

# **Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities Report prepared by the Chair of the Implementation Group in respect of Year Three – 2018**

## **Chairman's Commentary**

As the third year of the work of implementing the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities comes to an end, I welcome and endorse the NDA's independent assessment of the work to date. I think it might be fair to sum up the NDA's approach as welcoming what has been achieved, while pointing to a lot of urgent work still to be done.

The Implementation Group I chair has seen the first three years of implementing a long-term strategy as foundational. Government Departments have come together to begin to address a number of important objectives, and in the process have opened themselves to scrutiny by other members of the Group who represent the interests and aspirations of people with disabilities throughout Ireland.

We are preparing now to move beyond the foundational phase into a period of concrete action. We want to be able to measure progress, as opposed to wishing for it. That will inevitably require an investment in finding out how policy change is leading to real change in the lives of people with disabilities.

It is really encouraging to be able to report that we are beginning to make progress in some key areas. Some examples from the past year could include, for example:

- From the beginning of the year, people with disabilities can earn up to €427 a week without risking the loss of their medical cards. (The figure was up to €120 a week up to the point.) This measure is a direct consequence of the "Make Work Pay" Report, and could have positive effects for thousands of people.
- The roll-out of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment in all nine CHO areas for people with mental health difficulties wishing to work.
- 27 "Ability" programmes are now up and running throughout the country. These programmes were set up following an investment of €16m by the Department of Employment and Social Protection. They 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.

The Programme will promote employment prospects and meaningful social roles for young people with disabilities and in particular, young people who are distant from the labour market, using a range of person-centred supports.

But despite undeniable progress, it remains the case that as Ireland, despite threats and challenges, moves ever closer to a period of full employment – and towards a reasonable abundance of budgetary resources – the one group of citizens who remain stuck in an unemployment crisis are people with disabilities.

Which is not to say that reforms aren't working. As I mentioned earlier, the Make Work Pay policy measures implemented this year appear to have successfully enabled more than 1,000 people with a disability to move back to the world of work. Investment in more accessible public transport is paying visible dividends. The Government decision to move towards doubling the target of people with disabilities in the public service is really welcome, and we have previously called for that to be frontloaded.

But there are still big nuts to be cracked.

One of the key strategic actions in the government's approach (SP 5.1) obliges the HSE, the Department of Health, the Department of Education, the NDA and the Department of Employment and Social Protection to work together to "work together to develop an effective co-ordinated policy approach (and draw up an implementation plan based on that approach), to assist individuals with disabilities, including those who require a high level of support, to obtain and retain employment having due regard to the implementation of New Directions". (New Directions is a core HSE policy aimed at a person-centred approach to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities, and to enable them to live fuller lives into the community.)

An implementation plan was due to be finalised and rolled out in respect of this area by the start of 2017. Although I am aware that work has gone on in the background, nothing has yet been presented to the Implementation Group. I am determined that this will be a major priority in the early part of 2019.

It is a fact that for many people with intellectual disabilities, their biggest challenges arise when they turn 18. They are immediately seen as being out of the education system, and the responsibility from now on of the health system – even though they are not, in the main, sick. Opportunities for

further education and development become much more limited, and the world of work can seem miles away.

At the same time, the HSE funds service providers all around the country to provide day services for these young adults. We were told in the course of our work this year that this funding amounts to €17,000 per person per annum on average. Yet there is little evidence of the kind of services that encourage and enable young people to take their places in the wider community, and especially in the world of work.

It is therefore essential that the work be done to ensure that a genuinely person-centred approach emerges that enables young adults to participate in the community and the economy. When one considers that their siblings who don't have a disability have access, at the same age, to the widest possible choice of further education and vocational training, the discrimination in our failure to address 5.1 is all the more obvious.

The other major priority for me in the coming year will be Strategic Priority 6, which is titled "Engage Employers".

Huge work has been done, and is being done, to address the issue of employment of people with disabilities in the public sector. The private sector has, to a very considerable extent, opted out. There are many good and responsible employers – and the NDA funded Employers Disability Information Service (EDI) has done verifiably good work in this area. I have to say that I believe, however, that for every employer willing to consider employing a person with a disability, ten look the other way.

I have called before for a summit of employer organisations and the trade union movement to begin to take this issue seriously, and I repeat that call here. In its absence, I will be asking the Implementation Group to seek a modest budget to hold a one-day conference, bringing together as much expertise as we can, to seek to raise awareness in this vital area.

Fergus Finlay

Chair