An Examination of the Provision of Career Guidance to Students with Disabilities in Third Level Institutes in Ireland.

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement of the Master of Arts in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development

Submitted to the University of Limerick  
2nd October 2017
Declaration

The author hereby declares that this thesis is entirely his/her own work. No element of the work described in this dissertation has been previously submitted for any degree in the University of Limerick, or in any other institute.

Signature: ________________________________
Date: ________________________________
Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore the provision of career guidance supports to disabled students in Higher Education (HE) in Ireland as more students with disabilities are progressing to HE (HEA, 2015).

An interpretive paradigm was employed using semi-structured interviews to gather the perceptions of guidance and disability practitioners at four higher education institutions (Thomas, 2013; Biggam, 2008). This helped to explicate the types of career guidance supports available to disabled students as well as the degree to which guidance and disability departments work collaboratively in delivering supports to students. A thematic approach to data analysis allows for a critical appraisal of guidance provision in HE and an elucidation of the challenges and opportunities that exist.

The findings confirm a positive shift towards a more inclusive HE environment, where equality and diversity are promoted and supported. Increasing diversity and the prevalence of hidden disabilities in the student population pose a challenge for service providers in encouraging disclosure and broadening eligibility for supports. Timely guidance intervention was found to both support and empower disabled students in realising educational inclusion, retention and ultimately employment. Policy and practice must encourage further collaboration between disability and guidance services in order to build innovative and flexible programmes that strive toward a human rights model and universal learning approach. A number of recommendations were put forward for policy, practice and research.
Acknowledgements

I want to thank my husband and family who have supported me in all my endeavours.

I want to thank my Supervisor, Dr. Lucy Hearne, for her support and encouragement over the last number of years.

Sincere thanks to Tom and Margaret who together have taught me the importance of compassion, empathy and kindness.
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<tr>
<td>AEGS</td>
<td>Adult Education Guidance Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AGCSI</td>
<td>Association of Graduate Careers Services in Ireland</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AHEAD</td>
<td>Association for Higher Education Access &amp; Disability</td>
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<tr>
<td>AHECS</td>
<td>Association of Higher Education Careers Service</td>
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<td>ASD</td>
<td>Autistic Spectrum Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIP</td>
<td>Cognitive Information Processing</td>
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<td>DARE</td>
<td>Disability Access Route to Education</td>
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<td>DCD</td>
<td>Developmental Coordination Disorder</td>
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<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and Skills</td>
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<td>DO</td>
<td>Disability Officer</td>
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<td>EU</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDR</td>
<td>First Destinations Report</td>
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<td>FDS</td>
<td>First Destinations Survey</td>
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<td>HE</td>
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<td>Higher Education Authority</td>
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<td>Higher Education Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<td>NDA</td>
<td>National Disability Agency</td>
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<td>NGF</td>
<td>National Guidance Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCCT</td>
<td>Social Cognitive Career Theory</td>
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<td>SLD</td>
<td>Specific Learning Disorder</td>
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<td>SWD</td>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNCRPD</td>
<td>United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>WAM</td>
<td>Willing Able Mentoring</td>
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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Introduction
This chapter outlines the context of this research, presents a justification for the study and identifies the position of the researcher. The aim and objectives of the study are also presented along with the research methodology and a plan of the thesis.

1.1 Context and Justification for the Study
Historically, people with disabilities were often isolated from society and as a result had a lack of opportunity and access to some of the fundamental rights afforded to individuals (Heller et al., 2012). It was only after World War 2 that the rights of people with disabilities were promoted and this was primarily due to the amount of people returning from the war with disabilities (O’Reilly, 2007). In the last number of decades there have been fundamental changes in Irish legislation, laying down protections and ensuring the rights of the disabled person to fully engage in education and work. As a result, more students with disabilities are progressing to Higher Education (HE) and targets to increase numbers up to a level of 8% of the student population have been outlined by the Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2015) which will undoubtedly promote continued growth in numbers. Ryan (2017) argues that achieving equality of access to HE can, at an individual level, create an opportunity to increase earning potential; at an economic level, help the growth of a knowledge-based economy; and at a societal level, allow for all citizens to have successful personal lives, contribute to society and reach their full potential. Career guidance is positioned as being pivotal to support the career development of students with disabilities and has the ability to improve the circumstances of students with disabilities by adopting a stronger advocacy role and lobbying for the necessary supports to eliminate any perceived injustices (Sultana, 2014).

This study examines the level of support that is provided to students with disabilities with respect to career guidance in HE in order to support these students in their studies and aid progression to employment. The research identifies the most prevalent disabilities amongst the current student population and explores practitioner perspectives on how changes in the student profile are impacting on the career guidance and disability services. The interventions utilised by guidance and disability services are considered in
order to identify if current practice is meeting the needs of the students with disabilities. Evidence of best practice is identified and recommendations for policy, practice and research are suggested. The benefit of conducting this exploratory study is that it allows both the researcher and the reader to gain greater insight into the career guidance offered to students with disabilities and the challenges and opportunities that exist at this interface. The research can also be utilised by institutions to reflect on current practice, potentially identifying opportunities to improve service provision, as appropriate.

1.2 **Researcher’s Position in the Study**

An interpretivist approach was utilised in this study. In interpretivist research the person doing the research has a position within the research context referred to as “situated knowledge” or “positionality” (Thomas, 2009 p.110). This position can have an impact on the interpretations that the researcher makes; therefore, it is recommended that the researcher discloses his/her particular interest in the research in order to identify any biases. The researcher of this particular study has many different roles: a manager of a Department of Justice Workshop who also maintains a support worker role, a trainee guidance counsellor and a mother of a child with a diagnosed disability. The advantage of these numerous roles with regard to this study is that I am learning about the supports available for students and for my son in the future, should he decide to progress to third level education. The possible disadvantage of these various positions is the potential for bias and subjectivity of the findings. In order to address this, a reflexivity diary was used throughout the research so that I was aware of my assumptions and interpretation of the findings, thus allowing me to be more objective in my research.

1.3 **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of the study was to identify the types of career guidance supports provided to students with disabilities in third level education in Ireland.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To undertake a literature review of the topic of disability within the context of HE pertaining to the profile of higher education students with disabilities and the career guidance supports available to them.
2. To identify the types and level of career guidance provision to students with disabilities in a number of HEIs.
3. To ascertain the challenges experienced by HEI career services and disability services with regard to supporting students with disabilities.
4. To establish the degree of collaboration between HEI career services and disability services in supporting students with disabilities.
5. To determine examples of good practice in relation to student support and make recommendations for future policy, practice and research.

The next section explains the methodology employed in the study to address these research aims and objectives.

1.4 Outline Research Methodology
This study is underpinned by an interpretivist approach in seeking to identify what supports are provided to students with disabilities with respect to career guidance in third level education in Ireland. The data collection method involved semi-structured interviews with practitioners in a number of HEIs and utilised thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to interpret the primary data. The researcher has endeavoured to be ethical and to ensure the integrity of the research at all times in the study by observing validity, reliability, confidentiality and reflexivity. The next section outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.5 Structure of the Study
This section presents a brief overview of the six chapters in the thesis:

Chapter 1 Introduction
The first chapter outlines the context of the research study and presents a justification for it. It also identifies the position of the researcher. The aim and objectives of the study are presented along with an outline research methodology and the structural layout of the thesis.

Chapter 2 Literature Review
The literature review examines literature in the area of disability and guidance specifically with regard to career guidance to students with disabilities in the third level
sector. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the concept of disability, policy, definitions, models and presents an overview of participation of students with disabilities in HE. The second section provides an overview of guidance counselling policy and practice. It defines guidance and examines the career guidance techniques used in HE with students with disabilities. The third section examines the theoretical perspectives on retention, career development and successful inclusion for students with disabilities.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology
The third chapter outlines the research strategy and methodology utilised. It identifies the primary and secondary research questions which are the foundation of the study. This chapter discusses the paradigm, sample selection, data collection and analysis methods and discusses how purposeful choices were made so as to allow for a depth of insight into prevailing practice and practitioner perspectives. Issues related to validity, reliability, ethics and reflexivity are also addressed.

Chapter 4 Data Analysis and Findings
Chapter four presents the key findings of the primary research generated from the semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis of organisational sources, such as organisational websites and documents.

Chapter 5 Discussion
The aim of this chapter is to provide a synthesised critical discussion of the overall findings of the study in the context of the original research questions. In this chapter the primary findings are critically discussed in conjunction with the pertinent literature explored in chapter two.

Chapter 6 Conclusion
Chapter six draws conclusions within the context of the aim and objectives of the study. This chapter also evaluates the strengths and limitations of the study, presents a number of recommendations and discusses the personal learning of the researcher.
Chapter Two  Literature Review

2.0  Introduction
This study examines the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities in HEIs in Ireland. As the literature in the area of disability and guidance is vast, the challenge in this review has been to focus on literature pertaining specifically to career guidance to students with disabilities in the third level sector to contextualise the study. The literature review consisted of engaging with sources including Irish and international policy documents, academic journals, academic research reports, and primary text books. It also involved identifying relevant support agencies and representatives promoting access for students with disabilities and examining relevant web based articles and documents.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the concept of disability, determining policy, definitions, models and the participation of students with disabilities in HE. The second section provides an overview of guidance counselling policy and practice. It defines guidance and examines the career guidance provision to students with disabilities in HE. The third section examines the theoretical perspectives on career development and the career development of students with disabilities.

2.1  Disability Policy
This section identifies how disability is defined and explores the different models of disability. The section also addresses policy and legal frameworks and the participation of students with disabilities in HE in Ireland.

2.1.1  Disability: Definitions and Models
There has been much debate about the term ‘disability’ and there are a variety of definitions available from national and international context (AHEAD, 2008). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2017), the term disability is an umbrella term which covers a range of impairments experienced by individuals. Legal definitions of disability are not restricted to health problems, rather impairments can be physical, mental, communicative, learning and/or cognitive processing; the key commonality being that the impairment has implication(s) for the person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (Equality Act 2004; UK Disability Act, 2010; WHO 2017). A person can be
born with a disability or acquire a disability due to illness, accident, or age (Heller et al, 2012). In Ireland, the Disability Act 2005 defines disability as permanent. However, Marks (1997) identified that disabilities are not fixed and are more usefully seen on a continuum with changing boundaries and varying levels of presentation at different times (Heller et al, 2012).

There are many different models that are utilised to understand disability which have evolved over time. These models categorise disability based on perceptions of how the disability is identified and/or the impact of the disability. The medical model of disability identifies the deficit within the person, whilst the social model of disability observes the disability through the lens of the difficulties created by the external environment (Marks, 1997; Scullion, 2010). The Human Rights model shares many principles with the Social Model but additionally argues for an equity of fundamental rights and advocates that leaving the disabled person outside the normal services afforded to people in general is a violation of their human rights (Degenger, 2016). The United Nations (UN) has been pushing for a more widespread adoption of this model (UN, 2007) and whilst Ireland signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), it remains the last EU Member state yet to ratify the convention (Inclusion Ireland, 2017).

2.1.2 Policy and Legislative Developments

It is long established that the right to education is a fundamental entitlement of all persons (UN, 1948). However, historically people with disabilities were often isolated from society and as a result had a lack of opportunity and access to some of the fundamental rights afforded to people (Heller et al, 2012). Following an absence of policy development from the 1970’s to the 1990’s (NDA, 2014) the 1990’s saw the commencement of policy development in an Irish context which led to positive changes with regard to the improvement of the societal status of people with disabilities (NDA, 1996). In 1993, the Irish Government established the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, and The Final Report on the Status of People with Disabilities entitled “A Strategy for Equality” was published in 1996 (NDA, 2014). This was guided by the principles of equality, maximising participation and enabling independence and choice (NDA, 1996). As a result, funding mechanisms were put in place to support students with disabilities. Such developments led to the appointment of Disability and Access Officers
in HEIs and were also the foundation of the DARE programme which was designed to create opportunity for students with disabilities (MacNamara, 2001; DARE, 2017).

In the following years, a number of legislative acts were introduced to enshrine the right to education and place expectations on HEIs to eliminate discrimination, promote participation and increase student diversity. The 2004 Equality Act prohibits any discrimination on nine key grounds, one of which is disability (Government of Ireland, 2004). The Equality Acts 1998 – 2004 prohibit HEIs from discriminatory practices in their admissions policies and place a legal obligation on institutions to ensure that reasonable accommodations are put in place to allow disabled persons to participate in education and employment (Government of Ireland, 2004). The 2005 Disability Act stipulates that all public buildings are fully accessible to disabled persons and furthermore make provision that public bodies must safeguard at least 3% of their workforce for people with disabilities (Government of Ireland, 2005). Correspondingly, the National Plan for the Equality of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 promotes equality of access to all individuals and a target of 8% has been set for participation in higher education by students with disabilities (HEA, 2015). Although no research was identified to suggest that these policies were working, analysis of the data from reports on overall participation in third level see year-on-year increases (AHEAD 2017, 2013, 2010; HEA 2016, 2013, 2010)

In line with changing policy, Young (1990) contends that from a social justice perspective, the barriers to education should be eliminated where possible. Ryan (2017) argues that achieving equality of access to HE at an individual level can create an opportunity to increase earning potential, at an economic level help the growth of a knowledge based economy, and at a societal level allow for all citizens to have successful personal lives, contribute to society and reach their full potential. The OECD (2012) advocates that investing in equality pays off in the long term and can contribute to social cohesion and economic competitiveness. Even though the words ‘accessibility’ and ‘inclusion’ have become more prominent in disability, education and employment policy in recent years (DES, 2000; European Commission, 2010; OECD, 2004), Irving (2005) contends that the overuse of these words often simplifies extremely complex social issues and does not necessarily generate an inclusive society. Furthermore, the idea of equality
and social justice is high on the policy agenda in modern society but the level of advancement varies substantially (Muller, 2014).

2.1.3 Participation by Students with Disability in Higher Education in Ireland

Enrolments in HEA-funded institutions are estimated at 222,000 (HEA, 2016). According to 2015 figures, approximately 54% attended universities, approximately 40 per cent attended institutes of technology and the final 6 per cent attended colleges (DES, 2015). Figures for participation in HE by disabled students in Ireland are provided by the HEA and AHEAD and presented in Table 2.1 (p.9). The HEA figures are collected from the Equal Access Survey which is a voluntary survey that collects information on new students entering higher education (HEA, 2016). The AHEAD figures are collated from the registered enrolments with disability offices at the individual reporting HEIs. The disparity in figures shows that not all disabled students choose to register with the disabled services within their chosen institution. The figures show a gradual growth in participation by disabled persons and it would appear that the 8% target set under the National Plan for the Equality of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 is likely to be achieved. However, Shevlin (2004) argues that a comprehensive access service is needed to tackle the multifaceted needs of all marginalised groups, including those with disabilities and that barriers to access, such as lack of awareness need to be addressed.

The AHEAD figures allow for an exploration of the categories of disability reported by students and any changes in these over time. In 2016 the most prevalent disability reported was Specific Learning Disability (SLD) at 45.5% or 5116 students with the next most common being mental health conditions representing 12.6% or 1416 students. The most common category, SLDs, refer to a range of disabilities that can vary in severity and typically can have an impact on the way a student acquires, retains, processes and comprehends information (Chen and Chan, 2014). The second most common category, mental health conditions, has been increasing considerably over the years, and it is argued by AHEAD (2016b) that this particular group are the most vulnerable in terms of dropping out of their third level studies. Dooley and Fitzgerald (2012) advocated that 1 in 4 young people suffer from mental health issues, indicating that the numbers suggested in the reports for mental health may be under-representative of the actual figures. This is supported by Murphy et al (2016) who reported that there is a disparity between the actual numbers of students presenting at counselling services with mental health issues.
than would be registered as such with the Disability Services. Disabilities such as developmental disabilities, physical disabilities and medical conditions have lower representation in the student population according to the Irish reports examined (HEA, 2016; AHEAD, 2017; AHEAD 2016b). However, it is important to note co-morbidity between these conditions can be high (Chen and Chan, 2014) and it is the choice of the student under which disability they choose to register.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Student Population</strong></td>
<td>188,166</td>
<td>202,504</td>
<td>222,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% of Student with Disability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>HEA</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% of students with disabilities who require support according to the HEA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AHEAD</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
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**Breakdown by Category of Disability According to AHEAD figures**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asperger’s/Autism category (ASD)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADD/ADHD</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blind/Visually Impaired</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf/Hard of Hearing</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia</td>
<td>Not classified</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Condition</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neurological/Speech and Language Condition</td>
<td>Not classified</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Ongoing Illness</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Disability</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Difficulty</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other category</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.1** Profile of Disabled students in HEIs in Ireland

A predictor of success for students with disabilities in HE is engagement in support services during the first year of university (Julal, 2016). According to AHEAD (2016a), it is an encouraging development that the numbers of students with disabilities is increasing yearly and indicative that the relevant universities and colleges are working towards becoming more inclusive and promoting equality of access to students with disabilities. Student Support Services play vital roles in third level, contributing to the educational, social, financial and personal support of students and potential entrants to enable them to do well and flourish in higher education. However, with the increase in the number and diversity of students entering third-level education in Ireland, the role played by Student Support Services is more complex (Irish University Quality Board, 2006). All Irish HEIs provide student services that incorporate supports such as counselling, career guidance and student welfare, mentoring, chaplaincy and pastoral care, accommodation, health and disability liaison officers (NGF, 2007). The type and quantity of provision provided in each location is generally specific to each individual college due to funding provision and student support structures which have been developed within the individual institute (NGF, 2007). The provision of services is founded on an ethos of equality of access to all students. However, the Report on the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education 2001 recommended that each HEI should have a disability officer (MacNamara, 2001) whose responsibility it is to specifically coordinate support services for disabled students. When a student discloses a disability and links in with the disability service they are entitled to certain supports within the system including individual needs assessment and appropriate supports as well as potential funding for assistive technology (AHEAD, 2008 & 2013).

Despite the usefulness of student supports, more vulnerable students such as students with disabilities, or students with hidden disabilities often do not engage with the support services available (Couzens et al, 2015; MacNamara, 2001). MacNamara (2001) recommended that every student with a disability in second level should have access to guidance support service that prepares them for the transition to third level, thereby raising awareness of, and encouraging engagement, with support services in third level. In higher education, career guidance is commonly a stand-alone support service among the wider array of complementary services and is an important resource for all third level students. Career guidance is of particular importance to students who may experience social exclusion (due to disability) and whilst not a panacea for social exclusion could be
positioned to provide targeted interventions to assist them to reach their career ambitions (Muller (2014); Irving (2005)). In addition, Universal Design for learning, an educational framework which incorporates flexible learning environments and accommodates individual learning styles, proves to be beneficial to the student with disabilities, as well as the whole student population (Couzens et al, 2015; AHEAD, 2017). The next section examines this further by exploring guidance counselling policy and practice.

2.2 Guidance Counselling: Policy and Practice
This section defines career guidance and examines the development of career guidance policy. The section also examines the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities in higher education in Ireland.

2.2.1 Guidance Definitions
From an international policy perspective, guidance is positioned as a tool for “assisting citizens to overcome gender, ethnic, age, disability, social class and institutional barriers to learning and work” (OECD, 2004, p.70). The Council of the European Union (2008) refers to guidance as a process which is ongoing and allows the client to identify their particular strengths, capacities and competencies allowing them to make informed decisions with regard to their education and careers. Similarly, the Irish National Guidance Forum (NGF, 2007) stipulates that guidance is a process which facilitates growth and supports decision making allowing clients to reach their full potential and contribute to society in a meaningful way.

These different definitions illustrate the multifaceted nature of guidance counselling; a tool to overcome challenges, an aid to effective decision making and a reflective process that allows for personal growth and self-actualisation. The competency areas that the guidance practitioner should possess are guidance counselling skills, the ability to provide accurate information, the capacity to provide advice and assessment as required, the competence to facilitate classroom guidance activities, vocational preparation and referral as appropriate (NGF, 2007, IGC, 2017). Additionally, the practitioner should be able to manage and coordinate the service and network and advocate as appropriate (NGF, 2007).

In Ireland, guidance is provided in education, the labour market and the community sector (DES, 1998; DES, 2000; NGF, 2007). Formal guidance in the education system is
provided in secondary schools, further education colleges, Adult Education Guidance Services (AEGS) and HEIs (NGF, 2007). The guidance counsellor’s role is client centred, predominantly employing the humanistic Rogerian model and is a compromise between the American and European models of intervention (IGC, 2017; Hearne et al. 2016). The guidance counsellor is positioned to engage the learner in personal, educational and vocational counselling throughout the lifespan offering support in decision making and signposting to additional supports when required (IGC, 2017).

2.2.2 Career Guidance Policy

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 emphasises the importance of higher education in meeting the economic and social needs of the country within the context of diversity and a changing society (HEA, 2011). The strategy promotes working collaboratively with all stakeholders to afford students the opportunities to develop the necessary skills and competencies to allow the future generations to engage effectively and successfully in society and the workplace (HEA, 2011). Although the strategy does not identify career guidance as a mechanism for accomplishing these goals, the HE careers service is well positioned to assist students with progression routes and to support the development of the generic skills required for the effective and successful engagement in the workforce.

According to Watts (1996) there are four main overarching ideological positions underpinning guidance policy and provision, namely, liberal, conservative, progressive, and radical. The liberal approach is non directive and is influenced by the humanistic approach developed by Rogers (1961). A conservative perspective identifies the guidance counsellors as an agent of social control (Watts, 1996). The progressive approach identifies guidance as an instrument to promote individual change, and the radical approach identifies guidance as a mechanism to promote social change (Watts, 1996). In more recent times the radical approach with its sociological focus has emerged in the context of supporting a social justice agenda with clients (Blustein, 2011; Irving, 2005; Sultana, 2014). Under this premise, from a disability perspective, career guidance practitioners can improve the circumstances of students with disabilities by adopting a stronger advocacy role and lobbying for the necessary supports to eliminate any perceived injustices (Sultana, 2014).
In the context of this study, the development of formal career guidance services in HEIs can be traced back to the establishment of a University Appointments Association in Trinity College in 1902 to provide assistance to the students and graduates in acquiring appointments and employment nationally and internationally (NGF, 2007). Comparable measures were introduced by Queens University Belfast, though not until 1920. The first Appointments Office with full time staff was opened in Trinity in 1953 and in 1968 an appointments office with part-time staff was opened in University College Dublin (NGF, 2007). Services continued to develop and collaboration became more formalised resulting in the establishment of the Association of Graduate Careers Services in Ireland (AGCSI) in 1986. A 2002 OECD review of Guidance Services in Ireland found that careers services in HEIs were designated as specialist careers services, purposefully separate from the student support services that provide personal counselling and wellbeing advice. The report found that whilst the HEA had issued guidelines on guidance services in third level they were broad and played a limited role in defining practice (OECD, 2002).

In a British context, Simon (2014) argues that although there has been a lot of policy development promoting the importance of high quality career guidance there is no quality assurance framework for the delivery of guidance in higher education and as result services can differ greatly. In Ireland, there is a lack of empirical research with regard to the quality of guidance provision across all sectors. However, it is noted that the ratio of careers advisors to students is very low in HE and, as a result, it is often necessary to focus on final year students whom are about to progress to employment (NGF, 2007). This challenge has been addressed to some extent by the growing role of IT and career portals in third level institutions, allowing general guidance to be distributed more easily and widely across the student cohort (Watts & Van Esbroeck, 2000).

### 2.2.3 Career Guidance to Students with Disabilities in HE

It is important to note that “the transition into the world of work is one of the most important achievements in a young person’s life” (Nag, 2014 p.510). The role of the guidance counsellor is to help the student make sense of the stories and how they influence the client and perhaps help construct new outcomes (Savickas, 2013). Guidance counsellors should identify the client’s expectations and communicate and empathise with the concerns of the student through reflection (Ali & Graham, 1996; Egan, 2002; Rogers, 1951). The guidance counsellor should identify past successes and identify situations
which the student has overcome effectively, for example, using the student’s disability to identify barriers that they have overcome and help identify the strength of character (Egan, 2002; Ali & Graham, 1996; Smith, 2006).

Studies show that disabled students may need different types of guidance intervention to the general student body. The career guidance practitioner can have a positive impact on the transition from education to employment if the career development needs of the student with disabilities have been addressed in third level education in preparation for the world of work (Nag, 2014). The primary function of the career counsellor in preparing the student for the world of work is to help the student to help themselves (Enright et al 1996). Similar to all students, students with disabilities often seek advice with regard to their future careers and the career guidance practitioner should have an understanding of how a disability may impact on the career development of the individual (Enright et al, 1996). It was noted that students with disabilities often have lower self-esteem and confidence with regard to their abilities and have concerns regarding the transition to employment. Counsellors should employ techniques to assist the student to identify the strengths of their disability and allocate more time offering advice on disclosure, networking, resilience and accommodations (Enright et al, 1996). It is important that the career development of persons with disabilities is explored as a disability may not be a vocational handicap (Herr et al, 2004). Additionally, it is imperative that all people, including those with some form of disability, are given every opportunity to realise their full potential and contribute to society in a meaningful way (Herr et al, 2004).

However, Friehe and Aune (1996) have argued that approximately 95% of the career development and job search process is the same for all students but a student with a disability has the additional task of considering how their disability would function as a strength and identifying the challenges that the disability may present. Their study, although dated, did identify some interesting data for consideration to provide a more effective service tailored to the needs of students with disabilities, thus providing more positive outcomes and progression to employment. It is important to determine why disabled students might not be engaging, identify their needs and explore how the service can support their needs in collaboration with other relevant departments (Friehe & Aune, 1996). Career guidance services need to provide specific workshops on particular areas relevant to the cohort such as disclosure and reasonable accommodations in the workforce.
and query the lack of coordination between career and disability services (Friehe & Aune 1996).

Another American study which explored the challenges and supports required for students with disabilities such as ASD, identified that students faced difficulties with new situations and unexpected changes, social relationships, problems with information processing, time management and had doubts about disclosures (Van Hees et al, 2015). Similarly, Canadian research conducted by Lindsay et al (2014) reported that employment rates are lower for graduates with disabilities and that employers perceive that students with disabilities lack confidence and experience, therefore putting them at a disadvantage. Dipeolu et al.’s (2015) identified several practical strategies that can be employed by career counsellors to help develop students with disabilities. The strategies allow students to develop skills in organisation, executive functioning, grooming, problem solving and decision making. One of the limitations of the strategies put forward is that the nature of the student with a disability is that they may find engaging in such programmes very difficult.

The literature highlighted that disclosure of one’s disability is a complex issue. Although there is no legal obligation on a person to disclose a disability it has been advocated that the learning environment needs to be supportive and minimise potential harm for the student, especially in relation to disclosure (Andre & Manson, 2004; Nolan et al, 2014, AHEAD, 2013). Often, there is a combination of emotions such as fear, stigma and potential embarrassment about disclosure which can be complex and challenged by the different attitudes and experience of previous disclosure experiences (Claiborne et al., 2011). In Ireland, it has emerged that many of students who engaged with HE disability services were not in their first year of study, raising concerns about early interventions, which in turn may impact on the retention of such students (AHEAD, 2017). This is supported by research by Storr et al (2011) with regard to nursing students where it was found that failure to disclose can be a barrier to learning.

From an Irish context there appears to be an absence of literature, with the exception of AHEAD, on career guidance with students with disabilities. Students with disabilities may require different types of guidance and potentially more time, in comparison to
students without disabilities (AHEAD, 2008). There has been a positive move toward being more inclusive in society through policy development and from a graduate employment perspective there are examples of programmes being developed which are accessible for students with disabilities (AHEAD, 2017). Two examples of such programmes which are promoted by AHEAD are the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programme and GetAHEAD programme. These programmes engage with employers to create opportunities for graduates with disabilities and promote diversity in the workforce and promote disclosure (Quirke & Ó Murchadha, 2016). Another example of a work placement or mentoring programme with regard to working with graduates with ASD in the workforce is the Specialisterne programme, which is an exemplary model of sustainable inclusion for autistic spectrum youth who are often marginalised individuals (Wareham & Sonne, 2008). The next section will explore the relevant career development theories related to career guidance with students with disabilities.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Career Development

This section addresses literature related to career development which may prove to be useful when working with students with disabilities but is not exclusionary. Due to an absence of literature on career interventions for students with disabilities in HEI, the scope of the literature also examined interventions utilised in high schools.

2.3.1 Career Development of Students with Disabilities

From a career development perspective, Parsons (1909) first introduced the differentialist approach by introducing the trait factor and the concept of matching the person to the job. Holland (1997) assumes that most people can resolve their own vocational problems if they have suitable opportunities for obtaining information and are encouraged in their exploration. However, Holland’s measure of people and environments has also received criticism for its limited focus on matching people to jobs and occupations (Arnold, 2004) in that it has neglected some important constructs, such as some of the environments have not been conceptualised and that jobs continuously change which has the potential to pose challenges for students with disabilities.

Super’s lifespan theory of career development highlights the importance of career maturity and of developing a self-concept which refers to how people view themselves (Super, 1980; Sharf, 2010). Super’s career model is based on the belief that self-concept
changes over time and develops as a result of experience. Super (1980) also refers to the Career Rainbow and that we hold different roles; such as student, worker, parent; at different times in our lives. Confidence and self-efficacy for students is very important especially for students with disabilities. In research conducted by Chen and Chan (2014) critical issues facing students with learning difficulties were identified as poor self and career awareness, lower social competence and lower level of self-determination. All four factors contribute to the career maturity of the person and as a result a guidance counsellor can play a pivotal role in helping students with disabilities to address some of these issues with regard to career maturity with supported career activities, work experience and development of social skills (Chen and Chan, 2014).

Following the developmental perspective of Super, Krumboltz (1994) proposed a social learning theory which advocates that there are four factors which influence career decisions, namely, genetic endowment, environmental factors, the learning experiences of the person and the task approach skills. An individual can create opportunities to practice and master these skills with exposure to early work experience creating excellent learning opportunities for the student (Krumboltz, 1994). The career guidance counsellor should encourage and promote such learning experiences as early work experience where possible to develop relevant skills (Moxley, 2002). Kromboltz et al (2013) also identified the unpredictable nature of the world of work and advocate that the ‘planned happenstance’ theory could assist individuals to embrace change and take advantage of opportunities that arise. The planned happenstance theory allows the client to reframe an event or situation as a potential opportunity and helps identify solutions and actions to overcome obstacles (Kromboltz et al, 2013).

Ochs and Roessler’s (2001) research on the employment success of students with disabilities found that there is often a significant delay with regard to the career decision making skills, self-belief, career outcome expectations, career exploration and levels of vocational identity. Although students with disabilities recognised the connection between career exploration and success in later life, the students lacked a vocational identity (Ochs & Roessler, 2001). Ochs and Roessler (2001) argue that career guidance practitioners should intervene earlier with students with disabilities and intensify their efforts in order to bridge the gap. It was also highlighted in later research conducted by Ochs and Roessler (2004) that difficulties in the transition from high school often
corresponded to a lack of success in early career development tasks such as experiencing success, observation of career related activities to build confidence and an opportunity to experience or develop the necessary skills for potential work experience.

Other relevant theories for working with students with disabilities are the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 2002), career constructivist/narrative approach (Savickas, 2013) and the Cognitive Information Processing (CIP) approach (Sampson et al, 2004). The SCCT examines the relationship of social cognitive variables such as self-efficacy and other factors such as disability, support systems, culture and potential barriers and stresses the importance of agency in a person’s career development (Lent et al 2002). The career constructivist/narrative approach (Savickas, 2013) seeks to help the client to explore and understand their career and life story and what influences how the story is constructed, exploring the pattern of behaviour such as the thoughts, feelings and actions that the person feels at different junctures and how that influences their decision making. The CIP approach highlights the importance of the thought and cognitive processes in career development and supports the decision making process with the development of a model to support decision making (Sampson et al 2004). Dipeaolu and Keating (2009) advocate that this approach is particularly useful for students with disabilities, specifically students with learning disabilities as visual templates can be used and the structure is clear, user friendly and gives time to explore barriers and non-functional career thoughts. An example of a practical model utilised in a third level setting to support employability is the CareerEDGE model which emphasises the importance of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem of the student (Darce Pool and Sewell, 2007). Although some of these career development theories can be useful for exploring career development with students with disabilities, Fabian and Pebdani (2013) argue that more research in the area of career development of youth and young adults with disabilities is urgently needed.

2.4 Summary and Conclusion
This chapter examined the term disability and the fundamental rights that are afforded to the person through policy and legislative developments over the years to support students with disabilities in Higher Education. It also provided an overview of the current Guidance Counselling provision and career development of support students with disabilities. It was established that one size does not fit all. The chapter also identifies
tailored interventions which support the student with disabilities in career development tasks. The conclusions that can be drawn from this review of the literature are that there has been a positive movement towards a more inclusive society, with benchmarks and legislation now in place to promote equality and diversity in education and the workforce in Ireland.

Career guidance is positioned as being pivotal to support the career development of students with disabilities. The literature indicates that students with disabilities may need to complete more career development tasks due to the confines of their particular disability, confidence and social skills, personal and career self-awareness, reasonable accommodations, disclosure and the prevention of attrition. However, challenges appear to exist such as poor guidance practitioner to student ratios and resources. Additionally, those most vulnerable often find it difficult to engage with the HE careers service. Therefore, the focus of this Irish study is to identify whether students with disabilities are currently engaging with career services and disability services and how their needs are being met within these two specific services. The next chapter will discuss the methodology underpinning the study.
Chapter 3    Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research strategy and methodology utilised for this research. The chapter identifies the primary and secondary research questions which are the foundation of the study. The chapter discusses the paradigm, sample selection, data collection and analysis methods and shows how these are reinforced by the researcher’s chosen philosophy. Issues related to validity, reliability, ethics and reflexivity are also addressed.

3.1 Identification of the Research Questions
Research has been defined as a mechanism to solve problems and to add to one’s own body of knowledge (Herbert, 1990). It is argued by Bryman (2007) that the identification of a research question is critical to the research design. However, it is one of the more difficult tasks within research. Good research questions are specific and lead to the development of focused studies (Flick, 2011). As indicated by Stewart and Kamins (1993), commencing a study with secondary research allows for greater insight of the topic being investigated. It also provides a comparative tool for analysis of the new data, so that similarities and differences can be examined. International research indicated that there was a lack of engagement of students with disabilities in career services (Friehe & Aune, 1996; Julal, 2016) and students with disabilities often lack confidence and possess lower social competence contributing to a delay in reaching career maturity (Chen and Chan, 2014). Therefore, the current study set out to investigate specifically the context of guidance provision to students with disabilities in HE in Ireland. The secondary research identified an absence of specific literature and primary research in the Irish context and affirmed the researcher’s belief that it was an area ready for further exploration.

In essence, the prevailing ethos of this research stemmed from the concepts of social justice and equality which are referred to in the work of Muller (2014). Career guidance is seen as a mechanism to promote social justice and equality of access which at an individual level can create an opportunity to increase earning potential, but which at economic and societal levels can additionally help the growth of a knowledge-based economy and allow for all citizens to have successful personal lives, contribute to society
and reach their full potential (Ryan, 2017). The aim of this study has been to identify what is happening in Irish HEIs with regard to the provision of career guidance support to students with disabilities.

3.1.1 Primary Research Question
The primary research question asked: *What types of career guidance supports are provided to students with disabilities in third level education in Ireland?*

3.1.2 Secondary Research Questions
The secondary questions were:

- What is the profile of students with disabilities attending Irish HEIs and the supports available?
- What is the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities in Irish Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)?
- What are the possible challenges experienced by HEI career services and disability services with regard to supporting students with disabilities?
- Do career services and disability services work collaboratively to support students with disabilities?
- What types of good practice in student support are evident in the HEIs examined?

The next section will explain the methodology employed in the study to address these research questions.

3.2 Research Methodology
Upon determining the research questions, the next essential part of this research study was to consider the best approach (paradigm) to answer the proposed research questions (Thomas, 2013). The term that is used to describe the way we think about research and the world is ‘paradigm’. Kuhn (1996) denotes that a paradigm is the accepted view or model which refers to the shared ideas and thinking habits of researchers. From a social research perspective, Bimrose and Hearne (2012) assert that there are two main types of research paradigms in education and guidance counselling, namely; positivist (quantitative) and interpretivist (qualitative). The positivist paradigm can be referred to as
many different terms such as quantitative, scientific, traditional, empiricist (Merriam, 2009). This paradigm essentially advocates that the world can be studied objectively and rationally by similar methods used in natural science, where methods are mathematical and quantitative and search for order and systems of shared values (Thomas, 2013; Walliman, 2011). The difficulty with the positivist approach is that it regards human behaviour as passive and the method is unable to answer many interesting and important questions (Cohen et al., 2007). Furthermore, the findings of positivist research are often of little consequence to teachers, counsellors and social workers due to the nature of their work (Cohen et al., 2007). While this is debatable, it was thought that this was not an appropriate approach to utilise in this research as this study required the insight of practitioners.

Conversely, the interpretivist paradigm is founded on the premise that knowledge is socially constructed, all kinds of information is valid and information can be seen from many different perspectives (Thomas, 2013). A subjective approach allows for the search for dynamics and complex interactions through the analysis of value-laden data such as perceptions, feelings and ideas as heard or observed (Thomas, 2013; Walliman, 2011). Reflecting on the research questions allowed the researcher identify the type of data or information that would need to be analysed. As the subject matter is a complex phenomenon, based on opinion and experience of relevant professionals the interpretivist (qualitative) approach was deemed appropriate. It provided greater insight into the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities from the perspective of career guidance practitioners and disability officers. It helped to contextualise current service provision and gave the researcher a greater understanding of the supports available to students with complex needs. Whilst the interpretative approach suited the research questions, the researcher does acknowledge that there are limitations to this approach which can include misinterpretation of information, power relationships and a narrow sociological perspective (Cohen et al., 2007). In order to address these issues, the researcher tried to ensure that the research was not biased or misinterpreted. This is addressed later in the quality section of the chapter.

Within the interpretivist paradigm there are many different methods to collect data. In order to make the most appropriate choice, research into the different methods was completed and the most applicable method to answer the research question was identified
(Thomas, 2013 & Biggam, 2008). The data collection and analysis methods will be examined in the next section.

3.3 Data Collection Methods and Analysis
This section identified the access, sampling methods and data analysis techniques utilised for the study. It also examines the quality of the study.

3.3.1 Access and Sampling
The aim of this research is to examine the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities in third level institutes in Ireland through the perspectives of career guidance practitioners and disability officers who support such students. Representatives from the disability service were included in order to gain greater insight into the specific needs of the students with disabilities and to identify whether the two departments work collaboratively as was suggested as best practice in the reviewed literature.

Initially, Irish HEIs were identified online and relevant staff in the career services and disability services were identified. From a population of forty-four higher education institutions (DES, 2017), four HEIs were chosen due to convenience and accessibility. Biggam (2008) describes this type of purposive selection of participants as a non-probability or non-random sampling strategy, and in convenience sampling the researcher identifies participants due to access and positive response rates. Convenience sampling can provide interesting data, nevertheless there are limitations with regard to representation if not randomly selected, and therefore, not a representation of the general population (Cohen et al 2007). Bryman (2004) also points out there are limitations in relation to the small sample size and external validity. The relatively small sample size of four HEIs was due to a combination of time constraints, cost and limited access to educational institutes. Although the sample is small, it is of adequate range to give exploratory insights about higher level guidance provision to students with disabilities in Ireland. Ethical approval was sought and approved (appendix 3.1). Initial contact was made via a subject information letter (appendix 3.2). In total, six professionals were interviewed representing four HEIs (appendix 3.3). Two of the four disability officers approached agreed to participate in a face-to-face interview and one agreed to a telephone interview. Three career guidance practitioners agreed to a face-to-face interview. No reasons were provided to the researcher for non-participation by those subjects who chose not to partake in the study. The timeline of the interviewer was over a six-week period.
3.3.2 Method: Interviews

There are many different types of data collection methods such as group or individual interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and observation (Thomas, 2013). The data collection method chosen for this study was a semi-structured interview. Polit and Beck (2006) defined an interview as a means of collecting data in which the interviewer asks questions of a participant in order to elicit the required information. It is indicated by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) that interviews are the most frequently used technique of data collection because of the rich data they provide. There are three fundamental types of research interviews, namely the structured interview, the semi-structured interview and the unstructured interview (Thomas, 2013). The structured interview is where a predetermined set of questions is followed and there is little opportunity for probing or follow up questions (Thomas, 2013). The unstructured interview is more conversation focused, has no set questions and its purpose is to allow the interviewee to set the agenda of the interview (Thomas, 2013). The semi-structured interview has a set of questions developed before the meeting but allows for the exploration of areas of interest and probing of arising themes for clarification (Thomas, 2013). Therefore, the semi-structured interview method was chosen because it allowed for more in-depth data to be extracted and analysed in comparison to the other interview styles or quantitative methods such as questionnaires (Thomas, 2009).

One of the strengths of semi-structured interviews is that there is a strong element of discovery of detailed information on a research topic, while its structure allows for comparative analysis (Gillham, 2005). It was the researcher’s belief that the semi-structured interview was the most appropriate to the research topic as it allowed for exploration of the participants’ experiences and perceptions of how Irish HEIs support students with disabilities, in particular the role of career guidance services and disability services in the HE institutions. In addition, the interviews allowed for exploration of current service provision and potentially identified supports which may need to be developed or put in place to contribute to the success of students with disabilities in education and life.

The semi-structured interviews used questions that were open while allowing for the use of appropriate probes when issues warranted more exploration (Gillham, 2005). Broadly stated questions can help a qualitative researcher gain greater insight and understanding of the experiences from the participant’s perspective (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008).
However, the challenge of interviewing is that the interviewer may have a lack of knowledge, skill or hold a bias which could impact on the interview. Another limitation is that information can be biased, misinterpreted and the information cannot be generalised (Gillham, 2005). In order to ensure that there is limited bias and misinterpretation, it is necessary to reflect on these limitations (Cohen et al, 2007).

In this research two interview frameworks were developed for the career guidance and Disability Officers respectively, which combined structure and also allowed for follow up where appropriate for further information and clarification (Thomas, 2009). The interview with the career guidance practitioners consisted of 23 questions (appendix 3.4) and the interviews with the Disability Officers consisted of 22 questions (appendix 3.5), with the questions being clustered into themes, each theme having approximately five questions. Open-ended questions for the interviews covered the relevant areas (appendix 3.4 & 3.5).

All of the interviews were audio recorded which is the most common method of recording interview data (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). At the start of each interview the participants were reminded of the aims and objectives of the study and consent was obtained (appendix 3.6). The interviews were carried out in the participant’s place of work so that no inconvenience or travelling cost was imposed on the interviewee. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 50 minutes in duration. At the end of the interviews the participants were asked if they would like to comment on anything they felt had been excluded from the discussion. The audio taped interviews were transcribed afterwards (appendix 3.7); this allowed the interviewer to concentrate on conducting the interviews. After the research was concluded an email of thanks for participating in the research was sent to each participant and the transcription was emailed to the participant in order that they could check it for accuracy. All transcripts were deemed accurate accounts of the discussions conducted by the respective respondents.

### 3.3.3 Data Analysis Technique

The interview data was analysed thematically and cross referenced across the six interviews and compared with the key concepts arising from the literature review. The thematic framework, as in other analytic tools, is used to classify and organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories (Richie and Lewis, 2003). Effectively, thematic analysis is a mechanism for identifying, analysing, and reporting different patterns and themes which emerge within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). One
of the benefits of the method is that it allows flexibility (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Limitations of thematic analysis are the subjectivity of the researcher and time constraints. These limitations were addressed by ensuring that the primary research was reliable, interpreted objectively by applying a systematic model, the six phase model, (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and allowed sufficient time for data analysis (Biggam, 2008). The information provided in the interviews will be supported by an analysis of the information available on the individual HEI websites and from information and reports available in the respective centres.

3.4 Quality in Interpretivist Research
Quality research generally refers to the process incorporating all facets of study design; in particular, it relates to the decisions and conclusions regarding the match between the methods and questions, selection of subjects, measurement of outcomes, and protection against bias and error (Lohr, 2004; Shavelson & Towne, 2002). However, it would be a mistake to indicate that quality appraisal is a new concept for researchers (Boaz & Ashby, 2003). There are already many structures in place to support and promote quality work such as published standards and peer review during the research process (Boaz & Ashby, 2003). There are many different types of reliability and validity and threats to reliability and validity can never be completely eradicated, especially in qualitative research (Cohen et al 2007). This section discusses the mechanisms to determine the quality of empirical research and the measures taken by the researcher to ensure that the study was of sound quality as well as how far the results can be generalised.

3.4.1 Validity and Reliability in the Study
The term validity refers to the requirements which research has to conform to; if a piece of research is not valid then it is worthless. Validity is equally essential to both the positivist and interpretivist paradigms (Cohen et al, 2007). Validity refers to how well a piece of research or instrument measures what it is proposed to measure or investigate (Flick, 2011). There are different types of validity and mechanisms to measure the validity of research and instruments (Thomas, 2009). External validity refers to the degree to which the results can be generalised across the general population (Cohen et al, 2007) and in this instance due to the small population size the researcher acknowledges that this research cannot be generalised across the population but this does not mean that learning cannot take place from the HEIs examined with regard to current practice. Other possible
threats to this research which were identified were the researcher’s positionality, potential bias on results, subjective interpretation of data and attitudes and the halo effect (Cohen et al, 2011). One mechanism to address some of these concerns and check for internal validity was the use of ‘member checking’ (Creswell and Miller, 2000). This involved allowing the research participants to view their transcripts to ensure accuracy. No participants asked for any changes or amendment to be made to the transcriptions. In order to address bias, the researcher used researched reflexivity which will be discussed in a later section.

The term reliability pertains to the precision of a design or instrument used (Flick, 2011). Brock-Utne (1996) argues that reliability is relevant to both the positivist and interpretivist paradigms. However, Wolcott (2005) proposes that reliability can be more problematic in an interpretivist paradigm. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that instead of the term reliability, the terms trustworthiness, transferability, credibility or dependability should be used. One of the main reliability issues of interviews is ‘face validity’ which determines if the questions used are measuring what they claim to measure (Cannell and Kahn, 1968). In order to increase reliability in this research, all the interview questions were reviewed and pre-tested on colleagues who had an understanding of the subject matter and were able to assess their reliability. Biases can also occur in interviews for many different reasons including sampling, poor interview skills, poor interpretation of responses and inconsistent coding of results (Oppenheim, 1992). In order to check for reliability, it is important that findings are consistent and replicable (Cohen et al, 2007). In simple terms this would mean that if another researcher was to administer the data collection instruments applied in this research, would the results indicate test – retest reliability. It is difficult to determine this without completing a retest, but the researcher has to the best of her ability ensured that this would be possible.

3.4.2 Reflexivity
Reflexivity recognises that the researcher is an integral part of the social world they are researching and that this social construct can have an impact on objectivity (Cohen et al, 2007). As the researcher is interested in this particular topic due to personal interests, the researcher should ensure that any personal agenda does not predominate (Cohen et al 2007). In order to address this the researcher in the study at the outset advised the reader of her positionality in the research. One of the main issues that may have impacted on the
The decision to do this research was that the researcher’s son was recently diagnosed with ASD. Although he is only two, this generated a curiosity in the researcher to identify what supports are available to students with diagnosed disabilities in higher education. As a result of this position and in an attempt to remain objective throughout the study, the researcher kept a reflection diary (appendix 3.7) for self-awareness of any issues that were impacting on her personally and could have the potential to create bias and subjectivity (Cohen et al, 2007). The researcher documented feelings and emotions and identified any preconceptions and assumptions which may have clouded the objectivity of the researcher during the study. After the interviews the researcher documented her feelings on how the interview was conducted. When writing up the findings the researcher also considered how her own personal life experiences may have influenced how the information was interpreted.

3.5 Ethical Considerations in Study

Ethical issues are a fundamental aspect of any research and Flick (2006) highlights that research should always be based on informed consent and avoidance of harm to participants. This includes not invading privacy and refraining from deceiving the participant about the aims and objectives of the research (Flick, 2006). In order to ensure that this study was ethically sound, in the first instance it received institutional ethical approval by the university. The researcher also had to become familiar with legislation, such as the Data Protection legislation from 1998 and 2003 pertaining to collecting and storing of information and the procedures outlined by the university. The professional codes of ethics of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors and the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) were also examined in order to protect the integrity of the research.

All research contains some levels of risk. Potential risks may include psychological harm to participants, damage of reputation, the privacy of participants and loss of time to name but a few (Thomas, 2009). Cohen et al (2007) identify three main areas of ethical concern with regard to interviews, namely informed consent, confidentiality and the consequence of the actual interview. With regard to this particular study, all participants were over 18, so therefore informed consent was requested from the individuals being interviewed. Additionally, each participant received a subject information letter (Appendix 3.2) in order to ensure that they were aware of the purpose of the research and the objectives of
the study. Participants were assured that anonymity would be maintained throughout the study. Despite these efforts the researcher was aware that due to the limited amount of HEIs in Ireland and the roles of the interviewee there was potential for identification of participants. In an effort to ensure that this was minimised, all identifying information in the interview transcripts has been deleted for the purpose of the study. The fundamental aim of researcher was to be ethically conscious whilst gaining greater insight into the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities. As this was a sensitive research topic the researcher has endeavoured to take all possible steps to ensure that it is an accurate reflection of the support provision and that all involved were treated with respect, sensitivity and remained anonymous throughout the research.

3.6 Conclusion
This chapter outlined the research methodology and the methods employed for this research. An interpretivist approach, which included data collection method of semi-structured interviews was utilised. The researcher has endeavoured to be ethical and to ensure the integrity of the research at all possible junctures. The benefits of conducting this exploratory study is that it would allow the researcher to gain greater insight to the career guidance offered to students with disabilities. The research can also be utilised by colleges to reflect on current practice, potentially identifying opportunities to improve service provision as appropriate. The next chapter presents the data analysis and findings of the primary research.
Chapter Four  

Data Analysis and Findings

4.0 Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to present the key findings of the primary research conducted as part of this study. This chapter will present the findings which were generated from the semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis of organisational sources, such as organisational websites.

4.1 Data Analysis Technique
The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis in line with the six phase model of Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved me becoming familiar with the data; generating initial codes, identifying, reviewing and defining themes and producing a report. In order to do this, the interviews of the career guidance practitioners and disability officers were separated into two groups and the data transcribed by the researcher. Initial data coding of the information was conducted by reviewing the data and then identifying common themes. The two groups were then cross referenced to each other.

The three overarching themes that emerged in the study were:
1. Support Provision to Students with Disability in HEIs
2. Perceived Challenges and Antecedents of Successful Inclusion of Disabled Students in HE.

4.2 Profile of the Participating HEI Staff
Four HEIs were represented as part of this study with six participants engaging in the interview process (See Table 4.1). All four of the HEIs had a student support service, each of which had a range of services available to students ranging from medical to chaplaincy. Given the focus of this study, the research examined two specific supports available in each of the HEIs, i.e. Career Services and Disability Support Services, in order to determine the level of provision to students with disabilities. Contextual information about these two different services was also gathered from the relevant institutional websites (See appendix 4.1 and appendix 4.2).
Table 4.1 Profile of Interview Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>HEI</th>
<th>Professional Qualification</th>
<th>Engagement in CPD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 1</td>
<td>Career Guidance Practitioner</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 2</td>
<td>Career Guidance Practitioner</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 3</td>
<td>Disability Officer</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 4</td>
<td>Career Guidance Practitioner</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 5</td>
<td>Disability Officer</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 6</td>
<td>Disability Officer</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three career guidance practitioners and three Disability Officers (DO) participated in the study representing four institutions. The Career Service in the four institutions offered broadly similar levels of career guidance support, however the number of personnel involved in the service varied considerably between the institutions and was not directly proportionate to student numbers. In terms of the Disability Support Services all four institutions offered very similar levels of support. However, some elements of support were outsourced or offered on a contract basis. The number of personnel involved varied between institutions and was more proportionate to student numbers than the Career Services (See Appendix 3.3).

4.3 Theme One: Students with Disability in HEIs and Support Provision

The first overarching theme addresses the issue of students with disability in HEIs and support provision. It presents a profile of the student with a disability and examines their levels of engagement with the Career Services and Disability Services in the relevant HEI.
4.3.1 Engagement with Services by Students with Disabilities

This sub-theme relates to the profile of the students with disabilities and their general engagement and retention. All four of the HEIs had a diverse population of students with disabilities and promoted equality of access as part of their ethos. According to the responding Disability Officers, the range of disabilities presenting to the Disability Service correlated with the conditions outlined by the DARE and AHEAD categories, namely ASD, ADD, ADHD, Blind/Vision Impaired/Deaf/Hard of Hearing/DCD, Mental Health Condition, Neurological Conditions, Speech and Language Communication Disorder, Significant Ongoing Illness, Physical Disability and Specific Learning Disorder. According to the Disability Officers from HEIs 2, 3 and 4, their institutions had representation from all categories and the range of disabilities was “across the board really” (Interviewee 6) and “absolutely every disability” (Interviewee 5). Nevertheless, there was a general consensus that even though all disabilities may be represented the most prevalent disability was specific learning disabilities, “the largest category is SLD, specific learning disabilities, after that it is significant ongoing illness and the hot-on-the-heels and growing is mental health” (Interviewee 3). Additionally, it was noted that Autism is becoming more prevalent, “we have the highest number of students with autism” (Interviewee 5) and “ten years ago we wouldn’t have had as many students with autism” (Interviewee 5).

The three Disability Officers felt that whilst engagement by disabled students was good in their respective HEIs, it was noted that there was a self-refer process or opt in system. Therefore, students had to disclose their disability in order to access supports. However, there was no formal data available with regard to retention rates of disabled students, rather information was anecdotal and varied across the respondent HEIs. One DO commented that it was “fairly good ... less than 10 would not have completed the college year” (Interviewee 6); “Can’t say ....retention is an issue ...we haven’t broken down the figures and actually analysed” (Interviewee 3) and “Higher than normal, it would be higher than the regular students” (Interviewee 5).

With regard to the engagement of disabled students with the respective career services, all of the career practitioners articulated that it was difficult to determine the level of engagement of students with disabilities, with the exception of one career office which received a list at the beginning of the academic year from the disability service of students.
who were going on placement that year. Interviewee 4 commented that “I work very closely with the disability office” and students who decided to disclose or allow their information to be shared with the careers service were contacted directly by the career practitioner; “So I email them, I offer them our service and I encourage them to come meet with me”. With regard to the other career service in HEIs 1, 2 and 4 it was noted that the careers service was an opt in service and it was up to the student to engage with the service.

In all of the HEIs the careers service only provided career guidance to support disabled students with their career decision making. Nevertheless, if the career guidance practitioner felt that the student needed support in another area of their lives he/she would be provided with information about relevant supports within the college but it would not be followed up on unless the student was at risk of harm, which had a different protocol (Interviewee 2 and 4). It was difficult to determine the numbers of disabled students who engaged in the service. Interviewee 2 commented that “it would be hard to even find that data” and this was supported by Interviewee 1 who identified that “a student may present with a hidden disability which the career practitioner may be unaware of”. In terms of frequency of engagement with disabled students, in general terms, Interviewee 2 estimated that they encounter students with disabilities on a weekly basis; “I would easily meet at least one student a week if not more with mental health issues such as anxiety or depression, but that does not mean that they are registered with the disability service” (Interviewee 2) and similarly by Interviewee 1 “very difficult to tell because not all will disclose, but I would [see], a visual disability, maybe 1 every two weeks”.

4.3.2 Disability Service and Support Provision

This sub-theme relates to the provision of supports within the disability service. The disability service in the four participating HEIs is available to all students with a disability who choose to register with it. Anyone can register with the disability service once they have a medical condition, but in order to qualify for some of the funded supports a formal diagnosis for certain conditions may be required. According to the findings the role of the Disability Officer (DO) is primarily administrative, involving managing the service, department funding and resource allocations. All of the DOs identified their role as supportive and person-centred with the primary goal being to identify the needs of the student and put in place the necessary supports to help him/her engage fully in student
life. The two larger HEIs also have access to an occupational therapist “for students that are really struggling with that transition to college, we develop those, you know time management, planning, life skills that would be the occupational therapy service” (Interviewee 3). All of the DOs indicated that an initial needs assessment is completed and the necessary supports are then put in place such as assistive technology, personal assistance, transport, and/or exam accommodations. Additionally, direct referrals can be made and/or recommended to relevant students with regard to the student’s services available (e.g. counselling, health centres) as deemed appropriate.

The findings indicate that most of the students with disabilities enter the Disability Service via the DARE programme immediately once they commence third level which necessitates a registration process and needs assessment; “we need them to register with us in order to support them properly” (Interviewee 3). However, all three of the DOs did report that some students may enter the service at a later time. This can be for a variety of reasons, for example, the course is getting more difficult and they may feel that they now need the support, or they have been advised to link in with the disability office as they are not achieving as well as they should; “a certain amount would come to us say after maybe failing all their first year exams or when they get as far as second year or third year even when things get a little bit more difficult” (Interviewee 6), and “we’d often have lecturers referring students”(Interviewee 3).

In all cases, once registered with the disability service, students are eligible for the supports of the disability office for the duration of their time in college unless they self-identify that they no longer need support and even then they are kept on the books in case they change their mind or need supports at a later date. The findings showed that within the disability service the individual needs of students are paramount; “it would really depend on the nature of the disability and the type of course …. you may find … two people with the exact same disability …. have completely different requirement” (Interviewee 5). Uniquely, HEI 3 has a specific programme in place for students with particular disabilities to support the transition from school to college:

“...for our first year students with autism coming in we know they’re going to have problems negotiating the social environment and all of that kind of stuff so our student support officer has a very specific program in place for
students with autism and students with ADD and ADHD ... we know they’re the ones who are at that risk of not being able to navigate; negotiate an environment like this ... socially and otherwise so there’s a very specific program” (Interviewee 5).

This was found to be proactive, developing transitions programmes in conjunction with relevant organisations that support students with disabilities and creating opportunities for students to engage and familiarise themselves with college life. One example was linking in with students supported by the National Council for the Blind who may be considering applying to college through orientation activities; “second level students who are visually impaired and they'll come on campus for 3 days and they’re going to do a load of activities” (Interviewee 5). There was no evidence of similar transition or settling in programmes within the other participating HEIs.

4.3.3 Career Guidance Service and Support Provision

This sub-theme relates to the support provided by the four HEIs career services. An overview of the service can be seen in the Appendix 4.1.

From the primary research it is evident that the role of the HEI career guidance practitioner is to support all of the student population, including students with disabilities. This involves one-to-one career guidance and support with educational placements where appropriate. Part of the role involves organising and managing the activities of career guidance service, ensuring that relevant group workshops are provided, liaising with employers to identify their needs, ensuring that students are developing the necessary skills for the workplace and have an effective toolkit to market themselves to potential employers. This is provided through “drop in appointments, workshops on various things from CV clinics, interview techniques, networking, postgraduate study, LinkedIn, personality profile, industry sector analysis. We work very closely, that’s one thing about the careers module, we link very closely to the main stakeholders, like employers” (Interviewee 1). However, only the two larger HEIs have a designated career guidance practitioner to support disabled students. Interviewee 2 had “a designated case load, the different careers advisors here have different designated caseloads so mine is the college of science, the college of nursing, medicine and health sciences and international students
and students with a disability”. For Interviewee 4 the role was new and its purpose was to “assist the students who are on the registered disability list in relation to sourcing their [am] placement”

In all of the HEIs, the career service is an opt-in service for the entire student population, “it’s up to the student to access the service” (Interviewee 2), with the responsibility on the student to articulate and seek out support for their specific needs. However, Interviewee 4 did actively encourage students with disabilities to attend; “So I email them I offer them our service and I encourage them to come meet with me so we can discuss requirements or accommodations that need to be put in place in order to support them with their placement”. Some of the HEIs link in with different academic departments delivering career development skills as part of their course work so that students develop some generic skills “we have [am], an employability careers module that I developed with one of the academics” (Interviewee 1).

The participating career services are also responsible for collating data on the progression of students; “I have responsibility for the first destination report, so we do that every summer” (Interviewee 1); “there’s a graduate destination survey” (Interviewee 2), “we do, [am], a FDR survey” (Interviewee 4). One of the career services also has responsibility for retention initiatives in the college; “we are involved with others, academics and a retention committee in liaising with ... first year students and the retention initiatives” (Interviewee 1). Although, all of the four HEIs produce a First Destinations report, there is no mechanism to track the progression of students with disabilities in this system as the focus is on general progression from courses to employment.

All of the career guidance practitioners in this study advised that the same models and guidance interventions are used with students with disabilities as those with the general student population. They include the person centred approach (Rogers 1951), Ali and Graham’s (1996) career counselling model, career construction theory (Savakis 2013), developmental career theory (Super 1980) and employability models (Darce et al. 2007). Nevertheless, Interviewee 4 stated that the model and intervention utilised depends on the individual student, and career practitioners generally access their “toolbox” when meeting with clients. Notably, Interviewee 4 whose activities are linked directly to the disability
office develops a person centred plan with the student which can range from minimal intervention to going on site for induction during work placement.

Although the career practitioners advised that the theories and interventions do not change, it was indicated that the pace or style of delivery may change in order to meet the needs of the particular student (Interviewee 1). The main differences noted by Interviewee 1 were that the disabled student may need more support with regard to transition to the workforce and disclosure in the workplace. Disclosure was viewed as a complex matter and needs to be considered “case by case” (Interviewee 2). Although no career guidance practitioner would encourage disclosure, as it was ultimately the student’s decision, they ensure that they are cognisant of their rights; “I make them aware of the protections” (Interviewee 2). The role of the career guidance practitioner is to tease out the issue of disclosure in a safe environment (Interviewee 2). The general view was that appropriate disclosure placed the student in a better position in the interview process for employment as it is a mechanism to eliminate some difficulties arising in the normal recruitment procedure. From an educational perspective, all of the career guidance practitioners felt that students can be potentially disadvantaged if they choose not to disclose as they may not be accessing all the supports they are entitled to within the HEI; “it’s a disadvantage not to access the supports” (Interviewee 2) “the fact that they’ve disclosed. I suppose, I mean that they’re getting the supports and availing of it” (Interviewee 1).

In this study, two of the career offices have in-house programmes developed to support students with disabilities at a local level and all of the four institutions involved link in with national supports provided by AHEAD, e.g. the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programme. Interviewee 2 felt that these programmes provided hopefulness to the students “the amount of hope in the room once we start talking about the WAM program, it’s palpable, you can sense the optimism just rising.” However, it was noted by one career practitioner that the competition for placements and internships is difficult and the jobs available through the WAM programme were not always available locally to the students which made them more difficult to access (Interviewee 1).
4.4 Theme Two – Perceived Challenges and Antecedents of Successful Inclusion of Disabled Students in HE

This second theme relates to the challenges and antecedents of successful inclusion of disabled students in HE. It first examines the factors which contribute to success and then explores the perceived challenges that can often prohibit or reduce optimal inclusion.

4.4.1 Perceived Challenges for Students with Disabilities

According to the interviewees some of the perceived challenges experienced by disabled students are similar to those encountered by the general student population, namely wrong course choice; the transition to college; the method of assessments; growing mental health issues especially anxiety, exam stress, independent living and self-management. However, according to the DOs, there are additional challenges for the students with disabilities such as a dependency on SNA supports, a reluctance to engage with technology, the disability being viewed differently and not understanding the supports available or linking in with them. Interviewee 3 also commented that the name “Disability Office” may discourage students to engage with it and some colleges were now rebranding and merging with other support services to make it more accessible to students “the disability support service, it doesn't have to be called that. We are now merged with the access center which is a nicer title at least” (Interviewee 3)

4.4.2 Factors which Contribute to Successful Inclusion of Disabled Students in HE

It was reported by both the Disability Officers and career guidance practitioners that there are many different factors that contribute to the successful participation of the disabled student in college life, for example disclosure and being able to access the necessary supports required in the education setting. Other factors that can contribute, from the experience of the DO in this study is the student themselves, their resilience, self-esteem and attitude. Furthermore, a sense of belonging, peer support, preparation for the transition to the world of work or college, developing relevant skills and confidence, picking the right course, motivation, engaging with supports and having clear goals were identified. One particular DO felt that preparation was the key to success; “If they’re not prepared, if they don’t have the skills, if nobody has realized at second level that this is what we need to do for the student to succeed. They really do have to pick the right course. It’s more important for a student with a disability to pick the right course...” (Interviewee 5). Additionally, it is important to establish if they have supports from home
or if it is their first time living away from home as this can potentially have an impact on the transition to third level. However, it was noted by one DO that “Sometimes we think it’s disability related when in actual fact it’s transition related” (Interviewee 5). This was supported by Interviewee 3 who commented “it’s just to develop those skills, those self-management skills that often are lacking ya know, it’s transition from second level to third level”.

All of the career guidance practitioners felt that it is difficult to determine the impact of the disability on the student’s participation in college, as it depends on too many variables, such as the student, the disability and the level of support available. One career practitioner reflected that the students are so young; “just babies” at the start of their third level education and independence journey (Interviewee 4). However, the career guidance practitioners did identify certain factors that contribute to the success of students with disabilities namely, family support, peer support and support from within the college from the relevant support services. Interviewee 2 commented that engaging in “support services obviously have an impact”. Additionally, it was noted that the self-esteem and confidence of disabled students has a direct impact on their success, including their personal resilience and self-awareness of their capabilities, i.e. strengths and limitations. Nevertheless, Interviewee 4 also identified that some of these supports can be difficult to manage “parental engagement is a great help but it’s also a hard place to be”.

4.5 Theme Three - Collaboration between Disability and Guidance Services
The final theme that emerged in the findings relates to collaboration between the two services investigated and the opportunities and challenges that exist. The following section examines the levels of collaboration, opportunities and challenges for the Career Guidance and Disability Services.

4.5.1 Levels of Collaboration between Disability and Guidance Services
In the four HEIs there were no formal policies or procedures in place with regard to the sharing of student information or working collaboratively. All of the colleges indicated that information was not shared without student consent due to the Data Protection legislation. However, there were excellent examples of collaboration or occasional cooperation reported by the interviewees in order to meet the needs of students. The careers service and disability service in HEI 3 share a list of students with disabilities, with the
student’s approval, for support in securing work placement which allows for a direct link with the careers service. HEI 2 had delivered a six-week workshop programme, led by the careers service but supported by the disability service which was aimed at students graduating in the forthcoming year in order to support their transition to employment. This was a new initiative and had proven to be a great success for the institution.

All of the DOs reported that they advise and refer to the career service if students need career information. However, one observed that at the beginning of the college journey, the student is “bombarded with information” (Interviewee 3), consequently they tend not to give the information about the career services as part of the disability induction as they are trying to get the student to link in with other supports to support the transition to college. However, it is something that the disability service in HEI 2 was willing to explore further. A key consideration was that it would be important to identify the most appropriate time to give information with regard to career services and it was suggested that January of first year might be a viable option. In general, it was felt by all the interviewees that linking in with the career office would be of benefit to the student in order for them to explore their options and develop a clearly defined career plan early in their education.

4.5.2 Opportunities and Challenges for the Disability and Career Services

From the findings it is evident that, presently, there is the appetite for recognising and supporting diversity and equality in the HEIs and employment sector. The aim of national policy and the individual HEI strategies is to increase the number of non-traditional students. One DO identified the opportunity to develop and embrace a universal design for learning which would provide a positive learning experience for the whole student population (Interviewee 3). Additionally, both the career practitioners and disability officers were able to identify potential opportunities for collaboration with each other such as working on more projects together, the provision of collaborative training and exploring the sharing of information with student consent. Furthermore, all of the career advisors identified the opportunity for engaging with employers regionally to develop and strengthen employment opportunities for students with disabilities. It was felt that currently there was a lot more focus on diversity and inclusion in the business world. This in turn creates opportunity to link in with businesses, however there was an unstated fact that discrimination still does take place “there is a reality which I’m not talking about,
However, the findings indicate there are a number of challenges in providing supports to students with disabilities from both the perspective of the disability and career services over the last number of years. From the disability service perspective, the main challenges relate to the change in the profile of the student with disabilities with more students presenting with mental health issues and ASD. It was also perceived that there was over-reliance on the medical model which leaves international students and students who are struggling with mental health issues and undiagnosed at a disadvantage as they may not be eligible for funding supports (Interviewee 3). In order to address this, it was believed that the HEIs need to employ a universal design for learning and this was being examined in one of the HEIs in the study (Interviewee 3). For example, there is an initiative to video lectures which could then be uploaded to the college learning portals which would allow all students to benefit (Interviewee 3). In addition, particular challenges were identified in HEI 4, whereby staff resources are sometimes stretched at particular times of the year due to the influx of new students or during exam periods (Interviewee 6).

The reported challenges for the career guidance practitioner working with disabled students were similar in each of the three HEIs where they work. Primarily, the volume of clients needing support from the service and the importance of giving extra time to students with disabilities is an issue. It was felt that many dropped out of their courses due to wrong course choice, which applied to all of the student population rather than just students with disabilities. In addition, Interviewee 1 argued that more career guidance should be provided at second level to support student’s decision making. Additionally, two of the career practitioners admitted that there may be lack of awareness of the individual needs of students with disabilities due to variance amongst students (Interviewee 1 and 2) and that more training may be required. Furthermore, there appears to be insufficient time to engage with employers in order to support disabled students with their employment seeking opportunities.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter identified the main findings of the primary research. In general terms the needs of disabled students are similar to all third level students such as being accepted
and supported with the transition process. From a career guidance perspective, it was evident that the career guidance practitioners in this study use the same ‘tool kit’ for all students including students with disabilities. Nevertheless, disabled students do have specific needs that require services to spend additional time assisting them with issues such as disclosure, accommodations and employment support programmes. There was also a general consensus that many of the issues which affect disabled students are transition related and the importance of preparation and correct course choice at second level is evident. Support from peers, family and the HEIs were identified as important contributory factors to successful transition and inclusion. The four institutions in this study endeavour to support the entire student population including students with disabilities and some exciting initiatives emerged in the findings. Essentially, there appears to be an appetite to collaborate and improve service provision with the HEIs promoting a more inclusive and diverse student population. Nonetheless, there are significant constraints and challenges for HEI’s disability and career services such as limited funding, insufficient time and lack of training in some instances. It is important to note that, due to this being an exploratory study with a small number of participants, the findings cannot be generalised across the sector. However, it does give an interesting snap shot of the provision of service to students with disabilities in HE in Ireland today.
Chapter 5  Discussion

5.0  Introduction
The aim of this chapter is to provide a synthesised critical discussion of the overall findings of the study and relate them back to the extant literature and research questions. This next section will revisit the underpinning research question and address how the findings are presented.

5.1  Underpinning Research Questions
The primary research question asked: What supports are provided to students with disabilities with respect to career guidance in third level education in Ireland?

The research objectives required to address the overarching research question are:

1. What is the profile of students with disabilities attending Irish HEIs and the supports available?
2. What is the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities in Irish Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)?
3. What are the possible challenges experienced by HEI career services and disability services with regard to supporting students with disabilities?
4. Do career services and disability services work collaboratively to support students with disabilities?
5. What types of good practice in student support are evident in the HEIs examined?

As an exploratory study with an interpretative approach the findings elucidate the perceptions of three career guidance practitioners and three disability officers working in four HEIs in Ireland. The four HEIs’ had career guidance and disability services, although the size and provision of the individual services differed considerably. Factors that contributed to the level of service offered included the size of the relevant HEI, number of students being supported and funding allocation. In the literature it was determined that these services develop locally to meet the needs of the individual HEI (NGF, 2007) and this was found to be the case in the institutions examined. The next sections will address key findings of the study through three overarching themes of (1) Students with disabilities in HEI and support provision, (2) Factors which contribute to successful inclusion and perceived challenges and (3) Service collaboration to support students with disabilities.
5.2 Students with Disabilities in HEIs and Support Provision

This first thematic section will examine the findings with regard to the profile of students with disabilities in HEI and the support provision available to them in both types of services.

5.2.1 Students with Disabilities Attending Irish HEIs

It is evident that each of the HEIs examined as part of this study embrace diversity and that the numbers of students with disabilities or additional needs engaging in third level education is increasing. A very early finding of this study was the general difficulty that exists with regard to determining the ‘exact’ number of students with disabilities engaging in higher education and in particular within the four HEIs in this study. The findings do indicate that approximately 4 – 7% of students in HEIs present with a disability. This is anecdotal evidence based on approximations given by participants (see appendix 3.3). According to the HEA it is estimated that 11.1% of new entrants to third level have a disability, but 49% believe they do not require support (HEA, 2016). Recently published figures indicate that the figure of students registered with disabilities is 5.2% (AHEAD, 2017). The disparity in these figures is clearly due to the fact that not all students with a disability choose to register with the disability services. Despite the difficulty in quantifying the exact number or students, published reports do indicate that the numbers of disabled students is increasing and the HEI sector is on track to reach its inclusivity target of 8% by 2019 (HEA, 2015). This study identified that the growing numbers of students with disabilities is placing significant demands on existing services with concerns about time, staff and funding resource allocations. Similar to that espoused in the literature (Couzens et al, 2015; AHEAD 2017), participants in this study advocated that universal design for learning would enhance the learning experience for all students including students with (hidden) disabilities and help alleviate some of pressure on individual departments.

The current findings confirm the broad range of disabilities being presented within the HE student population and affirm the position of SLD as being the most prevalent disability. Although SLD is the most common, published reports show it is decreasing with a 15.5% reduction in the last eight years (AHEAD 2017, 2013, 2010; HEA 2016, 2013, 2010). This could be because new categories have been added to the profile over the years, such as dyspraxia and speech and language conditions, and it is likely that the previously
general SLD candidates are now reclassified as ADD, ADHD or ASD, for example. The findings show that ASD is increasing and this in turn can create challenges for disability and career services and the HEI as a whole (AHEAD 2017, 2013, 2010; HEA 2016, 2013, 2010). Changes in the profile of disabilities will result in a change of dynamic in third level colleges and there is no doubt that more targeted supports may be required to support the disabled student both academically and socially (Enright et al, 1996; Muller, 2014; Irving, 2005; AHEAD 2017, 2013, 2010; HEA 2016, 2013, 2010).

Mental health issues and significant ongoing illness were also identified as particularly noteworthy within the spectrum of disabilities presenting at higher educational institutions in this study. The research respondents perceived these as the second highest disability in the student population. According to the literature significant ongoing illnesses has remained relatively stable ranging from 10 – 10.6% over the course of the last eight years (AHEAD 2017, 2013, 2010; HEA 2016, 2013, 2010). However, in the current research it appears that “hidden disabilities” such as mental health conditions are increasing and this is posing significant challenges for the HEI sector. In published reports mental health conditions were the second most common category (AHEAD, 2016b) growing from 8% to 12.6% in the last 8 years (AHEAD 2017, 2013, 2010; HEA 2016, 2013, 2010). Dooley and Fitzgerald (2012), however, postulate that it is more likely that 1 in 4, or 25% of young people suffer from mental health issues indicating that mental health conditions are likely to be under represented in HEI figures from AHEAD and the HEA. It could be argued that a mental health condition may not be considered a disability by the student population or students have not acquired formal diagnosis and therefore do not register for and are unaware of available supports from the disability service. Nevertheless, students with mental health conditions are most vulnerable in terms of dropping out of their third level studies (AHEAD, 2016b). MacNamara (2001) has argued that students with mental health conditions are often the most vulnerable and find it difficult to link in with services.

There was a lack of concrete information provided in this study with regard to retention levels of students with disabilities. However, articulated perceptions were that retention of disabled students was “fairly good” (Interviewee 6) and “higher than normal” (Interviewee 5). This feedback is entirely anecdotal as it was specifically identified by the career guidance practitioners that it was not possible to determine retention figures.
amongst disabled students as they are not monitored from a disability perspective. While this research did not examine the retention issues amongst disabled students or explore the growth in mental health conditions, both these themes emerged as key issues that warrant further exploration to understand their impact on HE career guidance work.

5.2.3 Career Guidance and Support Provision

The HEI career services investigated in this study are designated to provide support to the entire student population, of which disabled students would be considered a subset. The services provided were numerous and ranged from guidance counselling, providing information on career opportunities, providing advice and assessment, facilitating group and classroom guidance activities, vocational preparation and referral to other agencies. The activities correspond with the functions of the career guidance practitioner as outlined in the literature (IGC, 2017; NGF, 2007). The number of career guidance practitioners employed differed considerably across the respective HEIs, however there is no doubt that the ratio of career guidance practitioners to students is very low in HE across the board, a fact first identified as a concern almost a decade ago in NGF (2007).

It was evident from the interviews that the career practitioners are under pressure and there is a distinct lack of time to undertake many key activities. In the context of supports for disabled students this includes activities such as networking and liaising with employers to advocate for students with disabilities. Whilst time constraints were particularly noticeable in the smaller HEIs, it was also an issue in the larger HEIs, although the larger ones appeared to have other internal structures that supported linkage with local employers. In order to compensate for poor time and staff-student ratios, all of the HEIs utilise IT supports, provision of classroom modules and workshops to disseminate and deliver necessary information to the whole student population. This approach, while useful and optimises resources, does reduce the ability of the career practitioners to engage directly with students and tailor supports to their particular disabilities and needs.

Identifying the specific numbers of students with disabilities engaging with the career service was problematic in this study since in each of the HEIs the career services do not capture this information or record it on their systems. The espoused rationale was that due to data protection legislation, information pertaining to disabilities is not shared
across departments nor can it be collated into institutional reports without student consent. Even key performance reports used by the career services such as the First Destinations Report (FDR), do not identify students with disabilities meaning that it would be difficult to determine the progression of students with disabilities to employment or further study. It is indicated in literature that employment figures are lower for students with disabilities, (Lindsay et al, 2014). However, the data constraints identified in this study demonstrate the difficulty for researchers or guidance practitioners to validate these potential issues or impacts without clear information being captured at source.

5.2.4 Career Guidance Interventions

According to Watts (1996) there are four main overarching ideological positions underpinning guidance policy and provision, namely, liberal, conservative, progressive, and radical. The liberal approach is non directive and is influenced by the Rogerian (1961) humanistic approach and appears to align with the type of interventions described by the career practitioners in this study. All of the practitioners advocated the concept of empowerment of all students, thus enabling students with disabilities to be autonomous (Rogers, 1961). Other theories and models employed by the practitioners were those of Super (1980), Savickas (2013), Ali and Graham (1996) and Darce Pool and Sewell (2007). Thus the career guidance practitioners adopt an eclectic style and a tool box of resources to dip into in order to engage and support disabled students with regard to their career development and employability.

The main focus of the career practitioners’ work in this study is the career and vocational development of students. Students are referred to the institutions’ counselling services for more personal and ongoing issues. There was an absence of some theoretical approaches such as Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 2002) and the Cognitive Information Processing approach (Sampson et al, 2004). These approaches may be of some value to the work of the career practitioner with students with disabilities. The challenge of upskilling in a world of finite resources is that acquiring expertise in new interventions/approaches takes time, which is currently limited, and training potentially reduces the number of guidance counsellors available to meet the needs of the students.
Frihe and Aune (1996) have indicated that much of the career development and job search process is the same for all students. Nevertheless, in the current study additional tasks emerged related to students with disabilities, such as the issue of disclosure of their disability and effective marketing of their strengths. Enright et al (1996) have advocated that counsellors should employ techniques to assist the student to identify the strengths of their disability and allocate more time offering advice on disclosure, networking, resilience and accommodations. Disclosure of any disability is a very complex matter (AHEAD, 2013; Nolan et al 2014) and this assertion is supported by the career guidance practitioners in this study. There is no legal obligation on a person to disclose a disability (Nolan et al 2014). However, this study found that disabled students may be disadvantaged if they choose not to disclose and are therefore not in a position to avail of many supports which may pose a barrier to their learning (Storr et al, 2011). It is argued that the learning environment should be supportive and minimise potential harm for the student (Andre & Manson, 2004; Nolan et al, 2014). In practice if the career guidance practitioner is unaware of a student’s disability, students may miss out on the necessary time, valuable information on potential progression pathways, students’ rights and protections and information on grants available to support the provision of reasonable accommodations in employment. In practice there appears to be limited time offered to support students with disabilities and initial appointments in this study often ranged from 15 to 30 minutes which may be due to the limited time career services can provide to students. However, if this need is not met the students with disabilities may not engage fully. Therefore, more time may be needed to support students with disabilities in order to ensure that they feel comfortable, safe and in a position where they may choose to disclose any concerns with regard to their disability and career progression (AHEAD, 2008; Enright et al, 1996). Notwithstanding the articulated constraints and resource limitations of the guidance services, there were interesting examples of good practice identified in this study related to collaboration, referral and particular needs-based interventions. The career service in HEI 3 received information from the disability service regarding students with disabilities who consented to share their information. This allowed the career practitioner to contact students directly encouraging their participation before commencing mandatory work placements. This worked very well as students are linked in and supported by the career practitioner as part of their educational journey and an appropriate plan to support students is put in place well in advance of the work placement. These mandatory work placements also allowed for the student with
disabilities to develop necessary skills and develop a network increasing the potential to gain employment into the future.

Other mechanisms of support were identified in the other HEIs but the referrals were individually based or on an ad-hoc basis. Additionally, national programmes exist within the four HEIs investigated to support graduate employment of students with disabilities, such as WAM, GetAHEAD and Specialisterne programmes (AHEAD, 2017; Wareham & Sonne, 2008). However, some challenges appear to exist due to time constraints to develop relationships with local employers. The focus on employability is now a key priority in HEIs (HEA, 2015) and the implication of not linking with employers to support disabled students transition to employment is that employment figures for this cohort of students will remain lower than the rest of the student population.

5.2.2 Disability Service and Support Provision

The findings established that the HE disability service provides a variety of services to students in need. They range from reasonable accommodations related to the examination process, assistive technology, personal assistance, transport assistance, learning support or occupational therapy, depending on what is available in a particular HE disability service (DARE, 2017; AHEAD, 2017). All of the participants in this study stated that students can access the disability support services at any stage of their educational journey and other departments and academic staff actively refer students to them. The two larger HEIs in the current study have a more developed disability service, with supports such as occupational therapy and stronger links with their career services. This is more likely due to funding provision and student support structures which have evolved over time (NGF, 2007). While the four HEIs examined had broadly similar service types it was difficult to ascertain the level of service availability and provision within each institution especially since the level of support is based on individual needs analysis since no two students with a disability are the same. The challenge is that students in smaller HEIs may not be getting access to the same level of disability supports as those in larger institutions which has the potential to disadvantage the student. This equity of access to services could be viewed as a social justice issue and both the literature (Ryan 2017) and practitioners in this study advocate for a set standard of supports to all students with disabilities.
The HE disability service is an opt-in service and the student has a choice as to whether or not to disclose his/her disability and seek available supports. A supportive mechanism in the HEI sector to encourage the student to disclose is the DARE application system which allows students with diagnosed disabilities to avail of a reduced points system to gain entry to certain courses (DARE, 2017). All students who register with DARE have their information passed on to the disability office for a needs assessment. Anecdotally, engagement in the disability service is good when students access via the DARE route. However, it is difficult to determine the percentage of students with disabilities who are not utilising the services available if they have not come through the DARE programme as they need to disclose voluntarily and link in directly with the disability office.

Both the literature and the research respondents highlighted a number of barriers to accessing and availing of disability supports within educational institutions. These barriers include lack of medical reports or diagnosis, fear of disclosure, stigma, lack of awareness of the services and potentially physical access (AHEAD, 2017; Shevlin, 2004). These articulated barriers are especially pertinent when considered alongside the reported growth in hidden disabilities such as ASD and mental health conditions previously discussed. A key finding in this study is that there appears to be an over reliance on the medical model in both identifying disability and allocating disability supports. Even the DARE scheme has inherent medical requirements, age criteria and funding stipulations that preclude participation by certain cohorts or categories of disability. A Human Rights model has been widely advocated (Degenger, 2016; UN, 2017), as well as a universal design for learning which would enhance the learning experience for the whole student cohort (Couzens et al, 2015; AHEAD 2017). It was also highlighted in this research that the name “Disability Office” may discourage students to engage and seek necessary supports. In the findings the terms ‘Access Office’ and ‘Disability Office’ were used interchangeably in the different HEIs. It is clear that there exists an opportunity for a rebranding of disability services so as to remove stigmatising labels, broaden inclusivity, build awareness and make students more inclined to avail of the supports offered by the disability service.
5.3 Factors which contribute to successful inclusion in HE and perceived challenges

This section examines the factors which contribute to successful inclusion of students with disabilities in HE and also some of the perceived challenges for this cohort of students.

5.3.1 Factors contributing to successful inclusion

From the perspectives of the career practitioners and disability officers in this study it was determined that students who are well prepared, resilient, have strong self-esteem, a positive attitude, support from family, peers and who generally feel connected to the college enjoy greater educational and inclusion success. Additionally, the importance of disclosure of their disability and engagement with the two services to support their educational journey is evident.

A key finding was that many of the challenges that students with disabilities encounter are similar to those experienced by the whole student population and as such were typically related to the transition to college life, mental health and wrong course choice (Friehe and Aune, 1996; Ochs and Roessler, 2004, MacNamara, 2001). This reinforces the need for a whole college approach and collaboration between the different support services. The importance of career guidance with regard to the transition to college was highlighted by many of the participants in this study and is also advocated in the literature (MacNamara, 2001). Both the career guidance practitioners and disability officers highlighted that many issues arise from the transition to college and from initial wrong course choice. In recent years re-allocations have occurred in the provision of career guidance in second level education where elements of course choice and transition planning are first dealt with it (DES, 2012; IGC, 2016; Hearne et al, 2016). Difficulties in the transition from school to college often correspond to a lack of success in early career development tasks such as experiencing success, observation of career related activities to build confidence and an opportunity to experience or develop the necessary skills for potential work experience (Ochs and Roessler, 2004). Therefore, specially tailored transition programmes may be needed such as the type of provision in HEI 3, and have the potential to have a positive impact on the transition and retention of students with disabilities.
Career maturity and the development of a self-concept to support career development and decision-making have been identified as very important for individuals (Super, 1980; Sharf, 2010). In HEI 3 it was evident that the supports afforded to the students with disabilities via the mandatory placement and the link to the career service a year in advance allows students to develop through the indispensable support from the career practitioner. Super’s (1980) theory of career development proposes that one’s self-concept changes over time and develops as a result of life experience and the process which has been developed in HEI 3 nurtures this very concept.

Confidence and self-efficacy for students is very important especially for students with disabilities (Enright et al 1996). One of the primary functions of the career guidance counsellor is empowerment and preparing students for the world of work (IGC, 2017; Enright et al 1996). This was resonated in all of the interviews. The transition to work is a significant milestone in a young person’s life and career guidance has the potential to positively support the transition for students with disabilities and the career development needs of the student (Nag, 2014). In the findings it was established that the career guidance practitioner plays a pivotal role in ensuring that students with disabilities have developed some of the necessary skills for the world of work, through workshops, classroom modules and individual guidance so that they are in a better position to market themselves and their strengths to the potential employer. However, for the most part it is an opt-in service, which poses a challenge for determining the number of students with disabilities who actually engage with the career service.

The findings of this study correlate with previous research that success in early career development tasks such as experiencing success, observation of career related activities to build confidence and an opportunity to experience or develop the necessary skills for potential work experience can be of major benefit to the student (Ochs and Roessler 2004). This is supported by Moxley (2002) who advocated that the career guidance counsellor should encourage and promote learning experiences such as early work experience where possible to develop relevant skills for the workforce. There is often a significant delay with regard to the career decision making skills, self-belief, career outcome expectations, career exploration and levels of vocational identity with students with disabilities (Ochs and Roessler 2001). Therefore, career guidance practitioners should intervene as early as possible with disabled students and intensify their efforts in
order to bridge the gap. This reality was recognised and supported by the career practitioners interviewed.

5.3.2 Challenges to inclusion of disabled students

Based on the preceding section it would be appropriate to assert that an absence of or low levels of requisite resilience, career maturity and transition preparation can all contribute to less than optimal inclusion and success in HE for disabled students and this was affirmed by the participants in this study. Notwithstanding the myriad of factors that can help inclusion, this research found that in many cases the greatest barrier or challenge to inclusion was the non-disclosure of a disability and the consequent failure to avail of relevant supports. Julal (2016) argues that a predictor of success for students with disabilities in HE is engagement in support services during the first year of university. It is evident when a student discloses a disability and links in with the services (AHEAD, 2008 & 2013) there is increased propensity of success. Appropriate supports can be put in place with an individual’s educational plan. However, the services are “opt in” services and students are “bombarded” with a huge amount of information which can cause challenges. The findings would indicate that not all students with disabilities engage with services when they commence third level.

Nevertheless, there was conflicting evidence in the current findings with regard to high achieving students with disabilities who appear to seek out the relevant supports early on. Conversely other students who have a poor self-awareness may not be in a position to identify that they need support. It is evident in HEI 3 that the early intervention model contributes to the success of the disabled students it assists. The challenge, especially for those that are not directly linked to the disability office, is that as an opt-in service, students with disabilities may not be proactively engaging with the service and as a result not as much preparation work can be put in place due to time limitation and lack of disclosure. Making disability and guidance supports both accessible and appealing to target students is a key challenge for the higher education institutions and one for which appropriate energies and resources should be targeted at.
5.4 Service Collaboration to Support Students with Disabilities
This section discusses the collaborative efforts within the HEIs to support students with disabilities and identifies possible opportunities and challenges in facilitating collaboration.

5.4.1 Levels and Examples of Collaboration
It is suggested that universities and colleges should respond to diversity with a whole college approach (AHEAD, 2016a) and attempt to improve service delivery and collaboration between departments (Friehe & Aune, 1996). In this study there was considerable variation in the levels of collaboration between the career services and the disability services across the four HEIs. Some appear to be more progressive than others. The two larger HEIs appear to have more developed services with better formed linkages with other departments, allowing students with disabilities to avail of more extensive supports. The consequence being that where departments are creating more opportunities to work together, students with disabilities were being provided with a superior service to those that do not. Although collaboration between the career and disability services was evident, there was an absence of formal policies to promote or support such collaborations. HEI 3 was unique in having a highly evolved and successful collaborative process which links both the career and disability office together.

The other HEIs were not yet at this stage but there was evidence of some joint programmes being delivered and there was an appetite for change within the departments. HEI 1 identified as having less opportunities for formal collaborative processes but the departments do link via regular meetings under the student services umbrella. HEI 2 had recently developed the EmployABILITY Programme which has proved to be a great success and received an Association of Higher Education Careers Service (AHECS) award. Overall, new initiatives and ways of working are being explored and the career and disability services in HEI 2 have an appetite to embrace collaborative work, a whole college approach and universal design for learning in order to meet the anticipated growth in number in the coming years.

In addition to internal collaborative initiatives, there was evidence of developments regarding national programmes to support disabled students engage in the labour market, such as the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programme in the four HEIs. However, these
programmes were identified as competitive and nationally positioned which can pose problems for students from an access point of view due to location. Furthermore, there were no figures available to identify how many places are available nationally. Nevertheless, these initiatives were widely welcomed by the participants as they instil hope in students with disabilities and address the need for closer links with the labour market. The next section looks at the challenges and opportunities for the career and disability services.

5.4.2 Challenges to and opportunities for further collaboration

The findings indicate that there are some challenges with regard to how career and disability services as well as other departments collaborate, in particular the data protection legislation issue. There is no doubt that cautious attitudes about sharing information may be stymieing some openness to collaboration, however there are many opportunities evident also.

There is an opportunity to develop transition programmes as identified in HEI 3, and relevant workshops as identified in HEI 2 which would support disabled students with their transition to higher education, employment and meet other identified needs. The challenge for such programmes is the provision of resources, such as time and finances, to develop relevant relationships with agencies such as secondary schools, support agencies or employers. It is evident, that both the career and disability services in this study are under considerable pressure to meet targets, and that there is a distinct lack of time to network and liaise with employers to advocate for students with disabilities at a local level. Whilst there is pressure from policymakers to increase inclusion and participation rates of students with disabilities to 8%, (HEA, 2015) there appears to be limited commitment to investment in funding or resources (AHEAD, 2017). According to the practitioners in this study, increased resource allocation is required in order for inclusion policy to be successful.

Diversity and inclusion are promoted from a policy, education and employment context (Government of Ireland, 2004, 2015, HEA, 2015). There is an impetus within all sectors to showcase their diversity which creates opportunity for the development of mentoring, employment and work experience programmes for students at local level. On a positive note, all of the career advisors in this study identified the opportunity of networking with
employers regionally to develop and strengthen employment opportunities for students with disabilities but resources such as time and staffing numbers may not permit this in the HEIs with current resource allocations. A potential challenge of this is the time that is required to develop the systems and relationships required. Furthermore, there is a “tension” between inclusivity and discrimination which is not addressed in this research. This observation is supported by Irving (2005) who contends that the overuse of words such as ‘inclusion’ often simplifies extremely complex social issues and does not necessarily generate an inclusive society.

Identifying training needs which continue to upskill practitioners and identify new ways of working together would be beneficial. Within the HEIs there is an opportunity to develop policies to support a collaborative way of working which would support a whole college approach to working with students with disabilities, incorporating a social justice approach, the human rights model and universal design for learning (Muller, 2014; AHEAD, 2007).

5.5 Conclusion
This chapter has critically discussed the overall findings of this interpretivist study. It is irrefutable that the number of students with disabilities engaging in HE is increasing. Additionally, there is now an impetus on policy makers, HEIs and employers to be more inclusive and recognise the diversity of individuals in society. However, this places significant demands on the HEI career and disability services in terms of the quality of their provision in the absence of adequate resourcing and recognition of the value of such services to students. The proposition that the Irish HEI sector needs to embrace a human rights model and a universal design for learning to support the whole student population, including students with disability is now timely.
Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to draw conclusions within the context of the research aim and objectives of this study. The chapter also identifies the strengths and limitations of the study. In conclusion the chapter presents a number of recommendations for policy, practice and further research in the area.

6.2 Summary of Findings
The overall aim of this study was to identify the supports that are provided to third level students with disabilities with respect to career guidance and disability services in Ireland. The study collated the perceptions of both guidance practitioners and disability officers to provide a picture of current practice and allow for an understanding of both the challenges and opportunities that exist in the provision of guidance supports to students with disabilities. The conclusions drawn from the review of the literature were that there has been a positive movement towards a more inclusive society, with benchmarks and legislation now in place to promote equality and diversity in education and the workforce in Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2004 & 2005; HEA, 2015; NDA, 1996, UN, 1948). Career guidance is positioned as being pivotal to support the career development of students with disabilities but there are also inherent challenges. It was determined that the number of students with disabilities engaging in HE is increasing in line with HEA targets for a more inclusive higher education sector. However, with increasing numbers come a wider profile of disabilities and a greater strain on limited resources and supports. However, the findings, point to an increase in mental health conditions and ASD, and the changing nature of the presenting disabilities is creating challenges for services (AHEAD, 2017, 2016a). It is thought that mental health conditions are underrepresented and is suggested that this may be a factor contributing to rising student attrition in HE (AHEAD, 2016b).

The findings also show that there is perceived adequate level of service provision in all of the HEIs disability services but some are better resourced than others, mainly due to their size. The research did highlight an over reliance on the medical model for access to supports and service (AHEAD, 2017; UN 2007) and this was deemed as a potential
barrier to those with hidden disabilities or those lacking formal diagnosis. The increasing numbers of students with disabilities availing of services was found to be putting significant pressure on the HE disability services, underpinning the need to change their approach to a more universal design for learning and Human Rights model, which would have the potential to support all students whether they have disclosed their disability or not (AHEAD, 2017; UN, 2007).

The findings unearthed a key structural challenge for HEIs in responding holistically to the changing context of wider diversity and inclusion and build wider capability so as to ensure that it is everyone’s job and not just that of the Disability/Access officer to include and support students with disabilities. Although the DO plays a vital part in the diversity strategy of the HEI, it is essential that they work with key players, such as career services, student services, policy makers in the institution and academics to identify the obstacles and gaps and to be innovative and flexible in finding resolutions that are sustainable and appropriate for the institution (AHEAD, 2017, 2016a).

From the primary research it is evident the role of the HEI career guidance practitioner is to support all of the student population, including students with disabilities. This involves one-to-one career guidance and support with educational placements where appropriate, utilising primarily the liberal and person-centred approach to guidance (Rogers, 1961; Watts, 1996). However, due to the low career guidance practitioners to student ratios, all of the HEIs utilise IT supports and classroom guidance to deliver necessary information to the entire student population (Appendix 3.3; Appendix 4.1; NGF, 2007). There appeared to be good support structures in all of the HEIs in this study. However, there was a greater variety of services within the career departments of the larger colleges. Nonetheless, the research identified key challenges in ascertaining the number of students with disabilities who engage with the HE careers service and/or the retention and progression pathways of these students. Data protection was identified as the reason such information is not collated and/or shared between departments.

A key issue that emerged in the findings is that there is no legal obligation on a person to disclose a disability (Nolan et al 2014) and the findings suggest that disabled students may choose not to disclose even if they are potentially disadvantaged in choosing not to disclose since they would not be in a position to avail of beneficial supports. The findings
showed evidence of a number of initiatives, such as the DARE programme to encourage disclosure in the HE sector and the WAM programme to encourage disclosure in the workforce. It was, however, found that there exists considerable potential to further remove barriers and stigmas associated with disclosure especially for students with hidden disabilities such as mental health issues.

The findings determined that students who are well prepared, resilient, have strong self-esteem, a positive attitude, support from family, peers and generally feel connected to the college tend to experience greater success in third level (Dipeolu et al, 2015; Enright et al 1996, Frieha and Aune, 1996; Herr et al, 2004; Nag 2014; Van Hees et al, 2015). Although there were some tasks that were identified as disability related, such as disclosure and reasonable accommodations, a key finding was that many of the challenges that students with disabilities encounter are similar to those experienced by the whole student population and are typically related to the transition to college life, mental health issues and incorrect course choices. The HEIs are now developing specific transition programmes for the whole student population, complemented with specific supports for students with disabilities.

A key objective of this study was to establish the levels of collaboration between the career and disability services in HE. The findings are that whilst collaboration between these two services does occur, it was found to be ad-hoc. The presence of formal policies to promote or support such collaborations is somewhat limited with the exception of HEI 3. However, there are obstacles to be overcome, especially with regard to data protection legislation and student’s rights to anonymity. Nevertheless, there were conversations taking place and a willingness to develop these working relations into the future, with evidence of many new exciting initiatives emerging in the different HEIs.

6.3 Strengths of the Study
A key strength of this study was the use of the interpretivist paradigm and the semi-structured interview method which gave valuable insight into the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities through the perceptions of the career guidance practitioners and disability officers (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Gillham, 2005; Thomas, 2013; Walliman, 2011). The ability to capture the free and open perceptions of practitioners gave insight with regard to the challenges and opportunities that exist for
them in the provision of supports to disabled students. Additionally, the research may provide a basis for identifying further research opportunities with regard to supporting students with disabilities as this area is under researched in an Irish context, especially with regard to career guidance provision.

A key strength in the research design adopted was the dual perspective approach, comparing the perceptions of both guidance practitioners and disability officers within each organisation. By interviewing both practitioners, a triangulation of evidence was made possible and an examination of the perceived issues from both sides regarding support provision emerged.

6.4 Limitations of the study
As a qualitative, exploratory study many of the limitations of this study were acknowledged in the design choices with an explicit trade-off made for depth of analysis rather than size of sample that a survey method might have allowed. The small sample size does limit the ability for wider generalisation but does not diminish the validity of the articulated perceptions of the respondents. The use of semi-structured interviews has inherent potential for bias, misinterpretation or the generalising of information in the analysis of the data (Cohen et al, 2007; Gillham, 2005). However, the researcher was aware of these risks and used the Braun and Clarke (2006) six phase approach in order to ensure that the research was not biased or misinterpreted and a reflexivity diary was kept in order to minimise subjectivity. Whilst every effort was made to remain objective, the researcher is aware that every individual makes sense of the world around them through their own perception of reality (Hopkins, 2008).

Another potential limitation of the study is that all of the participants in the study were female, and it only examined the perspective of practitioners in four institutions. The researcher could find no evidence that the gender of the respondents would have influenced the variables under consideration and the number of institutions examined was constrained by the resources available to the researcher within the parameters of the research timeframe. In addition, this study did not seek the perspectives of disabled students and it is evident that further research is needed to in the future in order to integrate the voice of the disabled student regarding services and supports provided in HE.
6.5 Recommendations

The following are recommendations for policy, best practice and further research.

6.5.1 Recommendations for Policy

National and international policy has allowed for significant positive growth in both diversity and inclusion in HE and the availability of a wide array of supports to disabled students are testament to these policies and resource investments. As the number of students with disabilities grows and the range of disabilities presenting become more varied, the next wave of policy must build on those of the past and future-proof support provision for the students to come. HEIs should develop policies to support working collaboratively, adopt the Human Rights Model of Disability as identified by United Nations (Inclusion Ireland, 2017, UN, 2007) and support the adoption of Universal design for learning (AHEAD, 2017). In addition, Irish policy should continue to ensure the employment and engagement of people with disabilities in the labour market and such policies should include the requisite resources to ensure that guidance and disability officers are supported in networking with employers in their locality. It is recommended that HEIs develop policies to support working collaboratively and sharing information appropriately between departments. Cross-functional teams need to be convened so that the needs of disabled students are incorporated into decision making and service provision across all areas without any need for students to explicitly disclose.

6.5.2 Recommendations for Guidance Practice

It is recommended that students with disabilities are allocated more one-to-one time in career guidance sessions in HEIs and that the availability of these sessions be widely communicated and not contingent on disclosure or medical diagnosis of a disability. Early engagement strategies should be explored in order to support the career planning of the student with disabilities at the earliest possible opportunity so that optimal employment and personal development outcomes can be attained by all students. Career practitioners from HEIs should work with their guidance colleagues in second level to develop timely guidance interventions for students with disabilities to support their transition to HE and advise them on the importance of accessing supports and advocating for open disclosure. Career practitioners should try and develop relationships with employers locally in order to support students with disabilities to be linked to the labour market. Career guidance practitioners should continue to engage in continuous professional development (CPD)
and become familiar with and avail of training in new research and career interventions to support the student with disabilities.

6.5.3 Recommendations for further research
Whilst research answers questions, it also inevitably leads to the opening up of new avenues of inquiry. Arising from this research, the researcher believes that further work could be conducted on the progression of students with disabilities to identify if students with disabilities are progressing to employment. There is currently no information captured on the First Destinations Report with regard to students with disabilities and this represents a significant lacuna in knowledge.

The research articulated and affirmed suggestions that mental health is of rising concern amongst higher level students. There is no doubt that contemporary phenomenon is worthy of considerable research and in the context of this study it would be important to identify if students are aware of the supports that the disability and career services can offer students with mental health conditions. An additional, yet considerable piece of important research would be to explore the possible link between mental health in the student cohort and retention or attrition in HE.

6.6 Reflection
Research has been defined as a mechanism to solve problems and to add to one’s own body of knowledge (Herbert, 1990). This study has allowed me to gain greater insight into the supports available for students with disabilities and various progression pathways allowing me to become a more informed practitioner in the future. I found the reflexivity diary very useful and supportive especially with regard to preparation for interviews and identifying prior assumptions. I had assumed that there was very little support for a student with a disability and was surprised and reassured to see some exciting developments to support diversity and inclusion in HE.

6.7 Conclusion
This chapter concludes the research by presenting the main findings of the study and through the discussion and summary of the same shows the attainment of the stated research objectives. As an exploratory study the research has provided an insight into the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities in higher education, explored the challenges and opportunities as perceived by those delivering the service to students and
evaluated the levels of collaboration evidenced across the disability and guidance departments. Arising from the research a number of key recommendations to policy makers and practitioners were developed, as well as opportunities for further research. The chapter concluded with an evaluation of the strengths and limitations of the study and a timely reflection on the personal learning of the researcher. This study has not only developed the researcher’s capability in the design and administration of research but has also provided valuable insights that will underpin the researcher’s personal practice and professional perspectives when engaging with students in guidance interventions.
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<th>An examination of the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities in third level institutes in Ireland.</th>
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<td>Ethics Number</td>
<td>2017_03_02_EHS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>Dr. Lucy Hearne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of EHSREC Meeting</td>
<td>15/3/17</td>
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<td>Section 3: Approved Procedures</td>
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**Section 4: Study Design and conduct of the study**

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<tr>
<td>b. Include a short justification for choosing this study</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Provide a description of the study</td>
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</table>

**Section 5: Recruitment of research participants**

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<tbody>
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<td>a. Describe the population you will recruit from</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. How will you source or identify your participants?</td>
<td>OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. How many participants</td>
<td>OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Provide details of financial remuneration or any other form of reward which the participants will receive</td>
<td>OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Where will the research work be done?</td>
<td>OK</td>
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**Section 6: Consent**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Details of how you will obtain consent (where relevant)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section 7: Care and protection of research participants**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Participation time for each participant</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. If there are multiple testing sessions for each participant, please provide breakdown</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Provide detailed information on potential risks to participant or researcher from procedures or techniques to be employed in this research.</td>
<td>OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Provide justification of the predictable risks and inconvenience to participants</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

**Section 8: Protection of participant confidentiality**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Who will have access to data collected from participants?</td>
<td>OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. How will confidentiality be ensured</td>
<td>OK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
c. How long will the data be kept? Destruction Method? OK

Section 9: Feedback to Participants and Relevant Communities
Describe how the results of the research will be made available to the participants and to the concerned communities OK

Section 10: Indemnity
Is research covered by UL insurance Y/N Y

Section 11: Document Checklist:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which documents are attached</th>
<th>Comments EHSREC</th>
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<td>Volunteer information sheet</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/carer information sheet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer informed consent form</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Carer Informed Consent Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter to school principal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview/survey questions/focus group script</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment letter/email/poster</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Acceptance of UL child protection form</td>
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<td>EHSREC or PESSREC Procedures</td>
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Section 12: Declaration

Section 13: Appendices

EHSREC Recommendations
| Approved |  
| Re-submit |   |
| Minor changes – amend as necessary and resend to EHSREC |   |
| Refused |   |

Notes
Appendix 3.2

Subject Information Letter (Participant)

EHS REC no.

Date:

Research title: An examination of the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities in third level educational institutes in Ireland.

Dear (Career Guidance Practitioner / Disability Officer),

I am currently a student of the MA Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development course with the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr Lucy Hearne.

As part of my studies I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling. In my research I would like to examine the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities in Higher Education Institutes in Ireland.

I would greatly appreciate if you would agree to take part in a face to face audio recorded interview with me on the topic. The interview will take approximately 1 hour and be arranged at a time and location convenient to you.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. The data from the interviews will be destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines. It is important to note that the HEIs name and the name of the individual participants will not be used in the research.

Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis stage. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences. The collected data will be stored in a secure location in the University of Limerick.
If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Hazel Fleming  
Supervisor: Dr. Lucy Hearne

Phone number: 061-202931

UL Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

This research has received ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (need to insert EHSREC no. here when approved). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

Chairman  
Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
EHS Faculty Office  
University of Limerick  
Tel (061) 234101  
ehsresearchethics@ul.ie
Appendix 3.3

Overview of the Selected HEIs

Four HEIs were selected and the following information present a picture of the nature of the services, interview participants and student cohort at each location. The table was compiled by the researcher using data obtained from the interviews conducted, institutional websites and documents sourced at each individual HEI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEI</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>Number of Student with Disabilities</th>
<th>% of overall Student population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>C.G.P</td>
<td>Multi</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Campus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>C.G.P</td>
<td>Multi</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D.O</td>
<td>Campus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>C.G.P</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D.O</td>
<td>Campus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>D.O</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Campus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Profile of Participating Higher Education Institutions

The responding institutions ranged in size from 5,000 to 17,000 students. The largest institution had the lowest percentage of disabled students and the smallest institution the highest percentage. Overall the average % of disabled students across the 4 institutions stands at 5.6%. It is important to note that these figures represented only those students who had registered with the Disability Service and it was accepted that there was likely to be additional students with disability within the student body that had not chosen to register with the Disability Service.

In each of the 4 institutions, a representative of the careers office and the disability office were invited to participate in the research. In total 6 of the invited respondents participated in the interviews, 3 career office members and 3 disability service personnel.
Interview Framework for the Career Guidance Practitioner

1. Tell me about your role as a Career Guidance Practitioner in this college.
2. How many staff are allocated to the career service?
3. Is there a member of staff specifically assigned to work with students with Disabilities?
4. Can you tell me about the level of engagement from students with disabilities with the college’s Career Service?
5. What are the prevalent types of Disabilities that you encounter?
6. What types / models of guidance interventions are used by you with students with disabilities?
7. Are they different to those used with other students?
8. In your experience, are there any differences in working with students with disabilities and students who do not have a disability as a careers practitioner?
9. In your opinion, to what extent does the student’s disability impact on the student’s participation in university/college life?
10. What are the factors with contribute to student with disabilities reaching their full potential success?
11. With regard to progression, how much career support is available to the student with regard to securing work placements, internships and employment?
12. Are there any career related programmes geared towards students with disabilities?
13. What are the progression rates to post graduate programmes for students with disabilities?
14. What are the progression rates to employment for students with disabilities?
15. Are there any specific challenges for the Career guidance practitioner/ Careers service/ department when working with students with disabilities?

16. If a student with a disability presents to the service, and is found to not be linked in with the disability support service, do you have a referral process in place?

17. Are you allowed to share student data/information with other departments/divisions e.g. the disability office?

18. Do you feel that you are meeting the students with disabilities early enough in their college experience in order to support them fully?

19. At what stage do you recommend that the student with a disability links in with the careers office?

20. What are the qualifications required to work in the Careers Service?

21. Is there any training or CPD available to support your work with students with disabilities?

22. Do you have any recommendations moving forward to augment the service delivery provided by the career service to students with disabilities?

23. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix 3.5

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

Interview Framework for the Disability Officer

1. Tell me about your role as a Disability Officer in this college?
2. Can you tell me how many students are registered with the disability service and what is the gender breakdown?
3. How many staff are allocated to the disability service?
4. What is the range of disabilities presenting to the disability service?
5. What is the retention rate of students with disabilities in your estimation?
6. How much support is allocated to the student?
7. What types of supports are provided by the Disability Service to the student?
8. Do students receive supports for the duration of their course once registered with the disability service?
9. Do many students choose not to disclose they have disability and then come to the Disability Office with learning issues after they have entered the institute?
10. To what extent does the student’s disability impact on the student’s participation in university/college life?
11. What do you feel are the perceived challenges for students with disabilities at the moment?
12. What are the progression rates to post graduate programmes for students with disabilities?
13. What are the progression rates to employment for students with disabilities?
14. What do you believe are the factors that contribute to success for students with disabilities?
15. Are there any specific challenges with regard to giving support to students for the disability officer/ service/ department?
16. In what ways do the Careers Service and Disability Service work collaboratively?
17. What procedures and processes are in place with regard to referral and collaborative/interdepartmental work with the Career Service?
18. Are you allowed to share student data/information with the Careers Service?
19. Do you recommend that students link in with the Careers Service? If so, when?
20. What do you think the benefits of linking in with the Careers Service would be?
21. Is there any training or CPD to support your work with students with disabilities?
22. Is there any other information you would like to add that you think may be relevant to the study before we finish up?
Appendix 3.6

Consent Form (Volunteer Participant)

EHS REC no.

Research title: An examination of the provision of career guidance to students with disabilities in third level educational institutes in Ireland.

☐ I understand what this research project is about, and what the results will be used for.

☐ I am fully aware of the procedures and of the risks and the benefits of the study.

☐ I am fully aware that the recording of the interview and the data generated from it will be kept confidential.

☐ I am aware that my identity will remain anonymous.

☐ I know that my participation in the research study is voluntary and I can withdraw my involvement at any time prior to the data analysis stage.

I hereby agree to take part in this study:

Signature: __________________________________________

Printed name: _______________________________________

Signature of Researcher: _______________________________

Date: _______________________________________________
Appendix 3.7

Extract of Interview Transcript with Interviewee Two

Interviewer What types of models or guidance interventions are used by you when you’re working with students with disabilities

Interviewee Well, in guidance I would use the same models that I use when I’m working with any students

Interviewer Ok

Interviewee So I use sort of Ali and Graham model in terms of structuring each of them contracting, back to the contract and you know trying to help move towards an action plan of some kind. Am, ya know all the guidance all the models that informing our guidance practice, a Rogerian approach which is all about being, displaying empathy

Interviewer Yeah

Interviewee Being non judgemental. I have a strong belief in empowering, ya know, looking at a students ability and empowering them, ya know, focussing on where their strengths lie

Interviewer Yeah

Interviewee And helping them to identify that, am, yeah, often its just those simple listening, ya know, so very much a supply and centered rogerian approach in terms of that

Interviewer Ok

Interviewee Space, am, that would be the main ya know because and yeah if I’m thinking of the other models that we use in terms of planned happenstance or Savakis, in terms of narrative approaches I would say its more a concept, concept of the heroic client and yeah just reflecting back their strengths in what they are doing already in just getting by day to day. I’m thinking of a particular student who was in earlier on this week
Appendix 3.8

Excerpt of Reflexivity Diary

09/06/2017 – Before interview entry
Today I have an interview. Before the interview I sat and had a coffee to check in with myself. I usually feel a little bit anxious before I start an interview because it is new territory. However, I am mindful that I have to clear my mind and be present in order to ensure that my personal feelings are not reflected in the way that I conduct the interview or how I interpret the data.
I check in with myself and reflect on my emotional state. Today, I am feeling a little bit rushed as I had to leave work early and I am very busy at work. In order to address this, I made a list of tasks that where not addressed today and need my attention. I write them in my “to do” list in my work diary so that I am fully present with regard to what I am about to do. I also check in with regard to my emotions with regard to my son. He is doing really well these days. His tutor is working with him and he is making progress. This brings a smile to my face.
In preparation for the interview, I go through the questions on my list so that I am familiar with them, this helps with the little bit of anxiety that I have. I have given myself plenty of time to get to the interview and to settle.

After Interview Entry:
I meet with an interview participant, whom was a lovely woman with a lot of experience and knowledge in the area and had an aura of confidence. She was the head of disability for over 20 years.
She made me feel very comfortable and asked how the study was going. I had a brief chat with her before we commence the interview which made me feel at ease.
Going through the interview questions, I realised that service at this particular HEI was very advanced. I felt that some of the questions did not fit with the flow of the interview, which is something I have noted in other interview sessions, but that is an error of mine that cannot be rectified at this time. I think if I was to do a research piece in the future I would like to do the literature review before completing the questions as I would then have a better understanding of the topic.
I am mindful that when I completed the Ethics form and completed the proposed questions, I was under a lot of pressure and I have learned to accept that it is OK that the research questions are not ideal. I am also able to compensate to a degree as it is a semi structured which allows me to rephrase questions and ask for more information to clarify points.

I feel that this particular HEI provide an excellent service and have strong links with the careers service. There is a lot of support available to the student if they choose to avail of it. Additionally, she has a wealth of knowledge and works very hard to develop transition programmes and link in with agencies which support students with disabilities. I learned a lot today about the importance of always keeping the client, (student with disability) central and the importance of supporting the transitions to third level.
### Appendix 4.1
Profile of Career Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Career Guidance Practitioners</th>
<th>HEI One</th>
<th>HEI Two</th>
<th>HEI Three</th>
<th>HEI Four</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of Staff in Department</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Unsure – 2 identified on website</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use IT to support service</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to One Appointments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Supports, advice, &amp; Info</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Applications, CV and Interviews Clinics</td>
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<td>Online Psychometric Tests</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Development Module</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Career Guidance for students with disability</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, but not linked to DS</td>
<td>Yes – Linked to DS</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 4.2
### Profile of Disability Office Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>HEI One</th>
<th>HEI Two</th>
<th>HEI Three</th>
<th>HEI Four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Staff</strong></td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund for Student with Disability</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam Supports</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Outsourced</td>
<td>Outsourced</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Supports</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
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<td>Occupational Therapist</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Assistive Technology</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Alternative Formatting</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Dyslexia Screening</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Assistants available</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Contracted</td>
<td>Contracted</td>
<td>Contracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scribes available</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Contracted</td>
<td>Contracted</td>
<td>Contracted</td>
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</tbody>
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