The National Federation of Voluntary Bodies

1. Financial In-work supports

We want to know what works best and is attractive for people with disabilities when considering a return to or taking up work in terms of financial supports

The National Federation of Voluntary Bodies Providing Services to People with Intellectual Disability is the national umbrella organisation for voluntary/non-statutory agencies that provide direct support services to people with intellectual disability in Ireland. National Federation members provide services throughout the twenty-six counties in both urban and rural areas. In all, the National Federation comprises some 60 affiliated organisations who between them account for in excess of 85% of this country's direct service provision for people with intellectual disability.

The National Federation is fully committed to supporting people with an intellectual disability to achieve real and valued roles, and enhancing the level of choice, individualisation and autonomy for people. A central requirement underpinning the realisation of these objectives is the availability of the necessary supports and accommodations to foster increased access to paid employment for the people with intellectual disabilities.

As our members work across all regions of the country this submission will not respond directly to the multiple choice sections of this submission, since there are local and regional variations in the experiences of some of these elements. However comment will be made on overarching themes found to be of importance to people supported by our members where appropriate.

How important are the following when considering taking up or returning to employment?

	Very Important	**Moderate Importance**	**Neutral**	**Slightly Important**	**Low**
Disability Allowance Earnings Disregards (up to €120, €120-350)	O	O	O	O	O
Partial Capacity Scheme (on Illness Benefit, Invalidity Pension)	O	O	O	O	O
Retention of Medical Card for 3 years	O	O	O	O	O
Secondary Benefits: (Rent Supplement/Free Travel/Fuel Allowance)	O	O	O	O	O
Household Benefits Package (Electricity/Gas Allowance/Free TV Licence)	O	O	O	O	O
Family Income Supplement	O	O	O	O	O
Tax Credits and reliefs	O	O	O	O	O

National Federation members have highlighted that the above measures are very important when considering taking up work or returning to employment. A consistent focus on the Disability Allowance Earnings Disregards, Retention of Medical Card for 3 years, Secondary Benefits, and Household benefits package being vital for people with intellectual disabilities emerged, with the Partial Capacity Scheme also being seen as very important or moderately important by the majority and a slightly more varied view in relation to tax credits and reliefs with a variation across the board in terms of the importance of this element being reported.

How well do you think the following are understood by people with a disability or their advocates?

	Well Understood	Moderately Understood	Neutral	Slightly Understood	Not
Disability Allowance Earnings Disregards (up to €120, €120-350)	O	O	O	O	O
Partial Capacity Scheme (on Illness Benefit, Invalidity Pension)	O	O	O	O	O
Retention of Medical Card for 3 years	O	O	O	O	O
Secondary Benefits: (Rent Supplement, Free Travel, Fuel Allowance)	O	O	O	O	O
Household Benefits Package (Electricity/Gas Allowance, Free TV Licence)	O	O	O	O	O
Family Income Supplement	O	O	O	O	O
Tax Credits and reliefs	O	O	O	O	O

Comments

There is considerable variation reported by our members in how well understood the above measures are – with some organisations reporting that key schemes were poorly understood or not understood at all by people with intellectual disabilities. The lack of understanding of these available schemes/accommodations highlights both a need for the development of accessible, Easy to Read information and the increased barriers that are in place when lack of understanding increases apprehension of those wishing to take up work and their families.

Please contact the National Federation or Inclusion Ireland for further information on developing accessible information – there are different requirements for Easy to Read information resources when compared to the Plain English guidance from the more general National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) provisions. (info@fedvol.ie)

2. Financial Barriers

Please rank the following in importance 1 – 6 (according to the scale of barrier) when considering taking up or returning to work: (1 = most important)

Loss of DSP Payment	O
Loss of Secondary Benefits (Rent Supplement, Free Travel, Fuel Allowance)	O
Loss of Household Benefits Package (Electricity/Gas Allowance, Free TV Licence)	O
Perceived difficulty obtaining DSP payment/ benefits again (e.g. If work ceases)	O
Loss of Medical Card after 3 years	O
Other (please specify)_____	O

It is recognised that the needs and issues arising for people with disabilities vary, and that different circumstances arise for different people at different times. If there are circumstances that are particularly relevant, please indicate:

National Federation members consistently highlighted the loss of the DSP and the Medical Card after 3 years as being most important in terms of the scale of barriers when considering taking up or returning to work, with the perceived difficulty of obtaining the DSP/benefits again if work ceases also scoring as one of the key barriers. These were followed by the loss of secondary benefits and finally the household benefits package.

Additional financial barriers include the difficulties associated with family income reducing or the fear of family income reducing, and the negative experiences that families have already encountered in trying to secure entitlements and benefits in the past leading to a reluctance to risk losing existing entitlements and benefits.

When ongoing medical needs are present alongside the intellectual disability the fears of losing benefits is heightened and can increase the barrier effect.

The cost of disability is another financial barrier to be considered – for instance additional costs that can be associated with accessing transport to get to work, adapted clothing or equipment etc.

In general, do people with a disability feel that they would be better off financially by taking up work?

Yes	**No**
O	O

Please elaborate:

3. Length of time out of workforce

Are there particular financial barriers to resumption of work for PWD if out longer term, i.e. 2 yrs or more?

What suggestions would you have to overcome barriers for PWD who have been out of the workforce long term?

Access to training opportunities, both mainstream training and personalised opportunities for the individual in their potential chosen work area, are key priorities to support people with intellectual disability back into the workforce.

Support workers play a key role in assisting people with ID to succeed in the preparatory work to access employment and the ongoing support to sustain the work.

Job shadowing, career guidance, training in interviewing and personal marketing skills and mentoring are also highlighted as significantly beneficial.

The removal of perceived or actual impediments to taking up work through loss of benefits needs to be addressed, with good communication to ensure that people understand their entitlements and benefits fully in this regard.

Do you feel there are particular financial barriers that apply more to men than women, or to women than men?

4. Communication

Please rank the following sources of information people with disabilities use to research the financial aspects of taking up or returning to work:

	Always	**Often**	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**	**Never**
Department of Social Protection website	O	O	O	O	O
Intreo office/Local DSP office	O	O	O	O	O
Citizens Information Office	O	O	O	O	O
Citizens Information Website	O	O	O	O	O
Representative groups for PwD	O	O	O	O	O
Friends and family	O	O	O	O	O
Media (TV/Radio/Newspapers)	O	O	O	O	O
Other (please specify)	O	O	O	O	O

Do you think people worry about asking for information from the Department of Social Protection when considering returning to work – e.g. applying for Partial Capacity Benefit, or the Disability Allowance Earnings Disregard?

Yes	No
O	O

If yes, why?

Improvements in accessibility of information and communication, and of the physical space/experience in INTREO offices would have universal benefits, not only to people with ID but to all citizens using the services. The National Federation are happy to provide further information on accessibility for people with ID in terms of communications measures that may enhance the experience of using the services and reduce anxiety in this regard.

5. Experience of PWD who ARE working

Approximately 21% ***of PWD are in the workforce; in your view what are the financial and other factors which have supported these people to:***

A) Transition successfully from education/training to employment:

Transition support has been key to successfully supporting people with ID into employment. Some helpful factors identified by National Federation members include:

Individualised support and training specific to the persons' skills, interests and abilities and the area of work that they are preparing for. A focus on the strengths-based approach is essential to building the aspirations, motivations and opportunities for the person. The building of a strengths approach including from the earliest stages as families and schools build high expectations from the outset.

Access to supports (job coach/employment specialist) for those seeking employment and transition planning for young people ahead of leaving school.

Training in-situ is a model that works particularly well for many people with ID.

A *customised employment* approach can work very well for people with ID who would struggle to compete for more traditional interview-based job access. Please contact the National Federation (info@fedovl.ie) for further information on and Irish examples of these kinds of approaches, including the use of the Discovery Model (http://www.marcgold.com/Publications/White%20Papers/Discovery%20is.pdf) through a Socially Valued Roles approach.

Confidence-building for potential employers in their ability to support the transition into work for the person. Fostering an understanding the abilities and potential of the person (and people with ID) and their valued contribution to the work force.

The availability of trial working periods/job sampling, internships and opportunities to experience the world of work.

Support for the individual to understand the benefits of working and to gain motivation and confidence

Support from families.

Access to transport.

An improved joined-up approach is required from all Government Departments to support this work.

B) Remain in employment:

A wide range of factors support people with ID to remain in employment, once work has been secured:

The financial benefits of work to the person.

Ongoing access to support staff if needed. This can be provided on-the-job and/or off-site.

The person's own satisfaction, and confidence in their valued role increases motivation and commitment to their job, which is often built over time as they succeed in their employment.

The availability of work opportunities that maximise the persons' skills, abilities, educational achievements rather than a 'one size fits all'. Continued opportunities to grow and develop within the role. A vision of career progression rather than simply a 'job'.

Supportive employers who are flexible and understanding, including for instance in relation to working hours. Supportive families have a positive impact on gaining and maintaining employment.

The person experiencing respect and equal treatment.

6. How do you see the role of the Intreo centre evolving to meet the needs of PwD?

The Department of Social Protection is expanding the role of the Intreo centres as an employment and recruitment service for pwd who wish to take up work.

What do you think PwD need from their Intreo centre in terms of assisting them to search for work?

A number of areas of recommendation are highlighted by National Federation members in terms of the supports that are needed by people with ID in assisting them to access employment. These include the need for a strengths-based approach to the supports provided; a focused personalised, individualised approach that provides a range of progression opportunities; the provision of job coaching and CV/interviewing skills; increased access to training including Fetac Level 3 and 4 courses in job skills and career planning; and access to work experiences.

Accessible communication with the individual is a necessary building block for good engagement.

The requirement for individuals to transfer from Disability Allowance to Job Seekers to access training should be removed.

The Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities in the US has just published its final report, which contains useful findings and recommendations in relation to this area. Key recommendations are provided in the areas of Capacity Building for Youth, Overall Capacity Building, Building Capacity in the Marketplace, and building capacity across agencies. The recommendations of this Committee should be considered in the context of this consultation in order to gain additional recent insight from the international perspective.
https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/pdf/ACICIEID_Final_Report_9-8-16.pdf

How do you think the Intreo centre can best engage with PwD? e.g.

- Communication – social media, email/letters from intreo, telephone?
- Promotion of services via disability representative bodies/media?
- Named case worker

National Federation members have highlighted the importance of training for staff in the Intreo centres in order to support enhanced accessible communication with people with intellectual disability and to support understanding of the potential and capacity or people with ID and the most effective methods of support in order to succeed in gaining employment.

Supports for people with ID need to be based on a strengths-based model rather than being deficit-focused and this should inform all communication and intervention – again this may be the subject of training which may benefit from drawing on models such as Socially Valued Roles (SRV), the Discovery model and others.
A named case worker is beneficial.
Communication with and through service provider organisations supporting the person with ID are very useful ways to engage.
Good public communications plans using for instance social media or multi-media are recommended to ensure that people with ID and their families are aware of the services and supports available through Intreo.

Accompaniment of family / friend / advocate at Intreo:

	Yes	No
• In this important to PwD?	X	0