Research on good practice in the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector

June 2018
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The NDA has commissioned and funded this research. Responsibility for the research (including any errors or omissions) remains with RSM PACEC. The views and opinions contained in this report are those of the authors, or the reported views of the people who took part in the consultation, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NDA.

The NDA and RSM PACEC would like to thank everyone who contributed to the production of this report.

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Executive Summary

In October 2015, the Government published the ten-year Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024, with a view to significantly increasing the proportion of people with disabilities in employment in Ireland. Under this Strategy, the National Disability Authority (NDA) committed to producing this report. The NDA tendered for external contractors to carry out the research and produce this report. After evaluating a number of tenders, the NDA commissioned RSM PACEC to carry out this project.

The purpose of the research was to identify good practice within the Irish public sector and how this is achieved, and particularly to identify innovative and new models to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. While it provides useful information, the extent of good practice identified is limited. RSM PACEC advised of areas they felt would require further research to guide continued improvements.

The research to inform this report was qualitative in nature. A number of different research strands were undertaken to ensure a thorough examination of practice:

- Literature review
- Scoping interviews
- Interviews with stakeholders
- Focus Groups with Employers and Employees
- Online Surveys with Employers and Employees
- Consultation with Occupational Health Therapists

The annual Reports on Compliance with Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 were also analysed. Every year, public bodies complete qualitative and quantitative Part 5 forms detailing the measures they are taking to meet their obligations under Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 - by promoting and supporting the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector, and by ensuring where practicable that a minimum of 3% of their employees are people with disabilities.1 Public bodies submit completed forms, via their respective Departmental Monitoring Committees2, to the NDA.

Under Part 5 of the Disability Act (2005), the NDA has a role to monitor the progress public bodies are making every year to promote and support the employment of people with disabilities.

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1 The Government has committed to incrementally increasing the statutory employment target to a minimum of 6% by 2024.
2 Under Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005, each government department has a Departmental Monitoring Committee. Each Committee is made up of representatives from the Department. The purpose of each of these Committees is to monitor the progress that public bodies under the aegis of their Department are making to meet their obligations under Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005. These Committees work in consultation with the NDA to encourage the public bodies under their remit to comply with Part 5.
employment of people with disabilities. In this capacity, the NDA analyses and reviews data in the statutory Part 5 forms, and produces the annual Report on Compliance with Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005. These Reports provide a summary of the actions public bodies are taking to meet their obligations under Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005. They also document any progress public bodies are making in increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

In total 2,174 people gave their views - this included 332 people who reported that they had a disability.

The literature review revealed seven core themes that underpin good practice in the employment of people with disabilities:

1. Developing an inclusive work environment
2. Reasonable accommodations.
3. Providing work experience programmes for people with disabilities
4. Recruitment policies and processes
5. Supporting employees with disabilities to remain in the workplace
6. Employee retention
7. Career development and progression for employees with a disability

**Summary of Key Findings**

The research concludes that overall the public sector does implement a number of models of good practice in the employment of people with disabilities. These fall primarily under the core themes identified:

**Developing an inclusive work environment**

Some Senior Management and HR Departments in the public sector have shown leadership in creating inclusive work environments, by having policies on recruiting and retaining people with disabilities and implementing the Civil Service Code of Practice on Employing People with Disabilities. There are examples of organisations that have established partnerships with their respective trade unions to help promote and communicate these policies and processes to their employees. Several public bodies have also provided employees with disability awareness training to ensure that the culture of the organisation supports a work environment where everyone, especially people with disabilities, feels included and supported.

A number of Senior Management and HR Departments stated that they published articles in staff newsletters and on the intranet and had campaigns to raise awareness of disability or to promote the positive benefits of disclosing a disability. These articles and campaigns contained contact information for Disability Liaison Officers.

Some participants in the employer and the employee surveys identified the impact of the statutory employment target on public bodies, reporting that it focused their attention on developing an inclusive work environment.
Reasonable accommodations
The findings from the research showed that there is no standardised approach throughout the public sector regarding the provision of reasonable accommodations for employees with a disability.

Reasonable accommodations include:

- providing information in accessible formats, for example,
  - large print and Braille for people with visual impairments
  - Plain English and easy to read formats for people with autism spectrum disorder and people with intellectual disabilities
- assistive technologies
- communication and literacy supports (for example providing scribes and readers for people with visual impairments, having sign interpreters for people with hearing impairments)
- person-centred supports for example providing an employee with their own office or a quiet space that is free from noise and distractions; ensuring that employees take regular breaks for their work.
- adapted assessments
- flexible working hours.

These measures can be put in place at the recruitment stage, at the time of induction for incoming employees, or following a change in the person’s circumstances during their career.

Participants identified the following important steps in providing reasonable accommodations:

- Employers consult with employees about the reasonable accommodations that they need
- Organisations effectively communicate their policies and procedures on providing reasonable accommodations so that all employees understand them
- Organisations have a process for regularly reviewing reasonable accommodations as the employee’s needs, their environment, or their work duties can change

There was evidence that public bodies are more likely to provide these accommodations in the workplace than at the recruitment stage. There is little hard evidence regarding how effective these reasonable accommodations are in practice.

Providing work experience programmes for people with disabilities
There are examples of public bodies providing work experience programmes for people with disabilities, primarily through participating in the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD)’s Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) scheme
or the national EmployAbility programmes run by the Department of Social Protection.

The duration of work experience programmes varied from 1 day to 3-6 months. Many participants suggested that work experience programmes should be at least 6-12 months duration, so that people with disabilities get a real opportunity to develop their work-related skills. They expressed the view that work experience programmes are a great way of increasing employees' awareness of disability. By working with a person with a disability, employees gain an understanding of this person’s capacity to work in a mainstream environment and to make a significant contribution to an organisation.

There was little evidence that these programmes translated directly to full time employment opportunities for the participants, although future employment outcomes can be better for those who have benefited from such programmes.

**Recruitment policies and processes**

Some public bodies reported that they had inclusive or disability-proofed recruitment policies and processes in place. Examples included open and transparent recruitment processes, HR staff and interview panels trained in disability awareness, the provision of specific supports to applicants with disabilities and specific recruitment competitions for people with disabilities.

Public bodies did not provide any evidence that they used using appropriate wording in job advertisements.

Research shows that for some people with autism spectrum disorders providing them with information prior to the interview about the interviewers and the types of questions candidates would be asked can alleviate their anxiety about the event. It also helps them to prepare for the interview. Public bodies did not provide any evidence that they used this process.³

**Supporting employees with disabilities to remain in the workplace**

A number of public bodies reported that they had policies and processes in place to support employees with disabilities in the workplace. Examples include having appropriate induction processes, so that all employees with disabilities were aware of the supports that were available to them and had the contact number for the Disability Liaison Officer. There was evidence of several public bodies using absence management policies, attendance policies and performance management policies, in a supportive way, to enable people with and without disabilities to perform their job to the best of their ability. There were also a few examples of public bodies having an Employee Well-Being Programme in place to assist employees to cope with personal problems that could impact on work performance or attendance.

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Across the different strands of research, there was little evidence regarding mentoring or buddying schemes. There was no evidence provided that line managers and/or public sector employers supported their employees to take the lead in projects, or to participate in meetings during their first 6-12 months in an organisation. There was little or no evidence that public bodies ensured that new employees with disabilities were included in work-related social activities.

**Employee retention**

A number of public bodies have policies in place to retain employees who are on long-term absence from the workplace and/or who acquired a disability. Across the different strands of the research, participants stated that line managers played an important part in the retention process. Regular, supportive contact with an employee, while they are absent for an extended period of time from the workplace, can assist them in returning to work.

There was some evidence of public bodies providing employees with appropriate return to work interviews, plans and accommodations. A number of public bodies also reported that if they employee required it, that they provided partial redeployment whereby an employee continues to do part of their original job (either part-time or with the addition of new tasks) and stops doing certain tasks. In this situation, retraining may be required to facilitate redeployment.

A number of public bodies also redeployed employees into another role or division if an employee was unable to perform their previous job, but could carry out other functions within the organisation.

**Career development and progression for employees with a disability**

The analysis of the Part 5 reports showed that public bodies had not made any mention of their organisation’s policies and processes to promote and progress the careers of employees including employees with disabilities. This may not necessarily mean that these public bodies do not have these measures in place, but that the bodies did not report on them in their Part 5 returns.

A few public bodies in the Part 5 reports stated that their organisations used the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) to identify the training and development needs of all employees, including employees with disabilities. This system was also used to review work performance.

The results from the employers’ survey showed that 81% of employers stated that it was the training and development provided by their organisations that helped employees with disabilities to progress their careers. Almost 76% of respondents with a disability also reported that their employers provided training that helped them progress their careers.

In some public bodies, if a performance issue arose for an employee, as a result of their disability, the employee would also meet with the Disability Liaison Officer to review their training and development needs and to review their work performance.
Overall there was little evidence that public bodies encourage employees with disabilities to apply for promotion or to take on additional tasks and expand their existing role.

**Summary of recommendations for current practice in the public sector**

Below is a summary of the recommendations within each core theme for current and future practice and research. These recommendations are those of the authors RSM PACEC. There are also a number of cross cutting measures which could be reflected on:

- Consistency of approach. There is a need to explore how consistent practice across the sector can be used to implement and evaluate good models of practice
- Capturing and maintaining accurate data in relation to the effectiveness of specific models of good practice in the employment of people with disabilities
- Providing guidance and support to HR staff and line managers to enable them to more effectively support people with disabilities; HR staff occupy a unique position as a point of contact for employees at different stages in the process – recruitment, induction, employment, performance management, leave etc.
- Increasing awareness of new and changing models of good practice

**Developing an Inclusive Work Environment**

- Senior Management and HR Departments in public bodies could increase awareness in their organisations about models of good practice on developing and maintaining an inclusive work environment. These models of good practice could be based on examples from other public sector organisations and/or from examples of good practice in NDA guidance that is currently on the NDA website at http://nda.ie.

**Reasonable Accommodations**

- A robust, consistent and transparent approach should be implemented throughout the public sector regarding the process by which reasonable accommodations for new and existing employees are determined, negotiated and evaluated to help employees to perform their job to the best of their abilities.
- Reasonable accommodations should be reviewed every 3-6 months to allow for changes in the employee’s needs. A more structured process could include a formal workplace agreement (See Appendix A).
- Public bodies may find it useful to benchmark how reasonable accommodations are negotiated in other organisations. The Business Disability
Forum in the UK has developed a workplace adjustment agreement that provides a record of reasonable adjustments agreed between an employee with a disability and their line manager. This is to ensure that both the individual and the employer has an accurate record of what has been agreed, minimises the need to renegotiate reasonable accommodations each time the employee changes jobs, and provides employees and their line managers with the basis for discussion about reasonable adjustments at future meetings (see Appendix A).

- Employees and their advocates may require training in how to clearly articulate their accommodation needs and to negotiate how reasonable accommodations will be provided and evaluated.

**Work Experience Programmes**

- Work experience programmes in the public sector should be flexible in terms of duration, in order to provide participants with the opportunity to develop work-related skills.
- A consistent approach could be taken to implementing and evaluating work experience programmes throughout the public sector to ensure improved access for people with disabilities.
- Data on the numbers of people with disabilities recruited through work experience programmes could be captured in the annual Part 5 reports.
- Employment policies should drive a greater translation of work experience programmes to actual employment opportunities.

**Recruitment policies and processes**

- The public sector could start implementing alternative means of recruiting people with disabilities, for example, via work experience programmes and specific competitions. The public sector could monitor, evaluate and report on how effective these measures are in their annual Part 5 returns.
- Directors, Senior Management teams and HR Departments should develop and oversee the implementation of clear and transparent policies and processes that promote and support the recruitment and retention of employees with a disability.

**Supporting employees in the workplace**

- The NDA guidelines on supporting people with disabilities in the workplace could be adopted and implemented throughout the public sector.

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4 The Business Disability Forum in the UK was previously known as the Employers’ Forum on Disability. It has over 25 years experience in bring people with disabilities and employers in the public and private sectors together to create disability smart organisations that increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. This Forum has provided guidance, shared expertise and provided training to employers to help them create and maintain more inclusive work environments that provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities. [https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/](https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/)
- Management throughout the public sector could receive appropriate training in how to manage and support all employees. This training could be provided by a company or organisation that specialises in management training, for example IBEC5 and CIPD Ireland6. Management throughout the public sector may also find it useful to work closely with organisations such as AHEAD and with disability organisations to get guidance and advice on how to support employees with disabilities in the workplace with different capacities and support needs.

- Public bodies could ensure that their employees are aware of all the supports that are available to them in relation to work performance.

**Employee Retention**

- It is important that HR Departments put in place appropriate retention policies and processes.

- There could be greater consistency in the public sector on effective systems, processes and procedures for managing and supporting a person to return to work, if they acquire a disability or experience a serious illness.

- There is little evidence as to whether the type of training line managers receive actually equips them with the skills to play a key role in supporting and retaining employees. It would be useful to gather more information around this in order to develop guidance for public bodies.

**Career development and progression for employees with disabilities**

- The models of good practice in career progression, identified in the literature review, could be implemented, monitored and evaluated throughout the public sector.

**Conclusions**

Although the public sector does implement a number of models of good practice in the employment of people with disabilities, there is a need for further research and exploration to support better employment outcomes for people with disabilities, including:

- Identifying the type of supports public bodies will need, and the actions they could take in the coming years to reach and exceed the new target of a minimum of 6% of employees with disabilities in the public sector by 2024.

- The process for reporting and measuring compliance with Part 5 of the Disability Act (2005) has been in place for some time. It would be timely to

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5 IBEC is Ireland’s largest lobby group representing Irish business both domestically and internationally. Its membership is home grown, multinational, big and small, spanning every sector of the economy. IBEC provides a wide range of professional direct services to members including employer advice and representation on HR and industrial relations issues. https://www.ibec.ie/

6 CIPD Ireland is part of an international organisation that sets professional standards for HR and people development, as well as driving positive change in the world of work. They provide guidance and training in HR and management issues. https://www.cipd.ie/
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review this now, particularly to guide improved compliance in the future with the increased employment target. The NDA has submitted a proposal to review this entire process later in 2018.

- Establishing informal groups for employees with disabilities to share experiences, provide peer support and discuss any potential issues/solutions.

- Research in the public sector to determine how often organisations provide work experience opportunities to people with disabilities; the duration of these programmes, payment arrangements, and the skills and experience that participants acquire. This information could inform future planning in relation to work experience programmes. Consideration could be given to further exploration of effective recruitment policies and processes that drive a greater translation of work experience programmes to actual employment opportunities.

- Research into how a robust and consistent process can be implemented throughout the public sector regarding the provision and evaluation of reasonable accommodations for employees. A preliminary process could be piloted and reviewed before a final process is rolled out.

- A pilot study on a potential approach to retaining employees with existing and acquired disabilities in the public sector to examine the effectiveness and impact of same.

- There is a need for quantitative and qualitative analysis into the length of time employees spend in their role, job turnover and progression to higher level roles. This could provide valuable evidence in relation to career progression for employees with disabilities.
Chapter 1 Introduction and Background Information

1.1. Context
In 1977, the Government introduced a policy to ensure that a minimum of 3% of employees in public bodies were people with disabilities. This minimum 3% target was put on a statutory footing with the enactment of Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005. This states that public bodies have a legal obligation to promote and support the employment of people with disabilities, and unless there are good reasons to the contrary, to meet the minimum 3% target.

In 2016, there were 213,991 people employed in the public sector. At the end of 2016, public bodies reported that 7,457 (3.5%) of employees employed in the public sector are people with disabilities. This is the highest number of employees with disabilities recorded since the process of statutory monitoring began in 2007. It should be noted that it can be difficult for public bodies to get an accurate figure regarding the actual number of people with disabilities they employ, because disclosure of disability is a voluntary not a mandatory process. It is possible that there may be more employees with disabilities employed in the public sector who have not disclosed their status. The NDA provides the public sector with continuous guidance and advice on how to create an inclusive work environment that not only promotes and supports the employment of people with disabilities, but one in which employees feel comfortable disclosing a disability. Our guidance can be found on the NDA website at http://nda.ie.

While the number of employees reporting a disability in the public sector has increased, people with disabilities are still more likely to be unemployed than people without disabilities.

The overall number of people with disabilities in Ireland has increased comprising 13.5% of the total population compared to 13% in 2011. There are now 643,131 people with a disability living in Ireland. In 2016, there were 176,445 persons with a disability in the labour force across the public and private sectors, giving a labour force participation rate of 30.2% compared with 61.4% for the population overall. The unemployment rate amongst persons with a disability was 26.3%, more than double the 12.9% rate for the population as a whole.

In October 2015, the Government published the ten-year Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024, with a view to

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8 Census 2016
9 Census 2016
significantly increasing the proportion of people with disabilities in employment in Ireland.

1.2. Aims of the research report

Under the terms of the **Comprehensive Employment Strategy**, the NDA committed to researching current good practice in the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector. The NDA tendered for external contractors to carry out the research and produce this report. After evaluating a number of tenders, the NDA commissioned RSM PACEC to carry out preliminary research and produce a report.

This research set out to examine the implementation of good practice in the employment of people with disabilities, and to identify the key components involved. It comprised of a literature review and consultation with key stakeholders, including employers and employees, in the public sector.

The research aimed to capture information on innovative and new models of good practice that will help the public sector to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. However, while certain sections of this report focus on the supports some employees with disabilities require in the workplace, it is important to recognise that not all staff with disabilities will need employment supports. Those that do may need varying levels of support, ranging from minor intervention to more intensive supports.

This research was considered to be timely in view of the Government’s commitment to increasing the statutory employment target to a minimum of 6% by 2024.

1.3. The structure of the report

Chapter 1 of this report outlines the context and background to the research project. It also describes the methodology used to carry out the research.

In chapters 2 to 8, each of the core themes on good practice in the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector, which emerged from the literature review, are described; the specific components of good practice within each core theme are explained in detail. Following this, the findings in relation to each component, from the analysis of the Part 5 reports and the consultation process, are discussed.

At the end of each chapter, there is a summary of the recommendations under each specific theme. These recommendations are drawn from both the evidence from the literature review and the findings from the analysis of the Part 5 reports and the consultation process.

Chapter 9 concludes the report, and identifies areas for future exploration which have emerged from the literature review and consultation process.
I.4. Research methodology

The aims and exploratory nature of this research project required an approach that was primarily qualitative. A number of different research strands were undertaken during this project to ensure a thorough examination of practice, and to capture a broad range of views on the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector in Ireland.

The strands of the research

Literature Review

The literature on good practice in the employment of people with disabilities was reviewed to determine the key relevant themes in this area.

Different search terms were used for the literature review. These search terms included; “good practice in employing people with disabilities”, “reasonable accommodations in the workplace”, “work experience programmes for people with disabilities”, “transitions from education into employment for people with disabilities”, and “equality legislation”.

International and Irish reports and presentations on good practice on recruiting, employing and retaining people with disabilities were reviewed spanning the period from 1998 – 2016.

The literature review revealed seven core themes that underpin good practice:

1. Developing an inclusive work environment
2. Reasonable accommodations
3. Providing work experience programmes for people with disabilities
4. Recruitment
5. Supporting people with disabilities to remain in the workplace
6. Retaining employees
7. Career progression

These themes informed the analysis of the Reports on Compliance with Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 from 2006-2016, and the development of topic guides and questions for the interviews, focus groups and online surveys.

Analysis of Reports on Compliance with Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005

Under Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005, public bodies must submit annual statutory reports to their respective Departmental Monitoring Committees. These reports outline the measures they are taking, where practicable, to promote and support the employment of people with disabilities. They also report the number of staff with disabilities in employment in each year. The Departmental Monitoring Committees then forward these reports to the NDA who produce an annual Compliance Report. Every year, this report is submitted to the Minister for Justice and Equality. The Report is then placed before the Oireachtas before it is published on the NDA's
website. Reports on Compliance with Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005, from 2006-2016 were analysed to determine:

- if the themes identified in the literature review were being put into practice in the public sector
- if there were any new examples of good practice in the public sector

**Scoping Interviews**

Scoping interviews were held with 7 key stakeholders to identify examples of good practice, potential interviewees and to gain access to network meetings, for example meetings of the Disability Liaison Officer Network. These stakeholders were chosen because of their experience of working with people with disabilities and in developing strategies and programmes to increase the employment of people with disabilities.

Representatives from the following organisations were interviewed:

- Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
- Disability Liaison Officers Network Committee
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions’ Disability Committee
- Irish Business and Employers’ Confederation (IBEC)
- Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO)

**Interviews with stakeholders**

Interviews were held with 17 stakeholders, with and without disabilities, from across the public sector. These stakeholders were recommended by the 7 stakeholders during the scoping interviews. Each of the 17 interviewees had experience in promoting and supporting the recruitment and employment of people with disabilities in their various organisations, and working with the disability sector.

These stakeholders worked in different parts of the public sector, including local government, trade unions, the non-commercial and commercial sectors, and Government Departments.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed with the interviewees’ permission.

The objective of these interviews was to determine from the interviewees the models of good practice used by their respective organisations to promote and support the employment of people with disabilities. Each interviewee was asked the same set of questions. Examples include:

- Did Senior Management and HR managers in their organisation promote and support the employment of people with disabilities?
- How did they demonstrate this support?
• Did their organisation have policies and processes that supported the recruitment and employment of people with disabilities?
• Were these policies and processes clearly communicated to all employees so that all employees understood them?
• How were these policies and processes communicated? Were they provided in accessible formats?
• Did their organisation have designated Disability Liaison Officers to support employees with disabilities?
• Were all employees provided with Disability Awareness Training?
• What policies and processes did their organisation have for supporting employees with disabilities in the workplace?
• What policies and processes did their organisation have to retain employees who acquire a disability and to support employees with disabilities to return to work?
• Did their organisation have policies and process that supported employees with disabilities to progress their careers?

Interviewees were also asked if the different policies and processes their organisation had in place were effective in promoting and supporting the employment and retention of people with disabilities.

Focus Groups with Employers and Employees
8 focus groups were held with employers and employees, with and without disabilities. Participants were identified with the support of the Disability Liaison Officers’ Network, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions’ (ICTU) Disability Committee and the Civil Service Personnel Network. The objective of each focus group was to capture examples of good practice in employing people with disabilities in the public sector. Assurances of confidentiality were communicated to the participants who were advised that disclosure of disability status, where relevant, was voluntary.

RSM PACEC facilitated each focus group. The maximum number of participants in each focus group was 10 people.

The topic guides used in the focus groups are included in Appendix B.
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Table 1.1 Break down of Focus groups

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<th>Organisation that helped to organise the focus group</th>
<th>Type of focus group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish Congress and Trade Unions (ICTU) Disability Committee</td>
<td>Employers and employees</td>
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<td>Civil Service Personnel Officers’ Network</td>
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<td>Public body outside Dublin</td>
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<td>Civil Service Personnel Officers’ Network</td>
<td>Employees</td>
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Online Surveys with Employers and Employees

Employers and employees were given additional opportunities to give their views anonymously via two online surveys, one for employers and one for employees.

The survey responses reflected information and perspectives from a wide range of organisations (type, size etc.). The Background Technical Document contains a copy of the survey forms, and provides a more detailed breakdown of the profile of respondents and the results from the employers’ and the employees’ online surveys.

Employer survey

The employer survey was issued to approximately 206 contacts including:

- 47 members of the Disability Liaison Officers’ Network
- 49 members of the Civil Service Personnel Officers’ Network
- 85 members of the Public Sector Equality Learning Network
- 25 additional contacts

These contacts then disseminated the survey within their own networks.

73 responses were received from 26 organisations in total. Given that there are 220 public bodies in total, this represents 11.8% of all public bodies.\(^\text{10}\) These 26 organisations employ 24.1% of all employees in the public sector.\(^\text{11}\)

The low response to this survey may have been due to people being on holiday when the survey was conducted in July/August 2016, or to the number of surveys taking place throughout the public sector within the same timeframe.

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Employee survey
The employee survey was disseminated through the same network as the employer survey. 2,020 employees, with and without disabilities, completed the survey. This represents around 1% of all employees in the public sector.12

Consultation with Occupational Health Therapists
It was agreed with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform that a survey of 19 questions would be sent to Occupational Health Therapists from the Civil Service, health and local government. The aim of this survey was to gather information on good practices in the provision of reasonable accommodations to support employees with disabilities to return and remain in work.

The surveys were sent to 30 Occupational Health Therapists in the public sector. 8 surveys were returned, and although this number is low, the responses provided valuable information in terms of understanding current practice within the public sector.

Data analysis
The researchers analysed the data from the different strands of the project to:

- determine the key themes that constitute good practice in the employment of people with disabilities
- make recommendations regarding progressing innovative and new models of good practice in the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector
- identify any gaps in good practice that require further examination and research

All of the material generated has been used in the compilation of this report. Outputs from each of the strands were reviewed and analysed by the researchers. Levels of agreement with each of the seven themes identified in the literature review as underpinning good practice were calculated. New models of good practice and areas for further examinations were also recorded.

Different Responses
This report summarises the analysis from the Part 5 reports (2006 – 2016) and the responses from interviewees, focus group and survey participants. The research approach yielded wide ranging and diverse responses. The researchers suggest that responses may differ based on each participant’s experience, level of knowledge and awareness of different models of good practice.

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Participant Profile
In total 2,174 people gave their views on good practice in the employment of people with disabilities in the Irish public sector.

Table 1.2 Breakdown of participants per strand of consultation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strand of Consultation</th>
<th>Total numbers</th>
<th>People who reported that they had a disability</th>
<th>People who did not report a disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key stakeholders</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewees</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Focus groups</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer online survey</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee online survey</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>1,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation with occupational therapists</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of participants</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,174</strong></td>
<td><strong>332</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,754</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that it is difficult to get an accurate figure of how many people with disabilities actually participated in the interviews, focus groups and online surveys, as it was not mandatory for participants to disclose if they had a disability. This trend was particularly noticeable in the employer survey where none of the respondents disclosed if they had a disability. In the employee survey, only 8 people did not answer the question about their disability status. Overall, out of the 2,174 people who participated in interviews, focus groups and online surveys, 88 people did not disclose if they had a disability.\(^{13}\)

Ethics
There was a strong focus throughout the process on adherence to best practice in consulting with people with and without disabilities and the maintenance of ethical standards.

A consent process was followed which ensured that all participants:

- understood what the project was about
- understood key information about the interviews and the focus groups
- were aware that they had a choice to participate in the project or not
- were aware that their participation was anonymised
- understood that they did not have to disclose a disability

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\(^{13}\) 7 key stakeholders, 73 respondents to employer survey, 8 respondents to employee survey
• understood that they could change their mind about participation at any time
• understood how the data would be collected, stored and used

The different participants were provided with information and consent forms prior to the interviews, focus groups and the surveys. The participants completed and returned the consent forms to RSM PACEC before they participated in the project.
Chapter 2 - Developing an Inclusive Work Environment

2.1. Definition of the theme
An inclusive work environment is one in which all employees feel valued and respected. In this type of environment, employees with disabilities are supported to perform their jobs to the best of their ability and should feel comfortable disclosing their disability.

2.2. Key components of an Inclusive Work Environment
The literature suggests that an organisation can create an inclusive work environment by implementing the following processes:

Leadership by Senior Management
Chief Executives, Directors and Senior Managers are responsible for creating and maintaining organisational culture. They lead by example. If they and Human Resource (HR) Departments implement clear and transparent policies and processes to promote and support the employment of people with disabilities, then staff will follow their example. This is the first step in developing an inclusive work environment.

Findings from the Research
A review of the Part 5 reports (2006-2016) showed several examples of Senior Managers and HR Departments developing and implementing such policies and processes in their respective organisations. Public bodies reported that their Senior Management Teams and HR Departments have established partnerships with their respective trade unions to help promote these policies and processes to their employees, and get buy in and support.

Many interviewees and participants in the focus groups also stated that leadership and support from their organisations' Senior Management and HR Departments was the key facilitator in the development of an inclusive work environment. One Human Resource professional reported that they would not have been able to adopt a ‘hands-on’ approach to supporting employees with disabilities, without the support of Senior Management in the organisation. They considered the culture of the organisation and the ‘can do’ attitude to be very important.

56.9% of respondents in the employer’s online survey expressed the view that their organisation was very supportive in helping an employee disclose their disability.

In the employee survey, 40.2% of people with disabilities and 53.1% of those without disabilities indicated that their organisations were very supportive of people with disabilities. Some respondents stated that having Codes of Practice for Employing People with Disabilities contributed to an inclusive work environment.
Policies and Procedures

The literature highlights that inclusive work environments have clear policies and procedures in the following areas:

- A Code of Practice for employing people with disabilities
- Providing reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities
- Retaining employees who acquire disabilities
- Assessing when employees with disabilities are fit to return to work and the supports they may need
- Supporting employees to progress their careers

Inclusive work environments also have:

- Disability Action Plans that document how the organisation will support employees with disabilities

The literature suggests that in this type of environment, all policies should be disability proofed. In practice this involves a comprehensive examination of how any proposed policy might impact on an employee with a disability.

Findings from the Research

A review of the annual Part 5 reports showed that a number of public bodies have the following policies in place to create an inclusive environment:

- A Code of Practice in relation to the employment of people with disabilities
- A written action plan or policy on the employment of people with disabilities
- An access audit on some or all of their premises

Many of the interviewees and focus group participants agreed that having Codes of Practice and written actions plans and/or policies on employing people with disabilities were key elements in creating an inclusive work environment.

The interviewees and focus group participants also identified the following key elements that helped to create an inclusive work environment:

- Having assessment procedures in place to ensure that new employees are provided with any necessary reasonable accommodations before they start employment in an organisation. These assessment procedures should also be in place to provide all employees with any reasonable accommodations that will help them to do their job to the best of their ability
- Policies that promote employees’ health and well-being, for example, the Civil Service Employee Assistance Programme
- Policies and processes around managing absenteeism and attendance at work
• Policies and processes that support employees with disabilities who have been absent from the workplace to return to work and to remain in work

A few participants also highlighted the importance of working with disability groups to develop their access policies.

6% of respondents in the employers’ online survey said that their organisations used policies as a means of supporting those with a disability. 21.7% of employees said that they were aware of their organisations’ policies to employ people with disabilities, and that this had a positive impact on people disclosing their disabilities.

**Communicating Policies and Strategies**

The literature suggests that in an inclusive work environment, Senior Management including HR Departments, ensure that organisational policies and procedures on supporting staff with disabilities in the workplace are clearly communicated to and understood by all employees.

Organisational communications, information and policies are provided in accessible formats to ensure that employees with different disabilities can understand them.

Providing employees with training can also ensure that they understand that policies and procedures are in place to create a work environment where everyone, especially people with disabilities, feels included and supported.\(^\text{14}\)

The literature review noted that Senior Management and HR Departments can encourage employees to disclose their disabilities by clearly stating:

• that disclosures are treated in confidence
• the benefits of disclosure
• the policies on reasonable accommodations

When an employee discloses their disability through an organisation’s anonymised confidential process they are already demonstrating the business case for employing people with disabilities.\(^\text{15}\)

**Findings from the Research**

A number of public bodies reported communicating their policies on employing and retaining people with disabilities and on providing reasonable accommodations to all employees, and reported ensuring that all employees understood the policies. Others stated that they published articles via staff newsletters and on the intranet to increase awareness and understanding of disability and diversity issues. They also had awareness campaigns such as ‘A Day in the Life of a person with a disability’ or implemented communication campaigns that promoted the positive benefits of

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disclosing a disability. These articles and campaigns contained contact information for Disability Liaison Officers.

**Disability Awareness Training**
The literature emphasises that providing all employees, from the Chief Executive Officer to a person on a work experience programme, with training in disability awareness is a crucial step in creating an inclusive work environment. This type of training provides all employees with the knowledge, the skills and the confidence to:

- support the development of inclusive policies and processes
- work with colleagues who have disabilities
- provide accessible/universally designed products and services to everyone including people with disabilities\(^{16}\)

Depending on their position, certain employees may require more specific training in how to support colleagues with disabilities. Research shows that line managers and Senior Management require training in how to:

- carry out effective induction processes for people with disabilities
- manage their team
- carry out regular reviews to ensure that each team member is progressing and developing in the workplace
- acknowledge and reward good work performances
- manage work performances
- support team members who appear to be having difficulties in their workplace, for example, performing their job to the best of their abilities, coming in late to work on a frequent basis, etc.\(^{17}\)
- seek advice or guidance from HR, and know when it is appropriate to do so

The literature also suggests that organisations could review the content of their disability awareness training programme on a yearly basis to ensure it is relevant and current. They could also review the means by which this training is delivered and decide which method suits their organisation and culture best. For example, they may decide between having a one day training session with an external trainer and accessing a free eLearning programme that employees can complete at their desk or in their own time.

**Findings from the Research**
A number of public bodies reported in the Part 5 reports, that they provided disability awareness training to all new employees, to raise awareness of disability

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\(^{16}\) NDA (2008) Effective Leadership and Organisational Culture for the Recruitment and Retention of People with Disabilities in the Irish Public Sector: Disability Research Series 10

issues and to update employees on any changes to legislation. In some cases, refresher training is also offered periodically. A few public bodies provided examples of disability awareness training that included access to online tools (e.g. the NDA’s disability and equality eLearning Tool). One participant stated that such training enables them to provide more effective supports to their colleagues with disabilities.

A small number of focus group participants stated that disability awareness training formed part of their induction programmes. They expressed the view that training should be provided for all employees even if there are no people with disabilities employed within the organisation. Training would be designed to make employees aware of the supports that are available, as well as enhancing understanding of the capacity of employees with disabilities.

Respondents in the two online surveys did not report that their organisations provide them with disability awareness training.

**Specific Disability Officers**

The literature review identifies that having trained Disability Liaison Officers is an important part of achieving an inclusive environment. In some organisations, these officers are called Access Officers. For the purposes of clarity we will refer to these employees as Disability Liaison Officers throughout this report. These Officers should be trained to provide employees with disabilities with advice and supports that will help them to perform their jobs to the best of their ability. They can also guide organisational policies and practice.

Disability Liaison Officers were established in the Irish Civil Service to support new employees with disabilities to:

- integrate into an organisation
- ensure existing employees with disabilities were receiving necessary supports in the workplace
- assist all employees with disabilities to progress their careers in their respective organisations
- assist their line managers by the provision of necessary information, appropriate contacts, guidance, suggestions and advice.  

All Government Departments and Offices are required to appoint a Disability Liaison Officer.  

It is important to note that not every public body may have a Disability Liaison Officer. The employee who was carrying out this role may have left for a new position or because they were retiring. In very small organisations, with less than 30 employees, there may be limited resources to carry out the organisation’s work and

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19 Department of Public Expenditure and Reform’s website http://hr.per.gov.ie/disability/
there may not be any available employees with the skills, expertise and/or the capacity to carry out the responsibilities of the Disability Liaison Officer.

However, it is essential in any organisation, regardless of its size, that a designated staff member is appointed to carry out the duties of the Disability Liaison Officer. In some organisations this role may be part of the brief of another post in the organisation, for example, the HR Manager. In these cases, it is important that the Senior Management, HR personnel and all line managers receive training in disability awareness and in how to manage and support all employees, including employees with disabilities.

The literature identifies that it is good practice to ensure that employees with disabilities meet these Officers when they join an organisation, and that all employees be provided with the names and contact details of these Officers.

Findings from the Research
Several public bodies reported that they had a Disability Liaison Officer who was responsible for supporting staff with a disability.

Participants in the interviews and focus groups agreed that the Disability Liaison Officer played a vital role in developing an inclusive work environment. They stated it was important that:

• a designated person is employed as a Disability Liaison Officer.

• the role of the Disability Liaison Officer is promoted throughout an organisation so that all employees, including managers, are aware and understand the services that this Officer provides. If an employee did not want to disclose their disability to their manager, they needed to know that they could approach the Disability Liaison Officer

• Disability Liaison Officers are supported by their organisations to engage in a more frequent and structured way with employees

Participants also noted that Disability Liaison Officers required specific training in order to:

• support employees who disclose their disability during the induction process

• provide appropriate supports to employees with different needs

• maintain confidential databases of employees who have disclosed a disability and ensure that they are adhering to data protection protocols

15% of respondents in the employer’s online survey reported that they were Disability Liaison Officers who worked with employees with disabilities.

13.1% of respondents in the employee’s survey reported that having a Disability Liaison Officer in their respective organisations supported them to disclose their disability status.
Research on good practice in the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector

Partnerships with disability organisations
Public bodies often establish partnerships with different disability organisations. The literature review explains that disability organisations can provide companies with guidance on their disability awareness training programmes and their workplace policies and procedures.\(^\text{20}\)

Public bodies can work with disability organisations to advertise and promote work experience programmes and job opportunities to people with disabilities. Disability organisations can recommend potential candidates for work experience programmes and for jobs in an organisation. If one of their members is selected to participate in a work experience programme and/or recruited for a full time job, the disability organisation can work with the employer to provide them with any necessary supports to assist the person with a disability to integrate into the workplace. The literature review highlights that participants with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder and/or certain mental health conditions may require ongoing support in the workplace. In such cases, it is suggested that an ongoing relationship between a disability organisation, the employer and the individual within the supported employment programme is important.\(^\text{21}\)

Findings from the Research
There are examples of efforts to establish partnerships between public bodies and disability organisations, to promote work experience and job opportunities in their organisations. As part of these partnerships, disability organisations have provided these public bodies with training in disability awareness and advised them on providing reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities.

Feedback from participants in the interviews and focus groups supported the evidence from the Part 5 reports. Participants described the type of supports that disability organisations provided to public sector bodies. These included helping public bodies to design assessment and psychometric tests, and promoting work experience opportunities in the public sector to their members.

Respondents in the two online surveys did not supply evidence that their organisations had partnerships with disability organisations.

Network group membership
The literature suggests that it can be beneficial to organisations to establish informal groups for employees with disabilities to share experiences, provide peer support and discuss any potential issues.\(^\text{22}\)


Findings from the Research
A review of the Part 5 reports revealed that public bodies did not supply evidence that their organisations were members of disability networks. This finding was consistent across the other strands of the research.

Work-related social activities
The literature identifies that inclusive work environments support new employees with disabilities to integrate into an organisation by:

- providing new employees with a buddy or a mentor. The buddy can provide a key social support as the employee adjusts to a new role
- ensuring that after an employee with a disability has been working in a position for 6 months, their employer/line manager, with the support from the HR Department, checks that they are comfortable participating in social events. This will help the employee’s continued integration into the workplace
- ensuring that employees with disabilities are included in all work-related social activities; the employee’s line manager, the HR Department and the Disability Liaison Officer could monitor this.

Findings from the Research
Public bodies in the Part 5 reports, interviewees and focus group participants did not provide evidence of measures taken to include employees with disabilities in work-related social activities.

52.2% of respondents to the employer survey said that social activities were open to people with disabilities in their organisations. 19.6% reported that their organisations ensured that all work-related events, including social events, were inclusive by holding these events in accessible venues.

In the survey for employees, 73.6% of employees with a disability and 73.2% of employees without a disability stated that employees with disabilities were included in social and after work activities.

Disability Champions Project
The Disability Champions Project was established by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) to recruit and train Disability Champions throughout the trade union movement in Ireland. This project focuses on designing best practice approaches to

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23 Murphy, C. et al. (2002) Employment and Career Progression of People with a Disability in the Irish Civil Service
24 Murphy, C. et al. (2002) Employment and Career Progression of People with a Disability in the Irish Civil Service
26 Dublin City Council (2011) “Work without limits”
social inclusion in the workplace and on the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities in trade unions.

The aim of this training project is to build an active network of knowledge and expertise in the relation to disability and employment. The training takes place over five days. It includes the following topics:

- Equality legislation
- Equality policy in the workplace
- Social model of disability
- The objectives of the National Disability Strategy
- Accessibility audits and understanding 'Reasonable Adjustments'/Reasonable Accommodations
- Disability awareness training
- Assistive technology
- Codes of practice
- Employment related grants to create an inclusive work environment and to support the employment of people with disabilities
- Developing improvement plans
- Models of best practice in recruitment

The Disability Champions Training Project was recognised by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC – now part of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)).

Findings from the Research
There was no evidence across the different research strands that public bodies used this model of practice.

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27 ICTU Disability Champions @ Work, Guidelines for Disability Champions
2.3. Other Processes Contributing to an Inclusive Work Environment

2.3.1. Statutory Employment Target

Participants identified one process, which contributed to good practice, which was not documented in the literature review - the impact of a statutory employment target on public bodies. A review of the Part 5 reports showed that public bodies did not supply any evidence that having a statutory employment target helped them to develop an inclusive work environment. However, many participants in the interviews and focus groups reported that it encouraged organisations to move beyond the minimum 3% target and focused their attention on developing an inclusive work environment. Some participants said that in the past many people with disabilities were assigned positions in administration, catering, cleaning and gardening. They reported that their organisations were now focusing on providing people with disabilities with different types of jobs and more senior positions.

Other participants said that the statutory employment target helped them to disclose their disability because the Part 5 staff forms that they had to fill out were anonymised.

A very small number of respondents in the employer’s survey felt that having an employment target helped create an inclusive work environment. In the employee’s survey, 39.7% of employees with a disability and 30.1% of employees without a disability stated that having an employment target increased employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

A number of public bodies stated that having a statutory employment target helped them to focus on increasing recruitment opportunities for people with disabilities.

A small minority of respondents (10.5%) to the employer survey stated that having a 3% employment target was an effective means of recruiting people with disabilities.

39.7% of employees with a disability and 30.1% of those without disabilities cited the minimum 3% employment target as a great incentive for employers to recruit people with disabilities.
Case Study 1: Developing an Inclusive Work Environment

The Senior Management team and the HR Department in one public body developed and implemented policies and processes for employing people with disabilities. The organisation had clear policies on providing employees with reasonable accommodations and policies for retaining employees with disabilities. All employees received disability awareness training.

The organisation had a Disability Liaison Officer. As part of its communication strategies, the organisation produced articles on the benefits to employees of disclosing their disability, and the reasonable accommodations and supports they would receive to help them do their job to the best of their ability.

This public body introduced a Traineeship Programme for people with disabilities, to give them training and experience of working in a mainstream business environment. Trainees were offered contracts for a period of 6 to 9 months to provide them with enough time to fully engage in the work environment, whilst gaining the competence and confidence to enhance their future employment opportunities.

This Traineeship Programme was different to other work experience programmes because participants were given the same tasks as the organisation’s employees, so that they could develop real work-related skills.

The Traineeship Programme was developed in partnership with AHEAD, who carried out the following tasks:

- Advertising the available roles to the candidates on their database
- Processing applications for the recruitment process
- Conducting a Needs Assessment for each successful candidate

AHEAD provided continuous support to the Programme participants and the employers throughout the duration of the Traineeship Programme.

The Chief Executive and the Directors of the organisation endorsed the Programme. Their leadership meant that employees throughout the organisation supported the Programme and welcomed participants into the organisation.

Participants were given a comprehensive induction and integrated into the organisation.

Trainees reported that they felt that they were part of project teams. The support they received from the organisation’s Senior Management Team, the HR Department and the other employees increased their confidence and self-belief.

Feedback from Trainees and Line Managers

Trainee: “Communication between my team, manager and mentor became easier after my first day. They developed very good skills in communicating with a deaf person, and I
felt comfortable at work from day 1. Whenever I could not understand a word, they would write down the word they were saying.”

Trainee: “I worked closely with the Project Team and some evenings I stayed back to help out. This was something I wanted to do as I got the opportunity to learn more and all the hard work paid off as it led to a permanent position with an IT consultancy company.”

Line Manager: “My experience with the Traineeship Programme has been very positive, perhaps, due to the very high standard set by our trainees, but also, due to the professional approach taken by all involved in managing the Programme.”

Trainee: “The staff were very supportive. Mentoring was a useful relationship. It helped me develop new skills”.

Line Manager: “Our trainee was a great addition to the office. He got stuck in with the work and got on very well with the existing staff. He was a great ambassador for the scheme and as a result all staff are very positive towards the Programme”.
2.4. Recommendations

Based on the findings from the research, RSM PACEC has made the following recommendations:

- Part 5 forms could ask organisations to provide details on all measures taken to create an inclusive work environment. For example, there was little evidence that public bodies ensured that employees with disabilities were included in work-related social activities. The NDA has already provided public bodies with guidance on this issue. One way of increasing public bodies’ awareness of this measure is by asking them to report on how they have included employees with disabilities in social activities when they are filing out their annual Part 5 reports.

- Senior Management and HR Departments in public bodies could increase awareness in their organisations about models of good practice such as the Irish Congress of Trade Unions’ Disability Champions Programme. It is recommended that Senior Management and HR Directors lead out on promoting this programme and link in with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to provide employees with relevant training in becoming effective Disability Champions.
Chapter 3: Reasonable Accommodations

3.1. Definition of the Theme
Providing people with disabilities with the necessary reasonable accommodations is a crucial element of many models of good practice in the employment of people with disabilities. This chapter provides an overview of reasonable accommodations and how they can be applied in the recruitment process and in the workplace.

3.2. Reasonable Accommodations
As detailed previously, under the Employment Equality Acts (1998-2015), employers are legally required to take reasonable steps to accommodate the needs of employees with disabilities, except where to do so would impose a disproportionate burden on them. The literature defines reasonable accommodations as a modification to the tasks or structure of a job or workplace, which allows the qualified employee with a disability to perform the job to the best of their abilities.

Reasonable steps take consideration of:
- the financial and other costs entailed in providing the accommodation
- the resources available to the employer’s business
- the possibility of obtaining public funding or other assistance
- employers are not obliged to provide employees with equipment they would normally provide for themselves, for example, reading glasses, hearing aids

3.3. Reasonable Accommodations in the Recruitment Process
Public bodies should provide people with disabilities with any necessary reasonable accommodations to help them complete the job application forms, competency/assessment tests and to attend interviews.

The literature identifies that reasonable accommodations include:

- providing application forms in accessible formats, for example hard copy, large print, Braille, Plain English and Easy to Read. This ensures that all applicants can understand the questions they are being asked and can fill out the form properly.
- assistive technologies
- communication and literacy supports (for example providing scribes and readers for people with visual impairments, having sign interpreters for people with hearing impairments)
- person-centred supports for example providing an employee with their own office or a quite space that is free from noise and distractions; ensuring that employees stake regular breaks for their work.
The literature suggests that organisations could take the following guidelines into consideration when they are designing job application forms:

- The form should contain clear instructions, in Plain English, that are easy to follow
- The questions should focus on work-related information, for example educational attainments, skills, knowledge and abilities
- There could be an option to outline non-mainstream but equivalent educational qualifications (some people with disabilities have non-mainstream educational qualifications) and/or relevant work experience
- A section on the application form could be provided for the applicant to identify any reasonable accommodations they might require for an interview, for example, sign language interpreters, extra time to answer questions, the option to give a presentation. The text in this section of the application form should reassure applicants that asking for reasonable accommodations will not hinder their application
- Organisations could restate their policy on providing reasonable accommodations when candidates are called for an interview. Organisations could also emphasise that all applications will be judged on the skills and qualifications demonstrated, and on how they match the criteria set out in the job advertisement.

Findings from the Research
A review of the Part 5 reports revealed examples of public bodies providing reasonable accommodations for job candidates on request. They included providing Assistive Technology for assessments, a sign interpreter for interviews or job application forms in accessible formats.

Some public bodies requested that candidates advise them of any reasonable accommodations they required to complete assessments and to attend interviews. These public bodies attached a Special Needs Identification Questionnaire to their application forms.

A few interviewees and focus group participants reported that they consulted with disability organisations to ensure that the materials used for the recruitment process

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28 Dublin City Council (2011) "Work without limits"
31 Employer Disability Information – Advertising the Role
are suitable. They provided examples of the reasonable accommodations their organisations provide for interviews or competency exams. These examples include:

- Providing sign interpreters for interviews
- Tests in Braille for people with sight loss
- Assistive technologies such as Jaws for people with visual impairments
- Providing documents in large print for people with visual impairments
- Providing readers for people with sight loss
- Providing scribes for people with visual impairments or with physical disabilities who require supports to help them write
- One to one testing, or small group testing for people with mental health issues, people with autism spectrum disorder or people with Asperger’s Syndrome
- Putting the tests onto different coloured paper, for people with visual impairments or with various forms of dyslexia.

Other focus group participants and interviewees stated that candidates are asked to highlight any accommodations they require in relation to the online testing, supervised testing and any strategic exercises, presentations or interviews. They explained that in the Irish Civil Service, the first stage in large open competitions is online psychometric testing, followed by supervised on-site testing in an assessment centre. Reasonable accommodations to support people with disabilities to participate in these tests are provided on a case-by-case basis. Requests for reasonable accommodations must be backed up with a letter from the candidate’s doctor.

One interviewee stated that the Public Appointments Service’ (PAS) approach to recruitment is particularly accessible, for example, people with visual impairments do not have to provide a letter from their doctor. It was sufficient for them to provide a letter from the National Council for the Blind Ireland (NCBI), stating that the individual was registered with NCBI, and as such may need extra time or assistive technologies.

15.8% of employers in the online survey stated that their organisations provided people with disabilities with reasonable accommodations in the recruitment stage.

Only a small number of employees (9.6% of those with a disability and 9.0% of those without disabilities) reported that their organisations provided people with disabilities with reasonable accommodations at the recruitment stage. Respondents to both surveys did not comment on the provision of accessible application forms.

### 3.4. Reasonable Accommodations in the workplace

The literature recommends that organisations could implement the following process for agreeing and implementing reasonable accommodations:
1. Consult with the employees to identify the type of reasonable accommodation they may require
2. Decide if the employee with a disability is qualified to perform the essential functions of the job involved with or without an accommodation
3. Select and implement the most reasonable and effective accommodation for the employee
4. Meet with the employee and the relevant personnel and agree a process to monitor the accommodation to check if it has helped the employee to complete the necessary work task(s)
5. Keep a record of the reasonable accommodations provided and evaluate them to ensure their effectiveness
6. Provide follow-up if needed (for example modifications of the accommodations made). 32 33

Examples of reasonable accommodations in the workplace include:

- Flexible work hours, for example, a person starts work later and leaves work later
- Amendments to work duties such as substituting tasks to replace those that may have become difficult
- Physical adaptations to the workplace, such as installing a ramp or putting in accessible toilets
- Changes to a person’s workstation, such as a different desk and chair
- Assistive technologies or adapted work equipment, such as special keyboards, telephone headsets and screen readers that convert computerised information to speech. 34 In situations where assistive technologies are being considered, staff with disabilities should be the key user testers for such products 35
- Provision of Irish sign language interpreters 36

Findings from the Research

Interviews conducted with key stakeholders and an analysis of the Part 5 reports revealed a number of examples of public bodies providing reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities.

Interviewees stated that there is no standardised approach throughout the public sector regarding the provision of reasonable accommodations. In some organisations,

36 Dublin City Council (2012) “Work without limits”
Disability Liaison Officers are responsible for supervising the provision of reasonable accommodations. However, in other organisations Occupational Health therapists are involved in this process.

A number of interviewees and focus group participants reported that their organisations provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities where it is appropriate and practicable to do so, and in response to changes in an employee’s capacity for work.

One interviewee reported their organisation uses a representative from the Occupational Health and Support (OHS) service, which is under the Chief Medical Officer Office, to meet with new employees with disabilities to determine:

- if they require reasonable accommodations
- the type of accommodations they require
- the process by which these accommodations will be evaluated and reviewed

This organisation also provides a rehabilitation/redeployment programme for employees who have capacity for part-time work or a slight reduction in work hours.

Another interviewee reported that their organisation uses different approaches for new employees with disabilities and for employees who acquire disabilities, to cater for each person’s specific needs. New employees meet with the Disability Liaison Officer and any reasonable accommodations are agreed at the point of entry to the organisation. Employees who acquire a disability meet with the Occupational Health Therapist who provides them with any necessary accommodations.

Interviewees and focus group participants identified the following important steps in providing reasonable accommodations:

- **Consultation:** Participants emphasised the importance of consulting with new employees about the type of accommodations they might need. Seeking to understand how the person with a disability views their own disability, and thus the accommodations they may require is critical. One participant learned that an employee who was deaf did not perceive this as a disability instead they wanted their deafness to be understood in terms of them speaking a different language. Some organisations said they liaised with relevant departments within their organisation, as well as external disability organisations, to ensure they were providing appropriate reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities.

- **Communication:** A few focus group participants said it was important that organisations effectively communicated their policies and procedures on providing reasonable accommodations so that all employees understood them.

- **Reviewing Reasonable Accommodations:** Other focus group participants stated the importance of regularly reviewing reasonable accommodations as the employee’s needs, their environment, or their work duties can change.
One participant stated that when their organisation moved to a new building they organised a walk-through of the building for an employee with a visual impairment. This walk through provided the employee with the opportunity to identify the reasonable accommodations they would need to have in place before they moved to the new building.

Focus group participants gave examples of the reasonable accommodations, provided by their organisations, to support employees to perform their jobs to the best of their abilities. These included:

- Redesigning a job description
- Redeployment or reassignment of duties
- Job sharing
- Provision of sign language interpreters
- Provision of documents in alternative versions
- Assistive technology
- Mobility aids
- Modified workstation/adaptation to buildings
- Emergency evacuation plans
- Flexible working time arrangements
- Time off to attend medical appointments
- Dedicated IT contact

Some respondents to the employer’s survey noted that their organisations received guidance from disability organisations on providing appropriate and reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities. 61.6% of respondents reported that their organisations provided people with disabilities with appropriate reasonable accommodations.

In the online survey for employees, 83.9% of respondents with disabilities and 85.6% of respondents without disabilities reported that the reasonable accommodations their organisations provided benefitted employees with disabilities, stating that employees felt more productive and valued.
Case Study 2: Supporting employees in the workplace – Reasonable accommodations

In one public body, the Senior Management Team and the HR Department were provided with training in disability awareness. They also received training in how to support employees with disabilities. The organisation’s Disability Liaison Officer provided the Senior Management Team and the HR Department with additional guidance and advice on creating an inclusive work environment. The Senior Management Team and the HR Department ensured that they disseminated this guidance and increased their employee’s awareness of disability.

The public body also participated in AHEAD’s Willing & Able Mentoring (WAM) programme.

One of the Departmental managers was asked by the Human Resources Department to provide work experience for a graduate with a hearing impairment. The graduate would be working as an Executive Officer for a 6 month period.

The manager met with the Executive Officer on their first day in the Department. He asked the Executive Officer about the best way for people to communicate with her. She explained that she could lip read. If people faced her and did not cover their mouths, she could understand what they were saying. She said that it was important that people did not turn their back to her when they were speaking to her. She also said that if someone wanted to get her attention they could tip her arm/shoulder or tip the desk. The manager asked the Executive Officer if she would like him to let her colleagues know this information and she agreed. The Executive Officer was also provided with a personal fire alarm which vibrates when the fire alarm sounds.

The Executive Officer is doing well in the organisation and has established very good working relationships with her colleagues. She has become a valued member of the organisation.
3.5. Recommendations

Based on the findings from the research, RSM PACEC has made the following recommendations:

- A robust, consistent and transparent approach should be implemented throughout the public sector regarding the process by which reasonable accommodations for new and existing employees are determined, negotiated and evaluated to help employees to perform their job to the best of their abilities.

- Reasonable accommodations should be reviewed every 3-6 months to allow for changes in the employee’s needs. A more structured process could include a formal workplace agreement (See Appendix A).

- Public bodies may find it useful to benchmark how reasonable accommodations are negotiated in other organisations, for example, the Business Disability Forum\(^\text{37}\) has developed a workplace adjustment agreement that provides a record of reasonable adjustments agreed between an employee with a disability and their line manager. This is to ensure that both the individual and the employer has an accurate record of what has been agreed, minimises the need to renegotiate reasonable accommodations each time the employee changes jobs, and provides employees and their line managers with the basis for discussion about reasonable adjustments at future meetings (see Appendix A).

- Employees and their advocates may require training in how to clearly articulate their accommodation needs and to negotiate how reasonable accommodations will be provided and evaluated.

\(^{37}\) Business Disability Forum; MS Ireland Work Toolkit
Chapter 4 – Providing Work Experience Programmes for people with disabilities

4.1. Definition of the theme
Work experience programmes are offered by employers to give people, including people with disabilities, an opportunity to gain ‘hands-on’ experience in a mainstream workplace. These programmes can provide people with an increased knowledge of a particular sector, company or role. The experience gained includes working and interacting with colleagues, working with clients and customers, or working to deadlines. The programmes are often short term, lasting from one day up to 6 months. Research shows that work experience programmes are an essential step in preparing people with disabilities for work and in equipping them with the skills and knowledge to get a job.38

4.2. Key components of Work Experience Programmes
The work experience programmes examined in the literature review use a step by step process to support people with disabilities to gain employment.

It is important to note that while many organisations providing work experience programmes use this step by step process, they may have different approaches to implementing this process. Some organisations may not have a designated job coach, but another staff member can often be responsible for this role, in addition to the other work duties.

The process identified in the literature review, for implementing work experience programmes, includes the following steps:

Vocational profiling
A person with a disability meets with a job coach (if they require one) or a caseworker to identify and discuss their career aspirations, skills, knowledge, qualifications, learning needs and job preferences. A job coach is someone who works with a person with a disability to carry out research and match their aspirations and skills to available work placements. The job coach and the person with a disability create a vocational profile. This profile is used to match the person to an employer and a job that suits their skills and preferences.

The EmployAbility Programmes run by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection have job coaches who work people with disabilities participating in work experience programmes.

Preparing for the work environment
A person with a disability works with a job coach to develop their Curriculum Vitae (CV). They receive training in work-related skills, for example communication skills or workplace etiquette. If the individual requires training to develop a particular set

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of skills, for example IT skills, then this training will be provided before the person embarks on a work experience programme.

Job coaches provide people with disabilities with interview training and help them prepare for their interview and for the meeting with their employer. They will also provide supports after the interview.

**Identifying reasonable accommodations**
A job coach works with a person with a disability and their support network to identify and document the types of support and accommodation they may need to carry out their preferred job. See Chapter 3 for more details on reasonable accommodations.

**Obtaining Work Placements**
An important part of this process is the relationship between the organisation running the work experience programmes and employers in different sectors. Organisations such as AHEAD, the Irish Association of Supported Employment (IASE), Trinity College Dublin and the Employability Programme have established good working partnerships with many different employers. These partnerships help them secure work placements for people with disabilities because employers know these organisations will provide the supports they may need to ensure the placement is successful.

Once an employer has agreed to take a person with a disability on work experience, they interview the candidate. If a person has an intellectual disability or has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the traditional interview format may not be suitable for them. In these situations, a more informal meeting with the employer may support the person to showcase their skills and expertise.

**Employer supports**
Some organisations, such as AHEAD, provide employers with disability awareness training and specific training on how to conduct interviews, so they can interview people with different disabilities, understand the need for reasonable accommodations and know how to support people with different disabilities in the workplace.

They also work closely with employers and liaise with them on a regular basis to ensure that the person on work experience is performing well. These organisations provide employers with ongoing guidance and advice so they can support the person on work experience.

Organisations such as AHEAD also provide people with disabilities with mentors and job coaches to ensure they have a positive work experience and can do the job to the best of their abilities.
Evaluation
Throughout the work experience process, participants meet with their job coaches and mentors to evaluate their experience, assess progress, identify and resolve issues. Participants and their job coaches also meet with employers on a regular basis to evaluate the participant's work performance.

There is evidence in the literature that employers may use work experience programmes as a way to observe if a person with a disability is a good fit for an organisation. Based on their observations the employer may then decide to recruit the person into a full-time position.39

Findings from the Research
A review of the annual Part 5 reports and consultations with key stakeholders revealed that public bodies use the following work experience programmes:

Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD)’s Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) scheme
The WAM scheme is a work placement programme that promotes access to the labour market for graduates with disabilities. It offers a 6 month paid, mentored work placement for graduates with disabilities in mainstream work environments.40

The Career Pathways Project, Trinity College Dublin
The Career Pathways Project is a collaboration between the Disability Service and the Careers Advisory Service in Trinity College Dublin. This project helps students with disabilities to:

• explore their career options
• identify their skills and the areas where they may need additional supports or reasonable accommodations
• prepare CVs
• learn workplace etiquette
• manage their disability in the workplace
• link with prospective employers41

Irish Association of Supported Employment (IASE) Job Shadow Initiative
This initiative provides the opportunity to shadow a workplace mentor for one day/week per year to provide an insight into a particular job or career area.42

40 Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) Willing Able Mentoring Programme.
41 Daly, Eileen (2014) From Personal to Professional. Presentation at the NDA’s Annual Conference 2014 on “Employing People with Disabilities”. Croke Park Conference Centre, Dublin Ireland.
42 Teagasc (2012) A Retention Case Study
Supported employment: EmployAbility Programme

Supported employment programmes, for example the EmployAbility Programme, use work experience programmes to support people with disabilities to get employment. The EmployAbility Programme is a national programme run by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

The objective of the programme is to support people with disabilities to gain employment and progress their careers.43

The duration of work experience programmes varied from 1 day to 3-6 months.

Some participants in the focus groups stated that their organisation used AHEAD’s WAM programme to provide work experience opportunities for people with disabilities.

One participant with a disability mentioned that they had participated in the National Learning Network’s Employer Based Training Course. This course helps students to acquire practical skills with a host company through a combination of on the job and in-centre training. It also provides students with employment supports and reasonable accommodations. As a result of being on this course, the participant was employed on a fixed term contract with an organisation, followed by a contract of indefinite duration. The participant has been encouraged by their manager to apply for Grade VI and VII jobs within the Civil Service.

A number of focus group participants suggested that work experience programmes should be at least 6-12 months duration, so that people with disabilities get a real opportunity to develop their work-related skills. They expressed the view that work experience programmes are a great way of increasing employees’ awareness of disability. By working with a person with a disability, employees gain an understanding of their capacity to work in a mainstream environment and to make a significant contribution to an organisation.

In the online surveys, 78% of employers, 60% of employees with disabilities and 55% of employees without disabilities said that their organisations provide work experience programmes for people with disabilities. There was very little evidence that work experience programmes led to full time employment opportunities for people with disabilities. This may be because in the past there was no clear process in the Civil Service to convert people on work experience programmes or internships into full time employees. This situation is now being examined under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024.

Case Study 3: Work Experience Programmes

One public sector body has provided paid work experience opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities for the past 10 years. This public body worked in partnership with an organisation providing services to people with intellectual disabilities, to develop and establish these work experience opportunities. The public body had a number of vacancies for people to carry out seasonal gardening and ground maintenance work. They worked with the organisation to identify people with intellectual disabilities who were interested in gaining this type of work experience.

The public body, with support from the organisation, held introductory meetings rather than interviews with each person. The meetings provided the public body with the time to explain the job to each person, to ensure each person understood the job they would be doing, and to ask what supports, if any, the individual may need to carry out the job to the best of their ability. The meeting also gave people with intellectual disabilities the chance to ask questions about the job and to decide if they were interested in the position.

Once a person agreed to accept a position, the organisation and the public body ensured that any necessary reasonable accommodations were in place to support the person to carry out their work. Some people with intellectual disabilities found it beneficial to have a “buddy”, that is another employee assigned to them while they were doing their work. The “buddy” was on hand to repeat instructions to the individual and ensure that they understood each task they were asked to do. Other individuals with intellectual disabilities, employed by this organisation, did not require a “buddy” and were supervised in the same way as other employees.

Depending on their capacity, a number of participants on the programme worked on a part-time basis, while others worked on a full-time basis. All of those on work experience were able to use public transport to get to and from work.

The organisation did not provide any disability awareness training for their employees. However, employees were briefed on how to communicate with and support people with intellectual disabilities before the work experience programme started.

Employees’ awareness and understanding of people with intellectual disabilities has increased as a result of this work experience programme. The participants on the programme have demonstrated their capacity to perform their job to the best of their ability, and to complete essential work for the organisation.

The work experience programme continues to be successful for this public body. It also provides people with intellectual disabilities with the opportunity to get paid work experience in a mainstream environment. Participants on this programme were paid the same amount of money as other employees holding the same position.
4.3. Recommendations
Based on the findings from the research, RSM PACEC has made the following recommendations:

- Work experience programmes in the public sector should be flexible in terms of duration, in order to provide participants with the opportunity to develop work-related skills. The public sector could commit to implementing work experience programmes of different durations for people with disabilities. These work experience programmes would also allow employers to determine if people on work experience could become potential employees.

- A consistent approach could be taken to implementing and evaluating work experience programmes throughout the public sector. This approach could be monitored by HR Departments in public bodies. A brief report on each organisation’s performance could be included in the annual Part 5 returns.

- Data on the numbers of people with disabilities recruited through work experience programmes could also be captured in the annual Part 5 reports. The NDA could use this information to track and evaluate the progress that public bodies are making in relation to work experience programmes and employment for people with disabilities. They could also identify any additional supports that public bodies may need to improve outcomes.

- Employment policies should drive a greater translation of work experience programmes to actual employment opportunities.
Chapter 5: Recruitment policies and processes

5.1. Definition of the theme
This theme centres on the approaches used by organisations to recruit and promote staff, and the policies and processes developed to support this. These policies and processes should ensure that employees with disabilities are treated equally and without discrimination. Certain aspects of this theme have been covered previously, for example, in the information in Chapter 3 on reasonable accommodations during the recruitment and assessment process.

5.2. Key components of Recruitment policies and processes
The literature review identified the following models of good practice in the recruitment of people with disabilities:

Open and Transparent Recruitment
All organisations should have a recruitment policy that applies to those with and without disabilities, and is based on recruiting those that have the necessary qualifications for the post, and are able to carry out the core functions of the job.44

Findings from the Research
A review of the Part 5 reports (2006-2016) highlighted several examples of public bodies using transparent and open recruitment policies.

Some participants in the interviews and focus groups reported that their organisations provided reasonable accommodations on request for candidates with disabilities who were undertaking aptitude tests and/or who were attending interviews.

A few participants stated that their organisations provided disability awareness training for interview panels.

Respondents to the two online surveys did not supply any evidence that their organisations had open and transparent recruitment policies.

Job Analysis
The literature suggests that a job analysis is a key step in the initial stages of the recruitment process. It provides an organisation with the information they need to develop an accurate job profile and the essential skills, qualifications and expertise that a person will need to demonstrate to perform the job. The literature review identified that the following criteria should be used when carrying out a job analysis:

- What is the relationship between the tasks involved in the job? Is there a special sequence which they must follow?
- What physical activities are required to undertake the job?

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44 Dublin City Council (2011) "Work without limits"
• How is the job organised in the overall work environment? Could a reorganisation of tasks and responsibilities improve the opportunity for someone with a disability?
• Would removing certain tasks to accommodate someone with a disability fundamentally alter the job?45

Findings from the Research
A review of the Part 5 reports revealed that a number of public bodies use job analysis and consider it an important part of their recruitment process. However, this process is not widely used across the public sector.

There was very limited evidence from the interviews, focus groups or survey responses of organisations using job analysis in their recruitment processes. However, one focus group participant stated that the HR Department in their organisation was starting to review all job specifications to ensure they included people with different disabilities or abilities.

Advertising
Organisations generally advertise jobs through the internet, newspapers and radio announcements. The literature suggests that an organisation can increase its opportunities to employ people with disabilities by promoting job advertisements through disability organisations and their publications.

The literature also shows that having the job advertisement in accessible formats will make it easier for people with specific disabilities to access the advertisement, understand it and apply for the job. Using accessible formats sends a clear message that the organisation has an inclusive approach and is open to employing people with disabilities. This may encourage a person with a disability to apply for the position.

Job advertisements should clearly state that the organisation operates a policy of inclusion and should explain that the organisation’s standard policy is to:
• provide application forms in accessible formats if job applicants require it
• provide reasonable accommodations on request for candidates attending interviews
• handle all such requests in the strictest confidence
• judge all potential employees on the skills and qualifications demonstrated in their application, and how they match the criteria set out in the job advertisement

Findings from the Research
The Part 5 reports highlighted examples of job advertisements from public bodies which mentioned that application forms are provided in accessible formats.

Respondents to the employer’s survey did not supply evidence in relation to job advertisements. A small percentage (5.3%) of respondents to the employee’s survey noted that their organisations stated that they were an equal opportunities employer when advertising jobs.

**Appropriate wording**
The literature review emphasises that job advertisements should not include non-essential experience/skills or inappropriate wording. For example, if ‘excellent communication skills’ are not necessary for the post, employers should avoid stipulating this as a requirement, as it may unnecessarily deter someone with a disability from applying for the position.

**Findings from the Research**
There was no evidence in the Part 5 reports that public bodies used this model of good practice. This lack of evidence was consistent across all strands of the research.

**Providing reliable information on salaries**
In Ireland, people with disabilities may have concerns about taking up employment in case they lose their benefits. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is, at time of writing this report, developing an online ready reckoner so that people with disabilities can calculate how much money they can earn while they are in employment and still keep their benefits. The literature suggests that it is important for organisations to provide accurate information on the salary for a position, so that people with disabilities can make an informed decision as to whether it makes financial sense for them to take a job.

**Findings from the Research**
There was no reference to information on salaries in any of the strands of the research project. Public bodies appeared to be unaware of this component in the recruitment of people with disabilities.

**Providing reasonable accommodations**
The literature suggests that not all public bodies provide employees with disabilities with necessary reasonable accommodations to apply for jobs, to help them complete competency/assessment tests and to attend interviews. Please see Chapter 3 for further details.

**Provide information on the recruitment process**
The literature review highlights that for some people with autism spectrum disorder it can be helpful if as much information as possible can be provided to them in

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49 NDA (2011) Strategic approaches to employing people with intellectual disability: Lessons from the UK
advance of an interview. This can help to alleviate their anxiety regarding the interview and it also helps them to prepare for the event. This information could include the names of people on the assessment panel, the interview format and the type of questions that may be asked.

Findings from the Research
Public bodies did not show any awareness or supply any evidence in the Part 5 reports of providing interview candidates with information in advance of an interview. This finding was consistent across all strands of the research.

Disability awareness training for recruiters, HR personnel and interview panels
The literature recommends that professionals responsible for the recruitment and selection process should be trained in disability awareness, including 'the importance of not making assumptions about ability and focusing on capabilities rather than potential performance restrictions'. Recruiters and HR personnel could consider working with disability organisations to disability proof competency based interview questions and assessments.

The literature suggests that interview panels could also be trained in disability awareness and in how to interview people with different disabilities. Interview panels should:

- ask a candidate with a disability the same questions that non-disabled candidates would be asked, for example “The job requires X to be completed, how would you achieve that?”
- be aware that a person with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or a visual impairment may not be able to maintain direct eye contact with the interview panel
- use the same criteria to assess every applicant whether they have a disability or not
- only ask questions that are related to the role being recruited for
- not discriminate against an applicant on the basis of a disability
- allow for the candidate to be accompanied by, for example, a job coach or sign language interpreter if required

Findings from the Research
A review of the Part 5 reports (2006-2016) showed a number of examples of public bodies providing disability awareness training to all employees, including HR Departments and employees responsible for recruitment.

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Some participants in the interviews and focus groups said that all employees in their organisations, including managers, received regular training in disability awareness. The participants agreed that this was very important.

Several public bodies reported that disability awareness training is provided to interview panels. A number of focus group participants stated that members of interview panels in their organisation received training in disability awareness, to ensure that they conducted interviews in a non-discriminatory way.

Respondents to the two online surveys did not supply any evidence that their organisations provided training for recruiters, HR personnel and interview panels.

**Specific Recruitment Competitions**

The literature review identified that the public sector has held specific recruitment competitions for people with disabilities as a means of increasing their employment opportunities.

**Findings from the Research**

A review of the Part 5 reports showed that some public bodies have held specific recruitment competitions confined to people with disabilities.

A number of focus group participants said that prior to the recruitment embargo being implemented in the public sector in 2009-2014, their organisations used specific recruitment competitions for people with disabilities. In some cases, participants commented that these competitions were very useful as they encouraged people with disabilities to apply for positions.

A small percentage of respondents who completed the employer’s survey (10.5%) reported that their organisations used these competitions to recruit people with disabilities.

Similarly a small percentage of respondents who completed the employee’s survey (16.4% of employees with disabilities, 12.8% of those without disabilities) reported that their organisations used specific recruitment competitions to recruit people with disabilities.

Overall there was little hard evidence on how effective the various recruitment processes were in practice.
Case study 4: Recruitment policies and processes

A public sector organisation had clear policies on recruiting people with disabilities and providing reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities.

The organisation ensured that job advertisements asked applicants to provide information on their application form, if they required reasonable accommodations to attend an interview. The advertisement also stated that the application form was available in large print and easy to read formats.

The organisation disseminated its job advertisements to disability organisations in addition to newspapers and online recruitments sites.

The organisation also partnered with a disability organisation to provide interview panels with training in disability awareness, and in how to ask appropriate questions to candidates with different disabilities.

The organisation advertised for a Project Manager. They received a number of applications and arranged interviews with suitably qualified candidates.

Candidate A was very impressive and was very interested in the organisation’s policies on recruiting people with disabilities. One member of the panel asked her about her interest in this area. Candidate A disclosed that she had epilepsy and described how she managed her disability to ensure that she performed well in her current position. The interview panel were impressed with her honesty and her performance throughout the interview. When all the interviews were completed, the interview panel reviewed and evaluated all the candidates, and decided to offer Candidate A the position, as she was the most suitable person for the job.

Candidate A’s references were checked and she accepted the position.

As part of her induction, the new employee met with the organisation’s Disability Liaison Officer and informed her about the frequency of her seizures and factors that tended to bring on her seizures such as lighting, noise levels and breathing problems.

The new employee was placed into a well-ventilated, quiet office. The employee also brought in cushions and blankets to her office to support her head should a seizure occur.

The employee and the Disability Liaison Officer discussed how they could inform the employee’s colleagues about what to do if she had a seizure in their presence. They decided that it would be beneficial if the employee gave a presentation to her colleagues on this topic.

The employee gave a presentation to her colleagues, which increased their awareness and understanding of epilepsy.
5.3. Recommendations
Based on the findings from the research, RSM PACEC has made the following recommendations:

- The NDA has disseminated guidance to public bodies on appropriate wording in recruitment materials and job application documents. They have also advised on providing candidates with specific disabilities, for example people with autism spectrum disorder with information on the interview panel and the type of questions to be asked at the interview. One way of increasing public bodies’ awareness of these measures is to ask them to state whether they are used in the narrative section of the Part 5 forms.

- The public sector could start implementing alternative means of recruiting people with disabilities, for example, via work experience programmes and specific competitions.

- HR Departments and line managers play an important role in supporting the recruitment and retention of employees with a disability. It is recommended that Directors, Senior Management teams and HR Departments could develop and oversee the implementation of clear and transparent policies and processes that promote and support the recruitment and retention of employees with a disability.

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Chapter 6: Supporting employees with disabilities in the workplace

6.1. Definition of the theme
When a person with a disability begins working in an organisation, they may require different supports to help them perform their job to the best of their ability, and to progress in the organisation. It is important that these supports are identified from the moment a person accepts a position of employment.

6.2. Key components of supporting employees with disabilities in the workplace
The literature review identified that the following models of good practice need to be present to support employees with disabilities in the workplace:

An appropriate induction process
Induction programmes can play an important part in helping new employees, including those with disabilities, settle in and understand how an organisation operates. Implementing the following steps can help an employee with a disability to integrate into an organisation:

- The Disability Liaison Officer, Equality Officer or designated person in the HR Department is notified of new employees with a disability. New employees with a disability meet with these Officers/Managers to discuss their new role and make sure any supports or accommodations are in place before they take up their new post.
- Providing new employees with a buddy or a mentor can help them to integrate into the organisation.
- After an employee with a disability has been working in a position for 6 months, their employer/line manager should support and encourage them to assume leadership roles on projects and to contribute to staff meetings.

Findings from the Research
A review of the Part 5 reports (2006-2016) shows some examples of public bodies having the following induction processes in place:

- Confidential questionnaires for employees which ask them about their disability and if they require reasonable accommodations to help them perform their job to the best of their ability.
- Disability training for all new employees, along with information about the Disability Liaison Officer, including the Officer’s contact details.

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A number of the interviewees and focus group participants said that their organisations had a pre-induction process and that the Disability Liaison Officer has an important role in this process. The Disability Liaison Officer meets with an employee with a disability before they start working at the organisation to identify the reasonable accommodations needed. They bring the employee into the workplace to review their office and discuss the type of work they will be doing. The Disability Liaison Officer then meets with the employee every 6 months to review how they are progressing in their job.

A few focus group participants commented that in their organisations, induction programmes are an opportunity to provide employees with a briefing on their organisations’ policies, for example, Disability Policies, Equality Policies, and Dignity in the Workplace Policies. New employees are also provided with Disability Guides.

A Disability Liaison Officer in one of the focus groups said that they were responsible for encouraging employees to make contact with them through email. They were also responsible for making managers aware of the Disability Liaison Officer’s role in supporting employees with disabilities. However, other participants noted that the role and responsibilities of Disability Liaison Officers can vary. In their organisations employees with a disability may be more likely to go to the Occupational Health and Support Services to discuss reasonable accommodations.

Across the different strands of research, there was little evidence regarding mentoring or buddy schemes, or line managers supporting new employees to assume leadership roles.

In the online survey, 9.8% of employees with a disability reported that they disclosed their disability during their organisations’ induction process because of the supports they received from the Disability Liaison Officers and Human Resource staff.

**Reasonable Accommodations**

The literature recommends that public bodies provide employees with disabilities with reasonable accommodations to help them perform their work to the best of their ability. Please see Chapter 3 for further details.

**Policies and processes for supporting employees who are experiencing difficulties in the workplace**

Sometimes employees, with and without disabilities, may experience difficulties in the workplace. These might include being frequently absent from work due to illness or family issues, being late for work on a regular basis, and difficulties performing well in the workplace. The literature suggests that organisations could have specific policies and processes in place to help management teams, and in particular line managers, to address these issues with employees in a supportive manner and to assist employees to resolve these issues.

Key policies and processes include:
Absence Management Policy
This policy is related to employee absences (including sick leave); how it is monitored; any extended leave arrangements; and the arrangements for contact between the workplace and the absent employee. Effective absence management policies assist organisations in supporting and retaining employees who are on extended leave of absence. These policies should outline the organisational processes to assist an employee to return to work after an extended period of absence.

All employees could be made aware of these policies when they join an organisation. They should understand that when they are absent from work for over two days that they will be contacted by their line manager or a designated colleague to ensure they are receiving any necessary supports.

The first step is to maintain contact with an employee while they are absent from the workplace. When an employee contacts their line manager to inform them that they will be absent from work, they agree with the line manager how often they would like to be contacted by a representative from the workplace. It does not have to be their line manager. They could also agree the type of contact that the employee would prefer, for example, via email or phone. Organisations then maintain a level of contact that the employee is comfortable with.

The objective of this type of contact is to reassure the employee that they are not forgotten by the organisation and that they will receive any necessary supports they require. Research shows that supportive contact between an employee and an employer in this situation can assist an employee to return to work and is therefore beneficial to both parties.

Attendance Management Policy
This policy documents the times when employees need to start and finish work. This policy also states the organisation’s definition of acceptable attendance and the procedures that will be used if an employee is late for work on regular basis.

Performance Management Policies and Performances
The literature emphasises that having clear policies and procedures on work performance will help management teams and in particular line managers to document, monitor and evaluate work performance. These policies and processes help identify issues with an employee’s work, to address these issues in a supportive manner and to discuss with the employee any solutions and/or reasonable accommodations required to resolve the performance issues. These policies and

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53 Similar examples of how best to support an employee to return to work are also referenced in the presentation by Sorcha Lowry ‘See Change in Your Workplace’ (delivered to the Equality Conference in Ireland in 2013)
54 Shift Line Managers Web Resource http://www.shift.org.uk/employers/lmr/keepingintouch/
Research on good practice in the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector

processes will also help employers and managers to identify good performance and provide the employee with positive feedback.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{Findings from the Research}

\textbf{Absence management and attendance}

The findings from the Part 5 reports, the consultation process and the online surveys reveal examples of certain public bodies using Absence and Attendance Management Policies. These policies set out the administrative arrangements for paid sick leave and attendance at work, and outline the supports that are available to all employees on an extended absence from work because of illness, family issues etc.

Some public bodies reported that their absence management policies helped them to identify employees who previously had not declared a disability. These employees were then able to discuss the reasonable accommodations they required with the Disability Liaison Officers and their line managers. In certain organisations, line managers are responsible for implementing absence management policies and sick leave policies. If an employee is frequently absent from work, their line manager meets with them to discuss the reasons for these absences. In other organisations, line managers, the Disability Liaison Officers and the HR Departments work together to support employees who are on extended leave and to support employees to return to work.

In some public bodies if an employee is absent from work due to mental health issues, they are referred to the Chief Medical Officer, who will refer them to a psychologist or a psychiatrist. In cases where it is not possible to refer an employee to this type of service, the employee is referred to the Employee Assistance Service (EAS). In some organisations this service may also be called an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

Several focus group participants and interviewees stated that managing absenteeism and attendance in their organisations is a supportive process, designed to understand the reasons for the person’s absences or their issues with getting to work on time. One interviewee noted that in their organisation, frequent absences are recorded in a report. The employee’s manager then has a conversation with the employee in order to explore the underlying reasons for the absences and any supports that could be used to address the issues. Depending on the supports the employee required they could be referred to the Chief Medical Officer and then to Employee Assistance Service.

Some focus groups participants said that different supports were provided for the different issues employees may have. One focus group participant suggested that line managers could be provided with training to help them support employees who have

\textsuperscript{55} NDA (2008) Effective Leadership and Organisational Culture for the Recruitment and Retention of People with Disabilities in the Irish Public Sector: Disability Research Series 10
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mental health difficulties and to recognise that if an employee is often absent from work, it could be due to issues around work-related stress.

24% of respondents to the employer’s survey reported that their organisations have absence management, attendance management and sick leave policies in place. 75% of participants believed these processes worked because employees felt that they were being supported.

27.6% of respondents to the employee’s survey stated that their organisations have absence management and attendance policies. 49% of respondents with disabilities and 45% of respondents without disabilities reported these policies to be effective.

Performance management

A review of the Part 5 reports showed that some public bodies have Performance Management Development Systems (PMDS). These public bodies reported that information around this process and the documentation used for this process are provided in accessible formats.

As mentioned previously, there are a number of examples of public bodies having an Employee Well-Being Programme (EWP) in place to assist employees to cope with personal problems which can impact on work performance or attendance. The EWP is available to all employees in these organisations.

Some employers participating in the focus groups reported that an employee’s performance was treated as a separate issue to their disability. In their organisations, employees with disabilities are provided with the necessary reasonable accommodations to help them to do their job. Their work performance is evaluated in the same way as colleagues who do not have a disability.

Several interviewees and focus group participants explained that in their organisations if an employee with a disability is having an issue with their work, then their line manager meets with them. The purpose of this meeting is to unpack the reason for the employee’s underperformance and to ensure that the organisation is providing the employee with any necessary supports. If the employee’s underperformance is related to their disability, then the line manager and the employee meet with the Disability Liaison Officer to see what additional supports the employee can be provided with. The organisation’s Senior Management Team and the HR Department may have to approve these additional supports. These participants highlighted the important role Senior Management and the HR Departments in their organisations played in supporting employees with disabilities in the workplace.

22% of respondents to the employer’s survey noted that their organisations used performance management systems to help employees with disabilities perform their work to the best of their ability.
In relation to the employee’s survey, 57.8% of respondents with disabilities and 41.1% of respondents without disabilities stated that their organisations supported employees with disabilities to perform their job to the best of their ability. They did this through a discussion and a review of the employees’ work, and re-allocating their work or sharing duties with colleagues. The respondents felt these processes were effective.

**Case Study 5: Supporting employees in the workplace – Induction**

One organisation stated that they liaised with the Staff Training and Development Department and were notified if a new staff, attending induction, disclosed a disability.

Before new employees with disabilities start in the organisation, the Disability Liaison Officer meets with them to welcome them and to discuss any reasonable accommodations the employee may need to have in place before they begin working. With the employees’ permission the Disability Liaison Officer meets with the line managers to explain the reasonable accommodations that each employee will need and when these accommodations will be put in place. During the induction process, the Disability Liaison Officer meets with the new employees with disabilities again, to ensure their reasonable accommodations are in place, to provide them with information about the organisation and the additional supports that are available to them in the organisation.
Case study 6: Supporting employees in the workplace – Managing absenteeism

An employee with a physical disability took a considerable amount of sick leave within a few months. Their line manager was concerned about the amount of sick leave. The line manager met with the employee about their absences from work and asked if they were having any problems at work. The employee apologised for their absences but reassured the line manager that the time off had nothing to do with his work. The employee seemed reluctant to say anything else and was upset. The line manager asked the employee if they would like to speak to the organisation’s Occupational Health Officer. The employee agreed.

The employee was experiencing a number of health issues. The employee had been using his sick leave to attend medical appointments to deal with these issues. The employee did not feel comfortable discussing this personal matter with his line manager or his colleagues, but he did feel comfortable discussing the issue with the Occupational Health Officer.

The employee met with the Occupational Health Officer who agreed not to discuss this issue with the employee’s line manager. The Occupational Health Officer agreed to write a report to the employee’s line manager confirming that the employee needed to take time off work at certain times to attend medical appointments. No details of the medical treatment were provided in the report.

The employee and the line manager met to discuss the report and agreed that the employee could have time off once the employee gave the line manager advance notice. This advance notice meant that the line manager could plan around the employee’s absence.
Case Study 7: Supporting employees in the workplace – Managing attendance

In one public organisation, a line manager was concerned about one of her employees. She noticed that this employee, who was normally very conscientious, had started to come in late once or twice a week. The line manager also noticed that the employee appeared to be very withdrawn and anxious.

The line manager met with the employee and asked how things were going. The line manager told the employee that she had noticed that he had been late to work and that she was concerned as this was not like the employee. The line manager asked the employee if there were any supports the organisation could provide to support him to resolve the issue.

The employee became upset and then disclosed that he had recently been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. His anxiety and stress about this diagnosis had prevented him from sleeping properly so he had trouble waking up in the morning, which caused him to be late for work. The employee was seeing a counsellor outside work hours to help him adjust to his diagnosis.

The line manager asked the employee what supports he felt would help him address this issue. The employee said that while he was adjusting to this diagnosis that it would help if he could start and finish work at a later time for a few months.

The line manager agreed with the employee the new hours that he would work, and that they would review the accommodation every 3 months to see if it was meeting the employee’s needs. The employee also agreed to come to the line manager if he was experiencing any further difficulties in the workplace.
Case study 8: Supporting employees in the workplace – Managing performance

An employee with dyslexia, working in a public sector organisation, described how she worked with her line manager to resolve issues with performing her work to the best of her ability.

The employee always used the spell check on her desktop to double check her written work. She also changed the background in her desktop from white to yellow to make it easier for her to read text. One of the employee’s colleagues left and because of the public sector recruitment moratorium, a new person could not be hired. The employee’s work tasks increased and she began to miss project deadlines. She also received feedback that the quality of her written work was poor, with frequent misspellings and poor structure. After a month, the employee decided that she needed to have a conversation with her manager.

She met with her line manager, disclosed that she was dyslexic, and informed her line manager about how she managed her dyslexia. The employee explained that she had not disclosed her disability in the workplace because it had never affected her work. However, the additional work tasks and stress in her job was making it difficult for her to manage her dyslexia. She wanted to discuss how she could resolve this situation with her line manager.

The manager appreciated the employee’s initiative in coming to her and asked if the employee had suggestions about any supports that would assist her. The employee asked if it was possible for the organisation to get speech to text software. The employee could hear what she has written which would help her to spot any mistakes with her work. The employee and her manager agreed that they would speak to the Disability Liaison Officer about getting this software. The employee also asked that the manager and the Disability Liaison Officer would not tell other colleagues about her dyslexia. The manager and the Disability Liaison Officer agreed with this request.

The employee received the software. As the employee has her own office, her colleagues were unaware of the software used and did not know that she was dyslexic. The manager also suggested that the employee may benefit from attending a time management course and the employee agreed.

The employee is now able to perform her job to the best of her ability and the quality of her work has improved.
6.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings from the research, RSM PACEC has made the following recommendations:

- It is recommended that Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, as part of its role of guiding on HR matters in the public service, encourages the public sector to follow the NDA guidelines on supporting people with disabilities in the workplace. They could implement the models of good practice, outlined in this report, as part of their strategy to ensure that by 2024, a minimum of 6% of employees in the public sector are people with disabilities.

- Line managers and HR Departments play a pivotal role in supporting employees with and without disabilities who are absent from work for long periods of time, who are frequently late for work or who are having issues with their work performance. It is recommended that management throughout the public sector receive appropriate training in how to manage and support employees with different capacities and needs who are experiencing difficulties in the workplace.

- Public sector organisations should ensure that their employees are aware of all the supports that are available to them in relation to managing and improving their work performance.
Chapter 7: Employee retention

7.1. Definition of the theme
70% of employees will acquire a disability during their working life.\textsuperscript{56} The most common forms of acquired disabilities are musculo-skeletal problems such as back pain, and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Retaining experienced and skilled staff saves organisations the cost of hiring and training a temporary or a new employee, and makes good business sense.

7.2. Key components of employee retention
The literature suggests that organisations should have clear retention policies and procedures that are communicated to all employees, particularly during the induction process. A review of the Part 5 reports (2006-2016) and the findings from the research from the consultation process showed that public bodies have policies in place to retain employees who are on long-term absence from the workplace and/or who acquire a disability.

Retention policies and processes should include the following simple steps:\textsuperscript{57}

**Line manager training**
The literature notes that line managers play a key role in the employee retention process. They require training to equip them with the skills and knowledge to:

- support employees with existing and acquired disabilities while they are absent from the workplace due to illness or other reasons
- work with employees and help them plan their return to work
- assist employees integrate into the workplace when they return to work
- support employees to remain in work

**Findings from the Research**
Across the different strands of the research, participants and respondents stated that line managers played an important part in the retention process. However there was no evidence that they were provided with training to prepare them to help employees to return and remain in work.

**Maintaining regular contact**
The literature suggests that regular, supportive contact with an employee, while they are absent for an extended period of time from the workplace, can assist them in

\textsuperscript{57}NDA (2008) Effective Leadership and Organisational Culture for the Recruitment and Retention of People with Disabilities in the Irish Public Sector: Disability Research Series 10
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returning to work.58 59 This practice is incorporated into many organisations’ absence management policies mentioned in Chapter 6.

Findings from the Research
Interviewees and focus group participants expressed the view that maintaining supportive contact with an employee who is on long-term absence from work is key. One participant gave an example of an employee in their organisation who was absent from work on sick leave for 8 weeks. The employee agreed with their employer that they would be contacted every 3 weeks by their employer via phone and email. Participants stated that this model of practice was very important as employees felt supported and it was seen as facilitating a successful return from sick leave. However, there were varying opinions on its effectiveness. It was suggested that employers needed to do more to maintain contact with employees who are absent from the workplace to help them transition slowly back to the workplace.

Return to work assessment
The literature recommends the following process as best practice in determining if an employee is fit to return to work:

- An occupational health professional will carry out an assessment to determine if the employee is fit to return to work.
- As part of this assessment, the employee will need a detailed job description/job task analysis, from their line manager, that breaks down each job into separate physical tasks and describes the skills and capabilities required to do the work.
- The occupational health professional will determine if the employee is fit to return to their existing job and what accommodations they may require to return to work.
- In certain cases the employee may not have the capacity to return to their existing job, so the employee and the occupational health professional will need to have a discussion with the HR manager about the type of tasks that the employee can do.
- When an occupational health professional has determined that an employee is fit to return to work, they will provide a written report to the employee’s line manager and the organisation’s HR Department. The employee and their line manager then need to discuss when the employee will return to work.

Return to work plan and reasonable accommodations
The literature suggests that the employee, their line manager and the relevant HR personnel develop a return to work plan. This is based on an assessment of the employee’s fitness to return to work over an agreed period of time. The

59 Employer Disability Information – What and Employer should know about acquired disability
occupational health professional and the organisation’s medical advisors may also be involved in the development of this plan.

The plan could include any reasonable accommodations the employee requires to help them return to work. These accommodations should be in place before the employee returns to work. The return to work plan would also state:

- The date the employee is returning to work
- The hours they will be working
- The supports the employee will need and how these will be provided
- The duties the employee will do when they initially return and over the following weeks and months as they gradually recover
- Details of contact (for example weekly meetings) between the employee and their line manager. These meetings address the employee’s progress and any issues the employee may have on returning to work. They also provide an opportunity for the employee’s work performance to be evaluated and the effectiveness of any supports to be assessed. At a minimum, a review of progress and supports should take place every six months.\(^{60}\) \(^{61}\)

The literature review recommends that the line manager provides a confidential copy of the review to the HR Department and the Disability Liaison Officer. A review may show that the employee may no longer need all of the reasonable accommodations or they may need new/different accommodations. \(^{62}\) \(^{63}\)

**Findings from the Research**

Across the research strands, there was some evidence of public bodies providing employees with appropriate return to work plans and accommodations. One employee noted:

“my line management were very clear in that ‘you’re here one day a week, we want you to do one day’s work, delegate things, we have the resources [and] it can be taken care of’. From my perspective, it was hugely beneficial, and it reduced the associated stress that can be linked in with the return to work after a long period of illness”

After a period of time (12 months), if the employee can no longer perform their job to the best of their ability, they have a meeting with their line manager to review the situation and to discuss positions that would be suitable for them. They are then provided with any necessary training they may require for the new position.

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\(^{60}\) NDA (2015) Retaining employees who acquire a disability: A guide for employers

\(^{61}\) Employer Disability Information – What and Employer should know about acquired disability

\(^{62}\) NDA (2015) Retaining employees who acquire a disability: A guide for employers

\(^{63}\) Dublin City Council (2011) “Work without limits”
A number of participants in the focus groups and survey respondents stated that managers in their organisations used return to work plans.

In the online survey, 49% of employees with a disability and 45% of those without disabilities felt the supports in place in their organisation used to retain employees who acquired disabilities worked.

**Return to work interview**
The literature identifies that the return to work interview is strongly associated with reduced levels of absence, and suggests that it is good practice to have return to work interviews for all employees who have been absent from the workplace for any duration. It provides the line manager with the opportunity to deal with any difficulties that the employee may have. Return to work interviews should take place on the first day an employee returns to work.\(^6^4\)

**Findings from the Research**
A number of public bodies reported having a system for return to work interviews in place. It was noted by participants in the focus groups that a return to work interview is required by the Irish Civil Service, after every instance of long-term sick leave (i.e. in excess of 4 weeks).

**Phased return to work**
The literature proposes that any option to return to work on a part-time basis (partial resumption of duties) or job sharing\(^6^5\) could be agreed with the employee before they return to work.\(^6^6\)

**Findings from the Research**
None of the public bodies in the Part 5 reports mentioned that they implemented phased returns to work in their retention processes. There was very little evidence of this in the data from the consultation process either.

It was noted in the focus groups that a phased return to work was available in the Civil Service following a fitness-to-work assessment, and letter from the Chief Medical Officer recommending that the employee return to work on a gradual basis. Thereafter, the HR Department provided an option for reduced hours, varying from one day or a couple of days per week, increasing to 5 days over a 4 to 6-week period (depending on the type of disability) in the Civil Service.

In the public service an employee’s return to work can span a 3 month period. In relation to the timeframe, one participant in the focus groups stated that they are guided by medical opinion as to what was appropriate for the employee.

\(^{6^4}\) NDA (2015) Retaining employees who acquire a disability: A guide for employers
\(^{6^5}\) Presentation by Browne, Carmel INTO Equality Conference 2013: Mental Health and Teaching
\(^{6^6}\) Employer Disability Information – What and Employer should know about acquired disability
Partial re-deployment and redeployment
An employee could return to work, and after a period of time, be able to do some but not all of the tasks they used to do. The literature suggests that employers could offer employees partial redeployment whereby an employee continues to do part of their original job (either part-time or with the addition of new tasks) and stops doing certain tasks. In this situation, retraining may be required to facilitate redeployment.67

Alternatively an employee may be unable to perform their previous job, but could carry out other functions within the organisation. These employees could be re-trained and re-deployed into another role or division. In these situations, it is important that the employee’s line manager and the HR Department liaise with the relevant trade unions to facilitate this process.68 69

Findings from the Research
There was some evidence across the different strands of research, that public bodies support partial redeployment and redeployment if an employee requires this.

Case Study 9: Employee retention
An employee worked in a Senior Management role in an organisation. The employee began to lose his hearing. As the employee’s role involved attending meetings and speaking to people on the phone, he began to find it increasingly difficult to perform his job to the best of his ability.

In order to support the employee and others in similar situations the public body provided him with:

- Loop Systems installed and acoustic panels fitted to rooms
- Assistive Technologies

The employee’s hearing continued to deteriorate. He was offered a cochlear implant by Beaumont Hospital. Following the operation, the employee took two months off to recover and adjust to his implant. His employer maintained supportive contact with him while he was out of work. This contact facilitated his return to work.

The employee enjoys his work and is able to perform his role to the best of his ability.

67 Citizen’s Information Board. Working with a Disability
68 Citizen’s Information Board. Working with a Disability
7.3. **Recommendations**

Based on the findings from the research, RSM PACEC has made the following recommendations:

- There does not appear to be a consistent approach to retaining employees with existing or acquired disabilities in the public sector. It would be helpful to capture data on how many employees with disabilities have been retained and/or supported to return to work in the public sector.

- Line managers and HR Departments play a key role in retaining employees. There is little evidence as to whether the type of training line managers receive actually equips them with the skills to provide this level of support to employees. It would be useful to gather more information around this.
Chapter 8: Career development and progression for employees with disabilities

8.1. Definition of the theme
It is important that employees with disabilities are aware that their skills and capacities are valued by their employers and that they will be considered for promotions. Employees with disabilities are more likely to stay with an organisation if they know they can progress their careers.

Organisations should have clear processes in place that support employees with disabilities to develop their careers.\(^7^0\) It is important that all these approaches are disability proofed.\(^7^1\)

8.2. Key components of Career Progression
The literature review identified the following essential components in relation to career progression for people with disabilities:

Job Mobility/Career Progression Policies
A number of studies suggest that organisations should have job mobility/career progression policies in place for all staff, including employees with disabilities. These policies should be disability proofed, monitored and evaluated on an annual basis. The policies state that for vacancies, all external candidates, with and without disabilities, and existing employees, will be considered for promotions if they have the necessary skills and qualifications.\(^7^2\) In practice this means that people, including people with disabilities, applying for positions within their organisation, or for vacancies in another organisation are aware that career progression is an option for the future.

Employees with disabilities are sometimes concerned that requiring reasonable accommodations may prevent them from getting a promotion. Job Mobility and Career Progression policies state that the organisation provides necessary reasonable accommodations to all employees including Senior Management.\(^7^3\)

Findings from the Research
The analysis of the Part 5 reports (2006 to 2016) and the data from the consultation processes did not yield any evidence that public bodies used job mobility/career progression policies to support employees with a disability. This may not mean that these public bodies do not have these measures in place, but they have not reported on same under the Part 5 process.

\(^7^0\) NDA (2008) Effective Leadership and Organisational Culture for the Recruitment and Retention of People with Disabilities in the Irish Public Sector: Disability Research Series 10
\(^7^1\) IBEC/ ICTU (2004) Workway Disability and Employment Guidelines
\(^7^2\) Partnership Steering Committee: Disability Issues Sub-Group (2003) An Enabling Environment
\(^7^3\) The Equality Authority and The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform Disability Resource Pack: Positive Action for the Recruitment and Retention of People with Disabilities in the State Sector (2014)
Career Development Processes
The literature recommends that employees with disabilities and their line managers allocate time during their meetings to identify what career development means to the employee. Line managers can help and encourage employees to identify their specific career goals and to create individual development plans to assist them in achieving these goals. They can also actively facilitate development opportunities for employees, using the following approaches:

- coaching and mentoring
- work shadowing; this is where an employee acquires new skills and experience by working in different departments or roles for specific time period
- increasing the use of secondments or transfers to ensure employees do not feel stifled in their career development
- providing employees with interview training to develop their skills and confidence.

Findings from the Research
There was no evidence from the review of the Part 5 reports that public bodies used specific measures or approaches to support career progression for employees with a disability. Public bodies appeared to be unaware of models of good practice in this area. A small number of interviewees and focus group participants referred to examples of their organisations supporting employees to progress their careers. Respondents to the surveys did not provide evidence on any specific career development process in their organisations, other than training.

Training
The literature suggests that employees with disabilities should be provided with training and opportunities to develop new skills, if they are to progress their careers in an organisation. It is recommended that where possible training is provided in a team situation so that employees with disabilities are not isolated from their colleagues. Training should be provided in accessible environments and all the training materials are in accessible formats.

Findings from the Research
A review of the Part 5 reports (2006-2016) revealed that some public bodies used the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) to identify the training and development needs of all employees, including employees with disabilities.

Several participants in the focus groups and interviews also noted that the PMDS was an effective means of identifying employees’ training and development needs and supporting career progression. 14.6% of respondents to the employer’s survey said that their organisations used PMDS to help employees with disabilities to identify their training and development needs and to progress their careers.

In certain public bodies, employees with disabilities met regularly with the Disability Liaison Officer to review their training and development needs.

Some public bodies reported that training and development opportunities are provided to all employees, including employees with disabilities. Employees with disabilities are provided with reasonable accommodations to help them participate in training.

This finding was consistent across the different strands of research. A number of participants in the interviews and focus groups stated that their organisations ensured that employees with disabilities were able to participate fully in training on an ongoing basis. One interviewee reported that their organisation had developed an inclusion checklist for all events, seminars, and conferences. The checklist covered questions on the planning of the event, the materials and presentations, and was designed to ensure that people with all types of disabilities were able to attend training events. Another interviewee stated that where an employee with a disability was not able to attend training in their organisation, they were provided with a one-to-one training session and any necessary accommodations.

45.8% of respondents to the employer’s survey stated that training and development is made available to all employees, including employees with disabilities. 81.4% felt that the training and development in their organisations helped employees with disabilities to progress their careers.

In relation to the employee’s survey, 75.7% of respondents with a disability reported that their employers provided training that helped them progress their careers.

**Performance Review**

Performance Reviews capture how employees are performing and developing within an organisation. Performance Reviews can also identify areas where employees may require developmental opportunities, training or additional supports.

The findings from the literature review recommended that all organisations should have a robust performance management culture, with regular formal reviews of employees’ performance every 6 months, and regular informal opportunities for employees to obtain feedback from their colleagues and line managers.77

As part of the performance review process employers could:

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• ensure they are sufficiently aware of the relevant issues to effectively conduct a performance review with an employee with a disability

• seek advice from relevant support agencies to assist in the assessment process

• set goals relative to the job description and ensure these are understood and agreed with the employee

• engage in constructive, positive discussions where targets have not been achieved

• review the accommodations in place and seek comments or feedback from co-workers if they are involved in the support of an employee with a disability

Findings from the Research
A number of public bodies identified in their Part 5 reports that they used the PMDS to review work performance. In some cases, employees with disabilities met regularly with the Disability Liaison Officer to discuss their work performance.

There was little or no evidence that public bodies encourage employees with disabilities to apply for promotion or to take on additional tasks and expand their existing role.

One interviewee reported that their Department is researching the type of careers that employees with disabilities are in, and investigating the most effective way to promote these employees into careers of their choosing and/or into more senior roles.

A number of interviewees and focus group participants referred to examples of career progression in their organisations. One participant gave an example of an employee with a disability who was promoted to a position that required travel to other parts of the country. This employee was provided with an administrative assistant who travelled with them and provided them with any necessary supports.

One quarter of employees in the focus groups reported that they felt they could not progress to higher levels in their organisations, because of their disabilities.

78.9% of respondents to the employer’s survey stated that the use of PMDS in their organisation, and the training provided by their organisations was effective as employees with disabilities have been promoted or supported to prepare for promotional opportunities.

Case Study 10: Career Progression

An employee with mental health issues was employed by a public body as a Communications Officer. When she accepted the job, she did not disclose her disability, as she did not think it would impact her work performance. The employee successfully completed her first year of probation. She had an excellent attendance record and made significant contributions to several high profile projects that had increased the organisation’s public profile. As a result of her performance, she was made permanent in the position.

The employee continued to perform well in her position and her supervisor encouraged her to apply for a more senior position that had been advertised. This position would involve a lot more responsibility but also more pressure. The employee was concerned that the added stress could impact on her mental health; however she wanted to apply for the position.

She met with the organisation’s Disability Liaison Officer, disclosed her disability and explained that she would like to apply for the position. The Disability Liaison Officer encouraged the employee to apply. She assured the employee that she would be provided with every support by the organisation. The Disability Liaison Officer advised the employee that she should disclose her disability to her supervisor and that the Officer would accompany her to the meeting if the employee wished.

The employee decided to meet with her supervisor by herself. The supervisor acknowledged that the employee had an excellent work and attendance record and had a very good work reputation. The supervisor encouraged the employee to apply for the promotion and acted as one of her referees.

The employee applied for the promotion and disclosed that she had a mental health issue, which had never interfered with her work. The employee received the promotion based on her work performance.
8.3. Recommendations
Based on the findings from the research, RSM PACEC has made the following recommendations:

- The models of good practice in career progression, identified in the literature review, could be implemented, monitored and evaluated throughout the public sector. Supporting employees with disabilities to progress in their careers dovetails with the Government’s commitment to ensure that a minimum of 6% of people with disabilities will be employed in the public sector by 2024.
Chapter 9: Conclusions

The research concludes that overall the public sector does implement a number of models of good practice in the employment of people with disabilities. These components of good practice fall primarily under the seven core themes identified in the literature review.

Based on the findings from the research, RSM PACEC has recommended that there are also a number of cross cutting measures which could be reflected on:

- Consistency of approach. There is a need to explore how consistent practice across the sector can be used to implement and evaluate good models of practice
- Capturing and maintaining accurate data in relation to the effectiveness of specific models of good practice in the employment of people with disabilities
- Providing guidance and support to HR staff to enable them to more effectively support people with disabilities as HR staff occupy a unique position as a point of contact for employees at different stages in the process - recruitment, induction, employment, performance management, leave etc.
- Increasing awareness of new and changing models of good practice

In addition, RSM PACEC suggest that there are a number of issues emerging from the literature review and the consultation process that may require further research and exploration to support better employment outcomes for people with disabilities, including:

- Identifying the type of supports public bodies will need, and the actions they could take in the coming years to reach and exceed the new target of a minimum of 6% of employees with disabilities in the public sector
- The process for reporting and measuring compliance with Part 5 of the Disability Act (2005) has been in place for some time. It would be timely to review this now, particularly to guide improved compliance in the future with the increased statutory employment target. The NDA has submitted a proposal to review this entire process later in 2018
- Establishing informal groups for employees with disabilities to share experiences, provide peer support and discuss any potential issues/solutions
- Research in the public sector to determine how often organisations provide work experience opportunities to people with disabilities; the duration of these programmes, payment arrangements, and the skills and experience that participants acquire to participate in these programmes. This information could inform future planning in relation to work experience programmes
• Consideration could be given to further exploration of effective recruitment policies and processes that drive a greater translation of work experience programmes to actual employment opportunities

• Research into how a robust and consistent process can be implemented throughout the public sector regarding the provision and evaluation of reasonable accommodations for employees. A preliminary process could be piloted and reviewed before a final process is rolled out

• A pilot study on a potential approach to retaining employees with existing and acquired disabilities in the public sector to examine the effectiveness and impact of same

• There is a need for quantitative and qualitative analysis into the length of time employees spend in their role, job turnover, and progression to higher level roles. This could provide valuable evidence in relation to career progression for employees with disabilities
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The Equality Authority and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Disability Resource Pack: Positive Action for the Recruitment and Retention of
People with Disabilities in the State Sector (2014) https://www.ihrec.ie/guides-and-
tools/human-rights-and-equality-for-employers/positive-action-in-relation-to-
disability/ (accessed November 2017)

The National Autistic Society Northern Ireland, the Department for Employment
and Learning, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and Employers for
London: NAS
Appendix A Formal Workplace Adjustment Agreement

This document template has been written by the Business Disability Forum – a general version is on their website. This one has been tailored to meet the needs of people with MS.

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The ‘workplace adjustment agreement’ is a living record of reasonable adjustments agreed between a disabled employee and their line manager.

The purpose of this agreement is to:

(iii) ensure that both parties, the individual and the employer, have an accurate record of what has been agreed.

(iv) minimise the need to renegotiate reasonable adjustments every time the employee changes jobs, is relocated or assigned a new manager within the organisation.

(v) provide employees and their line managers with the basis for discussions about reasonable adjustments at future meetings

This is a live document and should be reviewed regularly by both the employee and manager and amended as appropriate.

Remember, however, that expert advice from third parties, such as occupational health advisers, Access to Work or IT specialists may be needed before changes can be agreed and implemented.

New managers of employees with such ‘workplace adjustment agreements’ should accept the adjustments outlined in the agreement as reasonable and ensure that they continue to be implemented.

The agreement may need to be reviewed and amended at a later date but this should not happen until both parties have worked together for a reasonable period of time.

The agreement allows you, as the employee, to:

(vi) explain the impact of your disability on you at work.

(vii) suggest adjustments that will make it easier for you to do your job.
offer further information from your doctor, specialist or other expert
request an assessment by occupational health, Access to Work or another expert
review the effectiveness of the adjustments agreed.
explain any change in your circumstances.
be reassured that your manager knows what to do if you become unwell at work and who to contact if necessary.
know how and when your manager will keep in touch with you if you are absent from work because of illness or a disability related reason

The agreement allows the line manager to:
understand how a particular employee’s disability affects them at work
explain the needs of the business or organisation
explain the organisation’s attendance and reasonable adjustment policy
recognise signs that an employee might be unwell and know what the employee wants you to do in these circumstances including who to contact for help
know how and when to stay in touch if the employee is off sick
consider whether or not the employee needs to be referred for an assessment by an occupational health or another adviser to help both parties understand what adjustments are needed
review the effectiveness of the adjustments already agreed
explain any change in the employer’s circumstances

Workplace adjustment agreement
This is a record of the reasonable adjustments agreed between [employee’s name] and [line manager name]

It also outlines what to do in the event of [employee’s name] being on sick leave for more than [x] days.

This agreement may be reviewed and amended as necessary with the agreement of both parties:

At any regular one-to-one meeting.
At a return to work meeting following a period of sickness absence.
At six monthly and/or annual appraisals.
Before a change of job or duties or introduction of new technology or ways of working.
Before or after any change in circumstances for either party.
Employee
My disability in the workplace

| My MS currently causes the following issues in my work – list problems if any or leave blank (for example, I am exhausted after travelling to work on public transport) |
|---|---|---|
| I need the following agreed reasonable adjustments (refer to Access to Work agreement if relevant) | Date budget holder contacted, if relevant | Date implemented: |

I will let you know if I have a relapse or if there are changes to my condition which have an effect on my work and/or if the agreed adjustments are not working. We will then meet privately to discuss any further reasonable adjustments or changes that should be made.
If you notice a change in my performance at work or feel these reasonable adjustments are not working, I would be happy to meet you privately to discuss what needs to be done.

Emergency contacts
If I am not well enough to be at work, I am happy for my line manager to contact either of the following emergency contacts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GP/ MS nurse</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative/ other</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Line manager
Keeping in touch
If you are absent from work on sick leave for more than [x] days and have followed the usual procedures for notifying the organisation of your absence, I will keep in contact with you in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who will contact whom?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How will contact be made? (email, telephone, text, letter)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often? (daily, weekly, monthly)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When? (preferred day, preferred time)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conversations while you are on sick leave
These are the topics we have agreed we will discuss while you are absent, for example:

- How you are feeling,
- What I can do to help,
- Current work,
- Planned phased return to work,
Return to work
When you are ready to return to work after a period of sickness absence of more than [x] days we will meet to review this agreement and make any necessary amendments.

At this return to work meeting we will also discuss:

For example:

- Current work issues.
- A phased return/back to work plan.
- What to tell the team.
- Assessments to review existing reasonable adjustments (Access to Work, GP, occupational health) and identify new adjustments that might be needed etc.

Unauthorised absences from work
If you are absent from work and have not followed usual procedures for notifying us that you are sick or absent for a reason relating to your disability, we have agreed that I will do the following:

For example:

- Try to contact you on your mobile and/or notify your emergency contact whose up to date details are as follows:

An up to date copy of this form will be retained by myself/ line manager/ HR.

A copy of this form may also be given to a new or prospective line manager with the prior consent of the employee.

Employee signature:

Date:

Employer signature:

Date:
Appendix B – Topic Guides – Focus Groups

Employers Topic Guide

• How supportive do you think your organisation is about employing people with disabilities?
• Does your organisation provide all employees with training in disability competence?
• How does your organisation support employees to disclose their disability?
• How supportive do you think your organisation is in helping an employee with a disability to disclose their status?
• What process does your organisation have in place to recruit people with disabilities, for example, work experience as a means of recruiting people with disabilities
• Do these processes work? If yes why? /if not why not?
• How could these processes be improved?
• What processes does your organisation have in place to support people with disabilities to become permanent employees?
• Do these processes work? If yes why? If not why not?
• How could these processes be improved?
• What processes does your organisation have to provide reasonable accommodations to an employee with a disability?
• Do these processes work? If yes why? If not why not?
• Can you give examples of the types of accommodations your organisation provides for an employee with a disability? (Depending on the response maybe you could unpack this further and see if they can describe reasonable accommodations they provide to an employee with mental health issues, an employee with aspergers syndrome etc.)
• How could these processes be improved?
• What processes does your organisation have to solve the following issues:
  • Frequent absences
  • Frequently late for work
  • Difficulties managing workload
  • Performance management
• Do these processes work? If yes why? If not why not?
• How could these processes be improved?
• What processes does your organisation have in place to support employees who have acquired a disability to return to work?
• Do these processes work? If yes why? If not why not?
• How could these processes be improved?
• What training and development does your organisation provide to employees with disabilities?
• Do these processes work? If yes why? If not why not?
• How could these processes be improved?
• What process does your organisation have in place to promote employees with disabilities?
• Do these processes work? If yes why? If not why not?
• How could these processes be improved?
• Are there any other examples of good practice that your organisation has in place to support the employment of people with disabilities?
• Are there any practices that you think your organisation should implement?

Employees Topic Guide

• How supportive do you think your organisation is about employing people with disabilities?
• Does your organisation provide all employees with training in disability competence?
• Do you know of any employee who has disclosed a disability?
• What was their experience?
• If you had a disability would you disclose it to your employer? If yes why? If no why not?
• How supportive is your organisation in helping an employee with a disability to disclose their status?
• How do you think these supports could be improved?
• Does your organisation recruit people with disabilities?
• How does it do this?
• Do their processes work?
• Could these processes be improved?
• How does your organisation support with disabilities to become permanent employees?
• Do these processes work? If yes why? If not why not?
• Could these processes be improved?
• Does your organisation provide reasonable accommodations to an employee with a disability? Can you give examples?
• Do these processes work? If yes why? If not why not?
• Could these processes be improved?
• How does your organisation deal with the following issues:
  • Frequent absences
  • Frequently late for work
  • Difficulties managing workload
  • Performance management
• Do these processes work? If yes why? If not why not?
• Could these processes be improved?
• Does your organisation support employees who have acquired a disability to return to work?
  • How does it do this?
• Do these processes work? If yes why? If not why not?
• Could these processes be improved?
• What training and development does your organisation provide to employees with disabilities?
• Do these processes work? If yes why? If not why not?
• Could these processes be improved?
• Does your organisation promote employees with disabilities?
• Do these processes work? If yes why? If not why not?
• Could these processes be improved?
• Do you know of any other examples of good practice in your organisation that support the employment of people with disabilities?