![Northern Ireland Assembly]

Research and Information Service
Briefing Paper

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Transition Planning in the Republic of Ireland

1   Introduction

This paper has been written for the Committee for Employment and Learning as part of its inquiry into post Special Educational Need provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities (LD).

It forms part of a series of research papers on transition planning in the United Kingdom (UK) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI). It is intended as a companion piece to NIAR 384-2014 on transition planning in Northern Ireland and NIAR 359-2014 on transition planning in Great Britain.

This paper provides an overview of transition planning services provided to young people with learning disabilities as they move into tertiary education, training or employment in ROI. It outlines the relevant legislation and policy and highlights a number of transition planning projects.

2   Overview of Legislative and Policy Context

The Republic of Ireland does not have an established national policy on transition planning for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) as they prepare to leave compulsory education. The lack of a national policy was acknowledged by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) which has recommended:[1]

> *The development of a national policy on transition as well as the commencement of transition planning in the junior cycle with parents as active participants in this process.*

The NCSE further recommended that an expert group be convened to:[2]

> *Co-ordinate and develop national policy advice on transition from school to further and higher education for students with SEN.*

While ROI lacks a national policy, the transition planning process has been guided in part by disability legislation and related government policies. In September 2004, the Government launched the National Disability Strategy which was designed to tie together law and policy in the area of disability. Key elements of the strategy include:

- Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004[3];
- Disability Act 2005[4];
- Citizens Information Act 2007[5];
- Sectoral plans from six key Government Departments; and
- A multi-annual investment programme for disability support services for the period 2006-2009.

The EPSEN Act 2004 and the Disability Act 2005 provide the framework within which specialist support services to children and adults with disabilities and mental health are planned and delivered.

The EPSEN Act 2004 includes a provision for the planning of future education needs for children with SEN.[6] Specifically, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) system advocated in the Act requires that consideration be given to the pupil's post-school life.

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[1] NCSE Press Release 'NCSE research shows national policy required for students with special educational needs leaving school' (20 November 2013) http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Final_PR_for_web_191113.pdf

[2] McGuckin, Conor *et al. Moving on to Further and Higher Education: an Exploration of the Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs* (2013) p.7 http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Report_HigherEd_22_10_13.pdf

[3] http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2004/en/act/pub/0030/

[4] Under this Act, people with disabilities are entitled to have their health and educational needs assessed and to have individual service statements drawn up which set out what services they should get. http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2005/en/act/pub/0014/index.html

[5] http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2007/en/act/pub/0002/index.html

[6] Section 15 of the Act is concerned with post-school transition. http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2004/en/act/pub/0030/

As part of the preparation or review of the IEP, Section 15 of the Act places a duty on the school principal (or relevant Special Educational Needs Organiser):[7]

> *…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.*

To accomplish this, the principal or Special Educational Needs Organiser should:[8]

> *… 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.*

The Act is not prescriptive about the age at which transition planning should begin or the form that this process should take.[9]

The issue of transition planning for students with SEN is also addressed in guidance published by the Department of Education and Science.[10] This provides a clearer timeframe for the transition planning process:[11]

> *…planning for transition may need to begin up to two years before the date on which the student is due to transfer from the school.*

In a 2013 report, the NCSE also advised that sufficient time be given to the process:[12]

> *School professionals should begin the process of transition planning for students with SEN in junior cycle, and parents should be facilitated to become active participants in this process.*

However, it should be noted that both the EPSEN Act 2004 and the Disability Act 2005 have parts that have not been fully implemented.[13] The deferral of the full

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[7] Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 s.15
http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2004/en/act/pub/0030/sec0015.html#sec15
[8] Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 s.15
http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2004/en/act/pub/0030/sec0015.html#sec15
[9] However, the Act does state that in circumstances where the NCSE is involved in preparing or conducting a review of an IEP for a student with SEN who, within the following twelve months will reach the age of eighteen years, the NCSE will cause an assessment to be made of the success or failure of the goals of previous or existing plans in meeting such needs, and the effect of any such failure on the student's development. Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 s.15 http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2004/en/act/pub/0030/sec0015.html#sec15
[10] Department of Education and Science *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines* (2007) http://www.sess.ie/sites/default/files/insp_inclusion_students_sp_ed_needs_pp_guidelines.pdf
[11] Department of Education and Science *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines* (2007) p.48 http://www.sess.ie/sites/default/files/insp_inclusion_students_sp_ed_needs_pp_guidelines.pdf
[12] McGuckin, Conor *et al. Moving on to Further and Higher Education: an Exploration of the Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs* (2013) p.8 http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Report_HigherEd_22_10_13.pdf
In earlier guidance issued by the NCSE, they recommended that the "final steps" of transition planning should take place one year in advance of the young person leaving school. National Council for Special Education *Guidelines on the Individual Plan Process* (2006) p.51 http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/final_report.pdf
[13] In reply to a recent Dáil question, the Minister of State for Training and Skills cited the 2013 NCSE report which recognised that the current economic climate makes it unlikely that the Government will be able to fully implement the EPSEN Act in

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implementation of EPSEN has directly affected the introduction of statutory IEPs. As a result, there is currently no obligation upon schools to develop IEPs for students with SEN. The failure to commence this component of the Act has therefore presented substantial difficulties in developing a national framework for transition planning. The NCSE has recently called for the implementation of the IEP process, in the belief that it would:[14]

> *… provide a structured framework of support for this transition planning process.*

While there is no statutory requirement to adopt an IEP approach, it has been recognised as an important feature of good educational practice.[15] Schools are encouraged by the Department of Education and Skills to use some form of IEP for children with SEN and the Special Education section of the Department has reported that the majority of the schools have done so.[16]

In light of this support from the Department, the NCSE has outlined 'general principles' which should govern good transition planning as part of the IEP review process:[17]

- *Long-term planning is essential and should be conducted well in advance of the point of transition;*

- *Parents and young people should be provided with the information to make an informed choice about future educational / lifelong learning settings. All options should be explored, including the continuum of special education provision;*

- *Collaboration between the transition settings is crucial to ensure that all relevant information is shared and the necessary resources are put in place to facilitate a successful transition; and*

- *Support for transition can be provided by the Special Education Needs Officer (SENO) in collaboration with the relevant agencies/personnel.*

Research has found that, though schools are taking the initiative in developing IEPs, there is inconsistency in their use and in perceptions of their usefulness.[18] The variation

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the short to medium term. Oireachtas Written Question 23365/14 (29 May 2014) http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/takes/dail2014052900051?opendocument#WRC00250

[14] McGuckin, Conor *et al. Moving on to Further and Higher Education: an Exploration of the Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs* (2013) p.8 http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Report_HigherEd_22_10_13.pdf

[15] Oireachtas Written Question 31328/13 (27 June 2013) http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/takes/dail2013062700063?opendocument#WRK01200

[16] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Pathways for Disabled Students to Tertiary Education and Employment: Case Studies from Ireland* (2010) p.9 http://www.oecd.org/edu/innovation-education/47469308.pdf

[17] National Council for Special Education *Guidelines on the Individual Plan Process* (2006) p.49 http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/final_report.pdf

in the approaches taken to developing and managing the IEP process may be directly related to a lack of clear legislative guidance in this area.[19]

Given the lack of legislative provision or clear and comprehensive guidance, there are inevitably consequences for the consistency and quality of transition planning provided to young people with SEN in ROI. In the 2013 report commissioned by NCSE, researchers found that:[20]

> *…there was little evidence that schools were proactive in developing transition planning at an early stage in the school career of students with SEN.*

Though the NCSE guidelines on the IEP process acknowledge that transition planning may involve working in a "multidisciplinary partnership", in practice, co-operation is often limited to staff in other education and employment bodies rather than professionals in the health and social care sector.[21]

While accepting that a partnership approach to transition planning should be adopted as good practice, the NCSE guidelines go on to state that:[22]

> *Representatives from any of the above agencies* [college access officers and FÁS, the Irish National Training and Employment Authority] *are not required to attend planning meetings for these students.*

The guidance issued by the Department is similarly narrow in terms of the bodies that may be involved or consulted in the transition planning process:[23]

> *Preparation for transition can be carried out in collaboration with parents and the educational institution, training centre or place of employment to which the student is due to transfer.*

It is important to acknowledge that young people with SEN may be supported by a number of professional services in the community, apart from those accessed within their school. For example, they may have social workers, health workers or be supported by voluntary groups. All of these can play a part in enabling effective post-

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[18] Rose, R. et. al. 'Individual Education Plans in the Republic of Ireland: an Emerging System' in *British Journal of Special Education* vol.39, no.3 (2012) pp.110-116

[19] Rose, R. et. al. 'Individual Education Plans in the Republic of Ireland: an Emerging System' in *British Journal of Special Education* vol.39, no.3 (2012) pp.110-116

[20] McGuckin, Conor *et al. Moving on to Further and Higher Education: an Exploration of the Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs* (2013) p.6 http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Report_HigherEd_22_10_13.pdf

[21] National Council for Special Education *Guidelines on the Individual Plan Process* (2006) p.51 http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/final_report.pdf

In fact, the NCSE has questioned how common this multidisciplinary approach is, finding instead "…a lack of formal co-operation between schools and third-level institutions in the transition planning process". McGuckin, Conor *et al. Moving on to Further and Higher Education: an Exploration of the Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs* (2013) p.6 http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Report_HigherEd_22_10_13.pdf

[22] National Council for Special Education *Guidelines on the Individual Plan Process* (2006) p.52 http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/final_report.pdf

[23] Department of Education and Science *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines* (2007) p.97 http://www.sess.ie/sites/default/files/insp_inclusion_students_sp_ed_needs_pp_guidelines.pdf

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school transition for students with SEN. In their 2013 report, the NCSE accepts the importance of multi-agency planning:[24]

> *It is highly improbable that one type of professional can deal with all these complex, inter-related issues, which is why multiple agencies must act together to make this process work for young people…The level of interagency collaboration and co-operation with education providers is crucial to the success of the transition process.*

However, existing guidance on transition planning gives little consideration to matters beyond future education, training or employment. Concerns about ensuring continuity of health care or practical issues such as finance, accommodation, transport and travel are not addressed in any formal guidance or policy. [25]

In 2013, a *Framework for Collaborative Working between Education and Health Professionals* recommended the formation of a permanent National Education and Health Steering Group. The Steering Group would assume responsibility for drawing up policies, protocols and procedures on joint working for local implementation, including:[26]

> *Planning process for transition for individual young people from school and school age disability services to adult/vocational/other services.*

The proposed multi-agency pathway for transition planning is provided in Appendix 1. The Framework has been approved by the interdepartmental Cross Sectoral Group for implementation, but it is unclear whether the pathway has been widely adopted.

3   Examples of Transition Planning Projects

3.1 Disability Activation (DACT) Project[27]

The Disability Activation (DACT) Project is jointly funded by the European Social Fund and the Department of Social Protection. It is targeted at the borders, midlands and

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[24] McGuckin, Conor *et al. Moving on to Further and Higher Education: an Exploration of the Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs* (2013) p.36 http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/Report_HigherEd_22_10_13.pdf

[25] A 2013 nationwide survey of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Adult Mental Health Services (AMHS) in ROI revealed that only a small minority of mental health teams in both services had written transition guidelines. The researchers concluded that the transition process in ROI is unstructured given that the majority of both CAMHS and AMHS teams reported a lack of agreed, accessible and known transition care arrangements. McNamara, Niamh *et al.* 'Transition from Child and Adolescent to Adult Mental Health Services in the Republic of Ireland: an Investigation of Process and Operational Practice' in *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*. Published online 04 July 2013. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/eip.12073/abstract

[26] Education and Health Sub-Group of the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People Programme *Framework for Collaborative Working Between Education and Health Professionals* (2013) p.7 http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/disability/progressingservices/reportsguidancedocs/collaborativeworkingeducationhealthprof.pdf

[27] Oireachtas Written Question 50425/2013 (26 November 2013) http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/takes/dail2013112600067?opendocument#WRO02200

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western regions. The project commenced in 2013 and will run until April 2015. There are four strands to DACT:

- Strand 1 – Improving Access to Employment;
- Strand 2 – Progression Programmes for Young People;
- Strand 3 – Support for Progression and Retention of People with an Acquired Disability; and
- Strand 4 – Innovative Employer Initiatives.

A number of programmes operating under Strand 2 are concerned with the transition planning process. These are discussed below:

- **Transition Action Planning[28]**

Hosted by the National Learning Network, this Donegal-based project provides comprehensive transition planning services for adolescents (aged sixteen to eighteen) with autism and/or intellectual disabilities. The aim is to facilitate people's transition from school or children's services to adulthood and a wide range of educational, rehabilitation and vocational opportunities are explored.

- **Providing Equal Employment Routes (PEER)[29]**

This programme is operated by the Walkinstown Association for People with an Intellectual Disability. Based in Louth, the WALK PEER programme aims to create routes to sustainable and lasting employment for young people with disabilities aged sixteen to twenty-four (and in receipt of a disability payment). The programme works through a series of steps which are person-centred and links education and training to achieving a real employment outcome.

The PEER programme engages existing community networks, employers, educators, government agencies, trained volunteers and other key stakeholders to facilitate and realise opportunities for young people with disabilities to progress to sustainable employment.

- **ICTU Training Options Programme[30]**

This programme is run by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and offers individual progression planning, mentoring, the provision of FETAC accredited training[31] and work placement opportunities. It is the largest of the DACT projects funded by Department of Social Protection and the European Social Fund.

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[28] http://www.nln.ie/Community-Based-Rehab/TAP.aspx

[29] www.walkpeerprogramme.ie

[30] http://www.ictu.ie/projects/training-options-disability-activation-project-dact/

[31] The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) was the statutory awarding body for further education and training in Ireland. The agency is now dissolved and its responsibilities have been absorbed by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

The programme targets people with a disability, between sixteen and sixty-five years of age, residing in the borders, midlands and western regions (and in receipt of a disability payment). The twelve-week programme offers participants:

- Three FETAC component certificates;
- Ten days work placement; and
- One-to-one mentoring.

Working with their mentor, participants complete an individual learner progression plan and develop a clear pathway to either further education and training or return to work options.

3.2 Trinity College Dublin (TCD)

In recent years, there has been an emphasis on developing targeted access initiatives for higher education provision for young people with disabilities. These initiatives have supported the academic and social needs of students with SEN making the transition to, and progressing through higher education. Much of this pioneering work has been done by Trinity College Dublin.

3.2.1 Trinity College Dublin Disability Service[32]

The Disability Service (DS) in TCD has implemented an Outreach, Transition, Retention and Progression Plan 2011 – 2014[33] which aims to develop clear and effective support systems, at all stages of the student higher education journey, from pre-entry to employment.

The strategy was delivered in three phases:

- Phase 1: Pre-entry, admission and the first year experience;
- Phase 2: Building and maintaining a college career; and
- Phase 3: Progressing through College to employment.

The first phase, delivered as the 'Pathways to Trinity' programme, included a:

- Transition website[34];
- Transition planning tool[35]; and
- Transition outreach activities.

The Pathways to Trinity website is a dedicated transition site for second level students, parents, professionals, and other stakeholders that assists with transition planning. The

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[32] http://www.tcd.ie/disability/strategic-plan/
[33] http://www.tcd.ie/disability/assets/doc/Word%20Docs/Student%20Journey%20DS%20Strategic%20Plan%202011-14.docx
[34] http://www.tcd.ie/pathways-to-trinity/
[35] http://www.tcd.ie/pathways-to-trinity/tap/

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purpose of the site is to collate and disseminate information identified as being critical to transition success.[36]

The outreach programme seeks to engage students with disabilities during their final school year by providing college-based workshops which explore topics such as assistive technology, academic skills, planning a college career, and the college application process. Parents and practitioners are encouraged to engage in workshops which provide advice on the college application process, supporting students through state examinations, managing student stress and setting up a study environment. Sessions are designed and delivered by DS staff and Occupational Therapists, together with input from current students with disabilities in the university.[37]

All participants in the workshop are introduced to the transition planning tool, a web-based assessment and planning resource structured into five modules:[38]

- Preparing Myself for the Future;
- Independent Living;
- Academic Skills;
- College Application and Course Choices; and
- Identifying and Using Reasonable Accommodations.

In Phase 3 of the strategy, DS delivered further transition services as students progressed from higher education to employment. This phase focused on an examination of personal, occupational and environmental issues that disabled students deal with as they prepare for participation in work.

3.2.2 Univers' Emploi (Transition to Employment) Project (2010-2012)[39]

'Univers' Emploi' was an EU Leonardo funded employment transfer project which examined the process of transition from higher education to employment. In 2010, TCD and University College Cork (UCC) joined the project which was led by the INS HEA Institute (France) and partnered with the University of Aarhus (Denmark) and the University of Rome "Foro Italico" (Italy).

The focus of the project was an investigation into the experiences of disabled students as they made the transition from higher education into employment. The objective of

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[36] Doyle, Alison; Reilly, Declan and Treanor, Declan 'The Disabled Student Journey: a New Transition Model is Emerging' in *Trinity Education Papers* Vol.2, No.2 pp.112-131 http://www.tcd.ie/Education/research/trinity-papers/TEP%20-%20Special%20Edition%20-%20Vol2%20No2%20-%20Special%20Education.pdf

[37] Doyle, Alison; Reilly, Declan and Treanor, Declan 'The Disabled Student Journey: a New Transition Model is Emerging' in *Trinity Education Papers* Vol.2, No.2 pp.112-131 http://www.tcd.ie/Education/research/trinity-papers/TEP%20-%20Special%20Edition%20-%20Vol2%20No2%20-%20Special%20Education.pdf

[38] Doyle, Alison; Reilly, Declan and Treanor, Declan 'The Disabled Student Journey: a New Transition Model is Emerging' in *Trinity Education Papers* Vol.2, No.2 pp.112-131 http://www.tcd.ie/Education/research/trinity-papers/TEP%20-%20Special%20Edition%20-%20Vol2%20No2%20-%20Special%20Education.pdf

[39] http://universemploi.inshea.fr/spip.php?article4

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the project within TCD was to pilot and evaluate the final stage of the TCD transition tool (see Section 3.2.1).

In both TCD and UCC, an integrated model of support was used for students identified as having significant difficulties in preparing and gaining employment. This model combined:[40]

- Academic guidance;
- Disability advice;
- Career coaching; and
- Guidance in employment from a mentor.

On examining feedback from students, researchers concluded that:[41]

> *The inclusion of employability into the needs assessment was of considerable benefit to students, as it allowed them to focus on their future goals and to plan in respect of the skills and preparation necessary for successful transition to employment.*

The evaluation recommended that the employment focus should start earlier in the academic experience of students with disabilities attending higher education. In fact, some students and staff reported that the employment focus should begin in second level before the student with a disability chooses the degree programme as many students said they were not aware of the employment options following specific degree programmes.[42]

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[40] Trinity College Dublin and University College Cork *Univers' Emploi Transition to Employment: Irish Evaluation Summary Report: Trinity College Dublin & University College Cork* (2012) p.5
http://universemploi.inshea.fr/IMG/pdf/report_ireland.pdf

[41] Trinity College Dublin and University College Cork *Univers' Emploi Transition to Employment: Irish Evaluation Summary Report: Trinity College Dublin & University College Cork* (2012) p.6
http://universemploi.inshea.fr/IMG/pdf/report_ireland.pdf

[42] Trinity College Dublin and University College Cork *Univers' Emploi Transition to Employment: Irish Evaluation Summary Report: Trinity College Dublin & University College Cork* (2012) p.8
http://universemploi.inshea.fr/IMG/pdf/report_ireland.pdf

Appendix 1 Framework for Collaborative Working between Education and Health Professionals[43]

POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL – EMPLOYMENT / TRAINING / 3RD LEVEL						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
INDICATIVE TIME-FRAMES ONLY - SUBJECT TO LOCAL CONDITIONS						
Time	End of 2nd year	3rd year	Transition year (If available)	Pre-final year	Final year	Post-2nd level year
Event	Initiation of process for transition from Post-Primary. (May occur at this stage or up to the beginning of 5th year).	Investigation of career / training / education options.	Opportunity for consolidation.	Final preparation for transition.	Activation of Transition Plan.	Hand-over from Post-Primary.
Health Sector	With a view to refining vocational skills, review independent functioning, leisure skills, functional communication and interpersonal skills. SAT available for support.	Begin investigation of post-school health supports required. SAT available for support.	Support the student to further develop skills required. SAT available for support.	SAT ensures all necessary medical and psychological assessments are up-to-date. Occupational Guidance Service (OGS) involved in developing transition plan.	Initiate activation of post-school health supports.	Support adult services.
Joint Working	Liaise to ensure agreed approach to development of vocational and independent functioning skills.	Liaise to ensure agreed approach to development of vocational and independent functioning skills.	Liaise to ensure agreed approach to development of vocational and independent functioning skills.	SAT / School Guidance / OGS / SEN Team / SENO / NEPS as appropriate develop Transition Plan including necessary liaison with post-leaving cert providers.	SAT / School Guidance / OGS / SEN Team / SENO / NEPS as appropriate develop Transition Plan including necessary liaison with post-leaving cert providers.	Liaise to ensure that appropriate educational disability supports are put in place.
Education Sector	Review IEP with student and parents. Review curriculum and examination choices with parents and student. NEPS available for support. SENO available for advice on options.	Review IEP with student and parents. School Guidance / SEN team discuss with student / parents: - Post Junior Cert course options, - Career information, - Post Leaving Cert training options. School links in with other education providers e.g. VEC initiatives. NEPS and SENO available to school for support.	Support the student to further develop skills required (academic, social, functional) in a variety of settings. NEPS available for support. SENO available for advice on options.	Review IEP with student and parents. School Guidance / SEN Team discuss career guidance options with student / parents. Facilitate work experience placements / third level visits as part of curriculum as appropriate. NEPS available for support, review assessment as necessary. SENO available for advice on options.	Support student / parents to activate necessary post-school supports. Access necessary accommodations, supports for final accreditation.	Educational Disability Supports put in place.

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[43] Education and Health Sub-Group of the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People Programme *Framework for Collaborative Working Between Education and Health Professionals* (2013) p.7 http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/disability/progressingservices/reportsguidancedocs/collaborativeworkingeducationhealthprof.pdf