WALK

Accessing Mainstream Training:

Barriers for People with Intellectual Disabilities

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DIVERSITY IS PART OF THE HUMAN CONDITION, AND SYSTEMS OR STRUCTURES DESIGNED FOR 'TYPICAL' PEOPLE CAN BE A BARRIER TO THOSE WHO ARE EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT. THE CONCEPT OF EQUALITY RECOGNISES DIVERSITY, THAT PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT."

- National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan 2013-16

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1. Introduction

a. Background

WALK (walk.ie) is a progressive organisation offering person centred services to people with disabilities in Leinster. WALK supports people who have intellectual disabilities to live self-determined lives within socially inclusive communities. It operates rights based services, actively supporting service users to know and exercise their rights as full and equal citizens, and as customers of its services. Services are respectful of the right to self-determination: service users are at the centre of all decisions that affect them. They are provided with appropriate support for informed decision making, and facilitated to exercise control over and direct the supports that they receive.

WALK provides quality services including Walkways, which is a project aimed at increasing employment opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities. The project is a partnership between WALK in Ireland and Agoriad Cyf a disability support organisation based in North Wales. Another project is the Walkinstown Green development, which is a local training initiative and social enterprise supporting marginalised people to access to employment and training. The project has recently opened

The Green Kitchen (@greenkitchendub) as a social enterprise, aimed at supporting people in taking courses in hospitality and catering as well as a horticulture project that will offer FET level 3 training in horticulture/community gardening. Participants will be supported to progress towards subsequent further training or employment. In addition to offering its own training programmes, WALK provides support for people with intellectual disabilities in accessing mainstream education and training.

b. The Equality Mainstreaming Project

WALK sought expert advice from the Equality Mainstreaming Unit to

- help develop an equality action plan to improve educational outcomes for marginalised learners;

- foster and develop links with other education and training bodies so that its participants can overcome the barriers regarding equality of access that they all too often face;

- develop alternative forms of assessment for learners requiring reasonable accommodation or specific language and literacy supports;

As part of that support, it was agreed that a mapping exercise, identifying the barriers experienced by WALK service users when accessing mainstream training provision would be carried out. Other aspects of the support will include the development of an Equality Steering Group, training and action planning workshops.

c. The Mapping Exercise

"Inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers" (UNESCO 2005)

Aims:

- To provide information about the barriers currently experienced by WALK service users

- To obtain local service providers views on the barriers

- To identify areas for improvement;

- To provide a basis for engagement with other education and training bodies to facilitate the opening up of dialogue addressing the barriers faced by people with intellectual difficulties in accessing mainstream provision.

d. Scope

The mapping exercise will assess current issues with accessing mainstream provision and seek to identify some of the structural or underlying factors.

e. Methodology:

After discussing the outline and scope of report with WALK staff and staff from the Equality Authority's Mainstreaming Unit, a means of carrying out the mapping report was agreed. It was agreed to conduct a series of short, semi-structured qualitative interviews with a range of relevant stakeholders, including WALK staff, service users, disability organisations, support organisations, education professionals and training providers. Twelve people were contacted and eight agreed to be interviewed. The interviews took place in November and December 2014. In addition a focus group was facilitated by WALK which allowed service users to express their views on the barriers they experienced and the benefit they obtained from taking part in mainstream training provision. The report also drew upon case studies compiled by WALK of service user experiences as well as a telephone interview with another service user. To support and supplement this, a review of relevant documents, websites, databases and other sources was undertaken. This review looked at relevant material, such as current training provision, statistics, relevant national and international standards, legislation, policy & case-law.

2. Executive Summary

This report examines the barriers to accessing mainstream training experienced by WALK service users, who are people with intellectual disabilities.

The right to education is enshrined in Irish and international law and a specific requirement is made in Irish equality legislation for the reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities in accessing services such as training and education. Despite this, people with intellectual disabilities experience significant barriers in accessing mainstream training and education. This is borne out by national statistics which demonstrate low participation in higher and further education by people with disabilities. The barriers identified by this study include:

Barriers Arising from Attitudes

There is evidence of prejudice and negative attitudes or behaviours towards people with disabilities. Lack of knowledge and familiarity with people with intellectual difficulties contributed significantly to this. Barriers are also created through negative attitudes about educating people with intellectual disabilities. This was compounded by subjective judgments being made about whether a student with an intellectual disability could secure a placement and/or subsequently get a job.

Barriers arising from Stigma

The expression of these attitudes contributes to the significant stigma attached to intellectual disability. This clearly has an impact on capacity and willingness to engage not just in education and training but in the social and community activities that go along with being a student. It all adds to the "chill factor" for people with intellectual disabilities in accessing mainstream provision.

There is a Hierarchy of Disabilities

The existence of a hierarchy of disabilities was identified. There were more positive attitudes, it was felt, toward people with physical disabilities. Even within the category of intellectual disability, it was widely felt, there was a hierarchy.

Low expectations

Low expectations for people with intellectual disabilities were widely felt to be a significant barrier. As one person said "the idea that people cannot achieve something is a blanket

presumption." Risk aversion and reluctance on the part of some families and other carers was also felt to be an issue.

Barriers Arising From Lack Of Capacity in the Sector

Another category of barrier is capacity, ranging from lack of skills to limited awareness and a dearth of appropriate support in the education provider. There is a universal view that there is a need for training for staff at all levels and functions. However at the moment there are only limited opportunities to acquire such skills and little incentive to do so. The increasing workload for teachers, lecturers and managers in Further Education was also considered to be a barrier. The absence of proper supports was also a factor – as was the fact that support often did not become available until very late in the year, even when the need for that support had been communicated well in advance of courses commencing. There is also a need for support for new and inclusive teaching approaches, learning strategies and assessment regimes, drawing on good practice from elsewhere.

Structural Barriers

There were numerous structural barriers identified, chief of which was the lack of availability in mainstream providers of appropriate levels of courses and qualifications. Colleges are offering fewer courses at FETAC level 3 and below. However, this is the level that many prospective students with an intellectual disability interested in doing. Other issues were identified, including:

- the lack of availability of funding for supports for people with disabilities on part-time and lower level FET (Further Education and Training) courses;

- the absence of decent transitional support;

- uncertainty about the availability of particular programmes to people with intellectual disabilities (e.g. literacy programmes).

Lack of coherent policies – failure to mainstream

Lack of coherent policies is a general but significant structural problem. In particular the lack of clarity in what mainstreaming equality means for access to provision creates significant barriers. This is despite the policy of mainstreaming services to disabled people being in operation and by successive governments since 2000. It is given statutory effect by Section 26 of the Disability Act 2005.

Education providers are often not aware of their obligations under the Equality Acts in relation to the legal requirement of providing reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities. Reasonable accommodation is about meeting the

needs of people with disabilities, so that they can participate fully in education and employment, and so that they can access and use everyday services. It involves putting in place tailored supports or special facilities to assist a person with a disability.

Practical Barriers

There were a range of practical barriers identified – primarily the issue of transport and logistical issues, such as finding one's way around a college. Another barrier identified was an excess of bureaucracy and administrative errors, the impact of which is much greater on people with intellectual disabilities.

Positive Experiences

Whilst it is clear from the review that many barriers exist, there are also examples of good practice. Almost everyone interviewed was able to point to positive experiences where things had worked well. However, most of those had come about after a lot of effort, persistence and, usually, the help of a champion on the "inside". Whilst service users sometimes struggled to understand that they had a right to education, they all valued the experience of learning and wanted to continue.

Conclusion:

Many of these barriers could be addressed through training, better structural support and more widespread access to financial and other means of support. However, proper application of existing equality law and policy, combined with coherent targets and plans for the greater participation of people with intellectual disabilities would also help.

3. The Right to Education

The right to education is protected by a number of laws, including article 42 of the *Irish Constitution*, *The Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004*, *The Disability Act 2005* and the *Equal Status Act 2000-2011*. In addition to protecting people with disabilities from discrimination, the Equal Status Act requires providers of goods and services (such as education) to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities by making reasonable adjustments in their provision or by putting in place specific supports or facilities. These measures are necessary to put people with disabilities on an equal level.[1] Further education and training are also covered by both the *Equal Status Act* and the *Employment Equality Acts.* [2]

The right to education is further protected by an international human rights framework, including the two UN Covenants and a number of UN Conventions. Ireland has signed but not yet ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, although the government has signalled its intention to do so.

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1   See *REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE PROVISION OF GOODS AND SERVICES, EQUALITY AUTHORITY, Dublin 2012*

2   See *An Employee v. A Local Authority DEC-E2002-004 (18/02/2002)*

The Convention includes the following commitments:

"States shall ensure that:

i. Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability …

iii. Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;

iv. Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;

vi. Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion."

Ireland is also a member of the Council of Europe, which requires, for example, the mainstreaming of participation by disabled people in all forms of education and training.

Provision of further education is also governed by quality assurance standards, issued by FETAC originally and now governed by QQI.[3] These quality assurance guidelines also include equality standards. They therefore require that programmes of education and training and related services should be delivered in a manner that accommodates diversity, combats discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity. The guidelines also specify that:

> *"Delivery agencies should have an institutional capacity and commitment to combat discrimination, to accommodate and make adjustments for diversity. This capacity needs to be planned and systematic rather than ad hoc, informal or reactive."*[4]

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3 *FESS is the successor to FETAC and is Further Education Support Service that currently supports the Department of Education and Skills funded centres registered with QQI. These include City of Dublin ETB. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is a state agency established by the Quality Assurance and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 2012. QQI is responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of quality assurance in further and higher education providers.*

4 *FESS/FETAC QUALITY ASSURANCE IN FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICY AND GUIDELINES v1.3*

4. Participation in Education

"The creation of opportunities for disabled people to participate in mainstream education is not only important for disabled people but will also benefit non-disabled people's understanding of human diversity."

- The Council of Europe Action Plan To Promote The Rights And Full Participation Of People With Disabilities In Society: Improving The Quality Of Life Of People With Disabilities In Europe 2006-2015

Despite these legal rights, recent figures estimate that people with an intellectual disability are amongst the most disadvantaged in the educational system. For example, only 4% have a 3rd level degree and 63% have not progressed to second level (compared to 19% of all adults).[5] In participation terms only an "estimated" 5% of new entrants to higher education in 2011/12 were disabled.[6] These figures include "flexible learners" – i.e. part-time students, Distance & E-Learning students and In-Service students. However, figures on the participation of people with intellectual disabilities in further education are not available,[7] so the exact picture is unclear.[8]

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5   Watson, D. & Nolan, B A SOCIAL PORTRAIT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN IRELAND, ESRI/ Department of Social Protection (Dublin 2011) at p20

6   HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM PERFORMANCE FIRST REPORT (2014 -2016) OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY TO THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS, HEA (Dublin, 2014) P111

7   McGuckin et al, Moving to Further and Higher Education: An Exploration of the Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs) (NCSE RESEARCH REPORTS NO: 14) (National Council for Special Education, Dublin, 2013)m at para 5.1

8   In PATHWAYS FOR DISABLED STUDENTS TO TERTIARY EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT. OECD Country Report for Ireland. (Paper prepared by the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills) (Dublin, 2010) a figure of 8840 people with disabilities is quoted as participating in FE programmes in 2008, but it is unclear what percentage of overall participants that comprises. (Table 3.1, p38)

The National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan (2013) identifies one key goal as being *"people with disabilities have equal access to public services"* and another as *"people with disabilities get the education and training that enables them to reach their potential."*[9] Amongst the key objectives of the plan are *"ensuring mainstream services are accessible to persons with disabilities"* and *"provision of greater choice and control which are person centred to individuals with disabilities, particularly by enhancing access to mainstream services."*[10] Key to securing these aims and objectives is said to be *"Ensur[ing] provision of vocational education for people with disabilities by the Education and Training Boards (replacing VECs)."* A major outcome is set as *"participation by persons with disabilities in education programmes."* How these aims are to implemented is yet to be seen – for example, the 2014 Further Education & Training Plan makes little reference to disability.[11]

The issue was one raised by the then Minister for Justice,

> *"[I]t is essential that the training is designed in such a way that it is accessible to the widest possible group of candidates, and delivered in such a way that the widest possible group of participants can master and apply the knowledge and skills being taught. Apart from technical and administrative skills, it is highly important that the training provided will also develop the personal and communication skills needed to contribute to a working environment which respects diversity and promotes equal treatment."*[12]

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9   both at p7

10   both at p10

11   It states that "the Specialist Training Plan (STP) provides education for persons with a disability through dedicated training facilities in the city [of Dublin]." SOLAS, March 2014, At p109

12   Speech by Alan Shatter T.D., Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence at the opening of the Equality Authority Conference, "Mainstreaming Equality: making it real", Dublin Castle Conference Centre, Tuesday, 22 October 2013

5. Barriers

"Systems can indirectly exclude people with disabilities if the architecture, policies, information or service delivery, are not geared to include people with a range of disabilities."

- National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan 2013-16

From the work carried out for this report, a series of barriers to participation in mainstream education and training provision by WALK clients emerged. These can be divided into a number of categories.

a. Barriers Arising from Attitudes

Prejudice

"Negative attitudes or behaviours towards people with disabilities can also limit their participation in mainstream society."

- National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan 2013-16

A major barrier was created by attitudes to disability. Despite the ascent of the social model of disability and the growing awareness amongst many professionals of a rights based approach, old fashioned ideas rooted in the medical model remain. Alongside this often went a disempowering view of disabled people as 'tragic charity cases'. It seems although national policy is about mainstreaming access, "the practice on the ground hasn't really followed that," as one interviewee put it. It was felt that some middle managers in both education and health sectors "haven't come on board in terms of the social and community model." "They're still stuck in the medical model", as another person said.

This leads to low expectations for people with intellectual disabilities and the primacy of an approach which privileges risk aversion over everything else. As one person said, "people can be supported in taking a risk, but without risk there is no chance for people to change and develop. All of us take calculated risks in our lives and why should people with intellectual disability be any different?"

These negative attitudes take a number of forms, amongst them prejudice. Some are quite obvious – several examples were given of learners with intellectual disabilities being referred to very negatively and opposition to their inclusion being directly voiced.

Sometimes the prejudice is less conscious, or at least is less obvious. Thus, views are expressed that bringing students with intellectual disabilities into mainstream classes is unfair because they are regarded as not being able to cope or "do as well as the other people in the class," as one person had heard it said. So judgments are frequently made about the capacity of a prospective learner, often, as another interviewee explained, "by people that don't have an understanding of the disability. There is a lot of ignorance, a lack of knowledge. People focus on what they see or what they think they know without even, for example, discussing it with the student. They are making judgments that they are not authorised or fit to make."

Prejudice also often presents as concern, for example, about "fairness" to other students, those without an intellectual disability. "It creates difficulties for people with a reasonable ability," is an example of the views that people have heard expressed. Lack of resources are also given as reasons to exclude, but as one person noted, "even when resources are offered there is no change in the attitude." Another interviewee felt that "there is reluctance and a resistance to opening up institutions and establishments to people with an intellectual disability. If you have a physical disability, it's not so much of an issue but if it's an intellectual disability it's a whole different ball game." This

was a view shared by most people, with many referring to a general resistance to educating people with intellectual disability in mainstream provision. "It can be quite shocking to hear some of the views expressed, for example, in staff rooms," as one person said. It was felt that colleges are unable to offer support because many do not believe that it is part of their role to provide education and training to people with intellectual disability. Lack of knowledge and familiarity with people with intellectual difficulties contributed significantly to this resistance. These old fashioned, often prejudicial views were sometimes held because they had never been challenged in a positive way through experience or training. Barriers are also created through negative attitudes about educating people with intellectual disabilities. Several people had heard views expressed "questioning the value the amount of learning of someone coming to college who 'isn't going to qualify,'" as one person explained, "they would be asking, what was the point?" Several people felt this was a particular barrier that undercut a lot of attempts to mainstream access– the idea of education and learning as an economic output rather than as an entitlement. This was compounded by subjective judgments being made about whether a student with an intellectual disability could secure a placement and/or subsequently get a job.

Stigma

The expression of these attitudes contributes to the significant stigma attached to intellectual disability.[13] As the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights notes, "persons with intellectual disabilities…face stigmatisation and social exclusion.[14] Stigma is a key component in discrimination

> "The extent of discrimination encountered by people with an intellectual disability has been highlighted by recent reports from Mencap, a leading organisation in the UK for people with intellectual disability. In a survey of 5000 people, as many as 88% of people had been bullied over the previous year, with 32% being bullied on a weekly or daily basis. Forty-seven per cent of people reported verbal abuse and 23% reported physical violence."[15]

This clearly has an impact on capacity and willingness to engage not just in education and training but in the social and community activities that go along with being a student. It all adds to the "chill factor" for people with intellectual disabilities in accessing mainstream provision. As SCOPE observed in a recent report:

> "41% of people with intellectual, social or behavioural or learning disabilities have felt treated like a nuisance … it is also worth remembering that people who perceive themselves as stigmatised may also internalise the negative attitudes that they encounter in a disabling society. This in turn can have an impact on people's quality of life and wellbeing."[16]

A Hierarchy of Disabilities

The existence of a hierarchy of disabilities was mentioned by almost everyone interviewed. It was widely felt that it was more difficult to persuade a college to admit a person with an intellectual disability and to get support

13 Dorothy Watson and Bertrand Maître, UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH (EPMH) DISABILITY IN IRELAND: FACTORS FACILITATING SOCIAL INCLUSION (ESRI, March 31 2014), at p73

14 European Agency for Fundamental Rights, THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AND PERSONS WITH MENTAL PROBLEMS, FRDA, 2010

15 Afia Ali, Andre Strydom, Angela Hassiotis, Rachael Williams and Michael King, A Measure Of Perceived Stigma In People with Intellectual Disability THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY 2008 193: 410-415, at p413 (citing Mencap. THE NEED TO COMBAT BULLYING OF PEOPLE WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY.) Mencap, 2000.

16 Hardeep Aiden and Andrea McCarthy, CURRENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS DISABLED PEOPLE, SCOPE, 2014.

put in place than it would be for a person with a physical disability. There were more positive attitudes, it was felt, toward people with physical disabilities. Even within the category of intellectual disability, it was widely felt, there was a hierarchy – as one person commented, "there are "acceptable" intellectual disabilities and not acceptable ones – those that fit a certain category that's "handy", well, then, you're ok."

Low expectations

Low expectations for people with intellectual disability were widely felt to be a significant barrier and, as one person asserted "are something that really needs challenged – the idea that people cannot achieve something is a blanket presumption." Another interviewee suggested that "we are seeing now the first real influx of people with intellectual disability who want to come to college and they are in many ways pathfinders. But it is difficult for them because of that." Risk aversion and reluctance on the part of families and other carers was also felt to be an issue. One interviewee observed that "sometimes there is reluctance on the part of the families who are struggling with that balance between looking after the person and protecting them and getting them the opportunity and that can indirectly undermine the process. So the solution is to try and educate them as well and bring them along with you. "

b. Capacity

Another category of barrier is capacity, ranging from lack of skills to limited awareness and a dearth of appropriate support in the education provider. There is a universal view that there is a need for training for staff at all levels and functions. However at the moment there are only very limited opportunities to acquire such skills and little incentive to do so. It was also felt that training needs "to go hand in hand with that power of the example. If people actually see it happening, they'll realise it can and should be done," as one person said. It was also felt that lack of experience in working with people with disabilities generally was a problem throughout the sector.

The increasing workload for teachers, lecturers and managers in FE was also considered to be a barrier. As one interviewee noted, "colleges are used to people finding it difficult and struggling, so they should be able to offer support, but instead they are reluctant and saying well we have enough on our plate we can't really take anyone else on."

The absence of proper supports was also a factor – as was the fact that support often did not become available until very late in the year, even when the need for that support had been communicated well in advance of courses commencing. "It's as if the presumption is that this

sort of person won't be going any further in education or training, so there is no need to have anything set up," one interviewee commented.

Several people identified the need for support for new and inclusive teaching approaches, learning strategies and assessment regimes, drawing on good practice from elsewhere. There are many good examples and ideas about how to expand learning and teaching from the traditional methodologies which have tended to prevail in the past. Much could also be learned from the women's sector and the community education sector in Ireland have pioneered flexible, individualised learning support.

c. Structural

- Courses in the Further Education and training sector - Different Levels

There were numerous structural barriers identified but perhaps the most significant was the lack of availability in mainstream providers of appropriate levels of courses and qualifications. Whilst post leaving certificate courses (PLCs) have been traditionally seen as an alternative to higher education, increasingly they are provided in the FE sector as a form of transition to higher education. Thus colleges run fewer courses at FETAC/QQI level 3 and

below, which is the level that many prospective students with intellectual disability are seeking. Such programmes are being delivered, if at all, by other providers, such as community education organisations.

Funding

An additional problem is the availability of funding for supports for people with disabilities on part-time and lower level FET courses. There is no access, for example, to the Fund for Students with Disabilities, as those enrolled in part-time courses, access or foundation courses in or short courses are not eligible to apply. Nor is the fund available for courses below FETAC level 5. For many people with an intellectual disability, part-time programmes and those at a lower level offer a better and more appropriate means of accessing mainstream education. So, for example, of the 8840 participants with disabilities participating in FE programmes in 2007-2008, only 331 (3.7%) accessed the Fund. [17]

This is something that has long been an issue and was identified in 2008 by the HEA as a barrier.

> "A further system-level issue relates to the current absence of established funding for learning supports for part-time students with disabilities in higher education. Part-time education

17 OECD COUNTRY REPORT (2010) at pp39-40 (see note 8 above)

is the route of choice for many adults with disability due to the impact of their disability and without these supports in place aspiring adults do not have equality of opportunity to access higher education"[18]

For many providers, a further issue is that funding is increasingly being linked to student progression rates. Yet for many people with intellectual disabilities, progression will necessarily be slower than others.

Transitions

A significant barrier was felt to be the absence of decent transitional support. As one person put it, "we have moved some distance in terms of disability but something happens when kids get to the end of secondary school – as if disability moves from being something part of everyone's lives to becoming a problem." This is partly a result of low expectations – more than one person interviewed felt that one factor underlying many of the barriers was the presumption that people with intellectual disabilities were not going to be progressing any further in their education.

Eligibility and availability of programmes

Another problem is created by uncertainty about the availability of particular programmes. So, for example, there is a lack of clarity on the policy of access to and provision for people with intellectual disabilities in literacy programmes. Several of those interviewed reported difficulties in obtaining – or maintaining – places on such programmes for learners with intellectual difficulties. This has created difficulties for learners, support organisations and programme providers alike and was identified as an issue by the recent review of adult literacy programmes:

"The complexity of this issue was raised by many VECs during visits and in the survey; responses and local services have made different decisions in relation to the proportion of the literacy budget to be expended on work with people with learning disabilities."[19]

Lack of coherent policies – failure to mainstream

This lack of coherent policies is a general but significant structural problem. In particular the failure to make it clear

18 NATIONAL PLAN FOR EQUITY OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION 2008-2013, National Office of Equity of Access to Higher Education, Higher Education Authority (Dublin July 2008). At p53

19 Kett, M, REVIEW OF ALCES FUNDED ADULT LITERACY PROVISION, Department of Education & Skills,(Dublin 2013) pp40-41

what mainstreaming equality means for access to provision creates significant barriers. "There is no onus and no mechanism on Further Education and Training providers to mainstream provision. It's very much seen as a social responsibility – an add-on or a voluntary thing rather than compulsory or a right," as one interviewee put it. This is despite the policy of mainstreaming being in operation and by successive governments since 2000.[20] It is given statutory effect by Section 26 of the Disability Act 2005. Most people felt that there was a pressing need to articulate what equality of access to services means in practice and to set measurable, specific standards and outcomes. It was also felt that if equality of access was to be realised, there needed to be proper resourcing for it, including training and support for staff. Some of this has been provided by the Equality Mainstreaming Unit, which has offered support to FET colleges through expert advice and training.

More work is needed in mainstreaming reasonable accommodation policies and procedures in the FET sector, and in providing staff professional development with regard to understanding and applying reasonable accommodation supports and adjustments.

d. Practical Barriers

There were a range of practical barriers identified – primarily the issue of transport and logistical issues, such as finding one's way around a college. The ability to travel independently was highlighted as a key barrier to accessing educational opportunities. Whilst travel training can also overcome those barriers, there are others. "People with intellectual disability do need extra support – particularly in very practical things," as one interviewee put it, adding, "finding your way round college presumes a certain degree of capacity and literacy." There was a widespread view that such issues had to be an integral part of planning for access to education

Another barrier identified was an excess of bureaucracy and administrative errors. Whilst everyone finds it tricky to navigate increasingly complex admission and progression systems, it is significantly more difficult for someone with an intellectual disability. By the same token, whilst everyone experiences administrative mix-ups, the impact of those is much greater on people with intellectual disabilities.

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20 20 See speech by the then Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D. at the Launch of the National Disability Authority, Comhairle and the Mainstreaming of Services for People with Disabilities, O'Reilly Hall, UCD, 12th June 2000. See also NDA MAINSTREAMING POSITION PAPER, NDA 2006. Available at: <http://bit.ly/180C74b> visited 18 Feb 2015.

6. Experiences:

Whilst it is clear from the review that many barriers exist, there are also examples of good practice. Almost everyone interviewed was able to point to positive experiences where things had worked well. However, most of those had come about after a lot of effort, persistence and, usually, the help of a champion on the "inside". Below are some examples of both good and bad experiences, which illustrate the barriers experienced and also the efforts which often have to be made to overcome them.

"Where the experience is good is often where there is someone within the system who can help us navigate it. One example is where one young person is now about to finish a level 5 course. But they probably wouldn't have made it in the first place if the guidance counsellor hadn't smoothed the path. It's almost like you are looking for someone to do you a favour, which is not what it should be at all."

"One person was going back to education after many years. So we put in three months solid of independent travel training. Then the issue was to how to ensure that the person arrived safely. Now this person was an adult, so to have to sign in would have undermined that and their confidence but still, the risk assessment issue arose. So it was important to minimise the risk but how would we know that the person had arrived safely? So a member of staff volunteered to just keep an eye out for them. It was a very small act on their part but a very significant contribution to this person's ability to participate."

"I've seen lots of poor practice: for example, one person had applied to take a course, but once the training provider found out that they had an intellectual disability, there were all sorts of reasons suddenly manifesting as to why they couldn't now take that course. That was even though other people were prepared to put in a lot of time and resources into supporting the person on the course."
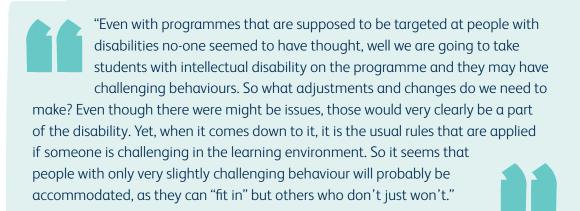
"There's one young person who is now on a PLC course and is doing really well but it was an absolute battle to get there. They had been in another programme but had gone about as far as they could with that. The person was quite determined about wanting to do this new course and initially the family were very reluctant, but the young person did a part time course to show their abilities academically. And then they did a work placement to show their commitment. But the biggest battle we had was with the HSE. In this particular instance the course co-ordinator was great and we started the transition work months ahead, working on travel and orientation. So whilst transport was an issue, it was solvable, the big problem was attitudes."

"Some of the big organisations are a nightmare to deal with. It's hard to get a sense of who is responsible for what. One person was trying to access a course but couldn't get to talk to anyone – they spoke to three different people and it ended up being a terrible experience. The week before the course this person got a letter saying yes, they had been accepted on to the course. So they finished their job and told people they were going onto this course and they were really delighted. Then when they turned up for the course on the day, they were then told that the training provider hadn't been known about their disability. The training provider went onto say that they didn't know if they could support the person on the course. Eventually after negotiations, it was agreed that in order for them to plan to take this student, they would have to defer their start. But just a few weeks before that deferred start still no contact had been made to do that planning."
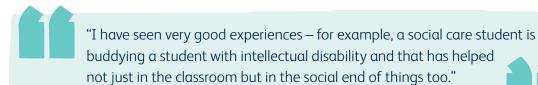
"Even with programmes that are supposed to be targeted at people with disabilities no-one seemed to have thought, well we are going to take students with intellectual disability on the programme and they may have challenging behaviours. So what adjustments and changes do we need to make? Even though there were might be issues, those would very clearly be a part of the disability. Yet, when it comes down to it, it is the usual rules that are applied if someone is challenging in the learning environment. So it seems that people with only very slightly challenging behaviour will probably be accommodated, as they can "fit in" but others who don't just won't."

"One young person had done their transition year in the school but hadn't done the work experience as the school felt that they couldn't support them out in a workplace. So they sat at home for those two weeks, as did their SMA. But we were able to arrange work experience and support the young person through that. So it showed the school that it could be done. With further support there was a course identified in a local college. The course was like a back to education programme, so there were a lot of people coming and going on it. So it wasn't an ideal programme, so part of the effort was in supporting the young person to see the programme through."

"I can think of one example where someone was lined up for a course and then was contacted and told they had to go and register again for the course. And then a few weeks before the course was due to start we went back just to check and were told that this person is now on a waiting list for the course. A lot of this is just lack of proper systems and failure in those areas - it isn't prejudice as such. But it has a much greater impact on those with intellectual disability."

"I have seen very good experiences – for example, a social care student is buddying a student with intellectual disability and that has helped not just in the classroom but in the social end of things too."

"One young person I know of went on a course at a local college and part of that was moving slightly out of their comfort zone as they had never travelled much outside of the small area around their home. As part of the course, they had to get some work experience and that was even farther away, so they had to learn to use different forms of public transport and needed help with that. But it was the ongoing constant support from the job coach who kept the person going – that support was crucial."

"One social care student is now supporting two young people in colleges to attend and the learning in that has been great. Because the social care student is familiar with the college and familiar with the surroundings etc. they have been able to offer detailed, tailored support of a very practical kind. That's an example of a good model. So good in fact that one of the learners has asked the social care student not to sit in class with them anymore as they now have the confidence to be there on their own!

7. Service Users Views

Whilst all of the service users struggled to understand that they had a right to education, they all valued the experience of learning. They described it as about 'learning new things', 'going on courses', getting 'new skills', 'learning to speak to other people", "building my confidence' and 'meeting new people'. They recognised the importance of education in having a career - they all wanted to learn new things to help them to get a job in their chosen field in the future. Most of those in the group were doing courses in mainstream settings and all of them said that they had identified these with the support and help of WALK staff members. Whilst they were able to use the internet to look for courses in Dublin, there was a shared view that they would need they would need a WALK staff member to help them and to work with them to 'learn to find courses'.

When asked about other sources of support, none of the participants named a teacher or referred to anyone from the mainstream providers. Two said that they hadn't had any problems getting onto courses that they were interested in doing. Another two said they had found it difficult to get on courses that they would like to do – these were in literacy, money management and telling the time. All found it difficult to identify additional supports that they could access should difficulties arise, other than speaking to a WALK staff member. However, one service user commented that "the teachers are nice. I listen to them." This person also identified their peer support person in college as supportive "[they] help me to write things down," adding "people, the students and teachers in class, give me help when I need it. I have made a friend in class and we chat about [the class content]."

When asked about difficulties, various issues were brought up, including the size of classes, lack of help and that they didn't understand what was being explained to them or expected of them. Although there was a view that it was "hard to learn," all of the service users recognised the value of learning and said that they would like to do more courses, but a majority of them expressed the view that the courses needed to be 'not too hard.'

Comments from service users include:

"It is the best thing that I ever did. I am working with other people, seeing how the system works in college and learning to find my classes… [but] I do find it a little bit hard sometimes."

"I knew that I wanted to do a course, and I was interested in working with kids. So my Job Coach helped me to find a Childcare course, and my keyworker set me up with a support person to help me along the way with the course. My support person was a student from [a local college]. I get a bus down from my house. [My support person] used to come to meet me at my house to show me the bus journey. They didn't have to do this for long as after a few practises I got the bus down by myself. At first when I started I was real nervous around people. After a while I got more confident and I go to the course on my own now. I feel much happier."

"I had to get used to how college works, new tutors, doing assignments and I did struggle at times, I even thought about giving up the course at one point. I am glad to say that I stuck with it with the support of my family and my job coach, they all helped me a lot. I have the confidence to continue studying. At the moment, I am doing a two year course. I hope to complete this course in 2015."

I'd love to carry on learning more skills and doing more courses because I'd love to have a paid job one day. I also go to college to work on my reading and writing. I feel like I'm improving loads. I love studying and being a student. But I want to get a full-time job soon, and I know my reading and writing will help me then.

8. Conclusions & Suggestions

It is apparent from this review that a wide range of barriers exist and that many of those could be addressed through training, better structural support and more widespread access to financial and other means of support. It is also clear that experiences are different for people with intellectual disabilities than those with physical disabilities and that even amongst those with intellectual disabilities access is more difficult for those with certain types of disability than another. As a recent report noted:

> *"While there has been progress in relation to access for disabled people to third level institutions, this has mainly focused on those with physical and sensory disabilities and additional supports and resources are required to ensure inclusion of people with an intellectual disability."* [21]

In addition to what may be a failure to apply the existing relevant equality law and policy on service provision correctly, a major issue is the lack of coherent policies and specific goals and targets for the participation of those with an intellectual disability. It is also unclear whether Further Education and Training providers are complying with the equality legislation by having reasonable accommodation policies and if staff and managers are indeed aware of their legal obligations under this aspect of the equality legislation. This impacts on every aspect of service provision – from funding of programmes and availability of support to how programmes are delivered and at what level. A recent debate in Seanad Éireann highlighted the many practical difficulties experienced by those with all forms of disability in accessing educational and other services.[22]

Had the policies which lead to these issues been fully equality-proofed before being decided, they might have looked somewhat different. As one interviewee said, "People need to be asking, how do they facilitate diversity - do they have an equality prism when they are looking at things, across all that they are doing?"

It may be that the enactment of the

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21 Webb, R., *ACADEMIC NETWORK OF EUROPEAN DISABILITY EXPERTS, IRELAND COUNTRY REPORT ON EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG DISABLED PEOPLE*, Centre for Disability Studies, University of Leeds, 2010

22 *Access to Educational and Other Opportunities for People with Disabilities: Motion Debated Wednesday, 24 September 2014 Dáil Éireann Debates Vol. 773 No. 1 (2014).*

new public sector equality and human rights duty, in s42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 may impact positively on this issue. The new duty imposes an obligation on all public bodies to positively promote equality and human rights, something which has already been introduced in Northern Ireland[23] and Great Britain.[24] As the Chief Commissioner of the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission recently observed:

> *"The introduction of a positive duty will offer a real opportunity to advance and further embed equality and human rights practices within the public sector and to build a culture of human rights and equality."*[25]

A key to this and to real change will be the implementation of mainstreaming itself, which despite being in operation for a decade and a half, needs further work. One interviewee described the issue in this way:

"In the past people were mainstreamed when we were a country of small schools. You still see that today - kids don't see people as "disabled." Sure, they know that they might need a bit if extra help but that's it. So we need to find that approach – that childlike view that sees the connections between us all and being very open. To see that everyone has special needs of a sort. Some of us pass our driving test first time, some of us take ten or twenty goes at it. So we all need extra support in some area. We need to normalise the notion of difference and support for that difference – whether it is in the classroom or that someone needs help with travelling. We are all on that spectrum and we just need to get that realisation into the system."

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23 *In s75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The duty relates to the promotion of equality and of good relations but not to human rights, which are covered by the Human Rights Act 1998, which incorporates the ECHR into UK law.*

24 *In s149 of the Equality Act 2010.*

25 *Addressing the Think Equality, Act Equality - Equality Mainstreaming Conference 14 October 2014, Dublin Castle*

Accessing Mainstream Training

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