this term, predominantly among members of the student groups. Focus group data indicated that it was the first time many of the students had been questioned on their future career or educational prospects. Despite being the largest participant group (n.37), the smallest proportional of focus group data came from students. Students appeared unfamiliar with the term and did not appear empowered to participate in an informed discussion. Teachers, on the other hand, gave more detailed explanations, while
parents/carers responses varied. The variety of responses between and within groups indicated that the concept of transition from post primary schooling to adult life ranges widely among the primary stakeholders. This may be partly explained by the variability in transition planning outlined by the focus group participants and the survey of schools. It calls into question the level of participation among students in the transition process. This reflects the study by Martin et al. (2006) that found students spoke for 3 per cent of the time during their transition planning meetings, despite the perception of teachers directing the meeting who reported students making greater contributions. The gaps in student responses oppose the quality indicators set out by the Beach Centre which recommends student views ‘should be listened to and respected, and (students should) be involved in all the decisions made’ (Beach Centre, 2002: 1). This could reflect the way in which transition is communicated to students. If this is the case, it is critically important that more is done to involve students, so as to ‘listen and respect’ their opinions and recommendations throughout the transition process.

5.2.1 Student, Parent/carer Aspirations

Over the course of the focus groups, students expressed a desire for greater emphasis on vocational transition provision, and information on post-school options. There was an overwhelming sense of career-orientation in student focus group data. Students recommended that more information on post-school options should be made available; this would require more school-based resources. Currently, there appears to be a gap between student aspirations and the reality of the limited post-school options available. Schools participating in the survey reported that Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, FETAC, National Learning Network or
third level courses were possible post-school destinations for students with intellectual disabilities. Few students were expected to transition straight from school to employment, and some students were acutely aware of the barriers preventing successful transition to paid employment. A Welsh study by Beyer and Kaehne (2008) found that professionals favoured education options over employment because this was a more tried and tested method that provided a clearer destination for students. This finding, however, fails to address student wishes, instead opting for the safer option.

The points system was identified as a major barrier to transition. Under the current accreditation system, entry to universities and other third level institutions is based on a points system which rewards points for traditional subjects like English, Irish and maths. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is an alternative method of accreditation, focusing on vocational training; it is not however accepted by all third level institutions. This marginalises and excludes students from access to third level education and training in Ireland. As a result, students with intellectual disabilities are put at a huge social disadvantage because some third level institutions are failing to recognise their abilities and academic achievements. This has the potential to create a culture of lifelong dependency, whereby people with intellectual disabilities are denied the opportunity to live meaningful and financially independent lives. The student focus groups confirmed that students aspire to be independent and successful at their chosen career.

Parents/carers expressed a desire for more life skills training and self esteem building. Parents/carers had little knowledge of both the post-school transition options available and school based transition planning. The additional comments made by schools suggested that the level at which parents/carers were consulted on the transition processes varied from
school to school. Like students, many parents/carers participating in focus groups were acutely aware of the barriers and challenges to transition; these included the points system, access to third level and the ability of students to cope with pressures of transition.

5.2.2 Student and family involvement

During the focus groups, both students and parents/carers displayed little or no knowledge of formal transition plans. Furthermore, none of these participants reported having been involved in preparing an individualised transition plan for students moving on to post-school options. Although there was some indication of parental involvement in the qualitative component of the survey findings, evidence from focus groups suggests that involvement of the students with intellectual disabilities in any decision making around transition was severely lacking; this is reflected by the small numbers of responses from students. This indicates a huge gap in terms of student participation, and has implications for the collaboration and balance of power between professionals and people with intellectual disabilities and their family members.

This lack of involvement of parents/carers and students in the development of an individual plan is at odds with the recommendations for school leavers set out by the NCSE. The NCSE recommend that it is important that the young person be involved in transition planning and that the views of carers and/or an advocate should also be taken into consideration. In addition, the quality indicators as developed by the Kansas Transition Systems Change Project (Beach Centre, 2002) include the involvement of family members and active participation of students in the development of their transition Individualised Education Plan (IEP).
Data collected from parent/carer focus groups highlighted the worry and uncertainty experienced by parents and other family members of students with intellectual disabilities. The extent to which parents/carers reported being in contact with schools varied on a school to school basis. Qualitative comments from the survey showed that some schools include meetings with parents as part of the transition process.

Tarleton (2004) highlighted that a lack of planning led to uncertainty and stress for parents. The earlier Irish study of IEPs (O’Brien, Kenny and Mahoney, 2006) also indicated the need for parents in Ireland to be closely aligned with the IEP process. In fact it was seen as a means of ensuring that the school and family unit collaborated in a manner that brought them closer together as a team in facilitating the agreed outcomes for the student. In addition to teacher training, family members could also be offered in service training alongside teachers on how to collaborate in the transition planning process. Families working as allies in the process is in keeping with the concept of a reliable alliance (Simpson, Hornby, Davies, and Murray, 2006) between professionals and families. Such an alliance is premised on the need for families and professionals to have a shared understanding of how to plan and implement the successful transition for the student with intellectual disabilities from school to the wider world of work, training or study.

5.2.3 Collaboration in planning and IEPs

The best practice guidelines put forward by Heslop et al. (2002) suggested that there should be effective inter-agency co-ordination and collaboration during transition planning. There was some evidence, from the survey
responses, of collaborative meetings and planning occurring for transition in special schools. The issue of school to school collaboration arose from a thematic analysis of school comments. Many comments highlighted the need for more guidance and training to meet the needs of students with intellectual disabilities. Similarly, some teachers in focus groups expressed a desire for more guidance and training. One mainstream school commented on how it would be beneficial to share best practice with other schools. One explanation for the variability in transition planning was the relative inexperience and underdevelopment of special needs education in certain schools.

A survey carried out by the NCSE found that 39.7 per cent of special schools surveyed claimed to have links with other mainstream schools (NCSE, 2009:106). These links included work experience for transition year students, and visits from teachers and SNAs to special schools (NCSE, 2009). Those who were involved in the collaborative process however, varied across schools. Collaboration was a major finding of the O'Brien et al. (2006) study regarding investigating resources required for generic IEPs. The collaboration for the generic IEP was to be built around the person, the family, school based personnel and relevant therapy staff.

Transition IEPs open up a new challenge. Will there be a separate form of collaboration for the transition plan? Simpson et al. (2006) advocated a collaborative planning alliance, developed for the student and family on entry into the school with the membership being added or modified as the student moves through the stages of his/her schooling (Turnball and Turnbull, 2002). In this model, transition collaboration would happen with the same core group but would also involve additional members to support post-school options and interests. In other words, the study found that
collaborative planning was organic. It grows from the needs of the student around the student and moves with the student across the various transition stages of his/her schooling. The suggested role and work of such a transition planning group is addressed in the recommendations outlined in the next chapter.

5.2.4 Variety in preparation and planning

The results of this study indicate that there is wide variety in the forms of planning taking place in schools and that there is inconsistency in the level provision of programmes across the country. The survey of schools found that transition planning varies across settings, with individual schools placing varying levels of emphasis on different components of the process. These components included career guidance, work experience and visiting centres providing post-school options. Transition provision varied according to school type, with carer guidance being most common in mainstream schools, and visits and work experience most common in special schools.

In terms of the planning and preparation, the experience of focus group participants varied significantly in the provision of supports, ranging from extensive to very little support received. Many teachers expressed frustration with what they perceived as a lack of standardisation and guidance in transition planning. The findings from the survey data indicated that rural schools were significantly more likely to provide visits and a wider range of preparation options to students than urban schools were, reflecting the close knit nature of community groups, a finding that is in keeping with the work of Dixon and Reddacliff (2001) who suggest that family linkages are most valuable in securing work placement for their sons and daughters.
Some schools commented that their programme was ‘still in development’ and highlighted that they had ‘limited experience with intellectual disability’. The opinions expressed by the expert panel group members agreed that planning is often ad hoc and generally down to individual teachers in individual schools. Other reports indicated that unless there is school leadership driving the planning process, it is unlikely to happen. This repeats the findings in the study conducted at the Norah Fry Research Centre (Heslop et al., 2002) which found that the quality of transition planning in the UK varied widely and in some cases was ‘ad hoc’, ‘confused and uncoordinated’.

Variety in transition planning and access to resources from school to school could create inequality of student outcomes. The current situation risks putting some students at a disadvantage, depending on the type of school they attend. A more equitable situation could be created if all schools created an IEP for all students with special needs. Student-centred planning is needed to bridge the gap between schools.

Over 80 per cent (n.44/55) of the special schools and 4 per cent (10/240) main stream schools (including those with a special unit) reported having individual plans for students with intellectual disabilities, however, the implementation process varied. It was reported in both the survey and focus groups that insufficient time was available for the transition process and that this would likely impede any attempt to include students in the planning and decision making process. As stated earlier, social desirability bias is a commonly reported feature of surveys, therefore we need to be aware that schools may over-report the level of transition planning which they provide. This could also account for the more positive reporting of
transition processes from the survey findings when compared to the analysis of the focus groups which indicated a less robust approach.

Such findings indicate that a number of schools are not currently following best practice for transition; this compares unfavourably to schools in the UK where Heslop et al. (2002) found that 80 per cent of students with learning difficulties left school with a transition plan. Similar findings were reported in the US National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) (Levine, Levine, Marder, Wagner, 2004) which was conducted in 2005. That study found that 60 per cent of students with intellectual disabilities had started their transition planning at 14 years of age. Nevertheless these figures highlight that there are significantly more students in the US leaving secondary schooling with a transition plan when compared to the Irish experience.

One possible explanation for variation is the relatively short history of IEPs in Ireland. IEPs were only legislated in Ireland in 2004 with the NCSE IEP guidelines subsequently released in 2006. Moreover, this is not yet mandatory as this element of the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act has not commenced yet. Findings are in keeping with the outcomes of the O'Brien et al., (2006) study that reported that schools in Ireland were requesting training and resources to be able to implement the IEPs. They also reported that schools were limited in their capacity to conduct the required individualised assessment prior to preparing mandatory IEP’s. Transition planning however should not be reliant upon specialist therapeutic assessment but rather placed within the context of teacher/student skills and abilities, particularly of those teachers with an interest in career guidance and vocational development.
If all stakeholders were recognised as being the experts in this area and if teachers were given an appropriate amount of training, then it would be hoped that a follow up study would reveal that more than the present 4.1 per cent of mainstream schools had a specific and individualised transition plan for students with intellectual disabilities.

5.2.5 School-based transition

Alternatives to the Leaving Certificate are being implemented, but this also varies from school to school. Students, teachers, and parents/carers expressed concerns about the barriers created by the points system, and the centrality of academic achievement in the Irish education system. A range of comments given in the survey phase of the study indicated that schools generally considered the LCA as providing a basis for transition planning due to its emphasis on vocational preparation and work experience modules. The LCA allows students to choose two specialisms from the following list:

- Agriculture/horticulture
- Hotel catering and tourism
- Engineering
- Technology
- Office administration and customer care
- Childcare/community care
- Graphics and construction studies
- Craft and design
- Hair and beauty
- Information and communications technology
- Active leisure studies.

(Second Level Support Service, 2010)
Interestingly, many of these job areas were mentioned by students in the focus groups as post-school destinations options. However, it was unclear whether this reflected actual student aspirations or if these were the only options communicated to students with intellectual disabilities.

As highlighted by the focus group and survey responses, the LCA programme is not available in all schools and some recommended that this option be provided across all secondary schools in the country. Currently, there are 386 schools in the Republic of Ireland listed as offering the LCA programme on the Second Level Support Service database (SLSS, 2010). Figures from November 2006 show that there were ten special schools offering the LCA in Ireland (Department of Education, 2006). Some focus group participants highlighted the negative effect of the social stigma that was associated with the LCA on its uptake among students with intellectual disabilities.

5.2.6 Student-centred planning

Training on how to work with families is only one part of the evolving picture. The issue of meeting the academic, social and cultural needs of the students within the process of transition has also emerged. The ‘quality indicators of exemplary transition programmes’ (Beach Centre, 1996) address this issue; they promote the view that instructional programmes need to be tailored to the students’ individual needs and interests.

The Beach Centre indicators also state that teachers in regular academic and vocational courses should be provided with assistance from special education teachers to adapt their instruction and curriculum to meet the
diverse needs of SEN students and to ensure their education rights. This has implications for the Irish scene and raises the challenge of integrating SEN students into mainstream classes, which could enhance the individual’s transition outcomes. A model that is being worked on at present within Trinity College Dublin is the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities into a series of classes of interest across a broad range of academic disciplines, such as zoology, history, drama (Kubiak and Espiner, 2009). Within this project, the lecturing staff and peer mentors attending the same classes are offered training through the National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID). If it can occur within a third level environment it should be able to be replicated within the second level system. The outcomes to date suggest that the students without disabilities are gaining as much in terms of their own further careers as are the NIID students.

Other options that were discussed in the focus groups involve schools being able to be resourced to deliver FETAC courses. Teaching staff would require additional preparation time to develop them and have them approved by FETAC. It may be possible for a Transition Certificate to be developed using already approved FETAC courses. If this was to develop then second level school staff, members of the National Training Network, providers of Rehabilitation Training and third level providers need to come together to collaborate on developing the content and delivery.

5.2.7 Career guidance and work experience

A major theme which emerged from both the focus group discussions and analysis of survey comments was the reported benefits of work experience and career guidance in the preparation of students moving into the world of work. Students in focus groups revealed they had career goals and
aspirations to move on to mainstream employment settings. Some expressed a desire for more vocational training and guidance to realise these goals. These findings concur with the reports from the Norah Fry Research Centre in the UK (Heslop et al., 2002) which found that parents included work experience and link placements as positive aspects of transition planning, as they built on life skills and self esteem for students.

The survey findings of the present study indicated that both career guidance and work experience proved to be the most prevalent forms of provision in preparing students in mainstream schools. However this was not the case in the special schools where career guidance was seldom given; instead, visits to potential post school options were the most prevalent forms of preparation in this setting. During focus groups, some teachers were more concerned with teaching very basic life skills to such students. They felt that students with more severe cognitive impairment and higher support needs are less likely to be able to engage in the career guidance process. Further investigation of the transition experience for these students could help identify methods of increasing involvement, inclusion and development which may prevent them from being engaged in segregated day centres or workshops and being more included in society.

The survey found that career guidance was offered in most schools and was considered the main form of transition support within the mainstream schools. However, it is not clear that this guidance is particularly useful for or tailored to the needs of students with intellectual disabilities. The feedback from the focus groups highlighted the need for more provision in the area of career guidance and it was one of the specific recommendations made by the students who took part in the study. Further work on the quality of such supports should be guided by students, families and staff.
working within special needs education. Liaising with these key stakeholder groups could help identify more effective guidance, supports and mechanisms which could improve students’ experience of transition.

Members of the expert panel stated that there was a need to increase the provision of work experience but they also highlighted that an increase in services in this area could not be achieved without sacrificing other resources. This group also suggested that in order for components such as career guidance and work experience to be successful, the expertise within the schools would need to be broadened. Likewise, teachers expressed the need for more special needs training, while some schools required more professional expertise to support transition programmes. It was highlighted that the placement of students can become ‘hit and miss’ with some school areas having a greater connection to service providers and to supportive businesses that are willing, able and committed to work with students within supported work programmes.

5.2.8 Assessments and individual profiles/plans

A strong recommendation made by schools in relation to the preparation and planning for students leaving school was that they have their needs and strengths assessed. As this had not been a priority within schools it was argued that this should be rectified and now be done prior to the student’s departure. However, if transition planning and assessment is placed within the context of the proposed ongoing planning alliance then it would be embedded within and seen as the last stage of the not yet mandatory IEP planning process for all students. The planning team is required to meet annually in order to meet the requirements of the EPSEN Act.
Schools surveyed have also called for a profile of each student’s requirements to form the basis of their individualised transition plan. In keeping with the ‘quality indicators’ (Beach Centre, 1996) this needs to be a person-centred approach that organically builds upon the student’s strengths, capabilities, interests, and preferences. What needs to be avoided is transition planning being seen as a separate entity. Transition activities need to grow out of what has gone before, otherwise students may not have enough time to make the transition if it is seen as a separate process that takes place in the last two years of the students’ schooling.

Jacobsen (2003) identified key factors for the successful development of the transition to work with provisions, which included training packages to suit the individual learner, and finding out at the start of the course what area of employment the learner is interested in and what employment opportunities are locally available. Comments provided on the completed questionnaires indicated that some schools worked towards making decisions for students on an individual, case by case basis. Other schools reported that they worked towards identifying strengths and abilities and focused on raising self-esteem and independence. There was, however, little evidence of direct consultation with students in the focus group and survey findings.

A number of teachers and parents/carers from the focus groups stressed the need to assess the strengths of the students and to review these regularly. The recommendations from the expert panel also highlighted the need for any transition plan to be specifically crafted to meet the students’ abilities and needs. These recommendations tie in with research carried out by Viner (1999) who highlighted the need for transition services to
review their practices regularly in order to be sensitive to the changing needs of young people with intellectual disabilities and to adapt their services accordingly.

5.2.9 Specific, formal programme with training and support

Research carried out by Barron et al. (2007) highlighted the need for specifically designed programmes to facilitate the smooth transition from school to adult services. Similarly, the results from the survey of this study indicated that schools felt they would benefit from a specifically developed transition programme, which relates to a Certificate in Transition Education approved by FETAC as mentioned earlier. The participants in the expert panel indicated that it is essential that there be a clear national specification on transition, with buy-in from all education providers. In this regard, the survey comments also suggested that specific material (worksheets or curriculum guidelines around career preparation for students with special educational needs) should be prepared and delivered to guidance counsellors to include further special needs training. In addition it was noted that career guidance teachers are not provided with specific training to enable them to support students with additional needs who may not follow the traditional CAO system. It was noted that this would be a welcome support to career guidance teachers. Finally, the expert panel suggested that there is a need for general training and guidance for school personnel to help them to support students with intellectual disabilities transitioning from school. The comments from the panel discussion indicated that the lack of staff training in this area resulted in a situation whereby staff were making efforts to plan and make transition provision but essentially had ‘no clue’ how to do this due to a lack of specialised training.
5.2.10 External support

The results from the focus group data highlighted the need for the provision of a range of external supports to schools in particular, from agencies such as the HSE and FÁS. The feedback from a number of the special schools indicated that they currently benefit from the support of HSE career advisors and FÁS advisors. Additional comments received from the survey questionnaire also suggested that input from external agencies would be beneficial to schools ‘in developing a guide’. A comment from one of the mainstream schools indicated that ‘a disability officer would be useful to give advice’. This perspective was reinforced during the expert panel group meeting where it was recommended that the IEP process should comprise more stakeholders than the school staff dealing with the students. The survey findings did indicate that in some instances this was occurring, though the degree to which it was happening is still unknown.

Research carried out by Viner (1999) supports the view that the planning process for young people with disabilities should involve a broad range of professionals. Viner identified one of the key elements for effective transition planning as a co-ordinated transfer process which would involve professionals concerned with the various strands of a young person’s life such as health and social needs. A more detailed suggestion was made at the expert panel meeting about the possibility of staff from the National Learning Network (NLN) working with schools in the preparation and planning of students prior to leaving school. However, it was highlighted that there would need to be an acknowledgment and agreement around the potential for the NLN to work with schools. The feedback from the expert panel also recommended the sharing of good practices between schools and highlighted the need for an official transfer of information from the
second level school setting to their post-school setting. However, it was emphasised that service providers would need buy-in from the Department of Education and Skills and the schools in order to enable them to share information on a formal level. This relates to the fact that further education providers do not have a formal avenue to request information on students transferring to their service and that they generally rely on the schools to provide the relevant information. It was reported that all services need to work together in sharing information, and be explicitly supported by the Department of Education and Skills in doing so. This recommendation ties in with the area of interagency collaboration which is another of the ‘quality indicators of exemplary transition programmes’ as reported by the Beach Centre, 1996. This process involves different agencies sharing programme resources and developing interagency agreements and policies that directly benefit the student’s development and transition.

5.2.11 Link person and collaboration

The participants from the focus groups indicated that the students would benefit if there was increased collaboration between schools and allied professionals. The need for a Special Educational Co-ordinator (SENCO) with special responsibility in the area of transitions to move the process forward was also highlighted. This suggestion was re-iterated in the survey comments which indicated that a SENCO would ‘provide solutions to the difficulties’. This recommendation ties in with Viner (1999) who outlined that a co-ordinated transfer process requires clearly identified professionals who can identify the various strands of young person’s health and social needs and co-ordinate their access to the appropriate adult facilities. One service provided in the UK which appears to provide the role of a link person is called Connexions. This service works to ensure that every
young person with a disability, up to the age of 25, has a personal advisor to help them negotiate leaving school and entering adulthood (DfEE, 2000). This appears to be the type of service suggested by members of the expert panel who proposed the need for a link person to ensure the continuation of resources and support after the student leaves secondary school.

The results of the survey, focus groups and expert panel meeting highlighted the benefits of schools and service providers collaborating and working together in meeting the needs of students during the transition phase. The comments from the survey phase indicated that schools would like the opportunity to share experiences and to be informed of ‘best practices’ in this area. In addition, comments from focus group participants indicated that there should be more collaboration between the mainstream and special schools to allow them to tap into the expertise and experience of teachers working in the special school settings. This is set out in the ‘inclusion in school’ component of the Beach Centre ‘quality indicators’ which states that teachers in regular academic and vocational courses should be provided with assistance from special education teachers to adapt their instruction and curriculum to meet the diverse needs of students (Beach Centre, 2002). The Beach Centre has published a fact sheet, *Quality Indicators of Exemplary Transition Programs* (2002), which identifies seven quality indicators of effective transition for students with special needs. Within this model, special schools could become a resource for other mainstream schools by indirectly supporting the sustainability of mainstream placements throughout transition.
5.2.12 Post-school opportunities and options

An interesting theme that emerged from this study was the discrepancy between student aspirations and post-school options and opportunities available to students with intellectual disabilities. Student feedback from focus groups indicated that students had mainstream employment goals and aspirations, yet the findings of this study show that, in reality, post-school options for students with intellectual disabilities are different to those for other students. The research carried out at the Norah Fry Research Centre in relation to transitions in the UK (Heslop et al., 2002) found that over three quarters of the young people surveyed went directly from school into further education. Furthermore, it was found that over half of these students went onto residential colleges, often because this seemed to be what was expected rather than something the young person might choose to do.

In this current study both focus group and survey data indicated that further training options, as opposed to further education or work options, were the most likely destination for students with intellectual disabilities upon leaving school. The survey data highlighted that 54.8 per cent of students were most likely to attend additional training courses with work options emerging as the least cited post-school option from both survey and focus group data. It must be noted, however, that this finding relates to likely destinations; further research would be required over a longitudinal period to obtain statistical data on actual destinations. This area is expanding with growing numbers of students being included in mainstream schools and succeeding in gaining employment and further educational opportunities. The feedback from the expert panel indicated that there needs to be clarity on third level options available to students with disabilities, with clear guidelines and
expectations for universities and institutes of technology, in order to give students with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to explore areas not previously available to them. One recommendation by the expert group was the publication of an annual schedule of options to be made available to students. The participants of the expert panel also suggested that there should be a mix of part-time and full-time provisions with a work-study format.

The findings of this study emphasise the need for improved post-school options for students with intellectual disabilities. Some schools reported that the choices are currently ‘extremely limited’. This was particularly an issue in rural areas where a limited availability of employment options was noted. This concurs with feedback from the research conducted in the UK (Heslop et al., 2002) which found that there were few post-school options available to young people, particularly in relation to housing and employment. The results of both the survey and focus group data reported highlighted a lack of residential care and employment options available to students and the stark reality of a number of students who were left at home ‘doing nothing’ or ‘lost’ after leaving school. This is of particular concern in light of international research which found that difficulties in finding or keeping employment, poor integration into the community, lack of a social network, and lack of independence are among the difficulties that students with intellectual disabilities have experienced (Fardig, Algozzine, Schwartz, Hensel and Westling, 1985; Hasazi, Gordon, and Roe, 1985; Mithaug and Horiuchi, 1983). Overall, the expert panel recommended that there needs to be a shift in the current mindset on this issue, away from the traditional model of education and towards a genuine commitment to students with intellectual disabilities at a whole school level; this would require a fundamental cultural change from the present system. In addition,
as indicated by a survey comment, more needs to be done to ensure inclusion in the ‘proper sense’ to adequately prepare students for the ‘real world’ on completion of their formal education.

The availability of third level courses for students with intellectual disabilities was called for, both within the focus groups and by the expert panel. This was however, the least cited post-school option among students, teachers and parents/carers in focus groups. Reference was made to courses that had been ongoing within UCD and TCD. Such courses are in keeping with what has been reported in the literature. In addition, TCD has been funded by the HEA as part of its Strategic Innovation Fund to roll out the Certificate in Contemporary Living to other third level institutions in Ireland.

Resourcing this type of two year programme in the long run challenges the system. What is being called for is that such courses are funded by the government outside of the traditional CAO system and that entry arrangements as well as course levels remain flexible to meet the learning styles of people with intellectual disabilities. Access to third level education is in keeping with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) where inclusion across all sectors of education is advocated for. To this end, equal access to education and training could be a means of addressing the gap between student aspirations and the reality of post-school options.
6.1 Conclusion

The outcomes of this study have implications for the further development of both transition programmes planning within schools as well as the development of post-school options. As such, they apply to the policies and practices of several government departments, including those relating to education, health and employment. As a result, a collaborative approach involving different government departments underpins all of the following recommendations.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Equal access to suitable transition planning

Students with intellectual disability across the post primary school system should have equal access to suitable transition planning which includes:

- A person-centred planning alliance that accompanies the student and his/her family throughout all stages of his/her schooling
- A planning process that is organic, building to transition as the student moves through the stages of his/her school life
- An assessment of their needs, strengths and interests
- A shared understanding among all stakeholders that transition is not a process that only occurs in the last two years of the students’ schooling but builds upon the student’s strengths and future interests as he or she moves through all stages of schooling
6.2.2 Including students with intellectual disability in preparing Individualised Education Plans (IEPs)

A dedicated transition Individualised Education Plan (IEP) should be developed for each student prior to entering the last two years of their schooling. It should involve collaboration and consultation with the student, his/her family, key teaching staff, specialist and therapy staff as well as representatives of other relevant government and community agencies. To facilitate this:

- Students with intellectual disabilities should be trained in decision making skills in order to facilitate their participation in the development of IEPs and in the selection of school and post-school options and to enable their involvement in the decision making process, as much as possible, about their future
- All information discussed at and produced from transition planning meetings should be available in accessible formats for students.
- Additional personnel resources to the membership of the planning alliance need to be available as the needs of the student move into transition.

6.2.3 Further teacher training

A training programme for school staff should be developed, to address what constitutes transition education, types of transition programmes, use of resources and how to develop/collaborate with different government departments and community agencies.

Basic principles and practices of working with students with special needs should be introduced into initial teacher training.
A Certificate in Transition Education, approved by FETAC, should be developed as a collaborative effort between SESS, DES, FÁS, to cover academic, social, vocational and life skills, with the aim of equipping students to have a successful transition from school to their chosen post-school option(s).

6.2.4 Clarification of the role of the SENO

The role of the SENO should be clarified within the transition process. The SENO may be the ideal person to facilitate IEP transition plans and programmes that are documented and evaluated in collaboration with teachers and families.

6.2.5 Promote external linkages

Schools should be encouraged to develop inter–agency links and to set up inter-agency programmes, as part of their transition education programme.

The development of transition education programmes should ideally involve co-ordination between different government and community agencies, such as, the Department of Education and Skills (DES), FÁS, VECs, the HSE, institutes of technology and universities.

Schools should collaborate with government, business and community agencies in the provision of transition information for students, and families and teachers.
School-based curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities regarding transition education should incorporate work experience that includes work placements supported through a system of on-site job coaching.

6.2.6 Post-school options

Although this was not a specific focus of this research we did get a strong sense that options post-school for students with intellectual disability were perceived to be very limited. We would view the following as very positive developments:

- More third level options funded by the HEA
- Supported employment agencies being further developed to support students from school to work
- A dedicated community agency given the responsibility to co-ordinate, advocate and locate post-school options for students with intellectual disabilities across Ireland, in collaboration with appropriate government, business and community based settings.

6.2.7 Research on best practice

Further research is needed to identify best practice in the area of transition planning for young people with intellectual disability and to explore ways in which this might be implemented in an Irish context. A longitudinal study to track students’ progress after they leave school would help to inform relevant government departments and schools of the processes in transition planning and training that work most successfully and the changes that need to be incorporated.
REFERENCES


Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of focus groups: the importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of Health and Illness, 6*(1), 103-121.


**STATUTES AND ACTS**


US, Education for All Handicapped Children Act, P.L. 94-142, § 1400, et seq.


## Appendix 1 Principal Day Service by Category of Persons Availing of Day Service NIDD Database 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal day service</th>
<th>Not verified</th>
<th>Mild</th>
<th>Moderate, Severe and profound</th>
<th>All levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;18</td>
<td>18+</td>
<td>All ages</td>
<td>&lt;18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home support</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home help</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early intervention team</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream pre-school</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special pre-school for intellectual disabilities</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child education and development centre</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream school</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource / visiting teacher</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special class – primary level</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special class – secondary level</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special school</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>1634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitative training</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation centre</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme for the older person</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special high-support day service</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 1: Principal Day Service and Type of Educational Establishment by Category of Persons Availing of Services- continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Not verified</th>
<th>Mild</th>
<th>Moderate, severe and profound</th>
<th>All levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;18</td>
<td>18+</td>
<td>All ages</td>
<td>&lt;18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal day service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special intensive day service</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheltered work centre</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheltered employment centre</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multidisciplinary support services</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre-based day respite service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day respite in the home</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other day service</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enclave within open employment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported employment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open employment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic day services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1776</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>2385</td>
<td>2859</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 15: Planning for Future Education Needs

(1) In preparing or reviewing an education plan, the principal of the relevant school or relevant special educational needs organiser shall, from the child’s attaining such age as the principal or organiser considers appropriate, have regard to the provision which will need to be made to assist the child to continue his or her education or training on becoming an adult.

(2) In performing the functions under subsection (1), the principal or the special educational needs organiser shall—

(a) ascertain the wishes of the child concerned and of his or her parents, and

(b) take such steps as are necessary as will enable the child to progress as a young adult to the level of education or training that meets his or her wishes or those of his or her parents and that are appropriate to his or her ability.

(3) In preparing or carrying out a review of an education plan in respect of the child who has special educational needs and who within the following 12 months will reach the age of 18 years, the Council shall cause an assessment to be made of:-

(a) the extent, if any, to which goals set out in any previous such plan or the plan, as the case may be, successfully met the special educational needs of the child or student, and

(b) the reasons for any failure to meet those goals and the effect any such failure has had on the development of the child and the plan shall include measures to address any such effect.
Appendix 3 Full Text of Article 24-UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Education

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to:

   a) The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;
   b) The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;
   c) Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.

3. In realizing this right, States Parties shall ensure that:

   a) Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
   b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;
   c) Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;
d) Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;

e) Effective individualised support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. To this end, States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including:

a) Facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring;
b) Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community;
c) Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deaf blind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.

4. In order to help ensure the realization of this right, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means
and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.

States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities.
Appendix 4 Information letters

14\textsuperscript{th} April 2008

Dear Parent,

We are a group of researchers from the National Institute for Intellectual Disability based at Trinity College Dublin. We are conducting a study, funded by the NCSE, to explore the options available for young people with intellectual disabilities when they come to the end of their compulsory schooling. Our aim is to find out what is currently on offer for students with intellectual disabilities at this point in their lives, and what are the strengths and weaknesses in this provision.

We hope to identify what needs to be developed in order to equip these students to move on with confidence into adult life, including further and higher education, and employment.

We plan to consult with students with disabilities, their parent(s) or guardians, and their teachers, in a number of selected schools by running a range of focus groups with these three groups of informants. The schools are chosen to represent the range of provision in the country – mainstream and special provision, large and small schools, urban and rural locations.

We would be delighted if you would be interested in taking part in this valuable piece of research. Confidentiality is assured and any points made in the group discussion will be included in the report but care will be taken to ensure that persons, schools or places are not identifiable.
If you have any further queries about this research you can contact one of our researchers, Stephanie Fitzgerald on 087-1306938.

If you wish to take part in this research, please fill in the consent form below.

Thank you for your attention.

With best regards,

Stephanie Fitzgerald

NIID Researcher

Consent form*(If you agree to the point, please tick the right-hand box)*

| The purpose of this research, and the means being used to gather participants views have been explained to me and I understand them. |
| I understand that I am free to withdraw from the process at any time, and can ask to have specific comments omitted from the data being gathered |
| It has been made clear to me that all input will be treated confidentially. |

Signed: _______________________________ Date _______________
14th April 2008

Dear Principal,

We are a group of researchers from the National Institute for Intellectual Disabilities based at Trinity College Dublin. We are conducting a study, funded by the NCSE, to explore the options available for young people with intellectual disabilities when they come to the end of their compulsory schooling. Our aim is to find out what is currently on offer for students with intellectual disabilities at this point in their lives, and what are the strengths and weaknesses in this provision.

We hope to identify what needs to be developed in order to equip these students to move on with confidence into adult life, including further and higher education, and employment.

We plan to consult with students with disabilities, their parent(s) or guardians, and their teachers, in a number of selected schools by running a range of focus groups with these three groups of informants. The schools are chosen to represent the range of provision in the country – mainstream and special provision, large and small schools, urban and rural locations.

We would be delighted if your school would be interested in taking part in this valuable piece of research. Confidentiality is assured and any points made in the group discussion will be included in the report but care will be taken to ensure that persons, schools or places are not identifiable. If you have any further queries about this research you can contact one of our researchers, Stephanie Fitzgerald on 087-1306938.
If you wish to take part in this research, please fill in the consent form below.

Thank you for your attention.

With best regards,

Stephanie Fitzgerald

NIID Researcher

**Consent form  (If you agree to the point, please tick the right-hand box)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The purpose of this research, and the means being used to gather participants views have been explained to me and I understand them.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand that I am free to withdraw from the process at any time, and can ask to have specific comments omitted from the data being gathered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has been made clear to me that all input will be treated confidentially.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Signed: _____________________________ Date
Hello,

Our names are Stephanie Fitzgerald and Niamh Lally and we are researchers from the National Institute of Intellectual Disability at Trinity College. We would like to invite you to come to a group meeting to tell us about your choices when leaving school. The meeting will be held in your school and should last up to one hour.

At the meeting we will talk about what you think about your choices after you finish school:

what is happening at the moment

😊
what you would like to change about your choices

What you would like to happen in the future

At the meeting there will be other students telling us their views. We will ask you to keep what you hear private. We would also record the conversations so that we can go over what has been said after the meeting.

After the meeting we will also be meeting with parents and teachers to hear their views

Your ideas are important to us and we will write them up in a book and send you a summary copy at the end of the research. Your name will not be mentioned in this book. The book will be important and read by people like yourselves as well as your families and people who make decisions about people's lives.
If you change your mind about talking to us then all you have to do is to say that you do not want to go on with being part of our research.

If you decide not to be involved in the survey this would not affect you in any way.

If we hear some things however that makes us think that people are unsafe then we would ask you to meet with a person that you trust to talk to about what has happened and to support you to decide what to next.

If you are happy to take part in our research, please read the next page and sign the consent form which we will get from you on the day of the meeting.

If you have any questions please contact Stephanie or Niamh on (01) 896 2179 or Patricia O’Brien (01) 8963879

Thank you
Appendix 5 Consent form

NIID
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN, 4TH FLOOR, 3 COLLEGE GREEN, DUBLIN 2.
Tel: 01 896 2174 Fax: 01 677 9131  lallyn@tcd.ie

Consent form for participants

Researchers: Dr. Patricia O'Brien, Stephanie Fitzgerald and Niamh Lally, National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID), Trinity College, Dublin.

I have had this research explained to me.
I have been able to ask questions and have them answered.

I understand what is expected of me.

I can stop being involved at any stage of this project.

I will not talk about what goes on in the meeting to other people.

I would be happy to talk to another person if I have any big concerns

I am happy to have the group tape recorded
I agree to take part in this project.

Signed: ..........................................

Name: ..........................................

Date: ..........................................

Witness........................................

Name: ..........................................

Date: ...........................................
Appendix 6 Interview questions

Transitions from compulsory schooling: possibilities for young people with intellectual disabilities

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

1. What do you understand by the term ‘Transition’?
   Give definition: Transition may be defined as the life changes, adjustments, and cumulative experiences that occur in the lives of young adults as they move from school environments to independent living and work environments (adapted from Halpern, 1994 and Benz et al., 2000).

2. At what stage did the transition phase begin for your son or daughter?
   e.g. three months prior to leaving
   one year prior to leaving

3. Do consider the transition phase to be a long-term or short term process?

4. As students approach leaving compulsory schooling, what aspects your son/daughter do you think should be focused on? For example academic, social, vocational?

5. What choices are currently available to these students leaving school?

6. Are there any other choices that you feel should be made available?

7. Are you aware of any transition plan that has been developed to guide your son or daughter through the transition phase?

8. If so, how much involvement have you had in developing this plan?
9. Are you aware of how much involvement your son/daughter have in developing this plan?

10. Along the transition process has there been any thought given to the development of goals?

11. Have you any thoughts of how transitions should be handled when preparing students for leaving school?

12. **What do you think a specific Transition programme should involve?**

13. How satisfied are you with the current provision for your son/daughters transition from compulsory schooling?

14. **What are your best hopes for your son or daughter’s future?**

Do you have any other comments/recommendations?

Transitions from compulsory schooling: possibilities for young people with intellectual disabilities

Questions for students

1. **What do you think ‘Transition’ means?**

Give definition: Transition may be defined as the life changes, adjustments, and cumulative experiences that occur in the lives of young adults as they move from school environments to independent living and work environments (adapted from Halpern, 1994 and Benz et al., 2000).

2. **What are you doing in school that is preparing you for leaving?**

E.g. career guidance (one: one/class level), course modules, work experience etc.
3. When did this preparation begin?
4. **What choices are currently on offer to you when leaving school?**
5. Are there other options that are not currently on offer that you would like to be able to do?  
   If so, what are these?
6. **Have you been involved in developing a ‘Transition’ plan?**  
   If so, what did this entail?
7. **Do you think there should be a specific programme to support you in your transition from school?**
8. If so, what do you feel this programme should involve?
9. Do you have any other comments/recommendations? If you were running the school what would you do differently?
10. What are your hopes for the future?
Transitions from compulsory schooling: possibilities for young people with intellectual disabilities

QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. **What do you understand by the term ‘Transition’?**
   Give definition: Transition may be defined as the life changes, adjustments, and cumulative experiences that occur in the lives of young adults as they move from school environments to independent living and work environments (adapted from Halpern, 1994 and Benz et al., 2000).

2. **At what stage do you see the transition phase from schooling begin?**
   - e.g. 3 months prior to leaving
   - 1 year prior to leaving

3. **What is happening in school that is preparing the students for leaving?**
   - E.g. career guidance (one: one/class level), course modules, work experience etc

4. **What choices are currently available to these students leaving school?**

5. **Are there any other choices that you feel should be made available?**

6. **As students approach leaving compulsory schooling, what aspects of their lives do you feel should be taken into account?**
   - For example academic, social, vocational, life skills?
   - Is there a specific transition plan that has been developed to guide the students through the transition phase?

7. **If so, who has been involved in developing this plan?**
8. *How much involvement have the students had in developing this plan?*

9. *How much involvement have the parents/guardians had in developing this plan?*

10. *Do you feel there should be a specific Transition programme in place for all students with Intellectual Disability on leaving school?*

11. If so, what do you feel this programme should involve?

12. How satisfied are you with the current provision for your students transition from compulsory schooling?

13. *What are your best hopes for the future of the students?*

14. Do you have any other comments/recommendations?
Appendix 7 Questionnaire

Your school and transition for intellectually disabled students –
School Questionnaire

For the purpose of this questionnaire, transition is defined as the movement of students from compulsory schooling to further training or employment.

FOR THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS PLEASE TICK ONE RESPONSE ONLY:

1. Which of the following best describes your school?
   - □ Special School
   - □ Mainstream School with a Special Unit
   - □ Mainstream School
   - □ Other - Please State ________________________________

2. Which of the following describes your student profile?
   - □ Female single sex school
   - □ Male single sex school
   - □ Mixed School

3. Which of the following best describes the location of your school?
   - □ Rural
   - □ Suburban
   - □ Urban
4. At what stage do you see the transition stage from compulsory schooling beginning?

☐ Before the end of Primary School

☐ Before the Junior Cert Cycle Finishes

☐ During the Transition Year Programme

☐ 2 Years Prior to leaving Second-level

☐ During the final Year

☐ Other - Please State ________________________________

(Please turn over)
THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ONLY REFER TO YOUR STUDENTS WHO HAVE AN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

5. **What is happening in your school to prepare this group of students for leaving school?** *(Tick as many as applicable)*
   
   □ Career guidance
   
   □ Work experience
   
   □ Visits to potential post-school options (such as colleges and training workshops)
   
   □ None of the above
   
   □ Other - Please State ________________________________

6. **Please RANK (with 1 being the highest rank) what you think are the most common choices of your students with intellectual disability for what they plan to do on leaving school:**

   ___ Additional courses (Post Leaving Certificate, FETAC, National Learning Network, Third Level College Course)

   ___ Vocational Training Centre

   ___ Employment

   ___ Other (Please State ________________________________ )
7. Is there a specific transition plan that has been developed within the school to guide students with Intellectual Disability through the transition stage?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If Yes, what does this plan involve?

8. Any other comments/recommendations?
Discussion paper based on preliminary findings of study funded by the NCSE on

Transitions from Compulsory Schooling: Possibilities for Young People with Intellectual Disabilities

Research team: Stephanie Fitzgerald, Patricia O’Brien, Phillip Curry, Niamh Lally and Leone Mitchell.
National Institute for intellectual disability Trinity College Dublin

Summary of preliminary key findings for discussion/verification

- Currently, the transition planning process for students leaving second-level stems over one to two years, however, parents believe this process begins earlier for students with intellectual disabilities.

- There is no formal transition plan being developed for these students with most of the planning involving 'bits and pieces pulled together' and 'hit and miss placement of students'
The current options available to students include courses with the National Learning Network (NLN); Post-leaving Cert (PLC) courses; FETAC courses; FAS apprenticeships and training workshops. Parent and teacher groups indicated that they would like to see more options such as the third level university courses offered through UCD and TCD.

A lack of government support was highlighted in relation to the following areas:

- Lack of a formal curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities aged 16-18 years
- Lack of specialised training in special needs for teachers and Special Needs Assistants
- Discontinuation of funding for students aged over 18 years
- Lack of follow-up of students with intellectual disabilities who leave the school system
- Lack of funding, training to support the introduction of FETAC into schools.

In terms of recommendations for the future, teachers suggested that schools should be given more time to prepare students for their transition from second-level school. School staff should be given more training and there should be an opportunity for collaboration between schools.

Parents recommended that there should be a system that allows for the profiling of students’ needs and strengths and that this should form the basis of an individual plan. They also suggested that there should be more information available to students.

The students highlighted the importance of work experience and career guidance and recommended additional provision for these within the curriculum.

The following sections of the discussion paper briefly provide:
- a short review of the literature which defines the key term of ‘transition’, consideration of the current legislation in relation to transition planning and an outline of post-school options for students with intellectual disabilities on leaving school
- the aims of the current study
an overview of the methodology
key emerging themes from this phase of the research.

Review of literature

What is transition?

Transition is a term that has been in use in the field of intellectual disability research and practice for the past 20 years. Transition may be defined as the life changes, adjustments, and cumulative experiences that occur in the lives of young adults as they move from school environments to independent living and work environments. Successful transitions increase success, confidence, and competence in one’s work skills. There are a number of different ways of theorising the transition to adulthood but the literature has predominantly focussed on two areas: (a) models based on life phases (child to adult); and (b) models based on institutional status transition. In terms of institutional status transition, three specific transitions are usually highlighted: school to work; housing (moving out of the family home); and domestic (movement from ‘family of origin’ to ‘family of destination’). While the transition from education to adulthood can be difficult for young people, all three of these transitions can prove difficult to achieve or even elusive to young adults with an intellectual disability. For young people with intellectual disabilities their experience of transition can be qualitatively quite different from that experienced by other people. People with intellectual disabilities are also more likely to be subject to adverse life experiences. Successful transition requires planning and this review will focus on the transition practices for students as they prepare to leave school both in Ireland and the rest of the world.

Transition practices in Ireland

With the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN), 2004 comes the requirement that every student should have an Individual Education Plan (IEP), which takes into consideration the future of the student as they prepare to leave secondary school. To facilitate the preparation of IEPs, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) prepared a detailed book, Guidelines on the Individual Education Plan Process, as a guide to good practice in relation to the preparation, implementation and review of IEPs. This book recognises that a student will experience many transitions in the school life – pre-school to primary school or special educational setting (SES), primary to post-primary school or SES and finally the transition as students leave school.
For the earlier transition of primary to post-primary, the Special Education Support Service (www.sess.ie) offers advice on the best ways to assist students in their transition. For the school leaver, the NCSE recommends that:

- The final steps of transition planning should take place one year in advance of the young person leaving school. It is important that the young person be involved in making these plans. The views of parents and/or an advocate should also be taken into consideration.
- Transitions can involve working in a multidisciplinary partnership.
- There is a variety of pathways that young people might follow upon leaving school and there are professionals with responsibility to assist them along these pathways which include:
  - Leaving school and entering the world of work
  - Pursuing further education
  - Vocational training
  - Rehabilitative training
  - Sheltered employment
  - Supported employment.

Aims of current study
The purpose of this study is to:

- Identify what occurs for students with intellectual disability 16 years and above within school based settings as part of the school leaving transition process
- Identify the options that students have as part of the transition process
- Compare and contrast student, parent and teacher satisfaction with transition arrangements and transition programmes
- Identify the implications of the findings for transition policy and practice for students with intellectual disability 16 years and above.

Methodology

The reported phase of this study was qualitative in design which included 21 focus groups. These groups were used as a means of interpreting and making sense of what students, family members and school staff said about the transition planning from school into further training or employment. All sets of focus group recordings were transcribed. These
transcriptions were coded using open, axial and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Three groups of participants participated in the focus groups:

- students aged 16 to 18 years of age with intellectual disabilities
- parents and carers of students with intellectual disabilities
- school staff responsible for teaching and planning for students with intellectual disabilities

These focus groups spanned over three geographical locations. These locations broadly covered the census classifications, that is, greater Dublin area, one of the other four major cities and a rural location with population of less than 10,000. An outline of the participation rates are outlined in the tables 3.2 to 3.4 below:

Table 3.2 Breakdown of students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dublin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.Mainstream school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Special school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connaught</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.Mainstream school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Mainstream (special unit)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.Special school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cork</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.Mainstream school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Mainstream (special unit)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.Special school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3 Breakdown of parents/carers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dublin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.Mainstream school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Special school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connaught</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.Mainstream</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Mainstream (special unit)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.Special school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cork</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.Mainstream</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Mainstream (special unit)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.Special school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.4 Breakdown of teaching staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dublin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.Mainstream school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Special school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connaught</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.Mainstream school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Mainstream (special unit)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.Special school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cork</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.Mainstream school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Mainstream (special unit)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.Special school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Out of a total of 74 focus group participants

**Key Themes in Transition Planning**

In this section the views and experiences of the students, teaching staff and parents/carers are described, outlining some of the main themes that have arisen from an analysis of the focus group data. The following aims to present and subsequently discuss a portion of these themes under the following organising categories namely, the current transition process; options open to transitioning students; challenges encountered and recommendations for the future. The voice of the participant groups is illustrated through selected quotes that exemplify the themes that characterise each participant group’s experience and views on the transition planning process.

**The Current Transition Process**

During the focus groups, questions were raised around the length and structure of the planning process for students leaving second-level schooling. There was wide variation in the responses given from the student, teacher and parent/carer groups. Students stated that the transition period generally spanned over one to two years. Many of the teachers interviewed concurred with this view and stated that the transition phase generally began two years before leaving school:

*Definitely it should start 2 years before they leave here.*

(Teacher, Connaught 3)

*With the Leaving Cert Applied it's on-going from when they start.... even when we are talking to parents we say that the most important thing for the student during the 2 years is to find out exactly what they*
want to do when they leave. What they are good at, what are their skills.
(Teacher, Cork 2)

In contrast, participants from the parents/carers groups reported that they felt the transition phase began much earlier. They stated that planning was a ‘long-term process’ which began from primary school or at the start of secondary school:

I would have to say it started for me when I realised that he was going to school, because it was obvious he was different, and things that made him different are the things that are going to affect him most when he goes, when he leaves here.
(Parent, Dublin 1)

So really I think we almost from the very beginning with them starting into secondary school you are watching the steps all the time, but it’s the final step, like when its coming to the final step that you need the help, right.
(Parent, Cork 2)

In terms of preparation for life after school, various approaches were quoted by the participants of the focus groups. The most common type of preparation quoted the students and teachers are listed as follows:

- Career guidance
- Work experience
- Project work
- Researching careers on the internet
- Field trips and visits to open days.

In terms of a specific transition plan, the students and teachers reported that there were no formal plans developed for students leaving school. The teachers reported that the planning process sometimes consisted of ‘bits and pieces pulled together’. Others expressed dissatisfaction with the current level of planning and preparation of students leaving school describing it as ‘hit and miss’.
There should be kind of a separate programme or place for people in their last two years. At the moment it's not working out like that...
There isn't really [a programme], there's bits and pieces put together or pulled together that we do ourselves. There is nothing that we can take and just use, and implement.
(Teacher, Connaught 3)

I think we need to look at it. I wouldn't be completely happy with it. Because we are so keyed up with or concerned about looking after them when they are here and putting all sort of support in, but when they get to the final day of the leaving cert we haven't really thought about it... So, it’s uncoordinated, it’s kind of hit or miss, they either get a course here or a shelter or whatever, a course somewhere or that’s it.
(Teacher, Cork 1)

The parents/carers also reported that they were not aware of any formal transition plan and outlined some of the difficulties with planning for these students:

So I don’t plan from day to day. Any plans I have made already were gone. They can go overnight. So I mean, they choose themselves as they’re ready. As far as she is concerned, this is her year. She comes home with a piece of paper, I passed, I failed. I don't care. You’re alive, you're well and, you know. Keep going.
(Parent, Connaught 2)

Options open to students
The students, teachers and parents/carers outlined their perceptions of the current options available to students once they leave secondary school. These options were grouped into three broad categories namely; further training; college courses and work options.

The students and teachers largely concurred with the range of further training options they considered possible post second-level schooling. These included the following:

- National Learning Network (NLN)
- Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses in areas such as childcare and home help
- FETAC courses
- FÁS apprenticeships
- Sheltered training workshops attached to intellectual disability service providers.

The move to a third level college course was the least cited option for all three groups of stakeholders. Some parents and teachers were aware of the programme offered by the National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID) in Trinity college, specifically for students with intellectual disability. The teachers also mentioned a similar programme they believed to be running in UCD. Overall, it was felt that similar programmes should be made more available to students:

There should be maybe a third level environment or maybe a school or something set-up ideally, for the children that are leaving with disabilities, so like the Trinity course.

(Parent, Dublin 1)

A number of our students I should also point out have gone into a programme at UCD and Trinity... I think it's a two year... I would definitely say there is a need for a programme that will take the kids on at their pace that provides them I think with additional social skills. And would provide them with at least some degree of protection for want of a better word, in a training environment.

(Teacher, Dublin 1)

For students, the work options outlined included:

- Working in a shop
- Working in the cinema or bowling alley
- Working with animals
- Working with children
- Hairdressing
- Working in the catering industry.

The teachers concurred on some level with the students in outlining what they perceived as the current work options available. They also included enlisting in the defence forces such as the army or the Navy or going into the family farm business. One teacher highlighted the fact that some students find it difficult to secure any type of course or work after finishing school:
Now we have some cases also where some of our students have done nothing. And we have had cases where it was great for them to come into a mainstream setting. That was the achievement. But they're still not able to go into the world of work and all the stresses inherent to that. They're not able....I think they get a disability allowance and you know and we have a few cases here, where I will think that will happen.
(Teacher, Connaught 2)

Challenges encountered

A number of challenges emerged for all three groups when discussing the transition planning process. These included issues around the lack of a formal curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities, the uncertainty about the future and a perceived lack of government support.

The teachers who took part in the focus groups highlighted the fact that there is currently a lack of a formal curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities, particularly in their final years in school to prepare them for, as one parent termed, the 'big, bad world'. The lack of a formal programme left teachers feeling isolated and without direction on how best to support these students:

*There really isn’t an overriding curriculum for these children.... until there is actually a curriculum in place you are working in a void, you are really clutching at straws to try and do something for the children, trying to benefit them somehow.*
(Teacher 2, Dublin 2)

*The draft curriculum guidelines that are there at the moment... I can see those kind of working with primary school children you know. But I don’t see them working with children who are 17 and 18 years old who have a street language all of their own, who would buy and sell you as regards to the drug and alcohol cultures and so on... there’s a huge void there between reality their aspirations in these guidelines you know.*
(Teacher 2, Connaught 3)
One curriculum option listed by teachers of students with intellectual disabilities in both special school and mainstream settings was the introduction of FETAC. This was viewed as a viable option for students for whom 'neither the Leaving Cert or Leaving Cert Applied suit'. FETAC was described as 'one step of the ladder' for these students. However, a number of challenges emerged in relation to the introduction of the FETAC curriculum into the school system. These challenges include the amount of work and time involved in developing modules, the lack of support and training given and the lack of funding for this programme:

At this end of the school, we're doing FETAC full stop. There's very little help given, you have to do it. It's a hell of a lot of work.
(Teacher, Connaught 3)

FETAC isn't department recognised, funded, anything...the problem is that FETAC have now decided we should all self-regulate - they're going to form a panel of externals that I ring up and ask to my school but the funding for this is a bit ambiguous at the moment like who pays for that? Somebody should take it on board because neither the Leaving Cert or Leaving Cert Applied really suit the level of students I have. So that's the problem I have.
(Teacher, Cork 3)

A significant theme that emerged through the analysis of the data was that of uncertainty about the future after second-level and the impact this has on parents in particular.

There seems to be a big black hole after the secondary. You know, there is huge uncertainty. A lot of people that have followed the mainstream approach and now there's no light at the end of the tunnel, you know, in many ways.
(Parent, Dublin 1)

They're all anxious about leaving school and parents are particularly anxious, and they are the big issues. So when we have the regular meetings with parents in school initially and we plan small steps.
(Teacher, Connaught 3)
Overall, one of the biggest challenges for schools and parents related to the lack of government support in terms of training, funding and follow-up of students with special needs who leave the second-level education system. The issues of training related to a lack of specialised and mainstream training in the area of special needs.

One of the huge things, it's a huge issue with guidance counsellors working with kids with special needs, and that is that ... guidance counsellors have no training in special needs and we have no training in assessing the suitability of any student with a disability for any particular - and I mean that is a huge gap in the thing and the - you know, things like [service provider name] are of no use to us. I mean they are of no use to us full stop. But in this context, they are useless to us.

(Teachers, Dublin 1)

Most of our in-service training is mainstream... now we had a little bit on special needs on the school, because we had to get the rest of the staff to acknowledge the fact that the money that was going in there was not a waste of money. But you know, you are still beating your head against a wall at times.

(Teacher, Cork 1)

In terms of government funding, a key challenge that emerged for teaching staff and parents was the discontinuation of government funding for students at second-level once they reach 18 years of age:

The department guidelines are if you're eighteen on the first of September you're too old to continue on at school and there's no capitation for those pupils either we retain them at our own cost.

(Teacher, Cork 3)

The government is signing off at age 18. That's what, that worries me because a lot of kids with special needs, well they are not 18 when they finish. So if the government can say well they are 18 we don't have to provide anything, you know, so that is, that's a worry, but then also they feel that's it you know.

(Parents, Dublin 1)
The importance of on-going government support and follow-up for students with disabilities after they leave second-level was highlighted by a number of members in the focus groups. There was a suggestion that some of the students ‘feel lost’ or their placement fail after school as they have ‘left their comfort zone’. This issues appeared particularly pertinent within the special school setting:

You don’t realise it until the kids leave school. Until you meet them, out in town a year after, and some of them feel lost.
(Teacher, Connaught 3)

I think it’s, I think it’s the government really that is not putting the plans in place and is not following up on the children that are leaving secondary school with disabilities or difficulties in learning. It is up to them to do it really. You know they are spending it on other things that are more foolish I think.
(Parents, Dublin 1)

Recommendations for the future
The students, teachers and parents/carers outlined a number of recommendations around the future provision for supporting students with intellectual disabilities who are leaving school. These recommendations are grouped into a number of broad categories namely; more time to prepare the students for transition; further training before employment; more information and options and increased collaboration.

The teachers in particular highlighted the need for additional time to prepare programmes for the students and for a longer preparation period for students with intellectual disabilities leaving school as ‘the longer [preparation] takes, the less it takes to adjust to it’.

We have to be much, much better prepared for it, and while what we have been doing in the last couple of years has been perfect for the kids that are there, we now see that the needs have changed and its sitting down over the summer, it’s preparing the programmes ready for September in the first second years for our first second years, and third years in the resource room.
(Teacher, Cork 1)

I think that from the moment they start in secondary school it should be part of the interviews with parents, the early interviews as their child transfers from
primary into secondary and thinking ahead. Very often parents are so keyed up, especially parents of special needs children, that they are so delighted if they have got the child, if they have got a school that they are happy with they will sort of relax and that's that, and not think ahead. So I think it should be, I think we are responsible perhaps to remind them gently of the importance of thinking ahead and thinking what's beyond the terminal LCA exam, even in first year.
(Teachers, Dublin 1)

In general, the teachers also emphasised the need for further training for students with intellectual disabilities to prepare them for 'the world of work'.

'We would always recommend that they go training to some place before they go out to work because they are going to be in the system in all sorts of halfway sort of states.... and that's another reason to get them into training as opposed to getting them to work, because if they fall out of that then if they are flagged they will be picked up by the HSE who will either put them back into training or get them out into the workforce or do something with them. It's like it's a support system for them, whereas if they leave here and just go into a job then they are not flagged.'
(Teacher, Dublin 2)

'In the past we would have had students who went maybe work sampled in shops or hotels or what have you… And maybe got a job as a result of that. But these days people do need a bit of training, they need training in health and safety that is a big issue anymore. So there's lots of issues like that, that they need something in between school and work to prepare them for the world of work.'
(Teacher, Connaught 3)

Another main recommendation by the teacher group focused on the need for more collaboration between schools.

Another bugbear in mind, and this is all going back as sort of feedback, ok there is, I think I counted these providers on the FETAC website - there is 30 odd special schools running FETAC courses there should be some facilitation for a network for those and I should be given my horticultural FETAC to
somebody else and swapping somebody else. So we’re not all reinventing the wheel but that’s not done.
(Teacher, Cork 3)

I think a great use would be if the special schools and the mainstream schools could come together and teachers in both, and the wonderful expertise of the special school teachers, if we could tap into that.... Where we could tap into their expertise and work together. ..I know I am asking an awful lot, in a generalised way but if there was some way and put it all at the service of the special needs child.
(Teacher, Dublin 1)

In general, the parents felt that the introduction of a 'profiling' system of the students would assist the planning and monitoring of their progress and support future planning beyond school:

They should be tested. Like a profile kept on the children now with disabilities. And have a kind of a file made up that, right three months ago she was brilliant at maths and all of a sudden this has gone downhill. You know, and kinda keep a record of what....you know.
(Parent, Connaught 2)

I would like them to be... say a teacher sat down with their strengths to look through every course that's available to them and that within that course what exactly they have to do. What subjects, what's involved in it.
(Parents, Clon 1)

The parents also felt there should be more information and 'lots of it' which is more widely available.

'That the information on what’s there is more readily available. That you haven’t got to go and search for it.'
(Parent, Cork 2)

'There should be website or something that you can just go in on and see you know what courses they might be able to get into or what...Yeah, you shouldn’t
have to search. You should be able to go straight to it, it should be, its big enough thing in the country, that it should be dealt with properly.’

(Parent, Dublin 1)

The students highlighted the importance and need for additional work experience and career guidance.

Work experience is important because you get experience in where you are going to work or stuff like that.

(Student, Dublin 1)

I think they should give more talks about like preparing you for what’s going to happen to you. or you won’t be ready for it.... I suppose if you got a guest speaker in a few times, or another week or two extra work experience, move it up a bit more So you could try out other things.

(Student, Connaught 1)

One student also suggested a review of the points system to open up more options for students going forward:

'I reckon that points for some courses are way too high. Way too high like... say you wanted to do electrician or some trade for instance an electrician, ... and everyone just does a year and then, like a lot of people drop out after the first year... then whoever isn’t good gets kicked out of the course and then whoever is good stays. I think that' the way they should do it. and then if you don’t pass you don’t pass. I think that's the way they should do it.’

(Student, Connaught 1)

---


Appendix 9

Glossary of terms

CAO
The Central Applications Office (CAO) is responsible for centrally processing applications to their first year undergraduate courses (CAO, 2010, Retrieved 29th June 2010 from http://www.cao.ie/index.php)

Compulsory schooling
In the Republic of Ireland full-time education is compulsory for all children between six and sixteen years of age (Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

An Garda Síochána
The police service in the Republic of Ireland.

Intellectual disability
‘Intellectual disability is characterised by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical skills originating before age 18’ (AAIDD)

Junior Certificate
The Junior Certificate examination is taken on completion of the first three years of Secondary school (Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

Leaving Certificate
Students normally sit for the examination at the age of 17 or 18, after five or six years of secondary education. Pupils following the established Leaving Certificate programme must take at least five subjects, including Irish (Department of Education and Skills, 2010)

Leaving Cert Applied
‘The Leaving Certificate Applied is a distinct, self-contained two-year Leaving Certificate programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life. The programme puts an emphasis on forms of achievement and excellence which the established Leaving Certificate had not
recognised in the past. It has as its primary objective the preparation of participants for adult and working life through relevant learning experiences’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

Mainstream schools
Students with special needs study alongside peers without special needs. The Report on the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) favoured integration over segregation (Department of Education 1993).

Mainstream with special unit
Students with special needs are educated alongside peers without intellectual disabilities; however, there is an additional unit to cater for their special needs.

Points system
Points refer to the unit of measurement of Leaving Certificate success. Most third level courses have minimum points requirements, courses are allocated on a competitive points basis. The maximum number of points is 600.

Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) course
PLC courses have been ‘developed to assist young people who have completed senior cycle education, and require further vocational education and training to enhance their prospects of employment or progression to other studies’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2010. Retrieved 29th June 2010 from http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=11397&ecategory=14957&language=EN)

Second level education

Special Needs Assistant (SNA)
SNAs are recruited to assist with the care of pupils in an educational context. The allocation of a SNA support may be on a full or part time basis (e.g. an hour or more per day) and may be shared among special

Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)
All schools in the UK have a SENCO and they work with other teachers and with parents to ensure that the needs of pupils, who are identified as having special educational needs, are met within the school (Surrey County Council, 2010. Retrieved 29th June 2010 from http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/sccwebsite/sccwspages.nsf/LookupWebPagesByTITLE_RTF/Special+educational+needs+co-ordinator+-+SENCO?opendocument)

Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO)
‘The role of the SENO ensures that a child with special educational needs receives the supports they are entitled to’ (NCSE, 2010, Information for parents. Retrieved 29th June 2010 from http://www.ncse.ie/for_parents/Information_for_Parents.asp)

Third level
This term incorporates the seven universities, the institutes of technology, colleges and other higher education bodies in the Republic of Ireland.

Transition year
Transition year occurs between the Junior and Senior cycle in the 4th year of Secondary School. Transition Year is an optional additional year in Secondary School. It provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs and work experience at a remove from the examination focus. (Department of Education and Skills, 2010)