



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK

O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

**An Exploration of the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) Programme as a Support for
Dyslexic Students Transitioning from 2nd to 3rd Level**

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Declaration

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

Signature: _____

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----------|
| Cover Page | i |
| Declaration | iv |
| Acknowledgements | v |
| List of Appendices | ix |
| Glossary | x |
| Abstract | xi |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 1 |
| 1.0 Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Contextual Background | 1 |
| 1.2 Rationale for the Research Study | 1 |
| 1.3 Position of the Researcher | 2 |
| 1.4 Research Methodology | 3 |
| 1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Research Study | 3 |
| 1.6 Outline of the Thesis | 4 |
| 1.7 Conclusion | 4 |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review | 5 |
| 2.0 Introduction | 5 |
| 2.1 Defining Dyslexia and its Educational Impact | 5 |
| 2.2 Policy and Provision | 7 |
| 2.3 The DARE Programme | 8 |
| 2.4 Theoretical Orientation: Inclusion | 10 |
| 2.5 Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in the International Context | 13 |
| 2.6 The Role of the Guidance Counsellor | 14 |
| 2.7 Conclusion | 15 |
| | vi |

| | |
|--|----|
| Chapter 3: Methodology | 16 |
| 3.1 Introduction | 16 |
| 3.2 Research Questions | 16 |
| 3.2.1 Primary Research Question | 16 |
| 3.2.2 Secondary Research Questions | 17 |
| 3.3 Research Paradigm: Interpretivist | 17 |
| 3.4 Limitations | 18 |
| 3.5 Research Epistemology | 19 |
| 3.6 Data Collection Method: Semi-Structured Interviews | 19 |
| 3.7 Access and Sampling | 19 |
| 3.8 Qualitative Methods: Semi-Structured Interviews | 20 |
| 3.9 Data Analysis Method: Constant Comparative Method | 21 |
| 3.10 Validity and Reliability in Interpretive Research | 21 |
| 3.10.1 Validity | 21 |
| 3.10.2 Reliability | 22 |
| 3.11 Reflexivity | 22 |
| 3.12 Ethical Research Practice in Guidance Counselling | 23 |
| 3.13 Conclusion | 24 |
| Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings | 25 |
| 4.0 Introduction | 25 |
| 4.1 Data Analysis | 25 |
| 4.2 Findings | 25 |
| 4.2.1 Resourcing | 25 |
| 4.2.2 Inclusion | 27 |
| 4.2.2.1 Access without support is not opportunity | 29 |
| 4.2.3 Stigma | 30 |
| 4.2.4 Transparency | 30 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 4.2.5 Accessibility and Fairness | 32 |
| 4.3 Conclusion | 33 |
| Chapter 5: Discussion | 35 |
| 5.0 Introduction | 35 |
| 5.1 Articulation and Transparency | 35 |
| 5.2 Disability Stigma | 36 |
| 5.3 The Inclusion Delusion | 37 |
| 5.4 Resourcing to Promote Inclusion | 39 |
| 5.4.1 Inclusion and the Role of the Guidance Counsellor | 41 |
| 5.5 Accessibility and Fairness | 41 |
| 5.6 Conclusion | 44 |
| Chapter 6: Conclusion | 45 |
| 6.0 Introduction | 45 |
| 6.1 Overview of Key Findings | 45 |
| 6.1.1 Resourcing | 45 |
| 6.1.2 Transparency | 45 |
| 6.1.3 Inclusion | 46 |
| 6.1.4 Stigma | 46 |
| 6.1.5 Accessibility and Fairness | 46 |
| 6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Study | 47 |
| 6.2.1 Strengths | 47 |
| 6.2.2 Limitations | 48 |
| 6.3 Recommendations | 48 |
| 6.4 Reflection on Personal Learning | 49 |
| 6.5 Conclusion | 50 |
| References | 51 |
| List of Appendices | 64 |

List of Appendices

Appendix A: IGC Subject Information Letter

Appendix B: IGC Consent Form

Appendix C: Guidance Counsellor Subject Information Letter

Appendix D: Career Office Staff Member Subject Information Letter

Appendix E: Disability Office Staff Member Subject Information Letter

Appendix F: Volunteer Participant Consent Form

Appendix G: Disability Office Staff Member Interview Schedule

Appendix H: Career Office Staff Member Interview Schedule

Appendix I: Guidance Counsellor Interview Schedule

Appendix J: Image Screenshot of accesscollege.ie DARE website 2015

Glossary

| | |
|-------|--|
| AEN | Additional Educational Needs |
| AHEAD | Association for Higher Education Access and Disability |
| ATAR | Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank |
| CAO | Central Applications Office |
| DAI | Dyslexia Association of Ireland |
| DARE | Disability Access Route to Education |
| DAT | Differential Aptitude Test |
| DEIS | Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools |
| DES | Department of Education and Skills |
| EAS | Educational Access Schemes |
| HEAR | Higher Education Access Route |
| HSC | Higher School Certificate |
| IGC | Institute of Guidance Counsellors |
| IT | Institute of Technology |
| NCGE | National Centre for Guidance in Education |
| PLC | Post Leaving Cert Course |
| RACE | Reasonable Accommodations at Certificate Examinations |
| SEN | Special Educational Needs |

Abstract

The overall aim of this research is to explore the perspectives of relevant practitioners in regards to the DARE programme. The DARE programme is the Disability Access Route to Education. It offers reduced points places to students who have been educationally impacted by their disability.

An interpretivist methodology was used which looked at the perspectives of five guidance counsellors, two disability office staff members and one career office staff member in relation to their experiences and perceptions of the DARE programme. The data for this research was gathered through the means of a semi-structured interview with each participant.

The findings of this research indicate a gap in the inclusivity of the DARE programme, especially in regards to participation of students with disabilities from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds who are often excluded due to financial reasons. Furthermore, the practice of students buying psychological assessments and applying for the DARE programme despite not being impacted on educationally by a disability arose as a concern for both guidance counsellors and disability office staff members.

The research addresses the deficit in literature surrounding the DARE programme. The research is of value to guidance counsellors who can draw on it to deepen understanding of the programme. Several recommendations from the research are of importance to policy makers, practitioners and support the development of future research in the area.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the research topic and the intention of this research. It provides details of the positionality of the researcher within the study. The research methodology, aim and objectives and a plan of the thesis will be outlined as well as a justification for the research.

1.1 Contextual Background

The Disability Access Route to Education, DARE as it is more commonly referred to, is an alternative admissions scheme for people wishing to enter into third level whose disabilities have had a negative impact on their second level education and who have the ability to benefit from and succeed at third level but who may not be able to attain the minimum points entry requirements for a third level course due to their disability (Accesscollege, 2014). In order to avail of extra assistance students must declare on their CAO form that they have a disability. The CAO handles applications from secondary school students wishing to apply to undergraduate courses in higher education institutions. Students qualify for places on undergraduate courses when they meet three separate requirements. Students must attain a minimum entry point's requirement, the institutions grades requirements and the institutions faculty requirements, once a student has satisfied these three separate requirements they will be offered a place on the course they have put down on their CAO form (Central Applications Office, 2017). The establishment of the DARE programme was as a result of years of policy reforms to help make education more inclusive (Universities Act, 1997; Education Act, 1998; Equal Status Act, 2000; Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004).

1.2 Rationale for the Research Study

The largest cohort of students with disabilities who apply to the DARE programmes are students with dyslexia. The DARE Programme recognises that because of the educational impact that dyslexia has had on their education, students may have been put at an educational disadvantage, and is a form of equity of access which has evolved after numerous legislative changes (Access Success, 2016). In order to avail of this programme students must be able to prove that they have been disadvantaged by their disability. For students with dyslexia this means having to meet several criteria.

Dyslexia is a neurological condition that causes a student to have difficulties in reading and writing, specifically difficulties with phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed (Ball & Mc Cormack, 2013). Dyslexia is a cognitive disability that impedes a student's progression in education and impacts on their ability to learn. The DARE programme is intended to rectify the educational disadvantage that dyslexia causes a student. This educational disadvantage is also something that a second level guidance counsellor can help a student with as guidance counsellors can be considered as 'having the capacity to counteract some of the main inequalities prevalent in schools' (Harkin, 2015) by provision of career information and motivation, such as advice on which third level institutions are a part of the DARE programme.

There appears to be a deficit in research on the perceptions of relevant practitioners to the DARE programme, in fact there is a deficit in research surrounding the DARE programme in general and this adds to the mystery that surrounds the workings of the DARE programme that was referred to in Shevlin et al. (2004). This study is warranted as there is a deficit in the literature surrounding the DARE programme and in what way it provides assistance to students with dyslexia going to university. Moreover, this research will provide an insight to guidance counsellors on the workings of the DARE programme and will help clarify any previous misassumptions as to what the DARE programme can actually provide to students.

1.3 Position of the Researcher

This study takes an interpretative approach, Thomas (2009) highlights the importance of making the researcher's positionality clear in interpretivist research, as the researcher plays an active part in acquiring, summarising and highlighting the knowledge gathered. Therefore this section aims to provide a clear understanding of the researcher's position in this study. The researcher developed an interest in dyslexia and the DARE programme for personal reasons as the researcher has three family members who have been diagnosed with dyslexia. One of these family members needed to use the DARE programme in order to access university. However they found the transition from second level to third level too strenuous despite the resources and assistance provided to them by the university and thus left university at the end of first year, instead choosing to go to an institute of technology. Even though the institute of technology suited this family member a great deal more academically, she could not apply to it using the DARE programme, as it was not a participating institution in the DARE programme. These experiences for the researcher created an interest in both dyslexia and the

DARE programme. In addition, the researcher has worked as a secondary school French and Spanish teacher for five years and has seen first-hand the educational impact that dyslexia can have on students and their progression in a subject. Additionally, the researcher is currently working as a guidance counsellor and has assisted students with disabilities in applying for and receiving a place at university due to the DARE programme. Before conducting this research the researcher was aware of the DARE programme and the assistance that it provided to students with disabilities but was keen to gain a deeper understanding of the workings of the programme and how relevant practitioners felt about the programme. The researcher's role as a teacher, trainee guidance counsellor and researcher was given careful consideration throughout this study. The research is underpinned by the IGC (2012) and the NCGE (2008) code of ethics and their principles of conduct.

1.4 Research Methodology

In order to gather the qualitative data needed, face-to-face individual interviews were carried out with three different types of candidates including second level guidance counsellors, disability office staff members as well as career office staff members. These interviews were semi-structured allowing for flexibility in the participants' answering as well as the ability to ask follow up questions, while still maintaining a set number of issues to be addressed (Thomas, 2009). The eight interviews were transcribed and a constant comparative approach used to analyse the data gathered during the interview process in order to synthesise the primary findings. Issues of validity, reliability and reflexivity were considered for the duration of the research.

1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Research Study

The overall aim of this research is to explore what insights can be gained from exploring the DARE programme from the perspectives of relevant practitioners.

Additionally, there are four objectives of this research which are:

1. To review and critically analyse literature related to dyslexia and the DARE programme.
2. To gather qualitative data from several relevant practitioners through the use of face-to-face interviews.
3. To highlight current perceptions of the DARE programme from relevant practitioners.
4. To make a number of recommendations to inform future policy, practice and research.

1.6 Plan of the Thesis

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the topic of research and the intention of this research.

Chapter 2 develops the context of the research findings through the critical lens of literature analysis. It critically analyses the policy that surrounds inclusive education in Ireland as well as the educational impact of dyslexia on a student. Also the DARE programme and the assistance that it provides to students with disabilities, specifically dyslexia, is examined.

Chapter 3 outlines the underpinning methodology and the methods that are used in this research study to gather the data and then how that data is analysed.

Chapter 4 briefly describes the methods of data analysis and presents the primary findings of this study for discussion.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of this research in the context of existing literature which is then critically interpreted.

Chapter 6 concludes the research study by providing an overview of the findings within the context of the aims and objectives. This chapter also discusses the strengths and limitations of the study as well as providing recommendations for future practice.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the main aspects of the research study by providing an overview of the topic. The justification for this study has been detailed along with the aim and objectives of the research. Furthermore, this chapter has described the positionality of the researcher. Chapter 2 will provide an examination of the contextual background to the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The core concern of the research is to investigate the perceived benefits of the DARE programme for students with dyslexia who are accessing the DARE programme, as well as exploring the existing literature surrounding the DARE programme. Dyslexia is defined by the Irish Task force on Dyslexia (Government of Ireland) as:

A continuum of specific learning difficulties related to the acquisition of basic skills in reading, spelling and/or writing, such difficulties being unexpected in relation to a person's other abilities and educational experiences.

(Government of Ireland 2001, p.xxi)

With 8% of the population affected by dyslexia, its high prevalence places it as a central issue within modern education and society (Loftus, 2009). Firstly this chapter will examine dyslexia and its educational consequences for the dyslexic person. Secondly this dissertation will look at the DARE programme and its implications for students with dyslexia as well as international efforts to help students with dyslexia progress onto third level education. Following on from this the role of the guidance counsellor in aiding students with dyslexia entering into third level education will be explored.

2.1 Defining Dyslexia and its Educational Impact

Current statistics identify dyslexia as the most common specific learning difficulty (Dyslexia Association of Ireland, 2014). However, the exact figure of people with dyslexia is debateable as Snowling (2000) estimates that three in ten people are affected by dyslexia while Loftus (2009) approximates the figure at a much higher 8%. This variation in figures may be due to a lack of clarity as to what dyslexia actually is, as there are several definitions for dyslexia, evidently there is an absence of a universal definition that would provide clarity (Elftorp & Hearne, 2014). For the purpose of this study, the DAI (2014) approximation of between 8-10% will be referenced. Regardless of the variable figures that are proposed it is clear that the number of students with dyslexia represents a sizeable proportion of the student body that a second level guidance counsellor would be in contact with.

The Irish education system is still heavily based on summative assessments involving several written examinations, therefore having dyslexia can create significant hurdles in progressing through the education system, something that the guidance counsellor must be aware of in order

to effectively help students with dyslexia (Craddock & Mathias, 2009). Dyslexia affects the learning process in relation to reading, writing, and speaking thus dyslexia can be a massive burden when reading is a 'skill that is highly valued by society and in most communities holds the key to education' (Snowling, 2000, p.1). This theory of inequality between academic ability and reading ability is reiterated by Snowling who admits that it is these 'unexpected' difficulties that 'occur in otherwise bright and able children who master other tasks well' that become indicators of dyslexia (2000, p.1). These difficulties are not in tandem with the student's other intellectual abilities, as dyslexia only impacts on a person's reading, writing and speaking ability and does not affect a person's intelligence. It is because of this mismatch in abilities that one is able to diagnose a student with dyslexia. Snowling's use of the word 'unexpected' in her explanation of dyslexia is interesting as it highlights that dyslexia is not an indicator of inability but rather an imbalance of skills that would not occur if dyslexia was not present. It is essential to clarify that dyslexia is not a question of ability but rather a block in one's way that prevents a person from demonstrating their true ability in such tasks as reading, writing and spelling. Critchely (1970, p.11) describes dyslexia in more clinical terms as a 'disorder manifested by difficulty in learning to read despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence and socio-cultural opportunity'. Though this definition has been the subject of much criticism (Rutter, 1982; Fletcher, 2009) due to its loose terms and hard-to-define specifications, this definition of dyslexia further highlights the fact that dyslexia is not an indicator of ability but rather a cognitive impairment. Critchely (1970) later goes on to describe dyslexia as a fundamental cognitive disability that originates from the very beginning of that person's conception. Though Critchely's theory on dyslexia has been in existence for quite some time it is still a good explanation of what dyslexia means for the person. If one looks at Critchley's explanation of dyslexia more closely, it is easy to see that dyslexia is something that cannot be controlled by the person, rather it is inherent from birth and does not recede over time. Therefore a student with dyslexia will always be affected by the specific learning difficulty but will instead learn ways around their disability and will find methods of coping with the consequences of having dyslexia (McKendree & Snowling, 2011). Moreover, dyslexia can impact on the concentration and co-ordination of the person affected by dyslexia (Bull 2009). This is important to note because not only does dyslexia affect students cognitively but it also impacts on their psychomotor ability and on the student affectively. It is evident that there is quite an impact on a person's educational life with dyslexia.

Students with dyslexia show a lower or slower ability in reading and/or spelling and therefore are at risk of falling behind in school, thus it is important that other risk factors that may further impede the learning of a student with dyslexia be identified and corrected. Evidently, teacher expectation is a risk factor to students as low teacher expectations for students with dyslexia can have a negative impact on student's ability to progress (Rosenthal, 1987; Clark, 1997; Hornstra et al., 2010). It has been proven over many years that teacher expectations of students' academic abilities has a minor, yet significant, effect on the achievement of students (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Madon et al., 1997). It can be argued that a label of dyslexia may 'evoke a negative attitude in some teachers that may cause them to have lower expectations for such students' (Hornstra et al., 2010). It has been noted the ways in which schools can damage pupils' self-esteem by highlighting students who are high achievers and comparing them to their less successful classmates; because of this some pupils attribute a sense of failure to the work that they do. Consequently, these students then get caught in a vicious cycle of underachievement on their part and low expectations from their teachers (Kyriacou, 2007). These issues further highlight the relevance of the guidance counsellor in helping students with dyslexia overcome the barriers brought on them by their specific learning difficulty.

2.2 Policy and Provision

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that affects students in a continuum that ranges from mild to severe, while impacting on a student's ability to remember in sequence what is seen or heard, his/her ability to identify sounds in words and his/her ability to put things in order; it may affect concentration, co-ordination, letter/numeral formation skills and the speed of reading and understanding. In the last twenty years, policy, legislation and government funding designed to increase participation of students with disabilities at university have been introduced (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006); these state that education should be fully inclusive and reasonable allowances should be made for people with disabilities where appropriate, with students who have dyslexia accounting for the largest group of students with disabilities attending third level education (Madaus et al., 2011). As far back as 1993 in Ireland the SERC reported that appropriate education should be provided to all including those with special needs (DES, 1993). The Irish Government's acknowledgement of a need for policy and legislation on special needs education was, on an international platform, notably late. While the government in America promoted inclusion of students with special needs as long ago as 1975 and England doing the same with the Education Act of 1981, Ireland was still arguing that due to 'demographic and geographical reasons' it was not always possible

to provide a high quality service for all children with special needs in an integrated setting (European Commission, 1991). While government provisions since 1993 in theory provide great supports to students in education at primary and post primary levels there is very little acknowledgement of students with disabilities who continue their education onto third level and the allowances that should be made for these students to succeed in their wish to continue their education. In recent times access initiatives have been designed to facilitate greater access and uptake of third level courses for people ‘from marginalised groups who have traditionally been excluded from higher education’ (Shevlin et al., 2004, p.37). Young people with disabilities such as dyslexia in Ireland are part of these marginalised groups who previously were greatly under-represented at third level. However, people with disabilities still remain under-represented in higher education in spite of programmes such as the DARE programme. Despite government legislation such as the Universities Act 1997, Education Act 1998, Qualifications Act 1999, Equal Status Act 2000 and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, the percentage of students with disabilities still remains worryingly low with Ahead (2017) suggesting that only 5.2% of students at third level have a disability. Interestingly, of this number 45.5% of these students had specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Students with dyslexia making up almost 50% of all students with disabilities going to university is an ongoing statistic as Hoey (2000) discussed that students with dyslexia comprise by far the largest cohort of students with disabilities in higher education. The lack of participation by people with disabilities in higher education has been put down to several factors and not necessarily the lack of ability by the student but instead because of ‘attitudinal and environmental barriers’ (DES, 2001, p.63). This is reflected in the participation rates of third level institutions who take part in the DARE programme, effectively inclusive education, in terms of access and long term success, is provided at primary and post-primary education though this is not necessarily the case in third level education (López Gavira & Morina, 2015; Fuller et al., 2004; Hopkins, 2011; Mullins & Preyde, 2013; Riddel & Weedon, 2014).

2.3 The DARE Programme

For most students who enter into third level education they must enter through the CAO (Central Applications Office), an application system that allocates students to courses according to the points that they achieved in their Leaving Certificate results. For students who have a disability there is extra assistance provided to them known as the DARE programme. In order to avail of this extra assistance, students must declare on their CAO form that they

have a disability. The declaration of disabilities box on the CAO form was designed as a way of enabling third level institutions to include appropriate provision for students with disabilities in their planning (Central Applications Office, 2001, p. 4) and was formerly absorbed into the CAO application in 2010. The DARE Programme recognises that because of the educational impact that dyslexia has had on their education students may have been put at an educational disadvantage, and is a form of equity of access which has evolved after numerous legislative changes as well as social pressure (Access Success, 2016). To be eligible for this programme students must be able to prove that they have been disadvantaged by their disability. For students with dyslexia this means having to meet several criteria. DARE (2017) lists several points that must be met by the student in order to avail of the programme, for which they require 'evidence of the disability'. A student with dyslexia must be able to provide a 'psychological assessment report completed by a psychologist', an 'educational impact statement' and, depending on the age of the student's psychological assessment report, some students may also have to supply 'two literacy or two numeracy attainment scores at or below the 10th percentile'. If a student upon supplying all of this documentation meets the criteria for the DARE programme they can then enter into a university course below the standard CAO points requirement. According to Shevlin et al. (2004) the problem with this system is its lack of standardisation and transparency, as the system has been described as opaque (p.37). As well, each participating third level education institution has its own guidelines as to whom they will accept and what allowances they will make for a student. However, as there are no agreed procedures, practice can change widely both within and between colleges (Kenny et al., 2001).

The lack of transparency of the DARE programme may make it difficult for second level guidance counsellors, as they cannot specify how much of a reduction in points a student may be eligible for in order to get accepted to their chosen course. For example in some universities the allowances that are made for students are within 15% of the mandatory points while other universities work on a quota basis and then other universities work on a case by case basis (Access Success, 2016). While this is nonetheless a vital assistance for many students with dyslexia who want to go onto third level, the DARE programme is only offered in certain universities and only four institutions of technology (Accesscollege, 2014). This programme was created with the intention of helping erase the educational divide between students with learning difficulties and those without, but it is flawed in several ways and limits students in their choice of course based on what universities and institutes of technologies actually provide the programme as a possible supplement to the traditional CAO entry route.

In 2012, the HEAR/DARE strategic development group commissioned an examination of the effectiveness and sustainability of the DARE programme (Byrne et al., 2013). The results of this examination of the DARE programme led to some interesting findings. One outcome of the study worth noting was that in comparison to the CAO process the DARE programme is being utilised by a narrow student base as those who attend private schools and grind schools are five times more likely to apply for DARE. Additionally, applicants from DEIS (disadvantaged) schools are significantly lower than expected and the reason why such divergence exists isn't documented in current literature, however this dissertation aims to add to the understanding as to why such disparity exists.

2.4 Theoretical Orientation: Inclusion

The DARE programme has been developed amongst an educational context and theoretical orientation moving towards inclusivity. The way in which we educate students with special educational needs in Ireland has undergone substantial change since the beginning of the twenty-first century. People with special educational needs once comprised of a marginalised group in society while in some countries, such groups are excluded from the education system altogether (Tiwari et al., 2015). International policies have demanded a more equitable education system that is considerate of diversity and addresses the needs of pupils who have previously been marginalised by the Irish education system; therefore there has been an increased focus on development of inclusive education (Rose et al., 2010). Inclusive education refers to a form of schooling in which a child with special educational needs is supported and brought into the mainstream classroom in order to ensure effective education (UNESCO, 1994), while King (2003, p.152) describes inclusive education as 'all students within a school regardless of their strengths or weaknesses, or disabilities in any area become part of the school community'. Inclusive education was first highlighted in the Salamanca Statement, and it was thought that by introducing the necessary supports for a student with special educational needs into a normal environment, it would then be possible to integrate almost all students with special educational needs into mainstream education which was seen as a paradigmatic shift in thought (Salovitita & Schaffus, 2016). Despite this, in recent years Ireland has seen an increase in the number of students with special educational needs who are deciding to leave the mainstream school and are now enrolling in special education schools with the main reasons being the failure of mainstream schools to meet their academic, social, emotional, behavioural, and access to health resource needs (Kelly et al., 2014). Despite the push for inclusive education in Ireland, education studies assessing the outcome of inclusive educational practices

have been mixed and have not been able to provide solid evidence to attest to its effectiveness (Lindsay, 2007). Nonetheless, educating students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms purports that students with special educational needs are not only members of our classrooms and the general school population, but are also valued members within that community (Obiakor et al., 2012). The same can be said for students with special educational needs who wish to go to university. In 1988 AHEAD was set up with the intention of changing attitudes and mind-sets about students with disabilities but also to encourage education professionals to see the potential of every student regardless of disability (Loftus, 2009).

Inclusive education places the student with special educational needs back in the mainstream classroom where they can follow the same curriculum as the rest of the student population with added support and resources to help bridge the gap between them and their peers caused by their disability. While the OECD (2012, p.3) describes the highest performing education systems as being ‘those that give all children opportunities for a good quality education’ it also describes a good education system as one that ‘combines equity with equality’. Thus follows the argument of equality versus equity in education for students with disabilities. While much research has been done around the topic of equity versus equality in education for disadvantaged groups based on socio-economic background, little has been written about equity in education for students with disabilities. This lack of research on equity in education for students with disabilities is compounded by the fact that students with disabilities were ‘never explicitly targeted in access programmes’ to university and are ‘conspicuous by their low representation in higher education’ (Shevlin et al., 2004, p.38). Students with special educational needs are at a disadvantage in mainstream classes with their peers and attaining equity in education provision is essential in providing these students with equal opportunities in life as it offers students a platform from which to begin their future development (Chelan Li & Wang, 2014). However, very large inequities and inequalities remain in both education and society despite equity being the most significant dilemma facing educators today (Klees & Qargha, 2014). The OECD (2008) determines that equity in education has two dimensions, the first being fairness and the second being inclusion. The former implies that personal and social circumstances, such as disability, should not be a hindrance to educational potential, while the latter ensures a basic minimum standard of education for all students. Although a lot of research describes attempts being made to make primary and secondary school more equitable for students, very little has been written on how equitable third level education is for students with disabilities. It has been argued that efforts to make the transition from second level to third

level such as the DARE programme can ‘lack transparency’ (Shevlin et al., 2004 p.37). The DARE programme to an extent makes an effort to provide students with disability equity in education as it helps to include students with disabilities in third level education.

In Olofsson et al. (2015) the progression and success of students with dyslexia in third level was examined with a particular focus on the experiences of dyslexic students. Though it was previously mentioned that there has been a shortage of research carried out with regards to the inclusion of dyslexic students in third level education, this research attempts to begin the investigation. Even though this research was carried out in Sweden the findings are still particularly interesting as it is a very unique study and a topic that has not been researched in much depth. The study discovered that it was more common among students with dyslexia than students without dyslexia to drop out of university and abandon their studies and to do so predominately in their first year of university and therefore not finish their study programmes. While the research discovered that students with dyslexia are more likely to abandon their studies than people that did not have dyslexia it is important to note that more than half of students with dyslexia can achieve a normal rate of study and progress through university without issue, however, one fifth of students with dyslexia may need a longer period of study than other students (Olofsson et al., 2015). Though this study is true of the facts in Sweden it is not clear whether the statistics remain true in the Irish context. The Irish education system has put in place certain mechanisms that are believed to help students with dyslexia in their education path. Such resources as the DARE programme for entering into university and the disability office that preside in most universities are vital in aiding the progression of students with dyslexia through university. It is evident from literature that much research has been carried out to uncover the effects of dyslexia on a person, similarly there is a lot of research that confirms a link between having dyslexia and having lower levels of self-esteem. However, despite the large quantities of research and information that is available about dyslexia there is a distinct lack of information surrounding the progression of students with dyslexia from second level to third level and their success rates once there. While momentous efforts have been made in Irish law to include students with disabilities at all levels of Irish education, one must be wary of including students with disabilities purely for the sake of having an apparently equitable education system. Olofsson et al. (2015) research points to higher dropout rates and greater struggles for students with dyslexia at third level, thus while inclusive measures and wider access is beneficial and welcomed it must be backed up by continuing supports to increase the likelihood of success for students.

2.5 Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in the International Context

In recent years, there has been a noted international effort to widen access to university for all students but especially for students with disabilities. In Ireland access has been defined in law under the Qualifications Act (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2009) as ‘the process by which learners may commence a programme of education and training having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence’. Efforts to widen access to higher education in other countries can take many different forms largely due to the extreme differences in admission routes both between and within countries. The many different forms that can be taken may include a general policy, measures focusing on specific groups, or a combination of both (EACEA 2010, 2012). EACEA (2012) noted five countries (Georgia, Ireland, Moldova, Switzerland and Ukraine) that have higher education systems that concentrate on targeted measures to help improve access to education for under-represented groups at university with the EACEA (2012) and the European Commission (2011) reporting that students with disabilities are the most targeted by these efforts. Though these countries have concentrated on targeted groups, other countries have made efforts to widen access also but through other methods. These methods, though they do not target under-represented groups directly, are nonetheless advantageous to students. Several countries such as UK, Spain, Portugal, France, Norway, Sweden and Denmark have alternative routes to higher education for non-traditional candidates which include short term programmes or professional programmes, while other countries now recognise alternative factors such as relevant work experience (Germany, Italy).

Outside of Europe, Australia’s admissions process holds the greatest similarities to Ireland’s with regards to admissions and the selection process for students wishing to go to third level. Australia’s system, known as Educational Access Schemes (EAS), works to provide help to students who have faced educational disadvantage during the final two years of their second level education (Byrne et al., 2013). Similarly to the DARE programme, the EAS programme offers students a place at third level even if a student receives a lower ATAR (HSC performance score) than what would usually be accepted for that course, thus in effect Australia’s system also offers reduced points entry into third level for students with disabilities. Equally, in terms of requirements for being acceptable for this reduced points programme, one must be able to provide evidence of educational disadvantage including evidence of disability such as an educational impact statement or medical certificates, an element that is identical to the Irish system.

It appears that, in a global context, Ireland's efforts to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities into third level education, though open to critique, is noteworthy on an international platform. Ireland is only one of a small number of countries (Armenia, Austria, Ireland, Finland and Norway) that have made quantitative targets that have to be met. In Ireland, the National Action Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 set very concrete goals stating that the number of students with disabilities should be doubled by 2013. Though it may seem a small and possibly insignificant measure to quantify the amount of students going to third level with disabilities, it allows comparisons to be made and success of the programme to be measured in easily quantifiable terms.

2.6 The Role of the Guidance Counsellor

Since its inception in 1966, guidance counselling in Ireland has evolved in response to a number of educational, societal and economic changes (Hearne et al., 2016). In Ireland, the notion of a holistic and integrated approach to guidance counselling provision has been promoted for the last four decades and is reflected in the 1992 Green Paper on Education (DES, 1992; Liston, 2011). This holistic approach incorporates personal and social, educational and career guidance (Hearne and Gavin, 2014; NCGE, 2004; Seed, 1992). The DES (2007) discusses the role of the guidance counsellor as a core member of the special educational needs support team, not only as a facilitator of education but also as someone who aids the inclusion of students with disabilities. Guidance is now considered 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). It is vital that the guidance counsellor involves students with disabilities into the guidance plan so that students with disabilities get the assistance that they need, whether it is counselling or guidance. Additionally, the DES (1992) discusses the important role guidance counsellors play in assisting students with special educational needs at different stages of their school life and also aiding the students in making career decisions. Students with dyslexia require extra help from the guidance counsellor when applying to the CAO as they need to apply for the DARE programme, which involves an educational impact statement that the school has to fill out and this usually falls under the remit of the guidance counsellor. There are a number of core issues that a person with dyslexia is affected by that the guidance counsellor may be able to aid the learner with. These include negative emotional, educational and vocational implications of dyslexia, as well as disclosure, accessibility to assessment and support services (Elftorp & Hearne, 2014). Due to the nature of the specific language difficulty, students with dyslexia would require extra assistance from the guidance

counsellor while researching the courses that they could apply for due to their language difficulties and possible language exemptions, but they may also require assistance in filling out forms so that they have not misread any vital information and so that the guidance counsellor can clarify any uncertainties that they may have after researching a career path. A student with dyslexia may also need further assistance from the guidance counsellor while completing the DARE form, something that could be instrumental to that student being awarded a place at university. The application form for DARE is quite text heavy and can create issues for dyslexic students trying to complete the form on their own. However, it has been shown that applicants who have received a lot of supports at secondary school 'are significantly less likely to have submitted incomplete applications' (Byrne et al., 2013). Further to this, there has been a long history of links between low self-esteem and dyslexia, with Humphrey (2002) noting that students with dyslexia were more likely to be shy and avoid stressful situations. Therefore the guidance counsellor has to be aware of this so that if necessary they can provide personal counselling to students with dyslexia who are suffering from low self-esteem to help them build confidence and consequently improve their chances of success and happiness in school but to also encourage them to aim high and be ambitious in their desires for furthering their education.

As with any disability, it is necessary that the guidance counsellor be fully aware of the issues that arise from having dyslexia. It is with that hope that this work may help dispel any incorrect ideas about the impact dyslexia has on students and instead shed further light on the specific language difficulty, and help guidance counsellors to enhance their current practice in how they facilitate students with dyslexia progress onto third level education.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined current literature surrounding dyslexia and its educational impact on the student. From examining the literature, several key themes have emerged including the lack of transparency that surrounds the DARE programme as well as Irelands notable efforts to make education more inclusive. This chapter has also explored what the DARE programme is and how the DARE programme compares to other countries' access initiatives. Finally this chapter has looked at the role of the guidance counsellor in assisting students with dyslexia going to third level. Chapter 3 will examine the methodology which will be used for this research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

It is the intention of this chapter to outline the methodology that will be used for this study while also presenting the rationale for the chosen methods, data collection and analysis. Methodology can be described as a plan for research, it is not just a description of the methods used in a research study but the reasons why these methods were chosen while also considering their limitations (Thomas, 2009). Methodology is a process which considers ethical practice, reducing bias and subjectivity (Ratner, 2002) while also providing a structure within which data can be collected and analysed (Bryman, 2008). It is clear that the importance of selecting the correct paradigms, methodologies and methods cannot be underestimated for the researcher as it provides the structure from which the research will be developed. (Hearne, 2013).

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodological approach of this study, to examine the research questions and research methodology. Methods of data collection and analysis as well as validity and reliability in interpretivist research will be examined. Finally, ethical concerns will be discussed.

3.2 Research Questions

Bryman (2007) describes formulating a research question as the most critical and difficult part of research design yet, the importance of this cannot be overlooked as Blaikie (2000 p.58) states that a research project is 'built on the foundations of the research questions'. Research questions should look at a socially relevant issue and lead to some form of progress (Flick, 2011). Bryman (2004 p.23) highlights that 'choices of research strategy, design, or method have to be dovetailed with the specific research question being investigated'. Thus the research question is the foundation on which the rest of the research is built.

3.2.1 Primary research question

The primary research question is 'what are the insights that can be gained from reviewing the DARE programme from the perspectives of relevant practitioners?'. This research will involve investigating what resources are available to students with dyslexia who enter into university through the DARE programme and if it is seen as truly beneficial to them by guidance counsellors in second level as well as disability and careers staff members at third level.

In order to fully answer this question several subsidiary questions were also formulated to get a fully encompassing answer.

3.2.2 Secondary research questions

1. What are the findings of the literature that has previously examined dyslexia in order to provide a context to this research?
2. What is the DARE programme?
3. What are the opinions of relevant practitioners in relation to policy, perceived benefits, good practice and areas for improvement of the DARE programme?

3.3 Research Paradigm: Interpretivist

Kuhn (1962) describes a paradigm as a manner of research using an accepted model, pattern or as a world view through a shared belief system or set of principles. In research there are two major forms of research, positivist and interpretivist (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The paradigm that was chosen for this study is interpretivist as this research will focus solely on qualitative methods with the interpretivist paradigm facilitating the study of humans and an understanding of the subjective multiple realities of clients (Hearne, 2009). This study shall use this interpretivist paradigm to gain insights into the perceptions, feelings, ideas and experiences of the DARE programme from guidance counsellors and third level Disability and Career staff (Thomas, 2013). Qualitative research can be summarised as the collection and interpretation of the views of participants by the researcher. The philosophical position of interpretivist research appeals to the researcher as it carries the same views of the nature of reality as well as the nature of knowledge (Merriam, 2009). The ontological stance of this study considers the reality and experiences of the interviewees as being true to them and that each interviewee may have different opinions or experiences of the DARE programme so their perceptions may be true to them and yet different to other participants (Punch, 2005; Creswell, 2003; Thomas, 2013). Moreover, it is acknowledged that an interpretivist paradigm is a more apt approach whilst studying human behaviour as science cannot always use numbers in which to explain behaviours and viewpoints of the world. A quantitative paradigm which seeks to explain the world in a straightforward manner cannot always capture the unstraightforward, unpredictable and subjective viewpoints of people, with Cohen et al. (2011) explaining that the quantitative approach disregards the huge intricacy of human nature and the incomprehensible

differences that are inherent in each human being and their thought processes and experiences thus a qualitative research approach has been undertaken for this study.

Interpretivism is often described as an interest in people and the way that they relate with each other, with a keen interest in what they think as well as how they form ideas about the world around them and how they see the world (Thomas, 2009). There are disadvantages to this paradigm however as it can be argued that interpretivism has abandoned ‘scientific procedures of verification and in giving up hope of discovering generalisations about behaviour’ (Cohen et al., 2011 p.21). In qualitative research the researcher is the ‘primary instrument’ (Merriam 2009 p.15). Within this form of research the researcher makes an interpretation of what they see, hear and understand from the data that they gather (Creswell, 2009). However Merriam (2009) suggests that the aforementioned ‘primary instrument’ has shortcomings and faults that may impact on the study. Therefore as a researcher one has to be aware of such shortcomings and take measures to assure that they do not affect the collection and interpretation of data.

Qualitative research describes the point of view of the participants (Flick et al., 2004) and for the purpose of this study the focus will be on the DARE programme and how a small number of relevant practitioners in the education sector feel about the DARE programme. Qualitative research will allow the participants to give an account of their experiences and how they truly feel about the DARE programme in a manner that is more open and allowing of new inputs than quantitative research which instead takes a more scientific stance.

3.4 Limitations

Nonetheless despite, the aforementioned advantages of using the qualitative approach and its growing acceptance in recent years, opposition still remains (Flick et al., 2004). Problems with qualitative research may arise due to lack of clarity about the value of standards in research, unanswered methodological questions and gaps in the research (Flick et al., 2004). In addition, the findings of this study will be hard to generalise due to the small scale of the study and the differing perceptions that each interviewee will provide, thus a universal truth cannot be presented, but the findings that will be presented will be true to the perceptions and experiences of each participant (Clandinin & Husu, 2017). Despite these flaws, the qualitative approach has been chosen as the benefits of its use far outweighs the disadvantages that it entails.

3.5 Research Epistemology

Epistemology can be defined as the nature, sources and limits of knowledge. It refers to the way that we look at the world and how we come to understand the world that we live in. A research epistemology is the system of knowing that then informs the ways in which one approaches the systematic practice of research. It can then be said that epistemology is the source from which the research process flows, as the selection of methodology and methods follow or question the original epistemological assumptions (Crotty, 1998). If the researcher has made the epistemological grounding of the research explicit and transparent, the researcher can then develop a more reflexive approach as they have questioned their assumptions. Crotty (1998) outlines three different epistemological positions: objectivism, subjectivism and constructionism.

Constructionism refers to the belief that people basically construct their own meaning of reality (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). Therefore as this research will be conducted using semi-structured interviews and the research paradigm is interpretivist the obvious epistemological basis for this study is constructionism.

3.6 Data Collection Method: Semi-Structured Interview

In this section the matter of sampling methods and gaining access to the research participants will be outlined. The process of data collection can also be referred to as fieldwork and the methods that are used in this fieldwork are thought of as practical tools to collect this information (Tight, 2003). Also, the researcher will discuss the reasons for choosing semi-structured interviews for the purpose of this study. Subsequently validity, reliability and ethical considerations will also be examined.

3.7 Access and Sampling

For the purpose of this study, there are three different types of participants involved: firstly, Guidance Counsellors from the second level education sector; secondly, Career office Staff members and thirdly Disability office staff members both from the third level education sector. Following ethical approval, access to the first group of participants was sought from the gatekeeper of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors who was contacted with information letters as well as consent forms (See appendix C, F). Career office staff members and Disability office staff members were contacted with the information letter and were then sent a consent form if they wished to take part in the study. Convenience sampling was used in the selection of all

candidates for this study. Groups that are chosen by convenience sampling are conducive to self-selection, administrative decision, time of the class etc. (Farrokhi, 2012). The title of the study and the procedures of interviewing were explained to all participants, along with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity before commencing the interview process. The researcher ensured that participants gave valid consent to the interviews. The right to withdraw consent before the data was analysed was also discussed with all participants. The interviews took place in varying locations at various times in order to suit the needs of the participants and their differing schedules. A digital recorder was used to record every interview and each interview was then transcribed in order to be analysed.

3.8 Qualitative Methods: Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews addressed the relevant practitioners' experiences of the DARE programme and their opinions on the resources that the DARE programme provides students with once they go to university. For the purpose of this study the researcher utilised face-to-face interviews which allowed the researcher to relate more to the people being interviewed as well as being able to observe and listen for nuances in each interviewee's behaviour (Thomas, 2009). This method of interviewing was chosen over structured interviews as the semi-structured interview does not have to adhere rigidly to a predetermined set of questions which may not fully capture the interviewee's true experience and perspective of the DARE Programme (Merriam, 2009). As a dialogical method interviewing was used because it is flexible and capable of gathering data that is detailed and personal. Additionally, the researcher is able to check for understanding with something the interview candidate has said that may not have been anticipated to come up during the course of the interview. Therefore open-endedness is an important factor of this research as it is intended that the voices of Guidance Counsellors, Disability office Staff Members and Career office Staff Members are heard throughout this research. Open ended questions allow for spontaneous and unconstrained responses from the interview participant as the researcher asks general questions, eliciting information that may not have been uncovered with structured interview questions or questionnaires. Drever (1995) discusses that in an interview the term semi-structured means that the interviewer sets up a general structure of what direction the interview will follow, allowing for unforeseen information to present itself in a natural way during the process of the interview. One of the advantages of a semi-structured interview is that it can help form a rapport of trust and openness that will ensure that participants express their feelings and experiences as best as they can. While it can be argued that semi-structured interviews are not necessarily a fact finding mission but more a view of

how individuals have interpreted the facts or experiences as they themselves have experienced them, it is clear that semi-structured interviews are capable of providing the researcher with a wealth of information (Walsh & Wiggins, 2003).

3.9 Data Analysis Method: Constant Comparative Method

‘Analysis is necessary because findings require evidence’ (Ryan, 2006, p.94). In order to have an accurate record of the interviews and thus evidence for this research’s findings, the researcher both audio recorded each interview as well as then transcribing each interview to provide the researcher with a clear version of exactly what was said in each interview. In order to analyse the data from the interviews the constant comparative method is used which involves going through the data continually, comparing each element with other elements that arose in separate interviews (Thomas, 2009, p.198). Themes will emerge using this method of analysing the data and this use of method is important as it helps ‘develop a theory that is grounded in the data’ (Boeije, 2002). The data analysis for the research will be looked at in more detail in chapter four.

3.10 Validity and Reliability in Interpretive Research

3.10.1 Validity

It is of the utmost importance that the research is represented as accurately as possible, in order for this to happen the research must be both valid and reliable. The term validity signifies how accurately an account represents the lived experiences and realities of interview participants (Curtis et al., 2014). If research is truly valid then it will truly attempt to answer the research questions and ensure that the research is truly searching to answer what it initially began to investigate. The trustworthiness of qualitative research is often questioned as validity and reliability cannot be guaranteed in the same manner as in quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). Moreover, Cohen et al. asserts that it is ‘inevitable that the researcher will have some influence’ (2000, p.175). Thomas (2009, p.106) is dubious of researcher efforts to prove that research is valid and reliable and argues that ‘in interpretative research you are interpreting on the basis of you being *you*, interviewing someone else being *them*’. Maxwell 1992 (cited in Cohen et al., 2007) warns against leaning towards the positivist’s agenda to prove validity and reliability in qualitative research and instead to place more merit on the genuineness of the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) insist that the trustworthiness of research is vital to evaluating the value of a study. To improve validity of the interview process, the first interview acted as both an information gathering opportunity but also as a pilot interview. From analysing the first

interview and how it developed and progressed the researcher was able to look at what could be improved and changed for the following interviews, though as the interviews progressed it was clear to the researcher that no two interviews were the same, each providing a different view of the world and experience and therefore called for different questions and thus had to be a constantly adjusting and developing process.

3.10.2 Reliability

Reliability is the ‘consistency of test results measured by looking at the comparability of scores on two different occasions or of two equivalent versions’ (Woolfolk et al., 2008, p.629). Brock-Utne (1996) debates that reliability is relevant to both positivist and interpretivist paradigms. Conversely, Wolcott (2005) argues that reliability is troublesome in social research when being applied to the interpretivist paradigm. For research to be reliable the results must be repeatable, however Kleven (1995 cited in Brock-Utne, 1996, p.614) asks ‘would a second observer with the same theoretical framework have seen and interpreted the observations the same way?’. Thus once again we must consider that reliability in interpretivist research is somewhat unattainable (Curtis et al., 2014).

3.11 Reflexivity

In the area of research reflexivity is used to describe the difficulties that may arise for the researcher with Lincoln and Guba (2000) describing it as ‘the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher’ (in Merriam, 2009, p.219). Creswell (2005) determines that a researcher who is using an interpretative approach holds no control over research outcomes and it is within the remit of others to make their own inferences from what the research produces. Cohen et al (2007, p.171) uses the analogy of researchers holding ‘themselves up to the light’ as ‘they are part of the world they are investigating’ and advises that researchers should disclose themselves and their position in the research. As well, reflexivity ‘requires researchers to monitor closely and continually their own interactions with participants, their own reactions, roles, biases and any other matters that might affect the research’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p.225). Therefore reflexivity is a constant process during the undertaking of research in which the researcher must continually question their actions and their motives for doing so in order to make sure that the research is not prejudiced due to the researcher’s own feelings or experiences. The researcher will focus on these requirements while conducting interviews with all guidance counsellors and third level staff as well as during the analysing of data and throughout the research period. In order to attain as high a standard as possible of ethical

reflexivity the researcher has focused on her positioning within the study as practitioner and researcher while also keeping the participants and their position in this study in consideration.

3.12 Ethical Research Practice in Guidance Counselling

Ethical approval was granted by the UL Education and Health Sciences Committee on 30th March 2017 (2017_03_10) to conduct this research study. Ethics cannot be disregarded in research as every stage of the process is bound by ethical considerations (Cohen et al., 2007). Ethics are a set of ‘principles of conduct of what is right and wrong’ (Thomas, 2009, p147). Murphy and Dingwall (2001, in Flick, 2011) state that ethical theory is based on four principals: non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy and justice. Non-maleficence and beneficence can otherwise be described as the cost/benefit ratio. The cost/benefit ratio is a ‘fundamental concept expressing the primary ethical dilemma in social research’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p.75). This cost/benefit ratio must be borne in consideration as Sugarman (2001) warns against any fast track methods which could endanger not only the ethical concerns but the safety of the participants involved. The cost to participants in this research may have been revelations about their professional roles, their place of work, their own feelings and experiences towards the DARE programme, therefore personal information that is sensitive to them and could thus cause embarrassment to them if the information was not dealt with in an ethical way. Hence the researcher adhered to the duty of care as outlined in the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (2012) Constitution and Code of Ethics and to the NCGE (2008) Research code of Ethics which requires ‘respect for the rights and dignity of the person, competence, responsibility and integrity’. Furthermore, there was a time cost for participants taking part in this study. Those taking part in the research had to take part in an interview that lasted approximately forty minutes; to ease some of the time constraints to participants the interviews were undertaken in a place that was most convenient to the participants and at a time that suited them the most. In addition, the justification for asking for this valuable time from Guidance Counsellors and third level staff was that the research provides the participants an opportunity to express their feelings and to voice their experiences of the DARE programme in an anonymous way. This anonymity was ensured by giving each guidance counsellor a pseudonym that they were continuously referred to as throughout the study (e.g. “Guidance Counsellor 1”).

The researcher attained autonomy for participants by providing participants with detailed information as to what participating in this this research would entail and then providing each

participant with a consent form with which the participant could reject being involved in the study.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology that will underpin this research. This research will utilise an interpretivist paradigm. Additionally, the validity and reliability of interpretivist research and ethical considerations have been considered. Chapter four will detail the data analysis and findings from the interviews.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the main findings of the interviews. A number of themes emerged during the course of the interviews which highlight the perceptions and experiences of the DARE programme by some relevant practitioners. This chapter begins by outlining the method of data analysis before presenting the findings thematically.

4.1 Data Analysis

The aim of analysing data is to gather robust themes that provide a rich insight into the perceptions and experiences of relevant practitioners. By using the constant comparative method the researcher is able to develop theories that are grounded in data gained directly from relevant practitioners in the area. The researcher used Thomas' (2009) constant comparative method to identify key themes that were consistent across the interviews to determine the most important issues to relevant practitioners. These interviews were recorded and then transcribed, which involved listening to the recordings several times to become familiar with the content of each interview. Once transcribed the text was then read numerous times to induce meaningful themes that appeared throughout the interviews, with any significant data being highlighted. Five major themes emerged from this constant comparison method: Resourcing, Inclusion, Stigma, Transparency, and Accessibility and Fairness.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Resourcing

All five guidance counsellors acknowledged that the DARE programme placed time constraints on them in some form. Interviewees presented with resentment towards the DARE programme itself with Guidance Counsellor 5 saying 'I find it an absolutely massive pain' with similar perceptions being echoed by other guidance counsellors. There are a number of stages required in order to fill out the DARE application in its entirety which also requires the input of several different people within the school. Although two guidance counsellors noted that in some schools it was not the duty of the guidance counsellor to fill out the DARE application, in other schools the guidance counsellor was the co-ordinator of all people involved in the process. Nonetheless, the process of filling out the DARE application was determined to be very time consuming with Guidance Counsellor 5 stating:

“I would say between sitting down with the students, filling out the form myself, and sitting down with the AEN department and looking for test scores and assessments easily 5 to 6 classes per student and then you have to go looking for the principal and for two teachers who can act as witnesses and you spend any amount of time looking for people.”

The form which must be received by the first of February coincides with a busy time of year for schools but especially for 6th year students and guidance counsellors which Guidance Counsellor 5 found particularly difficult.

“it’s coming at a time where in our school anyway, where we have just finished the DAT’s testing and we are trying to give back the DAT’s results to 170/180 TY students and we have to meet every single one of them around subject choice and giving back the results and then in the middle of this we have these DARE forms to fill out.”

This was something that was reflected by two other guidance counsellors who even suggested that the application could be filled out in the students 5th year, especially if the student has dyslexia which is a lifelong disability and so will not change like a medical illness may. Thus completion of the DARE forms in 5th year could reduce the number of things that the student has to do in 6th year. Guidance Counsellor 2 reiterated these sentiments by suggesting moving the date of the application:

“I feel the timing of the DARE scheme opening for a senior cycle student in the middle of a CAO application, mocks and whatever else, I mean I think it’s wrong, a student with dyslexia has dyslexia in 5th year as well as in 6th year and I think it should be considered to move the DARE application to 5th year for that reason.”

A sentiment that was further echoed by Guidance Counsellor 4 who felt that the DARE application took place during a ‘busy time’ and felt that moving the application date could lead to it being ‘less stressful’.

While these time constraints put guidance counsellors under pressure, something that is more than likely heightened by the cuts to the ex-quota hours of guidance counsellors in 2012, it is not the only factor that guidance counsellors were worried about in terms of resourcing the DARE programme on behalf of guidance counsellors and the student while in secondary school.

The second issue that guidance counsellors reflected upon was the financial impact of the DARE programme on students. Though one guidance counsellor suggested that there was no financial impact of the DARE programme on students it may be worth noting that this guidance counsellor worked in a private fee paying school. Guidance Counsellors 1, 2, 3, and 5, who

worked in DEIS and community schools, commented on the DARE programmes often inaccessibility due to financial reasons with some guidance counsellors suggesting that students were missing out on places in university simply because students cannot afford to pay for psychological assessments. Guidance Counsellor 2 described it as ‘heart-breaking’:

“I mean it’s really heart-breaking to see students when I do that presentation, the general one, and I see students coming up saying I think that would be me, I think I would qualify for that and it’s an awful thing but the very first question I will be asking is have you a psychological assessment? And you can see immediately that you know they know it’s a money issue and it’s not going to happen.”

This was a sentiment that resonated with almost all of the other guidance counsellors who were interviewed with Guidance Counsellor 3 mentioning the different routes that they would try to get a student the money for a psychological assessment:

“We would try and access maybe an odd assessment through school completion, schools funds, maybe through St. Vincent de Paul, we would encourage people to go back through other avenues to get to try and access funds and we would fund some of them through school funds if we really felt it was necessary.”

Even though the aim of the DARE programme is to make education more accessible to students with disabilities it is clear that a student with a disability may not even be able to apply for the DARE programme due to financial reasons.

4.2.2 Inclusion

To echo what was said previously, the purpose of the DARE programme is to promote and increase the number of students with disabilities in third level education. Despite this fact, not all third level institutions are a part of the DARE programme, something that all 5 guidance counsellors disagree with. Guidance Counsellor 1 argued that if the DARE programme was extended to all third level institutions then ‘there is equal access for all students from second level to third’ while Guidance Counsellor 2 said that ‘it would be fantastic if they all would’. While Guidance Counsellor 3 suggested it should even be extended to PLC courses:

“Absolutely like all 3rd level even PLC’s, I know it’s different but people have to be allowed to get to where they want to get to, they have to be allowed to shine, to be given a chance. I would always say that to my own students, you know there is so much ability around this disability, it’s just a small nuts and bolts thing that with training and with help is very surmountable.”

It is because of the fact that the DARE programme is not present in every third level institution that three of the five guidance counsellors felt that the DARE programme did not reach enough

students and that the number of students with disabilities in their school was not consistent with the amount of students who applied to DARE. Guidance Counsellor 3 stated ‘absolutely not’ when questioned on whether the DARE programme was coming to the assistance of every student with a disability in second level education. Something that was mirrored in the school of Guidance Counsellor 4 where a ‘huge number of them would not apply to the CAO’ and therefore despite the fact that they had a disability and wanted to go onto further education they were left completely unaided by the DARE programme. Guidance Counsellor 5 estimated that the amount of students who were left behind by the DARE programme due to its lack of level 6 and level 7 institutions to be around a third:

“We have students who have disabilities but who would not make the minimum entry requirements or the points and so wouldn’t be applying for university they would be applying possibly to the ITs or they would be applying to [name of further education college] and it could be a third, I’m just trying to think it might be a third of students who have disabilities who would not apply for DARE.”

The guidance counsellors wish for the DARE programme to be extended to all third level institutions was supported by both Disability Office staff members and the Career Office staff member. Disability office staff member 1 felt that the lack of third level institutions being a part of DARE held students back when asked if the DARE programme should be extended:

“In the ideal world yes, the only reason I say that is if a student wants to do something but the colleges within the DARE programme don’t do that then that student is kind of stuck.”

This was reiterated by Career office staff member 1 who felt it excluded students with disabilities from third level:

“Yes I think they should, I can only assume that students with disabilities are being kept out of courses (in some third level institutions) that they would do very well in simply because of points that they may have gotten if they did not have the disability.”

While Disability office staff member 2 admitted that some institutions had their own admissions route they did confess that it may be down to financial reasons why some institutions did not offer the DARE programme:

“Most universities if not all universities are a part of DARE. I think maybe they should all be part of DARE but you have to pay into it but maybe your institution isn’t big enough. Maybe your institution doesn’t warrant enough of buy in.”

Yet again it seems that the DARE programme is being held back from accessing as many students as possible due to financial reasons.

4.2.2.1 Access without supports is not opportunity

Though guidance counsellors expressed their reservation about how much of a reduction in points students are entitled to disability office staff member 2 saw the fact that there was no cap as a positive:

“I love that we don’t have a cut-off because it gives everybody an opportunity, if you get 320 points and you are brilliant at architecture and you get into architecture that’s so brilliant you not getting the points doesn’t matter.”

While guidance counsellors were unsure of exactly how much of a reduction in points students may be entitled to, every guidance counsellor was worried about putting students at a disadvantage if they were put in a group or class that was too advanced for their abilities. Guidance Counsellor 3 made this very valid point when they said:

“Am I wouldn’t like to see the points being dropped so that they are then coming under pressure in college there has to be a reasonable expectation academically.”

Which was also commented on by Guidance Counsellor 4:

“I sometimes worry that we don’t know what the cut-off is for things I sometimes worry about a student getting into a course that they are not going to be able for.”

In order to combat this problem four of the guidance counsellors felt that there should be a cap on the reduction of points that students should be allowed to get so as not to put them at a disadvantage on their future course.

While guidance counsellors were concerned about the reduction in points that students may be allowed and the consequences of this, disability office staff member 2 thought that it provided students with a huge freedom and preferred the no cap on points that their institution had as a policy for reasons that they outlined when questioned on the practicality of it:

“Whereas if you have the cut-off, those students are not in the running for places and sometimes the more significant the disability the less points that they will get and to me DARE is for people with more significant disabilities, you had mentioned earlier that some people are getting reports done so those people are only ten or fifteen points off a course whereas people with a significant disability are 100 points off the course and if you have a cut-off point those people have no chance and then you just fill up the course with people who maybe don’t need DARE and you cut off people with very significant disabilities who actually need DARE.”

4.2.3 Stigma

As well as being stopped from applying for the DARE programme due to financial reasons, and some institutions not offering the programme, some guidance counsellors made reference to the fact that some students may not be applying to the DARE programme due to the stigma that they feared may be attached to them by being a part of the DARE programme. Guidance Counsellors 1, 3 and 5 made reference to the student being worried about the label of having a disability following them to university. This was concurrent with the view of disability office staff member 1 who felt that students ‘might have a disability that they might want to keep to themselves’ which meant that students did not apply to third level though the DARE programme and often saw them not accessing help in university. Interestingly Guidance Counsellor 4 and 5 admitted that parents often had reservations about allowing their child to apply for the DARE programme due to the label of having a disability. Guidance Counsellor 5 was surprised by the level of avoidance that some parents will go to in order to avoid applying for the DARE programme:

“We would have cases whereby parents would have refused to talk to the Additional Educational Needs department about any possible issue with their son or daughter and even when the schools call them to come in to have a meeting about testing or that there could be an issue with dyslexia or with writing we have met parents who refuse to engage and they also then refuse to engage in 6th year.”

Conversely Disability Office staff member 1 found that parents were actually in favour of having their child diagnosed with a disability, though for the wrong reasons:

“Unfortunately parents want the label put on their child to say this is why they are not academically strong.”

While this may be rare it is nonetheless apparent that there is still some form of stigma attached to having dyslexia and is preventing some people from applying for the DARE programme.

4.2.4 Transparency

All five guidance counsellors alluded to the fact that they did not know about the inner workings of the DARE programme. All five guidance counsellors assumed that the DARE programme provided students with resources and not the university itself. Guidance counsellors assumed that the DARE programme provides educational, emotional and social supports though this was rejected by Disability Office staff member 2 who stated:

“I said DARE is just the admissions route so I would say that the supports are not linked to DARE; for me our university would offer all of those supports.”

Also, it may be important to inform students of this as the stigma that students are concerned about does not follow them through university:

“So as I said, to me DARE is just an admissions route, once you come through DARE, and we tell our students this, once you come through DARE if you never want to speak about DARE again you don’t have to.”

Disability Office staff member 1 then outlined the benefit for the University for using this programme even though it has to offer the students all of the supports:

“Yeah the whole point of it is that they are streamlined to us so that when they come to us then we already have an idea of the student.”

Guidance counsellors were also quick to admit that they were completely unaware as to how many points less than other students a student of the DARE programme may be able to enter into university with. Guidance Counsellor 1 presumed that ‘it’s only 10, 15 or 20 points’ while Guidance Counsellor 4 stated:

“I have heard, and whether its rumour or not I don’t know, but I heard from one of my students last year ‘sure it’s grand, I’ve got DARE. My brother got into his course and he was 130 points short.”

While Guidance Counsellor 3 tried to get students to focus on the other benefits of entering into university through the DARE programme because she was unsure of what reduction in point’s students could get:

“No I would just simply say you may get reduced points and I would often say to them to park that because the other benefits are far more important, the ongoing benefits when they are on the course and the reduced points may be there, they could be as low as 5 points.”

Interestingly Disability Office staff member 1 was unsure as to how much of a reduction in points students may be allowed also stating:

“I could not answer that now because I just don’t know, with the limited knowledge that I have you won’t get more than 40 or 50 points.”

However the institution that both Disability Office members work for has no cap on the amount of reduced points that DARE students are allowed as long as the student meets the course’s minimum entry requirements. Disability Office staff member 2 described specifically how students are awarded places on courses using the DARE programme:

“So it doesn’t work like you offered a certain amount of points, what happens is we have 5 places if five people apply, they all get a place regardless of their points, now we don’t have a cut-off.”

4.2.5 Accessibility and Fairness

Possibly the most surprising and startling theme that arose from the interviews was the fact that students who may not actually have a disability were buying a diagnosis for dyslexia to allow them enter into university on reduced points, according to the relevant practitioners that were interviewed. This appeared to be common knowledge for both guidance counsellors and Disability Office staff members. The theme first arose during the guidance counsellor interviews despite the fact that there was no question that remotely referenced this topic. The issue seems to be so common that Disability Office staff member 1 used the term ‘real dyslexics’ to speak about students who use the DARE programme who are actually impacted by the disability. Disability Office staff member 2 was resigned to the fact it was happening:

“I think that it is happening most definitely, I think that people are getting assessed and don’t necessarily need them, maybe getting the diagnosis in 6th year, prior to that having no supports but yeah get assessed.”

While both Disability Office members felt that this was occurring quite often they were slow to say that the practice was completely fraudulent as they both felt that there must be some justification for the educational psychologist issuing a diagnosis of dyslexia. Disability Office staff member 1 stated:

“Well I can’t say that they are not deserved because it’s kind of a case where they have to go to an educational psychologist to find out whether or not they are dyslexic or not.”

However Disability Office staff member 1 also said:

“Dyslexia is being thrown at everything now if a child is doing badly at school it’s almost like well they must have dyslexia.”

Disability Office staff member 2 was also slow to deny someone a position on DARE due to the possible abuse of the programme as they must go by the educational psychologist’s assessment as they felt they were not in a place to judge who was impacted by their disability and who wasn’t:

“I have somebody over here who says it impacts them, but they got their assessment 6 months ago and they are saying it has impacted them forever and then I have a student who has had a report since they were twelve and they think it doesn’t impact on them at all so I think that’s something that in schools I am very aware.”

Four of the five guidance counsellors felt that students buying a diagnosis was a widespread issue. Guidance Counsellor 4 even mentioned that their school had a specific educational psychologist that they directed their students to:

Interviewer: “So you have found that people are getting psychological assessments that allow them to go for DARE even though they might not deserve them?”

Interviewee: “Definitely, yeah like we have a psychologist that we recommend to students because his reports are excellent they are very clear cut and he even has a heading about DARE and whether the person is eligible or not, he has a heading for race and whether they are eligible or not. So we recommend him to parents.”

While other schools did not mention having specific educational psychologists that they referred their students to they had heard of great lengths that their students had gone to in order to attain a psychological assessment that may not have been merited. Guidance Counsellor 5 stated:

“Yes we have seen it, and some people will go to Galway, they will go to Dublin, they will go up to Ulster. They will go to somebody who will be very liberal with their test results and who will make sure that they can get some sort of exemption or that they can apply through the DARE.”

Guidance Counsellor 2 felt that this is where ‘the system could fall down’. While Disability Office staff member 2 described it as a ‘loophole’ yet felt that it is inevitable and later went on to describe the DARE programme as being imperfect yet still maintained its merits:

“I think the pros outweigh the cons, I think it creates a level playing field for the most part.”

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has comprehensively outlined the data analysis used in this research and from this the themes that have emerged in the process. The findings reveal that although the DARE programme holds significant advantages for students who are eligible to apply, several key issues are preventing the programme from reaching its full potential. Resourcing has been highlighted as one of these key issues, primarily the lack of funding available to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who cannot afford psychological assessments. Inclusion is a problem that has arisen due to resourcing issues; as third level institutes have to pay in order to be a part of the DARE programme most institutes of technology do not participate in the DARE programme and so the programme is not reaching its potential in terms of inclusivity. Stigma around having a disability remains and was found to stop students applying for the DARE programme. Additionally, the lack of transparency surrounding the DARE programme

left second level guidance counsellors uncertain when discussing the programme with students, specifically in relation to reduced points entry and the variation between policies in different third level institutions. Lastly, accessibility and fairness arose as a key issue as both second level guidance counsellors and Disability Office staff members were concerned about students buying a diagnosis that wasn't merited and how this may affect students who truly needed the assistance of the DARE programme.

In chapter five the findings will be looked at through the lens of literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The focus of this study has been on the DARE programme and the perceived benefits it holds for students. This chapter will demonstrate a critical interpretation of the information gathered in the interviews in the context of the literature from chapter 2. The primary research question of this study is ‘what are the insights that can be gained from reviewing the DARE programme from the perspectives of relevant practitioners’. This research looked at this question from the perspective of guidance counsellors, Disability Office staff members and Career Office staff members. From the data gathered five major themes emerged, resourcing, inclusion, transparency as well as accessibility and fairness. These themes provide a structure to generate discussion points and further synthesise sub-themes.

5.1 Articulation and Transparency

From the findings it is evident that guidance counsellors remain unclear as to what exactly the DARE programme is and what service it provides to students with disabilities. There seems to be a common misconception that the DARE programme offers access to students through reduced points while also providing students with resources once at university. There is the presumption that the DARE programme remains involved with the student throughout the student’s time at university. However this is not true; Disability Office staff member 2 was very clear when explaining that the DARE programme is solely for the purpose of access, to help students enter into university on reduced points:

“I said DARE is just the admissions route so I would say that the supports are not linked to DARE. For me, our university would offer all of those supports.”

There are inconsistencies between what guidance counsellors think the DARE programme provides and what it actually provides, as the guidance counsellors worked off the premise that the DARE programme provided students with disabilities a continuum of supports in university and that it was the DARE programme that provided students with resources at university and not the university itself. These assumptions can be drawn from information that was available on accesscollege.ie (2014, see appendix J), and although this content has now changed to reflect the fact the DARE programme is only an admissions programme, the idea that the DARE programme provides a continuum of supports remains. While it may be of little significance to guidance counsellors who provide students with resources, it is telling that

guidance counsellors were working off of assumptions as to what the DARE programme is but were mistaken as to what the DARE programme actually involved.

Additionally, guidance counsellors further struggled with the ambiguity of the reduced points offer. All five guidance counsellors were unaware as to how many reduced points a student is entitled to receive with some guidance counsellors refusing to be drawn on the topic by students while other guidance counsellors worked off of experience and what they had heard through rumours. However, this gap in knowledge by guidance counsellors can be explained by the fact that there are such wide differences between the exemptions and allowances that each third level institution offers to students. This is concurrent with the findings of Byrne et al.'s (2013) review of DARE and HEAR access initiatives which acknowledged institutional variations in terms of student intake, recruitment, implementation, subject choice and supports for DARE. Evidently due to such differing entrance policies for DARE applicants in different third level institutions there is a lack of clarity between guidance counsellors as to exactly how much of a points reduction the DARE programme may be able to offer a student. While this research can shed some light on the extremely varied nature of the DARE programme it cannot provide precise information about the DARE programmes quantity of places held on each course in every third level institution, the quantity of reduced points that students are allowed to enter into university on or the supports that universities provide to students as each institution differs and are not bound by any universal rules or regulations in regards to these issues.

5.2 Disability Stigma

One discovery by this research has been the fact that stigma may still be a factor in people not applying for the DARE programme. Stigma refers to the prejudice and discrimination that an individual may experience due to that fact that they have certain characteristics that are deemed flawed by society's standards (Goffman, 1963). Stigma is a problem faced by people with disabilities (Stuart, 2006; Ali et al., 2012), an issue that Guidance counsellor 5 sees the consequences of regularly. Guidance counsellor 5 commented on the fact that both students and parents are still conscious of having a disability to the extent that some parents were denying their children additional educational supports because they denied the existence of any disability:

“We would have cases whereby parents would have refused to talk to AEN (Additional Educational Needs) about any possible issue with their son or daughter and even when the schools call them to come in to have a meeting about testing or that there could be an issue with dyslexia or with writing we have met parents who refuse to engage and they also then refuse to engage in 6th year.”

This teacher's experience of denial by parents is consistent with the findings of Lalvani (2015) who noted that several teachers had encountered parents who opposed having their child assessed for special education purposes. In addition, the word 'label' continually arose throughout the course of this research. Guidance counsellors and Disability Staff members were all adamant that students and parents did not want to have a label placed on them due to the fact that they had a disability. This is consistent with the findings of Lalvani (2015, p.383) who found that parents had negative feelings about their child being labelled with a disability, and felt that 'the identification of a child with a disability alters perceptions of the child'. However problems still occurred for students even in the absence of a label as reported by Riddick (2000) and Morris & Turnbull (2006) who instead found that informal labels were placed on students such as 'slow', 'hopeless' and 'lazy'. Lalvani (2015) also discussed stigma and the differing views that teachers held in comparison to parents as to the stigma caused by being labelled with a disability. Lalvani (2015, p.384) noted that most teachers 'did not consider stigma to be associated with disability' but believed that 'parents may have concerns about stigma'. Goffman's (1963; Link & Phelan, 2001) sense of stigma suggests that it arises as a result of labelling, stereotyping, separating, status loss and discrimination, however this is in contrast to Riddick and Morris & Turnbull who found that students were still labelled though in a more informal way.

5.3 The Inclusion Delusion

The DARE programme was created in order to promote and increase inclusion at university for students with disabilities. Despite this fact a number of guidance counsellors during the interview phase acknowledged that there may still be groups of people who were excluded from this programme. In chapter 4 it was mentioned that financial issues may prevent a lot of people from applying to the DARE programme. This is concurrent with the findings of Byrne et al. who discovered that:

“The profile of DARE applicants and the schools that they come from suggests that the scheme is not reaching its potential in terms of targeting students with disabilities in second level schools.”

(Byrne et al., 2013, p.226)

Guidance Counsellor 3 made reference to the fact that as she had worked in a DEIS school where a lot of her students would not be able to afford the educational assessment that was necessary for the DARE application, whereas Guidance Counsellor 4 who worked in a fee

paying private school did not feel that there were financial barriers to students who wished to apply for the DARE programme. Yet again this difference in financial circumstances for students and schools was already noted in Byrne et al. who noticed that a large percentage of students applying to DARE came from what would be considered more wealthy schools:

“Attendance at both fee-paying second level schools and non-government funded fee-paying schools (‘grind schools’) is more evident among DARE eligible applicants than any other CAO applicant. 18% of DARE eligible applicants had attended a fee-paying school relative to just 9% of all CAO applicants, and a further 6% of DARE eligible applicants had attended a ‘grind’ school compared to just 4% of all CAO applicants.”

(Byrne et al., 2013, p.232)

Even though this research looked at the fact that students are being excluded by the DARE programme due to financial reasons in the last chapter, it is now necessary to look at what this means for the DARE programme and the profile of a student that it is more likely to benefit and include. Byrne et al. (2013, p.232) discovered that the DARE programme, due to financial reasons, benefitted more students from middle and upper class families than it helped students from working class families. This is evident from the fact that DARE eligible students attending DEIS schools remain under-represented with just 9% of students being eligible for DARE compared to 14% of all CAO applicants. From analysing the findings of their report Byrne et al. concluded that:

“It would appear that students with disabilities attending schools in more disadvantaged contexts do not have the same level of awareness, information and guidance in accessing the DARE scheme relative to students with disabilities in more advantaged contexts.”

(Byrne et al., 2013, p.234)

A further issue that arose during the course of the research was the fact that the DARE programme did not reach enough students due to the lack of participation by third level institutions. It was acknowledged by guidance counsellors during the interview phase that most third level institutions had Disability Officers that helped students with disabilities and typically have lower entry points than universities. Nonetheless the absence of the vast majority of institutes of technologies from the DARE programme was seen by guidance counsellors as a major disadvantage to students with disabilities wishing to continue their education. Due to the lack of participation by most institutes of technology and further education colleges there are a lot of students who, despite having a disability that makes them eligible for the DARE programme, are secluded from using it to their advantage. Guidance Counsellor 5 noted this lack of support for students who would not be applying for university:

“Because we have students who have disabilities but who would not make the minimum entry requirements or the points and so wouldn’t be applying for university or [name of institution] they would be applying possibly to the ITs or they would be applying to [name of further education college] and it could be a third, I’m just trying to think it might be a third of students who have disabilities who would not apply for DARE.”

(Guidance Counsellor 5)

Despite the DARE programme aiming to help students with disabilities go onto third level education and help erase any educational disadvantage that may have occurred for them due to their disability, it is clear that the DARE programme does not come to the assistance of every student with a disability who wishes to continue their education. This is consistent with the findings of O’Donnell (2014) who coined the term “inclusion delusion” to reflect society’s perceived creation of inclusivity in education, while still having to provide genuine change at an institutional level to truly create inclusivity. Instead the DARE programme helps top students who have been hindered by their disability but are still able to attain the minimum entry requirements for university while neglecting students who have struggled during their education and have been heavily impacted by their disability, who may not get the minimum entry points for university but who may flourish in the institute of technology setting. Fleming et al. touched on this topic when it was stated that ‘numbers from special schools are very low, which is disappointing given the disability focus of the DARE initiative’ (Fleming et al., 2017, p211). While it is clear that the DARE programme has helped a great deal of people and has helped increase the number of students with disabilities going to third level, evidently increasing the number of institutes of technology who participate in the DARE programme would help make the programme more inclusive for students with disabilities.

5.4 Resourcing to Promote Inclusion

Another key finding of this research was the problem students and schools face concerning resourcing. Students with disabilities are applying to universities in growing numbers, with the largest group of these students with disabilities being made up of students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia (Madaus et al., 2011). This increase in participation by students with disabilities also increases the workload of a guidance counsellor as the filling out of the DARE application usually falls on the shoulders of the guidance counsellor in most schools. All five guidance counsellors in the interviews made reference to the amount of time that has to be spent working with each student on the application form. Due to the 2012 budget cuts to guidance counselling, which abolished the guidance counsellor’s ex-quota allowance, the time of a guidance counsellor is limited. In 1983 it was required that a school have at least five

hundred students in order to have one full time guidance counsellor, yet their hours were not counted towards the school's total amount of allotted hours meaning their hours were ex-quota. However, the cuts to guidance counselling in 2012 meant that the hours of a guidance counsellor had to be found from within the schools already provided allowance of hours. In many cases this meant a significant reduction in the number of hours a guidance counsellor was on duty in a school and instead placed a lot of guidance counsellors back in the classroom with the IGC estimating the loss of around 450 posts in second level schools (IGC, 2012). Harkin (2015 p.5) found that the change in allocation of guidance counselling hours 'had a negative impact on schools in general'. While no guidance counsellor mentioned the budget cuts of 2012, much has been written about the problems caused by the cuts to guidance counselling hours and how it affects the service that guidance counsellors can provide to students (Harkin, 2015; IGC, 2013; Mc Guckin & O'Brien, 2013). Thus, despite the fact the cuts have become normalised and accepted, the effects and strains caused by these cuts are still being felt.

Another issue that guidance counsellors referred to, was their worry that for financial reasons students were losing out on the DARE programme. This is consistent with the findings of Fleming et al. (2017 p.171) who stated that 'the prohibitive cost of acquiring a recent psychological assessment/consultant report was seen as a significant barrier'. A psychological assessment carried out through the Dyslexic Association of Ireland for non-members costs €490, a large amount of money to any family (Dyslexic Association of Ireland, 2017). Skilbeck and Connell's report (2000) recognises that the issue of equity in higher education is not just educational but also economic. The report states that well-targeted financing will continue to play a major role in equity strategies; however guidance counsellors feel that students are being barricaded from the programme due to financial reasons. This financial barrier to accessing the DARE programme and therefore university is consistent with the fact that students in socio-economically disadvantaged schools have been found to lack the financial means of those in middle-class schools and neighbourhoods. School success was linked with social class, familial habitus and economic capitals (Lareau, 2003; Allat, 1993; Reay, David & Ball, 2001; O'Brien, 2005; O'Brien & Ó Fathaigh, 2005). This adversity faced by students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds points to the fact that these students are potentially missing out on places in university due to financial reasons. Byrne et al.'s research highlights 'strong concerns that the application process may be biased in favour of those with greater financial resources at their disposal to access medical or psychological reports' (Byrne et al., 2014 p.

114). Their findings mirror the findings of Rose et al. (2015) and Banks et al. (2015). These patterns suggest that the application process for the DARE programme ‘is not working for those who are already under-resourced and disadvantaged’ (Fleming et al., 2017 p.212).

5.4.1 Inclusion and the role of the Guidance Counsellor

The DES views guidance counsellors as having a broad role which includes providing students with counselling, promoting educational and social inclusion through guidance activities, addressing educational disadvantage and the prevention of early school leaving and poor educational attainment (Department of Education and Science, 2005). Promoting educational inclusion and addressing educational disadvantage are two elements that are addressed when helping students with disabilities apply to the DARE programme. Fleming et al. (2017 p.208) found that students applying for the DARE programme had considerable amounts of paperwork to submit to prove they have a disability as well as providing supporting evidence to confirm it all, which ‘places considerable demands on the applicant, their family and school support network’. Guidance counsellors are an integral tool in helping students go to university, as career guidance can provide the information on careers that may not be available from some homes (Foskett et al., 2008). Guidance counsellors in schools in working-class areas can provide some of the lacking resources that students in middle-class areas may take for granted (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). It is important to note then that the budget cuts affected students from disadvantaged areas the most as Mullen (2009) stated that students in middle-class schools generally receive more career guidance than in working class schools. Guidance was seen to be a significant factor in influencing students from previously non-academic backgrounds to consider higher education by challenging their assumptions, existing attitudes, knowledge and perception of university in a way that increases their positivity to the possibility of a future at university (McCoy et al., 2010). Additionally, guidance counsellors at second level have been found to be especially important sources of college-related information for young people from families who would traditionally have been marginalised from university (Smyth et al., 2011).

5.5 Accessibility and Fairness

The most concerning finding from this research has been the guidance counsellors’ and Disability Office staff members’ acceptance of the fact that the DARE programme is being exploited by people who can afford to pay for private psychological assessments from educational psychologists. It appeared to be common knowledge among guidance counsellors

that students were buying assessments that may not be fully justified, or securing course offers due to reduced points despite their education not being impacted by a disability. Despite the fact that there was no question in the interview phase relating to the issue, several guidance counsellors brought up the topic as they found the issue to be very unjust. Guidance Counsellor 5 spoke of the lengths that some students and their families went to in order to gain a diagnosis of dyslexia that would make them eligible for the DARE programme and therefore possibly allowing that student to enter into university on reduced points:

“Yes we have seen it, and some people will go to Galway, they will go to Dublin, they will go up to Ulster. They will go to somebody who will be very liberal with their test results and who will make sure that they can get some sort of exemption or that they can apply through the DARE.”

(Guidance Counsellor 5)

While guidance counsellors found this practice unjust, professional practice guidelines regarding confidentiality impedes any possible questioning of the issue (IGC, 2016). Guidance counsellors who work with students on a DARE application are bound by confidentiality regardless of whether the guidance counsellor thinks the diagnosis is merited or not resulting in the continuing issue of students receiving unmerited reduced points offers to courses. This acceptance of the exploitation of the DARE programme was particularly evident in the language that Disability Office staff member 1 used when he described people who are deserving of the DARE programme as ‘real dyslexics’. The DARE programme was established by the government in response to inequalities in access and participation at third level, which has resulted in the establishment of formal initiatives to incentivise individual access routes for diverse groups into higher education (Fleming et al., 2017). However these incentivised access routes are now being accessed by students who can afford to pay for a private assessment while students who have been heavily impacted by their disability but cannot afford an assessment are being left out. This problem is highlighted by Byrne et al. in their study which showed:

”An over-representation of DARE-eligible applicants attending fee-paying second level schools and non-government funded fee-paying schools (‘grind schools’) and an under-representation of those attending DEIS schools (9 per cent compared to 14 per cent of all CAO applicants).”

(Byrne et al., 2013, pp.20-21)

McGuire et al. (2003 p.41) noted that there is ‘considerable evidence of substantial class inequalities in the education system in Ireland’. Moreover, McGuire et al. (2003 p.41) highlighted the fact that despite significant educational expansion, there ‘remains remarkable consistency in the relationship between socio-economic background and inequality in

outcomes'. This echoes the findings of O'Connell et al. (2006 p.315) who stated that socio-economic inequalities are being reproduced and have 'remained largely persistent over time'. Additionally, it has been found that despite the fact that tuition fees were removed in 1996, social inequality on access was actually greater in 1998 than at the beginning of the 1980's (McCoy & Smyth, 2003). This problem remains today as Cahill (2015 p.302) stated that 'educational disadvantage is intrinsically linked to material poverty and wider economic inequalities in Irish society' (Cahill, 2015 p. 302). This is emphasised by the fact that 94% of students from middle-class schools applied to higher education in comparison to half of students from working class schools (McCoy et al., 2014). Thus while policy has for a long time promoted inclusivity in both second level and third level education (DES, 2005a; Equality Act, 2004; Equal Status Act, 2000; Education, 2015), Cahill (2015) points to an imbalance between policy and practice as certain marginalised groups, specifically socio-economically disadvantaged groups, remain under-represented at third level, with the balance being heavily tipped in favour of middle-class students.

While this research study is limited and cannot investigate fully why the number of students from fee-paying and grind schools are over-represented on the DARE programme, it is interesting to note that this over-representation is the opposite of what may be expected given that existing school data reveals 'stark differences in SEN prevalence between children from working class backgrounds and their middle-class counterparts with concentrations of SEN in DEIS schools' (Banks and McCoy, 2011 p. 6). Therefore when data gathered from the interview phase with guidance counsellors and third level staff is considered, which discovered that students from affluent backgrounds are buying diagnoses of dyslexia to help gain access to university on reduced points, it is possible to assume that this over-representation is a result of such actions. There is significant evidence here of social class inequality in an Irish educational context that furthers the disadvantage faced by students with disabilities from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. There remain very definite economic inequalities evident throughout Irish society, and these are particularly evident within the Irish education system. The challenge to policy-makers and educationalists is to 'deconstruct current practice, to reach beyond our current paradigms of thinking for the purpose of equalising opportunity and condition in Irish education' (Cahill, 2015 p.314).

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the overarching themes that emerged from the interviews with relevant practitioners in regards to the DARE programme. These issues when examined through the critical lens of literature provide the researcher with several key insights into the workings of the DARE programme and a clearer image of the feelings and opinions of relevant practitioners towards the DARE programme. The findings demonstrate a gap in the knowledge of guidance counsellors as to what role the DARE programme plays in the student's university experience, notably due to a lack of transparency from the DARE programme. In addition, it has been established that resourcing remains as a major issue in numerous ways and is preventing both the expansion of the DARE programme to more third level institutions as well as the uptake of the DARE programme by students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who simply cannot afford the assessments that are necessary to provide evidence of disability. Additionally, it can be argued that the DARE programme is creating further divides as those who can afford to pay for an assessment are possibly getting diagnoses that are not deserved providing them with assistance to go to university that is not merited while students who need an assessment but cannot afford it are being left unaided, purporting further inequality. This chapter highlights that amendments need to be made to the DARE programme to help balance the inequality that is currently ongoing. Chapter 6 presents the overall conclusions of the study and outlines some recommendations for both policy and practice.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This final chapter presents an overall conclusion to this study. It provides a summary of the findings within the context of the aims and objectives of the study. The strengths and the limitations of the study will be outlined and some recommendations will be proposed for policy, practice and future research.

6.1 Overview of Key Findings

The overall aim of this study was to explore what insights can be gained from reviewing the DARE programme from the perspective of relevant practitioners. Furthermore, a number of objectives were identified in order to achieve the overall aim including: to review and critically analyse the literature, to gather qualitative data from several relevant practitioners and to highlight current perceptions of these relevant practitioners. In this study a qualitative approach was taken which consisted of several face-to-face individual interviews being carried out.

Five key themes emerged when the data was analysed: resourcing, transparency, inclusion, stigma and accessibility and fairness.

6.1.3 Resourcing

The researcher found that resourcing was a major influence on the eligibility of students for the DARE programme. Initially the literature introduced this theme by acknowledging the fact that students from fee-paying and grind schools were more likely to apply for the DARE programme while students from DEIS schools were less likely to apply, despite a higher percentage of students with disabilities attending DEIS schools (Byrne et al., 2014; Fleming 2017). The literature was consistent with the sentiments expressed by guidance counsellors who felt that students were missing out on the opportunity of going to third level due to financial reasons. Thus, while it is evident that the DARE programme is increasing the number of students in third level education with disabilities, it is clear that the students who are benefitting the most are those from middle- and upper-class backgrounds, while students with disabilities from lower socio-economic backgrounds are being neglected.

6.1.2 Transparency

Yet again the theme of transparency emerged during the literature analysis as the DARE programme was described as 'opaque' and 'lacking transparency' (Shevlin et al., 2004). This

was confirmed by all five guidance counsellors who acknowledged the fact that they were unaware of the inner workings of the DARE programme. This lack of transparency meant that second level guidance counsellors were unsure when advising students about the DARE programme and the reduction of points that they may be entitled to if they are eligible for DARE. Furthermore, guidance counsellors presumed that the DARE programme was more than just an admissions scheme, but that it also provided a continuum of support to the student once in third level, an issue that Disability Office staff member 2 was aware of. Although previous research has highlighted problems with transparency, this study has detailed exactly where the problems of transparency lie within the DARE programme.

6.1.3 Inclusion

Yet again the findings of this study echoed what was already found in literature by Byrne et al. (2013) who described the DARE programme as ‘not reaching its potential’ in terms of targeting students with disabilities. This is due to the fact that the DARE programme has not been extended to cover all third level institutions thus only helping the small minority of students who have a disability and wish to go to university or a very small number of institutes of technology. Previous studies have found this problem with the DARE programme and this research highlights that the amount of students who are left unaided by the DARE programme is around one third of students with disabilities (Guidance Counsellor 5).

6.1.4 Stigma

Another finding of this research has been the discovery that stigma still remains around having a disability. Worryingly some guidance counsellors felt that this stigma and the fear of being labelled as having a disability were preventing some students from applying to the DARE programme and therefore getting vital assistance that could potentially see them entering into third level education. It is clear that more needs to be done in supporting students with disabilities so that they feel comfortable in applying for the DARE programme while also increasing awareness of the fact that the DARE programme is only an admissions programme and any student entering into third level through the DARE programme does not have to declare this fact to anyone.

6.1.5 Accessibility and Fairness

The most shocking discovery of this study has been the fact that some students are buying psychological assessments and applying for the DARE programme despite not being impacted

educationally by a disability. Four guidance counsellors and both Disability Office staff members were aware of this issue, with guidance counsellors finding the issue upsetting and unjust to those who had a disability but could not afford a psychological assessment. While this issue has been hinted at in other research, such as Byrne et al. (2013) who highlighted the difference in participation rates by students from fee-paying and grind schools in comparison to DEIS schools in the DARE programme. This study has demonstrated one possible reason why this may be happening: it is possible that students who attend these typically more affluent schools are using their financial means to take advantage of the DARE programme and enter into university on reduced points.

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

6.2.1 Strengths

This study has highlighted some of the benefits that the DARE programme provides to students with disabilities, however it has also demonstrated some areas that could be improved within the DARE programme. The findings can contribute to the further development of the DARE programme. The researcher found that the qualitative research methodology chosen for this study in order to elicit the perceptions of relevant practitioners was beneficial (Flick, 2004). The interviews with second level guidance counsellors, Disability Office staff members and a Career Office staff member provided an in-depth account of their perceptions of the DARE programme that provided rich content that could be synthesised and could provide further insight into the DARE programme. The face-to-face semi-structured interview provided the researcher with the opportunity to capture the voice of each participant and their personal experience of the DARE programme; this is a strength of the interpretivist paradigm. Evidently the use of the interpretivist paradigm allowed for the understanding of 'the subjective world of human experience' which was at the core of this research.

The researcher aimed to address a deficit in the literature that surrounded the DARE programme by conducting this study. This study has developed on the research of Byrne et al. (2013) and Shevlin et al. (2004) who both examined the DARE programme in depth and provided a platform on which to build this study.

Lastly, the study highlighted the perceptions of relevant practitioners with regards to the DARE programme providing them with a platform from which they could voice their concerns as well as what they felt were the benefits of the DARE programme. Even though this study

interviewed a select number of relevant practitioners, it nonetheless provided key insights that can help further the understanding of guidance counsellors and inform practice in the future.

6.2.2 Limitations of the Study

As previously mentioned, this study interviewed a select number of relevant practitioners, as it was a small-scale study conducted within a limited period of time. This naturally places some limitations on the study. There were five second level guidance counsellors interviewed for this study and within this group there was a large variation with regards to the type of school that they worked in. While this provided several different viewpoints of the DARE programme, it meant there was a limited scope to the study because of issues with generalisability (Thomas, 2009). Additionally, human bias should be kept in mind, particularly due to the ‘fairness’ findings of wealthier students buying assessments being based on hearsay and not verifiable despite being hinted at in Byrne et al. (2013).

Furthermore, the researcher had wished to interview more than one Career Office staff member, however there was reluctance by staff to be interviewed as they felt they lacked awareness about the DARE programme and so did not want to take part in the study. This further limited the scale of the study.

6.3 Recommendations

Resulting from the overall study, the following are recommendations for future policy, best practice and future research:

1. The extension of the DARE programme to include more third level institutions such as institutes of technologies in order to increase the inclusivity and potential of the programme.
2. Greater resourcing of the DARE programme to possibly assist students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in attaining psychological assessments.
3. To introduce qualitative measures to work alongside the quantitative measures that are already in practice to help assess the success of the DARE programme.
4. The reversal of the 2012 budget cuts to the ex-quota provision of guidance counsellors to help ease the pressure and stress of guidance counsellors so they can spend more time with students applying for the DARE programme.

5. To raise awareness among guidance counsellors of what exactly the DARE programme is and explicitly explain that the DARE programme is only an admissions route to third level education.
6. To create a universal policy for the DARE programme to create a standardised admissions policy that is accountable, transparent and less ambiguous.
7. That further policy be developed in relation to the educational impact statement to help decrease the problem of students buying a diagnosis that may not be merited.
8. That similar studies should be undertaken with regards to the DARE programme to help bridge the gap in literature that surrounds the programme.
9. Further research on the student perspective of the DARE programme is needed in relation to the progression and success rates of students who enter into third level education through the DARE programme as well as the possible stigma that is attached to using the programme.

6.4 Reflection on Personal Learning

At the beginning of this research the researcher had a number of preconceptions about the DARE programme based on personal experience of the programme as well as on experience as both a teacher and a trainee guidance counsellor. The researcher believed that the DARE programme provided students with a continuum of supports and not just reduced points entry into university. However, the researcher was surprised to discover that it was in fact the third level institutions that provided the resources for students with disabilities.

Additionally, the researcher was concerned that the data gathered would be influenced by the researcher and the previously mentioned preconceptions that the researcher held. However, the researcher was aware of these issues from the beginning and according to Cohen et al. (2007 p.171) the researcher should seek 'to understand their part in, or influence on' research. Therefore the researcher was careful to upkeep a self-reflexive approach for the duration of the study.

Throughout the interview process the researcher abided by strict ethics in research in order to maintain a process that ensured confidentiality for relevant practitioners as well as ensuring that each interview participant was cared for and did not become distressed during the interview process.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter provides a conclusion to the research study with an overview of the findings in the context of the aims and objectives of the research. This chapter has addressed the strengths and limitations of this study and has also provided several recommendations for future policy, current practice and future research. Finally this chapter provided insight on the personal learning of the researcher.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Subject Information Letter

IGC Branch Secretary

EHS REC no.

Date:

Research title:

An exploration of the Disability Access Route to Education programme as an aid for dyslexic students in third level; gaining the perspectives of relevant practitioners in the area.

Dear Branch Secretary,

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. Jennifer Liston. As part of my studies I have to complete a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of the DARE programme and its effectiveness for students with dyslexia from the perspectives of guidance counsellors and third level staff members. In order to gather this information I would appreciate if you would consent to allowing me carry out the research study with members of your organisation. This would involve me interviewing six Guidance Counsellors from the Mid-West Branch of the IGC for a total of forty minutes about their perceptions, feeling and experiences of the DARE

programme. In order to do this I wish to disseminate the Subject Info letter and consent form to the branch membership. If volunteers are interested in taking part in the study they can then contact me directly through the email that is supplied on the consent forms.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence. Interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines. Before the audio recordings are transcribed each participant will be given a pseudonym that they will be addressed by for the duration of the study so as not to identify them in any manner. Once the transcription is completed the recording will be deleted from the recording device. Only a digital copy of the transcription will exist and this file shall be encrypted and held on a password protected computer of the Principal Investigator After the designated period of time the transcription will be deleted from the password protected device.

It is important to note that the Institute of Guidance Counsellors name and the name of the individual participants will not be used in the research and the Institute of Guidance Counsellors will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the analysis of data. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

If you have any queries or require further any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Sarah Condon

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Liston

Phone number:0879440685

Email address: 09004695@studentmail.ul.ie

UL Email address: Jennifer.c.liston@gmail.com

Principal Investigator: Dr. Lucy Hearne

Phone Number: 00-353-61-202931

UL Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Thank you for your time,
Sarah Condon

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 B



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Consent Form

IGC Branch Secretary

EHS REC no.

Research title:

An exploration of the Disability Access Route to Education programme as an aid for dyslexic students in third level; gaining the perspectives of relevant practitioners in the area.

I have read the project Information Sheet and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participants will not be revealed in the reporting of this research study. The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of participants and respect their contribution are:

1. Participation is entirely voluntary.
2. Participants are free to withdraw at any time prior to the data analysis stage and any contribution made will be subsequently destroyed.
3. The interviews will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research and the supervisor. Excerpts from the interviews may be part of the final research dissertation but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

I hereby give my consent for *Sarah Condon* to carry out this research in the Institute of Guidance Counsellors:

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Subject Information Letter Guidance Counsellor

EHSREC no.

Date :

Research title:

An exploration of the Disability Access Route to Education programme as an aid for dyslexic students in third level; gaining the perspectives of relevant practitioners in the area.

Dear Guidance Counsellor,

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. Jennifer Liston. As part of my studies I have to complete a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of the DARE programme and its effectiveness for students with dyslexia from the perspectives of guidance counsellors and third level staff members. In order to gather information on the topic I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in a face-to-face audio- taped interview. The interview will take approximately 40 minutes and be held in a confidential location agreeable to you.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence. Interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines. Before the audio recordings are transcribed each participant will be given a pseudonym that they will be addressed by for the duration of the study so as not to identify them in any manner. Once the transcription is completed the recording will be deleted from the recording

device. Only a digital copy of the transcription will exist and this file shall be encrypted and held on a password protected computer of the Principal Investigator. After the designated period of time the transcription will be deleted from the password protected device. The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that your name will not be used in the reporting of the research. If you have any queries or require any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis stage. Upon completion of the transcription of the audio recording a copy of the full transcribed interview will be sent to you to ensure that you are completely satisfied with what was both said and transcribed. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

I acknowledge that all participants taking part in this study will have to sacrifice time out of their schedules to contribute to the study. Guidance Counsellors work closely with people who have entered into third level education with the help of the DARE programme and therefore will benefit from any insights that are gained from this study. Furthermore, policy makers may benefit from the perspectives of the Guidance Counsellors. I hope that these benefits will offset any inconveniences caused to you in the interview process.

If you are interested in taking part in this study please contact me directly by email before the 26th of April 2017.

Researcher: Sarah Condon

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Liston

Phone number:0879440685

Email address: 09004695@studentmail.ul.ie

UL Email address: Jennifer.c.liston@gmail.com

Principal Investigator: Dr. Lucy Hearne

Phone Number: 00-353-61-202931

UL Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Thank you for your time,
Sarah Condon

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (*EHSREC no.*). 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 D



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Subject Information Letter Career Office Staff Member

EHSREC no.

Date :

Research title:

An exploration of the Disability Access Route to Education programme as an aid for dyslexic students in third level; gaining the perspectives of relevant practitioners in the area.

Dear Career Office Staff Member,

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. Jennifer Liston. As part of my studies I have to complete a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of the DARE programme and its effectiveness for students with dyslexia from the perspectives of guidance counsellors and third level staff members. In order to gather information on the topic I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in a face-to-face audio- taped interview. The interview will take approximately 40 minutes and be held in a confidential location agreeable to you.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence. Interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines. Before the audio recordings are transcribed each participant will be given a pseudonym that they will be addressed by for the duration of the study so as not to identify them in any manner. Once the transcription is completed the recording will be deleted from the recording device. Only a digital copy of the transcription will exist and this file shall be encrypted and held on a password protected computer of the Principal Investigator. After the designated

period of time the transcription will be deleted from the password protected device. The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that your name will not be used in the reporting of the research. If you have any queries or require any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis stage. Upon completion of the transcription of the audio recording a copy of the full transcribed interview will be sent to you to ensure that you are completely satisfied with what was both said and transcribed. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

I acknowledge that all participants taking part in this study will have to sacrifice time out of their schedules to contribute to the study. Career Staff members work closely with people who have entered into third level education with the help of the DARE programme and therefore will benefit from any insights that are gained from this study. Furthermore, policy makers may benefit from the perspectives of Career Staff Members. I hope that these benefits will offset any inconveniences caused to you by participating in the interview process.

If you are interested in taking part in this study please contact me directly by email before the 26th of April 2017.

Researcher: Sarah Condon

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Liston

Phone number:0879440685

Email address: 09004695@studentmail.ul.ie

UL Email address: Jennifer.c.liston@gmail.com

Principal Investigator: Dr. Lucy Hearne

Phone Number: 00-353-61-202931

UL Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Thank you for your time,

Sarah Condon

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (*EHSREC no.*). 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 E



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Subject Information Letter Disability Office Staff Member

EHSREC no.

Date :

Research title:

An exploration of the Disability Access Route to Education programme as an aid for dyslexic students in third level; gaining the perspectives of relevant practitioners in the area.

Dear Disability Office Staff Member,

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. Jennifer Liston. As part of my studies I have to complete a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of the DARE programme and its effectiveness for students with dyslexia from the perspectives of guidance counsellors and third level staff members. In order to gather information on the topic I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in a face-to-face audio- taped interview. The interview will take approximately 40 minutes and be held in a confidential location agreeable to you.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence. Interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines. Before the audio recordings are transcribed each participant will be given a pseudonym that they will be addressed by for the duration of the study so as not to identify them in any manner. Once the transcription is completed the recording will be deleted from the recording device. Only a digital copy of the transcription will exist and this file shall be encrypted and held on a password protected computer of the Principal Investigator. After the designated

period of time the transcription will be deleted from the password protected device. The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that your name will not be used in the reporting of the research. If you have any queries or require any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis stage. Upon completion of the transcription of the audio recording a copy of the full transcribed interview will be sent to you to ensure that you are completely satisfied with what was both said and transcribed. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

I acknowledge that all participants taking part in this study will have to sacrifice time out of their schedules to contribute to the study. Disability Staff Members work closely with people who have entered into third level education with the help of the DARE programme and therefore will benefit from any insights that are gained from this study. Furthermore, policy makers may benefit from the perspectives of Disability Staff Members. I hope that these benefits will offset any inconveniences caused to you by participating in the interview process.

If you are interested in taking part in this study please contact me by email before the 26th of April 2017.

Researcher: Sarah Condon

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Liston

Phone number:0879440685

Email address: 09004695@studentmail.ul.ie

UL Email address: Jennifer.c.liston@gmail.com

Principal Investigator: Dr. Lucy Hearne

Phone Number: 00-353-61-202931

UL Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Thank you for your time,

Sarah Condon

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (*EHSREC no.*). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

**Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics
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University of
Limerick Tel
(061) 234101
ehsresearchethics@ul.ie**

Appendix F



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMN
IGH

Consent Form Volunteer Participant

EHS REC no.

Research title:

An exploration of the Disability Access Route to Education programme as an aid for dyslexic students in third level; gaining the perspectives of relevant practitioners in the area.

- 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 G



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Interview Schedule Disability Staff

Opening

My name is Sarah Condon and I am researching the perspectives that guidance counsellors and third level staff have of the DARE programme for students with dyslexia. I would like to ask you some questions about your current work, the contact you have with students who have used the DARE programme, your perspective on the programme and any changes that you would make to the programme.

I hope to use this information to help further inform other Guidance Counsellors and third level staff members of the DARE programme in relation to students with dyslexia. The interview should take 40 minutes. Are you comfortable to continue with this interview at this time?

Body

General

1. What previous knowledge do you have of the DARE programme?
2. In what way do you come into contact with people who use the DARE programme? Are they referred?
3. What percentage of places are kept for students of the DARE programme on average on each course?
4. Is the percentage set aside for popular courses the same as are held aside for non-popular courses? Why?
5. What other advantages does the DARE programme offer students? Educational? Social? Emotional?
6. Why are the number of places set aside for DARE students on certain courses not made more easily accessible/viewable?
7. What percentage of applications are normally approved for DARE?
8. What are the most common reasons for denying a DARE application? Who denies a DARE application?
9. Are applications ever rejected on the basis of the Educational Impact Statement, the part that has to be filled out by the school? Do schools ever get training in how to fill out the form?
10. DARE is meant to offer educational, technological and personal supports. What

supports does your third level institution offer to students? All of the aforementioned offered or some?

11. Can you rank the supports you have just mentioned in order of what you think supports the student the most?
12. Do you think that the DARE programme provides students with dyslexia an equal playing field, an unfair advantage or a mountain to climb in third level? And in what way does it do that?

Your perspective

13. Is dyslexia in your opinion an educational disadvantage that merits being a part of such a programme? Why?
14. What resources offered to students with disabilities do students find the most useful? Why?
15. What resources offered to students with disabilities do students find the least useful? Why?
16. In your opinion should weaker students be offered more points as part of the DARE programme or less? Why?
17. In your opinion should there be a cap on the amount of points a student should be able to get as part of DARE? Why?
18. Do you think that the DARE programme effectively tackles educational disadvantage? How?
19. Should students of the DARE programme be allowed to enter on lower entry requirements and not just lower points in some cases? Why?
20. In your opinion should students who have dyslexia be allowed in some cases both a spelling and grammar waiver in the leaving cert and lower points in the DARE programme? Why?
21. In your opinion should all third level institutions be made to hold places for DARE students? Why?
22. According to AHEAD in 2014/15 only 5.1% of all new students to 3rd level had one or more disabilities, on that basis do you think that the DARE programme does enough to help students with disabilities to go to third level? How?
23. Is there anything that you would like to add to what has already been said in this interview?

Closing

I appreciate the time that you have taken to complete this interview. Have you any questions or anything you would like to add at this point?

I shall now transcribe what has been recorded today, when that transcription is completed I shall send you a copy of the full transcribed interview to check that you are happy with the content. Thank you very much for your participation.

Appendix H



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Interview Schedule Career Staff

Opening

My name is Sarah Condon and I am researching the perspectives that guidance counsellors and third level staff have of the DARE programme for students with dyslexia. I would like to ask you some questions about your current work, the contact you have with students who have used the DARE programme, your perspective on the programme and any changes that you would make to the programme.

I hope to use this information to help further inform other Guidance Counsellors and third level staff members of the DARE programme in relation to students with dyslexia. The interview should take 40 minutes. Are you comfortable to continue with this interview at this time?

Body

General

1. What previous knowledge do you have of the DARE programme?
2. In what way do you come into contact with people who use the DARE programme? Are they referred to you?
3. What other advantages does the DARE programme offer students? Educational? Social? Emotional?
4. In what way does your office help students of DARE specifically?
5. DARE is meant to offer educational, technological and personal supports. What supports does your third level institution offer to students? All of the aforementioned or some?
6. Can you rank the supports you have just mentioned in order of what you think supports the student the most? Why?
7. Do you think that the DARE programme provides students with dyslexia an equal playing field, an unfair advantage or a mountain to climb? And in what way does it do that?

Your perspective

8. Is dyslexia in your opinion an educational disadvantage that merits being a part of such a programme? Why?

9. What resources offered to students with disabilities do students find the most useful? Why?
10. What resources offered to students with disabilities do students find the least useful? Why?
11. In your opinion should weaker students be offered more points as part of the DARE programme or less? Why?
12. In your opinion should there be a cap on the amount of points a student should be able to get as part of DARE? Why?
13. Do you think that the DARE programme effectively tackles educational disadvantage? How?
14. Should students of the DARE programme be allowed to enter on lower entry requirements in some cases? Why?
15. In your opinion should students who have dyslexia be allowed in some cases both a spelling and grammar waiver in the leaving cert and lower points in the DARE programme? Why?
16. In your opinion should all third level institutions be made to hold places for DARE students? Why?
17. According to AHEAD in 2014/15 only 5.1% of all new students to 3rd level had one or more disabilities, on that basis do you think that the DARE programme does enough to help students with disabilities to go to third level?
18. Is there anything that you would like to add to what has already been said in this interview?

Closing

I appreciate the time that you have taken to complete this interview. Have you any questions or anything you would like to add at this point?

I shall now transcribe what has been recorded today, when that transcription is completed I shall send you a copy of the full transcribed interview to check that you are happy with the content. Thank you very much for your participation.

Appendix I



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Interview Schedule Guidance Counsellors

Opening

My name is Sarah Condon and I am researching the perspectives that guidance counsellors and third level staff have of the DARE programme for students with dyslexia. I would like to ask you some questions about your current work, the contact you have with students who have used the DARE programme, your perspective on the programme and any changes that you would make to the programme.

I hope to use this information to help further inform other guidance counsellors and third level staff members of the DARE programme in relation to students with dyslexia. The interview should take 40 minutes. Are you comfortable to continue with this interview at this time?

Body

1. What previous knowledge do you have of the DARE programme?
2. In what way do you come into contact with people who use the DARE programme? Are they usually referred?
3. What advantages does the DARE programme offer to students with dyslexia? Educational? Social? Emotional?
4. In your opinion should students who are weaker academically be offered more points as part of the DARE programme? Why?
5. In your opinion should there be a cap on the amount of points that a student should be offered as part of the DARE programme? Why?
6. Do you think that the DARE programme effectively tackles educational disadvantage? How?
7. Do you think that students who can apply for DARE take comfort from that during their leaving cert? How?
8. Does being a student that can apply to DARE allow students to aim higher when choosing the courses for the CAO? How?
9. Do students feel comfortable about discussing DARE in front of other people in their class? Why?
10. Do students know what is involved in applying for DARE? How?
11. Are students ever reluctant to apply for DARE? Why?
12. Are parents ever reluctant to allow their children to apply for DARE? Why?
13. Is the amount of people who apply for DARE consistent with the amount of

- people who have disabilities in your school? Why is that in your opinion?
14. Does the DARE programme encourage more students with dyslexia to go to college? How?
 15. When discussing the DARE programme do you discuss how many extra points they may receive due to DARE? Why?
 16. Should students of the DARE programme be allowed to enter on lower entry requirements in some cases? Why?
 17. In your opinion should students who have dyslexia be allowed in some cases both a spelling and grammar waiver and other lower points? Why?
 18. In your opinion should all third level institutions be made to hold places for DARE students? Why?
 19. For third level institutions who do not offer DARE places do you know of any other assistance they provide?
 20. In your school is it the responsibility of the guidance counsellor to fill out the educational impact statement? If not who?
 21. If so do you find it time consuming? Why?
 22. Do you think there could be a more time efficient way to apply for DARE? How?
 23. Do you think students and their families should be responsible for filling out the DARE application in its entirety? Why?
 24. Do you feel that the DARE programme puts families under financial pressure to get all the assessments? How?
 25. According to AHEAD in 2014/15 only 5.1% of all new students to 3rd level had one or more disabilities, on that basis do you think that the DARE programme does enough to help students with disabilities to go to third level?

Closing

I appreciate the time that you have taken to complete this interview. Have you any questions or anything you would like to add at this point?

I shall now transcribe what has been recorded today, when that transcription is completed I shall send you a copy of the full transcribed interview to check that you are happy with the content. Thank you very much for your participation.

Appendix J

Image: Screenshot of 2015 accesscollege.ie DARE website

