Consultation - Strand 3 Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) – Make Work Pay

Department of Social Protection Consultation Paper, September 2016

Walkinstown Association for People with an intellectual disability Ltd.

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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

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

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

The financial supports available for people on Disability Allowance to take up employment are positive initiatives, but they are understood by the very people who need to access them and their families are particularly apprehensive when faced with the perceived prospect of losing benefits

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	1
Loss of Secondary Benefits (Rent Supplement, Free Travel, Fuel Allowance)	O	4
Loss of Household Benefits Package (Electricity/Gas Allowance, Free TV Licence)	O	5
Perceived difficulty obtaining DSP payment/benefits again (e.g. If work ceases)	O	2
Loss of Medical Card after 3 years	O	3
Other (please specify) the cost of going to work	O	6

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:

The initial prospect of getting a job is particularly difficult for parents of young people after they get a "Disability Allowance" because they have had to battle for services from the very beginning in health related issues such as speech and language, physical, psychological therapies and in school in terms of special educational needs. On top of that, parents are given little hope or encouragement by our health and social services that their son / daughter will ever be "able to hold down a job", let alone develop a career. So you can imagine how they feel when their son / daughter reaches 16 and gets a disability allowance; they do not want to risk "losing" it. This is a major barrier to encouraging young people who can and want to work, given the right support, to aspire to having a career and planning to transition from school into further education, training and open labour market employment. Hence there is an annual "school leaver's crisis" for places in the "Disability Services" where too many young people find themselves institutionalised in expensive HSE funded "Day Services" with no prospect of real and meaningful employment. This is a systematic failure caused by departments working in isolation and lack of joined-up services

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:

Without the correct communication, people with disabilities do not feel that they are financially better off in work. With the correct information, communicated by someone who they trust and the comfort of a "quick return to DA if the job does not work out" approach, they can quickly change how they feel and become more motivated to work.

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?

If someone has had experience of employment before and then experiences a long period of unemployment (for whatever reason) there is the "additional" cost of returning to work that can be the biggest barrier to taking up a job. Such things as clothes for work, the cost of lunches and childcare can seem too much to handle. Retaining a travel pass and medical card would be seen as critical.

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

Assuming the person is ready to return to work, application of the €120 weekly disregard is vital. The prospect of keeping all secondary benefits without question for the first year or two would certainly take the fear out of any perceived financial risk. Then a step down approach where secondary benefits can be reduced incrementally over the next three or four years would allow the individual to build up their income to replace any perceived "loss" of benefit.

The active promotion of such a programme would be necessary through a media campaign, through disability advocacy networks and consistently through INTREO offices, rather than passively on a website.

The priority should be to support the individual to be successful in their job so that they can sustain the job and not worry about losing benefits. The longer a person sustains a job the more likely they are to stay with it because the social benefits of being in the right job far outweigh the negative effects of unemployment. So unless the individual accesses employment they will never sustain it.

Anything that smooths the path into employment in the first instance is obviously vital.

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

No particular difference in financial barriers unless childcare is an issue. When childcare is an issue it unfortunately seems to be more challenging for women to be able to take up a job.

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
Intreo office/Local DSP office	O	O	O	■	O
Citizens Information Office	O	O	■	O	O
Citizens Information Website	O	O	■	O	O
Representative groups for PwD	O	■	O	O	O
Friends and family	O	■	O	O	O
Media (TV/Radio/Newspapers)	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**

If yes, why?

Fear of losing what they have! Any communication from Social Protection is viewed with suspicion.

In the first instance, it is only natural for people who have had to battle for basic services all their lives to be less than enthusiastic when a letter arrives with the welfare logo on it. Try getting SNA support or reasonable accommodations in our school system or Speech and Language therapy from the HSE for your child and see how much enthusiasm you have left for our state services. Unfortunately, by the time these young citizens reach "working age" and begin their engagement with Social Protection they and their parents already have a negative view of state agencies and it is only natural that they harbour a "hold what we have" mentality.

In the second instance, Social Protection has historically (like all other departments) treated people with disabilities and an issue for the department of Health. The only active engagement has been around disability / illness payments and everything else has been left up to the HSE funded services to provide. No effort has ever been made by Social Protection to genuinely "mainstream" services for people with disabilities.

In the third instance, the Social Welfare office environment has been completely unsuitable for many, many people with disabilities. The atmosphere is generally negative, sometimes outright hostile, and the information from staff has been inconsistent (to say the least), while the exit or "progression" routes are wholly inadequate.

If INTREO is to become the first class service that Ireland can and should deliver, then design it for people with disabilities in mind and it will serve all INTREO customers in a way that might just transform employment services in Ireland to be the best in the world. That should be our ambition!

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:

Three main factors which support people with disabilities to successfully transition from education into further education, training and employment are;

Aspirations & Motivation – fostered and supported by families who believe their child with a disability can and will work when they leave school.

Interests, talents, skills & competencies – developed because of their aspirations and motivation to have a career when they leave school.

Opportunity & support – the most difficult one of all in our current culture. We are sadly lacking in this whole area. Transition planning and support for young people with disabilities in our school system is wholly inadequate (i.e. there is no careers guidance in our special schools!). "Rehabilitative Training" programmes are congregated, funded from the Health budget (not very employment minded) and are segregated from the real world, with minimal exposure to work. The Employability service is selective in who it will take on – leaving those who need it most labelled as "not job ready".

So the real problem is not primarily a financial one, but a systemic one. Lack of joined up services, solo departmental initiatives, and a massive mainstream / services "gap" means that Social Protection's efforts to solve the crisis of poor labour market participation of people with disabilities without the full and meaningful participation of Health, Education & Skills, Jobs & Innovation and Justice and Equality will be frustrating to say the least and unlikely to make any real difference. Sorry this sounds negative, but this is the reality on the ground.

B) Remain in employment:

Financially one is better off in work. So once an individual with a disability is in work they experience for themselves the financial benefits of work and there is no ambiguity about it.

However, the most important factor for people with disabilities staying in work is being in the right job – i.e. doing work that they enjoy and feel successful doing in an environment that is supportive. This is true of anyone, but particularly important if you are less than confident in yourself.

On the opposite side of that, if you have a disability and have battled your way through our health and education services to go to college and get a degree in the likes of Computer Science or History and Politics and all the state employment service can offer you in terms of job opportunities is working in cafes or cleaning or in a garden centre, then you are unlikely to stick with jobs like this. There must be more ambition in our offerings.

So again, the financial factor is not the most important one. The value of the social role, the respect one feels for themselves and the respect one feels they get from their peers, colleagues and the mainstream is paramount and is the key to changing the current poor labour market participation of people with disabilities - no matter what type or level of disability.

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?

The first thing INTREO must be is welcoming and accepting of people with disabilities. So, there must be a complete change of culture for people with disabilities to feel comfortable to engage with INTREO at all.

The second thing people with disabilities need from INTREO is a positive disposition which focuses on their interests, skills, competencies, and talents before needing to know "what is wrong with them"

Thirdly, people with disabilities need appropriate and flexible progression options. Current provision is wholly limited and inadequate, mired in a "one size fits all" approach and isolated from disability services. This needs to change or nothing will change.

INTREO should look at its current offering on courses where individuals on DA are required to switch to "Job Seekers" to gain access. Systematic inequalities like this compound the message that people with disabilities are not welcome in INTREO.

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
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1. Train all INTREO staff on how to engage with people on a disability payment in the first instance.
2. Develop a range of progression, support, and exit options so everyone gets an appropriate service.
3. Then develop a multi-media promotional campaign that is targeted at people with disabilities, their families, and services to make them aware of the available supports from their local INTREO offices.
4. Gather, review and evaluate real time engagement and progression information as people pass through the system and enhance what is working and close what is not.

Accompaniment of family/friend/advocate at Intreo:

	Yes	No
▪ Is this important to PwD?	■	O