

 Office for Social Inclusion An Oifig um Chuimsiú Sóisialta Social Inclusion Forum Workshop	
	People with Disabilities – Access to Education, Training and Employment

National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion – relevant extracts from Office for Social Inclusion First Annual Report

Ireland's second National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/Inclusion) covering the period 2003-2005 was submitted to the European Commission on 31 July 2003. The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) is the Government Office with overall responsibility for developing, co-ordinating and driving the NAP/Inclusion process.

OSI's first Annual Report on the implementation of the Plan was launched on 17th December 2004 by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs. This report was produced by the OSI in consultation with relevant Government Departments who have policy responsibility for the social inclusion targets and commitments contained in the Plan, and with representatives of the Social Partners through the Social Inclusion Consultative Group.

The following extracts from the Annual Report relate to actions on the targets relevant to this workshop.

Copies of the report, in both Irish and English are available on line through the OSI website – www.socialinclusion.ie – or by contacting the office at 01 704 3851.

National Disability Strategy

The overall aim of social inclusion policies with regard to people with disabilities is to increase their participation in work and society generally and to assist them and their families to lead full and independent lives. To underpin this aim a National Disability Strategy was launched in September 2004. The Strategy builds on existing policy and legislation including the Employment Equality Act 1998; the Equal Status Act 2000; the Equality Act 2004; the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004; and the policy of mainstreaming service provision for people with disabilities within the State agencies that provide the service to citizens generally.

Participation by Students with Disabilities

Although research on the employment of people with disabilities is ongoing and in development, the results of research to date has shown that people with disabilities are disadvantaged in terms of access to employment. Of further interest is the ongoing research on access to third level education for people with disabilities. The National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion has set a target to increase participation by students with disabilities at third level to 1.8 per cent by 2006.

Further research on access to third-level for people with disabilities is underway. AHEAD (Association of Higher Education Access and Disability) carried out a survey for the Higher

Education Authority, which showed a first year under-graduate participation rate of 1.4 per cent in 1998/99. The report on the survey was published in 2004.

Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004

The recent Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act provides a new framework for the assessment of and provision for the needs of children with educational disabilities. The Act provides for the establishment of the National Council for Special Education to co-ordinate special education provision and the provision of Special Educational Needs Organisers to ensure children with special needs receive an appropriate education, and to promote good practice in special education. The provisions of the Act are to be implemented within a period not exceeding five years.

Among the key provisions of the Act are:

- The establishment of the “National Council for Special Education” (NCSE) to coordinate special education provision and the provision of Special Educational Needs Organisers to ensure children with special needs receive an appropriate education, and to promote good practice in special education;
- Education for children with special educational needs is, as far as practicable and appropriate, to take place in an inclusive setting;
- Every child with special educational needs is entitled to an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to be prepared by appropriate professionals;
- Parents have a right to be involved in the assessment of their children and the preparation of the IEP and assessments are to take a whole-child, holistic approach;
- Parents, if they feel their views are not being given full recognition, or where they feel the Plan is not being implemented, may effectively appeal any decisions concerning their children and these matters to an independent review Board. The Board has the power to compel bodies, including health boards to take specific actions to address matters before it; and
- Greater coordination between the education and health agencies in order to ensure clarity in their respective roles.

Training and Employment of People with Disabilities

The National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion has also set a target to reduce the level of unemployment experienced by vulnerable groups in general to the national average by 2007. The focus of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment’s policy on the employment of people with disabilities is on vocational training in a specific employable skill. This policy is centred on developing the skills of people with disabilities to enable them to access employment; stimulating awareness amongst employers of the contribution which people with disabilities can make to their businesses; encouraging companies to more actively consider recruiting people with disabilities; and providing specific employment supports for people with disabilities and employers. These policies are put into practice through various programmes and initiatives, such as Supported Employment and the Workway Project (details below).

Employment

(i) Data and research

The Quarterly National Household Survey for the second quarter of 2002 (which contained a special module on people with disabilities) showed that just over 40 per cent of people who were ill or had a disability were in employment compared with an overall rate of 65 per cent of the total population in the same age category.

A report by the Equality Authority: *Accommodating Diversity in Provision of Labour Market: 2003* indicates that overall only 42.9 per cent of people with disabilities were available to work. The percentage is only 30 per cent in the older age groups. Additional analysis and longitudinal studies are required to determine specific requirements, actual need and the size of the active population. This is a pre-requisite for planning coherent service provision.

(ii) Employment policy approach

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment continues to develop policy for vocational training in a specific employable skill and for employment of people with disabilities on a three-dimensional basis involving:

- Developing the skills of people with disabilities to enable them to access employment;
- Stimulating awareness amongst employers of the contribution which people with disabilities can make to their businesses and encouraging companies to more actively consider recruiting people with disabilities; and
- Providing specific employment supports for people with disabilities and employers.

(iii) FÁS services

For the year January – December 2003, 3,819 disabled people registered with FÁS. In addition, FÁS commissioned a ‘customer survey’ to obtain feedback from people with disabilities who availed of FÁS programmes post June 2000. This report was completed in February 2003, and its recommendations to improve service provision are being implemented.

(iv) Supported Employment

This programme is designed to assist in the integration of persons with a disability into a job in the open labour market, leading to independence and career progression. On-the-job training and individualised supports are key elements. An important outcome of this programme is that it has demonstrated to employers the value of employing a person with a disability. Since its inception in 2000 and up to the end of June 2004, the number of participants was approximately 700.

In the light of a review carried out on behalf of FÁS, new criteria for the provision of supported employment services were introduced in 2003. FÁS engaged in active dialogue with representative organisations on aspects of the new criteria. Criteria are structured under the following headings:

- Programme duration;
- Structure;
- Profile & Recruitment of Participants;
- Monitoring & Reporting;
- Employment Requirements; and

- Information requirements of FÁS under FOI Act.

Following a tender process with project sponsors, FÁS has contracted with a number of organisations to deliver supported employment services under the new criteria.

(v) Review of Vocational Training

A review of vocational training provision for people with disabilities was completed in 2003. The purpose of the review was to examine the delivery of vocational training for people with disabilities through various forms of provision funded by FÁS, and to identify areas where efficiencies and effectiveness could be improved. Consultations with key service providers and other stakeholders on the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report were conducted by FÁS under the aegis of the National Advisory Committee on Disability. The broad thrust of the consultants' recommendations has been accepted and will be implemented by FÁS during 2004, under an Action Plan approved by the FÁS Executive Board. The review highlighted that FÁS has made a significant investment in its training centres in terms of ensuring that reasonable access and accommodation are provided for persons with disabilities, along with disability awareness training for its own staff. The review also identified some of the areas that could be improved in the future, such as greater co-ordination between FÁS and external Specialist Training Providers, to ensure consistent delivery to people with disabilities.

Some of the specific recommendations include consideration of the potential for increased training of people with disabilities in an integrated way alongside those who do not have a disability; the future role of specialist training providers in the context of all training providers to people with disabilities, and the identification of operational procedure improvements.

(vi) Workway Project

Workway is the first initiative in Ireland to bring together employers, people with disabilities, trade unions and other groups representing the interests of people with disabilities in networks established under the initiative to improve their employment opportunities. It is the first such known partnership initiative in Europe to seek to address the high levels of unemployment among people with disabilities in the private sector.

This initiative was conceived under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, which acknowledged that social partners have a major role in raising awareness and promoting the employment of people with disabilities in the private sector. *Workway* was launched by the Taoiseach in July, 2002.

Funding for the duration of Phase I of Workway – 2001 to March, 2004 – was provided by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (a total of €818,000). Phase II (April 2004 – March 31, 2005) is being funded by FÁS in the amount of €223,000.

The first phase of the project had seven policy objectives:

- (i) awareness raising amongst employers;
- (ii) awareness raising amongst employers;
- (iii) exploration of skill availability and labour shortages;
- (iv) identify barriers to employment from the perspectives of employers and people with disabilities;
- (v) ensure involvement of all parties in finding practical solutions;

- (vi) impart information to assist with the integration of people with disabilities;
- (vii) ensure links with existing networks; and
- (viii) inform public policy makers and service providers of the implications for developing employment and training services.

Phase I is currently being reviewed by external consultants commissioned by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, arising from a commitment under *Sustaining Progress*. A Draft Report was received in the Department in July 2004, and at time of going to print it was expected that the report would shortly be finalised.

Phase II has three specific strands:

1. Development of a Template to address the deficits as identified at Pre-Employment stage
2. Piloting joint IBEC / ICTU Employment and Disability Guidelines
3. Development of a one stop information and employment website.

(vii) Regional Disability Events

The European Union designated 2003 as the European Year of People with Disabilities (EYPD) in order to raise awareness of the abilities, talents and participation of people with disabilities in Europe, as well as barriers to inclusion and the difficulties they face daily.

As a key contribution towards promoting the EYPD employment theme, a consortium of organisations working for the employment of people with disabilities was assembled to present a series of five regional awareness raising conferences in Cork, Galway, Limerick, Sligo and Waterford. The conferences took place in November and December, and were funded under a combination of a grant awarded by the EYPD National Coordinating Committee and match funding by consortium members. A significant amount of the match funding was provided through the ESF-funded EQUAL Community Initiative, which is managed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The objective of the conferences was to present flagship local events aimed at generating the maximum possible publicity, designed to capture employers' imaginations and change attitudinal thinking towards employing people with disabilities by taking a fresh approach.

Income Support

(i) Review of the income support schemes for people with disabilities

The report of the Working Group on the Review of the Illness and Disability Payment Schemes was published in September 2003 by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. In addition to consultations with a range of organisations representing the interests of people with disabilities and people who are ill, submissions were also received from many individuals. One of the key elements of this review was the examination of the extent to which schemes supporting access to work, training or rehabilitation. Other elements included

- clarifying the objectives of each of the illness and disability payment schemes;
- identifying gaps and overlaps in the overall provision;
- examining overall trends in numbers and expenditure; and
- looking at possible alternative approaches to the design and delivery of social protection for people who are ill and people with disabilities.

In relation to the effectiveness of the employment support objectives of schemes the report found that *“While the Department of Social and Family Affairs does not itself operate specific employment and training programmes, it aims through its range of supports to encourage and assist people with disabilities and long-term illnesses to identify and take up available employment, training, educational and other self-development opportunities. However, sample surveys undertaken by the Working Group highlight that availing of these supports results in generally very poor outcomes, in terms of progression to employment.”*

The Working Group identified a number of difficulties with the operation of the current social welfare employment supports, including the loss of secondary benefits on taking up employment, and the conflicts in trying to reconcile the underlying qualifying criteria that require claimants to be incapable of work, with the fact that many claimants have some employment potential. The Group concluded that there were a number of significant gaps in the operation of the current system of employment supports for this group which needed to be addressed, including the fact that there was no provision for partial (in)capacity for work; there was no meaningful assessment of employment potential; there was little active engagement with those who have an employment potential; and there was no follow-up on completion or cessation of the employment support measure. The Working Group also stressed the importance of meeting the additional costs of disability in ways that were less dependent on labour force status, if people with disabilities were to be given the opportunity of participating in the workforce.

The Working Group considered that a combination of measures was required to answer these problems:

- A recognition of the fact that some people’s medical and other circumstances might mean that they have some capacity for work, but may never achieve full-time work;
- Ensuring that whatever employment support measures are adopted do not act as a disincentive for people with disabilities and long-term illnesses in maximizing their employment and earnings potential;
- Retaining a range of employment supports for different client groups, and ensuring that clients are referred to the most suitable option, having regard to the nature of their illness/disability, age and social circumstances, etc.; and
- The introduction of early intervention measures, aimed at re-integrating people who sustain serious illnesses, injuries and disabilities back into the workforce, before they become long-term dependant on social welfare payments.

The Group recommended that the measures should initially be explored by way of pilot projects, which would better assess the benefits of such approaches, the additional resources that would be needed to be deployed and potential savings involved.