Comprehensive Employment Strategy NDA Year-end Assessment 2021

April 2022



Contents

[List of Acronyms 4](#_Toc101857179)

[Introduction 5](#_Toc101857180)

[The 2021 Context 7](#_Toc101857181)

[Evidence base for assessment 7](#_Toc101857182)

[Mainstream policy and strategy developments during 2021 8](#_Toc101857183)

[Experiences of disabled people during COVID-19 9](#_Toc101857184)

[Key Developments during 2021 11](#_Toc101857185)

[Actions progressed in 2021 11](#_Toc101857186)

[Actions with slow progress during 2021 14](#_Toc101857187)

[Strategic Priorities 1- 6 progress during 2021 15](#_Toc101857188)

[Vision and underpinning values 15](#_Toc101857189)

[SP1 Build skills, capacity and independence 15](#_Toc101857190)

[Early years transition to primary education 16](#_Toc101857191)

[Providing a transition programme for all school leavers (CES action 1.3) 16](#_Toc101857192)

[Additional progress during 2021 17](#_Toc101857193)

[SP2 Provide bridges and supports into work 18](#_Toc101857194)

[Department of Social Protection measures 19](#_Toc101857195)

[Department of Further Higher Education Research Innovation and Science measures 20](#_Toc101857196)

[Self-employment options 21](#_Toc101857197)

[Enterprise Ireland programme of work 21](#_Toc101857198)

[Transport developments during 2021 22](#_Toc101857199)

[SP3 Make work pay 24](#_Toc101857200)

[SP4 Promote job retention and re-entry to work 25](#_Toc101857201)

[SP5 Provide co-ordinated and seamless support 26](#_Toc101857202)

[SP6 Engage Employers 28](#_Toc101857203)

[OECD 28](#_Toc101857204)

[Employers for Change 28](#_Toc101857205)

[Public Appointment Service 30](#_Toc101857206)

[DPER-supported internship schemes 31](#_Toc101857207)

[Building on the evidence base 32](#_Toc101857208)

[Central Statistics Office 32](#_Toc101857209)

[DPER Spending Review 2021: 32](#_Toc101857210)

[Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 33](#_Toc101857211)

[Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) 35](#_Toc101857212)

[Conclusion 35](#_Toc101857213)

## List of Acronyms

| AHEAD | Association Higher Education and Disability |
| --- | --- |
| CES | Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024 |
| COVID-19 | Infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus |
| CSO | Central Statistics Office |
| DA | Disability Allowance |
| DCEDIY | Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth |
| DFHERIS | Department of Further Higher Education Research Innovation and Science |
| DPER | Department of Public Expenditure and Reform |
| DoE | Department of Education |
| DoH | Department of Health |
| DSP | Department of Social Protection |
| ESRI | Economic and Social Research Institute |
| FET | Further Education & Training |
| HEA | Higher Education Authority |
| HSE | Health Service Executive |
| IGESES | Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service |
| IPS | Individual Placement and Support, model of supported employment for people with mental health concerns |
| NDA | National Disability Authority |
| NTA | National Transport Authority |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| OWL | Oireachtas Work Learning programme for persons with intellectual disabilities |
| PAS | Public Appointments Service |
| RT | Rehabilitative Training |
| Solas | Seirbhisi Oideachais Leanunaigh Agus Scileanna (Further Education Skills Services) |
| UNCRPD | United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |
| WAM | Willing Able and Mentoring |

# Introduction

This paper sets out the National Disability Authority’s (NDA) independent assessment of progress made regarding the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities 2015 to 2024 (CES) in the context of developments during 2021. This is the sixth annual assessment conducted by the NDA.

The assessment is based on evidence gathered during the year that relates to the current employment environment of people with disabilities. This approach includes evidence gathered on the lived experience of persons with disabilities by the NDA and others, updates provided by various government departments relating to commitments under the Strategy, and new reports with data relating to the employment of persons with disabilities. In this paper, the NDA highlights significant government strategies published or commencing in 2021 that impact the strategic priority areas contained within the CES. In taking this approach, the NDA contextualises CES activity during 2021 in the wider mainstream provision of employment.

In November 2021 the first State report on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was submitted by Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) on behalf of Government to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Progressive realisation of the rights contained in this convention are directly related to the implementation of the CES.

In addition to this body of evidence, during 2021, a number of collaborative initiatives between the NDA and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Central Statistics Office (CSO) were published, thus expanding the evidence base for consideration of the employment theme. The OECD report - entitled ‘Disability, Work and Inclusion in Ireland: Engaging and Supporting Employers[[1]](#footnote-1)’ - has considerations that are relevant and pertinent to the development of the final three-year CES action plan. On the practical information of employer experience, AHEAD published a survey of employers’ experiences of their Willing Able and Mentoring (WAM) programme while Ibec[[2]](#footnote-2) and Employers for Change jointly published advice and recommendations to improve the employment of persons with disabilities. Disability specific contributions were made, with AsIAm detailing the experiences of autistic people in the workplace[[3]](#footnote-3) and publishing research on same. [[4]](#footnote-4) Employers for Change published a report on experiences of remote working during COVID-19[[5]](#footnote-5). This body of evidence highlights the opportunities that exist to include more people with disabilities at work while acknowledging that challenges continue to exist.

The following strategic documents are each relevant to the current and future provision of mainstream and disability services and supports:

* The Indecon ‘Cost of Disability in Ireland’ report and the ‘Pathways to Work 2021- 2025’ published by the Department of Social Protection.
* Spending Review 2021 Disability and Special Education Expenditure: Lifecycle of Supports by - Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES)- staff in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform[[6]](#footnote-6)
* Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) plans to develop Remote Working[[7]](#footnote-7) and Sick Leave[[8]](#footnote-8) arrangements
* Disability Capacity Review by the Department of Health[[9]](#footnote-9).

As the CES enters its final three-year action plan (2022-2024), implementation of these key policies and strategies and the learning from recent research and evaluations will aid the delivery of the long term goal of the CES which is for people with disabilities who wish to work to get a job and enjoy a rewarding career. Similarly, through measures completed under the CES, increased access to mainstream and specialist supports in a more tailored manner will support more people with disabilities into careers and jobs of their choice.

The NDA advises the following actions are included for delivery in the final three-year action plan:

* Develop a return to work approach for people with (acquired) disabilities who have employment connection and require support via a vocational rehabilitation process
* Utilise the Pathways to Work strategy to ensure the OECD recommendations on employer engagement are implemented
* Support actions relating to transition planning across the strategy
* Address the lack of progress on the provision of Career Guidance for learners with disabilities in special and mainstream school settings
* Address implementation of the agreed policy under CES action 5.1
* Extract learning from the Ability Projects and share that information across the system, therefore ensuring that the learning from these projects is mainstreamed
* Give further consideration to the issues raised in the Cost of Disability review, ensuring that any responses developed take a system wide approach
* Implement the DSP early engagement process
* Conduct a review of the reasonable accommodation fund and implement the recommendations emanating from the review
* Put in place actionable measures to achieve the increased target of 6% of persons employed in the public service by the agreed date of 2024

# The 2021 Context

2021 was the final year of the second three-year CES action plan and during the year the impact of COVID-19 continued to be felt across society, including by persons with disabilities. This section outlines the evidence base for this assessment regarding the disability employment landscape from a number of sources. It also includes a brief overview of relevant policies, strategies and research reports and includes the lived experience of persons with disabilities.

## Evidence base for assessment

This assessment paper is informed by a range of inputs, including the lived experience of people with disabilities, gathered from a range of sources and engagement opportunities:

* Presentations and discussion by members of the CES Implementation Group at meetings under the 2021 themes as co-ordinated by DCEDIY

* Analysis of end of year action plan updates by government departments and agencies responsible for implementing CES actions and involved in the CES implementation Group
* NDA analysis of data on the experience of people with disabilities, and specific consultations with persons with disabilities on a range of topics during 2021
* Engagements with departments through their Disability Consultative Committees
* Analysis of evidence including newly-collected data and information, including collaborations with the CSO, ESRI and OECD during 2021. More information on these are provided later in this report.
* Analysis of new strategies, policies and reports relevant to the employment of persons with disabilities.

## Mainstream policy and strategy developments during 2021

During 2021, a number of initiatives occurred that will have an impact on the delivery of the CES. In the NDA Assessment of CES for 2020, an outline was given of the DSP’s ‘Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025: Ambition, Goals, and Commitments’. Those commitments werereiterated in the ‘Pathways to Work 2021- 2025 strategy[[10]](#footnote-10)*[[11]](#endnote-1)* published in July 2021 where DSP stated:

‘Greater integration of income supports with employment, training and activation measures, closer engagement with employers and robust evaluation of labour market policies and outcomes, to support clients, on the route back to employment and self-sufficiency’.

Especially noteworthy is the Pathways to Workstrategic approachto extend and enhance the provision ofemployment services beyond the registered unemployed,to include additional groups such as those with caringresponsibilities, people with disabilities and qualifiedadult dependents of recipients of working-age payments. The implementation of supports necessary for persons with disabilities wishing to work will be an important element of this strategy.

In December 2021, a Cost of Disability study carried out by Indecon economic consultants was published by DSP. This study included a survey of 4,734 people with disabilities, the majority of whom were receiving disability benefits. Respondents explained that they incurred additional costs relating to equipment, aids and appliances, mobility, transport, medicines, care and assistance services, communications and additional living expenses. The survey results emphasised that there is no one single or typical cost of disability, but rather a range of costs from very low to extremely high depending on a person's individual circumstances. Certain factors that resulted in increased costs included age, household type, and the severity and nature of the disability. The report authors recommended that additional supports for individuals with a disability “should be focused on the alleviation of poverty, reducing inequality and improving social inclusion and the quality of life of individuals with disabilities in Ireland”. They also recognised that increasing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities was one way to support some people with disabilities to meet the additional costs of their disabilities, and so there are implications for the final stages of implementation of the CES.

## Experiences of disabled people during COVID-19

COVID -19 continued to have an impact in different ways on the lives of people with disabilities. In this section, experiences, some of which were due to public health guidance, such as interruptions to day service and schools to supporting return to workplaces, are described.

The National Advocacy Service (NAS) revealed some of the more challenging experiences, especially the closure and reduction of day services. This had a serious impact on the mental health of people who lost access to social interaction and structure, leading to isolation, anxiety and a loss of confidence and skills.[[12]](#footnote-11) For some, day services are a route of entry into work and therefore losing skills can have a detrimental impact on becoming work ready.

A research project conducted by and with people with intellectual disabilities, called ‘The Experiences of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities in Ireland during the COVID-19 Crisis’. This was a collaborative project by Inclusion Ireland and Technological University of Ireland.[[13]](#footnote-12) It found that the participants interviewed had particular needs regarding the return to workplaces affected by COVID -19. This included a call for better, clearer information about the crisis, and especially about mask-wearing.

The NDA also examined experiences during COVID-19 with a view to documenting interventions and approaches that people would like to see retained after the pandemic. The views of participants who attended an NDA consultation event entitled ‘Building Back Better post COVID-19’ spoke about their experiences. Some of the experiences expressed in this consultation were subsequently included in another piece of NDA work entitled ‘Lockdowns Unlock Innovation’. This report was a review of innovations and adaptations put in place to navigate through restrictions arising from the Government’s response to COVID -19.[[14]](#footnote-13) The report revealed that many people experienced COVID -19 in different ways. One finding showed that the impact of school closures was likely to have increased inequalities in educational attainment. The review also acknowledged that the shift to remote learning had adversely affected many children and young people, especially those with additional needs.

These consultations on experiences during COVID -19 revealed that:

* The closure of educational institutions had driven schools and colleges to embrace and embed technology at pace
* New avenues and opportunities for learning delivered through partnership and collaboration had been found for some people, while online delivery ensured that a wider audience accessed resources
* Blended learning formats that combine in-person teaching with digital resources had the potential to result in a more inclusive model of education, particularly at third level.

The lived experience of learners with disabilities during COVID -19 was captured in a survey conducted by AHEAD.[[15]](#footnote-14) This survey used the Likert Response Scale that provided answers to choose from the following range, ‘strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree or strongly disagree’. The results revealed the reality for students with disabilities who continued learning ‘as normal’[[16]](#footnote-15).

* Of the students surveyed 66% of respondents were in a higher education course, while 34% were in a Further Education Training (FET) course or other programme
* When students were asked their agreement with the statement ‘I am coping well with learning from home’ 67% of those with a Mental Health Condition, 62% of those with ADD/ADHD and 58% of those with a Specific Learning Difficulty (58%) disagreed or strongly disagreed
* Students that agreed or strongly agreed with the statement were those with Physical Disability (42%), Autistic Spectrum Disorder (37%) and Deaf/Hard of Hearing (36%).

This study provided a series of recommendations that are useful to consider as a hybrid system of learning is developed.

The reviews and consultations show clearly that the experience of persons with disabilities during COVID-19 depended on many variables, including the nature and severity of disability and of access to supports and services. A by-product of the COVID-19 response has been the realisation that collaborative working across layers of government is necessary to have real impact on the education and training experience of persons with disabilities. It is hoped that, for those where online delivery has worked, a hybrid system will remain.

# Key Developments during 2021

Complementing the data presented thus far, this section summarises key findings in relation to CES activity in 2021 and notes that completion of some actions will require a more concerted effort.

## Actions progressed in 2021

The following offers a high level summary of those CES actions where good progress was made during 2021, although noting in some cases that activity will continue on into the next three year action plan.

* Continued roll out of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) programme of supports for those with mental health issues. Especially welcome is the recruitment of the Mental Health Engagement Head with Lived Experience by the HSE.
* Continued successful implementation and review by the HSE of its deferral process for young people with disabilities leaving special education or mainstream school, who ordinarily would transfer to Adult Day Services. This process has supported 83 young people and has moved from pilot status to a permanent activity post education.
* DSP introduced a €1,000 training grant for Jobseekers with disabilities availing of services provided by contractors delivering the EmployAbility service[[17]](#footnote-16)
* DSP is making three grants available for jobseekers/existing employees with disabilities and Employers using the EmployAbility service that were previously not available to these groups. These grants include the Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant (WEAG), Personal Reader grant (PPG) and the Job Interview Interpreter Grant (JIIG)[[18]](#footnote-17)
* DSP introduced an increase to the upper earnings disregards for both its Disability Allowance and Blind Pension, by €25 per week, from €350 to €375 in budget 2022 thus further incentivising this group to seek employment.
* In budget 2022, DSP introduced an increase to the general weekly means disregard entry point for its Disability allowance from €2.50 to €7.60 per week. The effect of this measure will be to increase the weekly rate of payment by up to €5.10 per week for Disability Allowance recipients who have means. This also aligns the general weekly disregard for the Disability Allowance with that for the Blind Pension at €7.60 per week.
* DSP introduced a €20,000 disregard in the means test, for persons in receipt of the Disability Allowance or the Blind Pension, who receive a scholarship, bursary or stipend to complete a PhD.
* DSP, through the Dormant Accounts Action Plan 2021, provided funding for 45 projects, amounting to over €7.5 million, to support initiatives under the heading of "Measures to Support Employment, Education and Training Outcomes for People with a Disability and Family Carers".
* DSP produced a guide entitled ‘Get work supports if you have a disability[[19]](#footnote-18)’, to provide clear information for persons with disabilities on work supports that would be available to them on taking up employment.
* NDA published and disseminated policy advice on what would be required to establish a coordinated programme of vocational rehabilitation in Ireland. This comprised both research on vocational rehabilitation systems and a consultation of persons with acquired disabilities in Ireland.
* The newly commenced Employers for Change service,funded by DCEDIY and managed by the Open Doors Initiative, led to a significant programme of employer engagement work during 2021.
* A cross departmental approach convened by DCEDIY with several departments and bodies has established a programme of work in regard to supporting transitions from school, which incorporates activities to promote post school options for learners with disabilities.
* Noting the importance of accessible public transport in supporting disabled people to access employment, during 2021, Changing Places facilities were installed in Connolly Train Station. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has plans to further expand these facilities.
* Sponsored by Pobal and supported by the Open Doors Initiative, Technological University Dublin established a pilot programme on self-employment and entrepreneurship for people with disabilities. This 12 week programme was open to persons who had a business idea and wanted to evaluate the viability of their business proposition.
* DPER continued to successfully support the progression from internships to civil service employment for WAM and Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL) programme graduates.
* Solas published and disseminated guidance entitled ‘New Universal Design for Learning guidance published for Further Education and Training’. This work aims to reduce the barriers to learning for all learners. Solas also led the work to produce and launch the 10 year Adult Literacy for Life Strategy (2021-30).[[20]](#footnote-19)
* Solas provided additional supports in further education and training to support improved access and progression for persons with disabilities
* Higher Education Authority (HEA) Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH 3) funded programmes to support the development of regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education by specified groups[[21]](#footnote-20).
* HEA operated 1916 bursaries that encourage participation by students from sections of society that are significantly under-represented in higher education, including learners with disabilities[[22]](#footnote-21)
* Funding was made available in 2021 to support people with intellectual disabilities in higher education. This funding will support a number of initiatives, including the TCD Intellectual Disability programme[[23]](#footnote-22) and the University College Cork Programme[[24]](#footnote-23). These programme will require evaluation and lessons for scaling up.

## Actions with slow progress during 2021

The following action areas showed slower progress than anticipated during 2021. There are many reasons for limited progress, in some cases including reallocation of staff within public bodies as part of the response to COVID 19. These actions will be described in further detail in the strategic priorities section.

* Some of the recommendations of the Make Work Pay Report, published in 2017 are not yet fully advanced including the interplay between the medical card and access to assistive technology, and development of a new mobility allowance scheme,
* Implementation of the agreed cross-departmental policy in relation to a coordinated programme of supported employment (Action 5.1) was not progressed significantly during 2021. It is welcome to see some aspects of this policy described in the current Pathways to Work plan including the proposed job coach role within the Intreo. However, the requirement to develop a supported employment programme for those with higher support needs has not yet been achieved, although we note the DCEDIY application for ESF funding to develop such a programme,
* There has been a lack of progress on the implementation of career guidance in special education and mainstream setting for those with disabilities as committed in the first three year action plan,
* A lack of progress on DSP review of reasonable accommodation funding available to employers, although it is noted that this has commenced in 2022.
* While policy advice in relation to development of a coordinated programme of vocational rehabilitation was circulated to relevant Departments in 2021, not action was taken and further focus will be required in 2022 in order to implement this advice and test provision,
* The NDA continues to advise on the importance of clearly communicating policy changes made, and their impact on the employment opportunities available to disabled people, noting that it is still common for individuals not to be aware of developments in this space.

# Strategic Priorities 1- 6 progress during 2021

This section of the paper provides further detail on specific actions progressed by departments and/or agencies during 2021 under the CES using the format of the six strategic priority (SP) areas. The original vision and values of the strategy are worth reiterating as the strategy enters its final 3 year action plan.

## Vision and underpinning values

The vision for this strategy is that people with disabilities can get a job and enjoy a rewarding career. The values that underpin this strategy are as follows:

* People with disabilities are enabled to have jobs, earn a living and make a contribution
* People with disabilities are supported to maximise their potential
* The focus is on a person’s capacity not their incapacity
* The strategy covers people across the spectrum of disability
* It pays to have a job
* People with disabilities get the supports they need to work
* Support systems that cross departmental or agency boundaries are mutually coherent and provide a joined-up system and joined-up pathways
* Actions in this strategy are built into the mainstream national employment strategy

## SP1 Build skills, capacity and independence

This pillar of CES activity focuses on addressing gaps in education that may exist for people with disabilities, thereby impacting on employment outcomes. Issues that require action include raising expectations regarding employment and developing transition plans and approaches.

### Early years transition to primary education

The ‘Let’s Get Ready[[25]](#footnote-24)’ transition campaign ran in 2020 and 2021. It was led by DCEDIY, who worked with the Department of Education and a wide range of stakeholders to provide guidance for parents on practical steps they could take to support their children in the months leading up to the transition to primary school. The ‘Let’s Get Ready’ website provided tips on what children and parents could expect on their transition or return to pre-school and primary school. The campaign included a Transitions Pack that was distributed over the summer to all pre-schools and Home School Liaison Co-ordinators through the City and County Childcare Committees. Pre-school services sent them to over 50,000 children who were starting school for the first time. The pack included a tip sheet for parents on supporting independence skills and well-being; a postcard for children to draw a picture of themselves for their new teacher; and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's Mo Scéal template for parents to fill in and provide information on their child for the school.

Establishing the practice of managed and supported transitions along the education journey are an important feature of support the learner with disabilities requires as they build their skills and gain confidence.

### Providing a transition programme for all school leavers (CES action 1.3)

A cross-departmental and agency team consisting of Department of Education, Department of Health, DFHERIS, ETBI (Education Training Boards Ireland), HEA, HSE, National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and Solas have developed a ‘Transition from School’ pilot project during 2021. This project builds on evidence that has shown effective practices such as family involvement, inclusion in general education, work-based learning, and interagency collaboration is necessary to help young people with disabilities reach their potential[[26]](#footnote-25). This pilot project, which will commence in 2022, aims to provide all school leavers who require specialist supports with access to a transitions programme. The pilot will take place over 2.5 to 3 years in two demonstration sites (North Dublin and Galway). A project coordinator is in place and partners from across the education sector will ensure that all young people involved will have a transition plan. The project coordinator is conducting a mapping of provision in the two pilot locations.

Actions in this project include reaching out to rural, urban, DEIS and Gaeltacht schools, be they special schools, mainstream schools or mainstream schools with special classes. The pilot will track the journey of the young person, parents and schools and will be adapted as it goes in order to address the specific transition needs of participants.

#### HSE Adult Day Services

The picture presented by HSE funded Adult Day Services illustrates the level of movement and demand for these services during 2021. Nationally, the HSE processed in excess of 1,800 referrals from Rehabilitation Training (RT) or School Leavers. This process involves an extensive profiling of these referrals. Of note is that approximately 200-300 of those referrals do not enter HSE services. Instead, these young people - with support from disability providers, families and mainstream education providers - choose to access a mainstream option or remain with their current educational service for another year. Further analysis of the profiling data outlining what supports encouraged young people to defer an ADS place would be helpful to plan better transitions.

**Table 1 – Number of people in day services or rehabilitative training 2021**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Number of Adults in Day Services | 17,500 |
| Number of People engaged in RT | 3078 |
| Other: Non SL/RT | 292 |
| Number of Deferred placements RT/School Leavers 2021 | 83 |

### Additional progress during 2021

During 2021, DSP continued to fund the Ability Programme of pilot projects.[[27]](#footnote-26) A final evaluation report is in development, with dissemination to the CES Implementation Group expected in the first half of 2022. The Willing Able and Mentoring (WAM)[[28]](#footnote-27) programme, also funded by DSP continued in 2021. This programme is uniquely placed to support graduates with disabilities in mentored and paid work placements. In 2021, WAM supported a total of 85 graduates securing paid, mentored positions with 16 private sector companies and 16 Civil Service employers. All positions were full time and paid at graduate level. Positions varied in duration from six-months, one year to even some permanent contracts, all exclusively ring-fenced for graduates with disabilities.

As the Further Education Strategy was published in 2020[[29]](#footnote-28), a portion of the Fund for Disabled Students was transferred to Solas to support learners with disabilities. It will be important to capture the data on how this fund is used, and the outcomes associated with this expenditure.

The NDA, in its assessment of SP 1, suggests that the current FET strategy outlines how a cross-government policy can demonstrate and deliver reform. This reform and the other key actions outlined in the FET strategy can deliver tangible change that better serves both the needs of the learner and the labour market. This will require continuing to build and strengthen pathways from secondary school to FET for the learner with a disability and is a key strategic objective for Solas and the wider FET sector. Other measures necessary to unlocking learners potential include ensuring access to vocational options during transition year and senior cycle, and continuing to work with guidance professionals.

The NDA advises that there are specific actions where further information is required:

* Completion of the Solas review of Specialist Training Provision. This review was interrupted by COVID-19
* Solas to gather data on pre-apprenticeship developments to support people with disabilities.

## SP2 Provide bridges and supports into work

This strategic priority is concerned with stemming the flow of people with disabilities into joblessness. Post-age 16 options are critical to ensuring that this does not occur. As evidenced by research, school leavers with disabilities require pathways into further education training and/or higher education that are based on effective career guidance and appropriate support.

CSO evidence shows that more learners with disabilities are choosing further and higher education options. This is supported by Solas data from previous years. However, it is difficult to ascertain if these students are completing these courses and progressing through education and onto employment.

Maintaining supports during COVI -19 and ensuring that young people with disabilities progressed through education was examined by a Trinity College Dublin (TCD) project. TCD reviewed some of the initial literature regarding students’ experiences of online learning. This review was followed up with a survey of 141 TCD students[[30]](#footnote-29), the results of which stated that

‘For most students, the hybrid model of teaching (or blended learning) aspired to over the summer never materialised. Instead, due to the continued spread of COVID-19 in the autumn, students have been forced to be over-reliant on technology while fundamental opportunities for academic, social, and personal development have been severely limited and hollowed out. While technology has provided us with many tools to enable us to study and work from home, many of these solutions have created new problems that technology alone cannot solve; loneliness, isolation, anxiety, frustration and boredom[[31]](#footnote-30)’.

The evidence from the experiences of persons with disabilities such as the TCD survey illustrate that while the responses to COVID-19 were welcomed, the supports to implement them were slow to materialise. Without necessary supports in place learners will have difficulty in completing their courses.

Progress on supports into work for people with disabilities are outlined below.

### Department of Social Protection measures

In 2021 the Department of Social Protection (DSP) introduced a number of new measures to the EmployAbility supported employment scheme that will, over time, have positive impacts for persons with disabilities. The measures included a training grant for participants of up to €1,000. Budget 2022 also introduced a measure that will make reasonable accommodation grants that are currently only available through Intreo centres, available to employers who enter into EmployAbility contracts during 2022. These grants will be available for [Personal Readers](https://www.gov.ie/en/service/231dfe-personal-reader-grant/), [Job Interview Interpreters](https://www.gov.ie/en/service/4c4ce4-job-interview-interpreter-grant/), and [Workplace Equipment Adaptation](https://www.gov.ie/en/service/38fdd0-workplace-equipment-adaptation-grant/) . These two measures should provide further support to both employer and employee involved with EmployAbilty

DSP established an activation programme board as part of the Pathways to Work strategy. This board has agreed to deliver on the early engagement actions arising originally from the Make Work Pay report and carried through to the Pathways to Works Strategy. . A 2017 /2018 consultation exercise on the topic agreed six principles[[32]](#footnote-31), and these principles will underpin early engagement commitments as set out in the new Pathways to Work 2021-2025 strategy[[33]](#footnote-32).

DSP, through the Dormant Accounts Action Plan 2021, has provided funding for 45 projects, amounting to over €7.5 million - to support initiatives under the heading of "Measures to Support Employment, Education and Training Outcomes for People with a Disability and Family Carers".

DSP also applied increases to the Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS) which is a financial incentive targeted at private sector employers and is aimed at encouraging the employment of people with disabilities. The WSS base subsidy available for private sector employers, who employ people with a disability, increased from €5.30 to €6.30 per hour. The new rate is a substantial contribution to the employer’s wage costs. In situations where an employer employs between three and six employees with a disability eligible for WSS, a 10% top-up is applied to the hourly rate increasing the payment rate to €6.93 for each employee. In the case of an employer who has more than 23 eligible employees the payment rate will be €9.45 per hour for each employee.

During 2021, funding to continue the existing 27 projects under the Ability Programme was extended to December 2022**.** A report evaluating these projects due for publication, will have lessons for a number of CES actions and future service design.

### Department of Further Higher Education Research Innovation and Science measures

DFHERIS established a Disability Consultative Committee in 2021, which will be supported by a newly established internal Equality Diversity and Inclusion unit. This is a positive step aimed at ensuring inclusion is a priority for all business units within this department. Inclusion is set out as one of the core strategic goals in the Statement of Strategy[[34]](#footnote-33).

The National Access and Inclusion Plan which aims to deliver a more equitable higher education system received an additional €5m in Budget 2022. One of the key themes of the new plan is the continued targeting of specific groups, with policy measures, funding and institutional initiatives aligned to support these targets. For the first time this will include people with intellectual disabilities.

Also under this department, Solas will commission further research to examine barriers to participation in FET in 2022, with particular reference to persons with a disability. This will help to inform actions to improve participation.

The Action Plan for Apprenticeship (2021-25) was launched in April 2021. One of the five unambiguous objectives in the plan is ‘Apprenticeship for all’, meaning that the profile of the apprenticeship population will more closely reflect the profile of the general population. The explicit ‘deliverables’ underpinning this include an apprenticeship structure that is inclusive in terms of access and delivery.

### Self-employment options

September 2021 saw the development of a new programme for persons with disabilities interested in self-employment. The programme was sponsored by Pobal and supported by the Open Doors Initiative. The programme was open to persons who had a business idea and wanted to evaluate the viability of their business proposition. The 12 week online programme for people with disabilities, developed and delivered by Technological University Dublin, contained 12 weeks of lectures, access to online tools, business mentoring and a range of other supports.[[35]](#footnote-34) Self-employment continues to be an important route to employment for people with disabilities, how supports are continued to be delivered can be informed by this programme.

### Enterprise Ireland programme of work[[36]](#footnote-35)

In 2021, Enterprise Ireland established a *Diversity & Inclusion Steering Group* to oversee the development of the agency’s Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) vision and strategy. This group has now completed the ‘Insight Gathering & Scoping’ phase and is at an advanced stage of developing a D&I Vision and Strategy/ Charter for the organisation. A critical component of this D&I strategy is in supporting entrepreneurship & self-employment for people with a disability.

In addition, as part of Enterprise Ireland’s wider strategy development for 2022-24, a specific ‘Balance & Inclusive Enterprise Development’ working group has been established. This group presented recommended strategic options to Enterprise Ireland Senior Leadership team in Q3 2021, and is a specific pillar that was presented to EI’s Board in Nov 2021. It explores strategic options for the delivery of EI’s 2030 ambition on ‘Balanced and Inclusive Enterprise Development’, and as part of the next Enterprise Ireland strategy (2022-2024).

Throughout 2021, a number of virtual events (Virtual Ability Series) were delivered for EI clients and enterprises. These events included: Recruit for Ability; Inclusive Talent Strategies podcast; and DesignAbility - Innovation through Inclusion webinar. These events were organised in partnership with experts in the various fields, and linked SMEs to available supports. In addition, the event content is hosted on eiLearn portal and is available to enterprises nationally.

### Transport developments during 2021

Persons with disabilities, when consulted on topics such as access to work and education or training, frequently mention the lack of accessible travel options as a barrier. The Department of Transport, and the NTA are responsible for actions under Strategic Priority 2 to provide pathways and supports to work.

The NDA notes the following developments in this space during 2021. Some actions are not completed, but this section will illustrate where progress was made, and where it was slow.

* In 2021, Changing Places facilities have been installed in Connolly Station and it is planned to install such facilities in Heuston Station as part of the total rebuild of its toilets in Q4 of this year. Another Changing Place facility is planned for Waterford Station during its renovation works.
* There is now a four-year Lift Renewal /Replacement Plan of over €18 million to cover from 2020-2023. Twenty-three lifts were replaced/renovated in 2021 with more planned for 2022.
* Capital Funding was provided in 2020 and in 2021, to install the Lift Call System in Irish Rail Stations to try and to minimise the damage caused to lifts due to vandalism. Twenty-eight stations had been completed with an additional nine stations done in 2021.
* New Footbridges and Lifts were installed in Carlow, Ennis and Edgeworthstown in 2021 and similar works started in two other rail stations.
* Improved Wayfinding and Signage were installed at 38 rail stations in 2021.
* Accessible Bus Bays were installed in four bus stations and construction started in 23 locations nationwide.
* NTA want to improve the concept of car sharing beyond the car sharing website and voluntary car schemes. In this regard, the pilot community car schemes established during 2020 are to be reviewed by the NTA at the end of 2021. The review will include information and data on how these services operated during the pandemic as opposed to regular operations and will make recommendations on how to further develop the scheme.
* Providing accessible information on transport to and for persons with disabilities has continued in 2021, such as informing passengers about ‘out of order lifts’ or delays to journeys. However, this provision will continue to require further effort. The NDA suggests that linking these activities to the work underway in the ‘passenger assistance concept’ should provide further assistance to people with a disability to plan their public transport journey. The Travel Assistance Scheme operates throughout the Greater Dublin Area and includes assistance on Dublin Bus, Luas, DART and Go Ahead. The Travel Assistance Scheme recruited more staff in 2021, and this team now has 3 full time and 1 part time members of staff.

The NTA have a number of activities underway to increase the number of wheelchair and accessible taxis across the State. This will be achieved by allowing smaller vehicles to obtain taxi status and by incentivising purchase or adaption of those vehicles. During 2021, the following was reported:

* The NTA has conducted a small public service vehicle (SPSV) accessibility survey with the aim of getting information on the demand, delivery and accessibility levels of SPSV passenger services nationwide. The data will assist NTA in enhancing the SPSV passenger services strategy. As the current percentage of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles is now at 17%, the NTA hopes to continue to improve this number
* The NTA reports that 100% of all city fleet buses are wheelchair accessible and 100% of all Bus Éireann regional fleet is now wheelchair accessible. The NTA reports that 53 double decker coaches now have permanent wheelchair spaces
* 280 new Hybrid Double Decker (DD) city buses have wheelchair spaces, with newer models having additional buggy space on board and a backup ramp on the middle door. New hybrid DD buses also have Induction Loops, additional Passenger Information Displays at wheelchair space, priority seating covers and LED lights on front display.

The NDA note these developments during 2021, but the lived experience of persons with disabilities when asked continues to point to gaps in the public transport system, especially with regard to out of order lifts and availability of assistance staff regarding placement of ramps.

Strategic priority 2 is an important building block in the overall strategy with access to travel, internships, apprenticeship and Ability projects all necessary steps in preparing young people for employment. The NDA assessment is that some good progress has been made in this area but actions such as the review of the DSP reasonable accommodation fund and implementation of the early engagement process require further impetus.

## SP3 Make work pay

Strategic Priority 3 reflects the need to ensure that work pays. When consulted, persons with disabilities have often mentioned the disincentives to obtaining work. Many of those disincentives were addressed in the 2017 Make Work Pay report. Implementation of the recommendations of this report addressed obstacles such as access to a medical card, removal of the rehabilitative work criteria, and increasing the disability allowance earnings disregard.

DCEDIY commenced a review of progress of Make Work Pay recommendations in Q4 2021. This review required departments and agencies to describe and update actions in the Make Work Pay areas that they were involved in. This review is ongoing and will inform the final three-year action plan of the CES.

On the specific issues of ensuring that work pays there is evidence published in 2021 that continues to point to the risk of poverty, the cost of disability and the disparity in earning between persons with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. For example, as highlighted in the data section there are large discrepancies between the median income of people with and without disabilities, and the Cost of Disability study also points to the higher cost of living for people with a disability. The NDA funded ESRI report published in 2021 indicates that Ireland has one of the lowest at risk of poverty rates for employed people without disabilities, but, on average, a much higher rate for people with disabilities. The poverty gap in Ireland is one of the largest across EU countries, when we compare people without disabilities and people with disabilities that are unemployed or inactive[[37]](#footnote-36).

Below are some of the actions that progressed during 2021:

* DSP has secured an earnings disregard increase for the Disability Allowance[[38]](#footnote-37) and Blind Pension in budget 2021 of €20 per week increasing the lower disregard to €140 per week.
* Also secured in Budget 2021 is that from January 2022, the Wage Subsidy Scheme for people with disabilities will increase by €1 per hour (equivalent to 60% of National Minimum Wage)
* A Work Placement Experience Programme (WPEP)[[39]](#footnote-38) was introduced by DSP in 2021. It is a 6-month, 30 hour per week voluntary work experience programme. This programme is available for people in receipt of Disability Allowance or Blind Pension.

There are some actions that require further progress such as the DCEDIY led initiative to develop proposals to address access to, or affordability of, necessary aids, appliances or assistive technologies required for everyday living, for those people with disabilities whose entry, retention or return to work could be jeopardised due to being unable to afford these items.

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

Evidence shows that the likelihood of re-entry to work following acquiring a disability or long-term health condition decreases the longer someone has been out of work.[[40]](#footnote-39) Indeed, for many private sector workers, evidence suggests there may no longer be a job to return to after a six-month absence.[[41]](#footnote-40) It is through developing a systematic response to returning to employment that people with acquired disabilities can remain in employment.

The publication ‘NDA Policy Advice on Vocational Rehabilitation Provision in Ireland’ 2021, collated research on return to work. Evidence indicates that about three quarters of people of working age with disabilities have acquired their disability after the age of 18 and before the age of 65. Many of those affected cease employment within a fairly short time.[[42]](#footnote-41) One study showed employment rates of people with disabilities dropped to about a third.[[43]](#footnote-42) A number of those remaining at work do so part-time.

The current lack of supports provided to those with acquired disabilities and long-term health conditions who wish to return to work will continue to impede progress for those wishing to return to employment. Based on available literature and a consultation with persons with acquired disability the NDA proposed the necessary stages of the vocational rehabilitation pathway for an individual with an acquired disability and or long-term health condition to access, and advised the importance of testing approaches before wider roll-out.

The NDA advises that such a pilot should be led by a statutory body/department with a role in direct delivery of services to the public and that it should be included as an action in the next CES three year action plan. We look forward to supporting relevant stakeholders in this regard during 2022.

## SP5 Provide co-ordinated and seamless support

Progress on specific actions in this strategic priority area was limited during 2021 however, the Pathways to Work report identified a number of elements necessary for a more coordinated and seamless pathway into employment for persons with disabilities.

The commitments described in the Pathways to Work report are echoed in the recommendations set out in the 2021 OECD report, which stated that;

**‘**The Irish Government should make mainstream services by the PES [Public Employment Service] more accessible for persons with disabilities, including by earmarking resources and caseworkers to non-unemployment benefit recipients to ensure consistent outreach and guidance, and targeted profiling and registration of persons with disabilities in the Irish Live Register. In parallel, effective supported employment programmes such as Individual Placement & Support for persons with mental health conditions should be scaled up and rolled out throughout the country and the sustainability of such programmes ensured through long-term planning and funding[[44]](#footnote-43)’.

The following chart serves to highlight the connection between the mainstream public employment service Intreo and the delivery of supports that will assist people with disabilities to access employment. This connected coordinated approach is to be welcomed.

| **Summary CES Action** | **CES** | **Responsible bodies** | **Action detail as per Pathways to Work** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Early Engagement | SP3 | DSP/ DFHERIS & Others | Implement the Early Engagement Roadmap for jobseekers with disabilities. Page 67 |
| Intreo Case Office/ Job Coaches | SP2 | DSP | Implementation of a holistic profiling tool for use by Case Officers/Job Coaches to promote consistency in approach & assist them in forming an understanding of what might work best for their client. (Ensure people with disabilities are included in design) |
| Intreo Case Office/Job Coaches | SP2 | DSP | Invest in and embed continuous professional development as a core feature of Case Officers within Intreo. |
| Tailored Response | SP5 | DSP | The delivery of employment services to people with disabilities needs to be tailored to work for people who may have physical, communicative or cognitive challenges. |

Considering both the Pathways to Work strategy and the OECD findings, any activation process that wishes to include people with disabilities must provide an ‘effective supported employment programme’ such as Individual Placement & Support for persons with mental health conditions’. The OECD report states that current provision should be scaled up and rolled out throughout the country.

The NDA believes that Pathways to Work has the potential to significantly impact SP5 and lead to better opportunities for persons with disabilities seeking employment and for encouraging persons with disabilities to seek employment. We advise a specific focus on relevant actions within the Pathways to Work Strategy during the lifetime of the next CES Action Plan.

## SP6 Engage Employers

Highlights in 2021 relating to this theme include

* NDA-funded OECD research
* DCEDIY-funded Employers for Change initiative
* Public Appointment Service (PAS) work on Equality Diversity and Inclusion
* DPER work to support alternative recruitment measures
* DSP employer engagement activity

### OECD

At the NDA event in 2021 called ‘Effective engagement with employers to improve labour market outcomes for persons with disabilities’ where two reports were launched the OECD stated that,

‘Employer engagement and support for employers are critically important for the improvement of the labour market situation for persons with disabilities in Ireland. Effective strategies for employer engagement are critical to overcome disability-related misperceptions and discrimination and to raise awareness about available support programmes and subsidies. Yet, Ireland has an underdeveloped employer engagement structure with respect to information and supports for the employment of persons with disabilities[[45]](#footnote-44).’

The report includes recommendations with regard to employer engagement and system wide changes to support more people with disabilities into employment, and the NDA will engage further with relevant departments and stakeholders to ensure a focus on implementing these recommendations during 2022.

### Employers for Change

In 2021 the Open Door Initiative was awarded a contract by DCEDIY to establish an employer support service. The Employers for Change’[[46]](#footnote-45) service was launched in March 2021 and has had direct contact with 79 employers and 90 additional communications approaches with Employers/ Human Resources during 2021. Employers for Change are supported in delivery of their work programme by a strategy group with a broad membership from employer bodies, government departments and agencies and people with lived experience.

One of the main areas of support for employers was in relation to providing information on disability inclusion/awareness training and confidence building. Specific activities included:

* Participation in the annual Work and Skills week led by the Department of Social Protection,
* Working with Enterprise Ireland’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Leaders,
* Chairing Ibec’s ‘Medtech and Engineering’ webinar on Neurodiversity
* Participation in Podcasts and articles published in employer bodies such as Chambers Ireland magazine, Ibec’s ezine, Institute of Directors Ireland blog and Social Talent’s blog.

Another key area of support was in relation to information on reasonable accommodation supports, grants and accessibility for potential and existing employees. As outlined in previous research in this area, many employers are unsure of what a ‘reasonable accommodation’ is[[47]](#footnote-46). In alignment with this work, many employers are unclear and unaware of the Department of Social Protection Grants available to employers for the provision of reasonable accommodations. Through collaborative work, the Employers for Change service produced a joint policy paper with Ibec on what employers require to support employees with disabilities[[48]](#footnote-47). The recommendations centred on the need for greater investment in evidence-based employment supports to benefit individuals with disability, the economy and society. The recommendations listed below, are important considerations for the next CES 3 year action plan, including the DSP review of reasonable accommodation grants and the implementation of changes underway with regard to the Wage Subsidy Scheme.

* Reworking and updating the current grants system
* Amalgamate all the current disability supports into one grant
* Create an online application platform for all grants and supports
* Remove the onus from the employer to apply for grant support
* Provide €15m to extend personal assistant supports
* Increase the Subsidy Scheme for persons with a disability
* Remove the threshold of 21.5 hours work per week required to access the Subsidy Scheme for persons with a disability

In launching a joint Ibec and Employers for Change policy paper, Ibec Head of Social Policy, Dr. Kara McGann stated that

“Employers have a key role to play in taking steps to recruit and retain people with disabilities in their organisations and a whole of government approach will also be essential as the current siloed approach means issues can fall between the span of different areas and fail members of our existing and potential workforce from fulfilling their potential”**[[49]](#footnote-48)**.

To support employers in the future, Employers for Change has commenced work on the ‘Impact of remote working during Covid-19’ on people with disabilities and commissioned research with IT Sligo to develop a gold standard toolkit on inclusive recruitment practices for people with disabilities and other marginalised groups.

### Public Appointment Service

PAS launched its first Equality Disability and Inclusion Strategy (ED&I) in March 2021[[50]](#footnote-49). The strategy is built on pillars of actions that include

* Greater knowledge and understanding of diversity in the recruitment market and the Irish Public sector
* Recruitment and selection processes that encourage and enable access to candidates from diverse backgrounds
* Create a culture that models best practice in ED&I and supports building inclusive workplaces.

An ED&I Project Board is in place with an external chair, to drive and monitor this work. During 2021, a PAS staff-informed external review of reasonable accommodations for candidates led to several recommendations, which are now being implemented. To inform further work in PAS, an Equality Monitoring Data project is developing a data driven evidence base. In addition, an Assessment Services review is underway to examine the assessment element of recruitment process with a focus on disabled candidates’ experience, noting that standardised assessments may disadvantage some job applicants with disabilities.

### DPER-supported internship schemes

DPER has approved two paid Disability Internship Schemes that enable people with a disability to gain paid and mentored work experience with civil service employers. The schemes are:

* **OWL Programme** – The second intake of interns (x 10) graduated in December 2021 with the assistance of KARE and WALK. Nine of the interns went forward to successfully compete in a confined civil service recruitment competition, facilitated by PAS, at the end of their internship for permanent part-time roles with civil service employers. An enhanced Toolkit for Employers was published on the Oireachtas website that includes a video with inputs from interns that highlights the benefits and opportunities of such Programmes to both interns and employers.
* DSP funded **WAM Programme** – 2021 saw the highest number of civil service placements with a total of 25 paid full-time placements for third level graduates commencing during the year with the assistance of AHEAD. DPER is working with stakeholders to scope a pilot civil service recruitment competition for permanency, to be undertaken by PAS that will be confined to graduates that successfully complete their WAM placement from Q4 2022.

These internships are welcomed pathways to civil service employment, as they reflect alternative recruitment approaches outlined in the original text of the CES 2015.

**DSP employer engagement activity during 2021**

* DSP launch of labour market initiative Work Placement Experience Programme (WPEP).
* Nationwide information presentations to almost 2,500 employers, which included information on supports for people with disabilities such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme. In addition, a social media campaign on the 3rd December, international day of persons with disabilities, focused on people with a disability in employment and training. This campaign was supported by Intreo, JobsIreland and EURES services.

# Building on the evidence base

In addition to actions progressed under the banner of the CES, new data relevant to the employment of people with disabilities,, published during 2021 provides more information on the employment and educational experiences of persons with disabilities. New data from the CSO, DPER, OECD and ESRI are outlined below.

## Central Statistics Office

A new report from the CSO, developed in collaboration with the NDA was published in December 2021. The report was entitled ‘Income Welfare and Employment Analysis of People with a Disability in 2019’.[[51]](#footnote-50) A new database was created for the report that used government administrative datasets across a wide range of sectors linked to people who identified as having a disability in the Census of Population 2016. This method of analysis provides new insights into employment, education, housing and other outcomes in the lives of persons with a disability. It also reflects a novel use of data. Key messages from this evidence include:

* Less than half (44%) of people with a disability of working age were employed in 2019.[[52]](#footnote-51)
* Separately the data shows the median income of those with a disability in employment in 2019 was €20,212. This compares the state median of €36,095 in 2018, which is the most recent data available.

These data show that progression to further and higher education for students with disabilities is similar to their peers but there is a differences in the percentages in employment and in earning potential.

## DPER Spending Review 2021:

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform unit - Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) - conducted a review of spending on disability and special education lifecycle of supports.[[53]](#footnote-52) It compiled and examined information on 43 disability and special education related supports. Supports included income payments, grants, employment supports, education supports, specialist disability social care services and taxation measures that span several departments.

The review found that:

* A total of €7.1 billion was spent on disability and special education related supports in 2020
* Over the period 2011 to 2020, total expenditure on disability and special education related supports has increased by €2.4 billion or 51%

The number of people in receipt of disability and special education related supports has increased over the period 2011-2020. Specifically

* The number of people accessing Social Protection disability income supports has increased from 194,061 to 279,757, an increase of 85,696 or 44 per cent
* The number of HSE-funded residential places declined from 9,124 to 8,065 , primarily due to changes in policy and regulations
* The number of people in receipt of adult day services increased from 21,224 to 27,084 in 2019 before declining to 17,930 in 2020[[54]](#footnote-53)[[55]](#footnote-54)
* The number of pupils with significant care needs who are being supported by Special Needs Assistants in school has increased from 22,284 (2.7 per cent of school population) to 39,840 (4.2 per cent of school population)

## Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

The OECD, in collaboration with the NDA, examined levels of employer engagement and support for employers. These issues had been identified as critically important to improve the labour market situation for persons with disabilities in Ireland. The report ‘Disability, Work and Inclusion in Ireland: Engaging and supporting employers[[56]](#footnote-55)’ shows that engaging employers is central to building a better world of work for persons with disabilities. The report stated

‘Disability employment policy in Ireland has improved in the past decade but the reforms have not produced the desired results … there is a considerable risk that the crisis will deteriorate the labour market situation for persons with disabilities further – as was the case after the Global Financial Crisis in 2008-09’.

In their research the OECD engaged with government officials and relevant statutory agencies, employer groups and persons with disabilities. The report found that:

* Persons with disabilities in Ireland tend to have lower levels of formal education, are under-represented in full-time employment and over-represented in involuntary part-time employment. They are more vulnerable to job losses during a crisis. Being more exposed than the average worker to the risks from accelerated automation and slightly over-represented in the economic sectors hit hardest, they are also more vulnerable in the COVID-19 crisis
* Four out of ten working-age individuals with a disability in Ireland have only primary or lower secondary education, twice the rate of the rest of the Irish population. Lower levels of education, skills and adult learning participation act as a major impediment to the labour force participation of persons with disabilities in Ireland
* In 2018, over 10% of the Irish working-age population received one of the many disability payments, including many young adults. This is one of the highest shares in OECD countries, in part caused by the fragmentation and characteristics of the disability benefit system. Very few of those on disability payments in Ireland work, yet data indicate that a significant share of them would be able to take up work if the right incentives and support measures were in place[[57]](#footnote-56).

The OECD report outlined a number of actions that the Irish system could introduce to better support employer engagement these will be explored in the commentary on strategy priority 6.

## Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)

The ESRI publication ‘Identification of skills gaps among persons with disabilities and their employment prospects’[[58]](#footnote-57) was published in 2021. This research was commissioned by the NDA. It examined the skills and educational qualifications and employment prospects of people with disabilities compared to those without, and how the situation had changed over time. The study found that among EU-28 countries Ireland had the fourth lowest employment rate among people with disabilities of working age in 2018 (36 per cent). In addition, employment rates among this group did not benefit from the economic recovery that took place after the Great Recession to the same extent as other workers. The report described the prevalence and type of disability relating to the Irish population. With regard to education and employment the report found:

* **Disabilities and education**

The data indicated that the percentage of people with a third-level education had increased over time, but the education gap between people with and without disabilities remains. The Census data for 2016 showed that 30 per cent of people of working age with disabilities had third-level education while it was 47 per cent for people without disabilities. Part of the reason for this discrepancy is due to the older age profile of people with disabilities, but the gap persists even when focusing on young people.

* **Disabilities and employment**

In 2016, only a third of the working age people with disabilities indicated that their main economic status was employment. This compared with two-thirds of those without disabilities. There was considerable variation in the percentages in employment by disability type. In particular, only 15 per cent of individuals with an ‘’intellectual disability were employed in 2016, compared to 46 per cent of people that reported having ‘deafness or a serious hearing impairment’ and 34 per cent for those with ‘blindness or a serious vision impairment’.

# Conclusion

This paper serves to assess some areas of progress in relation to the goals of the CES during 2021, and to highlight key areas that require further action in order to achieve the aims of the Strategy.

The NDA advises that:

* Educational attainment remains a key factor. While improvements in access to further education and training and higher education have occurred, further data on course completion is necessary in order to understand the impact of these developments.
* Progression into employment from education and training requires additional support. A clear pathway aligning supports with individuals is not currently available, and work underway in relation to transitions will be of significant importance in this space.
* Options such as supported employment, internships and apprenticeships remain underdeveloped entry routes to employment for many people with disabilities and require more focused efforts.
* Poverty and lower incomes will continue to limit the opportunities available to persons with disabilities unless addressed.
* Employers seeking to recruit or retain staff with disabilities require access to a support process that includes easy to use, timely and streamlined reasonable accommodations and information.

The NDA advises that priority areas for consideration in the development of the 2022 to 2024 Action Plan include the following:

* Develop a return to work approach for people with (acquired) disabilities who have employment connection and require support via a vocational rehabilitation process
* Utilise the Pathways to Work strategy to ensure the OECD recommendations on employer engagement are implemented
* Support actions relating to transition planning across the strategy
* Address the lack of progress on the provision of Career Guidance for learners with disabilities in special and mainstream school settings
* Address implementation of the agreed policy under CES action 5.1
* Extract learning from the Ability Projects and share that information across the system, therefore ensuring that the learning from these projects is mainstreamed
* Give further consideration to the issues raised in the Cost of Disability review, ensuring that any responses developed take a system wide approach
* Implement the DSP early engagement process, which is key route to employment for young people with disabilities
* Put in place actionable measures to achieve the increased target of 6% of persons employed in the public service by the agreed date of 2024

As noted by the OECD in their 2021 report, Ireland’s employer engagement structure is underdeveloped. During the next CES action plan phase 2022 to 2024, further effort is required to improve employer structures ‘with respect to information and supports for the employment of persons with disabilities’. In that regard it will be important for the DSP review of the reasonable accommodation fund currently underway to be published at the earliest opportunity and for any new grant scheme developed to be accessible and easy to use for employers wishing to recruit and or maintain staff with disabilities.

In addition a unified communications strategy is necessary across the system; one that informs persons with disabilities about changes to the system introduced through CES activity so that the interplay with employment goals can be readily understood.

Finally it is important that persons with disabilities can participate in relation to any developments being planned or implemented on issues relevant to their lives and in the measures across government to ‘build back better’, post COVID-19. In this regard, the NDA advises the importance of meaningful engagement with persons with disabilities, including through their representative bodies, as activity is progressed.

1. https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/disability-work-and-inclusion-in-ireland-engaging-and-supporting-employers.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ireland’s largest lobby & business representative group [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. AsIAm is the national Autism charity https://www.irishjobs.ie/recruiters/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Autism-in-the-Workplace-Report-AsIAm-IrishJobs-April-2021\_FINAL.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.irishjobs.ie/recruiters/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Autism-in-the-Workplace-Report-AsIAm-IrishJobs-April-2021\_FINAL.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.employersforchange.ie/userfiles/files/EFC%20Remote%20Working%20Report%202021\_WebFinal.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/87ee1-spending-review-2021/?referrer=http://www.gov.ie/en/collection/8930f-spending-review-2021/#social-protection [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Making-Remote-Work.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/Legislation/Sick-Leave-Bill-2021.html [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d3b2c-disability-capacity-review-to-2032-a-review-of-social-care-demand-and-capacity-requirements-to-2032/ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. [gov.ie - Pathways to Work Strategy 2021 - 2025 (www.gov.ie)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1feaf-pathways-to-work-2021/) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
12. https://advocacy.ie/2021/10/20/new-advocacy-matters-reports-reveal-devastating-impact-of-covid-19-on-people-with-disabilities/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. https://www.tudublin.ie/media/website/news/2020/homepage/Covid-disability-report-September-2020.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. <https://nda.ie/publications/others/research-publications/lockdowns-unlock-innovations-report.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. <https://ahead.ie/userfiles/files/shop/free/Learning%20from%20Home%20During%20Covid-19%20->%20A%20Survey%20of%20Irish%20FET%20and%20HE%20Students%20with%20Disabilities.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. EmployAbility is a programme of supported employment [Employ Ability | Supporting employment for people with all abilities](https://employability.ie/wp/) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. [https://www.gov.ie/en/service/62fd96-reasonable-accommodation-fund/#](https://www.gov.ie/en/service/62fd96-reasonable-accommodation-fund/) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f6d74-get-work-supports-if-you-have-a-disability/# [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. https://www.solas.ie/alnd-strategy/ [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/path/ [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/funding/student-finance/1916-bursary-fund/ [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. https://www.tcd.ie/tcpid/courses/ [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
24. https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/inclusive-education-pathways-for-students-with-intellectual-disabilities-at-ucc/ [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
25. https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/the-lets-get-ready-campaign/ [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
26. https://www.walk.ie/perch/resources/paste-final-report-august-2018-pdf-1.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
27. Programme funds local projects that for young people with disabilities between the ages of 15 and 29 closer to the labour market. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
28. https://www.ahead.ie/wam [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
29. https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas\_fet\_strategy\_web.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
30. ‘Towards Inclusion - Impacts, Responses and Resources: The Experiences of Students with Disabilities on Learning from Home during Covid-19 – Trinity College Dublin’ [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
31. <https://www.ahead.ie/journal/Towards-Inclusion-Impacts-Responses-and-Resources-The-Experiences-of-Students-with-Disabilities-on-Learning-from-Home-during-Covid-19-Trinity-College-Dublin> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
32. https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c86d6-make-work-pay-report/ [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
33. Page 68 <file:///H:/Downloads/152608_090ec83f-7e86-4419-a63c-d3ee92bbce4a%20(1).pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
34. https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/3f066-statement-of-strategy-2021-2023/ [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
35. <https://www.tudublin.ie/explore/news/self-employment-for-people-with-disabilities---new-course-commencing-in-september.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
36. Enterprise Ireland is the government agency that supports Irish business trade internationally [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
37. https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/identification-of-skills-gaps-among-persons-with-disabilities-and-their-employment-prospects.html [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
38. Further increased in 2022 the earnings limit on Disability Allowance will increase by €25 from €350 to €375 and the weekly means disregard will increase from €2.50 to €7.60 in June 2022. https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social\_welfare/social\_welfare\_payments/disability\_and\_illness/disability\_allowance.html#:~:text=The%20earnings%20limit%20on%20Disability,%E2%82%AC7.60%20in%20June%202022. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
39. https://www.gov.ie/en/service/95fe1-work-placement-experience-programme/ [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
40. 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-39)
41. WRC Social and Economic Research (2008) Research Report on Acquired Disability and Employment [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
42. 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 and Employment [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
43. Gannon and Nolan (2006) Dynamics of disability and social inclusion. Those who experienced disability onset were already somewhat less likely to be employed. This study was based on a longitudinal data set covering 1995-2001, a period of steady economic growth. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
44. https://www.oecd.org/publications/disability-work-and-inclusion-in-ireland-74b45baa-en.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
45. https://www.nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/disability-work-and-inclusion-in-ireland-engaging-and-supporting-employers.html [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
46. <https://www.employersforchange.ie/> [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
47. https://www.ihrec.ie/guides-and-tools/human-rights-and-equality-for-employers/what-does-the-law-say/disability-and-reasonable-accommodation/ [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
48. https://www.ibec.ie/connect-and-learn/media/2021/07/18/improving-employment-opportunities-for-people-with-disability-in-ireland [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
49. https://www.ibec.ie/connect-and-learn/media/2021/07/18/improving-employment-opportunities-for-people-with-disability-in-ireland [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
50. https://www.publicjobs.ie/en/diversity-and-inclusion [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
51. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/fp/fp-iewad/incomeemploymentandwelfareanalysisofpeoplewithadisability2019/> [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
52. Previous reports by CSO, ESRI and others have used the principal economic status question in Census to look at the employment rate of people with a disability. The principal economic status in Census 2016 shows that 30.2% of people with a disability are in employment. As a Frontier publication, this report uses a different method to calculate employment which is based on income and number of weeks worked and will include those who reported 'Student or Pupil', 'Retired', 'Looking after home/family' or other status as their principal economic status in Census 2016 but meet the definition of employment based on income and number of weeks worked in 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
53. <https://assets.gov.ie/205042/ff56196d-476b-478c-abec-d8076f66d45f.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
54. The IGEES review considered that changes in numbers of day service users in 2020 may reflect more accurate data on number of service users and not necessarily a reduction in the volume of services [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
55. 2019/2020 the HSE completed a validation exercise on day service data and updated the National Day Service Database (NDSD) to record all people in day services [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
56. https://www.oecd.org/publications/disability-work-and-inclusion-in-ireland-74b45baa-en.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
57. https://www.oecd.org/publications/disability-work-and-inclusion-in-ireland-74b45baa-en.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
58. https://www.esri.ie/publications/identification-of-skills-gaps-among-persons-with-disabilities-and-their-employment [↑](#footnote-ref-57)