

Ireland: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

Addressing social inequalities through additional school funding for career guidance

Social disadvantage is associated with more challenging transitions from education into employment. Even when students leave secondary schooling with comparable levels of qualifications, international studies of large datasets show that students from less privileged social backgrounds face disadvantages in securing higher quality employment and higher wages. Analysis of PISA data also shows that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to show uncertainty and confusion about their career plans. They can also be expected to possess weaker social networks of value in career progression. Consequently, more effective career guidance systems direct greater funding towards schools serving more disadvantaged students, helping them to overcome greater challenges in securing personally fulfilling educational progression and employment.

In Ireland, the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme has been in existence since 2005. Schools are identified for inclusion in the DEIS programme based on the proportional disadvantage of their enrolment. This is measured using an aggregation of the relative affluence of the geographical areas in which the students reside, based on national census data. (In the Irish language, DEIS is pronounced as 'desh' meaning 'opportunity'). The funding formula also takes account of proportion of the student population in a school that is drawn from Traveller, Roma and refugee communities and experiencing homelessness.

All post-primary DEIS schools are eligible to receive a significantly enhanced guidance allocation. This allows them to secure funding above the standard guidance allocation per week for additional hours for guidance provision, which may be undertaken by trained guidance counsellors or by subject teachers working as part of a whole school guidance approach. Commonly, DEIS schools now receive approximately double the funding for guidance activities compared to non-DEIS schools (44 hours of dedicated staff time per week versus 18 hours in a similar sized non- DEIS school). Allocation guidelines require the dedicated funding to be focused on guidance activities with a 'significant proportion' supporting the work of the guidance counsellor.

DEIS funding enables additional guidance provision including:

- Greater access to guidance counsellors to undertake 1-2-1 provision and work with all students directly to enhance guidance provision with a particular emphasis on earlier engagement at lower secondary level
- A wider range of education and career development activities and involvement in junior access programmes with links to higher education institutions
- A greater focus on externally-facing provision including visits to tertiary education providers and work placements
- Specialised provision linked to vocational areas such as those related to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)
- Early identification of students at risk of underachievement and early school leaving
- Supporting and engaging parents in their children's education and career plans
- Involvement of the wider community in supporting students through in-school and out-of-school activities to raise aspirations and education levels
- Guidance support that is targeted at those most in need using a continuum of support model (focusing on initiatives which may be targeted on all, some or a few students)

Schools are encouraged to create whole school plans for their guidance provision to be evaluated within self-evaluation and external evaluation processes. National programmes involving tertiary education providers and employer associations also target additional guidance resources at DEIS

schools – see for example the [World of Work](#) programme recently initiated by Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology and Business in the Community Ireland.

Programmes also exist to support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds successfully continuing in education, including students whose economic and social backgrounds are underrepresented in higher education and students with disabilities. Examples include the [Disability Access Route to Education](#) (DARE) and the [Higher Education Access Route](#) (HEAR).

For more information about the DEIS programme, visit <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/4018ea-deis-delivering-equality-of-opportunity-in-schools/>