**Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2019:**

**NDA Year-end Review**

July 2020



# Background and Introduction

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024 (CES) has entered into its second 3 year action phase. This period of activity covers the 2019 to 2021 timeframe and has a focus on strengthening progress made in the foundation phase. The action plan supporting this timeframe was published on, International Day[[1]](#footnote-2) of Persons with Disabilities 2019.

This paper sets out the National Disability Authority’s (NDA) independent assessment of CES in the context of developments during 2019, essentially reviewing progress on actions committed by departments and relevant agencies for delivery during 2019. A key focus of activity in 2019 was of the work to finalise and publish the 2019 to 2021 three year action plan, and NDA welcomes this new guide for departments and agencies to implement the goals of the overarching CES. The process to develop and agree this new 3 year action plan took longer than originally anticipated, and so the usual traffic light reports were not produced before year end.

The NDA has therefore decided to structure this independent assessment for 2019 around the strategic priority areas within the CES and consider relevant activity over the year within each of those areas, noting that this will not always be aligned to a specific action articulated within the plan. The paper also incorporates NDA knowledge and awareness of the landscape from a range of sources, including:

* Presentations and discussion by members of CES Implementation Group at meetings under the 2019 themes as advised by NDA and co-ordinated by DJE, which allowed the CES IG to engage with departments/agencies on key issues;
* NDA awareness of relevant issues and priorities through its ongoing membership and input to departmental Disability Consultative Committees (DCC);
* NDA analysis of data on the experience of people with disabilities, including a specific focus on employment-related data in 2019;
* NDA advice and support of departments and agencies on specific CES actions including work with Enterprise Ireland on entrepreneurship, IDA Ireland on activity with FDI organisations, Solas on its on-going work to capture data to develop a picture on the needs of learners with disabilities etc.;
* Delivery of NDA commitments such as research on current practice with regard to provision of reasonable accommodations, on-going support for the cross-departmental working group considering implementation of the agreed 5.1 policy, input to Solas on their Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy for the period 2020 -2024 including guidance on a Universal Design Approach to that sector etc.;
* Bilateral engagements with departments to advise and highlight their role in relation to UNCRPD commitments relevant to employment.

# Key Facts and Figures

In its work to analyse and present key statistics in relation to employment, the NDA advises:

* The gap between persons with a disability and persons without a disability in employment remains steady (36.5% vs 72.8% for persons aged 20 to 64 years). This is one of the widest gaps in Europe, and progress in closing it has been slower than hoped.
* People with disabilities are still exiting school earlier than their non-disabled counterparts.
* The number of young people with disability failing to engage with further education and training or employment requires attention, and therefore addressing engagement before age 21 is key.
* While some people with disabilities have some work history, in the majority of cases that connection to work can be more than 10 years ago.

Some of the relevant and recent data analysis is set out below.

## The difference in employment profile of people with and without disabilities

The following Graph illustrates the low employment rates continuing to affect people with disabilities[[2]](#footnote-3).



The information highlights the fact that about three quarters of people of working age with disabilities have experienced its onset in the course of working life. Many of those affected cease employment within a fairly short time.[[3]](#footnote-4) One study showed employment rates of people with disabilities dropped from 60% to 40% following onset of disability, in other words a drop in employment rates of a third[[4]](#footnote-5).

## Solas Skills and Labour Market Research Unit

The CSO data highlighted above is now complimented by other sources of information that have been developed arising out of the focus brought by work under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy. For example, to better understand the experience of learners with disabilities Solas established in 2018 data gathering processes to capture information about learners with disabilities. The Solas’ Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) collated and published a report on the numbers of people with disabilities involved in further education and training (FET)[[5]](#footnote-6). This report shows that during 2018, 8644 people who declared a disability were involved in Further Education and Training. The majority of learners were 25 years of age or older. This points to the importance of FET provision for those who may need to return to education in order to retain employment or further their employment goals. However, the data collated by Solas also shows that early school leaving remains an issue, as 2,329 learners with disabilities said that their highest level of formal education is primary education or below, and for 2,178 their highest level of formal education is lower secondary. Approximately 55.3% percent of the learners had lower secondary or a lower level education attained prior to joining further education and training. This data mirrors the results of the survey of Disability Allowance recipients, conducted in 2015.

## The Inactive Working Age Population: A Comparison of Cohort Links to the Labour Market[[6]](#footnote-7)

In October 2019 the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) unit produced a paper examining the inactive working age population. One of the groups examined was those with a disability. This study found that a high proportion of people with a disability who are inactive have previous work experience (75%), although for about half of them (52%) the work experience was from over 10 years ten years ago. This means that a third of people with a disability who are counted as inactive have been employed in the last ten years (48% of 75%). The disabled inactive population had relatively lower levels of education (52% lower primary/secondary) and predominantly worked in occupations which are likely to require a physical aspect to the work (55% in skilled trade, operatives and elementary). This means that they may be physically unable to resume their previous work or that income replacement means that it is financially unattractive.

## Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEETS)

NEET is the term used in research and policy in relation to a young person usually aged 16 to 24 who is "Not in Education, Employment, or Training". Therefore a person who has NEET status can be either unemployed or inactive and not involved in education or training. Young people who are neither in employment nor in education or training are at greater risk of becoming socially excluded and at a greater risk of poverty than their non-disabled counterparts, and may lack the skills necessary to improve their economic situation without further supports. Studies have shown that the length of time spent NEET can have a detrimental effect on physical and mental health, and increase the likelihood of unemployment, low wages, or low quality of work later on in life.[[7]](#footnote-8) UK research shows that by age 21, young people who have been NEET for six months or more are more likely than their peers to be unemployed, earn less, receive no training, have a criminal record, suffer from poor health and depression[[8]](#footnote-9). NDA advises that together with FET, the provision of options such as internships, work placements are important mechanisms of ensuring young people do not become NEET and looks forward to seeing actions in these areas advanced under the second three-year action plan of the CES.

## HSE funded Rehabilitative Training Data

Rehabilitative training is a training programme of two years duration (that can be extended for up to 4 years in very exceptional circumstances). It is provided by the HSE under the remit of New Directions Policy. Rehabilitative Training focuses on the development of the participants’ life skills, social skills and basic work skills, thereby enabling progression to greater levels of independence and inclusion in their own community. HSE data for 2019 revealed the following outcomes.[[9]](#footnote-10)

**Overall outcomes**

* 51% of RT leavers continued to avail of HSE funded Adult Day Services. This is a significant increase in comparison to 2018 data at 39%.
* 9% progressed to employment and 17% progressed to further training and education.
* A further 9% exited RT with positive life outcome.
* 15% dropped out of training, became ill or exited with no recorded positive outcome.

**Outcome for those under age 25**

* 515 people aged 25 and under exited RT in 2019. The majority of these young adults,
* 57%, continued to access HSE funded day services.
* 21% moved to mainstream education and training programmes and
* 5% had obtained employment when exiting RT.

The NDA recommend the HSE examine data on the large cohort of people for whom there is no information as it is difficult to draw conclusions on how effective RT is as a programme. It would be useful to understand both the destination and the characteristics of that group. At presented we know the destination into employment is determined by age and dependent upon the availability of opportunities within the service users local area.

The data discussed above provides evidence of the challenges that persist for people with disabilities in obtaining skills and work. To ensure employment becomes a reality for those people with disabilities wishing to work, the NDA advises the importance of this next phase under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy in advancing activity under each of the six strategic pillars, in order to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

The NDA advises that the range of actions committed within each of the six strategic priorities can provide a systematic response to addressing the gaps and challenges that persist for people with disabilities wishing to access and maintain work, but notes that there have been some delays and challenges in the implementation of certain aspects of the Strategy. This assessment paper will outline some of these issues in further detail, and in particular will examine those strategic priorities areas to establish:

* What was achieved in 2019?
* What was well advanced?
* What requires renewed focus?
* What the NDA believe is necessary in 2020 to keep CES on track?

# 2019 CES Activity Strategic Priorities (SP) 1- 6

This section of the paper will consider progress made by departments and or agencies during 2019 on specific actions. The actions assessed are described in the final action plan 2019 to 2020 as either started, developed or for completion in 2019.

For the purposes of this assessment paper the format for 2019 is to make the assessment under each of the six strategic priority (SP) areas identified within the Strategy.

## SP1 Build skills, capacity and independence

This pillar of CES activity focuses on addressing gaps in education that may have existed for people with disabilities in order to ensure they have access to the necessary skills, qualifications, and training to be in a position to access employment. NDA advises that a number of areas will require further focus in order to achieve this goal, including:

### Raising achievement raises employment

Only a minority of respondents to the 2015 survey of Disability Allowance recipients[[10]](#footnote-11) reported educational attainment beyond junior secondary education (Junior/Inter/Group Certificate) or special school. The Solas review of educational attainment of students with disabilities involved in Further Education and Training in 2018 demonstrated a similar pattern. There are actions committed within the second three-year action plan to address this gap between learners with disabilities and those without. These include:

* Actions specifically aimed at developing the education, skills, competence and independence of people with disabilities
* Actions aimed at fostering positive expectations around the potential of people with disabilities, both among educators and family members.

### Planning ahead in the school years

Putting employment on the agenda for young people with disabilities during their school years has a positive impact on longer-term employment prospects. Evidence shows that a focus on employment and career planning needs to start as early as age 13, or the first year of post-primary school, rather than leaving it to the last year or two of school life as is typical at present.

### Work experience

The more exposure young people have to paid employment the higher the chance of future employment. Research evidence shows that young people with disabilities who take part in work experience during their school years, and in particular, paid work, have a significantly higher employment rate.[[11]](#footnote-12) This has implications for provision of Transition Year and other work-placement initiatives within the education system.

NDA welcomes progress on a number of initiatives relevant to these issues during 2019:

### Transition planning in early years

The ‘First 5, the Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families’ (2019-2028) was published by DCYA together with a First 5 Implementation Plan covering the period 2019-2021. Objective 9 of First 5 states that ‘children will be supported in their transitions to (and through) Early Learning Childcare (ELC) settings and onwards to primary schooling’.

The NDA advises that this objective offers an important opportunity to begin to address raising expectations and planning for children’s futures. The NDA looks forward to First 5 delivering measures to improve transitions from early year’s settings to primary education, noting that this can inform approaches for raising expectations and managing transitions across the education cycle for individuals with disabilities. NDA advises the importance of consideration of:

* Measures to strengthen the exchange of information, involve children and parents, and develop strong partnerships between ELC settings and primary schools to support transitions, so that children with disabilities can transition to primary school with their peers, thereby maximising the opportunity to access mainstream education;
* How continuity in curriculum and pedagogy across ELC settings and the early years of primary school can be used to facilitate a seamless transition from ELC to primary school;
* Showcasing good practice that ensures a seamless transition from ELC to primary school, in order to provide learning for other stages of the educational journey.

### Enhancing participation in education

NDA notes the commencement of a new School Inclusion Model, which aims to build a school’s capacity to include children with additional needs and to provide relevant supports in a single mainstream setting[[12]](#footnote-13). With the new School Inclusion model the Department of Education and Skill and the NCSE is testing ways to achieve better education and life outcomes for all children, including those with special needs. This Model will provide new evidence regarding the progressive realisation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities especially article 24 the right to education. As lessons for the overall provision of education and health supports will be gathered from examining a number of key features:

* A new frontloading allocation model for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs);
* A profiling system for Special Education Teaching to allocate resources, breaking the link with the need for an assessment;
* An appeals mechanism to deal with exceptional cases in schools;
* Expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to provide more intensive support where required;
* Recruitment of additional psychologists to give greater access to the full range of in-school supports for students with complex educational needs.

In addition to the above, SNAs will be offered a new National Training Programme. It will be designed to equip them with the skills and knowledge to support students with additional care needs arising from significant medical, physical, emotional/behavioural, sensory, communication and other significant difficulties that hinder participating in school life.

While noting the opportunity to test a new school inclusion model the NDA emphasises that any new training programme needs to also address the means of supporting students to develop independence and resilience. This would include the manner of delivery and provision of a national nursing service for children with complex medical needs in schools. Overall the NDA welcome that this initiative allows children with complex needs to receive nursing care and remain connected to education and school and will reduce the time children will spend away from school due to travel to appointments. This in turn will help to sustain links to school for children with complex health needs.

The lessons from this new school inclusion model will take time to establish and to fully implement. The NDA advises that this entire project has significant learning across the system for children, parents, educators and multidisciplinary professionals. A welcome development is the cross agency planning group established to develop the scope and implementation of the scheme, which to date includes DES, DCYA, DoH HSE and the NCSE. This is useful model of cross-departmental collaboration that would be relevant across the 6 strategic priorities of the CES.

Also relevant to the area of raising expectations and educational attainment, the NCSE published a progress report on **Policy Advice on Special Schools and Classes** in November 2019. A public consultation was launched shortly thereafter and ran until January 2020. The policy advice is due for submission to the Minister for Education and Skills by the end of June 2020.

This policy advice will provide future direction on the role of special schools and special classes and while in its initial stages of development, the key role of fostering positive expectations around work and providing access to work experience and career guidance for children with special educational needs is captured. NDA has previously noted that the fact that special schools are designated as primary schools has implications for learners with disabilities (and thereby their preparedness for employment) across a range of areas, including:

* access to the curriculum and, as a consequence, school-leaving qualifications
* access to transition year and therefore, work experience opportunities
* Access to career guidance and therefore, knowledge of and expectations around post-school options.

### Transition Planning and Career Guidance

The NDA also welcomes the work being commenced by NCSE and HSE in 2019 to consider transition arrangements between HSE funded services and education, and vice versa. We particularly note the importance of the planned expansion of this work to incorporate wider transition arrangements, e.g. between secondary school and higher/further education and/or employment. NDA notes the plans for SOLAS, ETBI and others to join the steering group and recognises the potential of this action to provide more effective post school options for young people with high support needs to access training and support rather than a direct route to Adult Day Services. The agreed aim from this collaborative action is to pilot a transition programme in 2020 and to monitor over a two year period.

A number of actions relevant to the topic of career guidance were set out in the first three-year action plan of the CES. Previously, NDA advised that these actions had not been progressed, recognising however that the implementation of the Independent Review of Career Guidance was a move on the part of DES to understand the landscape more completely. Now that the Review has been published, however, NDA advises again that there seems to have been limited progress in 2019 on actions related to

* The provision of career guidance support for students in special and mainstream education;
* Availability of transition year as an option for students with disabilities;
* Lack of a national policy approach to ensure work experience options.

The **Independent Review of Career Guidance Tools and Information**, was carried out by Indecon International Consultants on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. While the Review was entitled ‘Guidance for All’, the NDA advises this review offers limited new evidence regarding the provision of guidance counsellors allocated to special schools or mainstream school for students with disabilities. There was also little with regard to the provision of guidance for people with disabilities returning to education.

As above, the NDA notes the independent review did not address the previous commitments to deliver career guidance training and provision outlined in the 2015 – 2018 CES action plan, which were originally identified as of critical importance in advancing this Strategic Priority. NDA recognises that the work to progress the Review superseded the individual actions initially set out, but now that the Review has been completed, we advise that the original actions remain to be delivered, and recommend that they are progressed as a matter of priority within the current action plan, i.e. by 2021. The NDA recognises that, on foot of publication of the Indecon Report, an internal taskforce was established in DES with the objective of developing an implementation plan, chaired initially by the Department’s Secretary General. The NDA advises the importance of this group’s work incorporating the actions committed to in 2015, as well as developing an implementation plan to advance provision of career guidance and information across the life cycle for people with disabilities, therefore including people who wish return to education, who require upskilling or wish to achieve career progression. NDA has engaged with DES officials to suggest opportunities for learning from international good practice in this regard, and will continue to progress this option in 2020. Given the importance of this area, NDA advises that it may be useful to devote a thematic meeting of the CES IG to the issue of career guidance for persons with disabilities over the course of the coming year.

## SP2 Provide bridges and supports into work

While SP1 focuses on actions to enable persons with disabilities access the skills, qualifications and guidance required to prepare them for work, SP2 aims to assist the transition into employment. In this regard the management of effective transitions is critical, as are a range of other enabling factors such as accessible transport.

### Managing transitions from education

Research indicates that timely planning is critical to manage transitions between education and employment effectively. This includes some of the activity incorporated under SP1, e.g. raising expectations and career guidance, but should also include:

* Timely transition planning for the move from secondary school to further education;
* Transition planning from higher/further education to employment;
* Work placements and work-sampling that can bring people with disabilities closer to the labour market;
* Tools that can assist in the transition process, e.g. documented transition plans with clearly identified work goals, vocational passports outlining qualifications and skills attained etc.

NDA notes that similar to the limited progress in the provision of career guidance, is an on-going lack of information regarding increased access to and participation in working experience. Exposure to work experience can lead to paid employment and if paid employed is achieved during school years the chances of future employment also increase. For many students, work experience or placements achieved during Transition Year are a valuable step in this process, but NDA understands that many students with disabilities either cannot access Transition Year, or cannot access the work-placement modules of same. A recent survey on TY stated that Work experience is not always a compulsory part of Transition Year. The online survey showed that it was optional for 5% of students who did Transition Year[[13]](#footnote-14).

During 2020/21 the NDA advises that a focus on the access to and participation of students in work experience during transition year would be important. In the first instance it would be helpful to have further information on the numbers of students with disabilities accessing Transition Year and any associated work-experience. This data will highlight any gaps, and provide a base line for further actions to be developed. Such as developing guidance with TY coordinators on supporting students with disabilities to access and progress through TY, this guidance could then be rolled out across the system.

It will also be important to consider transition planning in the context of FET and Higher Education, as NDA notes many persons with disabilities can find the shift in the type and quantum of supports provided between the education and employment spheres a challenging experience. We also note that work-placement features in more courses of study at this level than would previously have been the case, and it will be important to understand the extent to which students with disabilities are facilitated and supported to engage in same.

### Transport

The importance of transport in the lives of persons with disabilities and the necessity for transport services that are accessible to everyone is highlighted in a series of integrated actions in this strategy. Transport continues to play a crucial role in empowering people with disabilities to participate in everyday life and the activities of their communities which includes travel to education, college and work. When the DEASP Disability Allowance survey asked recipients to list the importance of supports that helped them to achieve their employment ambitions and goal, the responses included a person’s ‘medical card’ as the most often mentionedsupport (cited by 64% of respondents), and access to transport was the fourth most mentioned support.[[14]](#footnote-15)

The NDA highlights the following progress from DTTAS a cross the range of transport actions. DTTAS have also refocused their approach to monitoring progress to ensure it is informed by user experience, to do this DTTAS issue a draft Work Programme update to members of the DTTAS Accessibility Consultative Committee (ACC) and other stakeholders such as the Irish Wheelchair Association, Chime, NCBI, Inclusion Ireland and Senior Citizens Parliament in advance of each Quarterly meeting. Progress on themed action areas is then discussed at the ACC meetings. For 2019 CES Actions, progress is as follows:

* Fare structure –This Action was achieved in October 2019, when the NTA published its “Fares Determination” for all operators providing contracted public transport services – see more information [on the National Transport Authority website.](https://www.nationaltransport.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/191120_Fares_Determination_2019_MA_-_FINAL.pdf)
* Leap Card – There was an 11% increase in Leap cards sold in 2019 and it is now the dominant means for fare paying passengers using public transport across most public transport services nationally.
* Number of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs) – The target under the CES was 12% by end 2020 and 15% by 2021. The NDA welcome the current figure of 14.7% which is above the target for 2019 and 2020 so this CES action is almost achieved a year ahead of schedule. A condition attaching to the grant scheme is that all successful applicants must complete a disability awareness training programme which is provided free of charge to the drivers by the Irish Wheelchair Association and funded by the NTA.
* Subsidy for public transport services – Public Service Obligation (PSO) subvention increased in 2017, 2018, and again in 2019. Over the 3 years PSO subvention will have increased by 37% in total. This facilitated 290 million passenger journeys on Public Service Obligation (PSO) services in 2019. This was an increase of 24m or 9% compared to 2018.
* New bus fleet – the target in this CES Action for 2019/2020, i.e. 50 new buses[[15]](#footnote-16)- has been achieved.
* Infrastructure - Accessible bus bays at bus stations/train stations: Works at Cavan, Monaghan and Drogheda stations completed. Similar works at Ballyshannon and Sligo stations commenced.  Bus Éireann commenced an Accessibility Audit on its Bus Stations.

Information tools currently undergoing development include:

**National Journey Planner**

* Transport for Ireland (TFI) website: This is a “one stop shop” for public transport information. [www.transportforireland.ie](http://www.transportforireland.ie/) and is being upgraded to include all accessibility requirements.
* Journey Planner – Step free journey: The NTA worked on developing options for a step free journey on its journey planner including acquiring accessibility data for all bus stops nationally.  All the information needed to build this feature has been gathered and in 2020 passengers will be able to know the accessibility of each bus stop and also how to plan a Step-free trip end to end.

**On Board announcements**

* Next Stop announcements project: The roll out of on–board audio and visual announcements for all 6,000 bus stops in rural and regional areas is underway – by end 2019 all stops were live in the Waterford, Sligo, Athlone, Galway and Limerick networks.
* DART Passenger Information System: Whilst all DART trains are equipped with Passenger Information Systems (PIS), 47% of the fleet is in need of upgraded PIS. Irish Rail commenced a procurement process with a view to awarding the contract in 2020 and installation on 17 x 4 car sets in 2021.

The NDA notes that in rural areas ‘car sharing’[[16]](#footnote-17) is the transport option most used by people with disabilities. NTA actions regarding this transport option include the provision of funding for 15 pilot projects where a local community provides a vehicle and volunteer drivers in 2019. Roll-out of this scheme is targeted for 2020 and managed locally by the relevant Local Link office and must have a strong accessibility focus[[17]](#footnote-18).

In the overall commitment to better accessible transport the NDA acknowledges and welcomes that since October 2019, all vehicles contracted for Local Link services must be wheelchair accessible. Accessible taxis are an important part of the mix of transport options for people with disabilities. In rural areas, licensed taxis may not operate or cover an area with hackney taxis providing the local transport service. Accessible taxis were one of the key issues identified in the "Accessibility of Public Transport for Persons with Disabilities " published by the Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport published in November 2018. In this report some persons with disabilities described the serious challenges they had experienced in getting accessible taxis. The quote below exemplifies the difficulties persons with disabilities encounter when trying to book and use an accessible taxi:

*“I can never get an accessible taxi. I go to college in Dundalk and there is one accessible taxi for the entire town. One cannot get it after 6 p.m. If I wish to go out and socialise with my friends or to be a regular 21 year old student..... I cannot be equal with my peers because that provision is not in place for me[[18]](#footnote-19).”*

While CES actions to develop hackney transport options with a funding package of €6,000 is available to individual drivers, over a twelve month period to operate a localised hackney service in 15 Local Link areas nationwide. The NDA recommends that the NTA reports on the challenges to implementation of the hackney service outlining reasons for delay, how targets for delivery have been established, what is the expected future delivery of this action. While DTTAS has refocused its ACC it would be helpful if the NTA could describe how it utilised its accessibility committee to offer solutions to these implementation challenges.

The NDA recommended that the NTA should ensure that the proposed licence conditions for the commercial bus and coach sector should incorporate an integrated universally designed approach to transport services, ensuring that all transport options are easy to access, easy to understand and easy to use for everyone regardless of age, size, ability or disability[[19]](#footnote-20). NDA looks forward to an update from the NTA with regard to the implementation of those conditions agreed following the consultation process. DJE’s plan to convene the cross-departmental working group to focus on coordinated provision of transport in the context of employment in early is also welcome. The NDA also look forward to the assessing the findings from a DTTAS public consultation to support the development of a new Sustainable Mobility policy, which commenced in November 2019[[20]](#footnote-21).

### Managing transitions into work

The Pathways to Work Strategy[[21]](#footnote-22), requires the network of Intreo offices, (part of the public employment service[[22]](#footnote-23)) to support people with disabilities who wish to work, and to secure jobs in the open labour market. Research continues to show that through active engagement with employers and job placement options, more people with disabilities will find work[[23]](#footnote-24).However this research also shows that some of that group of people with disabilities may need initial or ongoing assistance in settling into a job or in managing issues that may arise. Therefore the role of a job coach or employment specialist is key to supporting people with disabilities distant from the labour market with the correct and often on-going supports required to find and remain in work.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection operates a number of schemes to support people with disabilities to attain and retain employment, including:

* The EmployAbility Programme of supported employment for individuals who are available to work 8 hours a week. DESAP fund 24 contracts with the EmployAbility service with an average of 3,000 clients at any stage with a placement rate in the order of 40%;
* The Wage Subsidy Scheme currently supports1,696 employers availing who in turn are supporting 2,746 employees with disabilities;
* Supports to private sector employers with the cost of adaptations or assistive technology, including:
* Workplace equipment adaptation grant (new & existing staff)
* Employee Retention Grant (existing staff)
* Job interview
* Interpreter Grant
* Personal reader grant

During 2019 a joint initiative between the local Intreo service and EmployAbility service in Tralee Co Kerry was progressed, called ‘The Kerry Progressive Pathways Fair’. It saw 37 agencies attend an awareness raising event covering all post school options available in the Cork-Kerry region. Almost 600 people attended the event, this included people managing stands and presenters on themes such as Specialisterne, Supports to Employers, Assistive Technology. The majority of attendees included people with disabilities and their families and teachers. A similar styled awareness event was held in Tullamore during 2019. In addition during 2019 Limerick Intreo undertook an autism related initiative, which included the provision of a ‘Sensory Room’. This initiative resulted in Limerick Intreo being certified as an autism friendly building by AsIAm. DEASP is committed to the rollout and provision of Autism Friendly Sensory Room’s across the Intreo Service in line with its commitments to provide all customers with equal access to quality services. Work is now on-going in terms of the roll out of these facilities.

The NDA welcomes these local models of improving access and of raising awareness of post school options and achieving local co-ordination by all of the relevant actors, and believes that this model of activity relevant to realising the goal of Strategic Priority 2 could usefully be considered in other locations.

In late 2019, an **Ability to Work Fund** was announced supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) through the Dormant Accounts Fund. This fund will provide €1.5 million funding over 3 years to organisations working to empower more people with a disability to gain employment. This work is led through a partnership between Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI) and State Street. The NDA suggests that it would be helpful to hear more about this initiative during 2020, and in particular how this fund interacts with other support schemes and services, e.g. DEASPs Ability Programme[[24]](#footnote-25) , Youth Employment Support Scheme and EmployAbility services. Of key interest is a presentation on the models of support that this fund is testing, who is the fund targeting and what can the wider support system learn from the funding spend?

Also in 2019 Solas commissioned consultants to conduct an evaluation of Specialist Training Provision (STP) to generate evidence-based conclusions about the quality, effectiveness, on-going relevance and overall value of vocational training that is currently delivered by Specialist Training Providers for Persons with a Disability. The NDA looks forward to the evaluation providing a rich understanding of STP and its role in bringing persons with disabilities closer to the labour market as it develops its roadmap for an integrated FET sector. NDA advises that it will be helpful to consider how STP fits with the overall learner pathway that Solas are developing, to ensure integrated provision of service and support to learners with disabilities.

### Supports for entrepreneurs and self employed

NDA welcomes work progressed by two agencies under the remit of the Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation during 2019:

**IDA Ireland** is responsible for the attraction and retention of inward foreign direct investment into Ireland. So while not directly involved in recruitment or retention of employees, the IDA provides support for businesses, including consideration of the skills supply for such incoming organisations. In this context, the IDA is examining the potential of a pilot initiative aimed at enhancing the ability of job candidates with disabilities to avail of employment opportunities in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) companies. As an initial action in 2019, the IDA surveyed top 10 FDI companies regarding their perceptions of the main barriers and opportunities to increasing the potential of persons with disabilities to avail of employment opportunities. The next phase of this project will be to develop a pilot initiative in cooperation with other Government bodies and stakeholders aimed at enhancing the ability of job candidates. The NDA recognises the role of DEASP and Department of Education and Skills in assisting IDA with this action, and so effective cross-departmental collaboration and coordination will be critical in the success of the initiative. The NDA looks forward to further progress on this action in 2020.

**Enterprise Ireland** (EI) committed to creating a strategy that promotes and supports entrepreneurship and self-employment for people with a disability. In 2019, EI reported on desk and commissioned research supported by a series on one-to-one interviews with entrepreneurs with disabilities. The NDA welcomes initial developments resulting from this work whereby EI is working with their network of mentors to increase their knowledge and competencies in supporting people with disabilities. EI is also examining the potential of incorporating a Universal Design Approach in all of their programmes and supports so that they can be accessed and used by all, regardless of age, size, ability or disability. EI has agreed to keep CES IG informed on activity in 2020, and NDA looks forward to continued progress in this area, noting the importance of self-employment to persons with disabilities, who by very nature of self-employment can benefit from greater opportunities for flexibility and control of hours to their own work.

The NDA notes that there may be a potential confusion regarding the distinction between the supports provided by local enterprise offices, and those provided by Enterprise Ireland. The NDA recommends that during 2020 some further work is done to ensure all relevant organisations can clearly communicate their role and remits to their target client groups, so that individuals with disabilities can readily identify how and where to avail of supports. NDA notes that EI supports enterprise that has an export focus while LEOs support local business developments, and so activity in each space may be relevant to different client groups. Understanding the distinctions between these organisations could be further supported by DBEI and DEASP working together to develop communications regarding the access and provision of self-employment supports available through their departments for people with disabilities is a priority for 2020. During 2019, the chair of CESIG, with participation from WALK and the NDA, presented at an event on entrepreneurship and people with disabilities hosted by TU Dublin. From its attendance at this event, NDA advises that there are key differences between self-employment and entrepreneurship for people with disabilities, and this will need to be considered in the design and delivery of relevant supports.

The NDA advises that there were some areas related to SP2 where there was slower than hoped progress during 2019, and so further focus on these items would be required in 2020:

### Areas requiring renewed focus in 2020

Action 2.1 commits DEASP to developing an implementation plan[[25]](#footnote-26), subject to the results of the consultation exercise committed to by Government on Make Work Pay recommendations number 9 and 10, for the process around “early engagement” with persons with disabilities through the Intreo service. The plan will address the key principles identified as part of the consultation process and provide for further input of persons with a disability and other groups. NDA would welcome publication of the output of this consultation and associated implementation plan, noting that progress in this area will be critical to delivery of the recommendations set out in the Make Work Pay report.

Action 2.2 focuses on developing and strengthening the capacity of the Intreo service to support people with disabilities to get and maintain employment. The NDA recognises the steps taken in this regard in the first CES action plan, included Intreo case officers receiving dedicated training to enable them respond to the needs of clients with disabilities. The NDA would welcome further work to expand the numbers of Case Officers who have this capacity and continued review for improvement. There is also potential to develop practical guidelines to support those services and build on the DEASP training service in this regard. This is important to ensuring a consistent and high standard of service in all Intreo offices, noting some members of the CES IG have articulated concerns regarding experiences of some persons with disabilities in local Intreo offices. NDA advises that further information could be provided by DEASP regarding training received by Intreo staff, as well as the NDA recommendation that the development of a case management and referral system to understand how the capacity-building is being implemented in front-line services, and how this is working in practice for persons with disabilities.

Action 2.4 Review the operation of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund that provides financial supports for both jobseekers and employers (seeking to retain and recruit persons with a disability) in order to improve its delivery and effectiveness and to improve employment outcomes. A report to the CES IG could address the key concern raised by employers in their discussions with the Employers Disability Information Service[[26]](#footnote-27) that the current funding package is not fit for purpose. With employers experience of the funding package as one that is administratively burdensome i.e. obtaining quotes for purchases and the delay in receiving the funds. Innovative funding measures were shared with DEASP from the employer disability information service in 2018. It will be important for DEASP to consult with employers on initial review recommendations. This review will be informed by the NDAs report “Reasonable Accommodations: Obstacles and Opportunities to the Employment of Persons with a Disability” which was published in December 2019.

## SP3 Make work pay

The April 2017 Make Work Pay report examined the complex details of the disincentives to work for people with disabilities, fear of losing their Medical Card.[[27]](#footnote-28) the apprehension about re-qualifying for benefits if a job once taken does not work out and the disregard of earnings were all addressed in a series of meaningful recommendations. NDA notes the significant improvements to the system that have occurred since 2017, including the development of an online ready reckoner, the increase to the earnings disregard, and the removal of the concept of rehabilitative work.

However, as set out above, recommendations 9 & 10 in the report referenced the department undertaking an exploration of a reconfiguration of the Domiciliary Care and Disability Allowance (DA) schemes. New entrants into DA the payment were to be presented with a new process of engagement designed around the principle of early intervention/ engagement. DEASP undertook a co-designed consultation on these recommendations in 2018. The NDA understood that implementation of an early engagement process would commence in 2019, but as yet no details of the consultation report or engagement process are available. The NDA continues to stress that supporting young people with disabilities to avail of appropriate options that will support their journey to work must include providing further education and training options, as well as a mechanism for supporting people in employment where relevant and appropriate.

As noted above, young people with disabilities who are not in education, training or employment by the age of 21 are most likely to remain there for some time (NEETS), and NDA advises that the likelihood of achieving positive employment outcomes decreases with the length of time outside the labour market. The DEASP process of engagement with younger people should be able to offer tailored practical and ongoing supports to help ensure young people can avoid a pathway to long-term joblessness. The NDA advises the relevance of two particular developments in this regard. Firstly, the evaluation of the DEASP Ability Programme projects will offer valuable evidence regarding the quantity and type of service models that are beneficial for effective pre activation for young people with disabilities. Secondly, the gaps in provision of support that currently exist can be addressed in significant part through implementation of the agreed cross-departmental policy under Action 5.1,which aims to deliver a seamless pathway into work for people with disabilities, including those for people with high support needs.

NDA notes that a full update on the status of the recommendations of the Make Work Pay report would be timely, in order to consider progress since its publication in 2017, including those areas where progress has been delayed. The NDA looks forward to commencement and reporting on same. NDA also notes that by end 2019, two specific recommendations had not progressed, although at time of writing in early 2020, DJE has convened working groups of relevant stakeholders to advance same. NDA looks forward to seeing progress in each case over the course of 2020:

* Specific activity to undertake a review of transport supports encompassing all Government funded transport and mobility schemes for people with disabilities, to enhance the options for transport to work or employment supports for people with disabilities, and to make proposals for development of a coordinated plan for such provision.
* An action to develop and bring forward proposals to address access to or affordability of necessary aids/ appliances/ assistive technology required for everyday living for those people with disabilities whose entry, retention or return to work could be jeopardised by being unable to afford these items, given the level of employment income, and whose needs are not met by other schemes of assistance.

## SP4 Promote job retention and re-entry to work

This strategic priority is centred on improving the pathways back to sustainable employment for people who leave the workplace as a result of the onset of a disability or long-term illness.[[28]](#footnote-29) The evidence shows that the likelihood of re-entry to work falls the longer someone has been out of work.[[29]](#footnote-30) Indeed, for many private sector workers, after six months, evidence from current practice suggests there may no longer be a job to return to.[[30]](#footnote-31) The recent IGEES study referenced above, revealed that a third of people with a disability who are counted as inactive had been employed in the last ten years (48% of 75%) and predominantly worked in occupations which are likely to require a physical aspect to the work (55% in skilled trade, operatives and elementary).

This data emphasises the importance of ‘early intervention’ following the acquiring of a disability, and the importance of keeping work on the individual’s agenda while they manage their physical or mental rehabilitation. International research suggests that 6-10 weeks after leaving work is the critical intervention period. [[31]](#footnote-32) This is the rationale behind the IPS model of supported employment which uniquely places the job coach in the community mental health team, therefore ensuring that work and possibly return to work remains an option and an integral part of the recover process.

NDA notes that there has been overall slow progress in this strategic priority area in 2019, and advises the importance of focused effort in 2020, building on activity advanced under other strategic priority headings, which also have relevance in the context of ‘return to work’.

The work underway in DEASP to review the reasonable accommodation fund, and ensure that fund is an effective means of support for both employers and employees is relevant to progress under this Strategic Priority. This fund can provide financial supports to an employer who is supporting an individual to return to work after acquiring a disability or life long illness. The provision of a workplace adaptation or work intervention can often be the key support to returning to work. NDA looks forward to this review being advanced, and consideration given to how the impact of same for employers and employees alike can be measured.

During 2019 the NDA hosted a number of focused consultations with people with disabilities on the issues governing reasonable accommodations as part of its work to develop a research paper on current practice in this space. During these discussions, additional themes such as return to work, retraining for career change, and flexibility of working arrangements were considered. This evidence will assist in the development of the NDA policy advice paper on vocational rehabilitation which is committed under the second year action plan for delivery mid~~-~~2020. Although the specific actions regarding vocational rehabilitation in Ireland under the CES, i.e. conducting and disseminating research, were completed in 2017, the NDA has continued to progress this work with a series of key stakeholder interviews and a roundtable discussion on the necessary steps for a programme of vocational rehabilitation in Ireland.

The NDA has explored additional material relevant to the development of policy advice, such as:

* Return to work protocols for GPs building on the renaissance project;
* Examination of local initiatives that support return to work for specific disabilities such as acquired brain injury, commissioning occupational therapy supports;
* Developing an understanding of the role of the Intreo case officer in supporting an appropriate return to work, while examining the role of supported employment job coach in supporting both the individual and the employer in the return to work process.

The NDA is committed to delivering its policy advice in early 2020, for consideration by relevant government departments and agencies.

## SP5 Provide co-ordinated and seamless support

The NDA has previously described Action 5.1 of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy as a microcosm of the Strategy as a whole. The goal of this action is to achieve a ‘seamless and coordinated provision of supports’ for people with disabilities who wish to work, including those with high support needs. This in turn requires the provision of ‘in work’ supports for some in order to allow them participate in employment. A cross-departmental working group[[32]](#footnote-33) developed and agreed a policy for the provision of coordinated and comprehensive supports. However, agreement on how best to test both coordination and provision of these supports in the first instance, has not yet been achieved, and NDA advises the aims of the policy cannot be realised without same.

Throughout 2019 the NDA continued to facilitate the relevant departments and agencies in their discussions regarding the implementation of the agreed policy, and notes the importance of considering funding and governance mechanisms to support cross-departmental working such as this. In the meantime, departments and agencies have progressed other actions in the area of employment support that ultimately will benefit some people with disabilities, e.g. the implementation of the Indecon recommendations of EmployAbility, closer referral mechanisms between Intreo and their local ETB offerings which can offer models for referral and coordination approaches between other agencies in this space, and newly commenced HSE and NCSE work on transitions. While these individual measures are recognised as important in the agreed 5.1 policy, until they are addressed a gap will remain for people with high support needs, who may require an individual level of support to access and remain in work. If this policy can be effectively implemented, it will benefit persons with disabilities across the spectrum including those with acquired disabilities in the context of return to work.

As mentioned previously transport continues to play a crucial role in empowering people with disabilities to participate in everyday life and the activities of their communities and that includes travel to education and work. The following describes actions underway in strategic priority 5 during 2019.

* The real time information for all bus and Luas stops is available on Transport for Ireland website and on the integrated Real Time App which provides information on all rail and bus data. The NDA welcomes the ability of the real time passenger information system for bus services to indicate when a bus is accessible or not by showing the wheelchair symbol on the sign and on the web services. This simple information facilitates travel for people requiring accessible options as part of their journey to work.
* In 2019, Irish Rail began user testing a DART disability app to help persons with disabilities pre-book assistance and to manage their journey. A new pilot application to assist customers arriving in major train stations is also being developed which will be live in early 2020. NDA advises importance of monitoring implementation of these initiatives in order to guide wider roll-out and ensure the experiences of users are captured and addressed as they develop further.

NDA notes that in its on-going work to consult with disability service providers and people with disabilities on specific themes, transport is consistently raised as a significant barrier to accessing education and employment, and general participation in community activities. Therefore the NDA advises that monitoring implementation of the measures described above and under SP2 will need to include consideration of:

* How these measures assist persons with different disabilities to complete their end to end journeys, particularly in terms of getting to and from work. Having access to and confidence that they will be able to get work via a regular mode of accessible transport is an essential part of helping persons with disabilities to obtain and retain employment.
* How can these projects help in the development of integrated universally designed public transport services in rural areas that are easy to access, easy to understand and easy to use for everyone regardless of age, size, ability or disability.

## SP6 Engage employers

This strategic pillar aims to ensure that employers will be supported and encouraged to employ people with disabilities, to support job retention and to facilitate return to work after the onset of a disability. Significant work on employer engagement was progressed during the first action plan, and during 2019 follow on work was progressed as follows:

### Research on Reasonable Accommodations

In December 2019 the NDA published a report on “Reasonable Accommodations: Obstacles and Opportunities to the Employment of Persons with a Disability”[[33]](#footnote-34). This report is described under action 6.5, whereby the NDA examined the current provision of reasonable accommodations to guide good practice. This report was informed by an extensive consultation process, comprising employees with a disability, trade union representatives and employer representative bodies. The report also incorporated analysis of recent WRC decisions relevant to disability and the provision of reasonable accommodations. The NDA welcomes the addition of the ICTU and IBEC collaboration with the jointly launched Reasonable Accommodation Passport Scheme[[34]](#footnote-35).This passport allows for structured conversations about the impact of disability and what supports individuals need. This passport is a useful addition to the reasonable accommodation process. During 2020, the NDA will develop guidance for employers on the reasonable accommodations process, informed by the 2019 research work, and also notes that IHREC intends to publish a Code of Practice for Employers that will also be helpful in providing support and information in this space.

### Employer Awareness, Information and Advice

In early 2019, the pilot of the Employer Disability Information (EDI) service came to the end of its term. The pilot service had been managed by a consortium of employer bodies (ISME, IBEC and Chambers Ireland) to deliver peer-to-peer advice and support for employers regarding employment of persons with disabilities, recognising that previous research and surveys had highlighted the importance of this type of support to employers in mitigating their lack of awareness or fears regarding disability. Information gathered through two employer surveys conducted during the lifetime of the pilot indicated that employers valued the service, and in particular the delivery of advice and support from a business perspective. As the pilot project delivered on its objectives, the NDA provided advice to DJE on the potential for further development of specific elements of the EDI service, noting that levels of employer engagement had increased over the lifetime of the pilot. Guidance on available supports, recruitment approaches, developing inclusive and disability focused policies, and the merits of the peer support network were particularly valued.

NDA welcomes the work commenced by DJE in late 2019 to develop an employer awareness campaign, and advises the relevance of an information and advice to underpin same as it is implemented. We note commitments in this regard in the revised National Disability Inclusion Strategy, and advise that learning captured from the EDI pilot can be of benefit in this regard. During 2019, with grant funding administered by NDA, a consortium of four organisations (Rehab NLN, WALK. AsIAm and Not so Different) developed online learning employment awareness-raising materials that will be made available to employers. This awareness material specifically addresses employer needs as identified through a survey of employers conducted by EDI. The Consortium piloted the materials with private and public sector employers in 2019 with a view to launching on an online platform in 2020. The materials cover all types of disability, and can be delivered through face-to-face training, through the online module once available.

### Increasing the Part 5 employment target

Under the CES,the Government has committed to incrementally increasing the statutory employment target, so that by 2024, a minimum of 6% of employees in the public sector will be persons with disabilities[[35]](#footnote-36).

Numbers from 2018, and recently reported on reveal that the number and percentage of public bodies achieving or exceeding the minimum 3% target did not increase. The data shows that in 2018 there were 217 public bodies as compared to 218 in 2017,

* 183 of these public bodies (84.3%) achieved or exceeded the minimum 3%.
* The overall number and percentage of employees reporting a disability decreased from 7,796 (3.5%) in 2017 to 7,585 (3.3%) in 2018. This is a decrease of 211 (-2.7%) people from 2017.

These figures present for the first time that the overall number and percentage of employees reporting a disability for the entire public sector has decreased since 2013. The NDA notes this with concern, but understands the factors that contribute to this situation that may include unwillingness by staff to disclose and possible lack of proactive policies to create recruitment opportunities as employees with disabilities retire from the public sector. Measures described in the CES such as alternative recruitment approaches, civil service Internships, ensuring good practice in the provision of reasonable accommodation and specific approaches to promote the employment of people with disabilities are all necessary to ensure that this target is achieved, and NDA continues to advise public bodies in this regard.

NDA advises that further focus on activity committed for 2019 will be required in 2020, including:

* The DPER action to develop a pilot Civil Service internship for people with disabilities that could lead to permanent positions. There was no reporting of the delivery of this action in 2019. Internships are a useful method of recruiting staff. While the OWL project has successfully illustrated the approach in the houses of the Oireachtas, this model should have wider use across the civil and public service. DPER have indicated that they have plans to advance same, it will be important to understand the process of implementation in further detail. It is noted however, DEASPs[[36]](#footnote-37) funding of the WAM programme has created opportunities for work experience in both the public and private sectors – in particular supporting graduates with disabilities in their transition from third level into the world of work.
* DEASP has undertaken to raise awareness among employers of DEASP services and supports for the recruitment and retention in employment of persons with disabilities through the planning and implementation of an employer information campaign[[37]](#footnote-38). This action is for delivery by the mainstream employer engagement unit in DEASP and is a critical point of access for employers.

# Cross cutting work during 2019

## Developing 2019 to 2021 year action plan

As 2018 was the final year of the initial foundation phase of the CES, the CES IG and senior officials gave focused attention to the development of an action plan to support the next phase of implementation of the Strategy. This process, initiated by the Department of Justice and Equality, and supported by the NDA, began over the summer of 2018. As part of this process, the NDA met bi-laterally with individual Government departments to identify and consider priority actions for the next 3-year implementation phase.

The actions committed in the finalised plan are intended to:

* Build on progress to date
* Address delays or gaps in delivering specific actions from the first 3-year action plan, understanding that some actions required substantial groundwork and implementation before measureable progress could be achieved
* Consider new priorities or action areas that have emerged over the course of the Strategy to date
* Identify mechanisms for continuing to foster inter-departmental working to ensure coordination in delivery of services
* Consider approaches to data gathering and analysis in support of monitoring activity.

Senior officials continued to work throughout 2019 on finalising the actions and commitments to ensure that they could be delivered over the 3 year timeframe, informed by the feedback gathered at consultation exercises hosted by DJE in late 2018. While the three-year plan was later in being finalised than initially planned, the NDA welcomes the fact that the actions now committed are specific and measurable, and looks forward to their implementation to 2021.

## Progressive realisation of United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities

The NDA advises that the primary areas of focus for the 2019 to 2021 period of activity should be considered in how they enable progressive realisation of Articles 26 and 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities[[38]](#footnote-39). The NDA is continuing to advise and support relevant departments and agencies in their efforts to ensure the UNCRPD is fully realised. Throughout 2019 that body of work included bilateral discussions with individual departments and agencies and workshops with officials from other jurisdictions to learn from their experiences of the monitoring, implementation and reporting activities. In addition the 2019 NDA annual conferenceconsidered the wide-ranging policy measures necessary for implementation of the Convention, with learning for policy-makers across all departments. The conference placed a particular focus on Article 27 in one of its parallel sessions and the policy measures required to realise the right to work for people with a disability. Examples of good practice were showcased, including presentations on the Oireachtas Work and Learn (OWL) programme, on AHEAD’s work with the WAM programme and on Enterprise Ireland’s work in supporting entrepreneurship among people with disabilities. NDA is also aware from consultations with stakeholders on their perspectives on implementation of UNCRPD that there are concerns in relation to access to personal assistants in an employment context, in order to support access to work. NDA advises that this issue will require further exploration across relevant departments.

## **Communications and Collaborative Working**

NDA advises that an important area of focus for the 2019 to 2021 period will be the provision ofeffective communication to people with disabilities and those providing services, regarding changes to the welfare, health and social care systems implemented on foot of the CES and associated actions so that they can benefit from them. A recurring theme in consultations and work progressed by NDA in the space of employment has been the perceived absence of coordinated communication of information regarding changes that have occurred since the commencement of the CES. For example, the Make Work Pay report in 2017 led to changes with regard to Disability Allowance payment with regard to rehabilitative work, to the medical card retention and to earnings disregards. While these are significant positive advancements, the NDA has heard from people with disabilities that they are unaware of the developments, or indeed that the information regarding application of the changes does not seem to have been passed down through the agencies and bodies charged with implementing same in a uniform fashion. The NDA advises the importance of a specific communications campaign for Intreo staff and separately for people with disabilities, so that each party is aware of the new landscape and how this can improve the opportunities to take up employment. As other changes or developments are progressed under the CES, it will be important for communications to be developed and coordinated so that they can be accessed and understood by all relevant stakeholders. It will also be important for communications to be consistent across departments and agencies, as well as measurement of their impact and effectiveness to guide continued improvement.

## Collaborative working; more effective implementation

The NDA has advised in previous assessment reports that for the CES to deliver its overall objective of increased numbers of people at work, new ways of working are required. The first action plan encouraged the practice of collaborative working, and NDA notes that further embedding of the practice of collaborative working is also currently underway in the second three-year action plan. Two examples for consideration include:

* The Ability Programme has provided €16 million to 27 projects to test pre-activation measures across Ireland. So far elements of pre-activation are being tested resulting in approaches that can be mainstreamed, and have included examples where multiple actors are involved, e.g. HSE, ETBs and employers. Understanding the learning from the Ability Programme projects will be of benefit in informing a national approach to effective pre-activation for young people with disabilities, and in particular highlighting the models of collaboration by the relevant factors that have worked well.
* Similarly, the IPS model of supported employment has benefited from two rounds of pilot funding, each incorporating a coordinated approach with HSE and EmployAbility staff collaborating to provide tailored support to individuals experiencing mental health difficulties to achieve positive employment outcomes. NDA advises that these projects, and others like them, can offer valuable learning in terms of collaborative ways of working, including what protocols, tools or guidance have been effective in supporting the collaboration. They can also provide evidence regarding the outcomes achieved, and this can guide considerations for further roll-out and implementation.

# Next steps for CES during 2020

This report assesses progress made during 2019 and highlighted key areas that require further action in order to achieve the aims of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy, noting that much of the focus of the year was on agreement of the action plan itself. NDA recognises that the work to finalise and agree the second three year action plan was extensive, and some momentum with regard to implementation of some specific actions may have been impacted. However, the agreed plan now provides for a strong programme of work for 2020 and 2021.

The NDA recommends that during 2020 the CES IG can focus on understanding implementation of actions scheduled for delivery in both 2019 and 2020, including consideration of:

* If the action is completed, what has been achieved and are there next steps to be advanced, including how to maintain continued implementation?
* If the action has not been completed, what has been accomplished so far and why is delivery of action delayed?
* And how can the delay or issue concerned has been addressed?
* Present details on the direct impact of this action,
* Provide specific details on what are next step with regard to delivery of this action?

In order to inform the CES IG updates the NDA advises it would be beneficial for departments to consider structured approaches to capturing and understanding the individual lived experience of persons with disabilities and their families, both through the mechanism of their DCC’s, and other consultation/participation avenues. This is to ensure that actions progressed and implemented are informed by the lived experience, and effectively address the challenges and gaps in support necessary to improve employment outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Due to the breadth of activity underway in the 2019 to 2021 action plan the NDA advises that the thematic approach to CES IG meetings continues to provide an opportunity for discussion on key issues. Suggested themes have been presented to the CES IG and are listed below, and include a specific meeting on the DJE-led employer awareness project. NDA advises that further individual meetings on specific topics can be scheduled as required as the year progresses and as particular issues emerge.

* Implementation of the seamless pathway to employment as described in report on Action 5.1
* Progress on designing and delivering alternative recruitment approaches
* Updates on Transition Planning & Practice
* Mainstreaming of learning from CES programmes i.e. Ability Programme IPS
* Consideration of actions to promote job retention and re-entry to work

A full update from departments and agencies on their actions is required during 2020. This update can use the traffic light system.

In summary, the NDA acknowledges that the strategy requires agencies and departments to work in different and coordinated ways to address the committed actions. A significant question for all departments and agencies in 2020 is also to consider approaches to the proactive communication of changes or policy interventions as they are implemented. This will ensure that both persons with disabilities and public sector staff are fully aware of developments that will have a direct impact on them. The NDA continue to be available to engage with and advise departments and agencies to guide implementation of the CES.

# Appendix One

National Summary of Rehabilitative Training Outcomes 2019

| Outcome Name | Trainees |
| --- | --- |
| HSE Funded Day Service | 491 |
| Training - ETB Specialist | 114 |
| Home Life | 91 |
| Training - Rehabilitative | 84 |
| Illness | 86 |
| Ceased To Attend | 54 |
| Open Employment | 52 |
| Unoccupied | 24 |
| Education - ETB | 24 |
| Voluntary Work/Community Activity | 24 |
| Education - PLC | 19 |
| Training - ETB Mainstream | 17 |
| Supported Employment | 17 |
| Education - 3rd Level | 14 |
| Death | 8 |
| Self-Employment | 6 |
| Relocation | 6 |
| Employment Programmes (DSP) | 2 |
| Education - Private | 2 |
| Training - Teagasc | 1 |
| Mental Health Services | 1 |
| Total | 1137 |

1. The 3rd of December 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. CSO Census 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. A 2007 survey of Illness Benefit recipients showed that 40% of those on benefit for six months, and 58% of those on benefit for 12 months, were no longer in employment. WRC Social and Economic Consultants (2008) Research Report on Acquired Disability & Employment [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/Learners%20with%20Disabilities%202018.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. [http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2020/Documents/Budget/The%20Inactive%20Working%20Age%20Population%20(A).pdf](http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2020/Documents/Budget/The%20Inactive%20Working%20Age%20Population%20%28A%29.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. For instance see O’Dea et al (2014) ‘A cross-sectional exploration of the clinical characteristics of disengaged (NEET) young people in primary mental healthcare’ https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/4/12/e006378 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. UK Social Exclusion Unit, 1999, Gardner et al 2017, Sissons & Jones, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Please see appendix for full list of RT outcomes in 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Conducted by the Department of Social Protection [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Over the 2019 to 2020 school year seventy- five schools, both primary and post-primary, in Kildare, Wicklow and South Dublin are participating in a new research-based package of education and health supports. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. [https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Transition-Year-Exploring-the-Student-Experience.pdf page 25](https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Transition-Year-Exploring-the-Student-Experience.pdf%20page%2025) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Department of Social Protection Disability Allowance Survey, Ciaran Judge et al figures 20 and 21 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. In fact, 52 of this new type of bus were delivered in 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. action 2.9 which is to ‘facilitate the concept of car sharing beyond the car sharing website and voluntary car schemes that currently exist and tailor that provision for those with a disability’ [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Under the Rural Transport Programme [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. (Ms Alannah Murray, 7 February 2018)" [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Further details describing UD transport <http://nda.ie/Publications/Transport/Submissions-on-Transport/NDA-Submission-on-Statement-of-Strategy-of-the-Department-of-Transport-Tourism-and-Sport-2017-2019.> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. <https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/f1b503-public-consultation-on-a-review-of-sustainable-mobility-policy/> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Published in 2015 and updated to cover 2016 to 2020, [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. The State’s public employment service (PES) is managed by DEASP and is delivered through its network of Intreo centres and through contracted providers delivering services such as EmployAbility and Local Employment (LES) services, on its behalf. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Findings from across different studies suggest that: the role of the ‘job coach’ or employment/personal adviser is critical to the success of supported employment schemes (Beyer and Robinson, 2009); long-term support with a structured process is also important (Greve, 2009) as are close links maintained with employers (Eurofound, 2012); [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. The Ability Programme funds 27 organisations that support young people with disabilities. The programme is co-financed by DEASP and the European Social Fund - as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Early Engagement implementation plan and communications plan finalised Q4 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. NDA (2006) A Strategy of Engagement - Towards a Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. An NDA literature review has summarised research findings in this area <http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-Publications/Literature-Review-Guidance-on-retaining-employees-with-a-disability.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. WRC Social and Economic Research (2008) Research Report on Acquired Disability and Employment [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. <http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-Publications/Literature-Review-Guidance-on-retaining-employees-with-a-disability.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. The responsible body are the DOH, HSE, DEASP, DES and the NDA (Chair). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. <http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-Publications/Reasonable-Accommodations-Obstacles-and-Opportunities-to-the-Employment-of-Persons-with-a-Disability1.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. <https://www.ictu.ie/download/pdf/reasonable_adjustments_disability_passport.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. This is provided for in the Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016 which did not pass through [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. DEASP funds AHEAD, under a contract arrangement, to provide supports for graduates with disabilities in their transition into the world of work, including the delivery of the WAM Programme. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Action 6.1 CES 2019 to 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Please see <http://nda.ie/Policy-and-research/Conference-reports/NDA-Annual-Conferences/NDA-Annual-Conference-2019-UNCRPD-Past-Lessons-and-Future-Aspirations.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-39)