

Moving to Higher Education: Opportunities and Barriers Experienced by People with Disabilities

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will examine how national initiatives have developed over recent decades and how they impacted on the participation of people with disabilities within HE. We contend that Initial access initiatives tended to focus on people from poorer socio-economic backgrounds and/or those from ethnic minorities. It was only at a later stage that children and young people with disabilities were given additional supports to enable their participation in educational settings and in particular HE.

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Access initiatives supporting people with disabilities emerged within the context of concerted efforts by many countries to develop and establish more inclusive societies. The World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca (UNESCO 1994), a seminal event within the move towards educational inclusion, specifically refers to the importance

of supporting access, transfer and progression within the education system for young people with disabilities: ‘should be helped to make an effective transition from school to adult working life . . . support to enter HE whenever possible and subsequent vocational training preparing them to function as independent, contributing members of their communities after leaving school’ (UNESCO 1994, p. 34). The World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, reinforced the recommendations from the Salamanca Conference through encouraging the development of effective partnerships: ‘between schoolteachers, families, communities, civil society, employers, voluntary bodies, social services and political authorities’ (p. 66) to achieve this goal. The United Nations Convention on Rights for Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2006, Article 24) asserts the rights of people with disabilities to access all levels of education:

States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Since the latter years of the twentieth century, there has been a focus within Irish educational and social policies on developing an infrastructure to support the greater participation of people with disabilities within Irish society. There has been an attempt at policy level to examine potential barriers to full participation within the education system and address these through a series of policy initiatives and enabling legislation. For example, a framework to support access, transfer and progression for all learners in the education system was mandated in the Qualifications Act (IG 1999). It was recognised that this framework, while designed to facilitate all learners, had particular relevance for people with disabilities (NQAI 2003). Facilitating meaningful access for people with disabilities required a series of measures including adaptation of existing programmes, flexible delivery, reasonable accommodation, appropriate supports and programmes designed: ‘to promote equality and combat discrimination’ (NQAI 2003, p. 6). The Employment Equality Act (IG 1998a) and the

Equal Status Act (IG 2000) provide support for the concept of access with the former permitting positive action to support for the employment of disabled people and the latter stipulating that reasonable accommodation should be made for a student with a disability where: ‘without this treatment or facilities, it would be impossible or unduly difficult to avail of the services provided’ (NQAI 2003, p. 8). It was anticipated that the establishment of an access, transfer and progression framework would result in: ‘a more diverse learner community throughout further and higher education’ (NQAI 2003, p. 15). Universities were obliged under the Universities Act (Irish Government 1997) to develop policies with regard to: ‘access to the university and to university education by economically or socially disadvantaged people, by people who have a disability and by people from sections of society significantly under-represented in the student body’ (Section 36: 1 (a)).

As was discussed in Chaps. 3 and 5, the report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level (DES 2001) represented a significant advance in establishing a viable framework for access, transfer and progression for people with disabilities within the education system. The authors recommended the setting of national targets for increased participation by students with disabilities. The Fund for Students with Disabilities was established and administered by the National Access Office. This fund was designed to support participation through the provision of assistive technology, sign language interpreters, note takers and extra tuition. A succession of Higher Education Authority reports (2005, 2008a, 2010c, 2015e) promoted a coherent rationale for extending access to HE, acknowledging the importance of HE opportunities both for the realisation of individual and societal goals such as economic progress and social cohesion. The second National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008–13 (HEA 2008a) aimed to double the numbers of people with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities participating in HE. The Mid-Term Review of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (HEA 2010c) reported that while there was evident progress in achieving participation targets for people with disabilities the majority of targets for 2010 had not been achieved. There was a renewed commitment to achieving the original targets over the lifetime of the plan; however, there was also a clear recognition that the rapid deterioration in the country’s economic circumstances had forced a review of the access plan to accommodate the needs of the newly unemployed with increased demand for a coherent response from HE institutions for retraining and

upskilling. As discussed in [Chap. 3](#), it was recognised that HE institutions had been proactive in developing specific access initiatives such as the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) and increased support in assistive technology and study skills. The DARE scheme is designed to take into account the adverse impact of a disability on the ability of students with a disability to achieve the requisite entry scores for admission to their preferred programmes of study (HEA 2008a). Students deemed eligible for the DARE scheme can compete for places with a reduced entry score in the Leaving Certificate examination and if successful will receive additional academic support within HE institutions. The Fund for Students with Disabilities budget had increased substantially from 2003–4 to 2008–9 with an allocation of 5.6 m. (2003–4) doubling to 11.3 m. (2008–9) and a more than doubling of the number of students with disabilities supported in further and HE with 1,425 (2003–4) and 3,689 (2008–9) (HEA 2010c).

Over the last decade, Disability/Access officers have been appointed in each HE institution with the responsibility for establishing support services for students with disabilities which can enable these students to transfer successfully to and progress through HE. Support services generally consist of needs assessment for each student to determine support needs, curricular access supports such as assistive technology, the provision of sign interpreters and note takers along with extra focussed academic tutorials. The Disability Officer will also recommend reasonable accommodations for assignments and examinations and liaise with academic and administrative staff within the institution. Outreach activities include established links with post-primary schools, open days and the Better Options Fair (AHEAD 2008) which provides in-depth information on accessibility of institutions and courses, availability of specific academic and personal supports and reasonable accommodations offered in each institution.

The AHEAD Report (2015) provides the most up to date figures on patterns of participation for students with disabilities with 27 (out of a total of 28) HE institutions reporting the participation rates. A total of 9,694 students (4.7 per cent of total student population) were identified with 8,769 (undergraduate) and 925 (postgraduate). Over the past decade, there has been an increase in participation rates though there are significantly fewer in postgraduate study or undertaking part-time courses of study. The participation of Deaf students has consistently fallen over the past 3 years. Students with disabilities are far more likely

to be studying in Arts and Humanities; however, students with ASD are marginally more likely to be found in the fields of Computing and Science. While students with disabilities were significantly under-represented in Education and Nursing over the last couple of years, this trend is being slowly reversed.

The latest National Access Plan (HEA 2015e) has set a number of targets for levels of participation by students with disabilities over the time period 2015–19. The three under-represented groups (physical, sensory and multiple disabilities) who were the focus of the previous plan (HEA 2008a) remain, but with an aspiration to increase from the current 6 per cent (approximately) to 8 per cent as a proportion of new entrants. The targets for those with physical disabilities are to go from 390 (current) to 570 (2019); the Deaf/hard of hearing from 210 (current) to 280 (2019); those who are blind/have a vision impairment from 140 (current) to 200 (2019). While specific targets have been formulated for particular groups, the Higher Education Authority remains committed to supporting the access needs of students in other categories of disability (for example, students with a learning disability, with mental health conditions or with neurological conditions).

ACCESS, TRANSFER AND PROGRESSION: PATTERNS OF PARTICIPATION

The participation of people with disabilities in HE is a complex issue as illustrated by research in this area both nationally and internationally. Factors influencing decision-making processes regarding post-school choices for students with disabilities will be examined within the context of how decision-making processes are facilitated for all students. In addition, recent Irish research on the access and transfer of students with disabilities to HE in the Republic of Ireland will be reviewed.

International data indicate that young people with disabilities are less likely to avail of HE opportunities than their contemporaries (OECD 2011a). The USA longitudinal study (NLTS2) reported that only 45 per cent of young people with disabilities were likely to enrol on post-secondary educational courses compared to 53 per cent of their peers. In addition, these young people were more likely to attend 2-year programmes (32 per cent) and were least likely to have enrolled in 4-year

college programmes (Newman et al. 2009). Disability category differences were apparent in the post-school outcomes examined: young people with visual or hearing impairments were more likely to attend post-secondary school placements than were those with speech/language or other health impairments, orthopaedic impairments, multiple disabilities, emotional disturbances or general learning disabilities.

Watson and Nolan's (2011) study investigated educational participation by people with disabilities within the Republic of Ireland. It was reported that 43 per cent of people with disabilities had not progressed beyond primary education compared to 19 per cent in the general population. In addition, 10 per cent of people with disabilities hold a third level degree qualification compared to 19 per cent in the general population. People with disabilities in each age cohort fare worse than their counterparts without disabilities with regard to their level of education. For example, in the 25–29 age group, 19 per cent of people with disabilities completed formal schooling at the end of primary school compared to 3 per cent of the general population. Within this age cohort, these people had lower rates of completion of second level schooling, 63 per cent compared to 84 per cent of the general population. One third of the students with disabilities left education earlier than intended which they attributed to a combination of systemic failures to accommodate the impact of their disability on their ability to complete their education (CSO 2010). The patterns of participation and non-participation outlined above give an indication of the extent of disadvantage experienced by people with disabilities in relation to educational access and transfer between the different levels of the education system.

Transition Planning and Decision Making

A 2011 review of access and transfer pathways for students with disabilities in five European countries and the USA confirmed that post-primary schools played a critical role in facilitating this pathway process: 'access to tertiary education and employment for young adults with disabilities greatly depends on the capacity of the secondary education system to prepare them for the passage to adulthood' (OECD 2011a, p. 27). However, major limitations were evident including the fact that schools were not inclined to encourage the students to plan for access and transfer early in their school career. There was limited evidence that

schools were proactive in preparing students with disabilities for the demands of HE or employment.

In the USA, transition planning was mandated through legislation and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (US Government 1997) requires transition planning in the individualised education programs (IEPs) of all secondary school students with disabilities beginning at age 14 (or earlier, if appropriate) in an effort to prepare them for the challenges of post-school life. This requirement was intended to make operational one of the IDEA's central tenets that a primary purpose of the free appropriate public education guaranteed to children and youth with SEN is to 'prepare them for employment and independent living' (IDEA 1997 Final Regulations, Section 300.1[a]). Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NTLS-2) (Cameto et al. 2004) confirmed that this IDEA requirement had been achieved in the majority of post-primary schools. Two-thirds of students with disabilities had begun transition planning at age 14 as required, and by the time students are at age 17/18, 96 per cent of them had transition planning in place. School staff reported that about three-quarters of these students had an identified course of post-school study to enable them to achieve their transition goals. The vast majority of students and their parents (85 per cent) were actively involved in the transition planning process though there was some evidence that collaborative partnerships between parents and schools had been achieved for about a third of students and their families.

In England, policy guidance on transition planning is provided in DfES's (2001) Code of Practice, which establishes an annually reviewed transition plan for students with disabilities beginning in year 9 (13/14 years). The Code of Practice clearly states that the student concerned and his/her parents/carers must be fully involved in the transition planning process and the importance of liaison with outside agencies is emphasised. Despite these stipulations, Dewson et al. (2004) reported that less than half of all students interviewed 2 years after leaving compulsory education (at age 16) could recall having a transition planning review meeting. It is highly unlikely that school professionals alone can deal with all these complex, inter-related issues, which is why it is generally recognised that the extent of inter-agency collaboration with education providers is crucial to the success of the transition process. While in school many young people with disabilities are often supported by professional services in the community such as social workers, health workers

or professionals from voluntary groups, and all of these can play a part in enabling effective transition for these students to post-school placements. However, the traditional division between child and adult services can make continuity in essential services problematic. Dee (2006) reported that professionals involved in the transition process needed to be aware that the disparity of power relationships in play could unduly influence the decisions being taken.

The following components of transition planning were found to be effective in a series of research studies conducted in the USA and England: informed choices based on accessible information; guidance around careers and employment opportunities after the course; including the student and parents/carers fully in the planning process; inter-agency liaison and communication; practical issues (finance, accommodation and transport and travel); continuity of medical care if necessary; consideration of social and academic issues arising from transition (losing and re-forming friendship groups and social networks; change of teaching styles and demands of course) (Cameto et al. 2004; Dewson et al. 2004; Marriott 2008; Wagner et al. 2006).

Preparing students, particularly those with disabilities, for successful access and transfer to post-school placement is a key task for post-primary schools. In Phillips and Clarke's (2010) UK study, students with disabilities reported that a positive school environment was a crucial factor in enabling them to make a successful transition to HE. Supportive teachers encouraged the students, had high expectations and enabled the students to make informed decisions about their post-school placements. Schools provide much of the information on educational opportunities and often act as the central coordinators of all the professionals in the transition process. Autonomy and empowerment for young people with disabilities have been recognised as a critical factor in facilitating access, transfer and progression to HE (Lewis et al. 2005). However, there is considerable evidence that the views of students who have disabilities are little represented in studies of transition processes (Cook et al. 2001; Farmakopoulou and Watson 2003). Smyth et al.'s (2011) study in the Republic of Ireland demonstrated that parents and families play a critical role in facilitating access, transfer and progression from compulsory education to post-school options for all students. Parents and families had been influential throughout their school career in enabling their children in making decisions around programmes, subject choice and level of study. Similarly, students with disabilities look to their

parents and families for support and guidance in the decision-making process around access, transfer and progression from compulsory schooling to post-school placement (Phillips and Clarke 2010). Parental support and guidance can encourage positive aspirations for students with disabilities as illustrated in the following: in study of transition for students with SEN:

A background of having had active support and encouragement from parents about academic capabilities was a critical factor in encouraging progression into higher education from school...strong parental belief in their children's ability seemed to counter even the most negative of early educational experiences by helping instil or reinforce self-efficacy and academic confidence, even when external validation was not present. (Phillips and Clarke 2010, p. 35)

Studies have demonstrated that parents can offer crucial continuity of support at a period in life when students with disabilities are facing many additional challenges (Aspel et al. 1999; Cameto et al. 2004; Goupil et al. 2002). However, there is evidence that the families and carers of students with disabilities are not sufficiently involved with the transition process, despite their wishes and concerns (Abbott and Heslop 2009; Dee 2006; Wagner et al. 2006). Even when families are involved in the transition process, there is no guarantee that their key concerns will be addressed and on occasion the views of professionals can dominate (Ward et al. 2003). In England, parents are often unclear about what options are available and may be frustrated by a lack of available and realistic options in their local area (Byers et al. 2008; Lewis et al. 2007).

SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

Making the transition from school to HE can be problematic and stressful for all students as it coincides with other significant transitions, such as from living at home to living independently, from family financial support to managing a budget, and coping with the demands of a completely different style of educational delivery and the intellectual demands of studying at a higher level (Yorke and Longden 2008). HE establishments are increasingly aware that positive first-year experiences for all students are crucial in enabling students to complete their undergraduate study and minimise attrition (Palmer et al. 2009). Social integration into HE has

been shown to be a key factor in ensuring that all students make successful transitions and survive their first year at university (Palmer et al. 2009; Yorke and Langden 2008). Students in the first year of HE reported that rebuilding friendship networks was a major challenge and developing a sense of belonging was a critical factor in successful transition to life in HE (Palmer et al. 2009). Harrison's (2006) research into first-year student's withdrawal in English HE reiterated these points: 'poor preparation, poor or passive decision-making and difficulties with socialisation or adapting to the student lifestyle' (p. 388) were potentially more important factors for success than the academic demands of the institution. While students with disabilities share many of the challenges faced by their peers in making a successful transition to HE, they usually face additional challenges in relation to admission procedures, institutional and programme accessibilities, receiving appropriate supports, developing friendship networks and overcoming the negative disability stereotypes held by others in the new environment (Marriott 2008). The transition process often involves a number of professionals, support agencies and a requirement to disclose disability to access appropriate supports (Dee 2006; Marriott 2008). Pre-transition activities are an important element in the transition process for students with disabilities including pre-entry visits, taster courses and open days, and contact with students with disabilities who have successfully made the transition to HE (Elliott and Wilson 2008; Marriott 2008). Ensuring a quality transition process for students with disabilities, 'depends on the existence of an inclusive ethos at the level of the institution which makes openness to diversity one of its goals and pedagogical, social, psychological and physical accessibility a component of the institution's culture' (OECD 2011a, p. 10). The OECD review (2011a) identified a number of institutional strategies to promote access, transfer and progression for students with disabilities. This involves designing the admissions and support strategies to provide an institution-wide access framework. Strategies include developing links with accommodation and transport services; developing working relationships with post-primary schools; encouraging early disclosure of support needs to facilitate provision of appropriate supports; and advising students on organisational aspects of chosen course. Transition was facilitated for first-year students with disabilities through 'the positive impact of friendships, peer support networks, significant education contacts and studying within an environment where the culture and related education practices understand and promote diverse learning' (Gibson 2012, p. 366). Support

provision for disabilities was presented as a ‘normal’ yet important element of provision to all new students which proved to be a significant indicator that students with disabilities would be made welcome and have their needs met.

Making a successful transition is the first step for students with disabilities; however, it is equally important that these students are enabled to complete their studies. Given that there is limited evidence around successful completion rates, a study in the Republic of Ireland provides such useful insights (UCC/CIT 2010). This report tracked the 2005 intake of students with disabilities across their career in HE. Low levels of entry were reported for students with sensory impairments and also for students who have mental health difficulties. Students with specific learning disabilities comprised the largest cohort among students with disabilities (61.4 per cent). Students with mental health difficulties had the lowest retention rates across all disability categories (56 per cent). First year represented a major challenge for students with disabilities and the highest rates of withdrawal occurred at this juncture. Challenging factors included difficulties with accessing appropriate technologies, settling into a more diverse physical and learning environment and developing social networks.

An Irish study (McGuckin et al. 2013) examined the access, transfer and progression pathways to HE for students with disabilities. The key findings that emerged from this study are now considered in the following under the themes of (i) preparation for transition to HE; (ii) managing the transition; (iii) early experiences in HE.

Preparation for Transition

Schools play a critical role in preparing young people with disabilities for the challenges involved in making the transition to post-school life. Within this study, there was considerable evidence that schools were regarded by students with disabilities as positive environments, with teachers who were open and approachable. However, there was little evidence that schools were proactive in developing transition planning at an early stage in the school careers of these students. Early transition planning enables students with disabilities to consider course options over an extended period, make the appropriate choice of subjects and facilitates active involvement in the process by the students and their families as demonstrated in the following observation by a disability support officer.

The whole transitioning process and the whole career progression are very, very difficult particularly if they have chosen the wrong subjects, moving from junior to senior cycle; it is very, very difficult for them then to make the right choice in relation to further and HE. So it is very complicated and the whole process needs to start a lot earlier with parents, young people and schools being a lot more informed as to what is out there.

The support provided by Guidance Counsellors was highly valued by the students with disabilities, and regarded as pivotal in enabling them to make informed choices about post-school options. However, there was a perception that Guidance Counsellors sometimes lack detailed knowledge about support systems in HE, specific progression routes to HE through Further Education colleges and educational opportunities for students with complex needs as illustrated in the following quotation from an administrator in a Further Education college ‘Guidance Counsellors don’t have the time or level of expertise needed for people with some very specific requirements’. This view was reiterated by Guidance Counsellors who perceived that despite some improvements, there was a lack of easily available information about the types of supports available in the receiving institutions. Within this study, Guidance Counsellors believed that a central point of information (national agency) needed to be established to address the gaps in their knowledge. Guidance Counsellors were aware that students with disabilities required more highly developed self-determination skills, as they moved from a highly supported and structured environment to a more challenging situation that demanded a higher degree of independent decision making. Guidance Counsellors were also concerned about the relative weighting that should be given to supporting academic attainment for students with disabilities compared to focussing on more practical life skills such as independent living.

Generally, students with disabilities were looking forward to their post-school education and anticipated that they would encounter a greater variety of learning experiences and opportunities for social inclusion. This anticipation was often mixed with some apprehension as illustrated by this student who has a physical disability:

For me the kind of loss of familiarity might be . . . does daunt me a bit but at the same time on a more optimistic level I think if I went to anywhere outside of here [it] is better because it’s a new start, it’s probably a chance

to... starting over is rare, and because they're rare, they're valuable and... I can start again, I can be anyone. Of course I can be myself but I can have the chance to bloom in a better way.

Parents and carers played a significant role in the transition process and were considered to be absolutely critical to the success of the process. Strong home-school links were evident and there was an awareness that parents/carers would continue to play a crucial role in supporting the students with disabilities throughout the transition process and in their post-school placements. As one Guidance Counsellor emphasised:

But his parents, now, would have been very involved with him and filling out his forms and they drove it all for him. So they would have been... and they will continue to support him. And his sister's in Leaving Cert and she's a high achiever as well so, he'll get huge support.

While these students with disabilities are generally considered as adults within their post-school placement, there is clear evidence that parents and carers continue to have an enhanced role in supporting students with disabilities, a role that needs to be formally acknowledged.

While the importance of developing access pathways to HE was acknowledged by support professionals, some concerns were expressed about the operation of the DARE (Disability Access Route to Education) scheme. Unintentional barriers included misconceptions about who was eligible to apply to DARE scheme, and the widespread perception that students gaining access to HE through DARE were not achieving this on merit compared to their non-disabled peers. In addition, the prohibitive cost of acquiring a recent psychological assessment/consultant report was seen as a significant barrier (it should be noted that recent adaptations to the DARE scheme if implemented will remove the need for a recent psychological assessment).

Managing the Transition

Students with disabilities reported that pre-course contact with HE institutions was highly significant in influencing their course choices as explained by one student who has a learning disability: 'because of all the details they give you and the letters and the support. That's why I'm going to [name of HE institution]—because they are really

supportive'. Friendly approachable personnel were particularly valued and direct personal contact with students with disabilities who had already made the transition to HE was very important. Open days were considered useful and specific information sessions targeted at particular groups of students with disabilities (e.g. students with Asperger Syndrome, students with physical disabilities) were valued.

Of key importance to these students was accessing the support that was available in their receiving institution. Unlike their previous experience in school, seeking support once the students progressed to further and HE required a new approach including independence and disclosing their SEN or disability if they had not done so already. This self-disclosure was a major change encountered in the progression into further and HE since it involved making decisions and taking on independent responsibilities, and could result in a decision not to seek support as expressed by one student who has Asperger syndrome:

It [support at school] was kind of forced upon me really . . . I didn't think people were . . . believed in me, so much as my abilities. So kind of disheartening really, that people would feel that you needed this help.

Another student with Asperger syndrome consciously decided not to assume the 'disability' label and so did not disclose or seek support. Other students with Asperger syndrome found it difficult to engage in the support process and support was only gained when parents intervened. In other cases, students did not access academic support services until they encountered difficulties in relation to assignments or examinations.

One of the biggest challenges facing students with disabilities concerned the significant changes in teaching, learning and assessment experienced in HE. Some students valued the anonymity and that their difficulties in learning were not publicised in front of their peers. Others, particularly those students with Asperger syndrome found the larger classes particularly daunting. Students particularly welcomed the opportunity to establish working relationships with tutors and lecturers who were approachable and treated them like adults. Students generally welcomed the opportunity to develop independence skills and taking greater

responsibility for their own learning as expressed by one student who has a learning disability:

It was more responsibility on me. Like they'd say, 'You have to go there and look at it yourself.' They're not going to push you like secondary school did like, your homework is... It's not like that and it's very different. It kinda, it took me about a month to really get used that kind of side of it.

The multiple modes of assessment were viewed favourably and regarded as a much fairer way of assessing their subject knowledge and understanding than the Leaving Certificate examination, which was conveyed as follows by a student with a physical disability:

I like how 'freeing' it is compared to school... I cannot just be asked to work on the spot. I need, you know, someone telling me, 'You've an essay due; it's due in one month and seven days' or something. And that gives me time to think, 'Okay I can get this perfect'... I think it gives me the time to work on everything properly, you know.

Social integration into the HE environment did not appear to be a major issue for the students with disabilities. The majority continued to live at home and so perhaps existing friendship groups and social networks had been retained. Those students who had moved away from home were particularly appreciative of social events organised as an induction for all students and 'ice-breaker' activities within their class groupings. The concept of a 'fresh start' was very strong for these students and this included developing their friendship groupings as observed by one student who has a physical disability:

I think you can very easily make friends in university. I've no doubt about that, because theres interests for everything. There is a juggling society, there's a society just for people who want to drink.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

While there are many encouraging signs that there have been significant improvements in opportunities for people with disabilities to access HE, a few cautionary notes are necessary. It is worth noting that further

support is required to develop meaningful transition plans for young people with disabilities at an early stage in their secondary school careers. There also appears to be differing rates of access depending on the type of disability experienced as illustrated by the fact that there have been limited increases for young people with physical or sensory disabilities despite targeted programmes. Opportunities for increased access to HE for people with disabilities need to be matched by enabling policies that ensure highly qualified disabled people are not trapped in welfare dependency and can attain economic independence.

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