

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities

“Disability is a mask that conceals a rich, surprising and fertile ability.” (Brendan Kennelly)

The function of the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities is to remove the mask and reveal the beauty and promise of a hitherto hidden talent now brought into the light of day and the light of appreciative minds.

Inclusion has become a major buzzword in society and this is reflected in the emphasis on developing an inclusive society in policies at national and European levels. While there is much discussion about inclusion no one appears fully certain about what inclusion looks like in practice. Everyone appears to agree that inclusion involves creating a fairer more equitable society that includes those people and groups who have traditionally been marginalised. Schools are central to this process and there have been significant developments over the past few decades to address areas of disadvantage both economic and social. Students with disabilities have also benefited from increased support and the development of accessible pathways from school to post school educational provision. However, one group of young people are conspicuous by their absence from this general trend. These are young people who have intellectual disabilities. Traditionally, young people with an

intellectual disability that complete compulsory secondary level education were expected to make a transition to adult day services and sheltered workshops run by community-based disability support agencies under the remit of the Health Service Executive (HSE). The National Intellectual Disability Database (NIDD), reported 23,583 people with intellectual disabilities were attending fulltime day service provision in 2017.

Increasingly, children and young people who have intellectual disabilities are attending mainstream schools but have very limited choices in accessing pathways to postschool education and employment. This article presents an innovative educational and work readiness programme for people with intellectual disability. Through this presentation we seek to highlight the facilitating factors that may encourage a more ambitious reimagining of what may be possible for those individuals who have been marginalised to date.

THE IRISH TIMES
WEEKEND
 Saturday and Sunday, January 26 and 27, 2019
 €2.20 (incl. VAT)
 £2.10 (Northern Ireland)

Football & hurling leagues special
 ★ Mickey Graham interview
 ★ The young players to follow
 ★ Kilkenny's re-fit **Sports Weekend**

Magazine The Health issue
 ★ Meat - friend or foe?
 ★ Screen rules
 ★ Fall in love with running

Graduates celebrate success for six students
 Students from Trinity College Dublin graduated yesterday with certificates in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice: Marian O'Rourke, Co Wicklow; Mark Hogan, Dublin; Niamh Biddulph, Co Meath; Hugh O'Callaghan, Dublin; Dairine O'Rourke, Kildare and Shane McGilton, Co Laois.
 Photograph: Colin Maloney/Fcnnells

Richard E Grant Oscar and I
 TICKET

Trans for beginners
 Jennifer O'Connell
 WEEKEND REVIEW

Widening societal participation for people from marginalised groups has become an established feature of policy frameworks internationally and in recent decades, the international community has been promoting the social and economic benefits that lifelong learning offers to people with disabilities as a pathway to employment and full participation in society. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD], 2006, recently ratified by Ireland, has provided an impetus in trying to make these aspirations a reality in the lives of people with disabilities. Many countries (e.g., US: Americans with Disabilities Act 1990, the Higher Education Opportunity Act 2008; Australia: Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Disability Standards for Education 2005; UK: Disability Discrimination Act 2005, Equality Act 2010; Republic of Ireland: Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities 1996, Educational Act 1998, Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, Equal Status Act 2000) have acted on the recommendations of this Convention and have endeavoured to make access to compulsory education and FE/HE a reality for people with disabilities.

Access to education and training throughout the life-span for people with disabilities is gradually becoming more widely accepted; national codes of practice for learners with disabilities in higher education have typically adopted more inclusive policies and practices to support the enrolment, progression, and subsequent employment of people with disabilities. For people with disabilities, becoming an active member of society requires the concept of embedding them within normative pathways of inclusion - i.e., life avenues ordinarily pursued by individuals without disabilities. For example, in the context of education, non-disabled people's identity begins in primary school and is developed further in secondary school; this journey invariably leads on to a range of options at Further Education/Higher Education, vocational training, adult education, and lifelong learning.

Lack of opportunity to gain meaningful postschool education and employment has had severe repercussions for people who have intellectual disabilities. The IDS-TILDA research study reports that people with intellectual disabilities are much more likely than their peers to lack basic literacy skills, be dependent on social welfare and are at high risk of poverty.



Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities

The Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID), situated within the School of Education at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, promotes the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disability in education and society. TCPID was established in 2014 and its' mission is to enable learners with an intellectual disability to develop their potential to fully participate in society as independent adults, through participation in a Higher Education programme that focuses upon both educational attainment and work readiness. TCPID developed a course entitled *Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice (ASIAP)* positioned at Level 5 on the Irish NFQ and had its' first intake of learners in 2016 (graduated in January 2019). With the support from philanthropic and competitive funding, key members of the TCPID team include academic lecturers, a Senior Occupational Therapist, a Pathways Coordinator, and a National and Schools Coordinator.

Over 2 academic years, learners participate in the Certificate in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice (ASIAP) course which aims to open up opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities as they make transitions towards adult life and the workforce. It helps to develop a broad range of skills across a comprehensive curriculum, including preparing graduates to work in diverse employment settings. The course is rooted in evidence-based research and seeks to provide learners with the independent living skills needed to become full participants in society.





TCPID has established a very strong network of business partners who provide learner work placements, mentoring, paid internships and in some cases permanent employment for the graduates. The Pathways Coordinator works with the business partners to offer supported career pathways, with the ability to look at specific industries that might suit their particular interests and skills. With the support of the business partners, TCPID has developed a Graduate Internship programme (funded by Ireland Funds) that involves paid graduate internships, two of which have been converted into permanent roles. The TCPID business partners are ‘real partners’ who are a core part of the programme and provide vital support. This partnership makes a real difference and enhances the ability of the programme to evidence true inclusion within the workplace and within society.

The National and Schools Coordinator (funded by Social Innovation Fund Ireland) is dedicated to developing and improving transition pathways and planning for learners with intellectual disability, by engaging with key stakeholders to focus on increasing awareness of inclusive post-secondary education opportunities, application processes, and entry requirements for particular programmes. Higher education institutions have attempted to address the lacunae in postschool educational provision for young people with intellectual disabilities. In Ireland, ten higher education institutions are delivering assorted post-school educational programmes that collectively seek to include students in every aspect of life as a third level student. Many of these initiatives have been established, and kept operational on a shoestring budget, due to the good-will of a select few programme coordinators based in these higher education providers. It is evident that these programmes have been designed as a response to the lack of post-school options for young people who have an intellectual disability. However, it is equally evident that transition pathways to post-secondary provision for these students are often ad-hoc and making the progression to post-school educational provision currently relies heavily on the capacity of families. The Coordinator established the Inclusive National Higher Education Forum (INHEF), a national interest group comprised of representatives

of higher education providers who offer programmes or are interested in establishing a programme of inclusive education to learners with intellectual disabilities in Ireland.

Adolescence and early adulthood is a time during which important life changes occur, attitudes are formed, and decisions with far reaching consequences can be made. The transition process for a young person is to develop a sense of identity – a sense of who they are, and also of who they are not. For any young person, this is a difficult psychological task. For young people with intellectual disabilities these choices are more complicated than they are for their peers. Research conducted by Mc Guckin et al. (2013) looking at transitions for young people with disabilities to postschool provision reported that the support provided by Guidance Counsellors was highly valued by the learners and regarded as pivotal in facilitating them to make informed choices about post-school options. Learners particularly valued individualised sessions with their Guidance Counsellor, especially the support offered in completion of application forms for entry to FE/HE and disability supports. While Guidance Counsellors provided individualised support, there was little evidence that schools were proactive in developing transition planning at an early stage in the school career of the learners. Guidance Counsellors and school professionals were conscious that learners with disabilities were moving from a highly supported and structured school environment to a more challenging situation that demanded a higher degree of self-reliance. They were concerned about achieving the balance between delivering appropriate support for academic attainment while encouraging the development of greater autonomy and the practical life skills required for active engagement in Further Education/Higher Education.

It is clear that we all face the challenge of ensuring that we develop appropriate transition pathways to post school educational provision and employment for young people with intellectual disabilities. This requires policy change, support for schools, young people with intellectual disabilities and their families as they navigate their pathway to a meaningful future within an inclusive society that values their contribution.

References

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The Authors



Mr Des Aston is National and Schools Coordinator in School of Education, TCD and is based in the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities. Des is responsible for establishing the Inclusive National Higher Education Forum (INHEF) with a vested interest in embedding inclusive education initiatives for students with intellectual disabilities into the higher education landscape in Ireland. Des is the point of contact within TCPID for schools/guidance counsellors that would like to engage with the centre.

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Dr Conor Mc Guckinn, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology in the School of Education at Trinity College Dublin. Conor convenes the Inclusion in Education and Society Research Group and is the founding editor of the International Journal of Inclusion in Education and Society. Conor's research interests include: psychology applied to educational policy and practices, bully/victim problems among children and adults, and special and inclusive education. Conor is an Associate Fellow of both the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI). Conor a Chartered Psychologist with both the BPS and PSI, and is a Chartered Scientist with the UK Science Council.