

Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities

Report prepared by the Chair of the Implementation Group (CESIG)

Year Four – 2019

Chairman's Commentary

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities Implementation Group is known internally as CESIG. The acronym reflects the fact that the Group has an awkward title, and in some ways it has had an awkward history.

The Group consists of representatives of all the Departments and agencies (including the HSE) whose work has an impact on the lives of people with disabilities, and especially their working lives. It also includes representatives of organisations representing people with disabilities, and some from the world of work, including the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and latterly IBEC. The work of the Group is facilitated and encouraged by the Department of Justice and Equality, and we are expertly advised and guided in many of our activities by the National Disability Authority.

I should begin by thanking everyone involved. There is an old political saying that a cross-departmental organisation tends to be a place where everyone protects their own patch. It may be set up to solve problems, but often its members don't see it that way at all. CESIG has, however, evolved through its foundational phase into a forum whose members share a lot of common ground, and a place where people are genuinely interested in achieving an overarching goal.

We are all committed to making breakthroughs that ensure the people with disabilities will gradually and progressively see that barriers between them and the possibility of fulfilling jobs and careers broken down.

Over the first three years of strategy implementation, as a result, some significant progress has been made. A report was produced called Making Work Pay, and many of its recommendations were implemented. In overall terms that implementation removed a lot of the fear from people with disabilities that if they secured particularly part-time work they could lose benefits that were crucial to them. Progress has been made in the area of more inclusive education; investment has begun to be ramped up in more accessible transport; a new public service target, obliging public agencies to seek to double the number of people with disabilities they hire, has been introduced – and some agencies are meeting that higher target already.

Internship programmes are being set up, and show very considerable promise. The employers involved in many of them are discovering – in some case for the first time – what steadfast, engaging and effective employees people with disabilities can be. In other words, myths are being dispelled.

A significant number of "Ability" programmes are now up and running throughout the country. These programmes are aimed primarily at the needs of young people with a disability, and are designed to assist in their transition from school to further education, training and employment. We'll need to learn a lot from the results of these programmes, especially how to mainstream the good ideas and initiatives that are already beginning to merge.

Towards the end of last year, Minister Finian McGrath published the second phase of the Comprehensive Disability Strategy Implementation Plan, which is intended to move beyond the foundational to more specific goals and objectives. We now have a detailed plan for the next three

years which includes milestones, deliverable, and accountability. (it's set out in full here: [Comprehensive Employment Strategy Action Plan 2019 to 2021](#)).

In publishing the second phase, Minister McGrath made the point that “people with disabilities are still only half as likely to be in employment as others of working age (between 20 and 65).”

In an era of virtual full employment, with a strongly growing economy and a very bright budget outlook (despite some risks and challenges), it is surely unacceptable that one sector of our population is so badly excluded and left behind. We can afford to do far more, and despite the progress that has been made, we must.

Employers are the key. In each report I have made in connection with the Strategy, I have called for much more active engagement with employers, and much more investment in awareness. This will be a key theme and focus for our Group throughout 2020, and I am glad to be able to report that we have now commenced work, with the support of the Department, on a significant public awareness campaign.

Even in an era when issues of diversity are high on the agendas of companies, and are even finding themselves incorporated into the core values of many enterprises, the concept of diversity very often does not include disability. Companies that pride themselves on their diversity in relation to gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity never seem to see disability in the same light.

So when I talk to employers – and indeed to the agencies tasked with promoting investment and job creation - about recruiting people with disabilities, the answer I tend to get is “yes, but ...”

One of the main purposes of the campaign we will launch in 2020 will be to address – and start the job of removing – that word “but” from the answer.

As I said earlier, I am grateful to all my colleagues on CESIG, to the Department of Justice and Equality for its support, and to the NDA for its guidance and expertise. Now that we have embarked on a second phase of implementation, I hope we will be able to report, this time next year, on many more concrete steps.



Fergus Finlay
Chair