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Evaluation of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy Transition Pilot Programme - findings from an NCSE commissioned evaluation

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Abstract

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) commissioned RSM (now Fortia Insight) to evaluate a Transition Pilot programme. The Pilot was designed to help young people with disabilities prepare for life after school. It was a direct response to Action 1.5 of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) 2015–2024, which called for a practical demonstration of how to improve access to post-school options for students with disabilities. The Pilot was funded by the Department of Education and Youth and delivered by the NCSE in partnership with schools and other stakeholders.

The Pilot was formally announced on 10 November 2022. Phase 1 was operational from September 2023 to June 2024 across 20 schools in North Dublin and Galway. These schools were chosen to represent a diverse range of school types and student needs. Each school was allocated funding to cover an additional 12 hours of teacher time per week to deliver the Pilot. In-school delivery included the identification of suitable students, transition planning and delivery of one-to-one and group transition support. A Project Coordinator was seconded to NCSE to support in-school delivery. They organised training for participating staff, curated resources via a shared online resource (Padlet) and facilitated shared learning days to promote joined-up practice. Schools were encouraged to involve parents and work with employers and training providers to increase awareness of available pathways.

School staff chose approximately 90 students to participate in the Pilot. Through the Pilot, school staff supported these students to develop essential skills and make informed decisions about their post-school pathways. These pathways encompassed further education, higher education, employment, apprenticeships, and adult day services. A core objective was to strengthen transition planning within schools and broaden access to a spectrum of post-school opportunities. Activities varied by school, but typically involved development of life skills, work related learning and career guidance. The Pilot aimed to address existing gaps in provision by equipping schools to plan and deliver tailored supports, thereby operationalising the transition planning ambitions set out in the EPSEN Act, New Directions (Health Service Executive (HSE), 2012), and the CES (Government of Ireland, 2015). It was also designed to complement wider access and inclusion initiatives, such as the National Access Plan for Higher Education.

The evaluation objectives were structured around three key areas: (1) implementation and embeddedness; (2) impact; and (3) scalability. It sought to review national and international evidence on transition practices, map the current landscape of transition pathways, understand the Pilot's impact on schools and staff, identify its effects on students' transition experiences and outcomes, report any perceived impact noted by post-school settings, and explore what worked to inform future scaling. Beth Young, Associate Director of Social Policy Research at Fortia Insight (formerly RSM) will present the evaluation approach and findings.

Bio

Beth Young, Associate Director of Social Policy Research at Fortia Insight (formerly RSM). Beth leads Children and Families Research at Fortia Insight. She has 20 years' experience delivering analysis and insights to help clients target funding, evidence impact and improve equity. This includes expertise in designing and leading mixed-method research and analysis. Her insights have been used inform policy and practice, evidence impact and improve interventions. Her current clients include Central Government Departments and third sector organisations in the UK and Ireland. For example, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE), the Department for Education in England (DfE), the Department of Education in Northern Ireland (DE) and The National Lottery Community Fund.