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Group of National Experts on Special Needs Education

**PATHWAYS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TO TERTIARY EDUCATION
AND EMPLOYMENT**

Project Overview

For further information, please contact:
Peter Evans; tel: +33 1 45 24 91 66; email: Peter.Evans@oecd.org
Serge Ebersold; tel: +33 1 45 24 93 90; email: Serge.Ebersold@oecd.org

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PATHWAYS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TO TERTIARY EDUCATION AND TO EMPLOYMENT

PROJECT OVERVIEW

1. Context of the project

This project follows, partly, the work done in the past on disability at higher education (OECD, 2003). This research revealed a crucial lack of reliable and comparable data about student with disabilities' access to tertiary education as well as their success within tertiary education and their employment opportunities

Such lack of data offers very little information about individuals' access to their rights and their development opportunities. This lack of information hinders also effective and equitable policy planning and monitoring.

Even being fragmental and unreliable, the existing information shows that persons with disabilities have a higher unemployment rate than non disabled people, this mainly due to their lack of qualification. It also shows that their opportunities to maintain their employability are reduced by having lower access to life long learning opportunities, by having a programmed life and by facing a lot of barriers reducing their pathways opportunities.

So, this project aims to reduce costs by increasing employment opportunities, to favor economical involvement by promoting professional mobility and lifelong learning and to promote diversity and effectiveness in institutions

2. Aims of the project

To reach this general aims, the project expects to

- Identify the existing data and their use in matters of transition to post-secondary education and work
- Identify the outcomes expected by people with disabilities, their families, the educators, the service providers and the policy makers
- Define quality in matters of transition by applying the actual knowledge on implementation and measurement of results and progress
- Describe young disabled peoples' experiences of transition to adulthood in relationship to employment and post-secondary education
- Describe how transition programs create links and collaborations between employers and trade unions.

- Identify practices and policies developed to support people with disabilities on transition to post-secondary education, during education and employment
- Identify how the social model of disability, inclusion and human capital theories impact the transition process.

3. Methodology

From a methodological point of view, the project focuses on persons with disabilities' transition opportunities to post-secondary education, within tertiary education and to employment. The data will be gathered through country reports, a three year longitudinal study and case studies.

3.1. Country reports

The country reports aim to link the quality of transitions programmes with current policies and their implementation. The literature review identifies existing publications and reports describing the methodologies that have been used and main conclusions that have been reached, especially as to the impact of policies and practices for the individuals.

It is also based on a questionnaire sent to a resource person in participating countries. This questionnaire may, for instance, focus on existing data on transition issues, on inclusion policies, on the articulation of education, health and employment policies.

It is finally based on visits and interviews for comparisons between national policies and the actual practices, and for describing factors facilitating or hindering transition towards post-secondary education and employment. The interviews will take place with representatives of schools and universities, representatives of firms and the labour market, and representatives of people with special needs and their families.

3.2. Longitudinal study

Quality indicators of good transition programs should also connect transition opportunities given by policies and existing provision with the pathways that individuals follow within systems and provision. The quality of transition programs should therefore be benchmarked by the quality of the processes with regard to the monitoring system, the continuity, coherence and effectiveness of the processes, their impact on individuals' daily lives as well as their enabling or disabling effects. Good program indicators may consequently relate to:

- The experiences of youth with disabilities in tertiary education, employment, and social inclusion.
- The impact of policy intervention and support mechanisms in terms of success within secondary and tertiary education.
- The effectiveness and quality of the links between health, social, education and employment systems.
- The coherence and the effectiveness of pathways after secondary education, within tertiary education and after tertiary education.

- The opportunities given to students with disabilities to participate actively and successfully in the transition processes.

In order to gather useful data covering the necessary time-span, it is proposed to carry out a longitudinal study during which a cohort of special needs students will be tracked over a 3-year period. This 3-year longitudinal study would be monitored by a team of researchers nominated by the participating countries. It should focus on three dimensions and will be enriched by case studies.

The three dimensions are:

- The mapping of the situation students find themselves in 2007.
- Transitions made by young people between 2007 and 2010 and the impact of policy intervention and support mechanisms.
- The enabling or disabling effect of the policy intervention, practices and support mechanisms.

3.3. *Case studies*

Good transition program quality indicators should relate pathways within systems and provision to the ability of educational strategies and support strategies to create a supportive environment. Quality should be therefore closely linked with the strategies allowing personalized practices, continuous pathways, articulation of employment, education and health issues, receptive and inclusive employment, education and health systems. Good programs indicators may consequently relate to:

- The articulation of individual transition plans (ITPs) with individual educational plans (IEPs) during implementation and their combined ability to maintain an effective and coherent dynamic.
- The enabling effect of quality based approaches.
- The supportive environment created by educational strategies as well as the support strategies
- The quality based approach favoured by interagency collaboration as well as collaboration between professionals having different educational background.
- The extent of the involvement of individuals and their families in the process and its empowering effect. How are they enabled to participate in the process?
- The impact on an individual's ability to see himself as able to cope with various and changing situations and conditions.

In order to attain these aims, interviews will be carried out with the different actors involved in the transition process. These include:

- The individual.
- The family.
- Those from the education sector.
- Those from the employment sector.

- Those from the health sector.

In order to do so, persons with disabilities and their families will be invited to indicate which professionals and/or institutions are playing (or have played) an important role in the transition process. This would lead to a specification of the different perspectives that have to be articulated to create a supportive environment, a quality based approach and coherent and effective transition process. It may also give the opportunities to qualify the processes and to identify what works in creating transition processes and how it works.