Executive Summary

Young adults with disabilities, and especially those with learning difficulties, have been going on to tertiary education in increasing numbers over the past decade. More are gaining the prerequisites for tertiary education as policies to promote the inclusion of disabled people developed over the past 20 years bear fruit.

Inclusive policies have increased access to tertiary education

The "school for all" approach mobilises financial, technical and human resources to provide students with disabilities equal opportunities on an equal footing with their peers by compensating for the consequences of their disability. More flexible learning environments that can be adapted to the diversity of educational needs, the reduction of dropout rates, and quality assurance policies have all helped to increase the number of students with disabilities able to aspire to tertiary education.

In addition, educational systems are more often being mobilised around students' prospects, with a wider range of educational opportunities beyond upper secondary education, more flexible pathways and measures to assist disadvantaged groups, including disabled pupils and students.

The growing proportion of young adults with disabilities in tertiary education is also a direct result of the strategies adopted by upper secondary schools and tertiary education institutions to build pathways to tertiary education and prepare upper secondary school students to cope with the demands of the transition to adulthood.

Secondary schools generally aim to provide upper secondary school students with disabilities with the information that will allow them to make informed decisions. Less often, they encourage them to plan carefully and early enough their path towards tertiary education. Only a few strategies are designed to prepare students for the experience of tertiary education.

In tertiary education, institutions have designed admission and support strategies for students with disabilities to succeed in their studies and, to a lesser extent, to also be well integrated into the university community. Approaches include linking with services that deal with transport, housing, etc., collaborating with secondary education institutions or offering to map out pathways with students.

Admissions strategies also tend to make students with disabilities responsible for themselves, encouraging them to clarify their particular educational needs at as early a stage as possible. They also provide information and advice to students on courses, their accessibility policy and available support and accommodations. They may involve developing a contract to mobilise actors within the institution around a specific support plan that sets out the objectives, the support and accommodations needed, and implementation provisions.

The quality of the transition process depends on whether the institution promotes an inclusive ethos throughout the university community that allows for mobilising each member of the institution to ensure the success and the inclusion of individual students.

This inclusive ethos can be seen particularly clearly in countries that have adopted an educational approach to disability. This approach focuses on how the institutions' modes of organisation and teachers' pedagogical practices can be adapted to address the rhythms and the needs of students with disabilities. In these countries, institutions tend to see diversity as a source of success for the entire university community, to consider support and accommodations as a way to facilitate the success of every student and to view accessibility as a source of development.

Transition issues are still a concern for young adults with disabilities

Inclusive policies have not always succeeded in ensuring the successful transition of young adults with disabilities. Despite the progress made, young adults with disabilities generally have a harder and bumpier transition to tertiary education than other young adults. Those students with a sensory, motor or mental impairment or psychological problems face particular challenges. Their pathways to tertiary education are also less straightforward and there may be breaks or forced changes of direction along the way.

Young adults with disabilities are also less likely than their non-disabled peers to complete their upper secondary studies successfully, particularly when they have a specific learning difficulty, behavioural difficulties or psychological problems.

Transition policies have significantly expanded opportunities for access to, and success in, tertiary education for young adults with disabilities. But they do not address all the obstacles that students face and do not do enough to provide a continuous and coherent pathway to tertiary education and employment.

Successful transition still depends too much on the resources and the resourcefulness of the individuals concerned and their families. Students with sensory, motor or mental impairments and/or from less fortunate socio-economic backgrounds may be more vulnerable as a result.

Successfully completing tertiary studies is a further challenge for disabled students who may encounter further obstacles during their studies. Moreover, the additional resources allocated to institutions and to young adults with disabilities are not sufficiently linked to preparing for their future social and professional inclusion. As a result young adults with disabilities may remain unemployed or underemployed in spite of easier access to higher education.

Develop transition policies to safeguard high-quality pathway opportunities

It is therefore essential to develop policies that encourage a good transition to tertiary education and to employment if education more broadly is to meet the goals of efficiency and equity by delivering access, success and a promising future for all.

Countries are starting to develop specific transition policies and integrate these into the education system: budgetary pressures have provided added impetus to optimising the

planning and steering of inclusive policies and avoiding excessive costs. Nonetheless countries continue to face a range of challenges including how to:

- mobilise stakeholders and systems around the future of young adults with disabilities and prevent them from being irremediably marginalised by discontinuities;
- promote synergies between systems and stakeholders involved in the transition process to ensure continuity and coherence in the career path;
- empower young adults with disabilities and their families to meet the demands of the transition to adulthood and of tertiary education and employment;
- make systems and stakeholders capable of satisfying the requirements imposed by the definition and implementation of transition processes;
- provide the mechanisms and tools necessary for planning policies and monitoring transition processes.

Quality transition policies are needed to give equal opportunities and treatment for young adults with disabilities. They:

- provide young adults with disabilities with the same knowledge and skills as other young adults to the full extent possible;
- furnish them, on the same basis as other young adults, with qualifications recognised by tertiary education institutions and the labour market;
- prevent them from being more exposed than other young adults to being neither in employment nor in education or training;
- offer them the same chances of access to the same quality of employment as young adults without disabilities; and
- give them equal opportunities in terms of the length and quality of transition.

This in turn requires policies that:

- are organised around an educational approach to disability which focuses on the enabling or disabling effect of policies and practices;
- promote a legislative framework that prohibits all forms of discrimination and requires institutions to include transition in annual action plans for each young adult with disabilities;
- ensure that the support offered acts as an incentive for tertiary education and access to employment;
- develop bridges between stakeholders that foster continuity and coherent paths between educational levels and sectors;
- provide education systems with financial and methodological incentives to improve transition strategies and strengthen linkages with their environment, particularly with employers and career services;
- link financial resources more closely to the individual education plan which includes a transition plan;
- are anchored in reliable indicators and statistical data for analysis and evaluation;

- create or improve co-ordination arrangements to facilitate local synergies among stakeholders in the education, employment, social and health sectors;
- improve initial and continuing training for personnel in the education system and provide them with methodological tools and support.

Optimising the transition to tertiary education therefore requires:

- strengthening local synergies among the actors involved in the transition process;
- training actors in the educational system involved in the transition process in order to better prepare young people with disabilities to cope with the demands of tertiary education;
- developing modes of financing that allow young adults with disabilities to cover the extra costs due to their disability, and encouraging schools and tertiary education institutions to support young adults with disabilities during the transition process or/and to ensure that they are supported;
- making available reliable and comparable statistics for effective planning and monitoring of policies and processes;
- developing the services and tools needed to steer transition processes or counter the ineffectiveness of existing ones.

Optimising the transition to tertiary education also requires that schools:

- supply adequate information about the courses proposed by the tertiary education sector and the conditions of access to tertiary education;
- provide support to young adults with disabilities throughout the process;
- strengthen their links with their environment.

An easier transition to tertiary education also requires that admission and support services in tertiary education institutions:

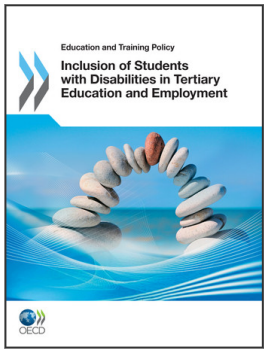
- strengthen their links with secondary education institutions, with the bodies that co-ordinate the education and/or transition process and with services involved in extracurricular issues;
- take an educational approach to disability rather than a diagnostic approach;
- develop admissions strategies that go beyond disseminating information;
- have at their disposal the skills, tools and methodologies needed for assessing, systematically and accurately, the educational needs of students with disabilities and providing high-quality support;
- effectively link admissions strategies to support strategies;
- endeavour to ensure that students with disabilities are capable of making the best possible use of the support provided and of taking charge of their future.

Improve transition to work opportunities

However, access to tertiary education does not necessarily lead to employment. The rate of employment of young adults with disabilities is lower than that of the working population of the same age.

Optimising the transition to employment presupposes that:

- the vocational education and training initiatives undertaken in secondary education to optimise the employability of young adults with disabilities offer a real educational alternative;
- tertiary education institutions attach the same importance to the professional future of students with disabilities as they do for other students;
- tertiary education institutions create sufficiently deep-rooted and formalised links with the economic sphere and the actors involved in active employment policies to be able to make full use of initiatives to encourage firms to recruit workers with disabilities;
- admissions and support services for students with disabilities give greater attention to access to employment in their strategies and work more closely with agencies that assist with job searches for persons with disabilities or job placement agencies.



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