Literature Review of Career Guidance for Learners with Disabilities in Second Level Education

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Contents

[Acronyms 4](#_Toc129603464)

[Statement on Language 5](#_Toc129603465)

[Executive Summary 6](#_Toc129603466)

[Introduction 6](#_Toc129603467)

[Key issues relating to career guidance in Ireland 7](#_Toc129603468)

[Key issues relating to career guidance in the international literature 8](#_Toc129603474)

[Conclusion 10](#_Toc129603480)

[Introduction 11](#_Toc129603481)

[Methodology 11](#_Toc129603482)

[Inclusion criteria 12](#_Toc129603483)

[Exclusion criteria 12](#_Toc129603484)

[What is career guidance and why is it important? 12](#_Toc129603485)

[Overview of career guidance in Ireland 13](#_Toc129603486)

[Policy context 14](#_Toc129603487)

[The Indecon Review of Career Guidance 15](#_Toc129603488)

[Career guidance for learners with disabilities 16](#_Toc129603489)

[Special Schools 16](#_Toc129603490)

[Student views of career guidance 16](#_Toc129603491)

[Career Guidance Delivery in Schools 18](#_Toc129603492)

[Career guidance professionals: qualifications and role 20](#_Toc129603493)

[Disability competency amongst guidance counsellors 22](#_Toc129603494)

[Mentorship programmes 23](#_Toc129603495)

[Approaches to making career guidance effective 24](#_Toc129603496)

[Career development 24](#_Toc129603497)

[Building self-efficacy and self-determination 25](#_Toc129603498)

[Self-concept and strength based approaches 29](#_Toc129603504)

[Social learning approach 30](#_Toc129603505)

[Transition planning 30](#_Toc129603506)

[Challenging stereotypes through career guidance 34](#_Toc129603510)

[Universal Design in Education (UDE) and web based guidance 35](#_Toc129603511)

[Frameworks, benchmarks, standards and quality assurance 37](#_Toc129603512)

[Frameworks 37](#_Toc129603513)

[Benchmarks and guidelines 39](#_Toc129603516)

[Standards and quality assurance systems 42](#_Toc129603519)

[Tools and resources used in career guidance 43](#_Toc129603520)

[Career assessment practices 43](#_Toc129603521)

[Career planning tools 44](#_Toc129603522)

[Career guidance provision outside school 47](#_Toc129603525)

[Employment Agencies, Germany 47](#_Toc129603526)

[Youth Guidance Centres, Denmark 47](#_Toc129603527)

[One-Stop-Shop Guidance Centres Finland, Germany 48](#_Toc129603528)

[Conclusion 48](#_Toc129603529)

[Limitations of this literature review 49](#_Toc129603530)

[Next steps 49](#_Toc129603531)

[References 51](#_Toc129603532)

# Acronyms

AEGAI Adult Education Guidance Association of Ireland

ASCA American School Counsellor Association

CES Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities

CCR College and Career Ready Framework

CPD Continued Professional Development

CICA Career Industry Council of Australia

DES Department of Education and Skills `

EA Employment Agency

ELGPN European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network

EPSEN Act Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs

ESF European Social Fund

FET Further Education and Training

ICF International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health

ICF CY International Classification of Functional, Disability and Health for Children and Youth (ICF CY)

ICT Information and Communications Technology

IGC Institute of Guidance Counsellors

IEP Individual Education Plan

MEGI Motivational Enhancement Group Intervention

NCSE National Council for Special Education

NDIS National Disability Inclusion Strategy

NDA National Disability Authority

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OSEP Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (USA)

SCCT Social Cognitive Career Theory

SDCDM Self-Determined Career Development Model

SENCO Special Education Needs Coordinator

STEM Science Technology Engineering Maths

UD Universal Design

UDE Universal Design in Education

UDL Universal Design for Learning

UN United Nations

UNCRPD United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

YGC Youth Guidance Centres

# Statement on Language

In this report the terms “people/persons with disabilities” and “disabled people” are used interchangeably. Many people within the disability rights movement in Ireland recognise the term ‘disabled people’ because it is considered to acknowledge the fact that people with an impairment are disabled by barriers in the environment and society and so aligns with the social and human rights model of disability. However, we also recognise that others prefer the term “people/persons with disabilities”. This also reflects the language used in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We also acknowledge that some people do not identify with either term.

The term ‘Deaf’ with an uppercase ‘d’ refers to those who identify culturally and linguistically as part of the Deaf community. A lower case ‘d’ refers to those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and who do not identify culturally and linguistically as a member of the Deaf community. The term ‘d/Deaf’ refers to both groups.

For further information on disability-related language and terminology, please refer to the NDA’s Advice Paper on Disability Language and Terminology.[[1]](#footnote-1)

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The importance of career guidance for all students and particularly for learners with disabilities is undisputed. Effective career guidance will ensure all students are aware of the post-school pathways available to them. Career guidance is a complex issue as the quality of career guidance provided depends on a range of factors including the type and social mix of a school; a pupil’s gender; type of disability and the vast range of tools and approaches available for use by career guidance professionals. From an international perspective, the language and terminology around career guidance can be unclear and similar terms appear interchangeably, for example, in the USA the term Counsellor refers to what is termed in Ireland a Guidance Counsellor.

Young people are a heterogeneous group and this is no different for young disabled learners, therefore, person-centred approaches that positively focus on individual strengths are key to effective career guidance.

This is not an exhaustive review; rather it provides an insight into the many interrelated factors that influence career guidance provision for disabled learners in second level education. It includes literature examining specific disabilities such as young people with intellectual disabilities, autistic young people, those who are d/Deaf as well as literature focusing on disability in general.

The National Disability Authority is conducting this literature review to inform a policy advice paper on career guidance for learners with disabilities. One action stemming from the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) is for the Department of Education to ‘Implement recommendations arising out of the review of Career Guidance provision as they relate to SEN learners, progression and participation in Further Education and Training and Higher Education’. However, the 2020 Indecon Review of Career Guidance report had a very limited focus on learners with disabilities.[[2]](#footnote-2) This review addresses some of the gaps in this area.

## Key issues relating to career guidance in Ireland

The following issues identified in the literature relate to career guidance in Ireland, particularly with reference to students with disabilities:

### Special schools

In Ireland, special schools are designated primary schools; therefore, they have no career guidance allocation. Young people attending special schools do not have the same access to career guidance as young people in mainstream schools.

### Inconsistent approach to career guidance

There is an inconsistent approach to career guidance delivery across Irish schools including content, what is delivered as part of the career guidance curriculum; timing, when it is delivered; and who should deliver it, for example the school guidance counsellor or the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO). The timing of career guidance delivery is highlighted as problematic and the literature illustrates that career guidance would be more effective if received at an earlier stage of the school cycle. Studies reiterate that career guidance in many schools is narrowly framed as it focuses on third level education, rather than on information about Further Education and Training (FET) options.

In Ireland, the guidance counsellor role is holistic and includes personal, social and career guidance. In schools where there is a higher level of socio-economic disadvantage the career guidance counsellor might have to provide additional emotional support and focus more on the personal and social elements of the role rather than the career guidance aspect of the role.

The literature suggests that stereotyping exists in Irish schools and some young people are steered down particular post-school routes due to certain characteristics, for example socioeconomic status or academic ability. This may equally be true for young disabled learners and raises the question about how we can challenge these stereotypes?

### Inconsistent approach to transition planning

In Ireland there is no standard approach to assist learners with disabilities prepare for their post-school pathways. The literature highlights that a collaborative approach to developing and implementing transition planning is best, involving the young person, relevant guidance professionals and family members. The literature notes that Individual Education Plans should feed into transition planning and both should be person-centred.

### Disability competence amongst guidance professionals

The level of disability competence amongst guidance professionals is unknown. This includes knowledge amongst guidance professionals of the post-school pathways available for learners with disabilities. Currently, it is unclear what the required level of disability competency amongst those who deliver career guidance should be. Neither is it clear how to achieve this competency. The literature indicates that using career guidance tools and strategies that are strength-based and focus on the positive attributes of learners with disabilities is optimal.

### Universal Design in Education

Ireland is unique internationally in having Universal Design defined in primary legislation. Universal Design (UD) is an approach to the design of environments, products and services to ensure usability by the widest range of people. A Universal Design approach focusses on accessibility and usability from the earliest possible stage in the design process and throughout the lifetime of products and services. It also ensures the interoperability of products and services with assistive technology. Universal Design is not a special requirement, for the benefit of a minority of the population; it is just good design.

Universal Design in Education (UDE) focuses on whole systems design, so that the physical and digital environments, the educational services and the teaching and learning (Universal Design for Learning) can be easily accessible, understood and used by the widest range of learners and all stakeholders, in a more inclusive environment. A UD system recognises the multiple levels affecting human development including micro/ individual levels; meso/institutional level and the macro/ governance levels. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an important pillar of UDE systems approach. UDL assumes everyone learns differently and applying UDL provides learners with more agency in how they learn. If implemented correctly UDL has the potential to reduce the requirements of many accommodations.

## Key issues relating to career guidance in the international literature

### Role of career guidance professionals

The international literature on this topic illustrates that a guidance counsellor’s role is wide-ranging and qualifications are jurisdiction specific. A common consensus is that guidance counsellors must be aware of the post-school opportunities and relevant legislation applicable for all pupils, particularly those with disabilities. The literature highlights that career guidance professionals may stereotype some young people and steer them towards particular post-school pathways. Career guidance professionals play an important role in breaking down the stereotypes that exist by social class, academic ability and disability. Furthermore, a vital aspect of the guidance counselling role is to help young people develop a positive mind-set about themselves and what they are capable of achieving.

### Career guidance approaches

There are several approaches used to deliver career guidance. Career development refers to the development and refinement of career goals over time. Career guidance interventions comprise tools or career guidance assessments used to develop career guidance goals. Career planning tools are commonly used for learners with disabilities to support transition to employment or identify gaps in an individual’s skills set. Career planning tools are also useful to help support transitions and match individual strengths to occupational roles. Tools can be descriptive, evaluative or predictive with predictive tools the most common relating to career guidance.

Despite the availability of countless strategies, approaches and interventions used by career guidance professionals there are several characteristics identified throughout the literature as essential to develop: self-efficacy is the belief that an individual has the capacity to achieve their own goals and self-determination is the ability for an individual to decide their own goals. These are essential traits for all young people to develop but particularly young people with disabilities. Many of the strategies identified in this review centre on developing pupil’s self-efficacy and self-determination skills as well as their self-advocacy skills and resilience. Resulting with individuals owning their own career goals.

Several theoretical approaches to career guidance are prevalent throughout the literature such as a self-concept theory and a social learning theory. Developing self-concept i.e. how we view ourselves, is important as an underdeveloped self-concept leads to immaturity, which could impact negatively on career development. This needs particular attention for disabled learners who as the literature states may often view themselves negatively. A social learning theory advocates developing task approach skills. This includes skills like goal setting, clarifying one’s values and information gathering. Development of these skills can happen as part of an Individual Education Plan.

It is possible to teach career guidance as part of the school curriculum through individual and group sessions. Many jurisdictions also use online resources. In some countries, career guidance is also provided outside of the school setting, through agencies such as One-Stop-Shop Guidance Centres in Germany and Finland.

### Mentorship programmes

Mentorship programmes have the potential to provide support and coaching in a non-stigmatising way. Mentorships can take many configurations but often involve a planned curriculum, training for the mentor, a paid program co-ordinator and both formal and informal mentorships. Mentorship programs where the mentor has a disability are particularly beneficial.

### Benchmarking tools, standards and quality assurance systems

There is no uniformity to the implementation of standards and quality assurance systems for career guidance. The approaches advocated by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN), the American School Counsellor Association (ASCA), the Career Development Professionals Canada and standards used in Germany are briefly described. However, several frameworks and benchmarking tools to assess career guidance exist. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) can be used as a benchmark to assess if domestic practices align with the principles of the UNCRPD ensuring a rights based approach to career guidance exists. Applying Universal Design in Education (UDE) principles to career guidance curricula will optimise delivery for all types of learners. This review examines the eight Gatsby Benchmark (UK) and the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA) guidelines. Other frameworks suggested in the literature include the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), the International Classification of Functional, Disability and Health for Children and Youth (ICF CY) and the College and Career Ready Framework (CCR).

### Career guidance delivery outside of the school environment

Finally, the review highlights how career guidance can be delivered outside of the school setting through employment agencies (Germany); youth guidance centres (Denmark) and as noted earlier One-Stop-Shop Guidance Centres in Finland and Germany.

Successful and meaningful work experience is a key element of career guidance that will take place outside of the school setting.

## Conclusion

Despite the complexity of career guidance, it is essential that all young people receive effective career guidance to ensure they are aware of their post-school pathways. This is particularly true for young disabled learners who may have complex post-school pathways. The school guidance counsellor has a very important role to ensure young disabled learners receive the supports they need from an early stage in secondary school settings.

The findings from this literature review will inform an NDA policy advice paper focusing on how to achieve effective career guidance for secondary schools pupils with disabilities.

# Introduction

The national and international disability landscape is changing: an individualised, person-centred approach to establish a person’s needs is now a central focus. This is influenced by the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which recognises the right to a range of civil and political rights for persons with disabilities. Article 24 (1) recognises the right to an inclusive education that allows persons with disabilities live their life to their fullest potential (UN, 2006). General Comment No. 4 (2016) states that inclusive education should be embedded within the “whole educational environment” at all levels including counselling services, school trips and classroom teaching and relationships (UN, 2006). The UNCRPD is used as a benchmark to highlight domestic practices not aligned with the principles of the UNCRPD.

The focus of this literature review is to summarise effective career guidance strategies for learners in second level schools identified throughout the literature in Ireland and other jurisdictions. The review illustrates the many compounding factors that influence the delivery of effective career guidance. The findings of this literature review will inform an NDA policy paper outlining lessons for the Irish system with recommendations on how to achieve effective career guidance for young learners with disabilities. To provide context, the paper first outlines the issues raised in the literature about career guidance delivery in Ireland. Next, it addresses the complexity of career guidance followed by some approaches that make career guidance effective. It discusses key characteristics such as self-determination and self-efficacy, which are key attributes that help young people with their career progression. The paper goes on to outline career development approaches; career planning tools and assessments; career guidance interventions; frameworks, benchmarks, standards and quality assurance systems that are useful for use with learners with disabilities.

# Methodology

This review examines literature relating to career guidance young people with disabilities receive at second level education in Ireland and other jurisdictions. This review is an exploration of the available literature on this topic. The key issues identified throughout the literature were extracted and collated into themes. These themes led the structure of this literature review.

## Inclusion criteria

The literature search was limited to papers published from 2010 onwards and involved searching SocIndex, Campbell Collaboration, Google Scholar and Google along with a number of grey literature repositories. In total this paper reviews over 150 papers.

The search was split into three concepts: “career guidance”, “school” and “disability”. Each database was searched using individual index terms and keywords as well as combining all the terms. Keywords were used in databases that do not use index terms. Search terms used included the following terms and derivatives ‘career guide’, ‘disability’, ‘education’, ‘education policy’, ‘educational intervention, ‘educational standards, ‘education of people with mental disabilities’, ‘education of children with mental disabilities’, ‘developmental disabilities’, ‘autism-social aspects’, ‘epilepsy – social aspects’ ‘mental disabilities’ ‘developmentally disabled’, ‘children with disabilities’, ‘disabled minorities’, ‘developmentally disabled’, ‘vocational guidance’.

The search was expanded to include “guidance” as this is a term commonly used to indicate career guidance.

## Exclusion criteria

Career guidance at primary school or post-secondary schools was not included as it is beyond the scope of this review. A discussion on the different types of education systems that influence career guidance is also beyond the scope of this review and therefore excluded.

# What is career guidance and why is it important?

Career guidance refers to “to services intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers” (Watts and Sultana, 2004:107). This includes services provided in schools, using career guidance interventions as they “are concerned not with telling people what to do but with helping them acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help them make better career choices and transitions” (Watts and Sultana, 2004:111). A recent review of Guidance for the Deaf community defines guidance as “about knowing and appreciating what you have to offer and a deep belief you have a purpose” (Quirke, 2022:9).

The importance of formal career guidance to assist pupils decide their post-school pathways has been highlighted by a number of authors (McCoy et al, 2010; Smyth et al, 2011; McCoy et al 2014; Aston et al, 2021; Scanlon and Doyle, 2021). A literature review commissioned by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) examines evidence of ‘what works’ in facilitating progression from post-school education, vocational training and rehabilitation provision for disabled adults (Duggan and Byrne, 2013). The review also compiles evidence of effective practice for the education, training and rehabilitation of people with disabilities. The review highlights how career guidance assists people with disabilities make appropriate choices. It identifies career guidance as an effective intervention and a key factor related to successful transitions, in particular when accessing vocational rehabilitation. The review states that evidence suggests:

“Giving vocational guidance at all aspects of the student journey is beneficial. It can assist people in deciding on a course of study or training in the first instance; it can support participation by helping to retain focus; and clearly, it is instrumental in supporting a positive outcome from education or training. Vocational guidance should be embedded within training and education programmes and should be available to the participant or students before and throughout their course of study” (Duggan and Byrne, 2013:181)

For Deaf students Quirke (2022) highlights that “well thought-out” career guidance programmes improve both life and work outcomes for this cohort (Quirke, 2022:52). In a separate study the Oregon State School for the Deaf cites good career decisions as a result of “increased self-confidence, a comprehensive knowledge of the world of work and inclusive learning” (ibid:52).

Formal career guidance is particularly important for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and young people with no family traditions of attending further education (McCoy et al, 2010; Smyth and Bank, 2012; NCSE and NDA, 2017). However, the type of guidance pupils receive depends on many things: the school type; the school’s social mix; pupil’s social class, gender and ethnicity; and parental expectations (McCoy et al 2006; McCoy et al, 2010; Scanlon and Doyle, 2021). Effective career guidance is if a pupil knows all their options and the next steps available to them in terms of their post-school pathways. Along with maturing into adult life, post-school pathways can include progression into further or higher education, training/apprenticeship or employment (Aston et al, 2021).

# Overview of career guidance in Ireland

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 sets out how education will be provided to those with additional learning needs age 0-18 years old. The crux of the EPSEN Act (2004) is: all young people have an equal right to an appropriate education provided in an inclusive environment; ultimately ensuring that young people with special educational needs finish school having attained the necessary skills to participate in society while living independent and fulfilling lives (Irish Statute Book, 2004). The Act is also the basis for the establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the Special Education Appeals Board (ibid).

In Ireland, career guidance delivery is at different stages of the Junior Cycle, the Transition Year Programme and the Leaving Certificate Programmes (DESI, 2004). The timing of career guidance delivery is highlighted as problematic and literature illustrates that career guidance would be more effective if received at an earlier stage of the school career, i.e. at age 12/13 rather than the final year of school (Smyth et al, 2011; NCSE and NDA, 2017; McCoy et al, 2014, Government of Ireland, 2015).

## Policy context

Actions relating to career guidance feature in several national equality strategies.

Action 1.7 of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) requires the Department of Education and Skills to ‘work together to consider how Guidance Counsellors can effectively support students with disabilities in guiding them on further education, training and career options, for example:

* Guidance and training provided for Guidance Counsellors
* Counsellors provided with the skills to develop individual FET options’[[3]](#footnote-3)

Action 43 of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) states the Higher Education Authority will disseminate guidance about transitions to schools and parents. Action 45 stipulates that the Department of Education (in line with the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020) will ensure schools can use Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as tools for inclusive learning by providing guidance, advice and support on using accessible ICT and digital learning tools to teach, and assess students with special education needs (Department of Justice and Equality, 2016).

NDIS Action 46 sets out six main actions encompassing elements of career guidance and stipulates responsibility remains with all relevant agencies and Departments. First, all training courses offered to disabled people must be worthwhile and will support individuals to reach their full potential. Second, young disabled people must be aware that post-school further education and employment are viable options for them. Third, government policy should be co-ordinated to ensure students with special education needs experience effective transitions from school to further/higher education. Fourth, learners with disabilities have access to guidance concerning further education/training and career options. Fifth, create opportunities for young disabled learners to experience training, work experience and employment sampling while at secondary school. Sixth, increase the participation of under-represented groups in further and higher education, such as students with physical, sensory and multiple disabilities in further/higher education (ibid).

## The Indecon Review of Career Guidance

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) commissioned a review of career guidance in Ireland. The resulting Indecon Review of Career Guidance report (2019) highlights that there are no guidance counsellor allocation to special schools and teachers in special schools should be provided with career guidance training; equally, wider career guidance supports for special schools need improvement. The review notes that learners have a variety of influences, including family and friends; work experience; guidance counsellors and other teachers. It highlights that the way learners form opinions varies by socio-economic group, with those from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to consult with their parents; this illustrates the importance of career guidance for these groups in particular to work towards breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage. Econometric modelling in the review demonstrates that one-to-one career guidance sessions appear to have a significant impact on outcomes and are a stronger predictor of students progressing to further/higher education.

In terms of promoting inclusion the review recommends: that a module on career guidance should be included as part of teacher training in special schools; students in special education settings should have access to career support services including information on labour market opportunities; specialised and ongoing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) supports should be provided for teachers in special schools; resource allocation for guidance teachers should be prioritised for learners in most need of support (Department of Education, 2019).

Although the Indecon review highlights and addresses issues that special schools experience in relation to career guidance, the terms of reference omitted young people with disabilities in mainstream schools. As a result, the Indecon review excludes young learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.

## Career guidance for learners with disabilities

The Irish education system is moving towards a more inclusive approach to education, most notably the increase in attendance of some (not all) young disabled people in mainstream classrooms (Banks et al, 2015, Aston et al, 2021). Prior to this, children with additional educational needs and/or a disability were educated separately in special schools or special classes within mainstream schools (Kenny et al, 2020). Whilst this shift has brought a welcome diversity to the student population in some schools, established educational systems and policies may now not meet the needs of all pupils. The delivery of effective career guidance is a case in point.

People with disabilities are more likely to be early school leavers, attain lower qualifications and are less likely to be employed (NDA, 2018b), therefore, effective career guidance is particularly pertinent for this group (NCSE and NDA, 2017; NDA, 2018a).

The term NEET is an acronym for young people (age 15-24 years old) not in employment, education or training. Research indicates that time spent as NEET has negative outcomes for a person’s physical and mental health, while also increasing the likelihood of unemployment, low wages and lower quality of work later on in life (NDA 2019). Census 2016 indicates that 9.3% of the Irish population aged 15-24 have a disability. One in five people (20%) who are NEET have a disability. As a result, disabled people are twice as likely to be NEET as their non-disabled counterparts (ibid).

## Special Schools

In the Irish education system all special schools are designated as primary schools therefore, they do not have sanctioned guidance counsellor posts (Scanlon and Doyle, 2021; NCSE and NDA, 2017, Mc Guckin et al, 2013). Consequently, young people in special schools do not have access to the same career guidance resources as their counterparts in mainstream school (Scanlon and Doyle, 2021, National Federation of Voluntary Bodies, 2018). Career guidance in special schools depends upon the resources assigned to career guidance by individual schools (Scanlon and Doyle, 2021). Staff who undertake career guidance activities may not have formal career guidance training (Aston et al, 2021:25). An NDA Submission to the Department of Education and Skills consultation on their Review of Career Guidance notes that special schools need to develop more appropriate career guidance models (NDA, 2018a).

## Student views of career guidance

Many students value the support provided by guidance counsellors and view it as “pivotal” to helping them make informed choices about post-school pathways (Mc Guckin et al 2013). Young people aged 17/18 years from a recent wave of the Growing Up in Ireland study[[4]](#footnote-4) were asked who they consulted with to help them make decisions about their post-school pathway and how important this individual was in their decision making (McNamara et al, 2020). In terms of who they consulted with, career guidance professionals were deemed as second highest (class session 77%; individual appointment 65%) with only their mothers scoring higher (88%). Although parents were considered as the most important source of decision making for young people, over half (55%) ranked individual career guidance and guidance classes as important or very important (McNamara et al, 2020).

Some learners with disabilities in Ireland report mixed views on how helpful they found guidance counsellors, some stated they inputted on the guidance they received and another stated that: “The Guidance Counsellor did not understand what [I] wanted to do and was hard to talk to” (young autistic person in Higher Education) (NCSE and NDA, 2017:38). Career guidance can help students plan their post-school pathways through the use of tools, information, work experience and work sampling opportunities (NDA, 2018). Career guidance should be person-centred and foster a positive vision of what can be achieved in the future (Nota et al, 2015).However, the example above shows that this is not always the case.

The NCSE and NDA (2017) study also found that young disabled people would prefer more support in school relating to career guidance and social skills to help them prepare for life after school: “some young people with disabilities in both Further and Higher Education felt that they would have benefitted from more specific career guidance at an early stage to help them plan for ‘what to do next’” (NCSE and NDA, 2017:39).

In a small qualitative study[[5]](#footnote-5) exploring the transitions from post-primary to third level settings for pupils with SEN, participants agreed that pupils with SEN were not prepared for third level: “the findings exposed that the lack of time allocated to career guidance impacts negatively on clear communication pathways being established between schools and parents. Likewise, the lack of access to appropriate information on career choices application processes added to the challenges of transition for students with SEN” (Daly and Cahill, 2018:10).

# Career Guidance Delivery in Schools

Particular jurisdictions have specific traditions and history of career guidance therefore similar terms and concepts may mean different things (Watts and Sultana, 2004:107). Some countries (Finland, for example) operate a lifelong approach to guidance meaning guidance should not be considered as something received exclusively during secondary education (Toni and Vuorinen, 2020; Kautto et al, 2018). In Germany all citizens have access to lifelong guidance and counselling irrespective of their status (i.e. in education/training, employed, unemployed or not in the workforce) (Schober, 2014).

Watts and Sultana (2004) highlight specific differences to career guidance approaches from their review of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country reports.[[6]](#footnote-6) There are differences between countries with strong early streaming and tracking mechanisms and those with flexible pathways where guidance plays a more important role. There are differences with countries where career guidance services delivery is through the state or state agents or alternatively through the private and voluntary sector, which tends to have greater diversity of service provision (Watts and Sultana, 2004).

In Ireland, career guidance is a whole school responsibility meaning it involves a range of personnel, including a guidance counsellor[[7]](#footnote-7), relevant school management and teaching staff who are considered specialist in their respective subjects (NCGE, 2004). The career guidance role combines personal and social guidance along with career guidance (OECD, 2002). Research indicates that guidance counsellors in schools with a high rate of working-class pupils are more likely to focus on the personal support aspect of the career guidance role than those in other schools (Smyth and Banks, 2011).

Furthermore, “Parents and students must be seen as an essential part of this process and representatives of the local community, especially local business (the intention here is to show students the world of work), NEPS[[8]](#footnote-8) and other relevant agencies should also be consulted and actively involved as appropriate” (DESI, 2005:8). However, this could have disadvantages for schools located in areas with limited local businesses and create inequities across schools.

In Ireland, Section 21 of the 1998 Education Act stipulates that schools develop a school-plan based on the need of the school and that this includes a school guidance plan (Government of Ireland, 1998). Individual schools decide on the principle activities to include in their guidance programme (Dept. of Education and Science Inspectorate, 2005). This process allows schools to have freedom and autonomy in drafting a school guidance plan to suit individual schools and student needs (NCGE, 2004) whilst being cognisant of “available resources” and “contextual factors” (Dept. of Education and Science Inspectorate, 2005:4). However, it also means there is no uniformity or consistency across schools on the delivery of career guidance (McCoy et al, 2006; Smyth and Banks, 2012). A 2006 Inspectorate review found a variation in guidance delivery by different schools. This included variation across school types as well as variation within schools: “students in the same schools had different experiences of accessing and experience of delivery of the guidance service” (DESI, 2006:18). The nature of career guidance provision also varied between schools in a more recent study (Smyth and Banks, 2012).

Studies exploring career guidance in Ireland find it is narrowly framed as many schools focus on Higher Education options rather than Further Education and Training (FET options) (Dept. of Education and Science Inspectorate, 2006; McCoy et al, 2006; Smyth et al, 2011; NCSE and NDA, 2017). An NCSE and NDA (2017) study exploring how prepared young disabled people are for life after school captured this point from a young person with a disability in further/higher education about career guidance who “felt that the guidance available was geared toward aptitudes and did not take into account their specific needs or what they could/could not do” (NCSE and NDA, 2017:31). Participants in this study also noted that one-to-one career guidance at an early stage of their career is preferable (ibid).

The Ability Programme administered by Pobal[[9]](#footnote-9) and financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Department of Social Protection provided funding to 27 service providers working with disabled people aged 15 to 29. The Ability Programme aimed to support participants develop skills (both personal and work related) through a range of person-centred supports to help them progress in education/training, achieve meaningful social roles and/or secure employment. One recommendation stemming from a review of the Ability Programme is for the development of a national policy to ensure that people with disabilities are supported when transitioning from school into further education or employment. Service providers involved with the Ability Programme notes that there is a lack of career guidance and transition support in schools for particular types of disability and additional education needs, similar to findings in the Indecon Review of Career Guidance (2019). To guarantee that correct information, career guidance and transition supports are provided, will involve collaboration between the Department of Education, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, the Health Services Executive (HSE) and/or the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Quality Matters, 2021).

The remainder of this section examines the professional qualifications of career guidance counsellors in Ireland and internationally; the importance of disability competence amongst this cohort; as well as the value of mentorship programmes to strengthen effective career guidance delivery.

## Career guidance professionals: qualifications and role

The American School Counsellor Association define a counsellor’s[[10]](#footnote-10) role as helping “all students realize their potential [….] regardless of challenges resulting from disabilities and other special needs” (Naugle et al, 2010: 3). In Ireland guidance counselling is considered “a collaborative professional relationship to facilitate clients in their unique identification of strengths, skills, possibilities, resources and options at key developmental milestones through their lifespan in areas relating to personal, social, educational and vocational concerns” (Institute of Guidance Counsellors, 2016:14).

Buckley and Mahdavi (2018) highlight the wide-ranging role of a school counsellor: developing pupils’ IEP that meets each student’s needs, strengths and their goals; providing students with relevant college and career information, ensuring they are not channelled towards particular pathways without exploring the range of activities available to them. This is particularly important as “students’ beliefs about their competencies and future goals are influenced by the attitudes of others” (Buckley and Mahdavi, 2018:13). The counsellor also plays a role in promoting work experiences (summer and/or afterschool) (ibid, 2018). For Buckley and Mahdavi (2018) the school counsellor role also includes fostering students social-emotional development that enhance feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and skills such as positive self-talk; social-emotional learning including emotional knowledge, emotional expression, empathy and social problem solving; non-verbal communication and skills; emotional understanding and social-emotional problem solving. The school counsellor may also act as a supportive first point of contact for those with social and emotional difficulties. This includes initiating subsequent referrals as necessary, for example referrals to therapeutic services, and psychoeducational interventions. For Buckley and Mahdavi (2018) fostering and encouraging social support networks can serve as protective factors against emotional distress (ibid, 2018).

There are a wide and diverse range of qualifications required for career guidance professionals in different jurisdictions, for example in Germany there are no general requirements for staff delivering guidance. School based guidance includes teacher training with additional guidance related training, school psychologists have a Master’s degree in psychology along with a teaching qualification (Schober and Langner, 2014). In special schools, guidance is provided by the school Psychological service. Whereas, in Finland qualifications of school counsellors in comprehensive and secondary level education (which is standardised in legislation) include a master’s degree or a special qualification for vocational school teachers as well as a postgraduate diploma[[11]](#footnote-11) in guidance and counselling (Toni and Vuorinen, 2020; Sweet et al, 2015). Both the qualifications and required competences are regulated (Sweet et al, 2015).

There is a system of dual qualification for guidance counsellors in Irish secondary schools: a guidance counsellor must be a qualified post-primary teacher along with a career guidance qualification, which could be a Masters or a Higher Diploma depending on when they trained (Department of Education and Skills, 2016). The OECD country note on career information, guidance and counselling services[[12]](#footnote-12) in Ireland illustrates the constraints on guidance counsellor’s time arising from a role which combines both subject teaching and guidance; equally, a role which combines personal, social guidance with career guidance as well as an insufficient guidance counsellor to student ratio (OECD, 2002). As noted earlier, combining the role of personal, social and career guidance could result with guidance counsellors in disadvantaged areas focusing on the personal support part of the role as opposed to the career guidance aspect of the role (Smyth and Banks, 2012).

Guidance counsellors in Ireland are encouraged to keep updated on changes and developments in fields relevant to guidance, for example training/educational opportunities, ICT, and professions/occupations. Guidance counsellors also avail of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) provided by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE[[13]](#footnote-13)), the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) and the Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland (AEGAI). Where available, school guidance counsellors should avail of guidance counselling supervision (Department of Education and Skills, 2016).

## Disability competency amongst guidance counsellors

Those who provide career guidance must have knowledge and understanding of available post-school pathways options and supports such as training and employment options along with awareness on how they might suit the needs of individual pupils (NDA, 2018a). Individual career guidance counsellors may support people with particular disabilities only a few times in their careers. This highlights the need to build capacity and to have regularly updated information readily accessible. An examination of post-school preparedness of learners with disabilities notes that there is nothing specifically prescribed in the Guidance Counsellor role that describes how they should cater for the needs of this cohort (NCSE and NDA, 2017).

Bell et al (2017) note the importance of career guidance professionals having access to current information on the pathways available for students with autism, as well as current information about focused transition planning. This is true for all learners with disabilities. Currently, it is unclear what the required level of disability competency amongst those delivering career guidance in Ireland is or should be. Neither is it clear how to achieve this competency. Ahead[[14]](#footnote-14), an Irish independent, non-profit organisation who work towards creating an inclusive environment in education and employment for disabled people have published *Great Expectation*s[[15]](#footnote-15) a handbook for guidance counsellors when they are working with people with a range of disabilities; including students who are dyslexic, blind, d/Deaf, and who have physical disabilities and mental health disabilities. However, it is unclear how widely this publication is used amongst guidance professionals.

Naugle et al (2010) suggest strategies for school counsellors working with disabled learners transitioning into post-secondary settings in a US context and highlight how counsellor training programs would benefit if they included “special education and school counsellor collaboration” (Naugle et al, 2010:21). Naugle et al (2010) also recommends that counsellors need to be aware of community resources (such as those providing school to work support), the student’s specific needs and relevant legislation (ibid). In the USA, the Individuals with Disability Act (IDEA) require that all disabled pupils must have a transition plan as part of their Individual Education Plan (IEP) before they reach 16 years of age and this must include post-secondary goal statements (Naugle et al, 2010). School counselling and transition support services provided to young people with disabilities are no longer provided for students after high school, highlighting the importance of a counsellor’s awareness of relevant legislation (ibid).

## Mentorship programmes

Mentorship programmes have the potential to reduce barriers to education and employment as well as increase societal awareness about disability. Broadly speaking, mentorship programmes are a “learning partnership” provided by a “mentor to a mentee” (Lindsay et al, 2015:1330). The relationship is often reciprocal as well as asymmetrical with a primary goal to assist the mentee grow and develop, particularly in relation to academic, career and social competencies (Lindsay et al, 2015). Peer mentorship programmes have the potential to provide coaching “in a non-stigmatizing and cost-effective way” (Chen and Chan, 2014:287). This type of social activity may be particularly beneficial to pupils with learning disabilities (Chen and Chan, 2014). In relation to the d/Deaf community Punch and Duncan (2020) note, having role models and/or mentorship opportunities of d/Deaf adults and children will contribute to their self-esteem and their sense of identity (Punch and Duncan, 2020).

In a systematic review[[16]](#footnote-16) appraising available evidence of mentorship programs, Lindsay et al (2015) include (i) school based mentorship interventions (ii) work based mentorship interventions and (iii) community-based interventions. The interventions varied in the delivery format, duration, length, number of sessions and type of mentor. For example, seven were delivered through a mentor with a disability, two by peers without a disability, two by a researcher/parent lead and six by a mix of coaches, rehabilitation providers and peer mentors. The studies illustrate that mentorship interventions have the potential to help transitions to post-secondary education and/or employment; young people experienced an increase in social activities and noted improvements in their self-confidence, communication skills and knowledge of their own disability. Findings are consistent with research conducted with non-disabled youth, with seven articles reporting at least one significant outcome for example, “self-determination, quality of life, knowledge of school and work supports, social skills, employment outcomes” (Lindsay et al, 2015: 1346). The mentorship programs illustrating significant outcomes were longer in duration (more than six months) which could have allowed stronger relationships to develop; they often involved a planned curriculum and paid program co-ordinator. Barriers to implementing mentorship programs included limited time with mentor, lack of accessibility and/or accommodations, lack of available mentors and difficulty matching mentors and mentees (ibid:1346).

Finally, mentoring schemes can take many configurations, for example in Denmark mentoring schemes have been introduced for disadvantaged young people through their Youth Guidance Centres. They specifically target those who have dropped out of upper secondary education (Jensen, 2020). Virtual mentorship programs are found to have benefits for “STEM engagement and career planning confidence among youth with disabilities” (Kolne and Lindsay, 2020:540). With peer-mentoring schemes, the guidance counsellor plays a pivotal role, ensuring students feel supported throughout the process. Equally, the mentors have training to “give descriptive and non-embarrassing feedback” (Chen and Chan, 2014:287). Chen and Chan (2014) propose that the guidance counsellor takes the role of key trainer, educator and facilitator, supporting mentors to ensure the programme runs effectively.

# Approaches to making career guidance effective

## Career development

Career development is the first step in the career guidance journey and defined as a process of “developing and refining career goals over time” (Lindstrom et al, 2011). This is a complex process involving many factors at the individual, family, school and community level (Lindstrom et al, 2011; Sefora and Ngubane, 2021).

Psychologists view personality characteristics like abilities, interests and traits as determining factors to career development. Therefore matching individual traits with available career opportunities is key to career development. Whereas, sociologists view career development as influenced more by circumstances beyond the control of the individual, for example economic and social structures in society. As a result, career development must enable individuals to develop skills to help them overcome any constraints caused by their socio-economic environment. More recent approaches to career development lie between the two perspectives and view career development as “an interactive process” where “an individual has some agency in the determination of their career but it is also influenced by others. Thus, career decisions are both an outcome and the cause of community interactions, encounters and attachment to individuals” (Kuzhabekova and Ospanova, 2022:3).

Chen and Chan (2014) examine literature on career development for young people with learning difficulties identifying several complex barriers: poorer academic achievement; low self and career awareness; social skills deficits; a lack of self-determination; planning, monitoring and problem solving skills; low parental expectation; low self-esteem and self-efficacy. The authors also highlight that guidance professionals need an enhanced understanding of the challenges faced by this cohort.

## Building self-efficacy and self-determination

Building and developing self-efficacy, self-determination, self-advocacy and resilience as facilitators for learners with disabilities progressing to careers and further education is a recurring theme in the literature. Schoffstall et al (2015) note that disabled people including DHH with increased self-advocacy skills have a better quality of life, overall well-being and increased sense of agency. Self-advocacy can be viewed as a facilitator to academic success among DHH students in primary, public school settings (ibid).

Soresi et al (2008) found that “school-career guidance” must include strategies that enable the development of self-determination (the ability for an individual to decide their own goals); successful work experience; and stronger self-efficacy (the belief that an individual has the capacity to achieve their own goals). Support networks and social networks must include a range of relevant personnel such as family members, educators, co-workers and employers, all of whom should be actively involved in fostering a person’s self-determination (Soresi et al, 2008). A systematic literature review examining careers advice for young disabled people in education, notes that self-determination is a key predictor for successful transitions (National Deaf Children’s Society, 2019). Wehmeyer et al (2018) concur and highlight the importance of developing self-determination to allow young people become “causal agents in their lives”. This is because

“Self-determined learning goes beyond just student directed or self-regulated learning. Self-determined learners initiate, engage, adjust and assess learning; they determine what they learn and how they will learn. They own and manage their own learning. If young people are to engage in life designing, they need to be self-determined and able to self-determine learning” (Wehmeyer et al, 2018:184).

Lindstrom et al (2011) examine career development for young adults with disabilities finding a range of interrelated elements led participants to either an initial post-school placement in employment or training, including: family support and expectations, work experience during high school and access to transition services. The authors believe that a combination of the following factors helped participants advance their career: “a) enrolment in higher education or job training programs b) patterns of workforce participation and c) a set of personal attributes such as self-efficacy, persistence and coping skills” (Lindstrom et al 2011:8). These factors although varying by gender[[17]](#footnote-17) were present across all participants. The study also highlights the need for transition education focusing on individual knowledge and skills like self-determination, communication and self-advocacy. Young disabled adults need to know how to cope with the demands of a working environment (Lindstrom et al, 2011).

The ability “to take control and make conscious decisions was critical to coping with workplace obstacles and barriers” (Lindstrom et al, 2011: 2). Family support, advocacy and career-related activities help to shape career goals and employment outcomes. Lindstrom et al. (2011) also found that family expectations links to self-efficacy and achievement for young people with disabilities.

There are many career guidance interventions and models in the literature that focused on developing pupils’ self-efficacy, self-determination skills, self-advocacy and resilience. A selection of these are outlined below.

### Social Cognitive Career Theory

In terms of predicting behaviour a U.S study using a Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) task performance model[[18]](#footnote-18) led by Ochs and Roessler (2004) explores the predictors of career exploration intentions. It draws from previous research indicating that interactions exist between career decisions, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations and exploratory intentions. Data collection was quantitative from a sample of 77 students with learning difficulties aged between 16-19 years. Findings support the relevance of SCCT and suggest a “relationship between and among career self-efficacy beliefs and academic and career outcome expectations, all of which were related to career exploratory behaviour intentions” (Ochs and Roessler, 2004:231). Equally, as career exploration behaviour results in greater career maturity, which in turn relates to improved post-school outcomes, using a task performance model should be a high priority in educational services for young people with learning disabilities. Finally, a career development assessment should include measures of “career decision self-efficacy, academic and career outcome expectations, and career exploration intentions” (ibid, 231). The assessment results are suitable for use by an IEP team along with existing career education curriculum materials to involve the student in the learning experience leading to greater career maturity. For Ochs and Roessler (2004) this suggests that career decision self-efficacy and outcome expectations should be a factor in career assessments and interventions.

### Interventions relating to promoting STEM activities

Kolne and Lindsay (2020) conducted a systematic review[[19]](#footnote-19) of interventions aimed at developing an interest and participation in Science Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM) activities among young people with disabilities using an occupational justice perspective. Occupational injustice occurs when individuals do not participate in certain occupations, for example, there is an underrepresentation of disabled youth in STEM disciplines, therefore experiencing occupational injustice in a growing field (ibid). The findings in this review were varied, however, seven of the nine quantitative studies reported significant improvement in “one of perceived self-advocacy, self-esteem, social skills, independence, perceived value of the intervention, preparation for college and employment, perceived career options or interest in taking STEM classes and pursuing STEM careers” (Kolne and Lindsay, 2020:540). This demonstrates that the interventions had positive impact on participants’ “self-constructs, including self-determination and self-advocacy” (ibid: 540). The authors conclude that interventions aimed at engaging young disabled people with STEM fields can lead to both career and further education in STEM. Furthermore the interventions “had a positive impact on participants self-constructs, including self-determination and self-advocacy, important contributions to motivation and success in school and work for individuals with disabilities” (ibid: 540).

### Group counselling

Mayes (2020) highlights many advantages to using a group counselling intervention implemented by school guidance counsellors to help foster positive identity development amongst black, gifted students with disabilities. Mayes (2020) recommends an eight-step format to group counselling sessions that are sequential and build on one another. The sessions start with introductions and baseline assessments including academic and self-efficacy measures. As students’ progress a strength-based approach helps students identify their own experience and go on to build self-advocacy skills and resilience. Mayes (2020) also explores career aspirations and post-secondary educational opportunities. Mayes (2020) found that group counselling can be a protective factor helping students develop resilience on their career journeys despite experiencing negative setbacks, helping students “investigate their identities in order to find and channel their strength” (Mayes, 2020:207). The group aspect of the counselling allows students with similar experiences explore college and career opportunities together in a supportive manner (ibid).

Naugle et al (2010) also found that group-counselling sessions are useful to help prepare students to transition by informing them of their rights and promoting self-awareness, self-determination and self-advocacy skills.[[20]](#footnote-20)

### Motivational Enhancement Group Intervention

Sheftel et al (2014) designed, implemented and evaluated a pilot Motivational Enhancement Group Intervention (MEGI)[[21]](#footnote-21) focusing on increasing self-determination, self-efficacy and vocational outcome expectations for high school students with disabilities (n=135).The MEGI was comprised of ten, one-hour sessions that were implemented during transition[[22]](#footnote-22) and special education classes. The content included: past career aspirations; past work experiences; current work experiences; strengths; decision balance; values; review; importance/confidence; roadblocks and planning. Results indicate that participants reported positive and significant changes in vocational skills, self-efficacy and self-determination. Study limitations note this as a pilot and not an experimental study, “therefore not possible to draw a causal relationship between MEGI and changes in the main outcome variables” (ibid: 220). In other words confounding variables may also have affected the findings as delivery took place during ongoing classroom instruction. Despite the limitations, Sheftel et al (2014) illustrate the need for schools to embed these practices into the school curriculum.

### Career readiness curriculum

Lombardi et al (2020) examine the effects of delivering a career readiness curriculum online for students with and without disabilities (n=816) using a combination of student and teacher led variables. Student led measurers include self-reported career readiness measures and details about disabilities from student records. The delivery of the intervention took place in three different settings: integrated classrooms, dedicated classrooms and resource rooms.[[23]](#footnote-23) The results indicate the intervention effect was significant in all settings for both students with and without disabilities: all students that received the intervention showed significant gains in self-report career readiness scores compared to students who did not receive the intervention. The authors conclude that the study findings illustrate a blended learning approach in general education settings may be more flexible and meet the needs of students with disabilities ensuring they receive the same career readiness opportunities as their non-disabled peers (Lombardi et al, 2020).

## Self-concept and strength based approaches

Kravos (2019) highlights that persons with disabilities are often viewed negatively through their deficits or disability. Therefore, all assessments or supports provided to people with disabilities must have be framed positively. Learners with disabilities often present with low self-esteem, therefore focusing on strengths is important to progress career development (Kravos, 2019:14). Self-concept theory (developed by Super circa 1954) is recurring in the literature (Ochs and Roessler, 2004; Chen and Chan, 2014; Murugami, 2012; Wehmeyer et al, 2018; Kravos, 2019). Self-concept is defined as “a product of vast interactions, including individual’s life experiences and environmental factors; perception of self, including emotional factors of self (self-confidence, self-worth, ability)” (Kravos, 2019:13). Self-concept theory advocates for a developmental approach to career development, where insufficient career or self-awareness leads onto an underdeveloped self-concept contributing to career immaturity (Chen and Chan, 2014,). Thus, a person’s self-concept is a key aspect of career development (Wehmeyer, et al 2018) and particularly relevant for those with disabilities (Chen and Chan, 2014).

A Hong Kong study using mixed-methods tested a strengths-based longitudinal career intervention - the SUN[[24]](#footnote-24) Life Navigation Project - for junior second school students with additional needs (Yeun et al 2021). This school and strength based intervention is delivered by social workers over a period of one and a half years. It includes activities that were tailored to students own interests and abilities such as individual guidance interviews, work experience, group activities and career visits. The aim was to strengthen individual self-efficacy in setting personal learning goals for post-school education or employment, thus targeting their career path planning. Results indicate significant increases from time one to time two between the control (n=32) and treatment group (n=32) in personal goal-setting self-efficacy, career goal-setting self-efficacy and presence of meaning of life. The qualitative analysis identified the intervention had a positive impact on career, personal, social development self-efficacy (ibid).

## Social learning approach

The social learning theory of career development (developed by Krumboltz, cited in Chen and Chan, 2014) cites task-approach skills as essential to career development, for example, “(G)oal setting, values clarification and information gathering are all examples of critical tasks” (Chen and Chan, 2014:283). Annual IEPs are a useful tool to develop short term goals like work experience. The social learning approach also values the role of significant adults and peers to help strengthen the career self-efficacy of young disabled learners. It highlights how career development involves more than matching student interests and abilities with potential careers. Students should also be exposed to “chance encounters”, which is also referred to as “planned happenstance” (Chen and Chan, 2014:284). The article notes that students with learning disabilities are less likely to experience planned happenstance (ibid). Furthermore, students with learning disabilities may face other barriers, including social skills and social experience deficits (like planned happenstance), poorer academic skills, decision making difficulties, low self-determination, lack of self and career awareness. Overcoming these barriers is necessary for effective career development (Chen and Chan, 2014).

## Transition planning

Several studies examine post-school transitions for young people with different disabilities such as intellectual disabilities (Aston et al, 2021)[[25]](#footnote-25), Autism (Bell et al, 2017)[[26]](#footnote-26) and Special Education Needs (Mc Guckin et al, 2013)[[27]](#footnote-27). Similar themes are present across the studies including the importance of transition planning being a formal process; developing formal linkages between schools and further education facilities and employment opportunities; and ensuring career guidance professionals have knowledge on the post-school pathways available for learners with disabilities.

### Key elements of transition planning

A supported and an individualised approach to transition planning is a key element of successful progression from second level into post-school pathways (Mc Guckin et al 2013; NCSE and NDA, 2017; Daly and Cahill, 2018; Aston et al, 2021). A collaborative approach to developing and implementing transition planning appears throughout the literature (Daly and Cahill, 2018; Herbert et al, 2010).

A qualitative study from Malaysia examines the importance of transition programmes for young people with learning disabilities from the perspective of special education teachers (n=5) (Ibrahim et al, 2021). This study indicates that benefits include improving students’ self-image and skills, helping them to nurture an entrepreneurial mind-set and supports organisations to develop inclusive policies. The study recommends developing transition programmes for young people with learning disabilities in secondary schools.

Literature about transition planning in the Irish context notes that transition planning should be a formal process (Mc Guckin et al, 2013; Scanlon and Doyle, 2018) with parental involvement (Mc Guckin et al, 2013) delivered earlier i.e. for students with Additional Educational Needs it should start in the Junior Cycle (Mc Guckin et al, 2013). The timing is important as decisions made on subject choices and the level of study made early in secondary school impact on post-school choices. For example, students following the Leaving Cert Applied[[28]](#footnote-28) course in the Irish education system will not be able to apply directly to University (Bell et al, 2017).

Irish literature also found that sometimes staff are uncertain who is responsible for students transition planning: “In many instances, guidance for students with intellectual disabilities appears to fall between the two roles of the school Guidance Counsellor and the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)” (Aston et al, 2021: 9). Guidance counsellors should have the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and skills regarding transition planning through their CPD programme (Mc Guckin et al, 2013). Scanlon and Doyle (2018) identified formal transition planning and increased awareness of SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) as enablers of successful transition.

### Approaches to transition planning

The Irish literature notes that guidance professionals must be aware of the post-school options available (Aston et al, 2021; Bell et al, 2017). Creating formal linkages between schools and further education facilities will improve knowledge and awareness of potential post-school pathways for teachers, guidance counsellors and students (Aston et al, 2021) and also connect with real world opportunities (Scanlon and Doyle, 2018). The importance of this type of collaboration is present in other jurisdictions. For example, a literature review based on the South Korean context highlights the importance of collaboration between schools, rehabilitation agencies and employers to improve job preparedness and employment outcomes for young people with disabilities (Chun et al, 2016).

Naugle et al (2010) summarise the transition services that can be provided by school counsellor in a US context into four “cornerstones”: (1) knowledge of federal legislation; (2) training students and their families for appropriate self-advocacy; (3) identify and educate students/families on relevant community/national resources; (4) act as a facilitator with relevant personnel to ensure students goals are visualised and shared to those who act in a supportive role (Naugle et al, 2010:19).

In the Irish context best practice indicates that the process of Individual Education Planning (IEP)[[29]](#footnote-29) should develop into transition planning for learners with disabilities preparing to leave school (NCSE and NDA, 2017; National Federation of Voluntary Bodies, 2018). Equally, a supported and individualised approach to transition planning is key to successful progression from second level into post-school pathways (Mc Guckin et al 2013; NCSE and NDA, 2017; Aston et al, 2021). The literature outside of Ireland reiterates this point. For example, an Australian study notes that young people who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) are likely to encounter “structural, social and attitudinal barriers” in workplace settings along with experiencing higher levels of fatigue and stress than their non DHH colleagues (Punch and Duncan, 2020). Punch and Duncan (2020) highlight that in school (both primary and secondary) accommodations may be provided but these accommodations do not automatically transfer to post-secondary education or workplace settings, highlighting the need for targeted personalised transition planning. Ideally, self-determination knowledge and skills are threaded through the general curriculum, as they may be harder to develop for learners with disabilities. Punch and Duncan (2020) suggest autonomous behaviours such as allowing young people to lead on their own IEP meetings and making long-term career plans impacts positively on self-determination. Chun et al (2016) point to the value of using a Transition Education and Training model to positively impact on career development and employment outcomes for pupils with disabilities (Chun et al, 2016).

Wehmeyer et al (2009) proposes a Self-Determined Career Development Model (SDCDM)[[30]](#footnote-30) to assist young people with disabilities in secondary school (and rehabilitation) to self-direct planning leading onto employment. The SDCDM is overseen by facilitators using a three-phase process that enables youth or adults with disabilities to select goals to work towards. Participants receive support through all phases reflecting on their goals as they progress and are encouraged to develop solutions to any barriers they identify. A pilot of the SDCDM conducted in 2003 resulted in four of the five participants showing progress with their goals, a pilot in 2005 showed all five participants achieved their target goals (Wehmeyer et al, 2009). Wehmeyer et al (2009) conclude that young people with disabilities should engage in self-directed planning using models like the SDCDM as the promotion of self-determination is an important focus for this group (ibid).

### Training/education on transitions

The IRIS centre funded by the U.S Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) have developed a module for school counsellors to use to help prepare students for post-secondary transitions entitled *School Counsellors: Facilitating Transitions for Students with Disabilities from High School to Post-School*. The module provides information for counsellors and other education professionals to assist and support high school students with disabilities in the transition from the school environment to a post-school setting. It focuses on items such as IEPs; transition assessments; preparation for employment/further education and independent living; communication with community organisations and other relevant agencies.[[31]](#footnote-31)

## Challenging stereotypes through career guidance

Studies examining college and university access amongst learners with disabilities who want to attend higher education suggest they face many barriers (McCoy et al, 2014). The reasons for this are complex as there are many factors at play when examining what facilitates any young person to progress to higher education (Smyth and Banks, 2012). A 2007 study examining school processes and the transition to higher education found that schools providing more hours of career guidance had a greater proportion of higher-level college applications amongst their students (Smyth and Hannon, 2007). The study concludes: “the strength of guidance provision appears to vary across schools and may thus act to reinforce, rather than compensate for, existing social inequalities” (Smyth and Hannon, 2007: 192). Smyth and Hannon (2007) state: “guidance facilities appear to be crucial in encouraging college applications and entry, particularly if they are underpinned by strong academic standards within the school (Smyth and Hannon, 2007:192).

As noted earlier, those from disadvantaged backgrounds rely more on school-based guidance. However, guidance provided in schools may be framed by the socio-economic status of the individual and/or the school. As a result, the type of guidance provided to students may be stereotyped by their social class, rather than encouraging higher aspirations to all pupils (McCoy et al, 2010; Smyth and Banks, 2012). Academically weaker students raise similar points “some students felt that teachers did not provide sufficient encouragement to academically weaker students and tended to ‘look down’ on or ignore them” (Smyth et al 2011: 67).

Ableism is practiced by those who think that disabled people are unable to “be highly functioning, productive members of society” (Naugle et al, 2010:7). This can occur in the school environment when disabled learners are segregated from their peers, equally affecting the disabled learner themselves, which may result with early school dropout and low beliefs about their own potential. School counsellors have a role in confronting their own biases and learning how to address such issues in the school and community (Naugle et al, 2010).

Doyle et al (2017) conclude that insufficient levels of disability awareness in secondary schools “at a conceptual and individual level contaminates attitudes and expectations” (Doyle et al, 2017:279). If stereotypes exist within career guidance provision by social class and/or academic ability this could be equally true for learners with disabilities. This raises questions such as how can the system challenge stereotypes regarding expectations of learners with disabilities? How can career guidance assist with challenging these stereotypes?

## Universal Design in Education (UDE) and web based guidance

Ireland is unique internationally as Universal Design (UD) is defined in primary legislation. Part 6 of the Irish Disability Act 2005 sets out Universal Design as: “the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size, ability or disability” (Disability Act, 2005: Part 6). This includes both the built and digital environments, products and services and ICT systems. A UD system recognises the multiple layers in the ecological framework that affect human development, in particular at multiple levels in the educational ecosystem. A fundamental concept of advancing the educational ecosystem is viewing it from a systems perspective covering the macro, meso and micro dimensions:

• Micro level refers to individual needs and abilities catered through teaching practices, classroom design and layout, and technologies, including assistive technologies, learning resources and spaces, shifting the focus of education from institutional to individual learners, reorienting education towards the user and user involvement in the co-design of their own education

• Meso level is the institution level – covering governance, policies, and procedures, as well as linking to families and community-based initiatives, now known to be critical for growing and sustaining innovative learning

• Macro level refers to establishing directives and legislative acts, developing standards, promoting awareness, and ensuring the diffusion of UD and its adoption at national and local educational system levels (Craddock and McNutt, 2020).

Universal Design in Education reaches beyond the curriculum incorporating the built environment, products, services and IT systems (CEUD, 2022) and is underpinned by seven principles:

* • Principle 1: Equitable Use
* • Principle 2: Flexibility in Use
* • Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive Use
* • Principle 4: Perceptible Information
* • Principle 5: Tolerance for Error
* • Principle 6: Low Physical Effort
* • Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use

These principles act as a guide to the design of environments, products, services and communications[[32]](#footnote-32).

One of the pillars of Universal Design in Education (UDE) is Universal Design for Learning (UDL) that aims to improve the educational experience for all students as it caters for the diversity of learners in each classroom. It incorporates flexible methods of teaching and assessment, therefore inclusive of different learning styles (CEUD, 2022). UDL was developed by CAST, an American non-profit education research and development organisation and includes a variety of teaching methods in order to give all learners equal learning opportunities (Heelan et al, 2021, CEUD, 2022).

UDL assumes that everyone learns differently, for example, some students are auditory learners and other students are visual learners (Levey, 2021). Applying UDL principles gives learners more choice and agency in how they learn and interact with educators (Heelan et al, 2021). There are three principles in UDL that provide a framework to support educators develop their curricula. First, Multiple Means of Representation, acknowledges that students learn differently (visually, auditory or through touch, tactile) and providing multiple, flexible ways of learning is optimal. Second, Multiple Means of Action and Expression, refers to the variety of ways that students express what they have learned and third Multiple Means of Engagement acknowledges the many ways that a student can be motivated to learn. These three principles form the basis of UDL Guidelines, which to assist educators ensure their lessons are accessible to all types of learners (Levey, 2021).

In Ireland guidance exists to support those in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector implement UDL. This guidance[[33]](#footnote-33) cites the role of a guidance counsellor as an example of why implementing UDL is necessary. For example, guidance services often provide support roles for students with a disability and “[t]heir work has no ‘one size fits all’ model; they work with learners as they are, as individuals” (Heelan et al, 2021: 4). As a result, using a UDL approach “improves service provision for all professional groups by reducing barriers to learning and by reducing the number of add-on supports that learners might need” (ibid, p4). If UDL implementation is correct, it has the potential to reduce the requirements of many accommodations.

In terms of using web-based guidance for career guidance, some learners with disabilities may need additional support to ensure they can sufficiently access resources in this way. The 2018 NDA submission notes “Career guidance tools, information delivery can benefit from the principles of Universal Design to ensure maximum accessibility and usability by all” (NDA, 2018a:2).

Finally, the new European Web Accessibility Directive (WAD) transposed into Irish Legislation in 2020, requires all public websites and mobile apps to be accessible based on the WCAG 2.1 guidelines. This also requires that colleges internal Intranets and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools are accessible.[[34]](#footnote-34)

# Frameworks, benchmarks, standards and quality assurance

Frameworks, benchmarks, standards and quality assurance measures are useful in developing, progressing and refining aspects of many disciplines. This section outlines some of those identified in the literature as useful in developing effective career guidance for learners with disabilities.

## Frameworks

### International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) and Children and Youth (ICF CY)

Soresi et al (2008) note that comprehensive career guidance programmes should be available throughout life using frameworks such as the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (Soresi et al, 2008). The ICF framework “acknowledges the complexity of environmental factors that shape one’s ability to access PSE” (Post-Secondary Education) (Lindsay et al, 2016:1329). One of the important implications of using the ICF is that it acknowledges a person’s disability in terms of how it interacts with the environment. It examines a person’s activity (the action executed by the individual) and the performance (the level of involvement a person has in different life situations). Between these two domains, a person is assessed with their ability and capacity to perform. Soresi et al (2008) believe the ICF is a useful resource to design career guidance programmes as it operates beyond diagnosis and categorisation of disability, meaning it can establish a disability profile for individuals. Identifying behavioural activities within a domain enables career guidance professionals to work collaboratively with individuals to plan and increase their participation in activities important to them whilst increasing their capacity to deal with their specific challenges (Soresi et al, 2008).

Aravind and Nag (2013) examine career guidance for children with learning disabilities in an Indian context. The paper highlights that parents, teachers or other influential people often make career decisions on behalf of children with learning disabilities, an issue also highlighted by Murugami and Nel (2012).

Aravind and Nag (2013) suggest using the WHO International Classification of Functional, Disability and Health for Children and Adolescents (ICF CY)[[35]](#footnote-35) to construct a learning skills profile. This framework incorporates three perspectives: the body, the individual and society. For Aravind and Nag (2013) the ICF CY establishes a disability profile going beyond diagnosis and categorisation, helping counsellors “to plan resources, increase participation in desired activities, and improve the capacity to face challenges” (Aravind and Nag, 2013:47

As a system of classification, the ICF provides a framework describing health and health-related circumstances for use across different settings (NDA, 2003). In terms of career guidance, the literature in this review focuses more on psychosocial approaches to frameworks, tools and benchmarks in the delivery of career guidance. Doing so reflects a rights based approach to career guidance recognising young disabled people as rights holders, impacted by disabling constraints in society. While the ICF and ICFCY are reputable frameworks it may be preferable to use frameworks aligned with UNCRPD for career guidance approaches.

### College and Career Ready Framework (CCR)

Morningstar et al (2017) suggest a College and Career Ready[[36]](#footnote-36) (CCR) framework emphasising both academic and non-academic skills for use for secondary students with disabilities. The framework development includes collating research focusing on student successes as well as focus group consultations with a purposeful sample of selected state education agency representatives. The final framework includes six domains of academic and non-academic skills associated with college and career readiness. These are academic engagement; mind-sets; learning processes; critical thinking; interpersonal engagement and transition competencies. Ensuring that students have positive extracurricular experiences is an essential aspect of implementing CCR in school settings. Equally important are positive social relationships such as those with adult mentors and support networks (Morningstar et al, 2017).

## Benchmarks and guidelines

### UK The Eight Gatsby Benchmarks

Like Ireland, career guidance provision in the UK was delivered inconsistently between and within schools. Responsibility for career guidance is devolved to individual schools reinforcing the primacy of school autonomy (Hutchinson, 2018). In 2013, the UK government commissioned a review to explore options available to establish what good career guidance would look like for the UK. The review provided eight Benchmarks for providing good career guidance, hereafter referred to as the Gatsby Benchmarks[[37]](#footnote-37) (Gatsby, 2014). The eight Gatsby Benchmarks “provide clear descriptors of organisation structures that need to be in place to facilitate career guidance practices…. [fitting] within the OECD (2004) definition of career guidance as a set of services and activities intended to assist individuals to make choices and manage their career” (Hutchinson, 2018:54). The Gatsby Benchmarks provide a “practical framework” for schools to use autonomously (Hutchinson, 2018:54) against which individual school guidance programs can be audited (Allen and Chant, 2021). A range of resources exists to assist implementing the benchmarks for example The SEND Gatsby Benchmark Toolkit. [[38]](#footnote-38)

The eight Gatsby Benchmarks are:

1. A stable careers programme

2. Learning from career and labour market information

3. Addressing the needs of each pupil

4. Linking curriculum learning to careers

5. Encounters with employers and employees

6. Experiences of workplaces

7. Encounters with further and higher education

8. Personal guidance[[39]](#footnote-39)

Each Benchmark includes a description of what is included and why it is included. For example, Benchmark 1 illustrates the importance of having a stable careers programme understood by all users including pupils, parents, teachers and employers. It also describes how to achieve it, for example stipulating that career guidance information should be easily accessible for everyone using it. The costings to implement all the benchmarks in a medium school (outside London) is estimated as £53,637 for the first year and then £44,676 per year, which equates to £54 per pupil (Gatsby, 2014). A 2019 publication *Good Career Guidance Perspectives from the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Sector* highlights that the Guidelines are intended to “help deliver a system of high aspirations for all students in all types of settings” (Gatsby, 2019:3). This publication illustrates how schools (special and mainstream) and colleges implemented the benchmarks in their respective institutions.

Criticisms of the Gatsby Benchmarks include they lack detail on implementing the interventions; equally, they do not detail the learning outcomes that should be achieved in educational or economic terms. Finally, they do not illustrate how young people might gain support to construct their own career identity (Hutchinson, 2018).

The Gatsby Benchmarks are enshrined in statutory guidance and it is up to individual career leaders to implement them in each school.[[40]](#footnote-40) The 2017 UK Careers Strategy requested that schools should achieve all eight Gatsby Benchmarks by the end of 2020 (Allen and Chant, 2021). The UK introduced online tools such as COMPASS – schools can compare their career programme against the benchmarks - and Tracker – an online platform to manage a school’s career plan once evaluated via COMPASS (Allen and Chant, 2021, Houghton et al, 2021). Allen and Chant (2021) explore the key facilitating factors to achieving the eight Gatsby benchmarks in secondary schools in Kent. Aggregated data from COMPASS found that the average number of benchmarks achieved increased from 1.34 to 1.87 in 2017, 3.00 in 2019 and 3.75 in 2020[[41]](#footnote-41) (The Careers and Enterprise Company 2020, cited in Allen and Chant, 2021).

An evaluation conducted by the University of Derby (2021) on using the Gatsby Benchmarks found that scores examining student career readiness increased significantly in all year groups. This evaluation also found that the greater number of Benchmarks held, the higher number of GCSE[[42]](#footnote-42) passes were achieved. Equally relevant is that teaching staff noted changes in learners’ engagement in class and there was less queries about the purpose of certain subjects, which they associated with learners having a better understanding between knowledge/skills and their future career (Moore et al, 2021).

Allen and Chant (2020) note that the COMPASS tool does not indicate the critical facilitating factors necessary to achieve the eight benchmarks, while achieving the Gatsby benchmarks is a challenge for all schools, how these challenges differ between schools is unknown. Their study investigates how schools and colleges in the Kent and Medway areas of England are progressing against the Gatsby benchmarks though an online questionnaire. Variables surveyed included progress against the Gatsby benchmarks. The data indicates that overall respondents were reluctant in self-assessing fully meeting any of the benchmarks (<10%); ranking of the benchmarks from easiest to hardest to achieve suggest that benchmark one (a stable careers programme) and eight (personal guidance) are the easiest with benchmarks four (linking curriculum learning to careers) and six (experiences of workplaces) as the hardest. From a list of nine possible facilitating factors resources, staff time and support from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) were most significant. Other facilitating factors included more time in the curriculum, careers software, engagement/support of parents, staff training, the COMPASS tool and the Tracker tool (ibid).

Allen and Chant (2020) conclude that the Gatsby benchmarks are a useful ‘check list’ of career guidance activities within schools (ibid: 29). They found no significant differences between any of the school types in relation to progress against each benchmark or what would facilitate good progress, concluding that “irrespective of budgets, ethos, pupil destinations and culture it should be possible for all schools to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks” (Allen and Chant, 2021:21).

### CICA Australia

The Career Industry Council of Australia[[43]](#footnote-43) (CICA) commissioned the development of guidelines to facilitate career development for young people with a disability. These guidelines were developed following consultations with stakeholders, a review of best practice literature and an online survey of relevant practitioners (n=150) (CICA, 2012b). Testing of the CICA Guidelines took place in settings with service providers who had a range of professional backgrounds. Participants included “a disability employment agency, a special education school and the career service and disability support service areas of a large VET[[44]](#footnote-44) institution” (CICA, 2012a:3). The guidelines consist of seven steps, each with an overarching aim and subsets.[[45]](#footnote-45) The Guidelines aim to ensure that career guidance is provided in a person-centred way responsive to each young person; encouraging and providing young people with the skills to be self-managing and self-determining individuals; attaining suitable work experience; expanding the young person’s support networks; ensuring career information is accessible to all; developing working relationships with relevant agencies and service providers; and finally providing organisational support to deliver effective career development programs and services.

Guidelines provided a baseline from which to develop an assessment tool using each of the seven guidelines as a performance indicator. Users must assess how well their organisation meets each indicator and where it does not meet indicators, provide evidence and the actions taken to address it. Overall, trial participants (guideline users) indicate they found the guidelines were straight forward to administer and they helped guide participants to make changes in their career development practices where necessary (CICA, 2012a).

## Standards and quality assurance systems

Like other aspects of career guidance there is no uniformity in the implementation of standards and quality assurance systems. The following section briefly explores some of the systems in place focusing on Europe, the USA and Canada.

The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) proposes a quality assurance framework, based on five key quality elements: 1. practitioner competence; 2. citizen/user involvement; 3. service provision and improvement; 4. cost benefits to Governments; and 5. cost benefits to individuals (Jensen, 2020). These principles stem from previous work carried out with member states between 2004 and 2005. ELGPN proposes using this framework at national, regional and local levels. Drawing on the principles (as a group not in isolation) meet with national and European 2020 targets on education, employment, poverty and social exclusion (ELGPN, 2015).

Germany has sector-specific and provider-specific quality assurance and standards in place. There are no quality standards applicable to all sectors of education, career and employment. Standards in guidance generally refer to a citizen’s entitlement to guidance rather than how to deliver guidance. Basic standards for career guidance include items like confidentiality, impartiality and guidance services based on individual client needs (Schober and Langner, 2014).

The American School Counsellor Association (ASCA) refer to four sets of school standards for the school counselling profession.[[46]](#footnote-46) The standards aim to assist school counsellors to implement and asses their school counselling program in order to improve student outcomes. The four sets of standards are ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counsellors; ASCA Professional Standards and Competencies; ASCA Student Standards: Mind-sets and Behaviours for Students Success; ASCA Standards for School Counsellor Preparation Programs.

In Canada, the Career Development Professionals Canada (formerly the Canadian Standards & Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners)provides a Competency Framework for Career Development Professionals.[[47]](#footnote-47) This replaces the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners (S&Gs) and the Code of Ethics. The new approach comprises four main categories of competencies, three of which relate to Continued Professional Development (CPD).

# Tools and resources used in career guidance

## Career assessment practices

Career assessments include a range of practices essential to career guidance work (Buckley and Mahdavi, 2018). Career assessment practices focus on individual career interests, aptitudes, individual strengths, weaknesses and achievements. Career assessments help students “develop effective career decision-making skills and achieve occupation aspirations” and therefore ideally conducted early in the secondary school/high school cycle (Herbert et al, 2010:18).

A study examining career assessment practices used for high school students with disabilities in the USA identifies a range of career assessment methods: job shadowing, computer-assisted career guidance systems, job-seeking skills training, work experience, paper-based career tests and online career assessments. Methods identified as infrequent resources include: job coaching, career fairs, career study programs, visits to local business, college and technical schools, paid internships and work-study programs (Herbert et al, 2010). The study identifies that ideally multiple rather than singular practices are used. The study notes “having a collaborative relationship among transition professionals, students and family members is related to the perceived usefulness that career services may hold in identifying career goals and career identity” Herbert et al, 2010:24).

In terms of how to assess, Aravind and Nag (2013) suggest assessments are suitable for young people with learning disabilities and where necessary test modifications should occur. For example, strategies such as reducing the use of pronouns and negatives and avoiding irrelevant words. Repeat assessments regularly to fully understand the changing profile of a young person. Aravind and Nag (2013) conclude that “promoting and understanding of learning-related difficulties, assessing the implications of these difficulties for future career development, addressing issues related to confidence and efficacy in career choice” will counteract some of the challenges of career counselling for young people with learning disabilities (ibid, 2013:49).

## Career planning tools

There are many tools disabled learners can use to help plan their careers (Murray et al, 2016). There are three main categories of tools:

* descriptive tools profile a person at a point in time and can be useful to compare individuals
* evaluative tools measure changes in a person over time
* predictive tools ascertain if a person has a particular trait compared to pre-defined criteria

Many tools used for career planning are predictive (Murray et al, 2016).

A systematic review conducted by Murray et al (2016) identifies tools published in peer-reviewed journals to use to support career planning for autistic people. Due to limited results specific to autism, the search was broadened to include individuals with a cognitive or developmental disability. Fourteen articles met the inclusion criteria resulting with 10 career-planning tools. The study concluded that the tools included in the review could be useful for autistic people, however, “none of the tools identified had strong reliability or validity in the areas required for predictive career planning tools” (Murray et al, 2015: 200).

Career planning can be taught as part of the school curriculum; Denmark is a case in point. The subject “education and work” is compulsory in Danish schools from pre-school to grade nine and divided into three levels: pre-school to grade three[[48]](#footnote-48); grades four to six[[49]](#footnote-49) and grades seven to nine[[50]](#footnote-50). Career guidance is taught as one thematic area, including, “activities outside of school, including study and company visits, introductory courses for upper secondary school programmes, business internships, contact with upper secondary schools, organisations, industry, etc.” (Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality, 2015:3). Three different themes, personal choice, education and work, work life are taught and within each theme, there are three skill and knowledge areas. (Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality 2015:3).

### Guidance and intervention models

Chen and Chan (2014) identify guidance and intervention models that help some of the challenges faced by young people with learning disabilities. They describe using a four-phase career guidance model (developed by Castellanos & Septeowski, cited in Chen and Chan, 2014) to address issues with career maturity by establishing individual ability, skills and interests and linking them with career activities or work experiences. Phase one collects information from the student/parents/relevant assessments; phase two uses tools to assess career maturity and work importance; phase three investigates potential occupations including action items such as work placements; and during phase four counsellors follow up and addresses any issues with students (Chen and Chan, 2014).

Another model is the Pathways Programme, which is a secondary school career education course for students with learning disabilities. This program addresses five areas pertinent to career development, including “self-and career awareness, writing skills for employment purposes, interview skills, job-related problem solving skills, and anger management” (Chen and Chan, 2014:286). While delivering the Pathway Programme counsellors may use strategies from the Cognitive Information Processing (CIP)[[51]](#footnote-51) framework. Other assessments relevant to pupils with learning disabilities include the Career Thoughts Inventory[[52]](#footnote-52) (CTI) the Career Maturity Inventory – Revised[[53]](#footnote-53); and my Vocational Situation[[54]](#footnote-54) (Buckley and Mahdavi, 2018).

### Tools and resources for students

Online tools and resources for all young people are common in many jurisdictions; some examples from Denmark, Germany, the USA and Finland are below.

Denmark has established an e-Guidance Portal providing personal guidance through e-channels. This is personal communication via telephone, SMS, email and social media. This service is provided by professional guidance counsellors and the Danish system of Youth Guidance Centres, the regional centres and editors of the national guidance portal (Jensen, 2020).

In Germany, the Federal Employment Agency provides printed and online media relating to careers, training opportunities and self-assessment tools. Psychological and medical services are offered to those recommended by counsellors, in particular to support career development of specific groups with additional needs including people with disabilities (Schober, 2014).

In Finland, to fulfil the national strategic objective of ensuring guidance services are easily accessed by all groups, the public guidance service provision relies on online applications and tools including: “several internet portals developed by the national education and employment authorities, municipalities, different regional actors, youth information centres, etc. to serve the information, advice and guidance needs of their primary client groups” (Toni and Vuorinen, 2020: 136; Sweet et al, 2015). The aim is to develop career services through a variety of channels for all citizens as part of the national e-governance strategies (Toni and Vuorinen, 2020).

# Career guidance provision outside school

Several jurisdictions have career guidance provision outside the school system such as Skills Development Scotland[[55]](#footnote-55) as well as support for career guidance professions through online mediums such as Career Wales[[56]](#footnote-56). Other methods of delivering career guidance outside the school system are below.

## Employment Agencies, Germany

Employment Agencies (EA) provide guidance relating to career choice and development for youths and adults. Career counsellors from the EA support career education in secondary schools including guidance, individual counselling and apprenticeship training places. Individual career counselling is offered by the EA to pupils and school leavers in the employment office or at school. EA also provide supports to teachers responsible for school guidance at school and offer career guidance for people with disabilities though a Rehabilitation team and those who attend special schools and rehabilitation centres (Schober, 2014).

## Youth Guidance Centres, Denmark

The Guidance system in Denmark is complex and has been subject to much reform since 2003 (Jensen, 2020). Denmark has a Career Guidance Act (2003) covering all legislation relating to career guidance (Watts and Sultana, 2004). The responsibility for guidance has changed from schools/educational institutions to “new independent and professional institutions at three levels-national, regional and municipal” (Jensen, 2020:111) called Youth Guidance Centres (YGC). The aim is to support pupils in primary and lower secondary with upper secondary education as well as vocational educational and training. They are also available to young people under the age of 25 who have not attended upper secondary school aiming to help them back into education training or employment (Skovhus and Thomsen, 2017). The YGC link with schools and organise guidance activities at schools (Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality 2015:3). Guidance practitioners must have post-graduate guidance qualifications (Jensen, 2020). Recent reform has resulted in “increased sectorisation” of career guidance with teachers having more guidance responsibility than professional guidance practioners resulting with the professional guidance being “reserved for special and vulnerable groups” (Jensen, 2020:124).

## One-Stop-Shop Guidance Centres Finland, Germany

One-Stop Guidance centres[[57]](#footnote-57) also provides guidance in Finland for all youth ages 16 to 30 (Toni and Vuorinen, 2020). These are nationwide centres providing a range of services such as housing, social care and career guidance. They provide face-to-face as well as digital services and support. Central government, the European Social Fund and participating service providers provides funding (Savolainen et al, 2018). In Germany Youth Vocational Centres (one-stop-shops) provide support for disadvantaged pupils, for example prevention measures for early school dropout (Schober, 2014).

# Conclusion

Career guidance is a complex process compounded by the fact it has diverse meanings in different jurisdictions. The literature demonstrates that there are a variety of approaches and a range of different methods to deliver career guidance. In summary, career guidance is an important component of the secondary school curriculum. However, the literature indicates that in the Irish context, there is a variety of barriers to effective career guidance, for example, delivery is unsystematic, as there are diverse approaches to career guidance varying by both content and timing. Furthermore, special schools in Ireland do not have allocated guidance counsellor teachers.

The literature agrees that for career guidance to be effective it is crucial for all young people to ensure they have knowledge of the post-school options available to them. This is particularly true for young people with disabilities who may have complex post-school pathways. The literature notes that effective career guidance is a key factor relating to successful transitions. The role of the school guidance counsellor cannot be undervalued. Personnel in this role and any career education roles must be aware of the post-school options available for all students. Equally, they have responsibility to help young people develop a positive view of themselves and their future. There are several key personal traits that should be cultivated that are recurring in the literature. For example, pupil’s self-efficacy and self-determination need development in school settings to help young disabled learners make the right post-school decision for them. Self-advocacy and resilience are important traits to nurture in school settings.

The literature demonstrates that a host of tools and frameworks are available to use for different aspects of career guidance, including career assessment tools, interventions, benchmarking tools and frameworks. Used together these approaches can ensure career guidance delivery is suitable for all learners. Best practice indicates that career guidance delivery should be early in the secondary school cycle, as opposed to during the final year of school. The literature is clear that best practice indicates transition plans should be person-centred and developed collaboratively among transition professionals, students and family members.

There is no panacea to effective career guidance however, the following quote from a teacher in a mainstream UK school that has a high number of students accessing Special Educational Needs and Disabilities support, sums up how to approach career guidance:

“Careers is no longer something that we ‘add on’ to lessons: it is a thread that runs throughout the school” (Gatsby, 2009:34).

Finally, in addition to the approach outlined above, the school also supports all young people through positive approaches:

“One of our key enablers to addressing these issues was to deliver careers advice in a truthful and realistic way. If our lowest ability student wanted to be a doctor, we would support them while offering realistic alternatives to allow entry into that field from a different direction. We question any suggestion that opportunities don’t exist and demonstrate this to students by linking opportunities to lessons, visits and careers activities” (Gatsby, 2019: 35).

## Limitations of this literature review

This paper was limited to English language papers. Some of the studies included in this review used small study samples. Although these studies are useful for the purposes of this literature review, they cannot infer representative of the entire population so limited inferences can be drawn.

## Next steps

The National Disability Authority will publish a policy advice paper on the ‘delivery of effective career guidance: lessons for Ireland’. This policy advice paper will be submitted to both the Department of Education and the Department of Further Higher Education Research Innovation and Skills[[58]](#footnote-58) to inform considerations with regard to career guidance delivery.

This policy advice paper will draw on the findings in this literature review as well as findings from a roundtable discussion with education experts and other stakeholders including Disabled Persons Organisations and other persons with disabilities with an interest in the education and employment spheres that took place in the National Disability Authority in May 2022. The initial findings from this literature review were presented at this roundtable discussion.

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1. National Disability Authority, 2022a [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/01ce11-indecon-review-of-career-guidance/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. CES 2015 to 2018 action plan [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Growing Up in Ireland is a national longitudinal study of children and young people in Ireland following two groups of children who were aged 9 years and 9 months at the first round of data collection. The study participants are currently age 23 and 13 years old, respectively. See https://www.growingup.ie/about-growing-up-in-ireland/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Student case studies n=3; teacher interviews n=2; parent interview n=1; qualitative student questionnaires n=8; qualitative parent questionnaires n=8; qualitative teacher questionnaires n=13 (Daly and Cahill, 2018:10). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This includes three overlapping reviews of career guidance policies in 37 countries, including an OECD (2004) review covering 14 countries; World Bank Review (2004) covering 7 countries; a 2004 report of EU member-states and acceding countries review of 29 countries (Watts and Sultana, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Each school has a guidance allocation which varies dependent on the type of school, see <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/221111/ae3429e4-9e38-46bc-81f0-1a7285fbff48.pdf#page=nul>. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The National Educational Psychological Service see <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/5ef45c-neps/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See <https://www.pobal.ie/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The term counselor is used in USA (Naugle et al, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. A master’s degree in guidance and counselling is another option (Toni and Vuorinen, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The OECD’s Education Committee and Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee sanctioned a comparative review of national policies of career information, guidance and counselling services. Countries that participated completed a national questionnaire and hosted a visit by an expert team who visited guidance services in schools, tertiary education, employment offices, training centres and community settings. The country note (2002) summaries the main findings and suggestions for Ireland (see <https://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/ncge/uploads/OECD.doc.pdf>) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The NCGE closed in September 2022 see <https://www.ncge.ie/> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See <https://www.ahead.ie/> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See <https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files/shop/pay/GEInsider.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This included a search of seven electronic databases for peer-reviewed English language articles published between 1980 and 2014, including articles focusing on mentorship interventions related to post-secondary education and employment for the under thirty age group with physical, cognitive and developmental disabilities (Lindsay et al, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The female participants had higher levels of family involvement and support than the male participants (Lindstrom et al, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The value of using a SCCT is twofold as it provides an outcome variable, i.e. a goal or intention as well as describing factors that influence goal setting or forming the intention to act (Ochs and Roessler, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This included a review and critical appraisal 5 databases (CINAHL, ERIC, MEDLINE, PsychINFO and Scopus) of peer-reviewed articles published between 1993 and June 2018 reporting a STEM intervention. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Naugle et al (2010) identify the six domains that guide counsellors provide advocacy: client/student empowerment; client/student advocacy; community collaboration; systems advocacy; public information; social/political advocacy. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This is based on the Ecological Model of career development (Sheftel et al, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Transition services help youths on their development into adulthood including developing their post-school pathways (Sheftel et al, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Integrated classrooms teach technology based transition curriculum with other curricula (e.g. EnvisionIT); dedicated classrooms solely teach technology based curriculum; resource rooms have multiple objectives (Lombardi, et al, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Strength-based orientation; Uniqueness; New perspective (Yeun et al 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. A mixed-methods study examining post-school transitions for young people with an intellectual disability in Ireland. In the first phase quantitative data is collected through a questionnaire distributed to post-primary school principals. This produced baseline data on post-school transitions for this group. The second phase included interviews with key school personnel to elicit some of the meanings behind the findings from the survey data (Aston et al, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. A small study (n=6) exploring experiences of the transition process to post-secondary education for autistic pupils (Bell et al, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. A qualitative study using interviews with students (n=42) and professionals (n=28) to explore experiences of the transition process to further and higher education for students with SEN (Mc Guckin et al, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. LCA is a two-year leaving certificate programme consisting of four half year sessions aiming to prepare students for adult life, the sessions include English and Communications; Mathematical Applications; Introduction to ICT; ICT: Specialism. See <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Senior-cycle/LCA/> [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. There is no legal requirement to provide IEPs in Ireland, however, Section 9 and Section 15 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 (EPSEN) outline the main features of the IEP process (NCSE, 2006). These sections of the EPSEN Act 2004 have yet to be enacted. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The SDCD model is a modified version of the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) developed to help teachers support adolescents to self-direct learning (Wehmeyer et al 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf_module_outlines/cou2.pdf#content> [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See <https://universaldesign.ie/what-is-universal-design/> [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/6154fce37c/udl-for-fet-practitioners.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See [European Union (Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Bodies) Regulations 2020 | The National Disability Authority (nda.ie)](https://nda.ie/publications/communications/eu-web-accessibility-directive/) [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth (ICF-CY) is a modified version of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). It records characteristics of the developing child and the influence of the surrounding environment. See [ICF CY](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/43737/9789241547321_eng.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Generally CCR models rely more on academic indicators, however, there is evidence suggesting that these measures do not necessarily align with the knowledge and skills needed by first year college students (Morningstar et al, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The review included desk research; six country visits (The Netherlands, Germany, Hong Kong, Finland, Canada and Ireland; visits to 5 private schools in England) as well as benchmark costings. See <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/focus-areas/good-career-guidance> [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See <https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/browse-category/send> [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Taken from <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/focus-areas/good-career-guidance> [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See [Gatsby Benchmarks | The Careers and Enterprise Company](https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/careers-leaders/gatsby-benchmarks/) [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. This includes schools and colleges (Allen and Chant, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. General Certificate of Secondary Education, a system of qualification used in second level education in the UK see <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/gcses> [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. This is the Australian national body for the career industry see <https://cica.org.au/> [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Vocation Education and Training see <https://www.studyaustralia.gov.au/english/study/vocational-education> [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See [Career-Developement-Guidelines-PWD-February-2012.pdf (cica.org.au)](https://cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Career-Developement-Guidelines-PWD-February-2012.pdf) p29-35 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. [https://www. schoolcounselor. org/](https://www.schoolcounselor.org/) [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. [https://ccdp-pcdc. ca/en/](https://ccdp-pcdc.ca/en/) [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Age 7 to 10 years (see https://www.scholaro.com/pro/Countries/Denmark/Education-System). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Age 11 to 13 years (ibid). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Age 14 to 16 years (ibid). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. A CIP approach examines the role of executive processing in human cognition, which are common deficits for students with learning disabilities (Chen and Chan, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. The CTI identifies career guidance problems and improves the effectiveness of career counselling by evaluating skills/traits such as: decision making; commitment anxiety and external conflict. See [CTI](https://www.creativeorgdesign.com/tests/career-thoughts-inventory-cti/#:~:text=The%20Career%20Thoughts%20Inventory%20(CTI)%20is%20a%20self%2Dadministered,students%2C%20and%20high%20school%20students). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. The Career Maturity Inventory measures how career development tasks are approached by adolescents and adults see [Career Maturity Inventory](http://psychology.iresearchnet.com/counseling-psychology/career-assessment/career-maturity-inventory/#:~:text=The%20Career%20Maturity%20Inventory%20(CMI,adults%20approach%20career%20development%20tasks). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. The My Vocational Situation measures difficulties relating to vocational decision making, see [My Vocational Situation.](https://www.sralab.org/rehabilitation-measures/my-vocational-situation#:~:text=The%20My%20Vocational%20Situation%20scale,guidance%20to%20make%20career%20decisions) [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. See https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/ [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See <https://careerswales.gov.wales/education-and-teaching-professionals/careers-in-the-curriculum> [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. The translation for a One-Stop Guidance centre is “cab” see <https://ohjaamot.fi/mika-on-ohjaamo> [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. the Department of Further Higher Education Research Innovation and Skills has responsibility for the implementation of the Indecon review of career guidance [↑](#footnote-ref-58)