

IRISH ASSOCIATION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT LTD
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RESPONSE OF IRISH ASSOCIATION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT TO NEW FÁS CRITERIA FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME

The Irish Association of Supported Employment is a National Voluntary Organisation, which was formed in 1994 with the aim of promoting the development of Supported Employment in Ireland. Many of our members have been involved in the pilot phase of the Supported Employment Programme and this has resulted in significant numbers of people with disability entering the open labour market and enabling them to make a valuable contribution to society. It should be noted that our members have significant levels of experience and expertise with regard to this model as many of them have been delivering supported employment for years prior to the introduction of the FÁS scheme. Significant concerns have been expressed by our members around the country in relation to the new criteria published by FÁS with regard to the operation of the Supported Employment Programme.

ESTABLISHING CONSORTIA AS A LEGAL ENTITY:

Many of the current projects operate with a lead organisation, and lead organisations have taken on additional responsibilities around the selection and hiring of staff, the provision of office facilities and generally a broad administration service. To our knowledge this arrangement has worked well and we are not aware of any difficulties. The issue of consortia becoming separate legal entities has major implications from a corporate governance perspective and raises significant issues with regard to terms and conditions of employment for staff. There are also implications from a budget perspective and may require significant additional resources being given to projects, in order to cover all of the additional costs. For these reasons a significant number of the major organisations involved in the pilot phase have indicated their intention to withdraw from the programme if this issue is not resolved.

18 HOURS WEEKLY REQUIREMENT:

One of the benefits of the model of Supported Employment is that it was designed originally for people with the most significant disabilities. In the pilot phase of the programme, there are people with more significant disabilities who have been successfully integrated into the labour market. There are people however, who may not be in a position to reach this 18-hour minimum. There are also employers who have offered consortia's part time positions less than 18-hours, however under the new criteria, programme participants will not be allowed to avail of those jobs. The Association suggested to FÁS the adoption of a whole time equivalent approach, which would resolve this problem at no additional cost. Initially this appeared to be acceptable to FÁS, however, the current position by FÁS does not support the IASE proposal.

PROFILE AND RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS:

FÁS definition of "Job Ready" – "A person (with a disability) who has the necessary training, education, motivation and capacity to pursue a job and or career in the open labour market", - is a complete contradiction to a programme that alleges to be promoting the concept of Supported Employment.

Supported Employment was developed originally as an alternative to the “readiness model” which places heavy emphasis on pre-training before entry to the labour market as against the Supported Employment model which places no emphasis on pre-training for entering the labour market, as all of the training is done on the labour market. We see this particular change as an extremely negative development and it fundamentally changes the whole programme and is likely to significantly discriminate against people with significant disabilities – the group for whom Supported Employment was originally designed.

ON-GOING SUPPORT:

Supported Employment while ensuring people enter the open labour market, has built into the concept a commitment to on-going support. The Irish Association of Supported Employment has significant concerns with the statement in the criteria for the Supported Employment Programme regarding an “exit strategy” from the programme. Under the pilot phase of the programme, there are many people with significant disabilities who have been extremely successful and continue to enjoy the benefits of participating in paid employment in the open labour market. It is essential however, that for those individuals who require some level of on-going support, that this is acknowledged within the programme and that adequate funding is provided to ensure that these job placements do not break down. In the Martin Evaluation of the pilot phase of the programme 96% of employers agreed with the statement that the on-going support provided by the job coach after the employee had been recruited was a vital element of the Programme. A supported employment programme is of course an open labour market initiative, however, supported employment recognises the on going issues that affect the lives of people with disabilities in an open labour market context. Labour Market Initiative should not be confused with an open employment labour market initiative.

JOB COACH ACTIVITY:

The guidelines suggest a throughput of clients per job coach of 25 per year. This is based on job coaches being active across four areas of needs assessment, job coach/job development, in employment with job coach support, independent job coach placement with after care/mentoring. This figure of 25 is unrealistic as it is significantly above established international norms.

Signed: Michael Fleming
Chairperson
Irish Association of Supported Employment.

The above position is supported by the following organisations:

1. The National Federation of Voluntary Bodies providing Services to People with Intellectual Disabilities.
2. DFI - The Disability Federation of Ireland.
3. The Not-For-Profit Business Association.
4. CNEASTA - The Irish Council for Training, Development & Employment for Persons with Disabilities.
5. PWDI – People with Disabilities in Ireland