



Dublin City South
Cathair Bhaile Átha Cliath Theas

**A Report on Supporting Successful Transitions from Junior to Senior Cycle in Post-
Primary Schools**

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August 2018

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INTRODUCTION

Dublin City South Children and Young People's Service Committee (DCS CYPSC) is tasked with improving outcomes for children and young people within its area through better coordination in the planning and delivery of services. Children and young people experience a number of key transitions in their journey from childhood to adulthood. Transitions in education include those from pre-school to primary school; primary to post-primary school; from living in care to independent living or transitioning from child to adult services.

Planning for and providing coordinated supports at key moments of transition can help ensure better outcomes for children and young people. Better Outcomes Brighter Futures identifies strengthening transitions for children and young people as a national policy goal. The most recent DEIS¹ plan (2017) identifies 'supporting successful transitions' as an area that needs to be further developed in order to achieve better outcomes for children and young people. The Education subgroup² of the Dublin City South Children and Young People's Service Committee decided to explore successful transitions from junior to senior cycle³ in post-primary schools. Initially, the education subgroup decided to conduct a scoping exercise with all of the post-primary schools to examine the issue of transitions from junior to senior cycle. A short questionnaire was sent to all post-primary schools and the data received from individual schools were grouped together so that no individual school can be identified. Following this, two focus groups were conducted with a number of young people in order to explore their views in relation to the transition from junior to senior cycle. The map below

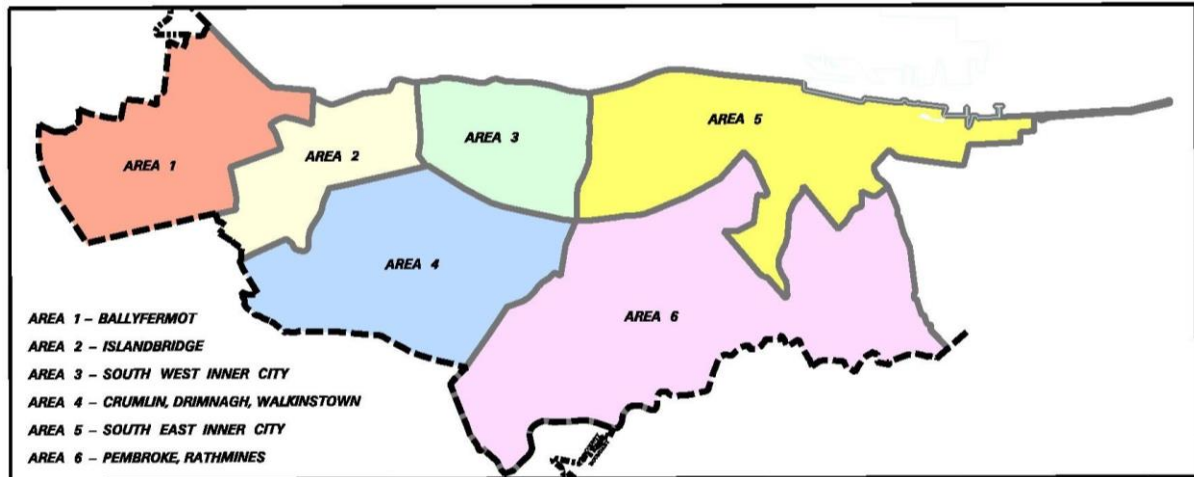
¹ Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

² For this particular research project the Education Subgroup was made up of Glenn Perry, Nuala Nic Giobuin, Julie O'Hagan, and Declan Markey

³ The period of transition from 3rd year into either Transition Year, 4th year or 5th year

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outlines the area that the Dublin City South Children and Young Peoples Service Committee covers.



METHODOLOGY

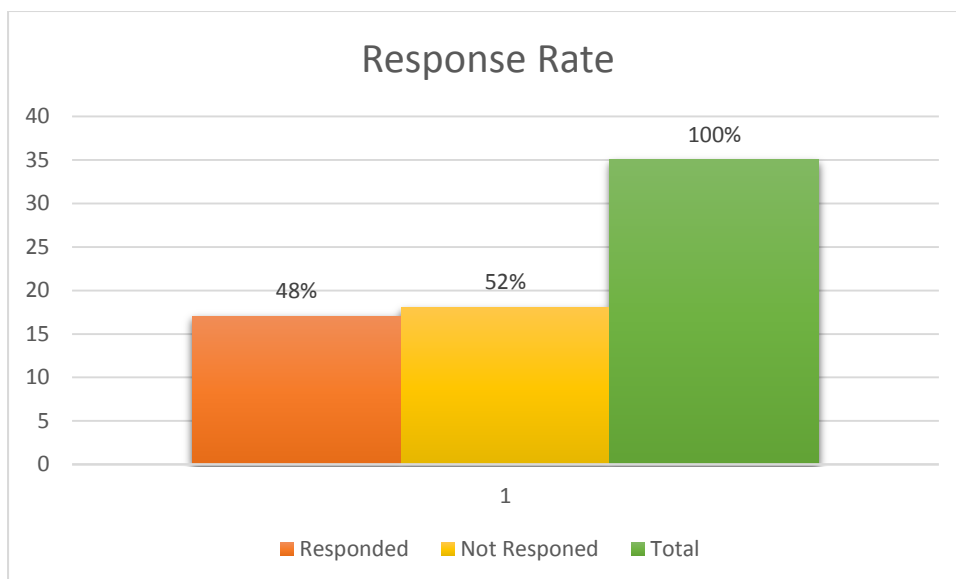
This piece of research used a mixed method approach in order to explore the topic: ‘supporting successful transitions from junior to senior cycle’. A questionnaire was designed and sent to all post-primary schools in the Dublin City South Children and Young Peoples Service Committee area. Following this two focus groups were conducted with a number of young people in order to gather their views. It is extremely important to be cautious when interpreting the focus groups as the views presented are individual views and are therefore not generalisable.

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THE ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Response Rate

School questionnaires were sent to 35 post-primary schools within the Dublin City South Children and Young People's Service Committee area. In total 48% schools responded and 52% did not. One of the schools responded explaining that they only have repeat leaving certificate students and as a result the remainder of the analysis will only include data from 34 schools.



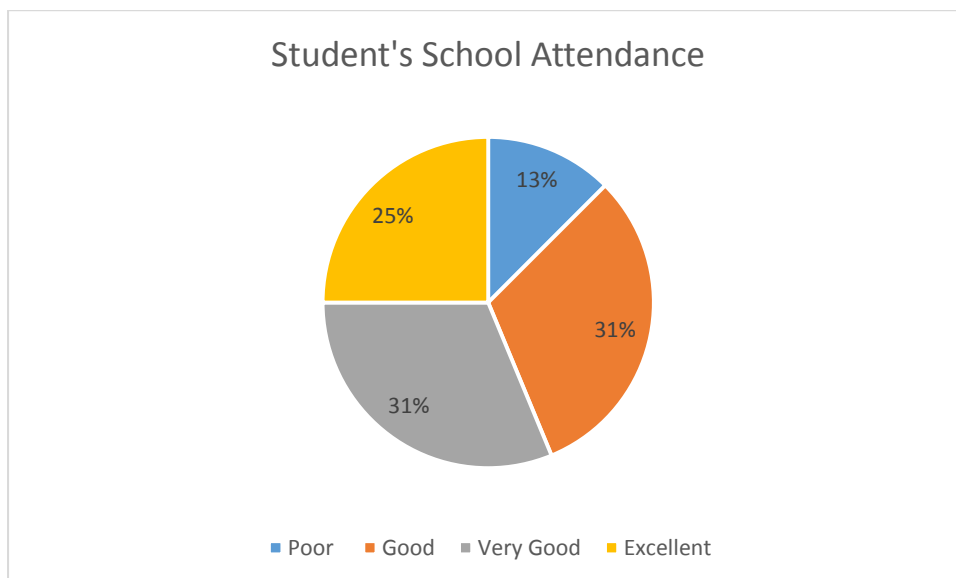
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2. The % of Young People who left school in the Senior Cycle for 2016/2017

Of the schools that responded there was a total enrolment of 6,284 students. Of this the schools reported that 48 students had left school in the senior cycle for 2016/2017 which represents 0.8%.

3. School Attendance in Senior Cycle

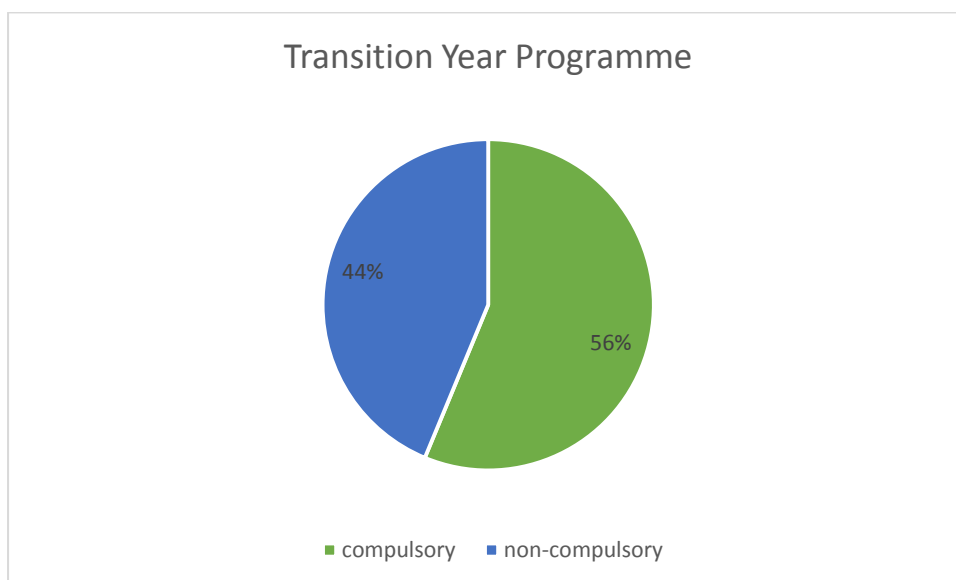
Overall the data confirms that in general schools reported that student attendance in senior cycle was viewed as positive. 31% of schools reported that student attendance was 'good' with a further 31% reported that student attendance was 'very good'. Furthermore, 25% of schools considered the students attendance in senior cycle as 'excellent'. However 13% of schools categorised the attendance as 'poor'.



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4. Transition Year Programme

The schools were asked if they had a transition year programme within their school and if it was compulsory. The data confirms that all of the schools that responded provide a transition year programme. However, 56% of the schools reported that the transition year programme is compulsory whereas 44% reported that it was not compulsory.

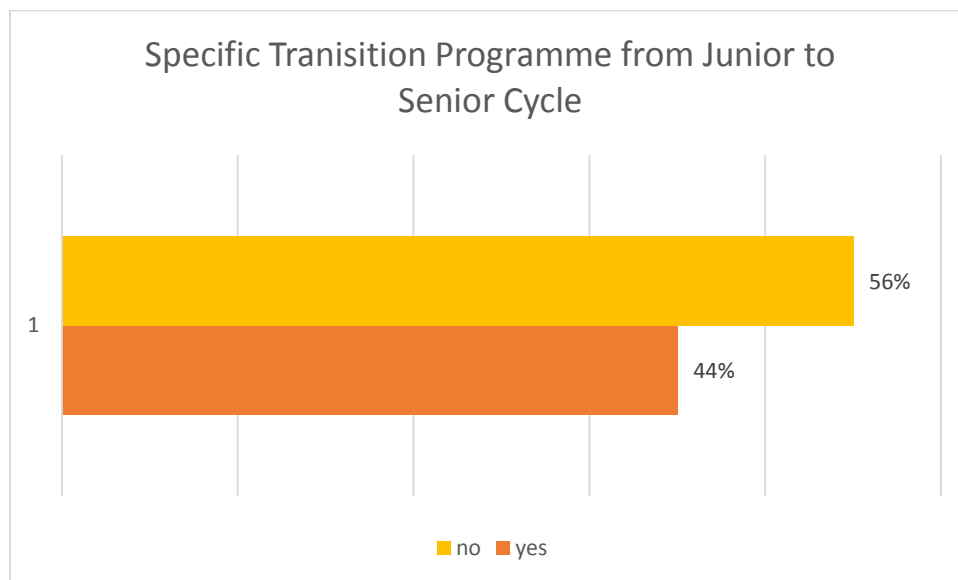


5. A Specific Transition Programme from Junior to Senior Cycle

The schools were asked if they provided a specific transition programme for students moving from junior to senior cycle. Of the schools that responded, 44% said that they had a specific

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transition programme for students entering the senior cycle whereas 56% of schools reported that they did not have such a programme.

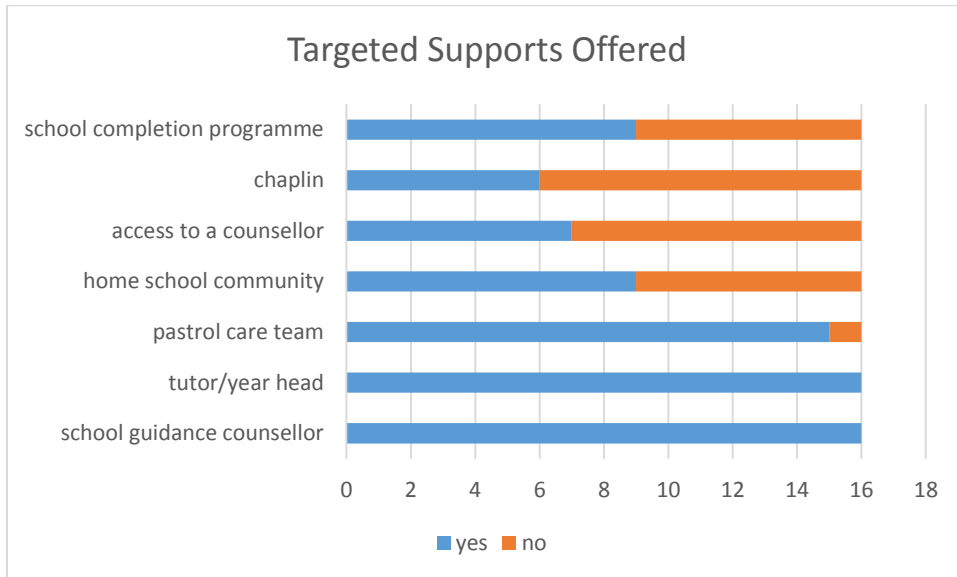


6. Supports School Offers to Students Transitioning from Junior to Senior Cycle

The data confirms that the schools reported that they offer a number of supports to students transitioning from junior to senior cycle. The majority of the schools reported that they provide students with a school guidance programme and support from a tutor/year head. Most of the schools (94%) reported that they had a pastoral care team in place which supports students who experience difficulties in school. School completion and the home school community programme are only offered in certain school under the DEIS programme and are

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therefore not offered in some of the schools. The data also confirms that 37% of schools provide a chaplain service and 44% of schools provide access to a counsellor.



7. Most Common Reason that Students fail to Transition into Senior Cycle

The schools were asked to outline the most common reasons why they think students fail to transition from the junior cycle to senior cycle. The schools reported a wide range of reasons why they think students fail to transition such as; history of poor school attendance, history of early school leaving, mental health, homelessness, transfer to another school, the lure of earning money, literacy and numeracy difficulties, students not liking school, a negative experience of school, peer influence, teenage pregnancy, choosing the wrong course

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(Transition year/5th year), poor support system in the school, expulsion, not having friends and lack of parental support.



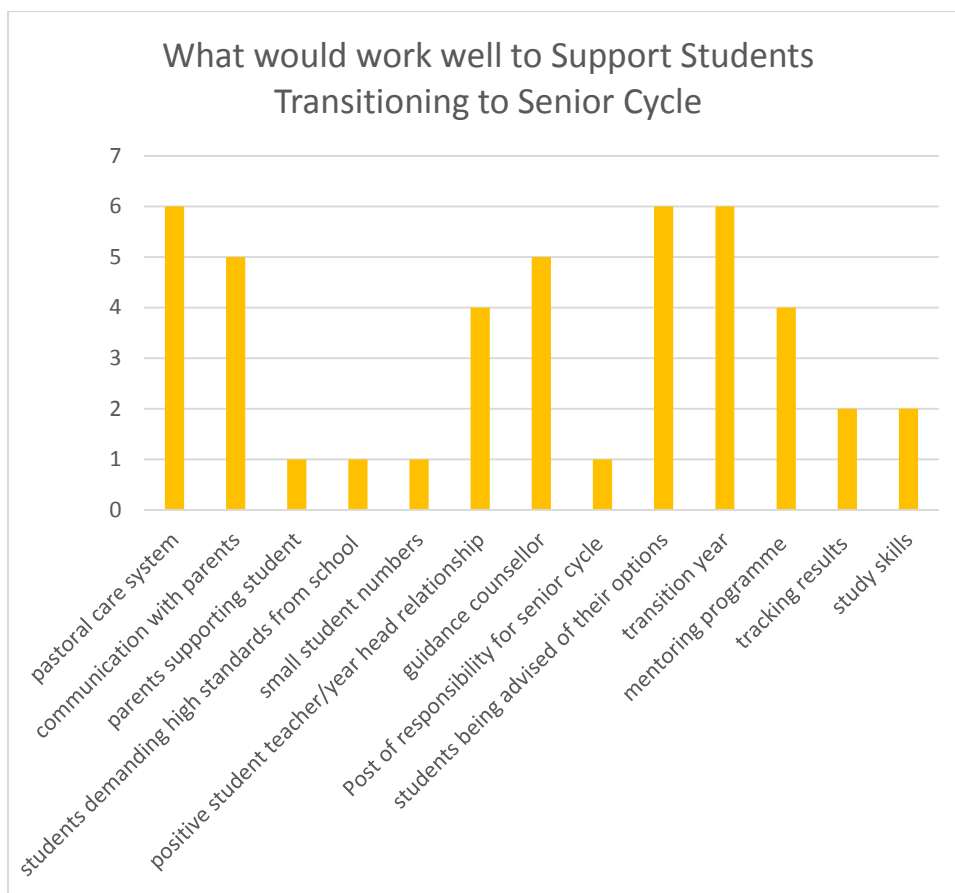
8. What Works Well to Support Students Transitioning to Senior Cycle

The schools were asked to give their opinion on what they thought works well to support students transitioning to senior cycle. The schools reported on a wide range of interventions that could support students transitioning to senior cycle. In total, 13 different types of interventions were outlined by the schools. The interventions that were reported the most frequent included; having a pastoral care system, ensuring that there is effective

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communication with parents, positive student/teacher relationship, guidance counselling, ensuring that students are advised of their options, the student completing transition year and a specific mentoring programme for senior students. Other interventions included parents being supportive, small student numbers, a post of responsibility for senior cycle tracking results and ensuring that students are offered study skill training.



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FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

In order to explore the topic ‘supporting successful transitions from junior to senior cycle in post-primary school’ in more detail, two focus groups were conducted involving 12 young people. The focus groups were run by Julie O’Hagan and Declan Markey. The first focus group involved six young people which consisted of four girls and two boys who were currently in 6th year. The second focus group involved six young people, consisting of three girls and three boys who were currently in Youth Reach. Prior to the focus groups, consent forms were signed by each participant and parental consent collected for those participants under the age of 18. In total, six questions were used in the focus groups:

1. Did you have a school transfer programme in preparation for moving from primary to post-primary school and if so, what did you find successful?
2. Did you find it a big jump to go from junior cycle to senior cycle?
3. Did you have a transfer programme in preparation for moving from 3rd year to transition year or 5th year?
4. What areas of support do you think would be beneficial to support students transitioning from 3rd/4th to 5th year?
5. What do you think is the most common reason for students leaving school after 3rd year?
6. What supports are in place to help students who are considering leaving school and do you think they work?

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Did you have a school transfer programme in preparation for moving from primary to post-primary school and if so, what did you find successful?

Most of the participants said that they were included in a transfer programme in preparation for moving from primary to post-primary school. However, some participants said that they had no transfer programme with one participant saying they cannot remember. The participants spoke about different activities which they felt supported them transferring from primary to post-primary school. These activities included things such as visiting the post-primary school, attending an open day in the post-primary school, having a mentor in 1st year, having access to the chaplain, being given a booklet about post-primary school, post-primary teachers visiting them in 6th class and 1-1 support in 1st year. Some of the participants expressed that it was important for them to be able to visit and move around the different rooms in the post-primary school. However, one participant said that this was done when all the other students were not in school. She explained that it would have been more helpful for her to understand how busy the school was going to be if the other students were in the school at the time of her visit.

Did you find it a big jump to go from junior cycle to senior cycle?

Some of the participants expressed that going from 3rd year to 4th year was a lot easier and more relaxed than going into 5th year. One participant said: *'it hits you like a ton of bricks'* going into 5th year. Most of the young people who did 4th year said that it was good for self-development but the lack of structure did not prepare them to make the transition to 5th year.

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Some of the participants expressed that it was helpful that the group stayed the same going into 5th year but that they found the jump regarding school work very stressful. One of the participants expressed that students can lose interest in 4th year due to the lack of structure and as *'no one is really checking up on you like they were in the years before'*.

Did you have a transfer programme in preparation for moving from 3rd year to transition year or 5th year?

The majority of the participants in the two focus groups expressed that they did not have a transfer programme in preparation for moving into 5th year. However, some of the participants expressed that 4th year gave them a break for a year, while other participants expressed that they would have liked some extra support going into 5th year as the work load increased dramatically.

What areas of support do you think would be beneficial to support students transitioning from 3rd/4th to 5th year?

The participants expressed a number of supports that they thought would be beneficial to support students transitioning into 5th year which included:

- Offer more emotional support because young people at this age are going through a lot in their personal lives
- Mindfulness/meditation

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- Provide students with a mentor
- Provide 1-1 educational support for those students who are struggling
- Have more structure and routine in 4th year
- Keep elements of school work in 4th year
- Ensure that students are aware at an early stage of what will happen in 5th year and what the workload will be like
- Have a dedicated room for senior students in the school

What do you think is the most common reason for students leaving school after 3rd year?

The participants outlined a number of reasons why they thought students would leave school after 3rd year. These include things such as: a lack of interest in school, employment opportunities, laziness, and parents not supporting their child to return to school, peer pressure, the student not being able to cope with the stress, or the student being bullied

CONCLUSION

The Education subgroup of the Dublin City South Children and Young People's Service Committee decided to explore successful transitions from junior to senior cycle in post-primary schools. As already discussed, this involved sending a questionnaire to all post-primary schools in the Dublin City South area. This was also followed up by conducting two focus groups with a number of young people in order to explore their views in relation to the transition from junior to senior cycle. In total 48% of schools responded to the questionnaire

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and a total of 12 young people took part in the focus groups. While this piece of research used a mixed method approach to explore the topic ‘supporting successful transitions from junior to senior cycle it is extremely important to be cautious when interpreting the results as the views presented are individual views and are therefore not generalisable.

Notwithstanding this, the study presents an opportunity to add to the overall discussion regarding school transitions at this point of a student’s life. While the schools reported that they provide a range of supports to students transitioning into senior cycle, over half of the schools (56%) said that they did not provide a specific transition programme for this age group. However some of the participants in the focus group suggested that they would have benefited from a range of different types of support going into senior cycle. Developing a specific transition programme for students transitioning into senior cycle might be an area that needs to be developed. It would also be important to take into account the students perspective on what support they think would support them at this time of transition.