

**Submission to the Department of Education & Skills**

**Career Guidance Review**

**June 2018**

## Introduction:

The National Federation of Voluntary Bodies Providing Services to People with Intellectual Disability is the national umbrella organisation for voluntary / non-statutory agencies that provide direct services to people with intellectual disability in Ireland on behalf of HSE. Our 60 member organisations account for in excess of 85% of this country's direct service provision to children and adults with an intellectual disability.

The services and supports provided to people with an intellectual disability are founded on the values as set out in the O'Brien (1987) Principles of Inclusion, Choice, Dignity, Respect, Participation and Contribution. They are rooted in the rights based perspective that people with intellectual disability have the right to live full and active lives, and be active participating members of their own community.

National Federation members are fully committed to supporting people with an intellectual disability to achieve real and valued roles, through active citizenship. We are committed to ensuring that children and adults receive high quality supports and services most suited to meeting individual needs, promoting inclusion and independence.

The National Federation welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Department of Education & Skills' **Career Guidance Review**, and in particular the opportunity to highlight the importance of the review taking account of the guidance needs of students with intellectual disabilities.

This submission is the outcome of consultation with member organisations and reflects the views of organisations who support individuals in mainstream school settings and who are patrons of special schools. Organisations have provided feedback with regards to the Career Guidance Review; the contents of which have been collated and summarised in this document.

### a) Equal citizenship

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability, recently ratified by Ireland, reaffirms the equal rights of persons with a disability, throughout all stages of life.

“Reaffirming the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and the need for persons with disabilities to be guaranteed their full enjoyment without discrimination”

In addition:

“Putting employment on the agenda for young people with disabilities during their school years has a positive impact on longer-term employment prospects.” (*Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024, Government of Ireland p.15*)

It is source of considerable concern, therefore, to the members of the National Federation that the career guidance needs of young adults with intellectual disabilities, and particular those receiving their education in special schools, have not been equally considered or included in career guidance planning and delivery thusfar.

The Department of Education and Skills announcement of the review of career guidance (DES website, 22 January 2018) states:

“The purpose of the review is to ensure that we are providing a high quality, relevant career guidance support service to **all** students from post-primary level up to further and higher education”. *(emphasis added)*

Every young person, including those with a disability, has the potential to take up valued roles in society - including for many further education (in a range of settings) and employment (whether that be customised employment, supported employment or open market employment). In light of the stated intention of the career guidance service to support *all* students, and in the light of the potential of all young people, it is essential that the career guidance needs of students with a disability - including those receiving their education in special schools - are equally considered; and addressed on an equal basis to those of their peers without disabilities.

The individual submission to the Career Guidance Review made by Walk – one of the member organisations of the National Federation – provides significant detail on the disconnect between the lack of career guidance for young people with intellectual disabilities and the thrust of overarching national policy which seeks to facilitate inclusion and mainstreaming for people with disabilities. Extracts from this individual submission to the Review are included as an appendix to this overall National Federation submission, since many of the issues that members have brought to the consultation are presented in detail therein.

## **b) Absence of Career Guidance in Special Schools**

The absence of career guidance in special schools has been highlighted by members through this consultation as a grave injustice and source of discrimination. They state:

- Special Schools do not have any access to any career guidance for students aged 12-18 years old and this is a huge disadvantage for the students, their parents and the school. It can be argued that it is also a form of discrimination against secondary age students who attend special schools directly funded by the state yet resourced unequally for such students, because teachers such as Career Guidance, Home School Liaison or other support teachers are not allocated to special schools by the Department of Education and Skills. Yet students with SEN attending mainstream second level schools or special units attached to mainstream schools do have access to career guidance throughout their time in that school. Career information or information about possible after-school options from experienced and qualified career guidance teachers are therefore not available at all to students.
- Without this service pupils in special schools are left unsupported and their potential ultimately unrealised. By highlighting this vacuum in the career guidance service, it is

hoped that the review will recognise the reality for pupils in special schools and include as a matter of priority these pupils going forward.

- In special schools, teachers, learners and parents cannot form opinions around possible career choice or options as there is very limited information available to them. Schools liaise with the Vocational Guidance Advisor from the HSE as regards further supported training or employment options, but such options are limited to HSE supported services and do not include any further education options under the ETB or Further Education system. As such students have limited options available to them.
- Students also may not study through the linear mainstream secondary level i.e. students may not be able to achieve a Leaving Cert or even the Junior Cert yet they have skills in other areas that are not given the award or appreciation merited. Such skills could be used to develop interests in career areas but again with no career guidance or support for parents from a Home School Teacher or Career Guidance teacher to explore such options that are available in any way limits the opportunities for the students.
- Essentially students after-school choices have been limited to whatever further training can be sourced from HSE or local disability service provider. There could be many other options for school leavers if career guidance was available as this service would be in a position to interact with local employers and trainers and colleges of further education.
- Special schools – even those that have a Post Primary Curriculum - are considered to be Primary schools by Dept of Education and Skills and have no career Guidance post/teacher or any Home /school liaison post. As most schools for pupils with a MGLN are completing Post Primary courses now it would seem reasonable to have career guidance or access to this service.
- As it stands anomalies exist among special schools in that some have several subject-specific teachers while others have none.
- Special schools have developed great links with local colleges such as GMIT for their own students to work in the school on their own work experience placements for courses such as Social Care Studies. However, there is no reciprocal type of provision or option for students from special schools to access supported courses - even if these were on offer.

Best practice tells us that the process of Individual Education Planning should develop into Transition Planning for older students with disabilities preparing to leave school. This is a really anxious time for students and their families. Lack of information and certainty causes a lot of unnecessary anxiety and can lead to parents seeking permission for their children to remain on in school beyond the age of 18.

Three key issues impacting schools, students and their families are:

1. **Lack of certainty about funding and availability of training places.** It appears that decisions relating to funding are made in the late summer, after students leave school. Schools and families need to know what options are available for young adults and prepare them for this major change in their lives. Many students have spent up to 14 years in the same special school and need time to become familiar with new

circumstances. Currently, many students leaving our schools do not know if they will have a place in a training centre or when that is likely to become available. If funding were planned in advance, it would give time to identify suitable courses and allow for some choice and certainty. We know how many young people are due to leave school in any given year so there is no reason why funding cannot be planned in advance. Lack of funding also means that young people age 16+ cannot access training although the state says they may leave school at this age.

2. **Lack of transport to allow students to participate in training.** Many disabled and vulnerable young adults cannot travel independently and require specialist transport. This is not available for many and they are therefore at risk of being excluded from training opportunities.
3. **Lack of Options.** A third issue arises for students who are not offered in every case an opportunity to access an education funded and structure placement when they leave school. This is not in line with NCSE policy guidance and purpose to develop education opportunities for adults with disabilities including intellectual disabilities. Health funded courses are often the only option offered to young people leaving schools

As in post primary schools, young adults with disabilities need trained guidance counsellors who know the options, can identify the strengths, interests, abilities and support needs of students and assist families to access suitable opportunities. Students with disabilities may require a package of supports, transport, personal assistance, specialist equipment etc to enable them to participate fully and safely in available courses. Families should not have to deal with many different departments and agencies to put this package together but rather have one person whose role involves bringing all the services together.

Young people with disabilities find it difficult to break into the employment market and often end up in a cycle of training courses without any real employment opportunities. Courses need to have an employment focus with real opportunities for work experience and supported positions in the workplace.

Career guidance for people with disabilities needs to extend beyond the time they leave school and be available throughout their working lives. Retraining may be necessary to meet the new challenges of the changing workplace.

### **c) Roles for Career Guidance in the Special School Setting**

Member organisations who participated in the consultation provided their views on the roles that can be played by career guidance in the special school setting. These included the following:

- There is a role for career guidance in the special school setting particularly if the school is delivering the Junior Cycle Level 2 curriculum. The Priority Learning Unit in the Junior Cycle Programme Preparing for Work has the following Elements:
  - Setting Goals for Learning: (creating a plan for learning; implementing plan and expressing opinions)
  - Finding Out About Work (-listing own talents, creating a CV; doing a short interview; time management, record keeping)

- Preparing for work Related Activity;( practices in different work places;)
- Developing an awareness of Health and Safety using Equipment
- Taking part in a work-related activity; (working in different settings and at different tasks)

The support of career guidance would improve the delivery of this aspect of the Junior Cycle and aspects of the transition programme in place in the final year of schooling. A broader more personalized programme could be available for pupils if this resource was in place

- Profiling of pupils needs to happen once they turn 16. Career guidance input into this would be beneficial in pinpointing talents, interests and skills of individual learners and liaising with adult disability services (where this is the pathway that the young person will take), on how programmes can be tailored to offer suitable experiences for the young adults. Career guidance personnel work individually with pupils in secondary schools, gathering information on courses and internships etc. Through their individual work with students, they identify areas of strength and make recommendations on suitable courses/work placements etc. There is awareness at this level regarding what the various options are. In a new framework that includes special schools within the career guidance service, pupils in special schools will be afforded the opportunity to engage with this service and thus reach their potential in the workplace.
- There is a pastoral role for career guidance councillors in special schools to assist pupils and their families to deal with issues that present as the pupil comes into adolescence.
- At one time psychology was available to conduct a school leavers' assessment which was very helpful in determining future options. Career guidance could offer advice and support now in place of this.
- The term career guidance implies that there are choices available. Often there is only one choice of training centre as a pathway for a young person with a disability. Perhaps career guidance counsellors could advise on how to structure courses towards employment opportunities within communities.

#### **d) Existing career guidance:**

The submission from Walk, as outlined in Appendix A, has set out the benefits derived from the WALK Peer Programme, both for the individual and the significant potential savings to the State in terms of support costs for individuals whose potential is more fully realised.

Mr. John Kingston, the Saint John of God Education Officer representing seven Saint John of God Schools, has indicated that a Career Guidance Staff post, paid by the HSE is now uncertain of continuing after 30 years. Mr Kingston explained:

“It has been one of the most important posts in the school. I was Principal of that school for 20 years. This post has been of assistance to students, parents and school. It has also been of great assistance to the agencies that the students have been referred to as the students have been placed in environments that meet their needs.

The knowledge that this person has is quite specialised. They are seeking both day and residential places. They advise parents about the various entitlements and allowances. They arrange work Experience, Career Days, Visit to Adult Services, Interview Training etc. I am happy that the Career Model that exists in this school is an excellent one.”

Mr. Kingston has indicated that he is happy to arrange a visit to the school to demonstrate the value of career guidance in this special school context. In this regard, he can be contacted at xxxxxxxxxxxx.

#### **e) Recommendations**

- The Department of Education & Skills should take urgent action to address the unfair access to career guidance for students aged 12-18 years who attend special schools, acknowledging that special schools are an important and valuable part of the continuum of provision of education for students with special needs.
- A new framework should include the provision of career guidance teacher/service to all special schools who have students aged 12-18 years old. Such a teacher could work in a dual role as home school liaison as well as providing proper career information, advice and guidance to not only the students but their teachers as well. One teacher could be appointed to a cluster of special schools in an area e.g. in Mayo there are four special schools, and this teacher could also link in with other local post primary schools as well as the HSE Vocational Guidance Officer, local colleges and employment options.
- Links with the Further Education system should be developed further at a national level and engagement with special schools developed to ascertain how students with special needs who cannot attain Leaving Cert qualifications could follow through on vocational or further education and training.
- Part of a possible reframing of career guidance overall needs to be an examination of the special school system and how it supports both primary and post primary age students. Currently, this is hugely under-resourced to cater for the needs of the post primary age student cohort. One example is that special schools have to annually seek approval from the Department of Education to provide specialist post-primary subject teacher hours and are not even given access to equivalent choice of subject teachers that mainstream students have. One of these is access to a career guidance teacher and a home school liaison teacher, access to whom would have beneficial outcomes for students with special needs about their career choice and progression. There may be a need to differentiate between the needs of the primary age pupils and the post primary age pupils in special schools and the Department of Education and Skills should acknowledge that and resource schools accordingly.
- The omission of special schools from the initial survey has been identified as a recurring issue that should be addressed in future consultations and strategies. For instance, members noted that the recently developed Primary Language Curriculum had to be amended following roll out as the levels of pupils with intellectual disabilities were not clearly reflected.

## **Appendix I – Extracts from WALK Submission**

### **WALK PEER Programme – Providing Equal Employment Routes**

In 2012 the Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton TD, announced funding of €7 million for a range of projects under the Disability Activation Project (DACT). Funding was granted to organisations with experience of working with people with disabilities for strategic and innovative projects in the Border, Midlands, and West region.

The strategic aim of DACT was to increase the capacity and potential of people on Department of Social Protection disability / illness welfare payments to participate in the labour market. This provided WALK with an opportunity to test the WALK PEER Programme with a wider cohort of people (i.e. not restricted to people with intellectual disabilities and autism) in a “community or mainstream” setting (i.e. not based in a disability care environment) and support government policies of mainstreaming and New Directions, bridging the gap between services and the mainstream.

WALK PEER Programme was selected as one of 14 projects funded under DACT and commenced meeting participants in County Louth in April 2013. An extension of three months was funded in April 2015 and the project received a grant from the HSE and Ulster Bank to sustain it until July 2016. The WALK PEER Programme in Louth engaged over 170 young people with varying abilities, aged 16-24, who are in receipt of a DSP disability allowance and do not qualify for employment activation supports because they were deemed to be “Not Job Ready” by the Employability Services. This consigns these young people to lives in expensive health funded “care centre services” separated from their peers and their communities.

### **The Services - Mainstream ‘Gap’**

The most recent National Intellectual Disability Database (NIDD) analysis of future service requirements for individuals with intellectual disability, aged 16-19 and in an education setting in 2014, indicates that the planned service provision for 85% of students is in specialist segregated disability services, away from the mainstream, the majority of which are funded by the HSE. By contrast only 2% of students have a planned transition to mainstream environments such as further or higher education and / or the open labour market.

This reality on the ground is young people leaving special education have the very limited options of either HSE funded Rehabilitative Training (RT) / Day Service programmes or to struggle along in the “mainstream”. There is no “middle ground” option presented to these young people and their parents, which allows them the opportunity to “test” transitioning



to the mainstream before entering segregated “specialist” services, contributing to the rising number of young people who are NEET (Not in Employment Education of Training).

Figure 1 below illustrates the impacts of transitioning young people directly into segregated disability services, offering limited choices, options, or experiences, further separating them from their local communities and mainstream opportunities, thus compounding the services - mainstream “gap”.

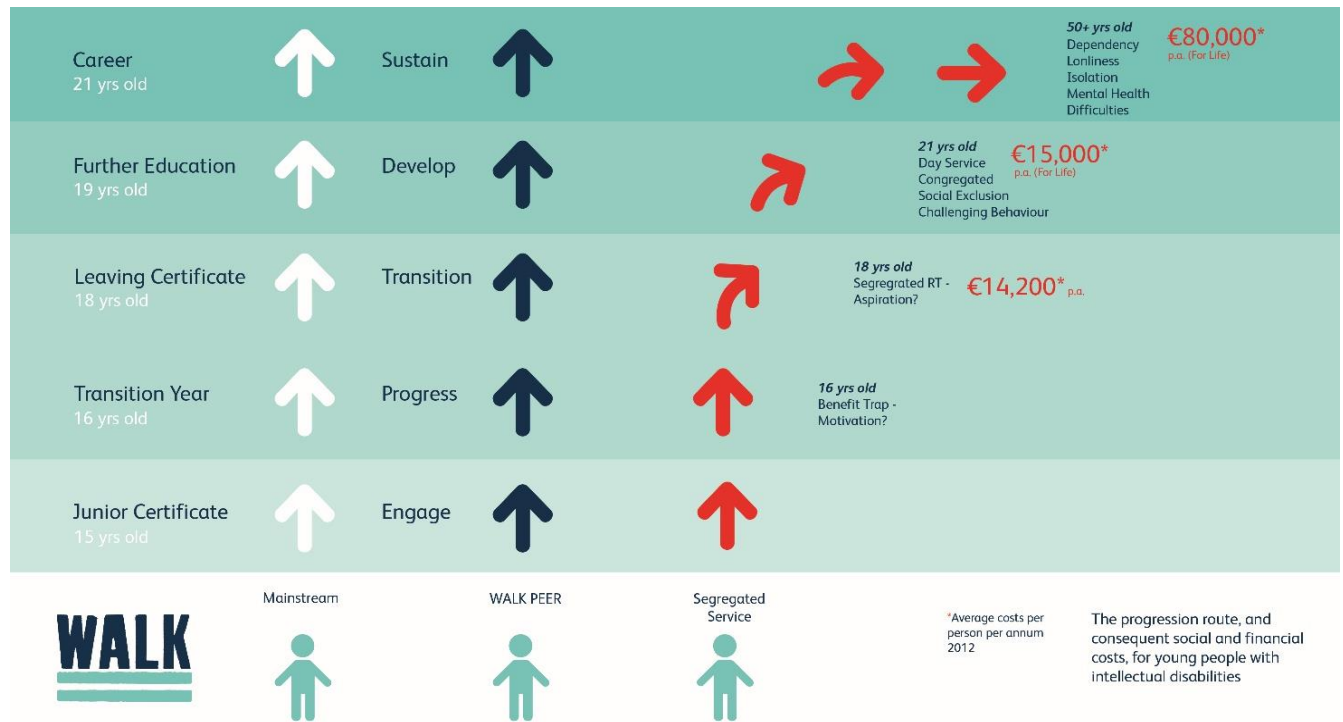


Fig 1: The “Services – Mainstream Gap” (see WALK submission for larger version)

### Policy Context for WALK’s Submission

Ireland is more than adequately served with an extensive range of legislation, policies, strategies, and action plans. Unfortunately, there are certain “policy gaps” and significant “implementation gaps”, where all the great intentions dissolve into never ending working groups, implementation groups, pilot projects, evaluations, and reviews. Policy needs implementation in the spirit in which policy is developed if we are to deliver better outcomes for young people living with significant disadvantages as per;

- Disability Act 2005 and the National Disability Inclusion Strategy; which established the principle of “mainstreaming” as policy and requires all mainstream public services are expected to be designed and delivered in ways that include people with disabilities, so that they are considered by the public sector to be an integral part of the community they serve.

- The national Youth Strategy 2015-2020; aims to enable all young people to realise their maximum potential, by respecting their rights and hearing their voices, while protecting and supporting them as they transition from childhood to adulthood.
- The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN); which envisages that a child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be in the best interests of the child.
- Comprehensive Employment Strategy for the Employment of People with Disabilities (CES); a ten-year approach to ensuring that people with disabilities, who are able and want to work are supported and enabled to do so, through six priorities;
  - o Building skills, capacity, and independence.
  - o Providing bridges and supports into work
  - o Make Work Pay
  - o Promoting job retention
  - o Providing coordinated and seamless supports
  - o Engaging employers
- New Directions; envisages that all the supports available in communities will be mobilised so that people have the widest possible choices and options about how they live their lives and how they spend their time” through the promotion of;
  - o Person-Centeredness
  - o Community Inclusion
  - o Active Citizenship
  - o Quality Service

### **Review of Career Guidance**

From the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE), which advises the Department of Education and Skills on policy development;

“Guidance facilitates people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social, and life choices so that they reach their full potential and contribute to the development of a better society. This is the agreed definition of guidance of the National Forum on Guidance (2004)

In the context of lifelong learning, guidance refers to a range of activities that enables citizens of any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences, and interests, to make educational, training, and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work, and other settings in which these capacities and competences are leaned and/or used. ... Examples of such activities include information and advice giving, counselling, competence assessment, mentoring, advocacy, teaching decision-making and career management skills. Taken from EU Resolution on Guidance (2008)”

With this policy advice in mind and in the context of young people with “Special Educational Needs” (SEN), it seems to be at least a major oversight by the Department of Education and Skills to exclude “Special Schools” from the Terms of Reference of the Review and at another level to be “systemic discrimination”.

Given that students with SEN are citizens, with an unemployment rate in excess of 80% and in view of the aim of the government’s Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) to “stem the flow into joblessness”, it is particularly concerning that the Department of Education would entertain the idea of excluding one of the most disadvantaged groups in our society.

Furthermore, it is seriously questionable how this has come to pass, given that the Department was made aware of this issue in September 2017, at a Disability Consultative Committee meeting, and followed up at a Comprehensive Employment Strategy Implementation Group (CESIG) meeting, chaired by Fergus Finlay, in October to confirm that Special Schools were to be included in the Terms of Reference of the Review of Career Guidance.

WALK respectfully submits that this decision be reversed immediately, and a root and branch review of the needs of Special Schools to deliver appropriate Career Guidance for students who desperately need it is part and parcel of this current review.

Our views address the following:

- From your experience, how could existing career guidance tools and career information for students and adults be improved, so that they have a greater impact on students making course and career choices?
- o Provision for “supported guidance” for all students in Special Education that is delivered in a manner appropriate to their needs.

- In your opinion, how do learners form their opinions around career choice including when, who and what influences these choices and which mechanisms and formats have the greatest impact on students and adults career choices?
  - o Young people begin to form opinions (aspirations) around career choice from an early age in primary school and begin to develop them (expectations) from the age of 12/13. The process of forming opinions on careers, as with anything else in life, is based on role models (who do I want to be like) and reference points (where do I fit into the greater scheme of things). Obviously, family has the greatest influence on younger people, but role models from outside the family (peers, teachers, wider family adults, employers, tutors, etc) have a greater impact on teenagers. Young people with SEN tend to benefit more from experiential learning, so they need to see, hear, touch, and experience a potential outcome to understand it. The experience of going out to the world of work, while still at school, has the greatest impact on them and feeds into their motivation to fulfil their aspirations, ambitions and expectations and ultimately successes.
- Outline what measures could be designed and what framework created to enhance enterprise engagement with the education and training system in relation to providing information on career pathways for students and adults.
  - o Development of inclusive “traineeships” at QQI levels 3, 4 & 5 in collaboration with industry sectors such as hospitality, retail, logistics, tourism, etc would generate significant and appropriate pathways for students with SEN, while filling a gap in economic needs of businesses and fulfilling one of the key National Disability Inclusion Strategy aims.
- Any other issues of relevance to the terms of reference.
  - o The “provision V practice” challenge of guidance for “special units” in post-primary schools needs to also be addressed. It is not enough to say that it is up to the school to provide guidance, if the resources are not available to the school. If the head count in special units is used for the ratio of guidance, then those students should at least get the same dedicated guidance time as their non-unit peers. However, this is not the practice. In reality, these students require more intensive supports, i.e. not just the CAO application type of guidance, and society as a whole will benefit if we look to connect them into meaningful work, careers and lives of choice and empowerment.