

**DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION
EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE**

Group of National Experts on Special Needs Education

**PATHWAYS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TOWARDS TERTIARY EDUCATION AND
EMPLOYMENT: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM A LITERATURE REVIEW COVERING
SELECTED OECD COUNTRIES**

**Informal workshop to be held from 09h30 - 18h00 on Wednesday 22 October 2008, at OECD Conference
Centre, Château de la Muette, 2 rue André Pascal, 75016 Paris.**

Participants are invited to discuss and comment on a synthesis of the literature reviews on the transition to tertiary education and to employment, carried out by experts appointed by the OECD secretariat. This synthesis provides initial findings regarding opportunities for transition towards tertiary education and employment.

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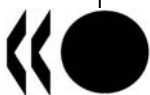


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PATHWAYS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TOWARDS TERTIARY EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM A LITERATURE REVIEW COVERING SELECTED OECD COUNTRIES

Introduction

1. The present document provides a synthesis of literature reviews carried out by experts appointed by the OECD secretariat, on the transition to tertiary education and to employment in the United States¹, three German-speaking countries² (Germany, Austria and Switzerland), England³ and Norway⁴, each of which are distinctive in terms of their education system and/or their policies for people with disabilities. The document also draws on research made by the Secretariat on the situation of students with disabilities in France, together with information made available regarding the situation of Dutch disabled students.

2. The literature review provides initial findings regarding opportunities for transition towards tertiary education and employment in:

- A country that typifies the Scandinavian approach to inclusive education (Norway).
- Countries in which the education system maintains very close links with the world of work (Germany, Switzerland and Austria).
- A country that has demonstrated concern for the transition of students with disabilities towards tertiary education (United States).
- A country that has extended access to tertiary education to the most socially vulnerable (United Kingdom).
- A country that has recently amended its legislation to encourage access to education and to employment of persons with disabilities (France).

3. The experts were requested by the OECD Secretariat to:

- Identify publications and reports published between 1996 and 2006 on transition of young adults with disabilities to tertiary education, within tertiary education and on completion of tertiary education.

¹ Lani Florian, University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom & Julia Rafal.

² Kai Felkendorff, Zurich University of Teacher Training (Switzerland), and Justin Powell, Social Science Research Center, Berlin (Germany).

³ Alan Dyson, University of Manchester, United Kingdom.

⁴ Bjorn Hvinden, Professor, Head of Research & Deputy Director, Norwegian Social Research Centre, Oslo.

- Describe policies for the transition of persons with disabilities to tertiary education and employment, and the impact of those policies.
- Identify existing data, those that are missing as well as those that may be necessary to describe significant issues related to the pathways followed by students with disabilities.
- Pinpoint the factors that open up or obstruct various pathways towards tertiary education and employment.

4. In line with the OECD approach (OECD, 2005a), the literature review looks at pupils and students who have been granted additional resources designed to meet educational needs arising from an impairment or an illness (CNC A) or a learning difficulty (CNC B). It excludes those who receive additional resources as a result of a social disadvantage (CNC C), unless they too also have educational needs stemming from an impairment, an illness or learning difficulty. It is thereby expected to set out a common approach to disability providing for a comparison of the policies of the countries concerned.

5. The number of reported studies on the transition to tertiary education and employment varies from one country to the next, as the importance attached to the transition issue differs in each country. While research on the subject is relatively extensive in some countries, studies that discuss it in others are much less common. They tend to focus far more readily on the education of pupils and students with disabilities at primary and at secondary level, on the different kinds of adjustment needed to make schools more accessible, or on access to employment than on the range of issues related to pathways students with disabilities follow after secondary education. Furthermore, while in some countries research examines questions arising from the transition to tertiary education, in others they concentrate primarily on the transition from school to employment, with access to tertiary education given much less attention.

6. Irrespective of the importance attached to the various aspects involved, research highlights the crucial nature of the transition to both tertiary education and employment in the light of the lack of qualifications held by people with disabilities. In 2004, only 26% of adults with a disability in Norway attended tertiary education, compared to 33.4% of those who were non disabled. In France in 2002, just 20.2% of persons who disclosed a health-related problem or a disability were educated to a level higher than the baccalaureate, whereas the proportion was 26.3% for the population as a whole (De Stephano, 2006). In Germany, only 12% of persons with disabilities who were surveyed in 2003 had a qualification giving access to higher education (such as the *Fachabitur* or *Fachhochschulreife*) (KMK, 2005). In the United Kingdom, proportionally more persons with disabilities, and particularly those with a cognitive impairment or psychological disorders, held no qualification or were qualified to only a modest level (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (PMSU), 2005).

7. The present overview does not claim to reflect the full coverage that research includes in the literature reviews submitted to the Secretariat by the experts. However, it describes the observable trends, the conditions governing access and attainment in tertiary education and the factors that support or hinder the various forms of transition to either tertiary education or employment.

8. The overview first describes clear trends in access to tertiary education as regards the number of students with disabilities involved and the policies adopted. Secondly, it sets out the conditions under which these students can pursue their studies, along with factors tending to encourage or thwart their progress. Thirdly, it discusses the main considerations underlying patterns of transition to tertiary education or employment.

9. The pathways project focuses on tertiary education and includes therefore access to higher education institutions as well as other post secondary institutions. However, the literature reviews focus mostly on higher education.

A tertiary education system that is more receptive to students with disabilities.

A growing number of students with disabilities in tertiary education

10. Tertiary education currently is more receptive for students with disabilities than it was previously⁵. In the United Kingdom, the proportion of these students in higher education rose from 4.6% in 2001/02 to 6.5% in 2006/07. In Germany, the proportion of those who said they had a disability or chronic illness increased from 12.5% in 2003 (DSW, 2004) to 18.9% in 2006 (DSW, 2008). In France, the population of students with identified disabilities went up from 7145 in 2001 (representing 0.3% of the student population) to 8763 in 2006 (or 0.4% of the student population). In the United States, the proportion of students with disabilities entering tertiary education is reported to have doubled between 1987 and 2003 accounting for 11.3% of the student population (Wagner et al., 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

11. In the United Kingdom, the increasing numbers of students with disabilities is particularly remarkable among those students having a dyslexia (36.3% of all students with disabilities enrolled in higher education in 2001 compared to 43% in 2006), multiple disabilities (7.1% of all students with disabilities enrolled in higher education in 2001 compared to 11.1% in 2006) and psychological disorders (4.2% of all students with disabilities enrolled in higher education in 2001 compared to 5.4% in 2006). The increasing of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education in France is mainly due to greater numbers of students with a motor or sensory deficiency, as well as a better identification of those with literacy problems such as dyslexia. In Germany, the increase has been characterised by a growth in the number of persons with health problems. For example, the proportion of students with allergies rose from 52% to 60% of disabled students between 2003 and 2006, while the proportion of students having psychological disorders went up from 6% to 11%. Conversely, the proportion of persons with a motor impairment fell by 3% over the same period to account for 13% of students with disabilities, while the proportion of those with a sensory impairment decreased by 4%, corresponding to 20% of disabled students.

12. However, this receptivity of tertiary education to students with disabilities varies among the countries. In France students who disclosed their disability in 2006 had a sensory deficiency (24.7%), a physical deficiency (19.8%), health problems (20.6%), psychological disorders (11.2%), language problems (8.2%) and a temporary incapacity (5.3%). In Germany, 60% of students who disclosed in 2006 a disability or a health problem had respiratory problems or allergies or a skin disease, whereas 16% were visually impaired, 13% had a musculoskeletal deficiency and 11% had psychological disorders. In the United Kingdom, students with an identified disability in 2006 had mainly dyslexia (43%) or an unseen disability⁶ (16.0%), while 7.8% had sensory impairment, 4% a motor deficiency, 5.4% psychological disorders, 11.1% multiple disabilities, 0.8% were autistic, and 0.1% experienced difficulty in performing daily routine tasks. In the United States, students enrolled in tertiary education who stated in 2003/04 that they had a disability had a physical impairment (25.4%), psychological disorders (21.9%), health problems (17.3%) or attention deficit or learning difficulties (18.5%), a sensory impairment (8.8%).

⁵ The figures and data provided by the literature reviews should be interpreted with caution for reasons described later in this report.

⁶ Unseen disabilities includes e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition

13. Among other things, these disparities reflect the variety of approaches to the concept of disability. Where this is regarded as the degree of incapacity caused by a deficiency or long-term disease – as it was for example the case in France until the Law of 11 February 2005 – disabled students are identified first and foremost in terms of the inabilities and difficulties due to an impairment. Accessibility refers mainly to physical and/or technical considerations such as physical accessibility, the provision of sign language interpreters, or technical facilities enabling visually impaired students to access courses. Where disability is viewed in relation to difficulties in fulfilling courses requirements due to health reasons (as in Germany), disabled students are defined in terms of chronic illness, and not just the impairment alone. Here, accessibility means more than the provision of special facilities appropriate to a given impairment, as it also concerns the many factors involved in reconciling the fairly specific demands arising from the state of health of a particular student with curricular demands and requirements. However, where – e.g. the United Kingdom – the disability is approached as an educational need that tertiary education providers have to meet, accessibility is related to the wide range of issues relating to an institution's responsiveness to all aspects of diversity.

14. Irrespective of these differences, access to tertiary education plays a major part in helping people with disabilities to begin working life. It stimulates positive attitudes towards lifelong learning and reinforces individuals' ability to convert opportunities into resources, enabling them to enhance their employability (OECD, 2005b). It also increases the employment rate very significantly: in Norway, the employment rate of those who had entered tertiary education was higher by 7.8% than those students with disabilities who had only completed secondary education. In the United States, the equivalent figure was higher by 15.1% (Labour Force Survey, 2006; Yelin & Katz, 1994; OECD, 2006; OECD, 2007a).

15. Access to tertiary education also offers persons with disabilities the same opportunities in professional terms as those who are non disabled. In the United Kingdom, the proportion of students with disabilities who had obtained their first degree in 2004 and were actively employed on completion of their education was close to the corresponding percentage for their non disabled counterparts (57.4% compared to 61.2%), and they entered the same sectors of activity at the same levels of responsibility. The chances of entering employment were highest among students with dyslexia (60%), those with a 'non-visible' impairment (58%) and those with a hearing impairment (58%), in contrast to students with a physical impairment (40%), psychological disorders (51%) or those having a visual impairment (52%) (Agcas, 2006).

Policies based on the responsiveness of schools and tertiary education institutions

16. The increasingly number of students with disabilities into higher education reflects the impact of policies developed since the beginning of the 1970s by OECD countries to encourage the social inclusion of disabled people. These policies have sought to make it easier for them to be both socially and professionally included, and to prevent the risk of deskilling and exclusion resulting from long term unemployment and confinement to administrative provision for the sick and disabled. To this end, policies have in particular encouraged inclusion and mainstream education for them at all levels and stressed that students with disabilities might also reasonably expect to gain access to tertiary education.

Empowering schools and young adults with disabilities in order to promote access and success.

17. Efforts made to broaden the access of young adults with disabilities to tertiary education began in the 1990s, through non-discriminatory legislation seeking to grant disabled people equal opportunities in terms of access to employment, education, public services, and business and transport facilities. Some of these laws, like the 'American with Disabilities Act' passed in the United States in 1990 or the 'Disability Discrimination Act' adopted by the United Kingdom in 2005 prohibit any unjustified discrimination on the grounds of disability. Others, along the lines of the 'Law for the Equality of Rights and Opportunities and

the Participation and Citizenship of Persons with Disabilities' (*loi pour l'égalité des droits et des chances, la participation et la citoyenneté des personnes handicapées*) adopted in France on 11 February 2005, require schools and tertiary education institutions to enroll anyone with a disability or a health-related problem living in their catchment area, and to adopt supportive measures on their behalf. With varying degrees of coercive intent, both types of legislation require institutions to offer young adults with disabilities the same opportunities to enter education and employment as those who are non disabled, and thus they ensure freedom of access in this respect.

18. Such non-discriminatory legislation aims to empower institutions and young adults with disabilities. The supports designed for the latter are intended to ensure that they assume responsibility for their own future. Such measures can be of a financial nature and students with disabilities may be eligible for financial support available to the entire student population. For instance, in the United States, they may apply for grants, donations exempt from repayment or study loans. They can also receive funding meant to offset extra costs associated with their disability, which may arise from the purchase of technical facilities needed to access the school and/or university curriculum (Council for Disabled Children et al., 2007; OECD, 2003). Similar measures also include information, support and 'empowerment' activity performed by guidance and information or reception services, so that disabled students are well informed when selecting their courses of study and can engage with them as required. In addition, students with disabilities may be encouraged – as in the United Kingdom and the United States – to draw up an individual transition plan focusing on their future and their expectations, as well as their personal potential and the resources required.

19. The empowerment of tertiary education institutions is meant to make them more responsive to the variety of profiles of student. This may involve legislative incentives as in the United Kingdom, in which higher education institutions are legally responsible for forms of discrimination related to the courses they provide. Empowerment may also be based on financial incentives encouraging institutions to become more accessible by helping them to bear the extra costs entailed. It may further be reflected in supportive provision of the kind available from the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities in the United Kingdom, which helps institutions to broaden their accessibility by offering guides to good practice, methodological resources and training initiatives to their professional staff responsible for advising and supervising disabled students. Supportive measures may also, as in France, seek to establish networks of tertiary education institutions by enabling staff members responsible for counseling and supervising students with disabilities to discuss and exchange information with colleagues about their own practices, or to embark on training provision that specifically meets their needs.

20. The aim of empowering secondary schools is to get them to ensure each student's success and to adapt their practices to each individual's needs and rhythms (Lee, 1996). It is therefore important for schools to make similar demands on each of them, regardless of whether they are disabled. In this respect, the 2001 'No Child Left Behind Act' in the United States requires that curricula should take account of the potential and prospects of each student and that the knowledge of each should be assessed (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004). In France, staff who monitor the progress of school children have to ensure that their path through school enables them to achieve learning goals consistent with prescribed curricular content. The 'university/disability' charter states that the learning agreement drawn up jointly by an institution and disabled student should be ambitious and realistic, and based on a set of concrete achievements consistent with the study path envisaged on entering higher education.

21. It is also important for secondary schools and tertiary education institutions to be accessible from the physical, curricular and social standpoint. They have a duty to provide disabled pupils and students with the teaching materials, technical support and, where appropriate, the human assistance they need in order to satisfy the requirements of the school and academic curriculum. In the United Kingdom, tertiary education institutions have to set out, in an information document, their strategy for students with

disabilities, as well as the courses and existing forms of support available to them. In addition, they must provide a service specifically for their reception and counseling. In most countries, *e.g.* Germany, tertiary education institutions appoint a supervisory assistant to help disabled students complete the required administrative forms, sometimes cooperating with social services outside the institution and ensuring that courses may be accessed.

22. Finally, secondary schools and tertiary education institutions have to be accountable for the success and subsequent well-being of pupils and students with disabilities. To this end, most countries have gradually introduced evaluation mechanisms looking at the effectiveness of education systems, their responsiveness to disabled students, and to foster their access to employment as well as their social inclusion. The United Kingdom thus keeps records of the number of students with disabilities who enter tertiary education, their background, the courses they do, their level of education and type of disability, etc. It also carries out studies to examine the conditions on which their academic success and professional prospects depend. The United States regularly conducts surveys for identifying the effectiveness of education and its openness to disabled pupils and students, as well as the effectiveness of various forms of support allocated to schemes for more personally-oriented provision in special education. In France, the 11 February 2005 ‘Law for the Equality of Rights and Opportunities and the Participation and Citizenship of Persons with Disabilities’ provides for the regular evaluation of legislative measures such as those for furthering education and access to employment. Since the beginning of the present century, the Netherlands has regularly evaluated action to promote the educational and professional integration of persons with disabilities.

Transition, a relatively underestimated dimension.

23. Over and above issues relating to accessibility, access to tertiary education and employment is also dependent on the conditions governing the progression from secondary to tertiary education. This period is one in which students become adults and is tantamount to a transitional period in which disability is viewed in new ways, as new demands are made on tertiary education institutions and/or employers, and young adults with disabilities confront previously unfamiliar pressures and responsibilities. Enrolment in post-secondary education marks for example the transitional point at which pupils educated to a prescribed pattern become students who are encouraged to choose their preferred curriculum, organize themselves, and decide where they will live (whether in the parental home, student halls of residence, or independent accommodation). Embarking on tertiary education thus calls for certain requirements in terms of autonomy which students with disabilities may not be able to satisfy because they are unaccustomed to doing so due to the characteristics of their impairment, and as a result of which they may become more vulnerable and likely to fail.

24. With the onset of adulthood come changes in the procedures for accessing support. In the United Kingdom, young people aged 16 or over become eligible for assistance in their own right instead of via their parents, and are entitled to forms of support intended for adults. However, these supports may be temporarily suspended because of a lack of cooperation between child and adult welfare services, and students with disabilities may have to face imprecise or unstructured pathways (PMSU, 2005). In Germany, ‘educational need’ is no longer a formal administrative category once secondary education ends, so that young people with learning difficulties, behavioral disorders or language problems can no longer access support provided for in legislation concerned specifically with disabled people unless they have enrolled in education or training programmes for those leaving special schools. In any particular instance, the transition towards tertiary education or employment may become uneven and young adults with disabilities may undergo successive forms of educational or professional experience that do not improve their employability.

25. The beginning of adulthood also alters the demands made to institutions, since the firm requirement that they should be accessible becomes dependent on proactive formal requests from the persons with disabilities. In the United States, for example, tertiary education institutions – unlike schools – are legally obliged to ensure access only in the case of men and women who have formally highlighted their particular disability and/or the specific nature of their requirements (Izzo & Lamb, 2002; Lamb, 2002; Stodden et al., 2002). Access to support is thus dependent on whether young disabled adults can draw attention to their needs, see that their requirements vis-à-vis particular courses are identified and make deliberate enquiries about the support and special arrangements available. Those having an unseen disability, such as a learning difficulty or an illness, and who do not wish to disclose it because they fear the possible consequences of doing so, are thus denied the requisite support and effectively deprived of their rights (Wagner et al., 2005). This may also prevent institutions from providing effective support for students with special educational needs and boosting the performance of all of them, since it results in the presence of some whose problems are overlooked given that support and counseling are offered solely to those who have disclosed their disability (OECD, 2003).

26. Furthermore, the transition to adulthood corresponds to changes in the approaches to disability and the eligibility criteria underlying them, so that people whose particular problems do not match the definitions applicable to adults may well be abruptly deprived of the support and resources needed to pursue their education or gain access to employment. For example, this may occur in the case of students with special educational needs who have no disability but who receive support designed to further their educational progress. Such students, particularly when presenting ‘mild intellectual disabilities’, may cease to be regarded as having ‘special educational needs’ yet have no deficiency entitling them to recognition as ‘disabled’. They may be denied any kind of formal assistance, while their career path subsequent to secondary education very often depends on their own means or their family resources, with the result that they are likely to become increasingly neglected by the support services (Caton & Kagan, 2006).

27. In order to prevent forms of vulnerability resulting from the discontinuities young disabled adults may face when they complete secondary education, countries removed the barriers that separate educational sectors and levels. The United Kingdom has attempted to simplify pathways through the education system by encouraging institutions to diversify their provision and make it less specialized: secondary schools have thus started offering vocational courses, while further education colleges are increasingly providing more theoretical courses. Higher education institutions are catering for ever greater numbers of adults who have already worked professionally or have followed less conventional career paths. Norway has promoted access to tertiary education by removing the barriers between general and vocational education (Reform 94), while the United States has encouraged cooperation between secondary schools and its ‘community colleges’ (the 1990 ‘Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act’) and extended the parental choice of schools (the 2001 ‘No Child Left Behind Act’). The ‘Law for the Equality of Rights and Opportunities and the Participation and Citizenship of Persons with Disabilities’, which was adopted in France on 11 February 2005, promotes cooperation between special schools and mainstream schools in order to broaden access for persons with disabilities to vocational training and employment, as well as to upper secondary and tertiary education.

28. Countries have also diversified the range of options available to young adults with disabilities on the completion of secondary education. They have supported their entry to employment by providing financial, technical and methodological assistance to firms wishing to recruit them and developing employment-based advisory and support services. In particular, the United Kingdom has extended its ‘Disability Discrimination Act’ to all employers, established a job brokerage network so that disabled people can gain recognised professional experience on the labour market, and set up a specialist counseling service to support them throughout the process (OECD, 2007a). The ‘Workforce Investment Act’ passed in 1998 in the United States has established an ‘America’s workforce network’ to assist employers in finding skilled labour, and persons with disabilities in managing their careers. Meanwhile, the 1999 ‘Ticket to

Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act' introduced the 'Ticket to Work Program' which offers job placement services to unemployed disabled persons, and has extended the entry conditions to cover care facilities so that they can be employed without fear of losing their jobs. France has set up a network of placement structures to assist employers in their recruitment procedures, as well as persons with disabilities in their efforts to obtain employment.

29. In addition, countries have been concerned to enhance the employability of young adults with disabilities who experience difficulties in finding employment, by making it easier for them to enter vocational training and/or by matching education courses more closely to the requirements and pressures of the labour market. In particular, Germany has developed both a transition system (known as *übergangssystem*) which provides vocational training in a school environment for young people with disabilities who have gained access to some customised training (*Förderlehrgang*), and measures proposed by the federal employment agency for securing entry to employment (Baethge et al, 2007; Schier, 2005). Like other countries, Norway has developed vocational training programmes to place young adults in a working environment so that they can acquire skills to best effect and gain professional experience (OECD, 2006). The 'School to Work Opportunities Act' passed in 1994 in the United States led the individual States and municipalities to associate more closely educational curricula and the demands of the world of work.

30. Far less frequently, some countries have deliberately taken steps to see that their education system takes account transition opportunities students with disabilities may have when they complete school. In certain instances, measures along these lines have been introduced quite recently. For example in France for the last three years, the schooling of disabled pupils and adolescents is embedded in an education career path that should include access to employment and social inclusion issues beyond lower secondary education. This education career path has to enable lower secondary school (*collège*) students having significant cognitive problems to progress smoothly to the vocational lycées, while ensuring that the education program they receive is consistent with the vocational training courses available to disabled adolescents.⁷

31. In other instances, countries have established an institutional framework concerned specifically with the question of transition. The United Kingdom has turned its attention to possible patterns of provision on completion of upper secondary education only after first considering those subsequent to compulsory education. It has asked secondary schools to organise meetings encouraging students, parents, school staff and other professional categories to elaborate transition plans that cover various factors likely to offer students easier career paths both during and after their schooling. The connexion services mobilise professional staff who support vulnerable young people during transitional periods up to the age of 19 (or 25 in the case of those with learning difficulties), while also acting as reference persons for families, schools and tertiary education institutions, as well as other support facilities involved in implementing transition plans.

32. The reform of the 'Individuals with Disabilities Education Act' undertaken by the United States in 2004 highlights the importance of preparing disabled students to pursue their education and training for as long as possible, and of encouraging their entry to employment and making them self-sufficient. It states that individual education plans designed by schools should cover issues relating to transition at the age of 16, or earlier if necessary, and involves the 'transition services' which may or may not be subsumed under special education. These services correspond to a set of coordinated activities seeking to improve the theoretical and practical achievement of disabled children so as to further their involvement in post-school

⁷ Circular No. 2006-126 of 17 August 2006 concerning the implementation and monitoring of proposals for more personally-oriented schooling (*Circulaire n° 2006-126 du 17 août 2006 relative à la mise en œuvre et suivi du projet personnalisé de scolarisation*).

activities, and to base their own working practices on children's needs, main interests and strengths. They are especially committed to encouraging young adults with disabilities to develop professional goals and, where necessary, skills associated with aspects of everyday life.

33. All countries have been concerned to offer young disabled adults who leave upper secondary education a sufficiently broad range of educational and professional opportunities to take account of their varied expectations and needs, or the restrictions inherent in their disabilities. All countries have put pressure on tertiary education institutions and employers to carry out the changes required to ensure reasonable accessibility and equality of opportunity for young adults with disabilities. However, countries have not acted with the same unity of purpose to develop their education systems with due regard for the conditions underlying the transition from secondary to tertiary education and from the education system to employment. As a result, measures to promote the access of young disabled adults to education and employment have not been as effective as they might.

Receptivity to diversity which may itself however contribute to social and professional vulnerability

Persistent difficulty in accessing tertiary education and employment

34. In spite of the progress achieved, young adults with disabilities continue to experience difficulty in entering tertiary education. In the United States, just 14% of upper secondary school leavers took an entrance examination for tertiary education in 2001/02, although 47% wanted to enroll. In the United Kingdom, disabled students remain persistently under-represented in tertiary education. In France, disabilities affecting upper secondary students were strikingly different from those of disabled students in tertiary education: in upper secondary education in 2005/06, a significant majority of disabled students (66%) presented physical deficiencies including those of a visceral, metabolic or nutritional kind (32%), motor impairment (17%) or sensory impairment (17%). During the 2006/07 academic year, out of those students in tertiary education who disclosed a disability or health-related problems, 20.6% had health problems, 20.3% had musculoskeletal disorders, 13.9% were visually impaired, 10.8% had hearing deficiencies, 11.2% predominantly psychological disorders, 8.2% language problems such as dyslexia, and 5.3% a temporary disability.

35. Furthermore, the study programmes to which students with disabilities gain access are professionally less rewarding than those that enroll non disabled people. These programmes maintain looser links with the labour market: in Germany, proportionally more disabled students are enrolled in social sciences/pedagogy/psychology (21%) or in mathematics/natural sciences (20%), whereas in Switzerland they more frequently gain entrance to courses in theology (21.9%) than in economics (8.2%)⁸. While in France in 2006, proportionally more students with disabilities (36% compared to 32.3% of non disabled students) were taking courses in languages or humanities, relatively few of these students were taking science (16.9% compared to 18.4%) or health sciences (8.3% compared to 13.2%). According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in the United Kingdom, in 2003 proportionally more disabled students than non disabled students were enrolled in art and design (12.5%), social sciences (10.3%) and historical and philosophical science (6.4% compared to 4.5%).

36. In addition, these courses do not always give access to posts involving a high level of responsibility. Despite the fact that access to education and training of long duration fosters access to employment in the United States, persons with disabilities are four times less likely than non disabled students to be admitted to long courses, or to undertake a Bachelor's degree, or enroll in institutions offering a first postgraduate (second-cycle) degree or a doctorate (Getzel et al., 2001; Wagner et al., 2006).

⁸ It is not possible from the existing data to compare the situation regarding disabled students with the position of those who are non disabled.

In France, proportionally more disabled students entering the ‘grandes écoles’ have health-related problems (43.7%) than those with sensory disabilities (26.5%) or motor deficiencies (22.1%) who enroll in universities in relatively greater numbers (Ebersold, 2007).

37. Entry to tertiary education may also very often result in failure, especially for students with learning, behavioral or emotional difficulties (Berthoud, 2006; OECD, 2003). In France, the proportion of disabled students enrolled on Master level courses is much lower than the proportion for students as a whole (19.9% compared to 32.4%) (Ebersold, 2007); proportionally more American students with disabilities than non disabled students – and especially those with learning difficulties – receive ‘C level’ or lower marks (29.9% compared to 27.8%) and experience greater difficulty in completing their courses (SRI International, 2005). In the Netherlands, it is estimated that 50% of disabled students fall behind in their studies, that they are more likely to drop out along the way, and that they are twice as prone as their non disabled peers to discontinue their undergraduate studies when enrolled in professional higher education (SER, 2007).

38. These difficulties may give rise to ruptures and discontinuity which are a source of professional vulnerability. In Germany, a greater proportion of students with an illness than in the student population as a whole change their study programme (23% compared to 19%) or institution (18% compared to 16%) and drop out (20% compared to 13%). In Austria, too, disabled students are more likely to drop out than non disabled students (17.3% as opposed to 13%). In the United States, greater numbers of disabled students pursue a somewhat erratic curriculum, either because they are unable consistently to keep pace with the requirements of a sustained full-time course, or because they study part time. These difficulties, and the stress they can cause, may also lead to a loss of self-confidence among disabled students, which can be detrimental to sound academic performance and their efforts to seek work. In Austria, the more students with disabilities study, the less confident they become about their chances of accessing employment. Nevertheless, while they are more likely than their non disabled peers to have decided to enter tertiary education to increase their chances of employment and they are less inclined to seek employment (66.6% compared to 82.2%) once they are postgraduating (Wroblewski, A. & Unger, M., 2003).

39. Such difficulties are thus a source of major inequalities. They may tend to maintain, if not widen, the qualifications gap between persons with disabilities and non disabled persons (Bliksvaer, 2006; Konsortium, 2006). They also perpetuate or even aggravate the problems experienced by disabled persons in entering employment, by making them more openly vulnerable to unemployment than non disabled people, especially in the case of those with mental, emotional or behavioral disorders (OECD, 2003; OECD, 2006; OECD, 2007a; Ebersold, 2008; Cornell University, 2006; SER, 2007; SZW, 2007; Wagner et al., 2005). The same difficulties also result in greater exposure among the disabled to the various forms of vulnerability attributable to recurrent unemployment, by forcing them to contend with precarious employment more frequently on average than the population as a whole (OECD, 2006; OECD, 2007a; De Stephano, 2006; Cornell University, 2006). Finally, disabled people are compelled by difficulties of this kind to confront the more acute forms of marginal existence associated with health systems that discourage them from searching for employment at the risk of exposing them to poverty and possible criminality (Wagner et al., 2005, PMSU, 2005; Aston et al., 2005; Dewson et al., 2004).

Transition towards tertiary education undermined by unequal access to knowledge

Fewer opportunities for entering secondary education

40. Barriers to tertiary education and employment are rooted in the unequal access to knowledge associated with the education of students with disabilities. While possession of an upper secondary school diploma is tending to become the norm in OECD countries, this does not apply to disabled persons who face persistent difficulties in accessing upper secondary education notwithstanding an increase in their

numbers at this level (OECD, 2007b; OECD, 2007c). In Germany, three-fifths of disabled persons surveyed in 2003 had at best reached lower secondary education, while those who had gone further said that at best their level of education was equivalent to that of a internship (*Praktikum*) or an apprenticeship (*Lehre*) (Pfaff et al., 2004). In the United Kingdom, 48% of young disabled adults aged 18-19 have no qualifications or non-advanced qualifications, in comparison to 28% among the population as a whole (PMSU, 2005; Burchardt, 2005). While 59% of disabled students in France were educated in mainstream schools at the age of 11 in 2005, the corresponding proportions were only 46% for those aged 15, and 30% for those aged 19 (Espagnol et al., 2007).

41. Disability is a factor that may explain this limited access to upper secondary education. In OECD countries, a greater proportion of students with cognitive impairments repeat a year in lower secondary education than in the case of other disabled students (OECD, 2007c). While in France in 2006/07, students with cognitive problems represented 30% of disabled students enrolled in lower secondary education, the corresponding proportion was no higher than 7.8% in the general and technical lycées, or the professional lycées. This group may be distinguished from persons with a motor impairment, who represent 19.2% of disabled students enrolled in general and technical lycées or professional lycées, and those with visceral, metabolic or nutritional problems who accounted for 17.2% (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2007).

42. A further reason for this restricted access to upper secondary education lies in the selectivity of the education system vis-à-vis students with disabilities who, on completion of lower secondary education, are more likely to be channeled towards vocational education at ISCED level 3C⁹ or special schools. In the United Kingdom, young disabled people are more likely to continue their education after compulsory schooling in the 'further education' sector or in some kind of special provision. They thus embark on courses that are educationally less demanding and more precarious as routes into employment and training (PMSU, 2005; Burchardt, 2005). In the German-speaking countries, the strong tendency for them to be guided towards vocationally-oriented training on completion of lower secondary education is two-edged in nature: while it makes for easier transition to the world of work and entry to employment after school, it may prematurely strip young adults with disabilities of the skills needed to remain employable, by depriving them of the knowledge and expertise required to access tertiary education as well as to lifelong learning opportunities (Shavit & Muller, 2000).

43. The chances of entering upper secondary education are also more limited for students taught in special schools, which do not always provide for the same level of learning achievement. In the United States, the marks awarded to students enrolled in special schools do not reflect a level of schooling very often lower than the level of schooling of mainstream students (Stodden, Jones & Chang, 2002). In Germany, only 13% of disabled students were enrolled in mainstream education in 2000/01, even though some research has revealed that the performance of disabled students in mainstream provision (the *Hauptschule*) is better than that of students with similar needs enrolled in special schools, despite the presence in the latter of specialist teachers (Wocken, 2000). Moreover, only 66 students (0.01%) who had left special schools held a qualification enabling them to enter tertiary education (KMK, 2005).

Less likelihood of success in secondary education

44. Pupils and students with disabilities are also less likely to do as well as their non disabled counterparts. Fewer of them obtain the qualification for which they have worked: in Germany, probably not more than a hundred or so of the 45,000 disabled students leaving secondary education each year hold qualifications giving access to tertiary education; in the United States in 2003, a greater proportion of these students than of others (13.5% compared to 8.2%) held qualifications that were an alternative to the high school diploma, such as the certificate of 'General Educational Development' (GED). Conversely, they

⁹ ISCED stands for the 'International Standard Classification of Education' developed by UNESCO.

discontinued their courses in greater numbers than their non disabled counterparts. Despite progress made, they had a dropout rate twice as high as that among students as a whole. This applied in particular to students with learning or behavioral difficulties, as well as those who came from cultural minorities or were poor (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004; Wagner et al., 2006).

45. Research may thus highlight the problems caused by curricula unable to adjust to the needs and pace of students who may be slower than average if they present a cognitive impairment, and whose motivation for school work and educational attainment are emphatically more dependent on their self-confidence than in the case of other students (OECD, 2007c; McIntosh et al. 1993; Coté, 1996). Research also notes the possible harmful effect of curricula that make lesser demands on students with disabilities (Gersten, 1998), as well as of lack of support or any special arrangements or facilities during tests to assess their knowledge (NCES, 2004; Thurlow et al., 1998). Conversely, it emphasizes the potentially positive impact on their performance of a sound appraisal of their educational needs, the award of the financial support required, and the presence of educational support to make knowledge more accessible. In this respect, research highlights the role of resource persons in assisting students who need help with their work. And it further draws attention to the importance of involving all students in school activity, mobilising the various players likely to contribute to their sound progress, and developing a wide variety of different teaching practices and approaches to school organisation, through which innovation becomes the means of ensuring that every student does well (OECD, 1999; Christenson, 2002; Sinclair et al., 1999).

46. Students with disabilities also appear to be inadequately prepared by secondary education for developing professional goals, assuming responsibility for their own well-being and asserting their rights (Stodden et al, 2002; Whemeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Disabled students at this educational level are that much more equipped to exploit transitional periods in order to acquire skills and faculties strengthening their prospects of social and professional integration if they are self-confident, aware of the expectations placed on them and can view themselves as capable of responding to the possible changes and requirements entailed (Shaw, 2007; Jones, 2002; OECD, 2007b). They are similarly better placed to take advantage of support adapted to their needs in tertiary education if they are able to clarify their expectations, specify their requirements or clearly explain their difficulties.

47. The documented research emphasizes how important it is for curricula to help students acquire cognitive, emotional competences, ethical faculties, and the social and physical skills needed to take decisions for which they can assume responsibility and to develop the sense of belonging required to interact with others on an equal footing (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). This may involve encouraging them to identify their preferences regarding their post-school careers, with due regard for their abilities and the corresponding skills, as well as the professional options open to them (Castellano, Stringfield & Lewis, 2002). It may also be necessary to enable them to overcome problems, take decisions and assume responsibility for themselves, by means of extracurricular activities, or artistic, sports or voluntary activities (Larson, 2000; Wehman, 1996).

48. Research also highlights the role here of the joint planning that professional staff can undertake with young disabled adults to address matters relevant to their transition. This activity encourages them to develop professional goals and greater awareness of the demands of working life or the academic world, and to be ready to identify their needs (Doose, 2007; Wetzel, 2002). Planning is also a means of overcoming barriers that may be created by the different definitions of disability liable to exist, for example, in different educational sectors as in the United Kingdom. Here, the definition based on special educational needs, which is adopted in secondary schools, does not correspond to the one based on learning disabilities and difficulties in use in the further education sector (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2007). And planning may also create appropriate conditions for cooperation among multidisciplinary team staff in order to identify and implement the individual educational plan and/or the transition plan (Dee, 2006; Ebersold, 2003).

Less likelihood of success in tertiary education

49. The conditions experienced by students in tertiary education are another factor affecting their access to courses and how they progress. Admissions strategies have an important part to play here, given that students with disabilities will be more inclined to disclose their disability and discuss their needs and expectations if they consider that in doing so they run no risk of being stigmatised or marginalised. Strategies responsive to possible expectations and fears among students in this respect do more than just increase their willingness to be open about their disabilities. They also offer them every chance of integrating within the academic community and doing well, by bolstering their self-confidence, making it easier for them to share their experiences with other students, and ensuring that they will not be regarded as in difficulty. In addition, resourceful admissions strategies boost the effectiveness of support, and strengthen the personal dimension of courses by offering institutions a clearer picture of the variety of needs at issue, simplifying access to assistance and facilities, and encouraging action geared to student progress. As such, they enable special arrangements for disabled students to be seen as a way of ensuring that all students perform well and of making diversity a force for the development of institutions, their students and their staff (OECD, 2003; Ebersold, 2008). From this angle, the visible increase in the number of disabled people studying in the United Kingdom is definitely linked to improved identification of those requiring additional resources to complete their studies successfully: the proportion of students thought to have a disability without it being clearly identified fell from 33.9% of those enrolled in 1995 to 2.2% in 2004 (HESA).

50. The physical and pedagogical accessibility of institutions is another factor relevant to the progress achieved by students with disabilities. Besides those aspects inherent in their impairment, disabled students in Austria feel themselves disabled by the examination procedures (40%), the coursework (34%), and the study of written documents (43%). They also tend to attribute their difficulties to the conditions underlying their participation in courses and at meetings (40%), as well as their access to internships (25%) or the accessibility of transport facilities or buildings (10%) (Wroblewski & Unger, 2003). In the Netherlands, the majority of students with disabilities are unaware of the support and facilities available at institutions, while almost half of them consider that the lack of either teaching materials suited to their requirements or special arrangements for examinations put them at a disadvantage (SER, 2007). In Germany, students with a disability or an illness attempt to offset possible difficulties during their studies by turning to the counseling services. Here, they seek advice concerning their health problems, the problems they face in satisfying course demands, anxieties about examinations or difficulty in concentrating, or ways of fighting loss of self-esteem and the risk of depression (BMBF, 2007).

51. Special arrangements and support of this kind enable students with disabilities to meet and satisfy the demands made by their curriculum. Information raising awareness among the entire academic community about the special nature of disability lessens the burden of prejudice that the disabled students may confront in their daily contact with their student peers and their teachers, and reassure them in their identity capital (Danermark, 1999; Lee, 1996; Thomas, 2000). Both financial support and special technical and teaching arrangements are essential in ensuring that these students can reconcile the academic demands placed on them with the restrictions caused by illness or disability.

52. In this context, some research highlights the limitations to funding procedures that take insufficient account of the additional time required by some disabled students, or the possibility that they may have to change direction during their studies as a result of disability or illness (SER, 2007). Certain authors consider it particularly unfortunate that it appears harder for students with disabilities than for non disabled students to obtain allowances, grants or loans, or that the amounts awarded compensate only very modestly for the inconvenience and extra expenditure attributable to the deficiency or illness concerned. These sources have thus noted, as in the case of the United States, that the average amount of financial support obtained by these students is lower than for those in good health (\$7,200 a year compared to

\$7,400 a year), as well as the fact that their financial resources are on average lower too: the resources of 46.7% of disabled American students were less than \$20,000 a year, whereas this applied to only 39.8% of the non disabled. In Germany, in 2006, the resources received by disabled students were comparable to those of those who were not disabled, despite the extra costs that disability or illness might entail. Furthermore, special accommodation and types of support also enable students – whether voluntarily or for compelling financial reasons – to combine their studies with some form of professional activity which increases their income and importantly offers also invaluable experience in terms of access to employment (DSW, 2008).

53. The various aspects relating to physical and pedagogical accessibility are especially important in that they can represent a psychological burden tending to discourage good progress. While Austrian students with a disability in most cases complain about problems of physical accessibility (47.7%), those having an illness report difficulty in coping with stress (34.9%) or the psychological burden their course represents (23.7%). German students with psychological disorders or a disorder of the nervous system are more likely than those with a musculoskeletal disorder to claim they encounter difficulties during their academic career (91%, 70% and 60% respectively). German students with disabilities are also more likely than their non disabled peers to experience stress-related health problems (36.1% as opposed to 18.4%), to complain about psychological problems (24.2% as against 11.1%) and to favour the development of evening courses (36.4% compared to 32.3%).

A transition to tertiary education beset with lack of continuity during the transitional period

Discontinuity related to the compartmentalisation of sectors and levels

54. Compartmentalisation between levels of education and between the employment, education and health and social affairs sectors is another factor hindering entry to tertiary education and employment. Such compartmentalisation may be attributable to weak links between secondary schools and tertiary education institutions. Where these links are firm, it is possible to prepare students to meet the demands they will have to face and equip them with the means required. This also provides for a measure of continuity avoiding the unwillingness of students to disclose their disability or learning difficulty in order to obtain support do so. Such links allow also for anticipating adequately support that may be required to meet individuals' needs. Links may be developed through courses in which staff members are able to mentor students, take part in teaching and in certain cases contribute to curricular design. They may be further developed by monitoring students on the completion of secondary education, through appropriately targeted training initiatives for those involved in both secondary and tertiary education, or through the establishment of multidisciplinary teams responsible for evaluating needs and devising transition procedures.

55. Compartmentalisation may also be the outcome of lack of contact between schools or tertiary education institutions and the world of work, depriving persons with disabilities of valuable professional experience and employers of a better insight into the potential and abilities of disabled persons (IWI, 2007; Anvik, 2006; Getzel et al, 2001). For example, while schools in north America try on the whole to be accessible to students with disabilities, only a quarter of them get in touch with tertiary education institutions, organisations concerned with vocational training, or bodies dealing with placement in employment issues under the transition plan drawn up with disabled students (Wagner et al., 2006). Research also emphasizes the importance of curricula that enable upper secondary school students to combine effectively general education with vocational training and gain insight into the world of work (OECD, 2000). Studies also note the significance of courses that encourage students to take account of professional aspects when making plans about their future and/or that are organised on the basis of contextualised teaching methods which prepare upper secondary school students to relate their theoretical knowledge to real needs and circumstances.

56. Another factor contributing to compartmentalisation is the lack of cooperation between the advisory and support services within tertiary education institutions and similar services external to them (Commission for Social Care Inspection, 2007; Ebersold, 2005; Dee, 2006). Cooperative links can provide a global approach of students' needs fostering continuity of pathways and support and encouraging higher education institutions to take account of the medical, social and paramedical factors that may impact on student's success opportunities. These links favour close collaboration between the relevant players at local level, in order to plan for optimal accessibility and prepare resources and information materials (CDs, videos, etc.) that are as appropriate and comprehensive as possible. And, where necessary, such links allow for mobilization of the individuals' skills, for example, by agencies dealing with employment issues and offering disabled students the same opportunities as others to gain access to internships.

57. Yet a further aspect of compartmentalisation is the lack of cooperation between tertiary education institutions and families, given that the latter have as much influence on how students perform and are socially included (Henderson & Mapp, 1994; James & Partree, 2003; Simon, 2001). The involvement of families encourages students to attend school regularly and engage fully in the schooling process, improving their results there and reducing the likelihood of dropout and failure (Catsambis & Garland, 1997; Lamorey, 2002; Harry, 2002). Existing research in this area emphasizes the need to inform parents about course content and pedagogy, the expectations made to students and themselves, and possible options available on the completion of courses. It also points up the potential significance of developing cooperative projects which have clearly defined goals, identify the expectations of all parties and indicate the procedures involved (group or individual meetings, etc.). Research further highlights the need to involve parents in planning the transition process and allowing them to make an active contribution while paying due regard to their availability and expectations. They should also be encouraged to comment and express opinions and should be given clear explanations about the organisational and decision-making processes at issue. Research draws attention above all to the potential contribution in this area of training activities for the benefit of staff at institutions, as well as for families and other parties actively involved in the transition to tertiary education and employment.

58. Finally, compartmentalisation is reflected in the lack of opportunities for transferring from professional to general tertiary education (ISCED levels 5B and 5A respectively) and vice versa. Such transfer points provide for more effective coordination between the two levels and prevent career decisions taken on the completion of secondary education from committing students with disabilities to branches or fields of study that might reduce their scope for choice and compromise their access to employment or their professional development (OECD, 2000). They also prevent students with disabilities who are enrolled in vocational courses (e.g. apprenticeship or sandwich courses) on the completion of lower secondary education from being deprived of opportunities to upgrade their qualifications during working life and enhance their employability (Shavit & Muller, 2000). They reduce the likelihood of failure faced by students obliged to change courses because of disability or illness in a way that threatens to halt or disrupt their career. And they encourage the smooth continuation of their career path when they wish to embark on more professionally-oriented courses following the completion of lower secondary education (Reiersen, 2004).

Discontinuity arising from a lack of accurate and reliable statistical data

59. The continuity of student progress is also compromised by a lack of sufficiently accurate and reliable statistical data to provide for time series analysis that monitors the career paths of individual students, identifying the support they obtain and the barriers they encounter.

60. The existing data do not indeed provide an accurate view of the number of enrolled students with disabilities who are likely to need support. Very often they reflect the number of persons who, because they have no choice in the matter, turn to services provided by bodies working for the disabled, and/or men

and women who feel they are disabled or regard themselves as such. The result is that the statistical coverage is not comprehensive. Data may fail to include people who may have a disability without having any educational needs, or those requiring support that either do not feel disabled or do not satisfy the prevailing criteria for eligibility. Conversely, data may record students with difficulties for whom there are no clear origin to be identified. For example, the increase in the number of dyslexic pupils and students reported in the United Kingdom is uncertain. Research is unable to establish whether that increase is attributable to a greater prevalence of dyslexic children, a steady rise in the number of dyslexic pupils and students enrolled in education, or greater responsiveness to dyslexia on the part of schools, as a result of the policies implemented or the impact of identification methods based on individual subjectivity and the evaluation criteria established by schools (Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2007).

61. It is also hard for existing statistical data to provide a thorough view of the situation experienced by students with disabilities. Data collection methods very often vary widely depending on particular administrative authorities or areas, as well as the principles underlying the various components of education systems, and offer a fragmented or even contradictory picture of the conditions governing access and effective performance in education and employment. The counties responsible in Norway for gathering and analysing information about students and adolescents with disabilities have no common approach to this activity, so that any comparison between them is impossible and, with it, any meaningful overall view of the situation nationwide. In the United Kingdom, data on disabled students relate to those enrolled in higher education and generally fail to take account of people with disabilities in further education which is administered separately. The 26th annual report to the American Congress notes that the data provided by the 'United States Census Bureau' covers just households and excludes students living in university halls of residence, thus possibly overlooking almost half-a-million with disabilities. In France, special education and mainstream education are the responsibility of different ministries with the result that the data are not readily comparable.

62. The data may also preclude any accurate analysis of the impact of policies, as the evaluation criteria adopted are not always consistent with the aims pursued. Indeed, they may be such as to prevent any comparison between the situation of students with disabilities and the circumstances of those who are non disabled: in this context, the 26th annual report to the American Congress points out that the criteria used to calculate the success rate of disabled students in lower and upper secondary education and how it changes over time are dissimilar to those used in the case of their non disabled counterparts. In France, in contrast to the existing data for the school population as a whole, there is little detailed information on the schooling and subsequent career paths of students with disabilities. The evaluation criteria used necessarily allow for identification of existing barriers and their relation to specific types of disability. Indeed, most of the data in circulation are lacking in information about the learning achievement and development of the students catered for. They provide at best a very approximate picture of the positive impact of the extra teaching, financial, technical and human resources invested in them. Barriers obstructing progress towards tertiary education and employment may only become apparent very indirectly, via the increase in the number of young adults with disabilities who are in receipt of income allowances, or the rise in the number of unemployed persons with disabilities who have given up looking for jobs (Besseling et al, 2007; OECD, 2006). The presence of barriers may also be reflected in information that is primarily qualitative, basically unsystematic, or even anecdotal as when they are hinted at by teachers and support staff who report the failure of disabled students deprived of special facilities or support.

63. Existing data provide only a very imprecise grasp of changes in situations experienced by persons with disabilities over time. Few countries made possess studies of successive cohorts of students that provide a clear picture of the individual career paths of disabled people, and the way the data are processed and used makes it hard to consider them in terms of time series. In Germany, for example, key indicators concerning the transition into secondary education and towards tertiary education are scarce in national data on either the participation rate of disabled people in education (national reports on education) or on

vocational training, and are also lacking in reports on the circumstances and participation of disabled persons, and on their position in the vocational training market. Time series analysis may also be impeded by differences in the definitions used to describe disability in successive surveys, thereby precluding any truly reliable comparison over time.

64. Analysis of trends over time is also compromised by mismatched or overlapping population samples since the administrative conception of disability used by countries may lead to definitions that vary depending on the administrative authority or educational sector concerned. Indeed, in many cases each authority or body responsible for delivering resources or support to persons with disabilities or institutions define disability and groups of disabled people with respect to the eligibility criteria on which the provision of support depends. Profiles of children and adolescents considered as disabled may thus differ among the administrations and any attempt to calculate the population concerned becomes problematic. In the United Kingdom, the Department of Education refers to ‘pupils with special educational needs’, namely all those with educational needs that a school has to satisfy, regardless of whether they have a disability, whereas the Ministry of Health regards as ‘disabled’, all those with a health problem requiring financial, technical or human compensation, irrespective of the specific problems that may affect them. In France, data concerning pupils and adolescents with disabilities correspond to decisions made by the bodies set up for this purpose, whereas data concerned with disabled students reflect the number of individuals disclosing their disability or difficulty. This eliminates all those who may need assistance but who have not identified themselves, either through ignorance or refusal to be labeled in any particular way.

Concluding remarks

65. Transition of students with disabilities to tertiary education and to employment only recently became a policy making issue. Transition as a specific issue has only very recently secured a firm place on the public policy agenda as a result of more numerous and longer transition periods that have developed over the last two decades (OECD, 2000; OECD, 2005c, Meda & Minault, 2005), and of the persistent difficulties faced by education systems in implementing the rights to education of disabled children and adolescents and to secure their employment (Edgar, 1988, Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; McDonnell & Hardman, 1985).

66. The issue has however been tackled, with varying degrees of emphasis from one country to the next. Some countries have already readjusted their education system so that due regard is paid to the subsequent possible pathways offered to students with disabilities when they leave upper secondary school, and have established an institutional framework specifically to address the issue of transition. Others have concentrated on ensuring that their system focuses on the life chances of disabled students at the end of compulsory education, in preference to factors governing the conduct of upper secondary education and the transition to tertiary education. Yet others have begun to refocus their education system so that the different paths leading to tertiary education and employment are more stable and secure.

67. These national responses depend on how clear the transition periods for young adults are. In England for example they are given by age, and transition periods may not appear as clear as in France or in the United States where they reflect the end of an education cycle. They also depend on how disability is defined in each country, since the ‘developmental approach’ focusing on extra resources needed to achieve access to mainstream education and sound attainment among pupils and students is more suited to a diagnostic approach determined by what they cannot possibly do. The responses also depend on the selectivity of the school system, since encouraging students with disabilities to enroll for special provision or ISCED 3C type vocational training early on deprives of them of the opportunity to enter upper secondary or tertiary education, despite the fact that their disability or illness does not always justify the previous decision. They further depend on the links connecting upper secondary education and tertiary

education, given that weak or non-existent links between institutions limit opportunities for entering employment and restrict the range of career options available on the completion of secondary education or the undergraduate stage of tertiary education. Finally, the responses of each country depend on the existence of a service concerned specifically with the planning of transition periods, so that education geared to the needs of individual students can take account of their prospective career paths.

68. In addition to the foregoing issues, mobilizing the education system around transition towards tertiary education and employment implies the need to consider certain requirements. In this context, access to tertiary education and employment requires that:

- Pupils and students with disabilities can access the same courses of education as those who are non disabled, and have equal opportunities to perform well at all educational levels.
- Institutions of secondary and tertiary education are made responsible for ensuring their own physical, pedagogical and social accessibility, so that they become responsive to the wide variety of student profiles.
- Disabled students in upper secondary education satisfy the academic prerequisites of tertiary education institutions and can demonstrate a capacity for independence and self-advocacy.
- The developmental conception of disability is conducive to the continuity of paths through education, in paying attention to the resources required for a person's sound educational attainment and social inclusion, before concentrating on what it is impossible for him or her to do as a result of disability.
- Educational pathways derive their continuity from the strength and consistency of the links between different levels of education, from procedures for coordinating general and vocational education, and from the extent to which the education system, the employment sector and the provision of medical and social services satisfactorily complement and reinforce each other. Such links and coordinated activity are likely to offer varied educational and professional opportunities and to develop career options corresponding to the expectations, rates of progress and needs of each person.
- Access to arrangements for financial, technical and human support offer equal opportunities to students with disabilities in terms of access and good progress, both during their education and the various stages of the transition process. Such support may be informal and provided by other students no less than families which, for this reason, should be involved in defining the transition process and putting it into practice. Support may also be more formal and contributed by professional staff responsible for counseling and assistance within educational institutions, as well as by other professionals who are specifically concerned with working out and implementing the transition process.
- Statistical data exist which can be used to monitor individual career paths, identify aspects conducive to the continuity and consistency of routes through education and towards employment, fully understand the factors that impede the educational progress and social and personal integration of disabled people, and appreciate the positive or negative impact of policies and practices. Satisfying this requirement means placing far less emphasis on an administrative approach to disability which focuses on the recipients of support provided for in law, so that greater attention can be paid in particular to the educational needs of individuals.

- Longitudinal studies are undertaken to follow cohorts of people over a certain period and yield information on the opportunities for inclusion and participation offered to disabled people, as well as on the positive or negative impact of the way in which educational institutions, teaching practices and support are organised, on the continuity and consistency of educational pathways, and on the effect of adopting particular practices.
- Statistical data allowing for reliable international comparisons in order to be able to benchmark policies and practices.

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