

Information Briefing Sessions 16th September 2015

On 16th September 2015, the National Federation organised a 1 day information briefing - hosting two international speakers, and hearing from Irish contributors in relation to the topics of individualised funding, and inclusive approaches to vocational and post-secondary education and training. The event took place in the Ashling hotel in Dublin.

The 1-day information briefing provided an opportunity for those working in the disability and education sectors to network, share information and hear from a range of experts on these themes.



(L-R Ms. Alison Harnett, National Federation of Voluntary Bodies; Ms. Marsha Marshall, CEO Manawanui; Mr. John Hannigan, Chairperson of National Federation & CEO Sunbeam House Services; Dr. Wolfgang Plaute, Professor of Special Education & Inclusion, University of Education, Salzburg)

Ms. Marsha Marshall, CEO of Manawanui, New Zealand shared ***“The New Zealand Experience of Individualised Funding”***. Marsha, originally from Canada and now living in New Zealand, has been working for over 25 years in health and disability, in both New Zealand and Canada, with a focus on creating programmes that transfer control over supports back to the person receiving them. Having worked in the New Zealand Department of Health on the development of policy in relation to individualized funding, Marsha is now CEO of the largest provider of self-directed budgets and supports in New Zealand.

Ms. Anne Melly, HSE and Mr. Dharragh Hunt, National Disability Authority, provided an insight into the current context in Ireland in relation to individualized budgets and individualized supports, to set the scene at the beginning of the seminar. Marsha's presentation then set out the experiences and learning that she has gained through the work that has been taking place in New Zealand. A very interactive debate with the audience followed, exploring the aspects of individualized budgets that are of key interest to those working on the ground in this country.



(L-R Dr. Wolfgang Plaute, Mr. Mark Smith and Ms. Saranne Magennis)

In the afternoon, Dr. Wolfgang Plaute, Professor of Special Education and Inclusion at the University of Education, Salzburg and a partner in the 'INVESTT' European Project, presented ***"Inclusive Vocational & Education Training: Sharing a European experience of good practice"***. His presentation focused on a project that developed an inclusive vocational training programme in Austria, Belgium, Norway and Slovenia. The educational approach used is directly

connected to the principles of universal design and reasonable accommodation how it is mentioned in the UN-convention on the right of persons with disabilities.

The projects concrete objective is to provide vocational schools with specific information and suggestions in order to guide all students (including those with disabilities) towards the open labour market. The project develops and implements a teaching programme – intensively cross-referenced with the expectations of the labour market today - in the mainstream educational system in order to improve the inclusiveness of these settings and the employment of – especially – students with a disability into the open labour market.

The central question in this project is: How to come to a universal design in the learning environment in order to include persons with disabilities in the mainstream vocational education system, helping them to achieve the same qualification as other students, and to improve their transition from school to the open labour market?

In order to reach the aims and goals mentioned above, the following project outcomes are foreseen:

- A strategy at European level, helping practitioners to work towards a universal design in their own VET context, enabling them to provide a specialised tailor-made training for all.
- A teaching programme, helping practitioners to create a universal design in their concrete learning environment, including curriculum adjustments, inclusive teaching methods and a revision of the evaluation methods, in each partner country.

Both strategy and teaching programme improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities into the regular vocational education system, helping them to achieve the same qualification as other students and improving their transition from school to the labour market.

This was followed by a very inspirational input from Ms. Saranne Magennis and Mr. Mark Smith on the Inclusive Learning Initiative (ILI) that has been taking place in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. Ms. Saranne Magennis is Director of the Higher Education Policy Unit in NUI Maynooth, and she shared information with us about the ILI, which is a collaborative project which facilitates the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in higher education. She described how five students participated in the pilot phase from 2011 to 2014.



Saranne described how the students attended lectures and tutorials, completed assignments and took part in social activities on campus. The ILI is underpinned by the ‘fully inclusive’ or individualized support model of inclusion. The focus in this model is that the university experience for students with intellectual disabilities mirrors, as closely as possible, the experiences of the rest of the student body. There are no separate courses or modules and the students are not identified as a group – students are part of their chosen academic departments, just like their peers. Flexible assessment, focussed on what the students learn, rather than what they do not learn, is a core element of the initiative. Seven academic departments participated in the pilot.



Mr. Mark Smith, Graduate and Staff Member of NUI Maynooth

Mr. Mark Smith is a graduate and member of staff of Maynooth University. He shared with us his experience of an inclusive approach to 3rd level education. *“I studied Anthropology for three years and graduated with my class in 2014. In my second year in university I got a job in the students union. I loved college. It was the best experience of my life. Friendship is good because if you are trying to connect with your lecturers your friends can help you. I have grown from a boy into a man. I have grown an awful lot. I am meeting people outside of college. In my own time. My time with my friends not just*

in college. It is part of life. I can easily control my life. I believe that everyone should get an opportunity to access higher education. You have to be out there in society. ILI should be supported because there are a lot of abilities out there and people want to learn. People are isolated because people are visualised in a certain way. People should have a chance to study and go into college individually. But you need a strong team and access. You need more freedom. I wish there would be more ILI's in Ireland UK and America. Individuals should be allowed to learn in their everyday lives and meet new people.'

Mark told us about his experiences of learning about a wide range of topics in his anthropology studies, including the Irish Famine, and how other students had been very helpful to him, particularly in sharing learning about presentation skills and technology.

All of the presentations made on the day are available to download from the following link:
http://www.fedvol.ie/Presentations_now_available_to_download_from_oneday_information_session_16_September_2015_/Default.2112.html