

A Strategy of Engagement

Towards a Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities



NATIONAL DISABILITY AUTHORITY
ÚDARÁS NÁISIÚNTA MÍCHUMAIS

A Strategy of Engagement

**Towards a Comprehensive
Employment Strategy
for People with Disabilities**

prepared for the National Disability Authority

WRC Social and Economic Consultants

March 2006

Addendum for “A Strategy for Engagement”

The NDA wishes to advise that the figures regarding early school leaving among 15 year olds with disabilities reported in the second bullet point on page 13 of this document, are not mutually exclusive. That is, where we report that 'by age 15, over 20% of young people with a physical disability, 16% of those with an intellectual disability and 13% of those with a vision or hearing impairment have left school,' these figures could include young people with more than one disability. In each case, these figures could include young people with the stated disability and one or more other disabilities. NDA has conducted further analysis of the 2002 Census data by single impairment, using the 'have you ceased full time education' question rather than the 'principal economic status' question. A picture of early school leaving by single impairment, for ages 15 and 16 years, emerges as follows:

Table 1 : Has ceased full-time education by disability type and age – 15 to 16 year olds

Age in years	Disability type ¹										Total		
	Sensory disability only		Physical disability only		Learning disability only		More than one disability		All disability types			No disability	
15	237=100%		180=100%		848=100%		302=100%		1567=100%		59315=100%		60882=100%
Has ceased full-time education	%		%		%		%		%		%		%
	8.02		6.67		8.14		11.59		8.62		5.37		5.45
16	229=100%		211=100%		695=100%		302=100%		1437=100%		60245=100%		61682=100%
Has ceased full-time education	7.86		11.37		14.82		13.25		12.87		7.60		7.73

Data on school leaving rates among young people with disabilities by single year of age from 15 – 19 years is available on request from NDA.

¹ The categories in 'Disability type' are defined as follows:-

'Sensory disability' refers to persons with a sensory disability only or with a sensory disability only and 1 or more functional difficulties.

'Physical disability' refers to persons with a physical disability only or with a physical disability only and 1 or more functional difficulties.

'Learning disability' refers to persons with a learning disability only or with a learning disability only and 1 or more functional difficulties.

'More than one disability' refers to persons with more than one of 'Sensory disability', 'Physical disability', and 'Learning disability' as described above.

'All disability types' refers to the sum of 'Sensory disability', 'Physical disability', 'Learning disability' and 'More than one disability' as described above.

'No disability' refers to persons in none of the above but note that 1039 (0.34%) of the total 305,392 persons in this category did indicate that they had a functional difficulty. As per CSO classification, the 'No disability' category includes persons who did not answer any of the relevant Census questions or who answered 'No' to one or more of them and did not answer the remaining ones.

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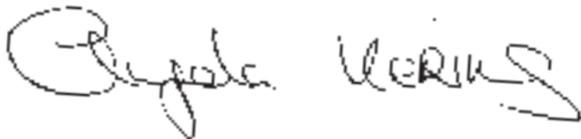
Foreword from Chairperson of National Disability Authority

Having a job is one of the most important ways people with disabilities can achieve economic independence and equal participation in society. A comprehensive strategy for the employment of people with disabilities should therefore be at the heart of the National Disability Strategy.

A comprehensive strategy needs to engage all actors – government, the relevant Departments including Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Social and Family Affairs, and Health and Children; FÁS, the social partners, and of course people with disabilities themselves. That is the core message of the strategy outlined in this report.

This report has been prepared for the National Disability Authority by WRC Social and Economic Consultants. It draws on national and international evidence and best practice, and on inputs from key stakeholders including the NDA itself.

The NDA endorses the road map set out in A Strategy of Engagement, and looks forward to working with all stakeholders to turn the outline strategy detailed here into concrete actions to benefit people with disabilities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angela Kerins', written in a cursive style.

Angela Kerins

Chairperson

National Disability Authority

An aerial photograph of a river valley, showing a winding river through a lush, green landscape. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text 'Executive Summary' is centered in white on the blue background.

Executive Summary

Towards a Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities

The Challenge

Ireland has had a legacy of segregated provision for people with disabilities in school, training and to a large extent in the labour market. The traditional message sent to people with disabilities, whenever in life that disability is acquired, is that they are unlikely to be economically productive and likely to be economically dependent. There has not been a process of systematic engagement with disabled people to establish their employment capabilities or aspirations.

Other factors, for example the benefits trap, inaccessible workplaces or lack of transport also restrict the chances of having a job. The result is that people with disabilities are far less likely to have a job than others of the same age. Moreover, despite sustained economic and jobs growth over the last decade, the employment situation of people with disabilities in Ireland has changed little and may, in fact, have deteriorated over the recent past. In the absence of strategic action that achieves fundamental change, this situation will almost certainly worsen. As Ireland moves more to the knowledge economy and high-value added jobs, people with disabilities are at risk of being left behind, particularly given lower than average levels of education and qualifications. The challenge is to prevent that happening. That is the purpose of the comprehensive employment strategy presented here.

Ireland has had a legacy of segregated provision for people with disabilities in school, training and to a large extent in the labour market.

What the evidence shows

The current system which generates economic dependency among people with disabilities evolved in the context of high unemployment and a much less favourable economic climate than exists today. Many of the components of the system were introduced to safeguard the basic living standards of people with disabilities. However, in today's world the different pieces of the system can serve to trap people into dependency. It is difficult to choose to enter employment if that choice means forgoing assistance with medical or mobility needs, issues that are much more critical for people with disabilities. But it is fundamental to people's lives to have a real choice about having a job.

The overall system has inherently low expectations in relation to people with disabilities. The system delivers very poor outcomes as shown by low levels of education attainment, high levels of early school leaving, low employment rates, high exposure to poverty and social exclusion. The concept of equality should be the core value underpinning the strategy for employment, affording people with disabilities the same real opportunity to hold a job as others in our society have.

Recent statistics show the wide-ranging inequality experienced by people with disabilities:

- just over half (50.8%) of people with disabilities aged 15 to 64 years have no formal second level qualifications – the corresponding figure among people without a disability is 18.8%;
- by age 15, over 20% of young people with a physical disability, 16% of those with an intellectual disability and 13% of those with a vision or hearing impairment have left school, compared to 6% of non-disabled young people. The minimum school-leaving age is 16;
- 27% of disabled young people aged 15 to 19 years have left full-time education compared to 19% of non-disabled young people in the same age range;

- in 1997 there were 1.1 people in receipt of a sickness/disability related welfare payment for every long-term unemployed recipient. By 2004, that ratio had risen to 4 to 1;
- in 2004, 37% of people of working age with a disability or long-standing health problem were in work, compared to 67% of other working-age adults. That represents about 111,000 of the 300,000 ill or disabled people of working age;
- in the twenty-month period between the two special surveys on disability conducted by the CSO in 2002 and 2004, the employment rate for people with a disability fell from 40.1% to 37.1% despite overall employment growth of 5.6% over the period.

The primary target of the proposed Comprehensive Employment Strategy is people with disabilities who are not in work. There is significant diversity amongst this group in terms of age, gender, educational qualifications, and severity and type of disability. Compared to their peers with disabilities who are in work, a substantially higher proportion of those who do not have a job report considerable restrictions in either the type of work or in the amount of work they can do, although a significant minority of those who do not work report no such restrictions. In numerical terms, just over 100,000 of ill/disabled people who are not in employment experience considerable restriction in the kind of work they can do. Just under 30,000 have some restriction, and about 33,000 experience no such restriction. Broadly similar numbers are restricted in the amount of work they could do.

So while 90% of workers with disabilities say they receive no assistance from their employer to facilitate their employment, it is likely that employer support and other assistance would be required to a greater extent to accommodate those now outside the job market.

The primary target of the proposed Comprehensive Employment Strategy is people with disabilities who are not in work.

Designing the response

In designing a strategy to address the need for work and the employment potential of those now outside the labour market, account has to be taken of: their low average levels of educational attainment; the relatively higher pattern of self-employment and part-time work among existing workers with a disability; and, the heterogeneity of the group. By definition, a comprehensive employment strategy, if it is to be effective, must not be based on a one-dimensional concept of disability. The responses and options provided by a comprehensive employment strategy must engage with the diversity of circumstances, needs and abilities of all people with disabilities.

Strategy must engage a range of actors

In order to ensure political and administrative coherence and a clear focus on employment, the strategy should be led, directly, by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The other Government Departments that should be centrally involved in implementing the Strategy include Social and Family Affairs, Education and Science, and Health and Children.

An early priority of the roll-out of the strategy is to establish a process of engagement with people with disabilities in order to ascertain their views on how labour market policy can give effect to their aspirations. Systems, programmes and supports must be put in place to enable equal participation in the labour market.

Certain core principles – consultation, empowerment, and integration – are important to ensure the strategy is relevant to people with disabilities and appropriate to their individual needs. It is also important to try and win the confidence of people with disabilities themselves whose experience has, to date, been less than positive. This will require sustained, committed and ongoing communication with them. To convince people that a comprehensive employment strategy is for real, there will need to be demonstrable change in the system with which people with disabilities interact. The strategy must also be seen to be outcome-driven.

The Strategy

The national and international literature, and the data on labour market inequality, underpin the necessary elements of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities. The key pillars include:

1. remove disincentives and benefit traps arising from the operation of the welfare system and ensure that transitions to employment are possible, financially rewarding, and sustainable;
2. enhance the capacity and effectiveness of the education, training and employment system – active labour market policy – to ensure that people with disabilities are equipped to compete for employment in the contemporary labour market and to benefit from future patterns of occupational growth;
3. ensure that both the public and private sectors implement policies to support the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities, which are rooted in a knowledge of the capabilities of people with disabilities;
4. devise and implement a preventative strategy:
 - a. reduce early school-leaving among young people with disabilities;
 - b. improve retention in employment following the onset of a disability in adult life;
5. develop a systematic process of engagement with people with disabilities in order to assist them articulate and realise their employment aspirations.

Cross-cutting the above is the need to:

6. ensure that the volume and overall pattern of provision in programmes of education, training and employment is sufficiently diverse to meet the needs of all people with disabilities, particularly people experiencing severe disabilities.

It must be emphasised that *all* of the components of the proposed strategy identified above must be implemented in an integrated manner if significant progress is to be achieved.

Summary of change required

From	To
Recipient status	Participant status
Passive maintenance	Active support
Dependence	Independence
Labelling as unemployable	Identification of work skills
Disincentive	Incentives to seek employment (and volunteer opportunities)
Insufficient employment supports	Opportunity to develop skills and experience
Insufficient portable benefits and services	Portable benefits and services
Multiple access requirements	Integrated access requirements

Conclusion

This report presents a comprehensive strategy to address the labour market integration of people with disabilities, with a view to achieving fundamental change. This will require prioritisation of these issues at political and administrative level. The effective implementation of the strategy will require senior level political patronage and support in order to arrive at a co-ordinated solution and to achieve real outcomes rather than piecemeal activity.

The current employment and economic climate presents an unprecedented opportunity to address the persistent issue of exclusion of people with disabilities from employment. However, the response needs to be both comprehensive and strategic if a difference is to be made.

People with disabilities are twice as likely to experience poverty, which is closely related to exclusion from the labour market. Adopting a comprehensive strategy on employment for people with disabilities would follow through on public policy commitments to equality, social inclusion, and the reduction of poverty.

Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement

Strategic Pillar	Rationale	Actions
<p>Removing disincentives and benefit traps arising from the operation of the welfare system and ensuring that transitions to employment are possible, financially rewarding, and sustainable.</p>	<p>The current system promotes dependence and effectively acts as a passive maintenance mechanism. It encourages economic inactivity by making it difficult to move from welfare dependency due, for example, to the failure to recognise partial capacity for work and to the loss, or threat of loss, of certain benefits on taking up employment and increasing gross income. There is no recognition of the cost of disability.</p>	<p>Key Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a tax credit for people with disabilities moving from welfare to employment. • Increase the income threshold for the Medical Card by introducing a disability allowance in calculating the income threshold. • Allow for the retention of the Medical Card for all persons with a disability taking up employment for a period of one year (regardless of the income threshold for eligibility). • Introduce an employment assessment dimension into procedures for qualifying for income support for people with disabilities. • Introduce a cost of disability payment. <p>Other Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationalise the number of illness/disability related welfare payments. • Recognise partial (in)capacity.

Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement (continued)

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Strategic Pillar	Rationale	Actions
<p>Enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of the education, training and employment system – active labour market policy – to ensure that people with disabilities are equipped to compete for employment in the contemporary labour market and to benefit from future patterns of occupational growth.</p>	<p>People with disabilities in Ireland are significantly less qualified than their non-disabled peers. In the context of a competitive and credentialist-based employment market, this places people with disabilities at an extreme disadvantage. Increasing the quality and market relevance of programming available to people with disabilities would significantly improve their competitive chances in the labour market.</p>	<p>Key Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In relation to the existing package of educational and training programmes, increase the level of participation by people with disabilities in education and training programmes that are effectively linked to contemporary and future patterns of employment demand. • For people with disabilities participating in basic or pre-vocational programmes, ensure that there is progression to education and training programmes that are effectively linked to contemporary and future patterns of occupational/employment demand. • Introduce a work placement module for people with disabilities participating in educational and training programmes. • Participation by people with disabilities in Community Employment should be more closely linked with the employment and career aspirations of people with disabilities, and access to education and training designed to enhance the labour market relevant skills of people with disabilities should be integrated into the operation of the programme. Post programme support should be provided to ensure that the benefits arising from participation in CE can provide a platform for accessing employment in the open labour market.

Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement (continued)

Strategic Pillar	Rationale	Actions
<p>Enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of the education, training and employment system – active labour market policy – to ensure that people with disabilities are equipped to compete for employment in the contemporary labour market and to benefit from future patterns of occupational growth.</p>	<p>People with disabilities in Ireland are significantly less qualified than their non-disabled peers. In the context of a competitive and credentialist-based employment market, this places people with disabilities at an extreme disadvantage. Increasing the quality and market relevance of programming available to people with disabilities would significantly improve their competitive chances in the labour market.</p>	<p>Key Recommendations (continued)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of the Back to Work Allowance as a link to employment for people with disabilities should be strengthened. • The Wage Subsidy Scheme should be recast as an employment support scheme, rather than being premised on providing a wage subsidy based on productivity deficits. The WSS should also provide employment support on a sliding scale basis and be time limited, thus permitting a continual level of intake to the programme over time. <p>Other Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put working and target driven progression pathways in place within the education and training system to facilitate the progression of people with disabilities. • Set realistic performance targets concerning progression and employment placement for state and other providers. • Examine the efficacy of existing arrangements from a labour market perspective and act based on objective findings. • Provide more in-work type training opportunities for people with disabilities in order to ensure relevance and currency but also to impact on attitudes, stereotyping and potential discrimination amongst employers and fellow employees. • Set and pursue participation, progression and employment related targets.

Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement (continued)

Strategic Pillar	Rationale	Actions
<p>Ensuring that both the public and private sectors are aware of the capabilities of people with disabilities and, on that basis, implement policies to support the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities.</p>	<p>There is a low level of demand for people with disabilities among employers. In Ireland there has been a number of (largely small pilot) efforts to address the negative attitudes of employers vis-à-vis people with disabilities. There should be a sustained and coordinated effort to change employer behaviour. The state has a major role to play in this regard as an exemplar in its own recruitment practices, as a significant purchaser of services and goods from the private sector, and as the primary funder of the community and voluntary sector.</p>	<p>Key Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All employer organisations (i.e., IBEC, SFA, ISME, and Chambers of Commerce) be engaged with – possibly as part of social partnership negotiations – to advocate amongst their membership in respect of the employment of people with disabilities and to identify from among their members a pool of employers stating a willingness to provide employment placements for people with disabilities, thereby facilitating the interaction of employment services with employers in this regard. <p>Other Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise public sector recruitment and retention of people with disabilities. • Prioritise public sector accommodation of disability. • Use public sector contracting to leverage change. • Use grant giving to leverage change. • Package and market supports for employers to employ people with disabilities. • Promote flexible working arrangements to accommodate diversity. • Undertake a sustained and targeted information/education campaign to promote awareness of capabilities of people with disabilities and their visibility as a source of labour supply.

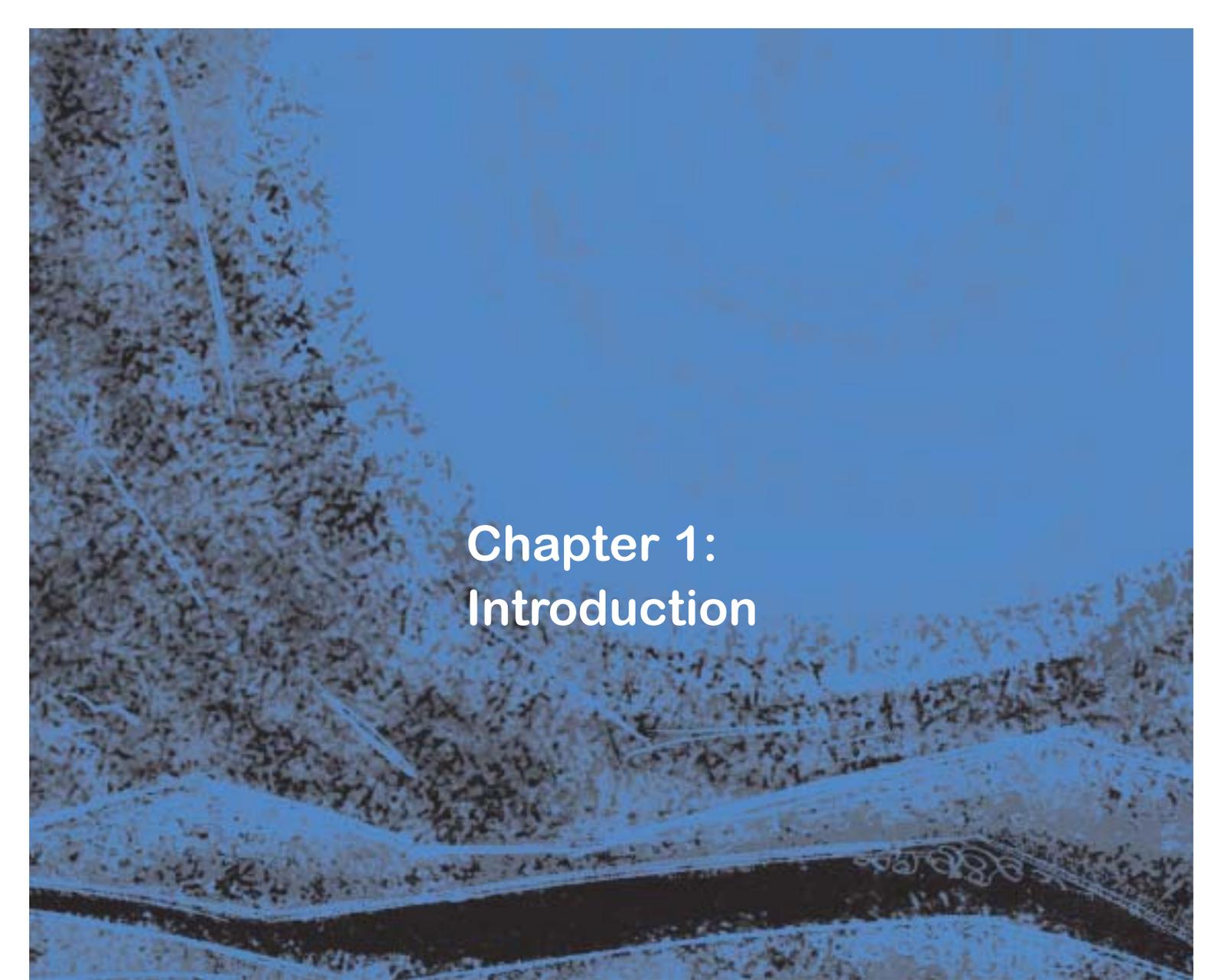
Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement (continued)

Strategic Pillar	Rationale	Actions
<p>Devise and implement a preventative strategy aimed at reducing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the current level of early school-leaving among young people with disabilities; and, (b) the rate of exit from employment in adult life following the onset of a disability. 	<p>Young people with disabilities leave school earlier and secure lower qualifications than their non-disabled peers with this, in turn, contributing to lifelong inequalities in employment rates and earnings.</p> <p>Between three-quarters and four-fifths of persons with disability acquire this during their life course and there is a high rate of exiting from employment following the onset of illness or disability.</p>	<p>Key Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a social guarantee programme that commits the state to ensuring that school leavers without Leaving Certificate qualifications receive further education and training to at least Level 5 of the National Qualifications Framework. • Ensure that vocational/occupational/employment assessment and guidance are provided as part of the process of qualifying for income support; (ii) support, on an early intervention basis, is provided (by the state and, where relevant, employers) to enable persons acquiring a disability to develop an individualised employment entry/re-entry plan. <p>Other Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote/legislate for employer responsibilities for employee retention. • Provide packaged supports to individuals and employers. • Train managers in retention strategies. • Provide support to help people cope with workplace stress. • Need to train for and practice ‘disability management’ in the system. • Explore international innovations such as Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilot in the UK and the system shifts that have resulted in increased employer responsibilities in the Netherlands.

Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement (continued)

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Strategic Pillar	Rationale	Actions
<p>Developing a systematic process of engagement with people with disabilities in order to assist them articulate and realise their employment aspirations.</p>	<p>This requires a shift from passive processing to active engagement with the client as a potential economic actor. Active engagement with clients as they enter the system sends a clear message – the process should be clearly focused on facilitating the greatest level of independence for the client and should never be reduced to a benefit limiting exercise.</p>	<p>Key Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devise and implement an action plan for engaging with people with disabilities. <p>Other Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure early intervention with people with disabilities. • Provide staff training for personnel in national employment service. • Provide services in the area of occupational assessment, counselling, guidance as part of national employment service. • Incremental introduction of benefit subject to assessment and guidance particularly for young people who can currently access full benefits from age 16 on the basis of purely medical criteria. • Integrate information and contact points – ‘one-stop-shop’.
CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE		
<p>Ensure that the volume and overall pattern of provision in the area of education, training and employment programming is sufficiently diverse to meet the needs of all people with disabilities, particularly people experiencing severe disabilities.</p>		

An aerial photograph of a river delta, showing a network of channels and distributaries. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text 'Chapter 1: Introduction' is centered in the upper half of the image.

Chapter 1:
Introduction

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1

1.1 Introduction

This report results from a request for tender issued in September 2005 by the National Disability Authority (NDA) that sought proposals to identify a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities in Ireland that would take into account, *inter alia*, the range of interventions already in place as well as the heterogeneity within the population of people with disabilities in Ireland.

The NDA required a research input that: (i) undertook an analysis of the labour market circumstances and experiences of people with disabilities¹; and, (ii) produced an evidenced-based comprehensive employment strategy rather than detailed operational recommendations. This was required in order to arrive at an overview of the necessary policy changes and associated set of recommendations that could inform the NDA's interaction with the rolling out of the National Disability Strategy from an employment perspective and, in particular, to inform its interaction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in the context of its preparation of a Sectoral Development Plan.

In order to meet the NDA's requirements, the research that informs the comprehensive employment strategy presented in Chapter 6 of this report includes:

- an analysis and presentation of data on the number of people with disabilities of working age, their qualifications, welfare and/or employment status, type of work engaged in, and level of severity of disability and its relationship to the type and amount of work that can be undertaken (Chapter 2);

...to identify a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities in Ireland...

- a literature review that covers key international research and commentary on the employment of people with disabilities as well as a comprehensive review of national research, evaluation and related policy documentation (Chapter 3); and,
- a summary analysis and presentation of data on the participation of people with disabilities in vocational education, training and employment programmes (Chapter 4).

Against the backdrop of the findings resulting from the above, Chapter 5 identifies and discusses a number of strands of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities. Chapter 6 presents the principles and values required to underpin the proposed *Strategy of Engagement* and re-presents the pillars of the strategy as identified in Chapter 5 together with key recommendations and associated activities.

This report identifies the key issues that must be tackled by a comprehensive strategy for the employment of people with disabilities. It also identifies the major headings or pillars under which the strategy should be rolled out. The authors are aware that there are many tactical and implementation intricacies that sit just below the pillars of the strategy and that there are many different ways in which the strategy can be delivered; however, it is beyond the scope of this report, which has a strategy focus, to engage with these tactical, managerial and operational issues. The key initial point is to get agreement on the legitimacy of the pillars of the strategy as identified and associated key recommendations before second-guessing some of the down-the-line issues that will, inevitably, be problematic.

This report identifies the key issues that must be tackled by a comprehensive strategy for the employment of people with disabilities.

1.2 Rationale for a *Strategy of Engagement*

1.2.1 Unprecedented Opportunity

Given the sustained employment growth of the past decade coupled with projected employment growth and demand for labour in the medium term, there is an unprecedented opportunity available to address the documented labour market inequality experienced by people with disabilities. **However, the data and literature reviewed here suggest that the fundamental change that is required will not occur simply because informed opinion and social policy agrees that it should.** The research presented in this report suggests that, despite sustained economic and employment growth, the employment situation of people with disabilities has remained, at best, static; although there is evidence to suggest that it has worsened. In the absence of strategic action that achieves fundamental change, the employment situation of people with disabilities in Ireland will almost certainly worsen as the labour force ratchets up its skills in pursuit of lifelong learning, the knowledge economy and high value-added jobs.

While there is an unprecedented opportunity to address a persistent issue, the response needs to be comprehensive and strategic. Such an opportunity, if taken, will be in tune with significant aspects of public policy including equality policy, social inclusion policy, anti-poverty policy and policy regarding lifelong learning. The means to deliver are also available given a buoyant exchequer.

This report presents a comprehensive strategy through which the issues could be addressed with a view to achieving fundamental change. What is ultimately required however, is the political and administrative prioritisation of the issues. In that regard the strategy presented – if it is to be effectively implemented – will require senior level political patronage and support with a view to arriving at a co-ordinated solution and achieving real outcomes rather than piecemeal activity.

1.2.2 Unequal Treatment

In *Disability programmes in need of reform* (OECD, 2003) the authors note (our emphasis):

*The low employment rate of people with disabilities reflects a **failure** of government social policies. **Societies hide away** some disabled individuals on generous benefits. Others **isolate them** in sheltered work programmes. Efforts to help them find work in the open labour market are often lacking. The shortcomings affect moderately disabled individuals, as well as those with severe handicaps, but are particularly true for people over age 50. ... **Recent research in 20 countries found none to have a successful policy for disabled people (p. 1).***

Although referring to the broader international experience in relation to the labour market and more general societal experience of people with disabilities, that paragraph succinctly and uncompromisingly captures the essence of the findings of the research that underpins the strategy presented in this report.

Historically, people with disabilities in Ireland have experienced segregation at school, in vocational education and training and in the terms under which they benefit from welfare. The critical message sent to people with disabilities, whether they be young people leaving school or people leaving work with a disability acquired in adult life, is that they are: (i) dependent and expected to be so; and, (ii) likely to be economically unproductive or less productive than the general population. There is no system that seeks to systematically engage with and establish the employment capabilities or aspirations of people with disabilities. The working assumption is that people with disabilities cannot work or cannot work in 'normal' jobs under 'normal' conditions.

1.2.3 An Outdated Model

The current dependency-generating system is an inherited model that evolved in the context of high unemployment and a much less favourable economic climate than pertains today. Many of its components were introduced as a safeguard to basic living standards for people with disabilities: however, in the current context, the combined and complicating effect of piecemeal responses

has resulted in a form of entrapment that produces dependency and makes it difficult for individuals to make what are fundamental life-choices in relation to their relationship with the labour market. These choices can appear to the individuals concerned to be of a magnitude and significance that is rarely, if ever, encountered by most non-disabled people.

The system has inherently low levels of expectation in relation to people with disabilities and it delivers very poor outcomes as evidenced, for example, in low levels of educational attainment, high rates of early school leaving, low employment rates, high exposure to poverty and social exclusion. It operates in a manner that is diametrically opposed to the concepts and practices that would be required to underpin the operation of a modern developmental welfare state. The *Strategy of Engagement* that is proposed in this report requires a level of engagement with people with disabilities and the delivery of a range of quality and relevant services commensurate with a developmental approach to welfare and commensurate with the scale and nature of the issues encountered by people with disabilities in relation to employment and the labour market. In that regard it is also in tune with the thinking that underpins the National Economic and Social Council's *The Developmental Welfare State* (2005). That report argues that the developmental welfare state should engage in three overlapping spheres of activity (i.e., services, income supports, and activist or innovative measures) and that a radical development of services is the single most important route to improving social protection. An Taoiseach emphasised this in the speech he delivered at the launch of the NESC report when he noted that he was "pleased that the Council has recognised the Government's current effort to deliver a Strategy, which will ensure that people with disabilities can participate on an equal basis in society. As the report highlights, this is a complex and demanding process – with the potential to deliver significant improvements in service to a long-neglected part of society." Delivering the *Strategy of Engagement* will need considerable innovation in policies and practices in the three overlapping areas identified by the NESC.

...the potential to deliver significant improvements in service to a long-neglected part of society.

1.2.4 Persistent Inequality

The recent availability of more and better quality official statistics concerning people with disabilities in Ireland serves to underpin an unambiguous message concerning the wide-ranging inequality experienced by people within that group. Some of the key employment-related statistics and trends reported in detail in Chapter 2 are as follows:

Education, Training and Qualifications

- just half (50.8%) of people with disabilities aged 15 to 64 years have no formal second-level qualifications – the corresponding figure among people without a disability is 18.8%;
- more than 20% of young people with a physical disability leave school by age 15 as do 16% of young people with an intellectual disability and 13% with a vision or hearing impairment (the legal school leaving age is 16 years); and,
- 27% of young people aged 15 to 19 years with a disability had completed their education compared to 19% of non-disabled young people in the same age range.

Welfare and Unemployment

- between 1997 and 2004, there was an absolute decrease of approximately 77,000 in the number of long-term unemployed welfare recipients (a reduction of 62.0%) whereas in the case of recipients of welfare payments related to illness or disability the absolute number increased by approximately 56,000 (a increase of 42.0%); and,
- for every long-term unemployed welfare recipient in 1997 there were 1.1 persons in receipt of a sickness/disability related payment – by 2004, the latter figure had risen to four persons.

Employment

- in 2004 there were almost 300,000 people aged 15 to 64 years with a disability or long-standing health problem in the population. Almost 111,000 were in employment corresponding to an employment rate of 37.1% compared to an employment rate of 67% amongst the non-disabled population;
- in the 20 month period between the two special surveys on disability conducted by the CSO in 2002 and 2004, the employment rate for people with a disability fell from 40.1% to 37.1% despite employment growth of 5.6% over the period;
- only 1% of the total increase in employment over the 20 month period is accounted for by the entry of people with disabilities – mainly women with disabilities – into employment;
- assuming no overlap between the two, 46% of people with disabilities in employment were self-employed (18.1%) or working part-time (27.7%) – the combined total (self-employed and part-time) amongst people without a disability is 32.1%; and,
- 90% of people with disabilities in employment stated that no assistance is provided by their employer to facilitate their employment.

The analysis of the official statistics shows that the employment rate of people with disabilities is in the region of half that of their non-disabled peers and that their employment situation has, at best, remained unchanged during a period of rapid employment growth, but more probably has worsened. It is also evident that the number of recipients of illness and disability related payments has increased rapidly despite sustained economic growth. Addressing this situation is the central challenge of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities.

The population of people with disabilities not in work (the primary target population for the strategy) is a diverse population in terms of gender, age, educational qualifications and severity and type of disability. Compared to their peers in employment, a substantially higher proportion of people with disabilities not in employment experience severe restrictions in both the type and amount of work they can do. Numerically, the size of this group is estimated to be approximately 110,000. On the other hand, approximately 36,500 people with a disability not in employment report no restriction on either the type or amount of work they can do.

In designing a strategy to address the employment potential and needs of people with disabilities, account must be taken of the heterogeneity within this group of people, of the low levels of educational attainment evident within the group as a whole, and of the pattern of employment amongst their employed peers, that is, a high rate of part-time employment and self-employment, both of which appear to provide more flexible working options.

By definition a comprehensive employment strategy, if it is to be effective, must not be based or collapsed onto a one-dimensional concept of disability. The responses and options provided by a comprehensive employment strategy must engage with the diversity of circumstances, needs and abilities of all people with disabilities. In that regard, a key priority is to establish a process of engagement with people with disabilities in order to establish their views regarding how labour market policy can give effect to their aspirations by putting in place the systems, programmes and supports to underpin their equality in the labour market and in employment.

By definition a comprehensive employment strategy, if it is to be effective, must not be based or collapsed onto a one-dimensional concept of disability.

1.3 A Strategy of Engagement

1.3.1 The Components of a Comprehensive Employment Strategy

The review of the international and national literature undertaken for this report has served as a means to elaborate on and interpret the picture of labour market inequality portrayed by official statistics concerning the employment situation of people with disabilities and underpins the identification of the necessary pillars and specific elements of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities. These pillars include:

- (i) removing disincentives and benefit traps arising from the operation of the welfare system and ensuring that transitions to employment are possible, financially rewarding, and sustainable;
- (ii) enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of the education, training and employment system – active labour market policy – to ensure that people with disabilities are equipped to compete for employment in the contemporary labour market and to benefit from future patterns of occupational growth;
- (iii) ensuring that both the public and private sectors are aware of the capabilities of people with disabilities and, on that basis, implement policies to support the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities;
- (iv) devising and implementing a preventative strategy aimed at reducing: (a) the current level of early school-leaving among young people with disabilities; and, (b) the rate of exiting from employment in adult life following the onset of a disability; and,
- (v) developing a systematic process of engagement with people with disabilities in order to assist them articulate and realise their employment aspirations.

Cross-cutting the above is the need to:

- (vi) ensure that the volume and overall pattern of provision in the area of education, training and employment programming is sufficiently diverse to meet the needs of all people with disabilities, particularly people experiencing severe disabilities.

It must be emphasised that *all* of the components of the proposed strategy identified above must be implemented on a parallel and integrated basis if progress is to be achieved. This, as indicated below, will require political will.

1.3.2 Political Will

A comprehensive and coordinated strategy is required to address the range of issues faced by people with disabilities in relation to employment and the labour market. In order to effect change it will be necessary to address the issues arising on a number of fronts. Piecemeal responses will make little inroad into the particularly invidious situation experienced by people with disabilities in this regard. The need to drive and coordinate activity on a number of fronts will require considerable political will. As such, the strategy must be headed by a senior political figure with the capacity and power to steer the process. Although the *Strategy of Engagement* presented below has implications across a number of government departments, it is fundamentally employment related and, as such, should be led by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and contextualised within the overall National Disability Strategy and linked through the Department of An Taoiseach to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion. The other Government Departments that should be centrally involved in implementing the Strategy include Social and Family Affairs, Education and Science, and Health and Children. Additionally, effective action to increase employment should be a core objective of all Sectoral Plans being prepared as part of the National Disability Strategy.

The official statistics unequivocally demonstrate the extraordinary labour market disadvantage experienced by people with disabilities. The research, evaluation and policy-related literature consistently put forward a number of core issues that need to be addressed in order to counter that labour market disadvantage. The *Strategy of Engagement* proposed in this report responds to the issues and the evidence. If pursued in a coordinated fashion, it would have the capacity to significantly address the labour market disadvantage experienced by people with disabilities in Ireland.

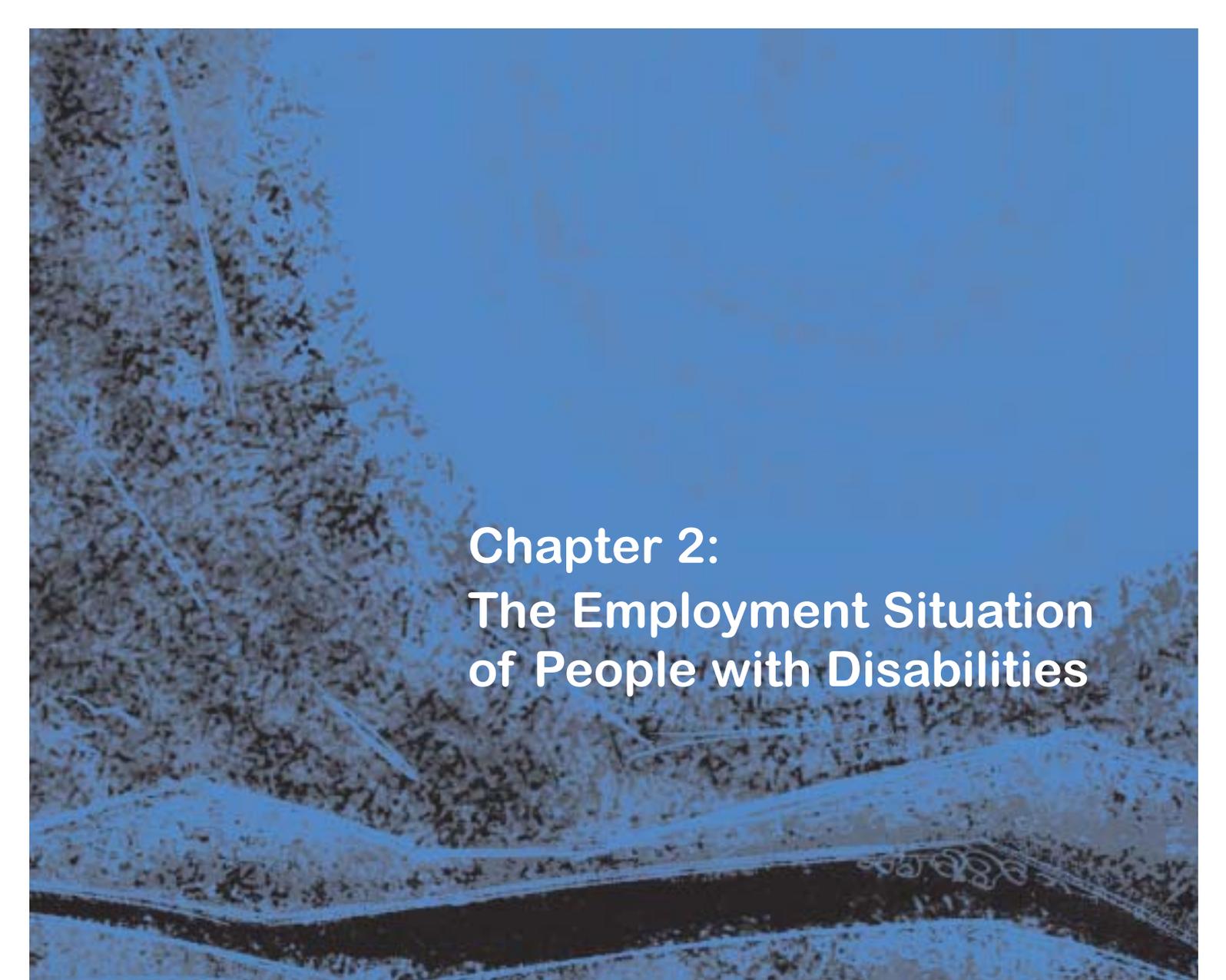
In order for the strategy to be realised it will require, in the first instance, a political decision to be made that it will happen. That decision needs to be driven through the collective will of government and spear-headed by a senior political figure – the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Beyond that, the strategy requires continued political and administrative focus together with adequate resourcing and management.

The strategy provides an opportunity to address a fundamental and persistent inequality in Irish society. If successful, it will have a wide range of benefits for the thousands of individuals currently denied the opportunity to participate in employment and all that that means from a social and economic perspective. It will also have significant benefits for Irish society and will be a marker of a maturing within society and a demonstration at international level of what it is possible to do with national wealth generated through sustained economic growth.

In order for the strategy to be realised it will require, in the first instance, a political decision to be made that it will happen.

Footnotes

¹The lens through which the issues are analysed is informed by a labour market analysis of the situation of people with disabilities. This includes stock and flow aspects of the population in question, the employment rate amongst people with disabilities with reference to qualifications, skills and available up-skilling opportunities, and current employment trends and opportunities. In the absence of a system to ascertain the employment capacity or aspirations of people with disabilities not currently in work, no assumptions are made in that regard other than to posit that it is likely, due to illness and other factors, that at least some people (as yet un-quantified) within the population of people with disabilities not in work will simply not be available for work.



**Chapter 2:
The Employment Situation
of People with Disabilities**



2

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the employment situation of people with disabilities and the recent trend in this together with examination of the factors associated with the low employment rate of people with disabilities. As recent publications have covered much of the ground in respect of documenting the labour market inequalities experienced by people with disabilities (e.g., WRCsec, 2003; Gannon and Nolan, 2004; NDA, 2005a; NDA, 2005b) this review concentrates on identifying a number of key features of the employment situation of people with disabilities. Recent international literature on this topic is considered and used as a backdrop to assessing the situation in respect of the employment situation of people with disabilities in Ireland. Particular attention is paid to estimating the size of the population of people with disabilities not in work and the composition of this group of people with disabilities is compared with that of people with disabilities in employment. The chapter concludes by identifying a number of factors that need to be taken into account in developing a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities.

2.2 Data on the Employment Situation of People with Disabilities

The recent availability of data on the demographics and economic status of people with disabilities has done much to address the gap that existed in national statistics in this area. The three recent sources of data are the Census of 2002, the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), special modules on disability undertaken in 2002 and 2004, and the Living in Ireland Survey (LIS) which has been conducted on a uniform basis every year from 1995 to 2001. Each of these surveys used different questions to identify people with disabilities. Notably, the questions used in the QNHS and the LIS included people with long-standing health problems and chronic physical or mental health problems, respectively. The different methodologies and questions used in these surveys result in different estimates of both the population of people with disabilities and of their employment rates. However, all three data sources show that the employment rate of people with

disabilities, however defined, is substantially below that of their non-disabled peers (see Table 2.1). For further discussion of these differences see Gannon and Nolan (2004) and NDA (2005a, NDA 2005b).

Table 2.1
Employment Rates^a of People with Disabilities and People without a Disability

	LIS 2000	Census 2002	QNHS 2002	QNHS 2004
People with Disabilities	44.3	25.0	40.1	37.1
People without a Disability	71.7	63.3	68.5	67.0
Employment Rate Gap	27.4	38.3	28.4	29.9

^a The differences in employment rates presented above also reflect different definitions of employment in the data sources. The Census data are based on the Principal Economic Status definition while the QNHS data are based on the ILO definition. The LIS adopts a different approach than both of the foregoing but approximates the ILO definition, hence the proximity of the estimates from this source with those of the QNHS.

Subsequent analyses presented in this chapter mainly use data from the two special modules on disability from the QNHS in 2002 and 2004. The reasons for using data from this source are threefold.

1. Data from this source underpin national and European Union (EU) labour market monitoring systems, are the source from which official employment and unemployment rates and trends are drawn, and are the basis for policy making in respect of the labour market.
2. The data are provided from a large sample of approximately 39,000 households, are available for two points in time, and permit examination of a number of work related issues such as personal assessments of work capabilities and requirements for assistance in working.
3. The estimate of the number of persons with disabilities not in employment in the 2004 QNHS is not that dissimilar from the number of people in receipt of illness and disability related payments from the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA). On the basis of the

Annual Statistical Report of the Department of Social and Family Affairs for 2004 (DSFA, 2005a), the total number of recipients of disability and illness related payments in the 15 to 64 year age range is 178,604. The corresponding estimate from the 2004 QNHS is 187,500.

It should be noted, however, that in using data from this source, people with longstanding health problems are included in the definition of people with disabilities. In surveys which encompass both disability and self-rated health status, about 40% of respondents report being in good or very good health, about 10 to 18% report that they have bad or very bad health, with the remainder stating that they are in fair health.²

2.3 The Employment Situation of People with Disabilities in 2004

The basic figures concerning the labour market situation of people with disabilities at the beginning of 2004 are that, of a population of 298,300, 110,800 were in employment, 9,200 were unemployed, and 178,300 were not economically active. Given the difficulties of accurately estimating the unemployment rate of people with disabilities, the employment rate is acknowledged to be a better indicator of their labour market position (Berthoud, 1993; Arthur and Zarb, 1995). Based on the foregoing figures, the employment rate of people with disabilities aged 15 to 64 years is 37.1%. The corresponding figure for people without a disability is 67.0%. That is, the employment rate of people with disabilities is a little over half that of people without a disability.

The estimate of the number of persons with disabilities not in employment in the 2004 QNHS is not that dissimilar from the number of people in receipt of illness and disability related payments from the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA).

Table 2.2

Employment Rates by Gender Among People with Disabilities and People without a Disability (2004)

	People with Disabilities	People without a Disability	Employment Rate Difference	Employment Rate of People with Disabilities/ Employment Rate of People without a Disability
Men	42.7	78.1	35.4	54.7
Women	31.0	56.0	25.0	55.4
All	37.1	67.0	29.9	55.4

Figure 2.1

Employment Rates by Age Among People with Disabilities and People without a Disability (2004)

	People without a disability	People with a disability
15-24	46.0	39.8
25-34	80.5	49.3
35-44	77.1	49.3
45-54	74.5	38.3
55-64	53.9	24.5

Analysis of employment rates by gender shows that women have lower employment rates than men among both people with disabilities and people without a disability (see Table 2.2). Among both men and women, the employment rate of people with disabilities is approximately half that of their non-disabled peers. That is, men and women with a disability experience the same relative gap in their employment rate vis-à-vis their non-disabled peers. Similarly, the employment rate of women whether with or without disabilities is approximately 70% that of their male counterparts. In other words, there is a greater disparity in employment rates associated with disability than gender.

At all ages people with disabilities have lower employment rates than their non-disabled peers (see Figure 2.1). The small size of the gap found among people in the 15 to 24 year age gap reflects the higher level of retention of young people without a disability in the education system. The gap in employment rates widens as age increases. This indicates that people with disabilities aged between 45 and 64 experience the highest levels of labour market inequality vis-à-vis their non-disabled counterparts.

2.4 Features of the Employment Situation of People with Disabilities

International research indicates that people with disabilities not only have lower employment rates than their non-disabled peers but that their employment and earnings profile is qualitatively and quantitatively different from people without a disability (Baldwin and Johnson, 1994; Baldwin and Johnson, 1995; Meager, *et al.*, 1998; Hotchkiss, 2004; Schur, 2002, 2003; Jones, 2005; Jones and Latreille, 2005). People with disabilities are more likely than their non-disabled peers to be employed in atypical forms of employment including part-time and temporary employment, self-employment, sub-contracted employment, and home working.

At all ages people with disabilities have lower employment rates than their non-disabled peers...

Data on these aspects of the employment situation of people with disabilities in Ireland are limited but, as shown below, people with disabilities are over-represented in part-time employment and, to a lesser extent, in self-employment. Also, data on the earnings of people with disabilities in Ireland reported by Gannon and Nolan (2005) are broadly consistent with the international literature in showing that, controlling for other factors that determine income (e.g., qualifications, experience), people with disabilities have lower hourly earnings than their non-disabled peers (Meager, *et al.*, 1998; Burchardt, 2000; Kidd *et al.*, 2000). A particular complexity in the literature on earnings is the difficulty of incorporating the heterogeneity of people with disabilities in estimating earnings differentials.

The finding that people with disabilities differ from their non-disabled counterparts in the types of work they undertake has raised issues as to whether the observed pattern is due to push factors such as discrimination in accessing more “standard” forms of employment or pull factors associated with voluntarily choosing forms of work where disability can be accommodated more effectively. The research findings are equivocal on this issue of motivation in that support can be found for both the discrimination and accommodation hypotheses. For example, Boylan and Burchardt (2002) found that among the self-employed, people with disabilities were more likely than their non-disabled peers to report that entry to self-employment was due to the absence of alternative employment opportunities. They also found that people with musculoskeletal problems and women with mental health problems were over-represented among people with disabilities in self-employment. More recently, Jones and Latreille (2005), have presented data indicating that entry to self-employment (particularly for men) is due to the greater flexibility in hours and times afforded in self-employment and thus, that the higher rate of self-employment among people with disabilities reflects a voluntary choice of a type of work that best accommodates their disability.

A recent analysis of the higher rates of part-time working among people with disabilities using data from the Labour Force Survey (2003) in the UK provides evidence that part-time employment “provides an important way of accommodating work-limiting disability rather than reflecting marginalisation of

the disabled by employers” (Jones, 2005, p. 1). This study also found that individuals with mental health problems are significantly more likely to be in part-time employment (than other people with disabilities) and that part-time employment increases with the number of health problems reported. The latter finding is interpreted as evidence that part-time employment provides a more effective accommodation into employment for people who might otherwise not engage in employment. There is also evidence that the welfare regime may be influential in this regard, particularly where there is a limit on earnings while retaining income support, thus placing a restriction on the number of hours worked (Schur, 2002).

2.4.1 Self-Employment Among People with Disabilities in Ireland

Based on QNHS figures for 2004, almost one in five (18.1%) of people with disability in employment are self-employed with the majority (75.5%) of these being businesses with no employees. The corresponding figures among people without a disability are 14.4% in self-employment with 68.1% of these being businesses with no employees. While the QNHS does not provide data on the specific occupations/businesses of the self-employed, data provided by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to the authors on people with disabilities participating in the Back to Work Allowance Scheme show considerable occupational differences between people with disabilities in the employee strand of the scheme and those in the self-employed strand of the scheme (WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2005a). Occupations/businesses common among the self-employed include taxi/hackney driving, operating bed and breakfast enterprises, providing childcare services, book-keepers, gardeners, carpentry services, electrical services, and beautician services. In contrast, among employees the main occupations included office, sales, and reception work (among women) and general operative and labourers (among men). A broad interpretation of these data suggest that people with disabilities entering self-employment enter areas of work where they can exercise a degree of flexibility in the hours worked as well as when they work. Relative to the employees, they would also appear to have higher levels of qualifications.

2.4.2 Full-time and Part-time Employment

Accounting for over one in four (27.7%) jobs, part-time employment is substantially higher among people with disabilities than among people without a disability (17.8%). This is also reflected in the lower number of hours typically worked by people with disabilities than people without a disability. Just over one quarter (25.1%) of people with a disability report working less than 30 hours per week while the corresponding figure among people without a disability is 18.2%. People with disabilities are also somewhat more likely than their non-disabled peers to work a variable number of hours per week (13.9% for people with disabilities and 10.1% in the case of people without a disability).

2.4.3 Occupations

There is little difference in the occupations held by people with disabilities and people without a disability. The most notable differences between the two groups are the higher proportion of people with disabilities working in occupations classified as “Other” (mainly unskilled occupations) and the higher proportion employed in sales occupations. Two factors may underlie the broadly similar occupational profiles of people with disabilities and their non-disabled peers: the demographic profile of people with disabilities in employment is more similar to that of the population in employment than to that of people with disabilities not in employment; and, a high proportion (i.e., 85.2%) of people with disabilities in employment have acquired their disability in adult life.

the demographic profile of people with disabilities in employment is more similar to that of the population in employment than to that of people with disabilities not in employment

Figure 2.2**Distribution of Occupations among People with Disabilities and People without a Disability (2004)**

	People with Disabilities	People without a Disability
Managers and Administrators	18.5	16.8
Professional	10.8	12.2
Associate Professional and Technical	9.6	9.5
Clerical and Secretarial	10.1	11.4
Craft and Related	12.2	12.8
Personal and Protective Services	11.1	10.9
Sales	6.6	9.0
Plant and Machine Operatives	8.7	8.5
Other	12.4	9.0

2.4.4 Atypical Work: Disadvantaged Status or Accommodation of Disability?

The published figures on atypical work among people with disabilities in Ireland are consistent with those in the UK and US. When combined, the numbers in self-employment and part-time employment could account for up to 46% of people with disabilities in employment, assuming no overlap between these two groups.

In the light of analyses of this phenomenon by Jones (2005) and Jones and Latreille (2005) in the UK and Hotchkiss (2004) in the US, there is evidence that these forms of employment can be seen as providing opportunities for people with disabilities to become engaged in work in a manner that accommodates their disability. The relatively high levels of participation by people with disabilities in Ireland in Community Employment and the Back to Work Allowance Scheme (self-employment strand) are also consistent with this interpretation (see Chapter 4). Also, over one-fifth (22.2%) of people with disabilities on the Employment Support Scheme were found to be in part-time employment (WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2005b).

Up to recently little attention has been paid to type of employment in the international literature on the employment of people with disabilities. If recent data on this prove to represent the voluntary choice of people with disabilities then there is a need for greater consideration to be given to these forms of employment in developing employment policy for people with disabilities. However, in considering moving in this direction, careful attention needs to be paid to the often precarious nature of self-employment and the limited income arising from part-time employment. In that regard the efforts of a number of innovative projects funded under the EQUAL Community Initiative in Ireland may provide useful reference points for mainstream providers and policy makers (see www.equal-ci.ie). For example, the *E-Quality through E-Work* project aims to address inequalities and barriers to employment for specific target groups, including people with disabilities, through up-skilling to take advantage of subcontracted e-working. The *Education for Employment* project aims to increase the employability of people from marginalised groups, including people with disabilities, through upskilling participants to work as Technical Support Officers in Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) and Assistive Technologies (AT).

2.5 The Recent Trend in the Employment Situation of People with Disabilities

A number of statistics concerning recent changes in the employment situation of people with disabilities can be extracted from the results of the two special surveys on disability undertaken by the CSO in 2002 and 2004 (see Tables 2.3 and 2.4). Noting the possibility of sampling errors associated with small numbers, the overall trend indicated is that, at best, the employment situation of people with disabilities remained unchanged during a period when employment growth was 5.6%. However, a number of aspects of the data presented suggest that the employment situation of people with disabilities may have deteriorated during the 20-month period between the two surveys. For example, the employment rate of people with disabilities was 40.1% in 2002 but fell to 37.1% in 2004. Also, when the percentage change in the number of people in employment is calculated for both people with disabilities

and people without a disability, it is clear that the former – at 0.8% – is seven times less than the latter (at 5.6%).

Table 2.3**Changes in the Employment Situation of People with Disabilities 2002 to 2004**

	2002	2004	Absolute Change	% Change
<i>In Employment (000)</i>				
No Disability	1,534.9	1,621.5	86.6	5.6
Disability	109.9	110.8	0.9	0.8
<i>Employment Rate</i>				
No Disability	68.5	67.0	-1.5	-2.2
Disability	40.1	37.1	-2.9	-7.3
<i>Employment Rate Gap</i>	28.4	29.9	1.5	5.2

Table 2.4**Changes in the Employment Situation of Men and Women with Disabilities 2002 to 2004**

	2002	2004	Absolute Change	% Change
<i>In Employment (000)</i>				
Men with a Disability	66.5	66.6	0.1	0.2
Women with a Disability	43.4	44.2	0.8	1.8
<i>Employment Rate</i>				
Men with a Disability	46.0	42.7	-3.2	-7.0
Women with a Disability	33.5	31.0	-2.5	-7.4
<i>Employment Rate Gap</i>				
Men With a Disability	33.3	35.3	2.1	6.2
Women with a Disability	24.4	25.0	0.6	2.4

When the figures are disaggregated by gender, the pattern that emerges is that men with disabilities fared worse than their female counterparts during the recent period of employment growth (see Table 2.4). This is best illustrated by noting that just 100 of the 900 person increase in employment among people with disabilities is accounted for by men. In line with this, the employment rate gap for men increased by 2.1 percentage points while that of women with disabilities increased by 0.6 percentage points. Again, the possibility of sampling errors influencing this trend should be noted.

Taken collectively these statistics indicate that, relative to people without a disability, the employment situation of people with disabilities is likely to have deteriorated somewhat over the most recent period for which we have data. One further and rather stark statistic that illustrates this is that just 1% of the total increase in employment over the 20 month period is accounted for by the entry of people with disabilities – mainly women with disabilities – into employment. These figures highlight the serious gap between policy aspirations in relation to the employment of people with disabilities and the actual realities of their employment situation and, consequently, raise a number of serious questions for current policies and practices aimed at facilitating people with disabilities into employment and reducing the labour market inequalities experienced by people with disabilities.

2.6 The Recent Trend in the Number of Recipients of Unemployment and Illness and Disability Related Welfare Payments

Data on the number of recipients of unemployment-related welfare payments and recipients of illness/disability related welfare payments are available from the CSO and the DSFA respectively. Analysis of these data for the period 1997 to 2004 shows that, during a period in which a substantial reduction in the number of recipients of unemployment related payments was achieved, the number of recipients of welfare payments related to illness and disability increased (see Figure 2.3). Given the acknowledged difficulties that people who are long-term unemployed experience in accessing employment, the trend observed in relation to people with disabilities is even more notable.

Between 1997 and 2004, there was an absolute decrease of 77,219 in the number of long-term unemployed welfare recipients. This corresponds to a reduction of 62.0%. In the case of recipients of welfare payments related to illness or disability the absolute number increased by 56,418, corresponding to a percentage increase of 42.0%. For every long-term unemployed welfare recipient in 1997 there were 1.1 persons in receipt of a sickness/disability related payment. By 2004, the latter figure had risen to four persons.

Figure 2.3

Trend in Unemployment, Long-term Unemployment and Recipients of Illness and Disability Related Payments, 1997 to 2004

	Unemployment	Long-term Unemployment	Disability
1997	256,856	124,458	134,406
1998	235,861	105,081	139,360
1999	198,076	87,630	146,478
2000	162,107	63,600	153,451
2001	139,519	48,222	162,420
2002	157,492	41,029	172,847
2003	170,284	44,834	181,775
2004	167,056	47,239	190,824

...during a period in which a substantial reduction in the number of recipients of unemployment related payments was achieved, the number of recipients of welfare payments related to illness and disability increased.

Table 2.5
Trend in Employment, Unemployment, Disability and Population, 1997-2004

	Employment 15+	Unemployment – Live Register	Long-term Unemployed Live Register	Recipients of Illness and Disability Payments	Population 15+
1997	1,379,900	256,856	124,458	134,406	2,830,800
2004	1,836,200	167,056	47,239	190,824	3,192,000
Change 97-04	456,300	-89,800	-77,219	56,418	361,200
% Change 97-04	33.1	-35.0	-62.0	42.0	12.8
% Annual Change 97-04	4.7	-5.0	-8.9	7.0	1.8

When the trend in the number of recipients of welfare payments related to illness/disability is placed in the context of population and employment change (see Table 2.4), the question that arises is: why did the number of recipients of sickness/disability related payments rise at an annual rate almost four times in excess of population growth and approximately 1.5 times higher than annual employment growth (and during a period when long-term unemployment decreased substantially)? The possible role of the activation process of the National Employment Action Plan in securing some of the decrease in long-term unemployment through transferring welfare recipients from unemployment to illness and disability related payments needs to be considered as a potential contributory factor. However, the trend in the number of recipients of illness and disability related payments, together with evidence of the recent widening of the employment rate gap between people with disabilities and people without a disability, illustrate that the current underlying dynamic is one in which the labour market circumstances of people with disabilities are actually deteriorating.

2.7 The Position of People with Disabilities in the Labour Market in the Current and Medium Term Context: The Role of Qualifications and Skills

Employment and occupational forecasts indicate strong employment growth in the medium term but also substantial shifts in the sectoral and occupational composition of this growth. Currently, two thirds (66.3%) of employment is in the services sector, just over one quarter (27.8%) is in the industrial sector, and 5.9% in the agricultural sector. The sectoral pattern of employment growth is located in the services sector and employment in the service sector is projected to rise to over 70% by 2010. Consequently, occupational growth is projected to be concentrated in professional, associate professional and non-manual occupations. More generally, the general trajectory of employment growth, and particularly employment policy, in Ireland is now characterised in terms of moving toward a high-skills, knowledge-based economy (e.g., FÁS, 2005).

The pace and sectoral pattern of employment growth has resulted in skills and labour shortages. These shortages have recently been the subject of a report by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs titled '*Skills Needs in the Irish Economy: The Role of Migration*', published in October 2005 (Forfás, 2005). The report identifies and quantifies skills and labour shortages arising across a wide variety of occupations. Increasingly, access to employment – particularly employment in the expanding sectors of the economy – will require the possession of post Leaving Certificate qualifications and the possession of vocational skills relevant to expanding sectors.

...the general trajectory of employment growth, and particularly employment policy, in Ireland is now characterised in terms of moving toward a high-skills, knowledge-based economy.

Table 2.6

Highest Education Level Among Persons who have Completed their Education by Age

	Primary		Lower Secondary		Upper Secondary		Third Level Non-degree		Degree or higher	
	PWD	Others	PWD	Others	PWD	Others	PWD	Others	PWD	Others
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
15-19	33.7	9.2	42.0	43.7	22.6	43.9	1.3	3.0	0.4	0.2
20-24	23.0	3.9	28.1	18.9	33.1	43.9	9.3	16.0	6.6	17.3
25-34	21.2	4.0	28.1	19.2	28.8	32.5	11.0	17.3	10.9	27.0
35-44	24.0	7.6	34.1	28.3	26.4	34.3	7.6	11.7	8.0	18.2
45-54	43.6	23.8	24.7	26.0	19.5	28.0	5.2	7.7	7.0	14.4
55-64	56.0	39.5	18.8	20.9	16.0	22.5	3.3	5.4	5.6	11.6

Source: NDA (2005b) Table 4.2 (Based on data from Census 2002).

Analysis of the educational qualifications of people with disabilities shows that they are poorly equipped to compete in the contemporary labour market and that if their access to education and training is not addressed they will be further marginalised in the medium term as the skills and qualifications to access employment rise. The available data is unequivocal in showing that the educational qualifications of the stock of people with disabilities are substantially below those of their non-disabled peers (see Table 2.5 and Figure 2.4). This is most evident in the very high proportion (50.8%) of people with disabilities possessing no formal second level qualifications (in Figure 2.4). While this high percentage reflects the segregated nature of provision for people with disabilities in the past there is evidence that, despite progress in accommodating young people with disabilities in mainstream second level education, early school leaving among young people with disabilities persists (NDA 2005b). This is illustrated by data from the 2002 Census showing that 27% of young people aged 15 to 19 years with a disability had completed their education compared to 19% of non-disabled young people in the same age range. Moreover, data from the same source show that among young people with disabilities early school-leaving is most prevalent among young people with physical disabilities.

Analysis of the educational qualifications of people with disabilities shows that they are poorly equipped to compete in the contemporary labour market and that if their access to education and training is not addressed they will be further marginalised in the medium term as the skills and qualifications to access employment rise.

Figure 2.4**Educational Qualifications among People with Disabilities and People without a Disability (Census, 2002)**

	No Second Level	Lower Second Level	Upper Second Level	Third Level
People without Disability 15+	18.8	23.0	30.4	27.8
People with Disability 15+	50.8	20.7	17.9	10.6

The higher rate of early school leaving among young people with disabilities than among their non-disabled peers is not unique to Ireland. Burchardt (2005) presents evidence of a similar situation in the UK and notes the negative implications of this for their employment careers.

Given the strong relationship between educational qualifications and employment, the educational qualifications of people with disabilities must be seen as an important factor associated with the labour market inequalities they experience as well as the persistence of their low employment rate during a period of rapid employment expansion. More generally, there are five important reasons why access to education and training should form a central plank of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities. These reasons are as follows:

1. Given the projected sectoral and occupational pattern of employment growth, access to employment, particularly “good quality” employment, will require possessing the requisite qualifications and skills. For both young people with disabilities entering the labour market and for people acquiring disabilities during their life course, access to forms of education and skills training, consistent with patterns of occupation growth, will be essential to developing their employability, avoiding limited occupational choice and enhancing earnings potential.

2. The shift from manual to non-manual employment and the more general growth in service employment provides new opportunities to accommodate people with disabilities in employment. However, access to such employment will require the possession of the requisite skills on the part of people with disabilities and requisite accommodations in work-organisation and environment on the part of employers.
3. In the light of evidence of benefit traps arising for people with disabilities (e.g., Workway, 2004) there is a need to focus not solely on the issues related to welfare but on issues related to earnings. Actions needed to eliminate benefit traps described in Chapter 5 need to be paralleled by actions to ensure that the earnings potential of people with disabilities is enhanced so as to avoid reliance on jobs affording earnings in the region of the minimum wage.
4. Given the high proportion of people with disabilities acquiring their disability in adult life (i.e., between three quarters and four fifths according to the QNHS 2002), there is a need to ensure the provision of education and training provision that affords the possibility of occupational change for people acquiring disabilities.
5. Recent international literature points to the considerable influence that differences in educational and skill levels play in accounting for the employment rate discrepancies found between people with disabilities and people without a disability, as much as 50% in some studies (e.g., Blackaby *et al.*, 1999; Jones *et al.*, 2003; Jones *et al.*, 2004). This, together with evidence that among people with disabilities, the potential effect of qualifications on employment may be greater than among people without a disability (e.g., Hollenbeck and Kimmel, 2001; Jones *et al.*, 2003), underscores the need for particular attention to be paid to this area.

Following a review of the current level and pattern of participation by people with disabilities in education and training programmes in Chapter 4, the actions recommended to address educational and training provision for people with disabilities are presented in Chapter 5.

2.8 Factors Associated with the Varying Employment Rates of People with Disabilities

Recent studies in Ireland (Gannon and Nolan, 2004) and elsewhere (e.g., Jensen *et al.*, 2005) have highlighted the substantial variation in employment rates found within the population of people with disabilities. As is the case among the population of people without a disability, lower employment rates are associated with increasing age and declining levels of educational qualifications. From a labour market perspective there would appear to be an additive effect arising from disability, age and education such that poorly qualified older people with a disability have particularly low employment rates and experience substantial difficulties in accessing work. Among the implications of this is that some people with disabilities experience multiple difficulties in accessing employment (e.g., due to gender, age, lack of relevant experience, qualifications and skills). Consequently, addressing their disadvantaged labour market situation and the labour market inequalities they experience will require not only addressing issues arising from disability, but also issues related to age and qualifications.³

Figure 2.5
Employment Rates (ER) by Disability Type and the Percentage of Persons Reporting Considerable Limitations on the Amount of Work they can do within each Disability Type

	ER	% Severe
Mental, nervous or emotional	22.0	69.6
Other progressive illness	28.4	59.0
Arms or hands	34.7	44.4
Legs or feet	35.4	50.0
Other longstanding health problems	36.2	50.4
Seeing difficulty	38.3	36.2
Speech impediment	38.5	54.5
Heart, blood pressure, circulation	40.4	40.7
Back or neck	42.7	49.7
Epilepsy	44.1	39.0
Hearing difficulty	46.4	21.4
Stomach, liver, kidney, digestive	48.3	30.5
Chest or breathing	50.5	18.5
Skin conditions	58.7	15.2
Diabetes	58.9	16.1

In addition to the expected effect of demographic factors (particularly age), these studies have documented substantial variation in employment rates associated with “type of disability” and “severity of disability”. Figure 2.5 provides a summary of the impact of “type of disability” in Ireland based on the findings of the QNHS (2002). This highlights the particularly low employment rates of persons with “mental, nervous and emotional” conditions, “progressive illnesses” and persons with mobility difficulties. It also demonstrates the substantial variation in employment rates found among people with disabilities (as identified in this data source). The impact of “severity of disability” on employment rates is also highlighted by the data summarised in Figure 2.5. Most notably, there is a strong association between the proportion of people reporting that they experience considerable restriction in the amount of work they can do within each “type of disability” and the

employment rate of people reporting each “type of disability”. This points to the strong influence of the self-reported severity of restriction experienced in relation to the amount of work on the actual likelihood of being in employment. The strong association between increasing severity of disability and declining employment rates is further underlined by studies of this using multivariate statistical procedures that controlled from the influence of other factors such as age and education (Gannon and Nolan, 2004; Jensen *et al.*, 2005). Gannon and Nolan (2004) report that, all other factors (e.g., age, educational qualifications) being equal, men with a longstanding illness or disability, which restricts them severely in the amount of work they can do, have on average a probability of being in the labour force that is 66 percentage points lower than men without an illness or disability. The corresponding figure for women is 42 percentage points.

Figure 2.6
Employment Rates by Cause of Disability

	% Rate
Disease (Work related)	50.5
Accident (Work related)	46.8
Accident (Other)	43.3
Born with Condition or Birth Injury	39.9
Accident (Non-work traffic related)	39.8
Disease (Non-work related)	38.8

Variation in employment rates is also associated with the time of onset of disability/cause of disability. Figure 2.6 shows employment rates by cause of disability. Relative to the overall employment rate of people with a disability (i.e., 40.1%), three groups represented in Figure 2.6 have higher employment rates; people whose disability is work related either through accident or illness, and people whose disability resulted from an accident in either the household, leisure or sports areas (i.e., “Accident Other” in Figure 2.6).

2.9 Composition of People with Disabilities Not in Employment

Estimates of the number of people with disabilities not in employment vary according to the definition of disability used (Census – “disability”, QNHS – “longstanding health problem or disability”), the basis for defining employment (PES – “usual employment status”, ILO – “worked at least one hour in previous week”), and the time of the survey (see Table 2.7)

Table 2.7

Estimates of the Number of People with Disabilities Aged between 15 and 64 Years Not in Employment (Rounded Figures)

	Census 2000 PES	Census 2000 ILO	QNHS 2002 ILO	QNHS 2004 ILO
Not in Work	128,000	151,000	164,000	187,000

As the QNHS figures include people with a longstanding health problem as well as people with a disability, a proportion will not be in a position to work because of illness as distinct from disability. Evidence concerning health status from other surveys suggests that about 10% to 20% of the QNHS figure for 2004 are likely to be experiencing bad or very bad health (NDA, 2005).

Applying this estimate to adjust the 2004 QNHS figure suggests that the pool of people with disabilities to be engaged with by an employment strategy is of the order of 150,000 to 168,000.

...there is a strong association between the proportion of people reporting that they experience considerable restriction in the amount of work they can do within each “type of disability” and the employment rate of people reporting each “type of disability”.

2.9.1 Gender and Age Composition of People with Disabilities not in Employment

As stated earlier, there is considerable agreement between the estimate of the number of people with disabilities not in employment, based on the QNHS 2004 (i.e., 187,500), and the number of recipients of disability related payments in the 15 to 64 year age range according to DSFA statistics for the year 2004 (i.e., 178,604). When both sets of figures are broken down by gender the figures for men with disabilities not in employment are almost identical: 89,200 in the QNHS 2004 and 89,455 according to DSFA statistics for 2004. The corresponding figures for women with disabilities are 98,300 and 89,149 respectively. The higher figure for women with disabilities not in employment in the QNHS 2004 is likely to reflect the difficulty some women with a disability experience in qualifying for means tested payments (i.e., Disability Allowance). Supporting this is the fact that the number of women recipients of Disability Benefit in the 15 to 64 year age range (i.e., 36,996) exceeds that of men (i.e., 21,158) while the reverse is the case in respect of recipients of Disability Allowance, 42,595 of whom are men and 28,540 of whom are women. Regardless of the source of data used, it is evident that the population of people with disabilities not in work is evenly divided between men and women.

Figure 2.7
Age Composition of People with Disabilities (15 to 64 Years) not in Employment and in Employment (2004)

	< 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64
QNHS 04	8.4	10.0	14.3	26.9	40.4
DSFA 04	7.0	14.3	20.0	25.5	33.1
In Employment	9.4	16.4	23.7	28.3	22.2

Figures from the QNHS and the DSFA on the age composition of people with disabilities not in employment show that the majority are over the age of 45 years: 67.3% in the case of the QNHS 2004 and 58.6% in the case of DSFA statistics for 2004 (see Figure 2.7). When the former figure is compared with the proportion of people with disabilities in employment in the same age bracket (i.e., 50.5%), it is clear that people with disabilities not in employment are older than their peers in employment.

2.9.2 Self-assessed Severity of Restriction among People with Disabilities not in Employment

Because of the association between “type of disability” and “severity of disability”, the population of people with disabilities in employment is substantially different from that not in employment. This is illustrated in Figure 2.8 which shows the substantial and disproportionate percentage of people with disabilities not in employment who report that their disability considerably restricts both the type and amount of work they can do. Conversely, the population of people with disabilities in employment substantially comprises people with a disability who report that their disability does not restrict either the type or the amount of work they can do. Noting the association between “type of disability”, the proportion of persons of each disability type reporting severe restrictions, and employment rates, it is also clear that the population of people with disabilities not in employment differs from that in employment with respect to both “type of disability” and “severity of disability”.

Because of the association between “type of disability” and “severity of disability”, the population of people with disabilities in employment is substantially different from that not in employment.

Figure 2.8

Distribution of Severity of Condition in Restricting the Type and Amount of Work People with Disabilities state they can do among People with Disabilities in Employment and among People with Disabilities Not in Employment

	Both, Considerably	Both, Same Extent	Both, No Limitation	Other
Employed	14.1	20.3	49.5	16.2
Not in Work	59.3	14.9	19.2	6.7

Data on health status indicate that among people with a longstanding health problem or disability about 40% would experience fair health and 40% would experience good or very good health. The former group may be more likely to be interested in part-time employment. Census 2002 asked if people had a difficulty in working at a job or business. Recognising that responses may have been influenced by society's expectation that people with disabilities would not be in work, 86,000 (ILO) to 89,000 (PES) people with a disability aged between 15 and 64 years stated that they had a difficulty in working.

2.9.3 Implications of the Composition of People with Disabilities not in Employment for Policy

The composition of people with disabilities not in employment is of considerable significance in the context of both assessing the adequacy of the existing policy approach to assisting people with disabilities enter employment and designing appropriate and effective interventions. There are a number of aspects to this.

First of all, the figures above indicate that the demand side of the labour market seems more effective in accommodating people with disabilities reporting no restrictions on either the type or amount of work they can do than in accommodating people with considerable restrictions in both areas. A corollary of this is that within the small proportion of companies reporting that they employ people with disabilities (estimated at 12% of all companies by

the Manpower SkillsGroup Survey, 2003), an even smaller proportion will have experience of employing a person with a disability experiencing considerable restriction in the kind and amount of work they can do. This may also underlie the finding that over 90% of people with disabilities in employment stated that no assistance is provided by their employer to facilitate their employment (QNHS, 2002, Table 13).

Second, the population of people with disabilities with whom policy intervention is needed disproportionately comprises people with disabilities who report considerable difficulties in both the type and amount of work they can do (in absolute figures the number likely to be currently in the region of 110,000). A substantial proportion of this group is accounted for by five types of disability. These are in order of scale: mental, nervous and emotional conditions, back or neck conditions, conditions related to heart, circulation and blood pressure, other longstanding health problems and mobility difficulties related to legs and feet. What is not known in respect of this group is the number actually seeking work, the types of work being sought, and the employment conditions and supports required to enter employment. An indicative figure in respect of the latter issue is that 18.5% of people with disabilities not in employment stated that they would need assistance to be provided in order for them to work (QNHS, 2002, Table 14). In absolute terms this currently amounts to approximately 34,700. Even if all of these were people reporting considerable restriction in both the type and amount of work they can do, approximately 75,300 people with a disability with considerable restrictions on both the type and amount of work they can do would not appear to require assistance in order for them to work.

Third, the variation in self-assessed restrictions among people with disabilities not in employment also points to the need for policy to be sensitive to the issue of “creaming” or dealing only with the “easy end” of the problem. That is, progress could be made in respect of increasing the employment rates of people with disabilities by only or primarily dealing with people with disabilities reporting no restriction on the type or amount of work they can do (approximately 36,500 people with a disability fall into this group). Taking account of this point in policy terms requires an approach to objective and

target setting that takes into account people's self-assessed restrictions on the type and amount of work they can do and their requirements in terms of supports and assistance in relation to employment. Failure to do this – given the current pattern of employment of people with disabilities – could easily result in the further marginalisation of a large number of people with disabilities, particularly people experiencing severe restrictions.

Fourth, while it is not possible to explore the overlap between severity of restriction and age from published statistics it is likely that a considerable proportion of people with disabilities not in employment will face difficulties in securing employment arising from a combination of their age and severity of restriction. Similarly, while it is not possible to examine the relationship between educational qualifications, age, and severity of restriction, the expected pattern of association between these factors would suggest that older people with a disability not in employment experience multiple barriers in their efforts to secure employment. One of the key issues arising, however, is that a substantial proportion of people with disabilities will face difficulties in accessing employment due to a combination of age and disability. Also, the policy effort required to assist older people with disabilities into employment is likely to be significantly higher than that required to assist younger people with disabilities.

Finally, it must be recognised that within the population of people with disabilities not in work, there is likely to be a substantial – but currently difficult to estimate – number of people with severe and/or multiple disabilities. Also, at any given time there will be a substantial – but again difficult to estimate – number of people who will be unable to work due to their illness or disability and/or concurrent health problems preventing them from seeking or taking up employment. With respect to the former group there is a need for information in respect of their employment aspirations and the supports they require if policy is to be effective in meeting their needs. With respect to the latter group their needs will primarily be addressed through the health and welfare system.

2.10 The Experience of Discrimination among People with Disabilities

Delsen 1996 has defined discrimination in relation to employment as follows:

Discrimination occurs when persons of equal productivity are offered different wages and unequal opportunities for employment.

Discrimination may result, for example, from prejudice, differential information concerning the average productivity of majority and minority workers or from exploitation. (p. 527)

Erhel *et al.*, (1996) note in the context of their discussion of jobs for people defined as “hard to place” that “information problems” constitute a substantial proportion of the difficulties arising from the demand side. In that context they present an account of statistical discrimination as follows:

in order to assess the productivity and motivation of a job applicant, an employer may simply rely on the mean productivity of the group to which the applicant belongs. Such an attitude constitutes a cheap screening device ... Depending on the nature of group productivity ascriptions, such ‘rational’ behaviour can lead to genuine discrimination. Stigma is a common feature on the labour market, and although helping job seekers to send the ‘right’ productivity signals can go some way to improving the situation, the problem seems to be more deeply rooted. (pp. 278-279)

The presence of direct and indirect discrimination on the part of employers in relation to the recruitment of people with disabilities has been identified as among the factors associated with the low employment rates of people with disabilities, though the estimation of the effect of this using econometric procedures has proved difficult and problematic – the heterogeneity of disability being a major factor. However, studies seeking to identify the factors associated with the low employment rates of people with disabilities vis-à-vis their non-disabled peers typically have found that factors related to productivity such as educational qualifications, vocational skills and occupational experience typically account for between 40% to 60% of the difference in

employment rates (Baldwin and Johnson, 1994; Baldwin and Johnson, 1995; Kidd *et al.*, 2000; Jones *et al.*, 2003). A major study undertaken in the UK estimated that differences in productivity account for a maximum of 50% of the difference in employment rates between people with disabilities and people without a disability (Blackaby *et al.*, 1999). It is notable that the study undertaken by Jones *et al.* (2003) found that the “marginal effect of each qualification is stronger for the disabled, indicating the particular importance of obtaining qualifications among this group” (p. 13). Among the unknown and unmeasured factors is the effect of discrimination.

Prior to the publication of the recent special module on equality by the CSO in August of this year, there was an absence of data on the experience of discrimination on grounds covered by equality legislation. Examination of data presented in this recent publication shows that the proportion of people with disabilities reporting discrimination, at 19.6%, is substantially higher than that reported by their non-disabled peers (i.e., 11.5%). The same source indicates that while the proportion reporting the experience of work-related discrimination was identical at 5.1% among people with disabilities and people without a disability, people with disabilities were twice as likely as their non-disabled peers to report experiencing discrimination in relation to accessing services with transport being the major area in which discrimination was experienced.

2.11 Conclusions

The employment rate of people with disabilities is approximately half that of their non-disabled peers. The employment situation of people with disabilities has at best remained unchanged during a period of rapid employment growth, but more probably has worsened. Certainly, the number of recipients of disability related payments has increased rapidly during a period of substantial employment growth. Addressing this situation is the central challenge of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities.

Whatever the level of labour market discrimination being experienced by people with disabilities – a quantity that appears to be small on the basis of self-reported data – it is clear that a major contributory factor to the low employment rate of people with disabilities is their low educational qualifications. While specific data are not available, these educational qualifications are also likely to be associated with a low level of post school participation in educational and training courses relevant to the contemporary labour market. If this issue is not addressed, the projected pattern of sectoral and occupational growth will result in a deterioration of the employment situation of people with disabilities and the restriction of employment opportunities to occupations requiring low entry-level qualifications and having limited earnings potential. The latter will reinforce benefit traps experienced by people with disabilities. Therefore, a central plank of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities requires effective action to enhance the educational and training qualifications of people with disabilities.

The employment situation of people with disabilities has at best remained unchanged during a period of rapid employment growth, but more probably has worsened.

The population of people with disabilities not in work and not in bad health must be seen to be the primary target of a comprehensive employment strategy. Numerically, this is currently estimated to be between 150,000 to 168,000 people. This is a diverse population in terms of gender, age, educational qualifications and severity and type of disability or longstanding health problem. However, compared to their peers in employment, it is clear that a substantially higher proportion of people with disabilities or a longstanding health problem not in employment experience severe restrictions in both the type and amount of work they can do. Numerically, the size of this group is estimated to be approximately 110,000. On the other hand, approximately 36,500 people with a disability not in employment report no restriction on either the type or amount of work they can do. While there are no data available specifically relating to the educational qualifications of this latter group of people with disabilities, it is likely that many are poorly qualified.

Up to recently, the type of employment accessed by people with disabilities has received little attention. Now it is evident that the employment pattern of people with disabilities is different from that of their non-disabled peers. Disproportionate numbers of people with disabilities are working in part-time employment and are self-employed. Consequently, the possibilities afforded by these types of employment to accommodate people with disabilities needs to be actively explored and developed. More generally, the issue being highlighted here is that flexible work arrangements, regarding when and how much work is undertaken, will be required to accommodate people with disabilities currently not in employment. As indicated above, people with disabilities not in employment experience higher levels of restriction in both the type and amount of work they can undertake. While we do not know the employment aspirations of this group of people with disabilities, the evidence points to the value of policy options providing greater access to part-time employment and self-employment (recognising that, in general, it is relatively better educated people with disabilities who enter self-employment) while ensuring safeguards in respect of low overall incomes.

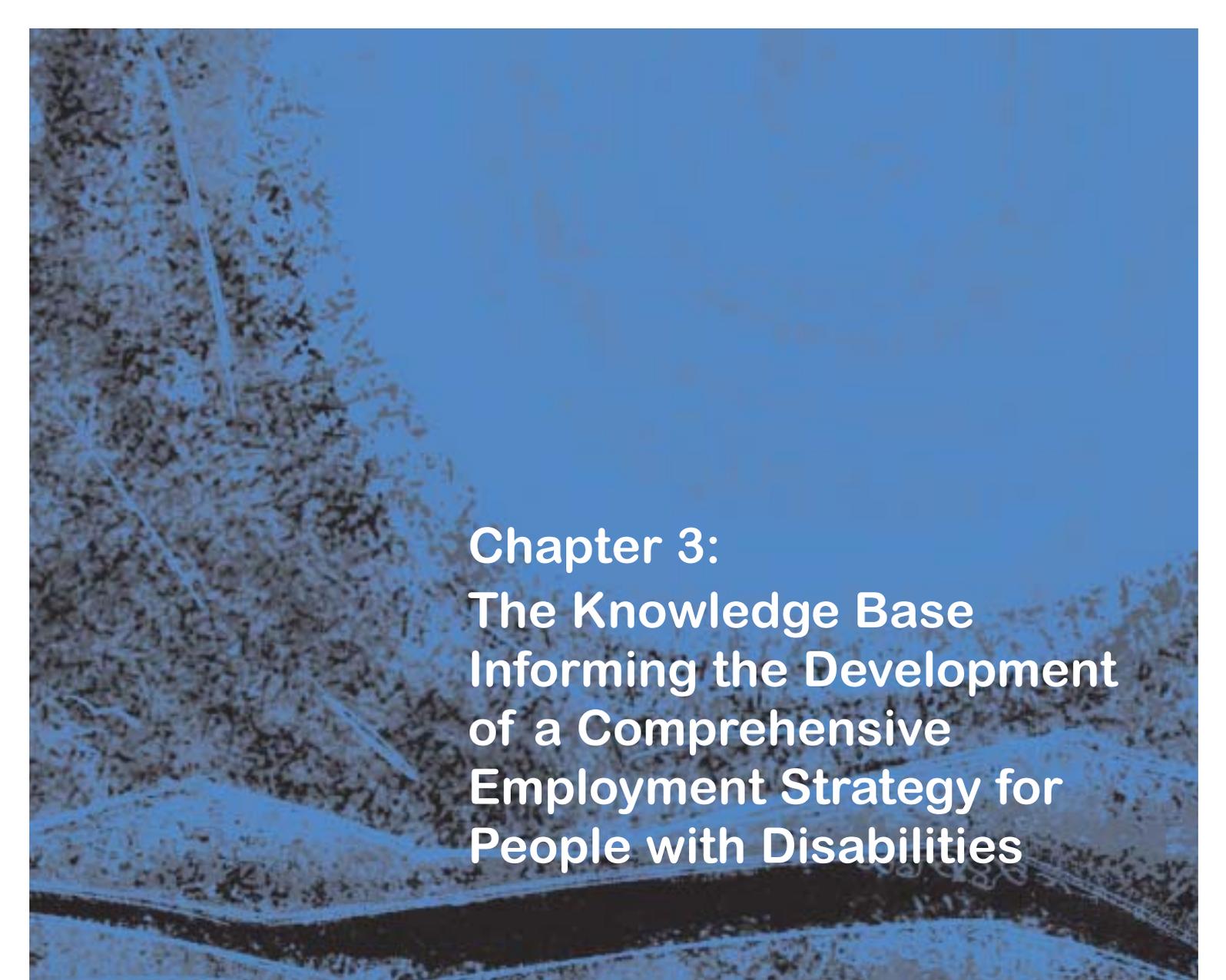
Finally, the evidence points to the need for the heterogeneity of people with disabilities – particularly those not in employment – to be actively recognised and responded to in the development of a comprehensive employment policy for people with disabilities. National and international research is *ad idem* in highlighting the association between the severity of self-assessed work restrictions, type of disability and employment rates. In particular, it highlights the very weak position of people with mental health difficulties in the labour market. By definition a comprehensive employment strategy, if it is to be effective, must not be based or collapsed onto a one-dimensional concept of disability. The responses and options provided by a comprehensive employment strategy must engage with the diversity of circumstances, needs and abilities of all people with disabilities. In that regard, a key priority is to establish a process of engagement with people with disabilities in order to establish their views regarding how labour market policy can give effect to their aspirations by putting in place the systems, programmes and supports to underpin their equality in the labour market and in employment.

By definition a comprehensive employment strategy, if it is to be effective, must not be based or collapsed onto a one-dimensional concept of disability.

Footnotes

² See Table 2.2 in NDA (2005) citing the Living in Ireland Survey, European Social Survey and SLÁN.

³ In *Accommodating Diversity in Labour Market Policy* the issues arising from the interaction of ground based inequalities and qualification based inequalities are discussed at some length.



**Chapter 3:
The Knowledge Base
Informing the Development
of a Comprehensive
Employment Strategy for
People with Disabilities**



3

3.1 Introduction

The international and national literature has consistently identified a range of interrelated issues that serve to conspire towards the extreme labour market disadvantage and inequality experienced by people with disabilities.

In this section the more recent international and national literature (policy, research and evaluation) is reviewed with a view to locating and contextualising the proposed strategy presented in Chapters 5 and 6. We also briefly refer to some older literature (1990s) in order to establish the significant lineage of system intelligence regarding the issues addressed in this report. For some time the system (welfare, education, training and employment, health, transport) has understood its limitations and the inherent barriers it puts in the way of the effective integration of people with disabilities. To date, despite the relative clarity of the issues as articulated over the last decade, that intelligence has not resulted in a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities as is now recommended in this report.

Before presenting this select literature review it is useful to briefly reflect on the educational backdrop that clearly influences vocational education and training provision for and the employment prospects of people with disabilities. It is well established in the literature that educational attainment has a very significant bearing on employment, career and earnings potential across the population in general. It is equally well established that people with disabilities have not derived outcomes from the educational system commensurate with their peers. A recent briefing note from the NDA titled *Early School Leaving and Disability – A Lifetime of Disadvantage* notes that: more than 20% of young people with a physical disability leave school by age 15 as do 16% of young people with an intellectual disability and 13% with a vision or hearing impairment (the legal school leaving age is 16 years). More than 20% of adults with disabilities have not even attained Junior Certificate level (against 4% of the general population). Primary level education is the highest level of education attainment for 33.7% of people with disabilities aged 15-19 years (and for 23% of those aged 20-24, 21.2% of those aged 25-34 years and 24% of those aged 35-44 years). Junior Certificate is the highest level of education attainment for 42% of people with disabilities aged 15-19 years (and for 28.1%

of those aged 20-24 years and 25-34 years respectively and for 34.1% of those aged 35-44 years). About one third of people with disabilities aged 15 to 19 have left education completely. The research by Bergin *et al.* (2003) shows that people's earnings and work are closely linked to the level of educational attainment regardless of disability. In that regard it is estimated that a shift involving retention to Leaving Certificate level of those currently leaving after Junior Certificate, would increase the employment rate among young adults with disabilities by 14 percentage points. Progression to degree level for that cohort would raise the employment rate by 20 percent.

We note the aspirations set out in the Education for Persons with Disabilities Act (2004). The Minister of Education sees this legislation as establishing "unequivocally that special education needs of children must be a matter of legal right." The Act envisages that the National Council for Special Education will maintain a register of all students deemed to have special needs from the age of three to eighteen. Each registered student is to have an individual education plan (IEP), which will set out the individual's educational needs, the special education and related support services to be provided and individual goals to be achieved over a period of twelve months. The IEP will be regularly reviewed. If the Act is successful in addressing the educational disadvantage experienced by people with disabilities it will, in and of itself, have a significant impact on the employment of people with disabilities in Ireland although the results of change are unlikely to be evident for some time. In the meantime, and regardless of the Act, there is a range of issues impacting on the employment opportunities of people with disabilities. These are outlined below.

...people's earnings and work are closely linked to the level of educational attainment regardless of disability.

3.2 Reflections on Disability and Labour Market Disadvantage – 1990s

Here we refer to a select number of reports, evaluations and research that relate to the labour market situation of people with disabilities during the 1990s and/or to the situation facing marginalised groups in general. The coverage is not intended to be comprehensive. Rather it is illustrative of the fact that many of the issues we are currently discussing in relation to the labour market marginalisation of people with disabilities have been noted and discussed for many years, as have related issues impacting on the labour market integration of all marginalised and excluded groups.

In an evaluation report produced in 1995 by the European Social Fund Programme Evaluation Unit and titled *Training for People with Disabilities*, the author notes that there is increasing recognition of the need for an integrated and flexible range of measures to increase the occupational integration of people with disabilities. In that regard the following core recommendations are made, expressing the need for:

- a multi-faceted strategy that focuses not only on the person but on the potentially disabling environment;
- early intervention and preparation for work including readily available support services;
- a national policy regarding training and re-training of people with disabilities recognising the heterogeneity of the population; and,
- increased efforts to increase awareness and understanding among employers and society at large and to actively market the abilities of people with disabilities.

Among the many recommendations relating to training and work made in the *Report on the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities* (1996) there is, *inter alia*, a call for anti-discrimination legislation, a transfer of responsibility for vocational education/training and employment of people with disabilities from the then Department of Health to the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment coupled with a strategy paper concerning the employment of people with disabilities and arrangements for the collection, collation and publication of comprehensive labour market statistics in respect of people with disabilities. The Commission also called for early attainment of the 3% public service quota in relation to the employment of people with disabilities and strict monitoring of the situation on an on-going basis with movement towards an 8% quota for all exchequer supported organisations within four years. The Commission recommended monitoring of the private sector and the introduction of a mandatory quota in the absence of progress towards 3% employment of people with disabilities.

Other recommendations envisaged: an expansion of the Employment Support Scheme (to 500 jobs within three years); expansion of the Workplace and Equipment Adaptation Scheme (supporting 500 jobs within three years); the promotion of employment of people with disabilities in the arts and cultural sectors; protection of the rights and status of people in sheltered work settings; accessible public services; occupational guidance for all who seek it; access to active labour market programmes (ALMPs); a review of mainstream training with a view to maximising accessibility; the expansion of the range of choice available in training and the introduction of innovations; prioritisation of training that integrates people with and without disabilities and a greater concentration on job placement and employer-based training models.

In *Opportunities, Challenges and Capacities for Choice* (1999), the NESC suggests a need for a new, multi-dimensional vision for Ireland. One dimension of that vision anticipated social inclusion reflecting full participation in the activities that constitute the norm in society – a rights based approach encompassing not only the civil and political domains but also the social, economic and cultural domains.

In a paper prepared for the International Labour Office (1999) O'Connell notes that empirical evidence proves that programmes with strong linkages to the labour market enhance participants' subsequent employment and earnings prospects while programmes with weak labour market linkages are much less effective in this respect. He noted, in turn, that during the 1990s, when it came to interventions for the long-term unemployed, resources were used to achieve an increased quantity of provision at the expense of improved quality in programming. O'Connell concluded that prioritising the long-term unemployed could serve both efficiency and equity goals.

In *Work Experience Programmes: Impact and Potential* (1999) Duggan traces the evolution of such programmes and points to their limited success as vehicles of progression to employment because they do not provide flanking supports to individuals. She argues for a multiple model approach with work experience as the core common component flanked by other elements of provision as appropriate. Four specific models are proposed as follows:

- Community Development Model – enabling people to participate in the development of their communities without a strong progression drive for participating individuals;
- Social Inclusion Model – addressing extreme marginalisation through the provision of direct employment and ensuring adequate income levels with the focus therefore on duration of programme and income levels;
- Economic Stimulation Model – developing local enterprise with return for the individual and the local economy; and,
- Reintegration Model – acting as a conduit to real and identified high quality employment or progression opportunities – this would be reflected in the type of employment made available to the individual as well as the duration of participation and, critically, flanking supports.

Given the evidence presented in the following chapter that substantial numbers of people with disabilities are participating in community employment, there is a need to ensure that this programme leads to effective progression to employment for people aspiring to this as well as providing access to meaningful and adequate income for those not aspiring to employment in the open labour market.

The report of the National Advisory Committee on Training and Employment titled *Employment Changes for the Millennium* (NACTE, 1998) provided a range of recommendations that included the following:

- Flexible and person-centred sheltered and supported work and employment options within a secure legal framework;
- More equitable balance between sheltered work (1,950 places by 2004), sheltered employment options (5,000 places by 2004) and supported employment options (3,000 places by 2004)⁴.

Coming out of the 1990s and in the context of the *Report on the Commission on People with Disabilities*, new equality legislation, a buoyant economy and labour market as well as imminent policy transfer for the employment of people with disabilities there was a wide range of issues that needed to be addressed with a view to enhancing the labour market experience of people with disabilities. These included: expanding the range and quality of options available; improving the progression routes within and enhancing the labour market relevance of provision; and developing a coordinated and integrated policy towards the employment of people with disabilities.

In the next section we refer to some key reports concerning efforts internationally to improve the labour market integration of people with disabilities. In the subsequent section we present the findings of the most significant literature published in Ireland since 2000 and pick up on the extent to which the issues raised above reappear and the extent to which recommendations have been addressed.

3.3 Recent International Perspectives

The international experience regarding the employment of people with disabilities is generally as negative as the Irish experience although, more recently, there are indications from some countries, including Britain and the Netherlands that certain strategies and approaches work. In this section we reference a small selection of the huge volume of academic and other work that has been undertaken regarding the employment of people with disabilities internationally with a view to contextualising the Irish experience and to supporting some of the strategic recommendations outlined in later chapters of this report.

In a report prepared for Human Resources Development Canada (Burt Perrin Associates, 1999), the authors note that “there is considerable evidence that a substantial proportion of the disability population not currently employed is capable of at least some form of work under the right circumstances” (p.16). In that regard they refer to the inter-relatedness of disability issues and note that “approaches that focus only on employment and do not address other barriers may be limited in effectiveness” (p. 18). The employment capacity of people with disabilities should not be presented as a yes/no dichotomy. Many people may be limited in the amount of work they can do, others in the type of tasks they can perform but may, with the right supports, be able to earn some income through employment.

The authors also refer to the concept and practice of disability management, which they describe as an on-going process rather than a once-off event (as already referred to above in McAnaney and Wynne, 2003). One aspect of disability management involves “the individual learning how to address functional limitations resulting from the disability. But another aspect focuses on the workplace identifying what accommodations are needed to permit return to work” (p. 20). The authors refer to strategies in Canada, the United States and Europe that have provided “strong evidence showing [the] potential to enable individuals to return to work and to create significant cost savings” (p. 20) and to evaluation undertaken in Canada in relation to a disability management pilot run by the Federal Government that pointed to certain barriers to disability management including:

- lack of understanding among senior managers of the real costs of paying workers who are absent due to injuries or disabilities;
- lack of accountability for results as the costs are incurred elsewhere in government; and
- lack of belief amongst people with disabilities in their capability to be re-employed.

The evidence suggests that disability management can assist people with any type of disability back into work. The authors suggest that “return-to-work is probably the area with the greatest possible potential for cost savings, given the previous work experience of participants, along with their employment skills and abilities” (p. 22) but return-to-work strategies require:

- Early intervention;
- Active case management; and
- On-going workplace accommodation.

Regarding workplace accommodation, the authors note that the vast majority of accommodations are of low cost and some, such as modifications to work tasks or work site arrangements are cost free. Attitudinal and informational barriers amongst employers regarding accommodations are often encountered and their removal, it is suggested, could open up employment opportunities.

The authors positively assess the international evidence concerning the efficacy of supported employment due to benefits to individuals and cost savings (despite high initial costs). They are less positively disposed to sheltered employment or wage subsidies unless such subsidies form part of a co-ordinated package of supports to the employer and the employee. The benefits of quality vocational rehabilitation are acknowledged although the relative lack of access for people with disabilities to such services renders them largely irrelevant.

In summary, the major findings and lessons learned regarding access to employment for person with disabilities include the following:

- Barriers and not disability *per se* operate against the employment aspirations of people with disabilities;
- Clear and precise standards can effectively address barriers;
- Support from the business community comes after implementation, not before – attitudes follow behaviour.

Thornton, Zeitzer *et al* (2003) outline a number of approaches common to the UK and the US in terms of the employment of people with disabilities although they caution that neither state “has yet found interventions that make a substantial impact and that the potential lessons learnt are only partial solutions” (p. 2). In that regard they refer to:

- (i) *Incentives to leave benefits for employment* such as: (i) easy return to benefit allaying fears for those taking up employment from benefit; (ii) retention of benefit for trial work periods; (iii) supplementing earnings, a central plank in UK reintegration policy through a tax credit system; and (iv) increasing awareness and take up of incentives and benefits planning involving, in the case of the US, intensive benefits advice and support.
- (ii) *Individualised Employment Services* such as: (i) early intervention at the point of application of benefits (UK and US) with “strong work focus between benefit claimants and advisers” (p.3) and, in the UK, the setting up of a single employment and social security benefits agency (a one-stop-shop) known as Jobcentre Plus. The system involves compulsory work-focused interviews as a condition of benefit claim. Both the US and the UK systems have built in mechanisms to allow for the identification of those most likely to be able to return to work and therefore best positioned to avail of employment related advice and assistance; (ii) increasing the employment expertise of benefits advisers so that they are aware of options, supports and competent enough to deal with flanking issues such as health problems or impairments;

- (iii) establishment of employment networks and support for community-based rehabilitation providers, these latter offering pre-employment services and supported employment.
- (iii) *Adjusting Work and Workplace* where, in the UK, costs of adaptations, work-related equipment, support workers and travel to work are supported. This latter support has been found to improve job retention whereas other supports have been found to assist in both recruitment and retention. Employers in the US can avail of an income tax reduction for the removal of architectural and transportation barriers in anticipation of their facilities being used by disabled people.
- (iv) *Making Disability Discrimination Unlawful* is another plank in the strategies employed in both states and in the US research suggests that the Americans with Disabilities Act has resulted in more flexible human resource policies, adaptations to premises to make them more accessible and a certain amount of restructuring jobs and work hours.
- (v) *Financial incentives to employers* are made available in various forms such as tax credits (US) for recruitment amongst particular groups including people with disabilities and long-term welfare recipients and such as subsidies for employment of unemployed people including people with disabilities under the New Deal in the UK.

While recognising the very different societal and economic contexts that apply within both states, the authors suggest that there are opportunities for mutual learning in terms of strategies and approaches to enhance the employment of people with disabilities as outlined in Table 3.1 below:

Employers in the US can avail of an income tax reduction for the removal of architectural and transportation barriers in anticipation of their facilities being used by disabled people.

Table 3.1
Learning Points between the US and UK – the employment of people with disabilities

	Learning Points
Learning points, US to UK	<p>In the US the Federal Government is seen as a model employer and as “a subtle catalyst for social change” (p. 8) through the exacting standards that it sets itself in relation to the hiring and promotion of people with disabilities and in terms of its emphasis and action on accessibility and accommodation. Agencies’ performance in hiring and retaining workers with disabilities is monitored and published. The Federal government also uses its power as a buyer of services and goods to insist that suppliers make products accessible and do not discriminate against people with disabilities.</p> <p>The US places a heavy emphasis on the inclusion of people with disabilities and advocacy groups in consultation processes regarding relevant issues, policies and programmes.</p>
Learning points, UK to US	<p>Unlike the UK, the US does not recognise partial capacity to work for welfare purposes (it operates an all or nothing approach) to defining disability for welfare purposes thereby ‘trapping’ many people who might otherwise work. The UK system begins by “linking entitlement based on disability to functional limitation irrespective of work considerations” (p. 7) and then proceeds to interact with the individual with a view to establishing optimum input in relation to employment aspirations.</p> <p>While the US tax credit system is useful for once-off adaptation, it is not particularly suited in the context of on-going support needs such as the need for a personal assistant or sign language interpreter. The UK’s Access to Work system allows the employer to purchase the necessary support and to claim the cost back directly and, in most cases in their entirety, for a period of three years after which the situation is reviewed.</p> <p>In the UK, integrated tax credits for people with disabilities (formerly a stand-alone Disabled Person’s Tax Credit) have helped to neutralise the costs of having a disability so as to make work pay. Disabled workers with children may also be entitled to childcare support.</p>

Thornton, Zeitzer *et al* (ibid.) conclude that the principal issues for policy development include:

- Compulsory work-focused meetings as a condition of benefit receipt;
- Early intervention with workers who acquire a disability with a view to accelerating return to work and avoiding a long-stay outside work with no effective vocational rehabilitation input that, according to the research, makes it highly unlikely of a return to work at all;
- More creative use of the taxation system to ensure that people with disabilities opting into work are better off than they would otherwise be on benefit and that employers are facilitated in making the appropriate adaptations and putting in place the appropriate supports;
- Changing employer behaviour (attitudes will follow) through model employer behaviour, particularly in the public sector to begin with;
- Finding the right policy mix delivered in a co-ordinated and streamlined fashion to ensure success.

Bambra, Hamilton and Whitehead (2005) systematically review the effectiveness of the UK's welfare-to-work programmes for people with a disability or chronic illness. They found that, in general, the various programmes operating in the UK over the course of the 1990s helped people with disabilities to find work although the degree of success depended on a range of factors including: how people were recruited onto programmes; the age, type of disability and job readiness of the participants; and the general labour market and social security context. In other words, the research was unable to be definitive about the employment effect of such interventions. The authors suggest a need for additional strategies to reinforce any benefits associated with vocational education and training. In that regard they stress the need to concentrate on measures to avoid the phenomenon of people with disabilities or illnesses leaving work in the first instance.

Smits (2004) reviews progress in “developing public policy, national infrastructure, and services in support of persons with disabilities seeking to enter and sustain meaningful employment” (p.647) in the United States. Smits refers to a number of ‘unresolved issues’ in that regard. In particular he refers to difficulties encountered in how we define disability and he cites legal, medical, personal and social definitions of disability that serve to confuse the policy arena. He suggests that neither the legal nor medical definitions of disability may fit social perceptions and that differences in the types and extent of the visibility of particular disabilities makes it difficult for us to conceptualise people with disabilities as a coherent minority group (or collective). He notes that this is true even amongst people with disabilities themselves.

In commenting on the lack of employment growth amongst people with disabilities (as measured through the ‘employment rate’) in the United States following the introduction of the Americans with Disabilities Act and a period of economic and employment growth throughout the 1990s, Burkhauser and Stapleton (2003) note that, “although theoretically all people with disabilities are able to work with appropriate accommodations, most would acknowledge that there is a group for which work is not a meaningful alternative” (p. 11). They suggest that the inclusion of the entire population of people with disabilities of working age in the calculation of the employment rate can make it difficult to interpret employment trends. Given that, in an Irish context, all disability welfare recipients are officially categorised as ‘unable to work’, the interpretation of trends in the employment rate amongst the population of people with disabilities is particularly difficult and is made all the more impenetrable given the lack of engagement that serves to differentiate amongst what is a heterogeneous population in terms of age, disability type, work experience, educational qualifications and other characteristics.

...the inclusion of the entire population of people with disabilities of working age in the calculation of the employment rate can make it difficult to interpret employment trends.

3.4. Reflections on Disability and Labour Market Disadvantage since 2000

In order to ensure that the proposed comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities is up to date with current thinking and research on the issue, we were asked as part of the terms of reference for the assignment to ensure coverage of a range of key items from the literature.

While it is clear that certain developments have occurred since the reports referred to in section 3.1 above were written (transfer of policy responsibility to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and operational responsibility to FÁS, new legislation, progress in equality proofing, progress in the provision of statistics etc.), the over-arching impression evident from a reading of the more recent literature is of little effective change in terms of the labour market integration of people with disabilities. In fact, our own research (*Motive, Means and Opportunity*, a paper presented at the NDA Research Conference 2005) and data presented in the previous chapter of this report suggests a worrying dis-improvement despite on-going economic and employment growth. Most of the emphasis of the older literature is on what should be done in the new economic context. The current literature retains this prospective outlook, looking at what will be done because we have new structures, new legislation and new organisations. However, in relation to the labour market integration of people with disabilities there are few hard facts that support improvement in the intervening period, despite significant administrative and organisational change and related activity.

3.4.1 Developmental Welfare State

At the opening of the conference to launch *The Developmental Welfare State* (NESC, 2005) An Taoiseach noted that recent growth has “given us great scope to make positive choice about social provision” and that there is a need to “improve systems, which embody low expectation and achieve low outcomes for a minority”. The report itself suggests that we need to significantly change the welfare state and social policy to meet the demands of a new context and the challenges of deep-rooted disadvantage. The authors note that the developmental welfare state needs to make effective transfers to those in need

but also to improve on the range and quality of services made available requiring what is referred to as a radical development of services. In effect, the recommendations support what is proposed in the strategy outlined in subsequent chapters of this report in that this strategy requires what An Taoiseach referred to at the launch as ‘new ways of working, new policy instruments and institutionalised innovations to deliver the necessary improvements’.

Given what we have shown to be the dynamic of deterioration that is operating in respect of the labour market prospects of people with disabilities (static and possibly declining employment rate despite sustained employment growth), it is clear that a radical but considered response is necessary to address the evident inequality. There is a wide range of issues to be addressed and there is a significant level of consensus in the literature concerning the issues in question. At the end of this section we collate the principal issues for ease of reference. First, we look at some of the major reports outlining the issues from various vantage points.

3.4.2 Recent Evidence

The NDA publication, *Disability and Work – The Picture we Learn from Official Statistics* (2005) found, on the basis of data from Census 2002, that people with disabilities are two and a half times less likely to be in work than non-disabled people and that people with more severe restrictions in what they can do are particularly disadvantaged in this regard. The report also notes that 85% of working-age people with a disability or chronic illness have acquired that disability thereby highlighting the importance of effectively managing retention in employment. In order to increase employment rates among people with disabilities, the NDA recommended:

- reducing early school leaving and increasing participation levels of people with disabilities in education at all levels;
- increasing recruitment of people with disabilities in public and private sectors;

- providing employers with more and better information regarding available supports;
- increasing job retention rates for those acquiring a disability once working;
- actively engaging with people with disabilities on welfare;
- tackling the benefits trap and making work pay; and,
- addressing access and transport issues.

The Workway Policy Paper (2004) notes the following issues that act as barriers to integration and/or affect attitudes to people with disabilities *vis-à-vis* employment:

- capacity of individuals to work;
- employability of individuals;
- attitudes of people with disabilities to work, carers and co-workers;
- accessibility issues;
- financial disincentives;
- range of suitable jobs; and,
- employers' perceptions of people with disabilities.

The report suggests that to address the issues identified will require the involvement of a range of stakeholders including: people with disabilities; employers; employees; families and carers; representative and support organisations; government departments; and state agencies. The report notes the emerging challenge to develop a strategic approach that seeks to achieve a sustained and inclusive integration of effort. The Workway experience (and

the subsequent and as yet undocumented experience of FÁS and the Department of Social and Family Affairs in the Midlands Pilot) showed the difficulty in contacting people with disabilities. However, the experience showed that there are:

- many marginalised people about whom little is known;
- people with disabilities with limited contact with any system or organisation; and,
- lack of contact between people with disabilities and other groups including employers or union representatives.

The report stresses the need to secure the confidence of people with disabilities in relation to labour market and employment issues. The project found that people with disabilities lack confidence and self-esteem regarding employment and find it difficult to decide on how to present their disability to prospective employers while simultaneously emphasising their abilities. The report also notes people with disabilities often have little or no work experience and that their skills are not always of relevance in the workplace. On the other hand, the exercise found that employers lack awareness of disability and are not informed about available supports. Employers also noted that people with disabilities need to participate more often in recruitment processes and to develop soft skills. Employers noted that people with disabilities lacked pre-employment preparation and that it was difficult to interpret the calibre or level of skills presented because they were derived via atypical routes.

Ultimately the Workway experience calls for a comprehensive, inter-related and strategic response that seeks to build the capacity of people with disabilities, achieves better and more informed engagement between relevant stakeholders and delivers on an advocacy service. It also refers to the 'benefits trap' and supports the idea of a cost of disability payment that is dealt with separately to income maintenance.

Although the FÁS/DSFA Pilot activation initiative is not yet formally evaluated, the initial assessments (DSFA) bear out the Workway experience. The Midlands Pilot was designed to test a more integrated approach to the delivery of employment supports and services to people with disabilities in the region, benchmarking the results against previous efforts. Specific objectives of the pilot included:

- provision of an integrated point of contact for persons with disabilities and a multi-agency examination of training and employment support potential;
- facilitation of participation in training and employment;
- reducing welfare dependency and creating economic independence for the target group;
- examining the nature and extent of existing supports available; and,
- analysis and benchmarking the outcomes of the pilot against previous approaches.

Of the 266 people called for initial interview, 78 attended and 75% of those were accompanied. The findings to date indicate that 70% were registered with FÁS and some would have participated in FÁS training, in employment programmes (CE) and others in National Learning Centre (formerly NTDI) programmes. However, there is no evidence of on-going engagement or follow-up. Over 10% were participating in second or third-level education and 5% were in part-time employment. Initial recommendations note that any extension of the pilot would require:

- files with full information, including accurate medical report and employment, education and training history to be on hand; and
- clear policy guidelines regarding persons who do not respond.

The initial assessment also suggests that the lack of engagement with FÁS services is indicative of a lack of suitable options and suggests the need for more innovative programming by FÁS but also by the VECs. The experience also suggests the need for more employment outlets or opportunities (e.g. sheltered employment on a social economy model). Finally, the pilot demonstrated a need for a more extensive psychological and counselling service.

3.4.3 Welfare, Disability and Employment

The Department of Social and Family Affairs paper that accompanies the Workway Policy Paper is in tune with that Department's Review of Illness and Disability Schemes (2003) in noting the shortcomings in the system in terms of:

- the lack of recognition of partial (in)-capacity for work and the associated 'incapable of work' tag that the system imposes on disabled individuals who require income support;
- the lack of meaningful assessment of employment potential;
- the relative lack of active engagement with those who have employment potential and the lack of follow-up on completion of employment support measures; and,
- the lack of early interventions.

The four key policy directions envisaged by the Department of Social and Family Affairs following on the review of the area are:

- recognition that some people have capacity for work that may never be full-time work;
- provision of supports that do not act as barriers in themselves to the earning potential of recipients;

- provision of a range of options and appropriate referrals for clients; and,
- introduction of early intervention measures.

In the actual Review of Illness and Disability Schemes the Review Group notes the scale of largely passive welfare payments to people with disabilities – 13% of all social welfare payments and 3.9% of Gross Government Expenditure. The Group also notes that there has been an increase of 46% in the number of recipients of disability and illness related payments over the last 20 years. Interestingly the group notes that the piecemeal and uncoordinated development of illness and disability payments over the years as well as the fact that people with disabilities are three times more likely than the general population to experience consistent poverty and twice as likely to experience relative poverty.

The Working Group notes that the purposes of the various welfare schemes are threefold:

1. To provide insured workers and their dependents with security against loss of personal income as a result of illness or disability;
2. To provide support to those whose capacity is substantially restricted;
3. To encourage and assist individuals to identify and take up employment.

The Group concluded that the range of supports needs to be rationalised and that employment supports for people with disabilities need to be more systematic and effective while acknowledging that many of the related issues are beyond the remit of the department itself. The Group supported the idea of a cost of disability payment that is addressed separately to income maintenance.

3.4.4 Vocational Education and Training, Rehabilitation and Labour Market Programming

In *Towards Best Practice in the Provision of Further Education, Employment and Training Services for People with Disabilities in Ireland*, prepared in 2004 for the NDA by Tom Martin and Associates, the authors' critique of the Irish system includes the following observations:

- mainstreaming is not working because of a lack of joined up service provision, fragmented policies and the failure to include people with disabilities in mainstream provision partly attributed to the lack of targets to that effect;
- continuing reliance on specialist providers providing services to people with disabilities in segregated settings;
- lack of control and choice for people with disabilities forcing people into inadequate and inappropriate services that are poorly co-ordinated;
- the negative effects of the benefits trap in discouraging people with disabilities from participation in and engagement with the labour market, including mainstream vocational education and training;
- confused and unhelpful definitions coupled with poor data make it difficult to more precisely identify and engage with issues;
- lack of effective needs assessment; and,
- low progression rates.

In the same report, an analysis of international good practice is presented. Key features that appear to merit consideration in the context of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities are presented in Table 3.2:

Table 3.2
Summary of International Good Practice

Country Studied	Innovations Towards the Integration of People with Disabilities
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough assessment of training and employment requirements; • Service providers working to specific targets; • One government department with overall responsibility; • Information available on a one-stop-shop basis.
US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directorate established in Department of Labour focusing on demand and supply side issues (Office of Disability Employment Policy); • National Council on Disability established, an independent federal agency that reports to the President, Congress and others; • President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities (a public-private partnership) established; • One-stop career centres established to co-ordinate service delivery & choice.
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy developed and accompanied by high quality statistics to support monitoring etc.; • Office of Disability Issues established at the relevant ministry.
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social policy underpinned by focus on needs of the individual – clear division of emphasis/responsibilities of 'employment' and social issues.

The authors point to the following key differences between the various international practices and the Irish situation:

- much greater emphasis on self-employment of people with disabilities in other countries;
- policy and practice supported by good data collection;
- greater emphasis on needs assessment in other countries;
- greater emphasis on outcome driven approaches;
- one-stop shop supports for people with disabilities; and,
- generally more strategic, co-ordinated and holistic approaches to the integration of people with disabilities.

In the *Review of Vocational Training Provision for People with Disabilities in Ireland (2005)* prepared by Bearing Point Consultants for the DETE, the authors found that, inasmuch as people with disabilities are engaged in vocational training, the majority are provided for by Special Training Providers (1,780 of the 2,035 in training). Participants are likely to be male and aged between 20 and 29 years and the most popular courses were found to be Computer Training (469 participants) and Introductory Training (412 participants). Most training is provided in centres (typically segregated settings). The progression rate to employment from centre-based training is 25% compared with 38% from employer based training. Progression from centre based training to further education and training is likewise low at 13% compared with 25% achieved for distance learning approaches.⁵

In light of the low level of participation by people with disabilities in vocational training in general, the tendency to provide for people with disabilities in segregated settings and the low progression rates achieved, the authors recommended the following:

- enhanced marketing of FÁS and FÁS services to people with disabilities to encourage greater take-up of available mainstream options;
- post-training follow-up to improve outcomes;
- enhanced linkages (including shared information) between the various forms of provision with a view to improving progression;
- provision of occupational guidance and counselling;
- providing more core skills content in training programmes for people with disabilities;
- providing workplace training, work trials and work experience.

There have also been a number of recent evaluations of individual programmes that provide useful analyses and relevant conclusions and recommendations. In the *Evaluation of the National Pilot for Supported Employment Programme* (FÁS, 2003) the consultants found that of the 1,918 people registering with one of the 24 supported employment consortia, 775 (40%) were placed in employment, which was generally in low-skilled sectors such as retail and hotel. Most, however, were placed onto a Community Employment scheme. Average hours worked per week were 15.9 although 10% of people worked for less than five hours per week. The average hourly wage was 6.22 and 96% of participants retained benefits. Three hundred and seventy-six people left the pilot programme prior to placement and 172 left employment subsequent to placement. The authors conclude that the Pilot programme helped to introduce the national programme now in place and to demonstrate the capacity of the model to assist people with a variety of disabilities to access open employment with appropriate supports. This has also helped to demonstrate to employers the value of employing a person with a disability. However, the authors also note that the high drop-out rates need further examination and that a more precise understanding or definition of what the programme is, is required in order to ensure that objectives are met.

In the *Evaluation of the Employment Support Scheme* (FÁS, 2005) the consultants make a range of recommendations including a recommendation in favour of an enhanced and expanded employment subsidy scheme to replace the existing emphasis on providing 'wage' subsidy and the inherent negative and built-in assumptions regarding the productivity of people with disabilities. The authors suggest that the argument for developing an enhanced employment subsidy scheme is also underlined by the low level of provision for people with disabilities within the package of programmes comprising active labour market policy. In that regard they note that the current level of provision for people with disabilities on employment programmes (including the ESS, Community Employment, the Back to Work Allowance, the Social Economy Programme, and Supported Employment) is estimated to be in the region of four percent of the population of people with disabilities and, if the calculation is confined to employment programmes aimed at facilitating employment in the open labour market (i.e., the ESS, the Back to Work Allowance Scheme, and Supported Employment), the proportion falls to approximately two percent. The authors also recommend a more specific focus on the demand side of the labour market in actions to enhance the employment rate of people with disabilities given the very low proportion of employers in Ireland actually employing a person with a disability (estimated at c. one in eight employers).

3.4.5 Back to Work Strategies

In *Employment and Disability: Back to Work Strategies* (McAnaney and Wynne, 2003) the authors focus on the reintegration of workers back into employment consequent on acquiring an illness, injury or disability in adult life. They note that the processes required to achieve this are complex and require coordinated and focused system responses from the company and state. In the preamble to the body of the study, the following key issues are highlighted:

- most disabilities are not acquired at birth or in early life; in fact, most disabilities develop during adult life and many are not visible (e.g. stress-related disorders, respiratory etc.); and,
- the major causes of disability are moving away from either congenital conditions or accident traumas to medical and psychiatric conditions.

The authors note that the incidence of an illness or disability that inhibits the capacity to work increases with age thereby making the capacity to rehabilitate and reintegrate such workers a priority in the context of an ageing workforce across the EU. Rather than active reintegration, the general emphasis appears to be on ‘procedural responses’ that tend to passively hold the situation and often making it difficult for the individual to re-enter employment – for example, due to concerns about the loss of benefits or the difficulty in re-accessing benefits if a return to work is ultimately unsuccessful.

The systems in place in a number of countries are examined as part of the report. The Irish system is described as “persistently complex, partly because the long-term absence process occurs at the intersection of different sectoral responsibilities: employment, health and disability, equality and social inclusion” (p. 65). Social and occupational rehabilitation services are generally not available to patients who have yet to register as disabled i.e. the majority of long-term absent employees. Irish employers have no legal obligation to engage in the rehabilitation of injured, disabled or chronically ill employees. In summary, the authors conclude that there is “no explicit policy framework for return to work in the Irish system apart from passive income support measures” (p. 69).

...most disabilities are not acquired at birth or in early life; in fact, most disabilities develop during adult life and many are not visible

The report contains many important overall conclusions and recommendations including the following:

- restricted participation in employment is not an inevitable result of ill health or reduced function but is a consequence of environmental and personal factors that limit a person's activity and impact on participation in employment;
- early intervention (as in the case of Finland) is critical in terms of job retention and reintegration and this requires 'disability management' delivered through coordinated services and supports – Germany and The Netherlands have an explicit disability management **policy focus**; and,
- responsibility for avoidance, retention and reintegration should begin in the workplace itself.

The OECD's Economic Survey of the United Kingdom (2005) draws attention to the Pathways to Work scheme, which is being piloted in 10% of the country at the beginning of 2005. Through that scheme, most new incapacity benefit claimants are required to attend six, monthly, work focused interviews soon after their move to incapacity benefit. This provides the potential for developing customised support to overcome the range of barriers that different individuals face in returning to work. New claimants are offered specialist employment advice, new programmes to help manage their conditions, access to a range of tailored support together with £40 per week as a return to work credit. The pilots have been successful, showing a large increase in participation in reintegration programmes and a marked increase in exits from incapacity benefit. It is planned to roll the approach out further and all except the most severely disabled will be expected to participate in activities that support a return to work. Incapacity benefit will be restructured into a basic rate plus a supplement, conditional on this activity – the current system incentivises longer term stays on benefit through increased benefit after one year.

3.4.6 Other Issues

Our emphasis here is on labour market and social policy as it relates to people with disabilities with particular reference to welfare and vocational education and training and the interface between people with disabilities seeking employment in the open labour market. However, we recognise that there is a range of other issues that are relevant in the context of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities including, for example, sheltered employment, the employment target system that applies to the public service and key complementary policy areas such as transport.

Sheltered or protected work settings are a widespread feature of the employment of people with mental or emotional impairments in particular. Almost 60% of people with disabilities at work whose primary income is derived from the welfare system are in sheltered work settings (NDA, 2005a). That said, the employment rate for people with mental or emotional impairments is very low (22%) and amongst those not at work within the group, almost 40% report they would need assistance to work (QNHS). An unpublished study of sheltered employment services (KPMG 2003) shows average earnings as £13 a week, with some centres paying as little as £3 a week, while a minority of workers whose productivity is higher earn up to £95 a week. As noted above, in its pre-budget 2005 submission, the NDA called for full, resourced implementation of the Code of Practice on Sheltered Occupational Services. Such services are a feature of the employment of people with disabilities in most countries although they are seen by some, for example the advocates of the supported employment approach, as an inappropriate form of intervention. However, such services are likely to be part of a spectrum of options taken into consideration in a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities. The key issue, as we will discuss later in this report, is the appropriateness of the sheltered option following active occupational engagement with the individual.

It appears that the 3% public service target for the employment of people with disabilities has never been met, although it is difficult to establish what exactly is the case given a lack of definitional clarity and relatively *ad hoc* monitoring of the situation (Goodbody, 2002). Available data suggests that the employment of people with disabilities in the public service stood at 1.49% at the end of 1995. Goodbody Economic Consultants (*ibid.*) found that 2.7% (n=800) of all Civil Servants were people with disabilities, based on a survey of relevant Personnel Officers and based on personnel records. One third of these had a physical impairment and a further 25% had a sensory impairment. Their study found that no civil servant who entered the Civil Service at Clerical Assistant level through a confined competition for people with disabilities had progressed beyond Executive Officer level compared to a 9% progression rate beyond that level in respect of people without a disability. The consultants also found through a staff survey that, on a self-declared basis, 7% of all employees declared themselves to have a disability of whom one third said they acquired their disability since joining the Civil Service. Interestingly, Civil Servants declaring a disability have a lower level of educational attainment than their peers without disabilities but one third of Civil Servants with a disability were found to be studying for a degree or post-graduate degree compared to 18% of Civil Servants without a disability.

The Goodbody report (*ibid.*) recommended, *inter alia*, that the Civil Service should become a model employer for people with a disability and a new 3% recruitment (rather than employment) target should be set and applied to all competitions. The consultants also recommended special confined entry competitions at Executive and Administrative Officer levels to boost representation of people with disabilities at middle management in the Civil Service. For all recruits with disability the consultants recommended the provision of a full range of supports identified on the basis of discussion with the relevant individual before s/he takes up the job.

Transport is a key flanking issue in relation to the employment of people with disabilities and transport issues will need to be taken into account in any comprehensive employment strategy. In that regard it is useful to note, for example, that the NDA's pre-budget submission for 2005 pointed to the fact that about 45% of the Dublin bus fleet is accessible and a quarter of Dublin

bus routes are served entirely by accessible buses although this had risen to 50% of the Dublin bus fleet and 55 routes (about 30% of all routes) by the end of 2005 (NDA, 2005b, p. 35). No inter-urban bus routes are accessible. Clearly these basic 'infrastructural' deficits have a bearing on the accessibility of work for people with disabilities with limited mobility regardless of educational attainment or relevant skills. A comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities would clearly have to interact with other relevant policy areas such as transport in order to ensure complementarity of effort with a view to securing successful outcomes.

3.5 Principal Issues Identified through the Literature

This report seeks to present the key components of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities and therefore 'starts' at the point of contact between the individual and the labour market. It does not concentrate on preceding education provision at first and second level, although we once again stress the critical impact that the quality of and derived outcomes from initial education have on subsequent employment and earnings potential. In that regard we have already noted the extreme educational disadvantage of people with disabilities and have acknowledged the (yet to be tested) potential of the new Act to counter at least some of the disadvantage experienced by people with disabilities.

The domestic literature concerning disability and the labour market provides a fairly consistent set of conclusions and recommendations that are outlined in Table 3.3 and in which we detail the issues and associate them with relevant commentators with a view to demonstrating and reinforcing the relative consensus that exists.

There are many inter-dependencies and relationships between the issues, hence the need for a coordinated and strategic approach with a view to effectively impacting on the labour market prospects of people with disabilities. The set of conclusions and recommendations outlined below provides a useful perspective from which to view the necessary components of a comprehensive employment policy for people with disabilities in Ireland and will be referred to in that regard subsequently in this report. The issues outlined below broadly mirror the findings in the international literature, for example in the OECD's *Transforming Disability into Ability: Policies to Promote Work and Income Security for Disabled People (2003a)*.

There are many inter-dependencies and relationships between the issues, hence the need for a coordinated and strategic approach with a view to effectively impacting on the labour market prospects of people with disabilities.

Table 3.3

Core Issues Arising in the Literature Concerning the Employment and Labour Market Integration of People with Disabilities

Issue	Commentators
General	
Need for integrated, coordinated strategy for integration and reintegration of people with disabilities into the labour market and employment.	NDA, OECD, European Foundation, WRCsec, ESF Evaluation Unit, Workway, Also implicit in NESC and the Midland Pilot.
Need for one-stop-shop to service both people with disabilities and employers.	Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, Workway, ESF Evaluation Unit, European Foundation.
Welfare	
Need to address the benefits trap and make work pay.	Commission on Status of People with Disabilities, DSFA, NDA, OECD, Workways, Bearing Point, Tom Martin, WRCsec, European Foundation.
Need to introduce a cost of disability payment, independent of income maintenance.	DSFA, NDA, Workway.
Need to address definition of disability <i>vis-à-vis</i> capacity to work – recognise partial capacity.	DSFA, NDA, Workway, Bearing Point, WRCsec.
Need for early intervention.	DSFA, NDA, OECD, European Foundation, WRCsec, Bearing Point.

Table 3.3**Core Issues Arising in the Literature Concerning the Employment and Labour Market Integration of People with Disabilities (continued)**

Issue	Commentators
Vocational Education and Training	
Need for early intervention and follow-up of people acquiring disabilities.	DSFA, NDA, European Foundation, OECD, ESF Evaluation Unit.
Need for high quality occupational guidance and assessment.	DSFA, European Foundation, OECD, Workway, Bearing Point, Tom Martin.
Need to more vigorously 'market' mainstream programmes and to avoid reliance on segregated services to people with disabilities.	Tom Martin & Associates, Bearing Point.
Need to ensure relevance of the content and context of training provision and employment programmes to ensure employability and 'saleability' of skills.	O'Connell, Duggan, ESF Evaluation Unit, Tom Martin Associates, WRCsec, European Foundation, Bearing Point.
Need for active follow-up and facilitation of progression.	Bearing Point, WRCsec, ESF Evaluation Unit, Tom Martin, NDA, OECD.
Need for more workplace training.	NDA, OECD, WRC Social and Economic Consultants, Bearing Point.
Employment	
Need to increase job retention.	NDA, European Foundation, OECD.
Need for public sector to lead the way in the employment of people with disabilities.	OECD, NDA, Commission on Status of People with Disabilities, International examples – e.g. USA, Canada.
Need to effectively raise awareness amongst employers of available supports and actively support them on an ongoing basis concerning the employment of people with disabilities.	NDA, Workway, OECD, European Foundation, Bearing Point, Tom Martin Associates, WRCsec.

3.6 Conclusions

In *Motive, Means and Opportunity: An Argument for Changed Policy and Practice in Relation to the Employment of People with Disabilities* (Ronayne and Tyrrell, 2005) we suggested that an examination of the range of policy measures in operation in the area of education, training and employment policy for people with disabilities points to the presence of a number of underlying assumptions regarding people with disabilities which, in the context of the evidence of policy failure, need to be identified and considered as possible factors contributing to the failure of policy.

In that regard we noted that:

- the bulk of current policy is primarily based on the assumption that it is the *person with a disability* who is in need of intervention/assistance (e.g., training, provision of assistive technology or income support) and that the *actual* attitudes and behaviours of other actors in the labour market – whether they are employers, employment services providers, or providers of education and training – are not seen as sites for systematic and ongoing intervention. This tendency to premise and isolate the intervention almost entirely on the disabled individual without attributing responsibility or consideration elsewhere is a feature of the current system;
- the policy package largely ignores the strong manner in which disability is the product of economic, political, and social environments despite the fact that the evidence for this lack of neutrality in the social, economic and infrastructural environments is the same evidence supporting the conclusion of policy failure;
- at least some of the specific policy measures in place unintentionally reinforce rather than undermine the view that impairments of bodily structures or functions result in inferior or lower capacities to work, more specifically productivity deficits; and,

- policy, procedural and institutional arrangements have largely ignored or sidestepped issues related to the nature of the impairment experienced by individuals, the types of activity limitation that are associated with specific impairments, and the severity of activity limitations. More generally, persons with disabilities are largely treated as a homogeneous group and variation due to the aforementioned factors is largely ignored. A key characteristic of current employment policy for people with disabilities is the absence of a response to evident diversity.

The analysis stands as applied to the set of issues identified here. Taken together they clearly identify the need for a coordinated, coherent and comprehensive strategic approach to the employment and broader labour market integration of people with disabilities. The evidence-based research and evaluation suggests that, in order to successfully address the labour market disadvantage experienced by people with disabilities in Ireland, any such employment strategy should be integrated and multi-faceted. It will need to win the confidence of people with disabilities and will therefore require substantial and resourced consultation in order to build effective communication channels with a view to achieving the necessary cultural change on the part of institutions and systems of the state and, ultimately, amongst persons with disabilities themselves. In effect, the evidence suggests that a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities must address the following:

Footnotes

⁴ Interestingly the NDA's pre-budget submission 2005 notes that the implementation of the Code of Practice on Sheltered Occupational Services with adequate resources is a priority for action.

⁵ The analysis does not take into account level or type of disability or the educational profile of the participants across the various forms of provision.

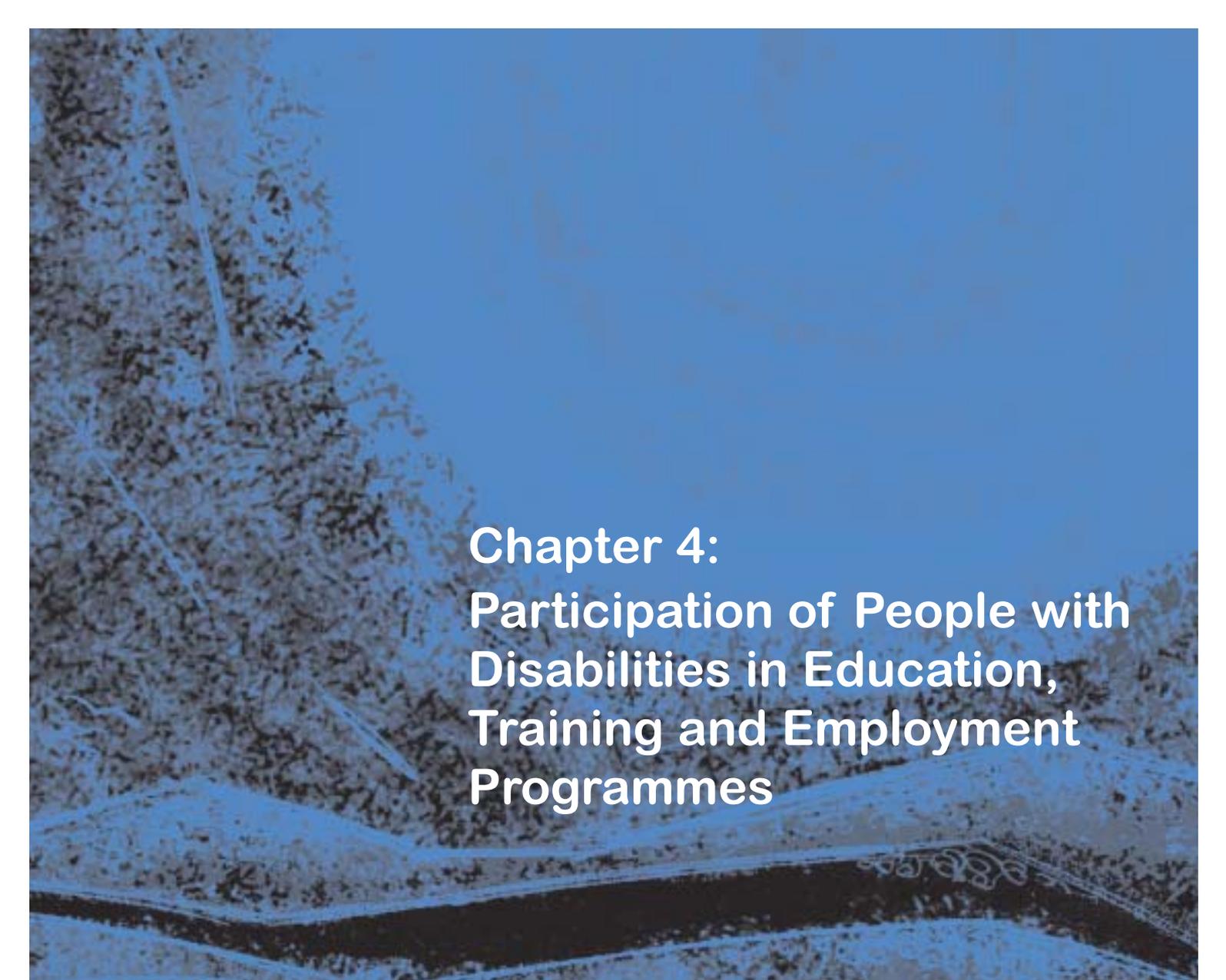
C O N F I D E N C E

- Tackle early school leaving and ensure meaningful educational outcomes for people with disabilities;
- Deliver early and effective intervention/engagement at the point at which individuals with disabilities encounter the welfare system, whether that be as young people on leaving the educational system or as adults having acquired a disability;
- Tackle the benefits trap and make work pay through a review of welfare and other supports that may result in rationalisation of existing supports, recognition of partial capacity, graduated loss of benefits for those entering employment, the introduction of a cost of disability payment independent of income maintenance;
- Provide an integrated, 'one-stop-shop' service for people with disabilities that addresses all relevant issues including welfare entitlement, education and training, employment, and transport;
- Review mainstream and other provision with a view to maximising accessibility, promoting choice and delivering sustained support through quality interventions that have labour market relevance, to include the provision of quality pre-employment and 'soft' skill inputs as well as 'hard' skill inputs;
- Encourage employers to recruit and retain people with disabilities. This may be achieved in a number of ways that may include, for example;
 - public service leading by example – achieving the 3% target, promoting people with disabilities, leverage change through contracting; –
 - employment subsidies;
 - tax/RSI credits;
 - active engagement with and ongoing support for employers through a co-ordinated and attractive package of supports;
 - legislation and programming to involve employers in the rehabilitation of employees acquiring a disability.

C O M M U N I C A T I O N

C O N S U L T A T I O N

C U L T U R E



**Chapter 4:
Participation of People with
Disabilities in Education,
Training and Employment
Programmes**



4

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data from various sources on the participation of people with disabilities in education, training and employment programmes in respect of 2004. FÁS and the DSFA provided data on a programme-by-programme basis. Data relating to other education and training provision is gleaned from other sources including Reports to the Monitoring Committee for the Employment and Human Resource Development Operational Programme 2000-2006. Data relating to participation at third level for the academic year 1998/99 are presented as no comprehensive data source is available at present (though estimates of the overall number in third level institutions for 2004 provided by AHEAD indicate a figure of approximately 1,800⁶).

It should be noted that different systems provide different data regarding 'participation'. In some instances the data refer to throughput (those completing) from programmes whereas in others the data refer to participation (those on the programme regardless of how long or whether or not they complete a programme during the reference year – basically a head count). We note the different types of data below. Most data in this regard refer to 2004.

4.2 People with Disabilities in Education, Training and Employment Programmes, 2004

Table 4.1 provides data on the extent of participation by people with disabilities in the main education, training and employment programmes. The data are presented by the department resourcing their delivery and by specific programme.

During 2004, a total of 6,429 people with disabilities left or completed FÁS programmes. Based on a total throughput of 71,494 in all FÁS provision, people with disabilities accounted for 9% of FÁS provision in 2004. The vast majority (84.1%) of people with disabilities had participated in employment programmes with Community Employment being by far the programme most frequently accessed by people with disabilities. It alone accounts for 83.7% of

FÁS provision for people with disabilities. Overall, people with disabilities accounted for 17% of throughput on employment programmes. In contrast, just 1,025 people with disabilities participated in training programmes provided either directly by FÁS (529 participants) or provided under contract to FÁS by organisations providing training for people with disabilities (496 participants). As a proportion of total throughput on FÁS training programmes, people with disabilities accounted for just 2.6% of throughput, with almost half (48.3%) of this being on programmes provided by specialist training providers.

As a proportion of total throughput on FÁS training programmes, people with disabilities accounted for just 2.6% of throughput...

Table 4.1
Level of Provision (2004) for People with Disabilities in Education, Training and Employment Programmes Presented by
Provider and Programme

Organisation	Number	Data 'Type'
FÁS		
Specific Skills Training (SST/JTS/Traineeship)	116	Completers (Throughput)
Re-integration Training (Bridging/Foundation/Return to Work)	107	
Apprenticeship	30	
Specialist Training	496	
Community Training (CTCs, Wider Horizons, LTIs, Social Economy, LWE, Other)	276	
All Training Programmes	1,025	
Throughput of People with Disabilities as % of all Throughput on	(15.9%)	
Training Programmes		
Community Employment	5,384	
Jobs Initiative	20	
All Employment Programmes	5,404	
% Throughput of People with Disabilities on Employment Programmes as		
% of all Throughput of People with Disabilities on all FÁS Provision		
(i.e., Training and Employment Programmes)	(84.1%)	
Department of Social and Family Affairs		
Back to Work Allowance (Employee)	755	Participation
Back to Work Allowance (Self-Employed)	521	
Back to Education Allowance (2nd Level Option)	204	
Back to Education Allowance (3rd Level Option) – note that there is inevitable overlap between this 'count' and the indicative participation rates at third level provided below.	445	

Table 4.1
Level of Provision (2004) for People with Disabilities in Education, Training and Employment Programmes Presented by Provider and Programme (continued)

Organisation	Number	Data 'Type'
Department of Social and Family Affairs (continued)		
Total	1,925	
People with Disabilities as % of All Participation	(10.2%)	
People with Disabilities as % of Recipients of Illness and Disability Payments (178,604)	(1.1%)	
Organisation	Number	Data 'Type'
Department of Education and Science		
Back to Education Initiative (Part-time option)	3,096 (16.8% of all participants)	Participation
Youthreach and Traveller Education*	335	
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme	627 (Core –11.1% of all participants)	
Third Level (1998/99 – 42 higher education institutions)**	255 (Dispersed – 4.5% of all participants)	
	1,367 (1.1% of all full-time students)	

*Estimate including people with disabilities and people with health issues.

** Amongst the 1,367 participants in 1998/99, 433 (32%) were asthma sufferers, 412 (30%) had Specific Learning Difficulties (e.g.dyslexia) and 121 had physical disabilities.

Additional data made available by FÁS show that during 2004 approximately 3% (n=3,014) of all new registrations with FÁS were people with disabilities. A breakdown of the outcomes secured by FÁS for people with disabilities is provided in Table 4.2. It confirms the overall pattern based on programme throughput in showing that employment programmes are the main form of provision toward which people with disabilities are directed. Also, the number facilitated onto specialist training exceeds that in FÁS training centres. In addition to persons placed in FÁS supported provision, a total of 554 persons with disabilities were placed in employment in 2004.

In addition to persons placed in FÁS supported provision a total of 554 persons with disabilities were placed in employment in 2004.

Table 4.2
FÁS: Analysis of Placement to Further Training/Employment Programmes

	CE/JI/ JTS/SE/ Workplace	TC Training	Trainee- ship	Training for People with Disabilities	SBA Training	Community Training	Total
N	2,923	474	2	658	27	174	4,258
%	68.7	11.1	–	15.5	0.6	4.1	100.0

In 2004, a total of 1,925 people with disabilities participated in programmes operated by the DSFA. These programmes include the Back to Work Allowance Scheme (BTWA – employee and self-employed strands) and the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA – Second and Third Level Options). Based on that number, people with disabilities accounted for 10.2% of all participants on programmes operated by the DSFA (i.e., 18,874). Numbering 755, the single largest number of participants with disabilities is found among participants on the BTWAS (employee strand). These alone account for 39.2% of people with disabilities on programmes operated by the DSFA. In line with the analysis presented in Chapter 2 regarding self-employment among people with disabilities, a total of 521 people with disabilities were participating in the self employment strand of the BTWAS at the end of 2004. Expressed as a proportion of all people with disabilities on the BTWAS (i.e., 1,276), this corresponds to 40.8%. The number of people with disabilities participating in the BTEA at the end of 2004 was 649, with the majority (68.6%) of these being on the Third Level Option.

Among the programmes resourced by the Department of Education and Science (DES), participation by people with disabilities is highest proportionally and in terms of absolute numbers in the Back to Education Initiative (Part-time Option). This programme is implemented by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and actual courses are designed and delivered in response to local circumstances and demand. For the most part, participants in these courses have less than upper second level education. A recent study of provision in two VEC areas concluded that the BTEI (Part-time Option) was effective in securing participation by people with disabilities and a number of the factors related to this and arising from it are summarised in Box 4.1. A key challenge, however, was securing effective progression from participation.

In the context of the high rate of early school-leaving found among young people with disabilities, it is of note that 335 participants in Youthreach and Traveller Educational provision are young people with disabilities. Currently, among the range of provision in place, Youthreach is the main programme specifically designed to cater for early school leavers. In the absence of specific data on outcomes for young people with disabilities it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of this programme for young people with disabilities.

Box 4.1**Accommodating People with Disabilities in the Back to Education Initiative (Part-time Option)**

On the basis of the experience and practices of the two VECs, accommodating people with a disability in the BTEI-PTO tends to be achieved by having organisations with experience of working with people with a disability provide specific courses or to organise courses for people with a disability in conjunction with organisations working with people with a disability. In general, the organisers of courses under BTEI-PTO considered that there was a need for specialised support to be available to enable them to work more effectively with people with a disability. Also, more information on how to cater for the needs of people with specific disabilities (e.g., visually impaired) was seen as needed in order to be able to accommodate people from this group.

The diversity present among people with a disability was also noted. This diversity includes people with learning disabilities, mental health difficulties, wheelchair users, people with sensory disabilities, people with an acquired disability versus people born with a disability, and people experiencing long-term disabling conditions (poor cardiovascular or respiratory health) resulting in securing a right to Disability Allowance/Benefit). The presence of such diversity and in particular the issue of the “severity” of disability in terms of the challenge it poses for providers in terms of the need for specialist knowledge and assistive technology was noted (by providers).

Source: WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2004, p. 24.

The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme is a large programme providing full-time educational opportunities for adults to improve their educational qualifications. In 2004 approximately 8% of participants were people with disabilities, with the majority of these being on the core option provided by this programme. This refers to the direct delivery of the course being pursued by VEC personnel involved in the programme. In contrast, dispersed students on VTOS are participating in established programmes including post-Leaving Certificate programmes provided by various colleges.

While participation by people with disabilities in third level education has increased from very small numbers in the mid 1990s (e.g., 450 in 1994), current levels of participation are low and amount to an estimated 1,800 students in 2004 (estimate provided by AHEAD). This figure corresponds to an estimated 1.3% of students in third level institutions. The detailed figures in respect of students with disabilities provided by AHEAD in respect the 1998/99 academic year amount to 1,367 students with disabilities corresponding to 1.1% of full-time students in third level institutions.

4.3 Schematic Overview of Participation by People with Disabilities in Education, Training and Employment Programmes

Before concluding this chapter we attempt to “pull together” the available data on participation by people with disabilities in education, training and employment programmes in a more schematic manner. In doing this, we emphasise that the estimates presented are provisional and would need further research to determine their accuracy. Also, the categorisation of provision used is based on a face value assessment of the position of specific programmes in relation to these categories rather than being the product of analytic assessment. However, we believe there is merit in attempting this exercise in order to highlight the position of people with disabilities in the overall pattern of provision of education, training and employment programmes.

Table 4.3
Schematic Overview of Participation by People with Disabilities in Education, Training and Employment Programmes

Sheltered Work	Employment Programmes – not in open labour market (including CE, SEP, JI)	Employment Programmes – open labour market (BTWAS, Wage Support Scheme)
8,000	6,000	1,800
34.0%	25.5%	7.7%
Basic Education/ Skill Development (BTEI-PTO, Reintegration Training, Community Training, Youthreach)	Intermediate Education/ Skill Development (part of VTOS, BTE 2nd Level Option, Specialist Training, Specific Skills Training)	Higher Education/ Skill Development (VTOS (post-Leaving), Apprenticeship, Third Level)
4,000	1,500	2,200
17.0%	6.4%	9.4%

In total, we estimate that in the region of 23,500 people with disabilities are participating in the main education, training and employment programmes currently in operation. It should be noted that participation in a number of these programmes is facilitated by employment supports operated by the DSFA. These employment supports include the earnings disregard of 120 for persons in receipt of Disability Allowance and the Blind Persons Pension and the Exemption from Rules of Behaviour in the case of persons in receipt of Disability Benefit and Invalidity pension. The former supported approximately 1,500 persons on Community Employment, 150 people in open employment and approximately 8,000 in sheltered employment in 2002 while the latter is estimated to support up to 4,400 people with disabilities in employment of various types including Community Employment (DSFA, 2003, p. 74).

The overall number participating in education, training and employment programmes represents 13.2% of the number of recipients of illness and disability related payments in the 15 to 64 year age range and 12.5% of the number of people with disabilities not in employment in the same age range in 2004. Thus, the current level of provision is engaging with approximately one in eight persons with a disability.

When the nature of this provision is examined it is clear that approximately 60% is in employment programmes not in the open labour market, 8% in employment programmes in the open labour market, and 32% in education and training programmes. Within the latter provision is approximately evenly divided between participants in basic education and skills programmes and those in intermediate and higher education and skills programmes.

The overall number participating in education, training and employment programmes represents 13.2% of the number of recipients of illness and disability related payments in the 15 to 64 year age range...

4.4 Conclusion

Notwithstanding limitations in the available data it is clear that:

- very few people with disabilities participate in education and training provision with strong linkages to employment; and,
- inasmuch as people with disabilities participate, their participation is concentrated in employment programmes that have limited training content and weak connections with employment in the open labour market.

As previously noted, people with disabilities experience significant educational disadvantage and this disadvantage contributes in a significant manner to their low employment rate. However, it is possible to address this.

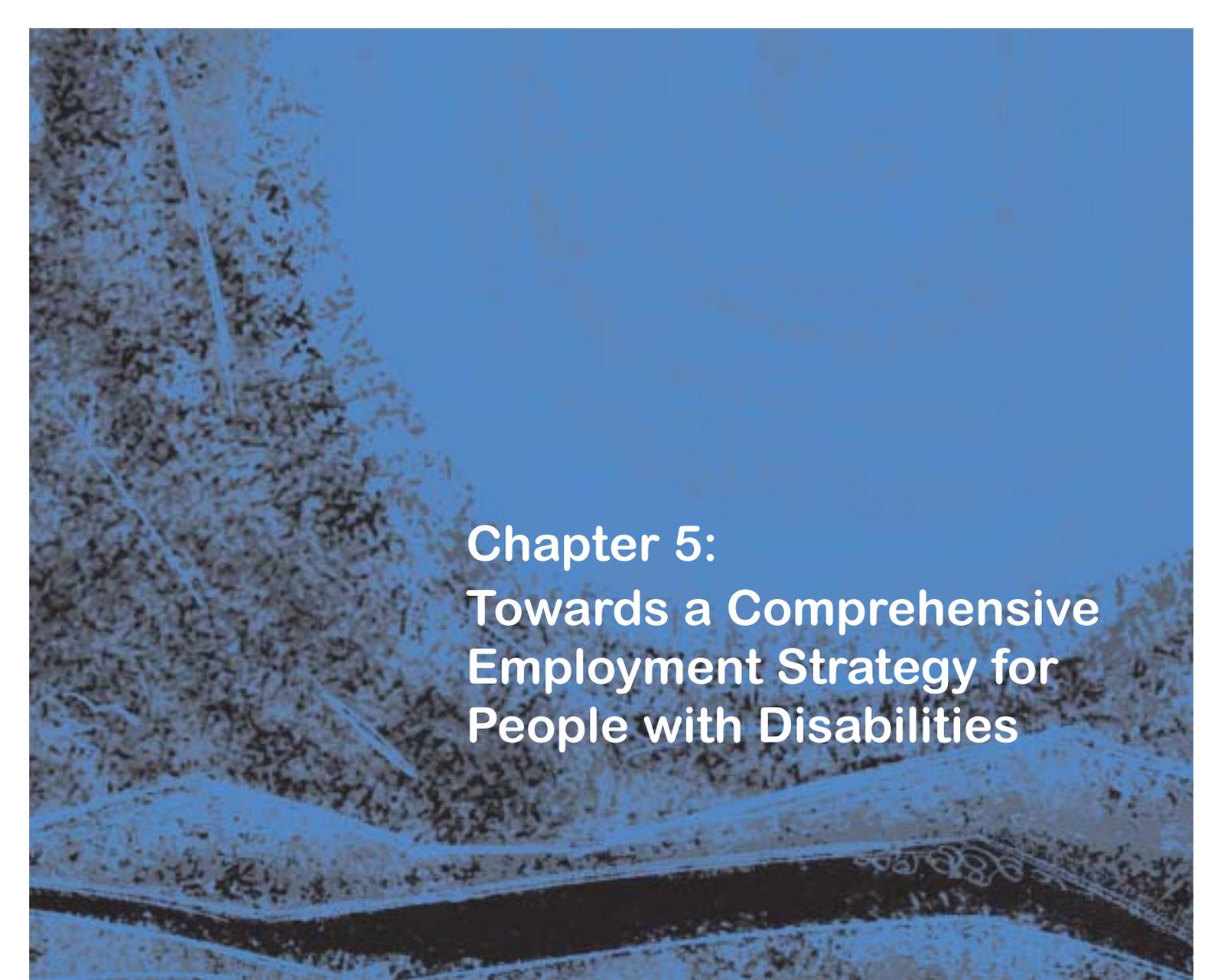
The figures on participation in education and training provision indicate a high reliance on basic education and skills training. A key issue in this regard is ensuring high levels of progression to programmes providing intermediate and higher levels of educational qualifications and marketable skills. Whether it is a question of actual and/or perceived accessibility, of presentation, of perceived relevance or of 'customary' over-reliance on less relevant segregated options, it is clear that the current mix of programming is not sufficiently engaged with the issue of enhancing the educational qualifications and skills of people with disabilities in a manner that would enable them to compete more effectively for employment, particularly employment arising from projected patterns of employment growth in skilled occupations. Failure to address this issue will confine people with disabilities to competing, for the most part unsuccessfully on the basis of recent evidence, for unskilled employment. It will also leave them vulnerable to the operation of the benefits trap due to their low earnings potential.

A comprehensive employment strategy will need to improve the range of options open to people with disabilities and to improve the manner in which such options are presented to people with disabilities. It will need to create transparent and functioning progression pathways between programmes, providers and provision that is integrated and supported as required (e.g. guidance, counselling, technology).

A comprehensive employment strategy will need to improve the range of options open to people with disabilities and to improve the manner in which such options are presented to people with disabilities.

Footnotes

⁶ Recent research undertaken on behalf of AHEAD shows 1,367 undergraduates with disabilities attending the Institutes of Technology.



**Chapter 5:
Towards a Comprehensive
Employment Strategy for
People with Disabilities**



5

Chapters 2 and 3 have provided a synthesis of recent research on the labour market position of people with disabilities and of associated recommendations in respect of addressing the factors identified as underpinning the low employment rate and disadvantaged position of people with disabilities in the labour market. Against that backdrop, and in the light of the findings in the previous chapter showing the overall weakness of active labour market policy in respect of people with disabilities, this chapter identifies the strands of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities. Essentially, there are five strands to this strategy:

- (i) removing disincentives and benefit traps arising from the operation of the welfare system and ensuring that transitions to employment are possible, financially rewarding, and sustainable;
- (ii) enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of the education, training and employment system – active labour market policy – to ensure that people with disabilities are equipped to compete for employment in the contemporary labour market and to benefit from future patterns of occupational growth;
- (iii) ensuring that both the public and private sectors are aware of the capabilities of people with disabilities and, on that basis, implement policies to support the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities;
- (iv) devising and implementing a preventative strategy aimed at reducing:
(a) the current level of early school-leaving among young people with disabilities; and, (b) the rate of exiting from employment in adult life following the onset of a disability; and
- (v) developing a systematic process of engagement with people with disabilities in order to assist them articulate and realise their employment aspirations.

...addressing the factors identified as underpinning the low employment rate and disadvantaged position of people with disabilities...

In overall terms, there is a need to move from a system that routes people with disabilities to forms of provision with weak linkages to employment, particularly skilled employment, to forms of provision with strong linkages to employment. Cross-cutting the above strands of action is the need to do the following:

- (vi) ensure that the volume and overall pattern of provision in the area of education, training and employment programming is sufficiently diverse to meet the needs of all people with disabilities, particularly people experiencing severe disabilities.

Following a summary of the factors causing the low employment rate of people with disabilities, this chapter presents specific recommendations with regard to the above.

5.1 Summary of Factors Causing the Low Employment Rate of People with Disabilities

First, key elements of the state's approach to, as well as its administration of services for people with disabilities not in employment, treat people with disabilities as being outside of the labour force. That is, policies and practices are more premised on the incapacity of people with disability to work than on their capacity to work. Disability is equated with inactivity rather than activity. A particular aspect of this is the operation of the income support system for people with disabilities and the manner in which this does not, in practice, recognise: (i) the possibility of a capacity to work and an interest in obtaining employment on part of people with disabilities currently not in employment; and, (ii) the diversity among people with disabilities not in work in terms of their capabilities for work, work aspirations, and the range and types of support needed to realise their aspirations.

...policies and practices are more premised on the incapacity of people with disability to work than on their capacity to work.

Second, in so far as the state has intervened to increase the employment rate of people with disabilities, the emphasis has been predominantly on the supply side, with little evidence of major effectiveness to date. Within this, the approach has focused on assisting individual persons with a disability to obtain employment rather than looking systematically at:

- (i) how the current system of welfare provision impedes or enhances the employment prospects of people with disabilities;⁷
- (ii) the adequacy of the quantity, quality and mix of active labour market programmes in relation to the diverse circumstances, aspirations and needs of people with disabilities; and,
- (iii) the role of the demand side of the labour market in increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities.

Treating people with disabilities as members of the labour force will broadly require:

- (i) developing an interface between welfare and employment that supports transitions into employment;
- (ii) enhancing the capacity of active labour market policy to engage with the diversity of people with disabilities with a view to responding to their real as opposed to assumed aspirations and needs in relation to employment;
- (iii) deploying a set of programmes that provide effective linkages into the contemporary and likely future pattern of employment; and,
- (iv) making a systematic effort to increase the demand for people with disabilities among employers.

That is, there is a need for the system to change – and to clearly signal its intent with regard to the employment of people with disabilities – if there is to be real progress in raising the employment rate of people with disabilities. Following on from the above, a number of specific elements of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities are presented here. It is important to emphasise that, if real progress is to be achieved, action is required in respect of all of the elements identified: a piecemeal approach or selective action in relation to particular elements will not, in our view, deliver results.

5.2 Resolving Issues Related to Welfare Provision

For the purpose of securing their welfare claims people with disabilities are required to establish that they are not capable of working. That is, there is a threshold rationale in operation and there is no consideration of a partial capacity for work. Medical assessment is dominant in determining whether this threshold is crossed and there is no meaningful vocational/occupational/employment assessment dimension to the process. Once people with disabilities become recipients of welfare they are:

- trapped by a system definition of their situation that, for the most part, precludes consideration of their becoming employed;
- treated as passive recipients of welfare with no employment aspirations; and,
- provided with limited financial incentives and active supports for them to seek employment or participate in educational and training programmes that could enhance their employability. The evidence from international studies is fairly consistent in pointing to the many routes into welfare dependency among people with disabilities and the absence of routes out of this into employment.

...a piecemeal approach or selective action in relation to particular elements will not, in our view, deliver results.

One specific outcome arising from this approach is the presence of unemployment and poverty traps. The former is defined by the DSFA (2004) as being taken to refer to “the position whereby a person’s financial circumstances, if unemployed, compares favourably with their net take home pay from employment, to the extent that there is disincentive for them to take up employment, or for people in low paid employment to remain at work (p. 25). The latter refers to disincentives to increase earnings from employment because of loss of welfare entitlements. Loss of secondary benefits, particularly the Medical Card, has been identified as a key issue in successive studies of employment and disability.

At present, recipients of Disability Allowance may earn up to €120 a week and retain full welfare payment (and secondary benefits): when earnings exceed €120 there is currently a euro for euro deduction from the recipients welfare payment. The €120 limit equates to 15 hours a week at the minimum wage. This situation is set to ease from 2006 when there will be a 50 cent reduction per euro earned after €120, up to a limit of €350 a week.

Drawing on the reviews and recommendations made in respect of the interface between welfare and work in previous reports – specifically *Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Illness and Disability Schemes* (DSFA 2003) and *Disability and the Cost of Living* (NDA, 2004) – and our own assessment of the issues arising in this regard, the following broad areas need to be addressed:

- (i) re-assess and redefine the criteria and procedures whereby people with disabilities qualify for welfare payments (i.e., dealing with the flow into welfare); and,
- (ii) introduce measures to assist the pool of recipients of disability related welfare payments exit from welfare.

More generally, there is also an over-riding need to ensure that the criteria, procedures, and payments related to income support for people with disabilities do not pose barriers to people with disabilities engaging with

education, training and employment. That is, there is a need to create an effective interface between welfare and the labour market for people with disabilities in receipt of welfare payments. The specific issues in relation to which action is required are presented below. The sequence in which these recommendations are presented reflects our view of the relative ease and capacity with which they could be introduced.

- **Introduce a tax credit for people with disabilities moving from welfare to employment.**

The introduction of such a measure would provide an incentive for people with disabilities to move from welfare to employment. The rationale for the measure includes:

- (i) its capacity to impact on the benefit trap by increasing the after tax income of people with disabilities moving from welfare to employment; and,
- (ii) the potential role of the measure in addressing the additional costs that people with disabilities experience in actually taking up employment.

The administrative changes required to implement the measure are modest. Given evidence that at present a significant number of people with disabilities enter part-time employment and enter occupations with low earnings (and thus may remain outside the tax net) the tax credit would need to be refundable to achieve maximum effectiveness.

- **Increase the income threshold for the Medical Card by introducing a “disability allowance” in calculating the income threshold.**
- **Allow for the retention of the Medical Card for all persons with a disability taking up employment for a period of one year (regardless of the income threshold for eligibility).**

The loss of the Medical Card has been identified as a particularly significant factor in shaping the decision-making and behaviour of people with disabilities

in relation to taking up employment. The actions recommended are based on a recognition of the additional medical expenses incurred by people with disabilities and the need to have some certainty regarding how these expenses will be met when taking up or re-entering employment.

- **Introduce an employment assessment dimension into procedures for qualifying for income support for people with disabilities.**

Current procedures are based predominantly on a medical model. While there is a need to reform these procedures *per se* (particularly in the context of any move to introduce a cost of disability payment that may be related to severity of impairment), in our view the most urgent short-term action that is required is to at least ensure that people with disabilities entering the welfare system are not solely engaged with on the basis of individuals with medical conditions or impairments, but also as people with capacities, aspirations and needs in relation to employment. Such assessments would also be an input to designing tailored actions to assist people with disabilities take up or return to employment. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that there is no intrinsic or deterministic relationship between impairment, severity of impairment, and work capacity.

- **Introduce a cost of disability payment**

The basis for this and the issues arising in relation to determining levels of payment have been extensively covered the DSFA's *Review of Illness and Disability Schemes* (DSFA, 2003) and in *Disability and the Cost of Living* (NDA, 2004). The action recommended in this regard is that the considerations raised in these reports be addressed with a view to introducing a cost of disability payment, an action recommended by both reports.

The loss of the Medical Card has been identified as a particularly significant factor in shaping the decision-making and behaviour of people with disabilities in relation to taking up employment.

Ideally measures to implement the previous two recommendations 3 and 4 above would be integrated and involve developing and adopting procedures not solely based on a medical assessment of a person's capacity for work but also:

- (i) an occupational/employment assessment focusing on identifying the person's capacities for work and the resources and supports required to realise this capacity;
- (ii) an assessment to determine the cost of disability payment arising; and,
- (iii) developing a plan to enhance their employability by developing their skills and competencies and identifying the resources and supports they require to access and remain in employment. Given the heterogeneity of people with disabilities along dimensions such as disability type, severity, and time of onset as well as qualifications, skills and experience, this plan would need to be individually tailored.

5.3 Enhancing Human Resource Development Policy/Educational and Training Programmes and Developing Preventative Approaches

One implication of the review of existing programming presented in the previous chapter is that people with disabilities are not securing employment at the same rate as people without disabilities because they are not being catered for by those elements of human resource development programming that are effective in securing positive employment outcomes. A considerable proportion of the total volume of current training provision for people with disabilities is programmes providing specialised/segregated training with low progression to employment.

...people with disabilities are not securing employment at the same rate as people without disabilities...

One further and important consideration is that there is a need to ensure that educational and training programmes incorporate actual work experience. The latter consideration arises because of: (i) the potential negative effect of a lack of recent employment experience on the probability of obtaining employment; (ii) the positive signal that participation in employment can send to employers regarding capacity to work (particularly given evidence that employers have uncertainties regarding the actual ability of people with disabilities to undertake employment); and, (iii) the value of actual contact with employers in breaking down any negative stereotyping of people with disabilities (or, in technical terms, engaging in statistical discrimination – see Chapter 2).

The broad lines of the action recommended in relation to educational and training programmes are:

- **In relation to the existing package of educational and training programmes, increase the level of participation by people with disabilities in education and training programmes that are effectively linked to contemporary and future patterns of employment demand.**
- **For people with disabilities participating in basic or pre-vocational programmes, ensure that there is progression to education and training programmes that are effectively linked to contemporary and future patterns of occupational/employment demand.**
- **Introduce a work placement module for people with disabilities participating in educational and training programmes.**

The implementation of the above needs to be seen in the context of three categories of participants:

- (i) young people leaving the educational system (particularly second level);
- (ii) people acquiring a disability in adult life; and,

(iii) the existing pool of people with a disability.

In relation to a sub-set of the first of these categories – young people with disabilities leaving the educational system at second level with less than Leaving Certificate qualifications – we recommend:

- **Introducing a social guarantee programme that commits the state to ensuring that school leavers without Leaving Certificate qualifications receive further education and training to at least Level 5 of the National Qualifications Framework.**

The need to address the situation of young people with disabilities is of particular importance given evidence of early school-leaving among this group of people with disabilities and of a widening of the gap between their qualifications and those of the cohort of young people leaving the secondary educational system on an annual basis.

It is recommended that the proposed social guarantee is characterised by a qualification-led approach (as apposed to a service or participation led approach) and that it would include a commitment to securing at least three months work placement for all young people with disabilities. The latter is recommended in the light of approaches in the US indicating that lack of work experience is among the key factors leading to the non-employment of young people with disabilities compared to their non-disabled counterparts with similar levels of qualification. The role of the public bodies in providing at least a guaranteed portion of the work placements warrants consideration.

One further consideration that needs to be addressed in introducing this is how to ensure continued participation in second level education and participation in training and eliminate any disincentives arising from young people with disabilities qualifying for Disability Assistance at age 16. This matter was considered by the DSFA in its *Review of Illness and Disability Payment Schemes* (2004) and the retention of the current situations is recommended pending further research on this matter.

In relation to persons acquiring a disability in adult life it is recommended that:

- **(i) vocational/occupational/employment assessment and guidance are provided as part of the process of qualifying for income support; and**
(ii) support, on an early intervention basis, is provided (by the state and, where relevant, employers) to enable persons acquiring a disability to develop an individualised employment entry/re-entry plan.

The main action to address the needs and circumstances of the third group – persons currently in receipt of illness and disability related payments – are addressed in Section 5.6 below.

5.4 Employment Programmes

People with disabilities are currently participating in a number of different types of employment programmes. These are: sheltered work, employment programmes (including Community Employment, the Jobs Initiative, the Social Economy Programme), supported employment, the Back to Work Allowance Scheme (employee and self-employment strands), and the recently introduced Wage Support Scheme (WSS).

Our analysis of the role of employment programmes is that there is a role for different types of employment programme. However, each should be premised on clear objectives and designed to cater for the needs of particular groups of people within the population of people with disabilities. Sheltered employment as currently operated has very low progression rates to open employment. In stating this there is also a need to recognise its role in providing access to occupational experience and the social benefits of employment. Employment programmes (such as CE, JI and SEP) also have low progression to the open labour market. However, they do represent real choices made by people with disabilities under the current system. To strengthen the progression outcomes from these programmes we recommend that:

- **Participation by people with disabilities in Community Employment should be more closely linked with the employment and career aspirations of people with disabilities and access to education and training designed to enhance the labour market relevant skills of people with disabilities should be integrated into operation of the programme. Post programme support and pathways should be provided to ensure that the benefits arising from participation in CE can provide a platform for accessing employment in the open labour market.**

Given the strong connection between the BTWAS and employment in the open labour market as well affording people with disabilities an opportunity to enter self-employment, the scheme is clearly benefiting some people with disabilities. In the context of the falling numbers of persons formerly in receipt of unemployment related payments taking up the BTWA:

- **The role of the BTWAS as a link to employment and self-employment for people with disabilities should be strengthened.**

The role of the WSS could be strengthened by adopting the recommendations made in the recent evaluation of its predecessor the ESS (WRCsec, 2005). In particular, we recommend that:

- **The WSS should be recast as an employment support scheme, rather than being premised on providing a wage subsidy based on productivity deficits. The WSS should also provide employment support on a sliding scale basis and be time limited thus permitting a continual level of intake to the programme over time.**

Overall, there is scope as well as a benefit in increasing the number of people with disabilities participating in the BTWAS and the WSS. Currently, these programmes are catering for a small number of people with disabilities relative to the number of people with disabilities qualifying for participation. In implementing this recommendation, there needs to be monitoring of wage trends particularly in respect of ensuring the maintenance of income levels following reduced support to employers or people in receipt of the BTWAS.

5.5 Issues Related to Demand

Just one in eight employers actually employ people with disabilities on the basis of survey results reported by Manpower (2003). Thus, the majority of employers in the private sector do not have a person with a disability (on a self-disclosed basis) in their workforce. What this indicates is a weakness in the demand side of the equation in respect of the employment of people with disabilities. The reasons for this are manifold: some employers simply never have received a job application from a person with a disability; some have never thought about the issue; there is evidence of a substantial level of uncertainty among employers about the capacity of “people with disabilities” to undertake work (particularly people with mental health difficulties); a substantial number of employers express concerns regarding health, safety and insurance issues; and, some employers may be either directly or indirectly discriminating against people with disabilities. Cutting across these possible reasons for the low proportion of employers employing people with disabilities is a lack of information about the capabilities, skills and competencies to be found among people with disabilities and a tendency to stereotype disability as associated with reduced capacity for work or reduced productivity. Indeed, some current programmes aimed at employers tend to reinforce rather than challenge this view.

Arising from the above considerations there is a need to increase the demand for people with disabilities among employers. Evidence suggests that contact reduces uncertainty and stereotyping and, on that basis, an important line of action in increasing demand for people with a disability is to ensure that employers are actually brought into contact with people with disabilities. In this regard, there is a need to be wary of the value of “PR campaigns”: they may create greater “awareness” of the issue but they are less likely to change behaviour in relation to the issue.

A number of possibilities arise here. First, and noting the work placement element of the proposed social guarantee for young people with disabilities and the inclusion of such placements for people with disabilities participating in educational and training programmes, there will be a need to recruit employers to provide such placements. To this end, it is proposed that:

- **All employer organisations (i.e., IBEC, SFA, ISME, and Chambers of Commerce) be engaged with – possibly as part of social partnership negotiations – to advocate amongst their membership in respect of the employment of people with disabilities and to identify from among their members a pool of employers stating a willingness to provide employment placements for people with disabilities thereby facilitating the interaction of employment services with employers in this regard.**

Operationally, to support the placement process it will be necessary to provide direct support to such employers to fulfil their commitment in this regard. This could be achieved by having the state cover the costs of the placement and any assistive supports required to accommodate the people with disabilities in their employment. With regard to the latter, there is also a clear need to more effectively market the availability of grants to employers to make adaptations to their workplaces to accommodate people with disabilities. Consideration should also be given to the possible use of tax incentives as a means of covering the costs of workplace adaptations. Employers should also be encouraged to use the placement as a possible pre-employment experience and to consider recruiting the person with a disability on placement with them.

While the rationale for this proposal derives principally from strengthening the demand for people with disabilities among employers, it also has the beneficial effect of providing people with disabilities with work experience and the possibility of securing a positive reference. The latter are two factors that considerably enhance employment prospects.

Flanking measures to the above that would encourage recruitment are promoting the WSS (with recommended modifications) and other programmes supporting the employment of people with disabilities among such employers. On the basis of the experience of the ESS and its successor the WSS one of the key factors limiting effectiveness is the low number of employers actually participating in the programmes. In this regard, much more explicit consideration needs to be given to the operational mechanisms of the WSS,

particularly in relation to the qualifying number of hours and the role of productivity as a basis for state support.

A key factor in securing the operational success of this recommendation is securing the participation of a sufficient number of employers. Achieving this will require securing the commitment of peak employer organisations to the high level goal of increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities by engaging in practical actions to achieve this.

5.6 Devise and Implement an Action Plan for Engaging with People with Disabilities

Currently, there is no process in place to actively engage with people with disabilities not in employment and in receipt of welfare payments. Where people with disabilities do engage with elements of active labour market provision it is primarily on a self-motivated basis. There are two adverse consequences of this evident at present: (i) very few people with disabilities are presenting to agencies providing education, training and employment assistance; and, (ii) there is a lack of any systematic data regarding the employment capacities, occupational aspirations, and the needed supports of people with disabilities. To address this we recommend:

- **Devising and implementing an action plan for engaging with people with disabilities.**

In devising and implementing this plan the following considerations arise. First, its objective should be seen as bringing people with disabilities actively into a process that would be supportive in respect of assisting them to identify their employment/career aspirations and the resources and supports required to realise these. Second, it would not be based on determining or enforcing conditionality in relation to welfare payments. Third, it should respect the individual circumstances and motivations of people with disabilities regarding employment and the obvious fact that some people with a disability may not be in a position to take up employment.

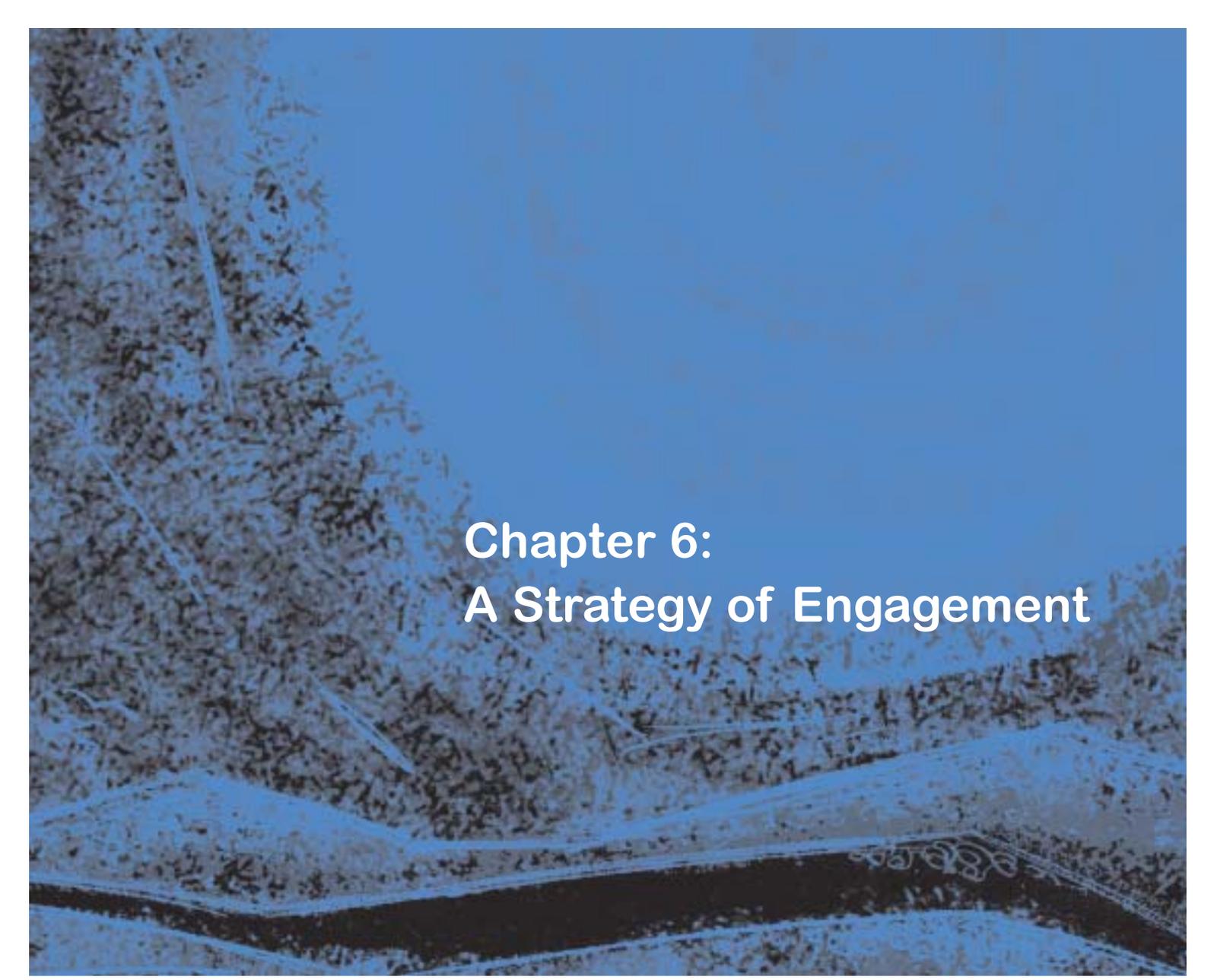
The process and procedures put in place will need to have: (i) professional competence in the areas of vocational/occupational guidance; and, (ii) effective linkages with organisations providing education, training and employment programmes.

Finally, given the scale of the task and the absence of an existing institutional framework to undertake such an engagement, we recommend that it be developed subsequent to the evaluation of the pilot exercise undertaken by the DSFA, FÁS, and the Health Service Executive in the Midlands region. That pilot highlighted the need to see the proposed process of engagement as not simply a re-run of the Employment Action Plan process but with recipients of illness and disability related payment being the target group. Furthermore, it should be recognised that the pilot exercise in the Midlands region focused on one group within the population of recipients of illness and disability payments, that is, young people aged 16 to 25 years in receipt of Disability Allowance. Also, persons “identified by the medical assessors as having a profound disability and therefore unlikely to be able to participate in work or training were excluded from the study” (DSFA, 2005, p.1). Designing a process of engagement that will have the capacity to engage with the diversity found among people with disabilities needs to be seen as posing considerable challenges but also as a vital element of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities.

Designing a process of engagement that will have the capacity to engage with the diversity found among people with disabilities needs to be seen as posing considerable challenges but also as a vital element of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities.

Footnotes

⁶ An exception in this regard is the *Report of the Working Group on the Review of Illness and Disability Payment Schemes* (DSFA, 2003).



**Chapter 6:
A Strategy of Engagement**



6

6.1 Introduction

The case for developing and implementing a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities is established in the research literature, in long-standing system intelligence, and by recent evidence of their deteriorating labour market experience in the context of sustained economic and employment growth.

There is a wide range of contributory factors underlying the failure to effectively integrate people with disabilities who, as a consequence, are disproportionately exposed to poverty and social exclusion. In that regard, the experience of Irish citizens with disabilities appears to be similar to people with disabilities internationally. As the OECD has noted (our emphasis):

*The low employment rate of people with disabilities reflects a **failure** of government social policies. Societies **hide away** some disabled individuals on generous benefits. Others **isolate them** in sheltered work programmes. Efforts to help them find work in the open labour market are often lacking. The shortcomings affect moderately disabled individuals, as well as those with severe handicaps, but are particularly true for people over age 50. ... Recent research in 20 countries found none to have a successful policy for disabled people (p. 1, OECD, 2003c).*

As such, the strategising exercise should be undertaken on an open, non-defensive basis. Ireland is not unique in its failure and no individual organisation (statutory or otherwise) has set about to marginalise people with disabilities. The 'inherited' situation is partially based on systems that were developed in a different context and informed by now outdated thinking. The situation is also partially based on the dysfunctional interactions between various supports (financial and organisational) that were introduced, individually, for benign reasons. Therefore, the strategy should be developed on a focused, prospective basis with the core concern being increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities with a view to enhancing quality of life, combating social exclusion, addressing poverty and building diversity in the workforce.

While Ireland is not unique in its failure, it is unique in the opportunity open to it to fundamentally address the issue. The economic and employment context is such that now, as never before, there is the inherent motivation, consonant with a range of policy aspirations (social justice, equality, anti-poverty, social inclusion, lifelong learning, labour market and competitive needs) to address the issue. Likewise, the ongoing economic buoyancy and robust exchequer provides the means to fundamentally address the issues and the advent of a new planning period coupled with new legislation provides the ideal opportunity to switch from passive to active engagement.

Change often occurs on a reactive basis as a response to crisis and, as such, can be both difficult and painful. The necessary set of circumstances is now in place for a safely managed, pro-active change effort. In that regard, the proposed strategy should be predicated on the needs of individuals currently excluded from employment and agreement by all parties regarding the following:

- the unacceptable situation pertaining, however measured;
- the identification and analysis of core issues is already undertaken and relevant intelligence is available regarding the issues to be addressed;
- many of the technical issues are, technically, soluble; and,
- there is an unprecedented opportunity to effect change and the available means to resource it.

We do not underestimate the range of tactical, procedural and other issues that will inevitably arise in ultimately implementing the proposed strategy. Nor do we underestimate the requirement for significant political and administrative will. However, we believe that the necessary confluence of motive, means and opportunity exist to fundamentally tackle the labour market inequalities experienced by people with disabilities and for Ireland to act as an exemplar in that regard on the international stage.

6.2 A Strategy of Engagement

One of the primary conclusions drawn in much of the literature as presented in this report is that the present system is passive and lacks integration and co-ordination. People with disabilities are virtually absent in terms of active and ongoing consultation and engagement. Organisations and supports within the system do not interact effectively and the demand side of the labour market does not interact with the supply side in the case of people with disabilities.

To counter this and to ensure that the necessary focus is placed on the needs of individuals and not on the system serving them, we are proposing a Strategy of Engagement.

6.2.1 Driving the Strategy of Engagement

Due to the range of interrelated issues, ministries and state and other agencies involved in the current arrangements in relation to welfare and vocational education and training provision, the Strategy of Engagement will need high level political and administrative support. Over the course of our investigations we have detected significant administrative or system based goodwill and a deep understanding of the issues involved. We believe that goodwill can be harnessed if an appropriate forum or space is provided with a view to working through the necessary tactics, timing and other arrangements with a view to addressing the wide range of issues in question. In other countries where fundamental change has occurred, political interest and support has been at a very high level, most notably in the United States where the President's Office takes a direct and hands-on interest in developments. Similar high-level prioritisation, visibility and political coverage needs to be provided in the Irish context.

We recommend that the Strategy of Engagement be driven directly by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment working in close consultation with relevant cabinet colleagues in order to ensure that the purpose of the strategy is clear and that no gap emerges between the high-level statements of intent and the actual realisation of these 'in the field'.

6.2.2 Principles Underpinning the Strategy of Engagement

In order to maintain a focus on the needs of the individual and to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of the strategy it will be necessary to observe certain principles. This will be particularly important in terms of winning the confidence of people with disabilities themselves whose experience to date has been less than positive. In that regard, the approach needs to ameliorate the historical experience and to convince people with disabilities that the exercise is 'for real'. This will require sustained, committed and ongoing communication over time. It will also require demonstrable change in the system with which they interact – changes in behaviour tend to change attitudes rather than the other way around.

In order to ensure the success of the strategy and taking account of the historical situation, the strategy must be informed by a set of core principles as follows:

Consultation – ongoing and sustained consultation with people with disabilities undertaken in the knowledge that it will often be difficult to make contact with people but understanding that the relative anonymity of many people with disabilities is a function of their active exclusion and marginalisation. Consultation will take time and will need to be resourced but is fundamental to the re-inclusion of people with disabilities as agents with an element of choice and control over their own employment prospects. People with disabilities need to be present in the process.

Empowerment – a clear focus on the purpose of the exercise will be necessary so that it never drifts into a more minimalist procedural exercise. The focus must remain on creating the circumstances and the environment within which people with disabilities can acquire the means to maximise their independence and improve their general well-being. People with disabilities should be treated as and facilitated to be active agents in implementing the strategy.

Integration – despite the inevitable fact that certain aspects of the strategy will be possible to deliver before others, the exercise must be undertaken with the goal of delivering an integrated solution that focuses on the needs of individuals and not the system itself – the results of *ad hoc*, albeit well-meaning, responses to the issue are clearly visible from this vantage point.

6.2.3 Values Underpinning the Strategy of Engagement

The central values underpinning the strategy should promote self-determination, independence, integration and participation, and should seek to both acknowledge and accommodate diversity and to promote choice. In our view the concept of equality embodies all of these ideas.

We recommend that the concept of equality should be the core value underpinning the Strategy of Engagement.

6.2.4 The Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement

Based on the body of evidence presented in the national and international literature concerning disability and the labour market, there are a number of pillars on which a comprehensive strategy needs to be built with a view to addressing the substantial and persistent labour market inequality experienced by people with disabilities. We have already commented on the need for significant improvement in securing higher level educational qualifications and skills for people with disabilities over the medium to long-term and we recognise the importance of that backdrop to the issue in question. However, from a labour market perspective there is a range of action that is both possible and necessary to effect change and secure improvement in the labour market integration of people with disabilities. That action clearly relates to the issues outlined in the preceding chapters.

...a comprehensive strategy needs to be built with a view to addressing the substantial and persistent labour market inequality experienced by people with disabilities.

From a strategic perspective it is important to state what needs to be done and why. We recognise that, beyond such high level statement or definition, there are many actions necessary. The teasing out of the actions is, however, a managerial and tactical exercise that we have paid only cursory attention to in this report. However, in order to demonstrate the linkage between the proposed strands of a comprehensive employment strategy presented in the previous chapter and the types of activities that may be required, we re-present here the strands in pillar form accompanied by their rationale and recommended actions.

The strategic pillars presented below are similar (although not identical) to those outlined in a presentation provided by Patricia Thornton at a recent Roundtable Discussion at the NDA on the subject of Disability and Employment. The similarities reflect the depth of Thornton's research and knowledge on the one hand and also point to the similarities in the welfare and labour market treatment and experience of people with disabilities internationally, as commented on above.

Table 6.1
Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement

Strategic Pillar	Rationale	Actions
<p>Removing disincentives and benefit traps arising from the operation of the welfare system and ensuring that transitions to employment are possible, financially rewarding, and sustainable.</p>	<p>The current system promotes dependence and effectively acts as a passive maintenance mechanism. It encourages economic inactivity by making it difficult to move from welfare dependency due, for example, to the failure to recognise partial capacity for work and to the loss, or threat of loss, of certain benefits on taking up employment and increasing gross income. There is no recognition of the cost of disability.</p>	<p>Key Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a tax credit for people with disabilities moving from welfare to employment. • Increase the income threshold for the Medical Card by introducing a disability allowance in calculating the income threshold. • Allow for the retention of the Medical Card for all persons with a disability taking up employment for a period of one year (regardless of the income threshold for eligibility). • Introduce an employment assessment dimension into procedures for qualifying for income support for people with disabilities. • Introduce a cost of disability payment. <p>Other Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationalise the number of illness/disability related welfare payments. • Recognise partial (in)capacity.

**Table 6.1
Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement (continued)**

Strategic Pillar	Rationale	Actions
<p>Enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of the education, training and employment system – active labour market policy – to ensure that people with disabilities are equipped to compete for employment in the contemporary labour market and to benefit from future patterns of occupational growth.</p>	<p>People with disabilities in Ireland are significantly less qualified than their non-disabled peers. In the context of a competitive and credentialist-based employment market, this places people with disabilities at an extreme disadvantage. Increasing the quality and market relevance of programming available to people with disabilities would significantly improve their competitive chances in the labour market.</p>	<p>Key Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In relation to the existing package of educational and training programmes, increase the level of participation by people with disabilities in education and training programmes that are effectively linked to contemporary and future patterns of employment demand. • For people with disabilities participating in basic or pre-vocational programmes, ensure that there is progression to education and training programmes that are effectively linked to contemporary and future patterns of occupational/employment demand. • Introduce a work placement module for people with disabilities participating in educational and training programmes. • Participation by people with disabilities in Community Employment should be more closely linked with the employment and career aspirations of people with disabilities, and access to education and training designed to enhance the labour market relevant skills of people with disabilities should be integrated into the operation of the programme. Post programme support should be provided to ensure that the benefits arising from participation in CE can provide a platform for accessing employment in the open labour market.

Table 6.1
Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement (continued)

Strategic Pillar	Rationale	Actions
<p>Enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of the education, training and employment system – active labour market policy – to ensure that people with disabilities are equipped to compete for employment in the contemporary labour market and to benefit from future patterns of occupational growth.</p>	<p>People with disabilities in Ireland are significantly less qualified than their non-disabled peers. In the context of a competitive and credentialist-based employment market, this places people with disabilities at an extreme disadvantage. Increasing the quality and market relevance of programming available to people with disabilities would significantly improve their competitive chances in the labour market.</p>	<p>Key Recommendations (continued)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of the Back to Work Allowance as a link to employment for people with disabilities should be strengthened. • The Wage Subsidy Scheme should be recast as an employment support scheme, rather than being premised on providing a wage subsidy based on productivity deficits. The WSS should also provide employment support on a sliding scale basis and be time limited, thus permitting a continual level of intake to the programme over time. <p>Other Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put working and target driven progression pathways in place within the education and training system to facilitate the progression of people with disabilities. • Set realistic performance targets concerning progression and employment placement for state and other providers. • Examine the efficacy of existing arrangements from a labour market perspective and act based on objective findings. • Provide more in-work type training opportunities for people with disabilities in order to ensure relevance and currency but also to impact on attitudes, stereotyping and potential discrimination amongst employers and fellow employees. • Set and pursue participation, progression and employment related targets.

**Table 6.1
Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement (continued)**

Strategic Pillar	Rationale	Actions
<p>Ensuring that both the public and private sectors are aware of the capabilities of people with disabilities and, on that basis, implement policies to support the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities.</p>	<p>There is a low level of demand for people with disabilities among employers. In Ireland there has been a number of (largely small pilot) efforts to address the negative attitudes of employers vis-à-vis people with disabilities. There should be a sustained and coordinated effort to change employer behaviour. The state has a major role to play in this regard as an exemplar in its own recruitment practices, as a significant purchaser of services and goods from the private sector, and as the primary funder of the community and voluntary sector.</p>	<p>Key Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All employer organisations (i.e., IBEC, SFA, ISME, and Chambers of Commerce) be engaged with – possibly as part of social partnership negotiations – to advocate amongst their membership in respect of the employment of people with disabilities and to identify from among their members a pool of employers stating a willingness to provide employment placements for people with disabilities, thereby facilitating the interaction of employment services with employers in this regard. <p>Other Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise public sector recruitment and retention of people with disabilities. • Prioritise public sector accommodation of disability. • Use public sector contracting to leverage change. • Use grant giving to leverage change. • Package and market supports for employers to employ people with disabilities. • Promote flexible working arrangements to accommodate diversity. • Undertake a sustained and targeted information/education campaign to promote awareness of capabilities of people with disabilities and their visibility as a source of labour supply.

Table 6.1
Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement (continued)

Strategic Pillar	Rationale	Actions
<p>Devise and implement a preventative strategy aimed at reducing:</p> <p>(a) the current level of early school-leaving among young people with disabilities; and,</p> <p>(b) the rate of exit from employment in adult life following the onset of a disability.</p>	<p>Young people with disabilities leave school earlier and secure lower qualifications than their non-disabled peers with this, in turn, contributing to lifelong inequalities in employment rates and earnings.</p> <p>Between three-quarters and four-fifths of persons with disability acquire this during their life course and there is a high rate of exiting from employment following the onset of illness or disability.</p>	<p>Key Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a social guarantee programme that commits the state to ensuring that school leavers without Leaving Certificate qualifications receive further education and training to at least Level 5 of the National Qualifications Framework. • Ensure that vocational/occupational/employment assessment and guidance are provided as part of the process of qualifying for income support; (ii) support, on an early intervention basis, is provided (by the state and, where relevant, employers) to enable persons acquiring a disability to develop an individualised employment entry/re-entry plan. <p>Other Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote/legislate for employer responsibilities for employee retention. • Provide packaged supports to individuals and employers. • Train managers in retention strategies. • Provide support to help people cope with workplace stress. • Need to train for and practice ‘disability management’ in the system. • Explore international innovations such as Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilot in the UK and the system shifts that have resulted in increased employer responsibilities in the Netherlands.

Table 6.1
Pillars of the Strategy of Engagement (continued)

Strategic Pillar	Rationale	Actions
<p>Developing a systematic process of engagement with people with disabilities in order to assist them articulate and realise their employment aspirations.</p>	<p>This requires a shift from passive processing to active engagement with the client as a potential economic actor. Active engagement with clients as they enter the system sends a clear message – the process should be clearly focused on facilitating the greatest level of independence for the client and should never be reduced to a benefit limiting exercise.</p>	<p>Key Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devise and implement an action plan for engaging with people with disabilities. <p>Other Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure early intervention with people with disabilities. • Provide staff training for personnel in national employment service. • Provide services in the area of occupational assessment, counselling, guidance as part of national employment service. • Incremental introduction of benefit subject to assessment and guidance particularly for young people who can currently access full benefits from age 16 on the basis of purely medical criteria. • Integrate information and contact points – ‘one-stop-shop’.
<p>CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE</p>		
<p>Ensure that the volume and overall pattern of provision in the area of education, training and employment programming is sufficiently diverse to meet the needs of all people with disabilities, particularly people experiencing severe disabilities.</p>		

6.3 Conclusion

6.3.1 Introduction

This report argues for introducing a comprehensive employment strategy to address the continuing and worsening labour market experience of people with disabilities in Ireland. Our engagement with key policy makers over the course of this and other research indicates that there is sufficient acknowledgement of the need for fundamental change within the system and enough policy pressure to motivate system change. The means are available to support such an effort and the timing appears to be right given new legislation, a new national planning process, and what appears to be significant system-based interest and goodwill concerning the issue.

6.3.2 Philosophy and Disposition

Any change effort will meet with resistance and this will be particularly true of change that is attempted outside of crisis – a ‘why rock the boat’ type of response. In political terms there is no crisis, primarily because the people most affected have little effective political voice. The Workway Initiative and the Midlands Pilot referred to above found that many people with disabilities are unconnected to any system or any group and are, in large part, invisible other than as recipients of welfare support. They have no voice and create no unrest.

That does not mean there is no crisis. The incidence of absolute and relative poverty amongst people with disabilities and their dependents suggests multiple crises. The falling rate of labour market participation in the context of economic and employment growth suggests deep-rooted inequality that, as we have argued and as the literature demonstrates, is partially to do with the manner in which people with disabilities have been dealt with by the state.

Our engagement with key policy makers over the course of this and other research indicates that there is sufficient acknowledgement of the need for fundamental change...

There is a clear need for fundamental change with a view to ensuring equality and securing at least some of the policy aspirations regarding people with disabilities across various policy domains including employment, social inclusion, anti-poverty, equality and lifelong learning. Such change will have to be carefully managed and will have to be underpinned by principles and values such as those outlined above. Perhaps most importantly, the change effort will have to be undertaken with reference to a clear underlying philosophy and delivered with a disposition that emphasises and communicates the proactive, person-centred, inclusive nature of the exercise. As noted above, the process itself should serve to ameliorate the historical experience of the intended beneficiaries. Failure to achieve this could result in the greatest resistance to change emanating from within the group itself (and/or within those closest to group members).

6.3.3 Leadership

The process will require real leadership at many levels. Our research suggests that there is high-level interest within the system itself. What is required to activate and lend form to that interest is high level, focused and cohesive political support. Given the economic and employment context that applies in Ireland and the relatively small scale of the issue in terms of absolute numbers, it can be argued that Ireland is uniquely placed to fundamentally tackle the issue of the employment and labour market integration of people with disabilities and to act as an example of best practice in that regard on the international stage.

6.3.4 Choice and Control

The strategy is, at heart, about providing choice and control to people with disabilities. It requires flexibility and sensitivity in its execution such that it maximises choice and control.

6.3.5 Communication

The strategy needs to be flanked by a sustained public information/education campaign aimed at diverse audiences including people with disabilities themselves, where relevant their carers and families, employers and society at large. Borrowing from and paraphrasing the Canadian model (In Unison 2000:

People With Disabilities in Canada, 2001) the message will have to be that the intention is to move:

From	To
Recipient status	Participant status
Passive maintenance	Active support
Dependence	Independence
Labelling as unemployable	Identification of work skills
Disincentive	Incentives to seek employment (and volunteer opportunities)
Insufficient employment supports	Opportunity to develop skills and experience
Insufficient portable benefits and services	Portable benefits and services
Multiple access requirements	Integrated access requirements

6.3.6 Opportunity

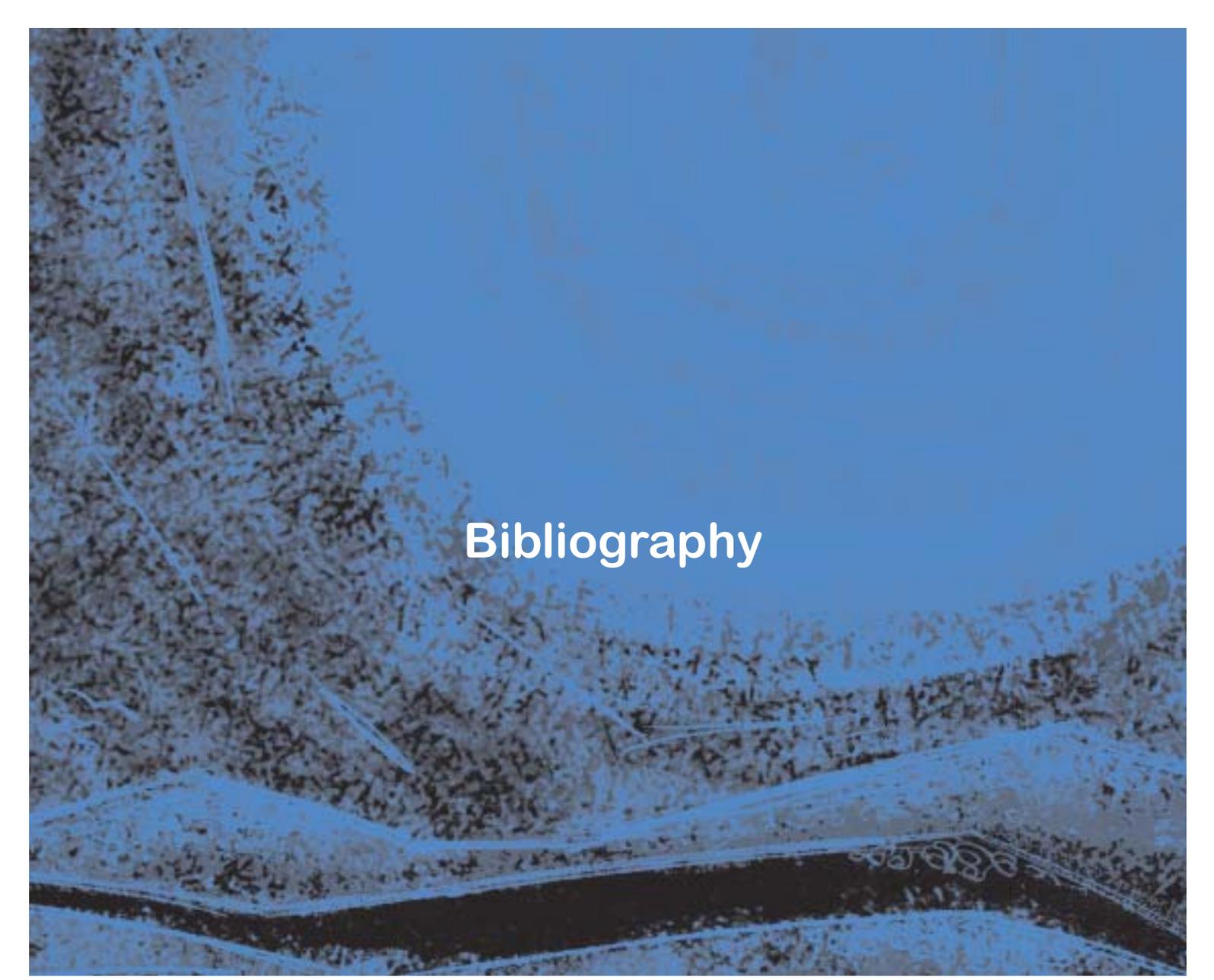
The strategy outlined in this paper represents an opportunity to fundamentally redress an unacceptable and ingrained imbalance regarding the employment and labour market experience of people with disabilities in Ireland. Given the increasing weight and significance placed on the function of employment in our society (e.g. as a mechanism to promote social interaction, self-development and independence), it is imperative that all citizens, including people with disabilities, are provided with the necessary supports and framework through which they can realise their potential.

The evidence and official statistics demonstrate the extent to which people with disabilities have been failed by the system (e.g. in respect of education, rehabilitation and integration) other than by way of passive supports. In that latter regard, the high exposure to poverty and social exclusion amongst the population of people with disabilities makes this approach questionable even on its own terms but all the more so in the context of growing disparities in wealth in general within the society and projected economic and employment growth in the medium term.

What is proposed here requires fundamental change in the manner in which and the purpose for which the system engages with people with disabilities. However, the proposed strategy is not radical in terms of the policy landscape. The strategy is consonant with the concepts and practices that underpin the developmental welfare state, with aspirations articulated in the social inclusion debate both within government policy and in the social partnership arena, with policy regarding lifelong learning, competitiveness and the utilisation and maximisation of resources and capacity, with anti-poverty policy and with equality policy. What is required is a radical actioning and prioritisation of swathes of existing policy in respect of a particularly marginalised group of people. This, in turn, requires focus, coordination, collaboration and consultation.

Within that there is challenge. But there is also an opportunity. Ireland is uniquely placed to fundamentally address this issue given employment and economic growth, a buoyant exchequer, an appropriate policy context and an overall strategic framework (National Disability Strategy) within which to set in train the *Strategy of Engagement* presented in this report.

What is required is a radical actioning and prioritisation of swathes of existing policy in respect of a particularly marginalised group of people.



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