

**Presentation by Mr. Dermot Mulligan, Assistant Secretary,
Department of Enterprise Trade & Employment to the
IASE National Conference on
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Introduction

- I am delighted to be invited here today to speak at the IASE National Conference. Employment is important for everyone. It provides self-esteem and economic independence. It gives people a sense of value to know that they are contributing to the progress of the organisation for which they work, and to the economy as a whole.
- For people with disabilities, the importance of accessing employment is just as profound. It facilitates their independence, heightens their self-esteem and provides them with the opportunity to make choices and have more control of their own lives.
- Raising public awareness of the contribution that people with disabilities can, and do, make to our society is a key element of our policy of mainstreaming services for people with disabilities.

Sectoral Plans

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is fully committed to addressing the needs of those with disabilities, and furthering the policy of mainstreaming services to help them play a full and active part in Irish Society. The Sectoral Plan of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment under the Disability Act, 2005, which forms part of the Government's National Disability Strategy, outlines the Department's key initiatives in promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities in the open labour market.

This includes the development of a Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities, aimed at addressing their diversity of circumstances, needs and abilities. This Comprehensive Employment Strategy will contribute to achieving the highest possible levels of employment for people with disabilities.

Broad Focus of Comprehensive Employment Strategy

The pillars underpinning the proposed comprehensive employment strategy of the DETE are:

- Enhancing the effectiveness of vocational training and employment programmes
- Further developing supports to the employment of people with disabilities
- Developing a strategy to facilitate the employment retention of those who acquire a disability during their working life

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy will be developed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment over the period of the Sectoral Plan (2006 – 2010) in cooperation with other Government Departments and agencies.

The primary targets that have been set under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy are to have to:

- have 7, 000 more people with disabilities in work by 2,010
- increase the employment rate from 37% to 45% by 2016
- increase the participation of people with disabilities in work, training and education to 50% by 2016

Vocational Training and Employment Programmes

Effective training and preparation for employment are pre-requisites for the achievement of these targets and this is being pursued through the implementation of the FAS vocational training strategy. The FAS Strategy recognises the need to promote participation of the maximum number of people with disabilities in training and employment programmes generally. The FAS Strategy will through regional benchmarking, set targets for participation of people with disabilities in all of its training programmes.

Specialist Training provision by providers such as the National Learning Network and other providers have some 2, 000 such training places for this purpose in 2007 at a cost of €53 million. Key recommendations of a recent efficiency review by Indecon International Economic Consultants of the training services provided by such organisations will be implemented.

An additional year of participation on CE has been put in place for participants with disabilities in order to provide additional training to assist progression to employment.

To encourage progression from rehabilitative training to vocational training, FAS and the HSE are developing proposals for a bridging programme to facilitate this process – these proposals are expected to be formulated by early 2008 .

Job Supports

Under government's mainstreaming policy people with disabilities can benefit from full range of FAS programmes and services including:

- FAS training courses
- Community Employment
- Apprenticeships

FAS training and employment supports include:

- Wage Subsidy Scheme
- Supported Employment
- Job Interview Interpreter Grant
- Personal Reader Grant
- Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme
- Employee Retention Grant Scheme

The **Wage Subsidy Scheme** offers a financial subsidy to employers outside the public sector to employ people with disabilities. Eligible employees can benefit from the Department of Social and Family Affairs *Back to Work Allowance* Scheme which allows the to retain a percentage of their social welfare payment, and the medical card for three years. The Scheme commenced as a three-year pilot in September, 2005 and is now about to be reviewed. The review will assess its effectiveness, performance and future potential to encourage and facilitate the increased labour market participation of people with disabilities.

FAS has a total budget of €10.5 million for the Scheme in 2007. Current participants numbers, including transfers from the *Employment Support Scheme* and the *Pilot Employment Programme* is approximately 1,100.

The findings from a the current review of the **Supported Employment Programme** will be available shortly. A budget of €8.5 million is being provided for this programme, for an annual target of 2, 500 participants.

Job Retention

In addition to its discussions to date on job supports and job preparation, the Consultative Forum on an Employment Strategy has identified as a key area for attention that of job retention following an acquired disability in the workplace. The Forum has identified that further research aimed at contributing to current policy provision, and developing a ore enhanced framework of supports for job retention in the workplace is warranted.

More than 80% of working age disability is acquired in workplace accidents, leading to a significant challenge to job retention.

The challenge facing an employer who wishes to hire or retain an employee who has acquired a disability will vary according to the nature of the work, the workplace itself and the extent to which the employee's disability is likely to affect their work.

The key to effective retention of employees who have acquired a disability or to recruiting employees with disabilities is to encourage a supportive workplace culture, a willingness to overcome obstacles, and to create an environment with practical supports, including those suggested above, to assist their effective inclusion in their workplace with real opportunities for progression in their careers.

Consultants have now begun to undertake this valuable piece of research work and their report will be completed in the first quarter of 2008.

Mainstreaming

Under its Sectoral Plan, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has identified a number of areas for further promoting and developing the mainstreaming agenda across the range of its services for people with disabilities including, for example, ensuring that the National Consumer Agency will work towards addressing the needs of vulnerable consumers, including those with disabilities, and ensuring that disability will be incorporated into the Department's business planning process.

Consultative Forum on Employment Strategy

- In line with a key priority identified in the Sectoral Plan the Department, a Consultative Forum on an Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities has been established.
- The Forum includes representatives from other Government Departments (as appropriate), social partners, and a representative from each of the new *National Disability Strategy Stakeholder Monitoring Group*, thus ensuring a fully representative membership covering the various forms of disability.
- It provides an important channel for members to discuss and to provide views on strategic issues that will impact on the development of the Employment Strategy in conjunction with the DETE and its agencies, and other Government Departments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to thank the IASE for hosting this National Conference and for inviting me to speak at it. I wish you continued success with your work.

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