



CONTRIBUTING TO A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION FROM SECONDARY TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH SUPPORT NEEDS

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INTRODUCTION

'I spent my last two school years in special secondary education (VSO), when my career teacher repeatedly emphasised the importance of knowing your rights as a student with support needs. As a result, I went straight to the website of my preferred university of applied sciences to find out what is available for me.'

Going from secondary education (VO) or special secondary education (VSO) into higher education can be a major step for students. The education changes, a more proactive attitude is expected from students, the care coordinator I is replaced by a student counsellor, and the list goes on. A study by [ResearchNed](#)¹ showed that 30% of all students in higher education have a disability or chronic illness. As a result of disability or chronic illness, 10% of the whole student population has difficulties with their studies. Furthermore, these students drop out twice as often as students with no support needs.

The continuity of the learning pathway for education and support is of great importance to students with support needs II. How can you support students in your capacity as a secondary education professional III in order to ensure a smooth transition from secondary to higher education and how do you ensure the continuity of the support within higher education? This guide addresses all such issues.



STRUCTURE

This guide is divided into two parts:

1. five steps that describe what education professionals can do together with students in order to ensure an optimal transition to higher education;
2. four steps that describe what professionals can do on their own both within and outside the secondary school in order to ensure a smoother transition to higher education.

All tips in this guide are general in nature. The most important tip is to provide a tailored solution for each individual student, taking into account the fact that a great deal more independence and initiative will be expected from the student at the higher education level. Steps described here do not need to be conducted in any specific order. The guide has been written for professionals within secondary education (VO) or special secondary education (VSO), although it can also be useful for other interested parties.

Note that the higher education sector uses different terminology to secondary education. If you are not fully up to speed with higher education terminology in your capacity as an education professional, start by reading Section 2.1: 'Ensure that your knowledge of higher education is up to date'.

In addition to this guide, an [online tool](#)² is also available, in which information and tips will become visible when you click on the individual steps.

- I *Different terms are used within secondary education to designate the professionals responsible for students with support needs, such as care coordinator, support coordinator, care counsellor, and so on.*
- II *Here, the term 'student' can be taken to mean 'student with support needs'. Within higher education, students with support needs are referred to as 'students with a disability'. However, students do not always identify their support needs as a 'handicap' or 'disability'.*
- III *In this guide, the term 'education professional' refers to any professional involved in providing care or guidance to students, such as care coordinators, tutors, career teachers, academic career counsellors, and so on.*

What can secondary education professionals do together with the student? +



What can secondary education professionals do on their own? +



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1 WHAT CAN EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS DO TOGETHER WITH THE STUDENT?

1.1 SUPPORT WITH ORIENTATION

During the transition from secondary education to higher education, it is important that students begin the orientation process as early as possible. You can help individual students to do so by making a step-by-step plan which sets out what the student can expect to happen in the near future, what action they must take and what deadlines they must meet. Naturally, this orientation will not be separate from the activities offered as part of the career education and guidance (CEG) process.

Tips:

- Use [Studieprocesinkkaart.nl](https://studieprocesinkkaart.nl) to make a step-by-step plan:
 - [link to the studentversion](#)³
 - [link to the professionalversion](#)⁴
- Have students consider their skills, opportunities and motives, and make use of the insights gained from the CEG activities. What are the student's capabilities and limitations with regard to study/traineeships/professional practice/employers? Encourage students to discuss this issue with their parents and the people that they know.
- Encourage students to participate in higher education orientation activities such as taster sessions, open days and shadow student programmes, which will give students a good idea of specific programmes. Advise students to examine related programmes in addition to their preferred programmes.
- Inform students about the student platforms available at a variety of universities of applied sciences. Platforms are also available for students with support needs, providing students with a useful extra source of information.
- Advise students to consult [Studiekeuze123](#)⁵, a website containing general information that can help students to select a programme for the next stage of their academic career. Here, students can find specific information on what other students with support needs think about specific institutions.
- Advise students to visit university websites in order to find out what facilities the institutions offer and to whom they can turn for support. Advise students to use the search term 'disability'.
- Organise contact opportunities, e.g. meetings with former students and/or employees with support needs who share their experiences of university and work.

1.2 DISCUSS THE FEASIBILITY OF THE STUDENT'S PREFERRED PROGRAMMES AND PROFESSION

'Now that I am applying for a job, I can really see how working in this profession is difficult with my disability. It's tough to be repeatedly turned down on the grounds of the same practical problem. If we had carefully considered and discussed this matter before I started my studies, I might have chosen a very different path.'

It is important that you discuss with students whether their programme and future profession of choice seem realistic. In addition, it is important to consider carefully what the profession involves exactly and how it could be affected by the student's capabilities and limitations.

The following tips can be used again later on if the student decides to discard their preferred programme and seek alternative programmes.

Tips:

- Advise students to consult with a student counsellor or study adviser at an early stage (well before 1 May) in order to discuss the feasibility of their preferred programmes and profession, given their support needs. The [Handicap + studie](#)⁶ website contains information for each individual institution on contact persons, facilities and the results of the National Student Survey.
- Discuss what possible challenges the student may face within higher education. What is required to remove or mitigate these obstacles and can the department responsible for the study programme offer the necessary support? Also encourage students to consider what it means to select either a vocational programme or an academic programme.
- Recommend that students examine how the teaching is conducted (lectures, group work, self-study, assessment methods, practical education) and whether or not this approach is compatible with their learning style. Is the same study programme taught at different institutions and is this aspect worth investigating? Also encourage students to consider the accessibility (via public transport) of the institution and the impact that the journeys would have on them.
- Ask students to find out which courses are involved in their preferred programmes and what skills these courses require. This information can be found on either the online or the printed prospectus of the study programme in question, among other sources. Are the required skills a good match with the skills and capacities of the student in question? Also ask students whether certain skills should be practised in preparation for the step up to higher education. For this purpose, consult the [Profielenbank](#)⁷.

1.3 ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO REPORT SUPPORT NEEDS AT AN EARLY STAGE

Research shows that identifying the right person to provide support at an early stage and making use of the right facilities/adjustments from the start of the programme increases students' chances of successfully completing their studies^{IV}. However, one precondition for this outcome is that the student must report their disability at an early stage and indicate what support they require. At the higher education level, this process requires a large degree of initiative by the student, significantly more so than at the secondary level.

Tips:

- Discuss with students whether they wish to report their support needs as well as what the advantages and disadvantages of doing so would be.
- You should also discuss when and how the student can report their support needs.
- Advise students to indicate their support needs in [studielink](#)⁸. Reporting support needs via Studielink usually results in information and/or contact details being sent to the student.
- Discuss the students' rights. Higher education institutions are prohibited from refusing entry to students on the grounds of their support needs. If students are refused admittance on these grounds, they can contact the National Student Law Office ([Landelijk Studenten Rechtsbureau](#)⁹ and [the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights](#)¹⁰).

TO REPORT OR NOT TO REPORT

Arguments to report the support needs at an early stage:

- Requesting and allocating required facilities and adjustments often takes several weeks. The advantage of reporting support needs in a timely manner is that the necessary facilities and adjustments will be available to the student from the very start of their studies.
- Students can be eligible for a deferred binding study recommendation.
- [Extra financial support](#)¹¹ is available and some or all of the tuition fees can be cancelled.
- A clear picture can be painted at a sufficiently early stage of what the programme can offer and what students must arrange for themselves. Timely notification of support needs means this entire process can be organised before the start of the study programme.
- While some students may not yet require facilities now, they may need them at a later stage in their study programme. In such cases, it is also important that the student reports such disabilities at the start of the programme or immediately after commencing their studies.

IV *Final measurement of the study Studeren met een functiebeperking ('Studying with a disability'), Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2013 (ITS/ResearchNed).*

Arguments not to report the support needs:

- Students do not want to be labelled and would prefer to start their studies with a clean slate.
- Students are afraid that they will be treated differently.
- Students are afraid of not being admitted to the programme of their choice.

As an education professional, it is vital that you are aware of these considerations and proactively devote attention to these factors together with the student. Experience shows that not reporting support needs can result in students getting stuck and/or suffering study delay.

1.4 DISCUSS THE SCC RECOMMENDATION

The study choice check (SCC) is part of the enrolment process in the higher education sector and is intended to examine whether the programme in which the student has enrolled is truly suitable for them. How the SCC is conducted differs between institutions. For example, learn more about how the study choice check at [HAN University of Applied Sciences](#)¹² is conducted. The end product of the SCC is a study choice recommendation. As the SCC is not a selection tool, students cannot be denied admittance on the basis of the SCC.

Tips:

- Encourage students to prepare properly for the SCC. Information on SCCs can be found on the website of the institution in question and/or will be sent to students following enrolment in the programme. Advise students to contact the necessary parties as soon as possible if they require facilities in order to complete the SCC.
- Discuss the SCC recommendation with the student (regardless of whether it is positive or negative). What does the recommendation say? Do you agree with the findings? Does anything need to be clarified? How will the student respond to the recommendation?
- In case of a negative study choice recommendation, examine the arguments made and discuss whether it is a realistic choice of profession. Discuss alternative programmes and/or institutions. Ultimately, the students must decide for themselves whether to heed or ignore their study choice recommendation.
- If they have any doubt about the choice of study, advise students to consult the institution in question. In case of reorientation, examine whether the institution in question offers support. For example, [Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences](#)¹³ organises workshops that provide guidance and supervision to students during the study choice process.

1.5 ENSURE EFFECTIVE DATA TRANSFER DURING THE TRANSITION

The continuity of the learning pathway for education and support is of great importance to students with support needs. An important aspect of this continuity is the provision of information on the students' development opportunities and specifically information on how to interact with them. The students themselves are responsible for the transfer of data. As a result, each individual student will require tailored support in this regard. During the transfer of data, you must ensure compliance with the [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#)¹⁴.

Tips:

- Advise the student to provide all relevant data to the HBO institution, such as information about their development so far, factors that may have affected or assisted their academic progress, or a list of facilities and adjustments that they have used during their secondary education.
- If necessary, offer students support with the process of data collection. You can then compile all the data collected into a transfer file. The moment of handover of this document depends on the complexity of the student's situation (the more complex the situation is, the earlier the data should be provided).
- Encourage students to involve their parents/guardians/carers at the earliest possible stage of their study choice process and during the transition to higher education.
- If a student has a caregiver, encourage the student to involve the caregiver in the study choice and transition process. If desired, the caregiver can attend the initial meeting/intake.
- Encourage students to contact you if they encounter problems or are at risk of encountering problems at the beginning of their study programme. Also inform them that the student counsellor or study adviser can contact you on their behalf.



2 WHAT CAN EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS DO ON THEIR OWN?

2.1 ENSURE THAT YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IS UP TO DATE

In order to provide optimal support to students during their transition to higher education, it is vital that you possess or acquire up-to-date and objective knowledge on studying with support needs and higher education.

Tips:

- Ensure that you are fully aware of the terminology used within the higher education sector and the care structure in place.
- Keep your knowledge of relevant legislation, regulations and financial matters up to date, and inform students of these issues.
- Visit conferences/open days addressing the transition from secondary to higher education or gain information from colleagues who have attended such events. This process could include activities organised by the [CEG expertise centre](#)¹⁵, [the Netherlands Association of School Guidance Practitioners NVS-NVL](#)¹⁶, [the Association of Career Guidance Practitioners in secondary education VvSL](#)¹⁷ or [the National Information and Expertise Centre for Transitioning to Higher Professional Education LICA](#)¹⁸.
- Keep up with general information on studying with support needs. Consult the websites of universities, [studiekeuze123](#)¹⁹, [the Handicap + Studie expert centre](#)²⁰, and so on.

TERMINOLOGY AND CARE STRUCTURE

Guidance

The care structure is different at every individual institution. Lecturers and academic career counsellors are the first line of care, as they play a role in identifying students who require support. As academic career counsellors are the first point of contact for students, special counsellors are sometimes appointed for providing support to students with support needs. If they have any concerns, or if they require adjustments or facilities, students are referred to the student counsellor or study adviser. They will refer the student to another professional if required.

In the higher education sector, there is no such thing as ‘inclusive education’; the ‘medical approach’ (nature of the disability and discussion of the diagnosis) largely determines the evaluation of students’ support needs and opportunities for tailored solutions. Increasing attention is now paid to the discussion of students’ support needs,

talents and diversity. The responsibilities of higher education institutions are specified under the law. As information on support and guidance via the websites of individual institutions is often insufficient, a face-to-face meeting can give you clearer insight into the opportunities open to you.

Student counsellor

You can consult student counsellors for information and advice on a wide range of issues that are not directly study-related, such as:

- student grants and loans;
- financial support in case of study delay caused by exceptional circumstances;
- enrolment and deregistration;
- deferment of binding study recommendations;
- scholarships for student representatives;
- submission of complaints or appeals and initiation of the complaint/appeal process;
- study facilitation for students with support needs, professional athletes or business owners;
- initial care in case of psychosocial problems and referral to appropriate care professionals.

These student counsellors can provide advice and mediation or refer you to other relevant parties. Within the higher education sector, student counsellors are consequently the primary point of contact for students with support needs. Student counsellors not only provide information to students, but they also arrange adjustments and facilities such as additional time during exams, extra resits or exam rooms with fewer stimuli.

The role of the student counsellor partially overlaps with the role of the care coordinator within secondary education. However, career teachers within secondary education mainly focus on ensuring the correct study choice and facilitating the students' career development. Student counsellor in higher education rather fulfil more tasks than career teachers in secondary education, although some tasks match those performed by academic career counsellors or study advisers, particularly those relating to important decisions that students have to make (study programme, minors, specialisations, and so on).

Study adviser/academic career counsellor/study coach

The job title and duties of this professional can vary between different institutions and programmes. Higher education students can consult the student counsellor if they have any questions or problems relating to their studies in the broadest sense of the term, such as:

- advice on personal circumstances during your study programme;
- guidance when making important decisions;
- questions about honours programmes, minors, and so on.;
- advice on study planning and any possible study delay;
- support with how to study more effectively;
- questions about legislation.

Flexible education and adjusted curricula

An increasing amount of attention is being paid to flexible education, customisation and diversity. A number of programmes feature flexibly structured education, such as [Fontys School of ICT](#)²¹, although higher education programmes are usually more supply-driven. Customisation of curricula, assessments and work placements is certainly not guaranteed at the higher education level.

LEGISLATION AND FINANCING

There is a wide range of important laws and regulations for students with support needs, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Higher Education Act (*Wet op het Hoger Onderwijs*) and the Equal Treatment of Disabled and Chronically Ill People Act (*Wet Gelijke Behandeling voor mensen met een handicap of chronische ziekte*).

UN Convention

This [international convention](#)²² establishes the right to inclusive education. As a result, educational institutions must provide universal access to buildings and information systems as well as make any necessary adjustments.

Higher Education Act

The [Higher Education Act](#)²³ establishes the right to university education and higher professional education. It also specifies that all students are entitled to make use of student guidance and other facilities, including the services of a student counsellor.

Equal Treatment of Disabled and Chronically Ill People Act

[This act](#)²⁴ prohibits discrimination against students with a disability. All higher education institutions are obliged to make effective adjustments for students with a disability, provided that the student has requested the adjustment and reported their disability in a timely manner. By 'effective' adjustments, we mean adjustments that are both suitable and necessary. In this regard, 'suitable' means that the adjustment does indeed resolve a problem faced by the student in question and increases their independence, while 'necessary' means that the same goal cannot be achieved by any other means.

If a student requests an adjustment, the institution is obliged to investigate whether the requested adjustment(s) and possible alternatives are feasible. The only situation in which the institution will not be obliged to grant the request is if the adjustment places disproportionate strain on the institution. Factors that determine whether or not this case applies include the size of the institution, the cost of the adjustment, any financial allowances applicable, the feasibility and the organisation's financial capacity, among other things.

Financing

A number of [financial facilities](#)²⁵ are available to students with support needs, e.g. in case of study delay.

Student grants/loans via DUO

All students arrange their grants/loans via DUO. Under certain circumstances, additional facilities can be granted to students with a disability:

1. extension of programme period;
2. extension of performance-related grants;
3. conversion of performance-related grant into a gift;
4. new student grants/loans for new study programmes;
5. cancellation of an amount (€1,200) of student debt upon graduation;
6. cancellation of student debt on medical grounds.

Student counsellors must sign off on all of the various facilities; for example, they must determine whether or not study delay was caused by the student's disability. To this end, it is vital that the student counsellor is informed of the student's situation in a timely manner. Otherwise, the counsellor will not be able to take the situation into consideration and the student will consequently not be eligible for the facility or facilities in question. For this and other reasons, it is advisable that students report any disabilities that they may have as soon as possible.

Individual study allowance via municipality

As young people with support needs find it difficult to combine their studies with a part-time job, an allowance has been established under the [Participation Act \(Participatiewet\)](#)²⁶. Students must request this allowance via the municipality in which they are registered. If the application is accepted, the student will receive a certain sum of money each month, the amount of which differs between municipalities. For example, see the individual study allowance offered by the [Municipality of Amsterdam](#)²⁷.

Institutional profiling funds

Students who suffer study delay as a result of exceptional circumstances can apply for reimbursement of costs via the higher education institution's profiling fund. These applications are made via the student counsellor. This case is another situation in which the student must inform the student counsellor of the situation in a timely manner, or the student will not be eligible for the funding. Examples of profiling funds include [InHolland](#)²⁸ and [Avans](#)²⁹.

2.2 BOOST YOUR NETWORK AND COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration – both within the secondary school and with the higher education institution – is a vital factor in ensuring the continuity of learning pathways. By investing in your network, you enable interdisciplinary collaboration. Effective distribution of duties within your own organisation is another key factor in this regard.

Tips:

- Ensure that the roles and tasks for the transition from secondary to higher education are clearly described. Reinforce each other's expertise.
- At many secondary schools, the transition process and the care process are separate. It is advisable to bring the care process and study choice process closer together, as this approach helps in realising smooth transitions to higher education.
- Appoint a single contact person – the 'case manager' – for communication with the higher education sector.
- Consider which network contacts are most relevant and useful, and invest in these relationships. Maintain your network by organising and attending meetings, such as regional student counsellor meetings.
- Organise [information exchange meetings](#)³⁰ with education professionals both at the secondary level and within higher education.

2.3 EVALUATE THE TRANSITION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

How successful have students with support needs been in the higher education sector? While information on this matter is often difficult to access, this information is extremely important in finding out whether sufficient support is being provided. In order to evaluate this aspect, policy is required.

Tips:

- Every year, conduct an evaluation together with the higher education sector to examine how well students with support needs made the transition and how their studies are progressing. This process will be part of the evaluation of all students. You can conduct such an evaluation as an individual school or within existing collaborative partnerships.
- Ask students whether you can contact them after their first year of study to find out how things are going and to evaluate the transition process (as well as the role that the secondary school and the higher education institution played).
- Conduct an internal evaluation to examine whether the agreed policy frameworks, procedures and task descriptions were complied with during the transition process.

2.4 CREATE NEW POLICIES OR SUPPLEMENT EXISTING POLICIES

To monitor and evaluate the continuity of the learning pathways for students with support needs, policy is required. In this way, attention can be paid to the transition towards higher education as part of the existing care policies. Policies for this purpose can also be created within collaborative partnerships.

Tips:

- Record results, procedures and task/role descriptions clearly.
- Monitor established policy and evaluate it on an annual basis, both within your own institution and within your collaborative partnerships.
- Carry out any improvement measures agreed.
- Announce results and work systematically.



3 REFERENCE LIST

This guide makes reference to the following websites:

1. https://www.handicap-studie.nl/124_1172_Factsheet_Cijfers_Studeren_met_een_functiebeperking.aspx
2. https://www.handicap-studie.nl/1_1384_bijdragen_aan_een_succesvolle_overgang_van_vo_naar_ho_voor_students_met_een_functiebeperking.aspx
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28. <https://www.inholland.nl/studiekeuze/studeren-bij-inholland/studeren-met-een-handicap/financi%C3%ABn/profileringsfonds/>
29. <https://studentinfo.avans.nl/publicaties/rechtspositie/regeling-profileringsfonds>
30. <https://www.vo-raad.nl/artikelen/121>

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Authors: Eline Thijsen, Sietske Sportel, Hannelore Veltman and Nanne Roos Vonk of handicap + studie, Marij Bosdriesz and Chaja Deen of the Netherlands Youth Institute (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, NJi), and Mike Jolink and Marlies Peters of the Centre for Inclusive Education (Steunpunt Passend Onderwijs, SPO).

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SPO

The SPO (Centre for Inclusive Education) provides support to schools, school boards and collaborative partnerships within the primary and secondary education sectors on the issue of inclusive education.

www.steunpuntpassendonderwijs-povo.nl

