



Mutual Learning Programme

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Peer Country Comments Paper - Ireland

Maximising Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities in an economy with full employment

Peer Review on "Employer service delivery"

26-28 October 2020



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1 Introduction

This paper has been prepared for the Peer Review on "Employer service delivery" within the framework of the Mutual Learning Programme. It provides a comparative assessment of the policy example of the host country and the situation in Ireland. For information on the host country policy example, please refer to the Host Country Discussion Paper.

2 Situation in the peer country

The most recent quarterly Labour Force Survey for 2019 indicates that unemployment decreased by 18,300 (-14.2%) in the year to Q4 2019 bringing the total number of persons unemployed to 110,600. This is the thirtieth quarter in succession where unemployment has declined on an annual basis. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate decreased from 5.0% in Q3 2019 to **4.7%** in Q4 2019, while the seasonally adjusted number of persons unemployed decreased by 4,800 to 115,900. The long-term unemployment rate decreased from 2.1% in Q4 2018 to 1.6% in Q4 2019. Long-term unemployment accounted for 35.0% of total unemployment in Q4 2019. There was an annual increase in employment of 3.5% or 79,900 in the year to the fourth quarter of 2019, bringing total employment to 2,361,200. This compares with an annual increase of 2.4% or 53,700 in employment in the previous quarter and an increase of 2.3% or 50,500 in the year to Q4 2018. The employment rate at **69.6%** can be regarded as being close to full employment.

The Public Employment Services (PES) in Ireland is delivered by the Department (Ministry) of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP). These PES services are delivered locally through the Department's 'Intreo' service. In recent years DEASP has increased its focus on Employer Services. The Employer Relations Strategy 2017-2020 sets out a comprehensive approach to the Department's engagement with employers. Special target groups of jobseekers are in focus and in the context of the current peer review, job placement of people with disabilities is a key target group for DEASP. Income supports for people with disabilities are also administered by DEASP. Following the Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities¹, the principle of mainstreaming has been the established policy since 2000, and was put on a legal footing in the Disability Act 2005. This mainstreaming approach means that jobseekers with disabilities are serviced as mainstream clients of the PES, on an equal footing with other jobseekers, albeit on a voluntary and self-identification basis.

Responsibility for general services for people with disabilities (PwDs) is shared across a range of government departments and agencies, with most service delivery taking place through the voluntary or non-profit sector with grant aid from the Health Service Executive. The sector is extremely diverse, both in size and in the range of services provided (Keogh², 2010). In some ways this fact scatters the focus on engaging with employers by PwDs and supports the perceived need for a coordinated approach on employer engagement specifically through the PES, as the main job broker for PwDs, nationally.

Labour market statistics for people with disabilities are not as comprehensive as those for people without disabilities and in general the most up to date figures are from the 2016 census of population. The census indicates that out of the total population of 359,657 people with disabilities in the 15-64 age group, 53% are not in the labour force. The reasons for this are complex (Indecon, 2016³), and include the low level of

¹ Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, 1996, *A strategy for equality: Summary of the report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities*

² Keogh, Department of Health, 2010, Dublin, Disability Policy Review, Government of Ireland, available at: http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/ERG_Disability_Policy_Review_Final.pdf

³ Indecon International Economic Consultants, 2016, Evaluation of EmployAbility (Supported Employment) Service, available at: <http://www.dsfa.ie/en/downloads/IndeconEvaluationofEmployAbility.pdf>

education and skills of PwDs, fears around loss of benefits, employer know-how as to how to support their integration in the workplace, low expectations of PwDs, and limited re-entry to work following onset of a disability. Of the 167,422 people with disabilities in the labour force (15-64 years age group), the unemployment rate was 27%⁴.

3 National policies and measures

National Policy Initiatives

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015 – 2024⁵ sets out a ten-year approach to ensuring that people with disabilities who are able to, and want to work, are supported and enabled to do so. The Comprehensive Employment Strategy Implementation Group (CES) which monitors the implementation of the Strategy, has an independent chair and is co-ordinated by the Department of Justice and Equality. The CES Implementation Group is made up of representatives from relevant Government Departments and Agencies, members of the Disability Stakeholders Group, employer and union representatives and other appropriate organisations.

The current second Action Plan provides a focus for work of the Implementation Group for the next period in the lifetime of the Strategy. The plan included a range of actions to advance the strategic priorities which are to:

- Build Skills, Capacity and Independence;
- Provide bridges and supports into work;
- Make work pay;
- Promote job retention and re-entry to work;
- Provide coordinated and seamless support and
- Engage Employers

35% of working age PwDs in Ireland are in receipt of a means-tested disability allowance. This is not based on social insurance contributions and is subject to the person with a disability demonstrating an income level or means below a certain nationally set baseline figure. The application process commences with the person's local general medical doctor who certifies the existence of a disability and this is subject to a review and decision by DEASP, including medical assessment. The person with disabilities may then receive a fixed allowance, with additions for any dependents and some other secondary benefits. A person in receipt of the allowance can also take part in work (which includes self-employment). They may retain their payment or a proportion of their payment while working. The first €120 of weekly earnings is not taken into account. (A taper or withdrawal rate of 50% is applied for income of between €120 and €350).

However, in the past, earning over a certain low threshold impacted on a medical card (gives access to a range of medical supports) and this created a barrier to PwDs taking up employment. This has now been addressed and they can earn up to Euro 427 per week without their entitlement to a medical card being affected. Also, previously, access to many disability supports were impacted negatively if earnings increased above a relatively low level. These issues have now been addressed. It is too early to assess the longer-term impact of these changes.

⁴ These census of population figures are not directly comparable with the 2016 quarterly national household survey (now called the Labour Force Survey).

⁵ Department of Justice, 2014, Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, Dublin, [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Comprehensive_Employment_Strategy_for_People_with_Disabilities_\(2015_2024\)](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Comprehensive_Employment_Strategy_for_People_with_Disabilities_(2015_2024))

PES Policy Initiatives

The main PES policy initiatives are included in the 'Pathways to Work' series of policy statements and action plans. The current draft of the 2020-24(6) 'Pathways to Work' focuses in particular on the employment needs of PwDs. The current main employment programme for PwDs is the 'EmployAbility' programme. This is a large 'Supported Employment' type initiative similar to those available in many European and other countries worldwide. This very successful programme has been in place for more than 20 years and has an average client base of 3000 at any given time. It is an outsourced programme that currently contracts 24 organisations including NGOs, to deliver this specialised job placement, coaching and support service for PwDs. The average post-programme placement rate is 40% according to the 2016 evaluation⁶ and on that basis must be regarded as a successful intervention for PwDs. Sustainability of employment after 6 months is lower at 28%, but since the client group often have multiple barriers to overcome, the overall impact is positive. The programme has been the subject of a number of previous evaluations and adjustments have been made over the years and is regarded as a robust model for supporting PwDs into employment.

Extra resources of 16 million Euro have been given to the 'Ability' Programme that is designed to test innovative approaches to pre-activation for young people with disabilities. The programme that aims to promote employment prospects and meaningful social roles for young people with disabilities and particularly those who are distant from the labour market. These demonstration projects provide an opportunity to develop services and approaches that can be scaled up for national implementation.

A relatively new Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) is also in place. The scheme opened for applications in October 2018 and is specifically targeted at young jobseekers including people with disabilities aged 18-24 years of age who are long-term unemployed or who face barriers to employment. This scheme aims to give a person the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment, while on a work placement in a host organisation. Participation on the YESS programme is wholly voluntary and participants will receive a weekly payment of €229.20 for 24 hours work per week.⁷ The actual take-up by PwDs is relatively low at 3% and full-time job placement post-YESS participation is very low for PwDs.

The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) is available to all jobseekers who have been unemployed for a specific period and who wish to start their own business. Basically, it provides financial support over two years for those in receipt of unemployment or disability payments and they can keep those payments on a sliding scale over the first two years of the business start-up. There are currently 4,300 participants availing of this support with 180 of them coming from an illness-related payment.

The new Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025⁸ includes a dedicated chapter on supporting people with disabilities including targets to increase labour force participation among PwDs as measured by the Census to 25% in 2021 and to 33% by 2026.

Employer-focused Initiatives

As set out above, a number of contributing factors to the low level of employment of PwDs in Ireland have been addressed in the past 3 years. However, there is still a deficit in employers' knowledge of the support available, including a generous wage subsidy scheme that is open to all jobseekers and attracts extra employer payments support if a PwDs is employed. In order to address this lack of knowledge, the current DEASP

⁶ Op cit : Indecon International Economic Consultants, 2016, Evaluation of EmployAbility (Supported Employment) Service, available at: <http://www.dsfa.ie/en/downloads/IndeconEvaluationofEmployAbility.pdf>

⁷ DEASP 2018, Youth Employment Support Scheme; <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Youth-Employment-Support-scheme-YESS.aspx>

⁸ Government of Ireland 2020, Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025, <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/46558/5cea3d74aa934fe780cc521ddbe477a7.pdf#page=1>

Employer Relations Strategy 2017-2020 sets out a comprehensive approach to the Department's engagement with employers. It identifies strategic objectives on raising awareness, the service offering and the supporting infrastructure, including actions and performance indicators. The Strategy is further supported by the Employer Communications Strategy 2018-2020 and the Employer Relations Training Strategy 2018-2020. A main focus is to not just fill vacancies that come in to the PES but to extend the focus beyond recruitment by **building employer conversations around three core areas**: (1) recruitment, (2) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and (3) gathering intelligence about the business activities, attitude to disability, future plans for expansion, recruitment etc.

On a current practical level, there are almost 80 employer relations PES staff involved in Employer Engagement activities around the country. Eight of these are dedicated Key account Managers based centrally, who focus on very large and strategic employers. The work includes direct recruitment for employers, promoting awareness of support available, recruiting clients for a number of employment support schemes (most notably the Youth Employment Support Scheme) and hosting recruitment events and job fairs. A current Employers Jobs Week initiative⁹ is reaching out to employers with 128 events and 18 of these events are solely focused on encouraging the employment of PwDs.

Separately from PES activities, an employer-led initiative has been piloted by the Employer Disability Information Service (EDI), through a consortium of employer agencies consisting of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), the Irish Small and Medium Enterprises (ISME) and Chambers Ireland. This 3-year pilot programme provided a unique peer-led information support and guidance service. In Q4 2018 the EDI service produced an employer survey that concluded the following:

- Employers reported that information resources and financial support would encourage them to employ people with disabilities¹⁰
- 47.8% opted for information
- 46.7% said financial support
- There is still a lack of understanding about supporting different disabilities at work (60.5%) and how to access such supports (62.7%).
- The perceived potential legal consequences is still a concern for employers with 62.7% of respondents stating it would be a worry if the employment does not work out.

The EDI operated as a 3-year pilot initiative until January 2019. Its purpose was to provide employers with an expert peer source of advice and information on employing staff with disabilities, with a view to enhancing the confidence and competence of individual employers to employ, manage and retain staff with disabilities. It is understood that an evaluation is ongoing.

On the other hand, according to the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI is a an NGO representing the interests of PwDs), 'we must avoid the thinking trap that assumes that all disabled people need specialist supports as many can progress through the mainstream activation process aided by nothing more than a positive attitude from PES staff, for example'. (DFI, 2018¹¹). Their view appears to be that work still needs to be

⁹ <https://www.europeanjobdays.eu/en/events/careers-ireland-2020>

¹⁰ EDI information on employers experience of DEASP fund for employers, 2018 <http://www.employerdisabilityinfo.ie/about/submissions/deasp-report>

¹¹ Disability Federation of Ireland, 2018, Submission to the Joint Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Dublin, available at: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/socialprotection/DFI-Opening-Statement-25-January-2018.pdf>

done to improve PES staff training and Employers' awareness so that they improve their application of the 'mainstreaming' approach to PwDs first set out in law in 2005.

4 Assessment of success factors and transferability

A key difference between the Netherland PES services and the Irish experience is that in the Netherlands, PES services for employers and PwDs have been delivered by both the PES and the Municipalities. In the case of Ireland, employment and also the social assistance supports are delivered by the one body, DEASP. The development of a joint desk for employers is therefore not required. The newly reinforced DEAP Employer Strategy is designed *inter alia* to support the delivery of a consistent approach through a series of guidelines, processes and template communications. These provide a framework around which Employer Relations teams tailor their approach. It is too early to evaluate its impact.

The instruments described in the Host Country paper are similar to the ones available in Ireland, with the exception of the 'no-risk policy'. This appears to be very specific to the host country but it would be useful to hear more about it.

The Netherlands Jobs Agreement that has a specific target number of 125,000 new jobs for people with an incapacity to work is an interesting approach. In Ireland the approach is more focused on a broad range of supports and measurable actions as set out in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (2015-2024)¹². The Strategy sets out a ten-year approach to ensuring that people with disabilities, who could and want to work, are supported and enabled to do so. A key outcome for example in that regard is the above referenced disregard of €427 earnings before any reduction in the access to a medical card. The already referenced development of the Employer Disability Information Service is another outcome of the Strategy.

5 Questions

- A key question for us all is how to improve our services to employers in order to ensure the full inclusion of PwDs into the labour market. Is a numerical target for new jobs for PwDs an effective way of increasing employment for PwDs? How successfully has the host country achieved that aim through the 'Jobs Agreement'?
- How would the Netherlands suggest we address the issue of the general lack of understanding among Irish employers as to how to support different types of disabilities and how to access such supports?.
- Have there been any successful initiatives to harness social media platforms and other tools such as ICT-based virtual meetings/interviews to match employers with jobseekers with a disability.

6 List of references

Department of Justice, 2014, Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, Dublin, [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Comprehensive_Employment_Strategy_for_People_with_Disabilities_\(2015_2024\)](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Comprehensive_Employment_Strategy_for_People_with_Disabilities_(2015_2024))

¹² Department of Justice, 2014, Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, Dublin, [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Comprehensive_Employment_Strategy_for_People_with_Disabilities_\(2015_2024\)](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Comprehensive_Employment_Strategy_for_People_with_Disabilities_(2015_2024))

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Annex 1 Summary table

The main points covered by the paper are summarised below.

Situation in the peer country

- The overall unemployment rate is 4.7% and the employment rate is 69.6%.
- PES is delivered by the Department of Employment and Social Protection (DEASP).
- A DEASP comprehensive Employer Relationship Strategy 2017-2020 is in place.
- According to the 2016 census of population, out of a total 359,657 PwDs age 15-64, 53% are not in the labour force and 27% of those in the labour force are unemployed.

National policies and measures

- The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015 – 2024 sets out a ten-year approach to ensuring that people with disabilities who are able to, and want to work, are supported and enabled to do so.
- The main PES policies are set out in the Pathways to Work series of policy papers
- A main programme is the Employability Programme (Supported Employment).
- The Ability Programme funds pilot initiatives for the employment of PwDs.
- A new Youth Employment Support Scheme has been introduced in 2018.

Assessment of success factors and transferability

- The Joint Desk for Employers is an interesting initiative.
- The main instruments described in the Host Country paper are also available in Ireland.
- The Jobs Agreement, with its numerical targets, appears to be a positive initiative. However, our approach is concentrated on a wider range of employment-focused holistic initiatives to support PwDs into work and results are generally focused on individual outcomes and increased participation levels. This latter would appear to be a more sustainable approach.

Questions

- A key question for us all is how to improve our services to employers in order to ensure the full inclusion of PwDs into the labour market. Is a numerical target for new jobs for PwDs an effective way of increasing employment for PwDs? How successfully has the host country achieved that aim through the Jobs Agreement?
- It would be interesting to hear more about the operation of the joint employer desk and any metrics on the outputs and outcomes.
- Have there been any successful initiatives to harness social media platforms and other tools such as ICT-based virtual meetings/interviews to match employers with jobseekers with a disability.

Annex 2 Example of relevant practice

Name of the practice:	EmployAbility
Year of implementation:	2000 ¹³
Coordinating authority:	DEASP
Objectives:	
Main activities:	<p>Employers</p> <p>A Job Coach provides support to assist employers to locate suitable candidates to fill any vacancies which may arise. Support can also be provided around disability awareness training, monitoring the placements and assisting with training at no cost to the organisation/company.</p> <p>The EmployAbility Service provides the following service to Employers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Recruitment and Employment Service. • Match needs as an employer with the skills, knowledge and experience of suitable candidates. • Access to a committed, local work force. • Provides support and assistance in understanding and managing diversity in the workplace. • Provides support, with induction and on the job training, if required. • Assists with advice and information on relevant grants and supports. <p>Jobseekers</p> <p>The EmployAbility Service provides a range of supports to people with a disability, through Job Coaches. The range of supports includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Needs Assessment • Vocational Profiling and Career Planning • Individual Employment Plan • Job Sourcing and Job Matching • On-the-job Support and Coaching • Follow-up Support and Mentoring
Results so far:	An average of 40% placement into jobs (see link to the 2016 evaluation in footnote below for detailed information). To quote from

¹³ Indecon International Economic Consultants, 2016, Evaluation of EmployAbility (Supported Employment) Service, available at: <http://www.dsfa.ie/en/downloads/IndeconEvaluationofEmployAbility.pdf>

	<p>the evaluation, 'the progression analysis showed that only 25.3% of clients (or just 28% of exits) in 2014 remained in open labour market employment after six months without support from the service. This suggests that while the service has positive benefits for clients, the net impacts in terms of sustained employment outcomes after controlling for deadweight are likely to be weaker' (Executive Summary Page iii).</p>
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