



ANNE MANGAN (M.Clin.Ed, Dip.Coaching)
CAREER & LIFE COACH

Part 1: How well prepared are secondary school students for the next phase of their lives?

This is the first of two articles aimed at helping parents gain an overview of some of the practical issues facing teenagers as they transition from secondary school into higher education and work, and how parents are ideally positioned to support their teenagers develop the life skills necessary to survive and thrive.

We begin by looking at some of the key challenges associated with transitioning from secondary school into higher education and work - what the research is telling us about how well Irish secondary school students are prepared for the next phase of their lives; what the new world of work looks like; and what we know about students' experience of higher education.

What's changed over the past few years?

It is predicted that young people entering the labour market face a far more challenging future than their predecessors. While overall employment rates, pre-COVID 19, were high, youth unemployment remained a concern at almost 20%. Precarious employment has crept in, leading to a significant decrease in full-time permanent jobs and significant increase in low paid, part-time and contract work. And while mental health disorders are a leading cause of disability in young people around the world, results of a large-scale study in 2013 suggested that Ireland may have higher rates than other countries (Cannon, M., Coughlan, H., Clarke, M., Harley, M. and Kelleher, I. (2013). *The mental health of young people in Ireland: A report of the psychiatric epidemiology research across the lifespan (PERL)*. Dublin: Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI). Retrieved from

http://www.rcsi.ie/files/psychiatry/20131009042046_PERL%20ResearchReport_041013_PRI.pdf)

Secondary school education is no longer adequate preparation for the world of work. Additional education and training greatly enhance one's choices and likelihood of finding job fulfilment. Education transforms lives. CSO figures consistently show that having a 3rd level qualification greatly increases one's chance of being employed and the higher the level of qualification the greater the salary. In fact, holding a higher education qualification makes you twice as likely to be employed.

CONTACT

PHONE:
086 810 8192

WEBSITE:
annemangan.com

EMAIL:
anne@annemangan.com

But how well does secondary school prepare students for the next phase of their lives?

There is considerable evidence to suggest that secondary school does not sufficiently prepare many of its students for the next phase of their lives. Research conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) earlier this year, suggest that many young people's perception is that secondary school does not prepare students sufficiently for making decisions about what to do after school, nor preparing for work and adult life. (*Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). (2019). Growing up in Ireland. National longitudinal study of children. Key findings: Cohort '98 at 20 years old in 2018/2019. Education, Training and Employment. ESRI Survey and Statistical Report Series, November 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/SUSTAT82.pdf>*)

This is echoed by parents also in a 2011 study by the ESRI, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Department of Education and Skills (Byrne, D. and Smyth, E. (2011). Behind the scenes? A study of parental involvement in post-primary education. Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Department of Education and Skills. Retrieved from <https://www.esri.ie/publications/behind-the-scenes-a-study-of-parental-involvement-in-post-primary-education>)

Overemphasis on rote learning and the CAO points system has set many students up for disappointment when they get to college. In fact, many of the students who drop out during their first year studied very hard in school and achieved high points. About 85% had received their first or second course choice. We will look at this in more detail when we consider the reasons why students dropout.

What's different about the workplace?

Most of us parents are likely to have only a cursory knowledge of how dramatically things have changed in the workplace over the last decade. While we are still part of the workforce, we are unlikely to experience what it's like for young people entering the workplace or trying to find their place in this fast-paced environment.

IBEC provides a useful summary - Ireland, like many other countries is going through significant transformation in the workplace. Globalisation, rapid digitalisation, changing lifestyles and new consumer preferences mean that jobs and careers are being transformed, which will bring significant change to the world of education, training and work. Such changes bring great opportunity but also great risks. Individuals are being forced to make frequent and complex choices which impact directly on their current and future lives. Over the last decade new roles have been created for jobs that didn't exist up to that point. 30% of these in the labour market change their employment status every year, while estimates suggest that students currently in the education system will have had on average 10 – 12 jobs by the time they are 38 Years.

Robots, automation and AI are quickly progressing and changing the nature and number of available jobs. IBEC says that we do not know where the jobs of the future will come from or what they might be. They say that this information is not reaching young people or their parents, who continue to look at a narrow range of occupations. It is expected that people entering the workplace today will have over 50 years of work (Irish Businesses and Employers Confederation (IBEC). (2018). Informed choices: career guidance in an uncertain world. Retrieved from IBEC website: www.

<https://www.smartfutures.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Informed-Choices-Career-Guidance.pdf>

There has been numerous reports about projected job losses and how many areas will not survive. Government-backed programmes are being developed and rolled-out to support tens of thousands of workers to up-skill.

On the ground, full-time, permanent jobs are much less the norm with many replaced by part-time or contract work. This means no payment for holidays or during periods of illness. No hope of securing a mortgage for a home.

3rd Level Education & training – what can go wrong?

We saw that having a 3rd level qualification greatly enhances one's opportunity of finding work that fits, and it leads to higher pay as a rule. But direct entry into higher education, immediately after secondary school, is not the only option. While almost 70% of students progress directly into higher education, not everyone is ready or suited to this way of life. Some may not find their area of interest within higher education. Further education provides an excellent alternative, and in many cases leads to students being better ready for higher education. For someone keen to start work, apprenticeships are well worth considering. Apprenticeships have expanded well beyond the traditional trades and crafts and now include sectors such as Finance, ICT, Hospitality, Recruitment, Sales and more. All apprenticeships are on the National Framework of Qualifications and many lead to degrees and beyond.

Transitioning from secondary school into higher education is much more challenging than many students and their parents expect. Up until the last year or so, the only reliable information available on drop-out rates in college was for first-year students. These have stayed relatively constant at 15% - 16%. This means that each year approximately 6000 students drop out of college during their first year. More recently, research is showing even more alarming data for example, of the students that complete their college course, more than 50% said that they chose the wrong course; and the real dropout rate, when the full length of the course is taken into consideration is closer to 24%.

In a 2015 study of the reasons why students decided to drop-out of their course, the following were identified: a lack of accuracy and depth of information at their disposal when deciding where and what to study, and their education experience was different to what they expected, such as unexpected course content and high work-load. Other reasons included stress, financial difficulties and difficulty making friends.

Another Report ***Transitioning from Second Level and Further Education to Higher Education*** provides unique insight and experiences of a sample (1,579) of Irish students transitioning into Higher Education. The study examined the extent to which early higher education students have been equipped with the skills, competencies and orientations they needed to succeed. Overall the research found that time management was the

most significant challenge of the transition from second level to higher education, followed by written assessments, critical thinking and conducting independent research. Other areas identified as challenging included increased personal responsibility, financial and social challenges. Commuting distances was also found to have a significant impact on transition, with those commuting long distances finding the transition more challenging than those living closer to campus. Those students who undertook further education courses prior to commencing in higher education found these courses particularly helpful in assisting the transition.

In summary, I conclude that secondary school students are generally not prepared for the next phase of their lives.