

JUNE | 14



NATIONAL LEADER FORUM

EMPLOYMENT EVENT

SEMINAR REPORT AND CONSOLIDATION OF WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

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Section I: NLF Employment Event Overview

1.1 The NLF

The National Leader Forum (NLF) is a collective of people with disabilities from across Ireland who share common goals or experiences. The purpose of the Leader Forum is to offer members the opportunity to make contact with others who can offer support. Support can come in the form of conversation and sharing experiences, or by listening to others. In some cases, support groups may take an active part in encouraging changes in laws or educating the public about social conditions. Membership of the National Leader Forum is drawn from the network of Leader Forums currently in operation at county level.

One of the primary concerns of the National Leader Forum is the lack of employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Given the drafting of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) for people with disabilities by Government the NLF called an open event to educate people with disabilities on the impact of the proposed strategy and to provide an opportunity for people to feed directly into the consultation process.

1.2 Agenda

- Introduction to the Day: Gary Lee, CIL
- Speaker Introductions: Rhona Coughlan, GDIL, Event Chairperson
- Employment and Disability: Joan O'Donnell, DFI
- Career Guidance & Disclosing your Disability: Eileen Daly, Trinity College
- Employment Supports: Audrey McPartlin, Department of Social Protection
- Education, Volunteering and Pursuing Employment: Paul Cudamore
- EmployAbility: Miriam Tighe
- Community Employment & the Job Hunt: Joe West
- Setting Up My Own Business: Paul Fagan, TRACS
- Comprehensive Employment Strategy: Siobhan Barron, NDA
- CILs Role & the Consultation Process: Gary Lee, CIL
- Leader Consultation Session & Feedback
- Conclusion: Michael McCabe, CIL

1.3 Introduction

Gary Lee thanked everyone for coming and introduced the agenda for the day. Gary explained how the CES will cover a 10 year period and its aim is to mainstream people with disabilities into the workforce. It is likely that the CES will be adopted by the end of 2014. The legislative framework for the strategy is comprised of Employment Equality Acts 1998 –

2004, the Equal Status Act 2000 and the Disability Act 2005. The draft CES has identified the following as being key strategic priorities:

- Build skills, capacity and independence
- Provide bridges and supports into work
- Make work pay
- Promote job retention and re-entry to work
- Provide co-ordinated and seamless support
- Engage employers
- Enable travel to work

It is vital that people with disabilities engage in the consultation process and as a representative body on the Disability Stakeholders Group (DSG) CIL welcome the opportunity to channel that feedback. All feedback from consultations made during this employment event, and subsequently received afterwards will be brought to the attention of Minister Kathleen Lynch.

1.4 Speaker Introductions

Rhona Coughlan, Chair of the Event, is from Cork and has been working in the disability sector for over 20 years. She is a previous Board member of CIL and is a very strong voice for equality in Ireland both through her positions in Cork CIL and Greater Dublin Independent Living and also her various acclaimed roles in local radio

Rhona welcomed everyone and introduced the Leader Forum (LF). Rhona believes that the LF should be important to all people and Rhona emphasised the importance of people working together with one common voice.

Speakers for the session included:

- Gary Lee, Center for Independent Living
- Joan O'Donnell, Disability Federation of Ireland
- Eileen Daly, Trinity College Dublin
- Audrey Mac Partlin, Department of Social Protection
- Paul Cudamore, Leader
- Miriam Tighe, EmployAbility
- Joe West, Leader
- Paul Fagan, Training and Consultancy Services
- Siohan Barron, National Disability Authority
- Michael McCabe, Center for Independent Living

Section II: Speaker Presentations

2.1 Employment and Disability

Joan O'Donnell, (Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI)), explained how the employment strategy relates to people with disabilities. The United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is very important for people to understand when examining the CES. The UNCRPD states that people with disabilities have the *'Right to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible'*. The UNCRPD also provides a safeguard and promotes the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability.

The UNCRPD also:

- Prohibits discrimination in recruitment, hiring and employment, continuance of employment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions
- Protects rights on an equal basis with others, including equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe and healthy working conditions, including protection from harassment, and the redress of grievances;
- Ensures the same labour rights as other workers
- Enables access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training;
- Promotes opportunities and career advancement, as well as assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment;
- Promotes opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship, the development of cooperatives and starting one's own business;
- Employs people with disabilities in the public sector;
- Promotes the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector
- Ensures that reasonable accommodation is made;
- Promotes work experience in the open labour market; and
- Promotes vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes

The statistics around employment for people with disabilities are stark. People who acquire a disability in their adult life have only a 15% chance of returning to work. However this isn't the case throughout Europe. **At present people with a disability in Ireland are only half as likely to be in employment as non-disabled people.** Most worryingly there has been very little improvement in this figure over the last ten years .

For those born with a disability, quality education and training, and good bridges from education and training into the world of work, are key to getting the job and career ladder. Those who acquire a disability during their working life need support to re-enter the workforce, either returning to their old job or being retrained for another position. It is also

important to note that about four out of five adults with disabilities have acquired their disability in adult life.

Jobless households are of a major concern. The European Union (EU) average is 11% where as in Ireland the figures are over one quarter. This creates a worrying cycle of unemployment into the next generation when children are still living in those households.

So why are so few people with disabilities employed? Level of education and skills; fears around loss of benefits; employer know-how; low expectations; and limited re-entry to work following onset of a disability are all barriers. However it is important to note that they can all be overcome.

There is also a close link between education levels, employment chances, and income earned over someone's lifetime. People with disabilities have lower levels of education than the population at large. This in turn affects their chances of getting a job, and their potential earnings in work. Some of the difference in education levels reflects the fact that people with disabilities are older than the average, but differences in outcomes remain for younger people with disabilities.

So will the employment strategy result in more jobs? About 15% of people that have a difficulty working are actually in work. People who have a weaker connection to the labour market are most likely to fare worst – e.g. women. Supports are required and a range of challenges and opportunities need to be examined and overcome if we are to make real progress in the employment of people with disabilities in Ireland.

2.2 Career Guidance and Disclosing Your Disability

Eileen Daly (career advisory Trinity College Dublin) as a person with a disability initially experienced mainstream education before taking a break for personal reasons. She then went back into school and completed her Leaving Cert. She entered UCD in 1994 and is still involved in the education sector. She understands the barriers to both education and employment from a physical point of view and also about challenging expectations with regard to what you can and cannot do.

Eileen firmly believes that peer support is vital and that she wouldn't be here today without the support of the Independent Living (IL) movement. When she was 19 she met with her guidance counsellor who told her that based upon her aptitude test results she had very little opportunities available to her. This made Eileen determined to prove her wrong. When she graduated from UCD she fell into adult education and training by default. She worked in further education for many years and also special education in navigating people toward mainstream education.

In November she took up a position in Trinity College assisting people into employment. She was one of five candidates interviewed and was delighted to be appointed to the post. A lot of the students she now works with are people with Asperger's or people with mental

health issues.

Eileen believes that as a person with a disability it is important to develop your CV the same as anyone else would. It is vital that you are very comfortable with who you are and from the employers perspective it is your responsibility to ensure that you can tell them what you can bring to the company and role you are applying for. There are very good initiatives run by AHEAD , which Eileen does not attempt to replicate. Eileen looks at what reasonable accommodations an employer can make to accommodate a person with a disability and how they can be achieved. If you need flexible working hours or transport or accessible technology then you need to tell your employer and most importantly how providing you with these arrangements can benefit the company. However whether or not you disclose your disability is up to you - remember that you cannot be discriminated against because of it.

2.3 Employment Supports

Audrey MacPartlin (Department of Social Protection) works with individuals to examine what can be done to match them with available services. Previous services were administered by FAS but are now administered entirely by the Department of Social Protection.

There are three main supports available to people with disabilities when accessing employment. They are: the Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS); the Reasonable Accommodation Fund incorporating: Workplace Equipment/Adaptation Grant (WEAG), Job Interview Interpreter Grant (JIIGS), Personal Reader Grant (PRGS), and Employee Retention Grant Scheme (ERGS); and the EmployAbility (Supported Employment Programme). These schemes are available to all employers except those in the public service.

The WSS is a financial incentive paid to employers who employ disabled people to work between 21 and 39 hours per week. Subsidies are structured under 3 strands, employers can benefit under one or all. All employers except Public Service Employers and/or any employers or schemes funded by State. Employers must comply with statutory requirements e.g. PRSI & income tax & Minimum Wage.

The RA Fund covers a number of different grants but the primary one that people enquire about is the Workplace Equipment and Adaptation Grant (WEAG). Its aim is to counter the additional costs of adapting workplace premises or equipment arising from the individual's disability, including those in self-employment. It should not be used to provide support usually provided by employers or supports required under legislation e.g. Health & Safety. The current limit towards the cost of adaptations or equipment is up to €6,350. The grant can be used to upgrade adaptive equipment, which may have been funded previously. It is not however intended to meet the costs of setting up and running a business. Part of the grant may also be used for training in the use of the grant-aided equipment. In general

people accessing this fund will know the type of equipment they need when making the application.

The purpose of the Employee Retention Grant Scheme is to assist employers to retain, at work, employees who acquire a disability through illness or injury. They can be offered re-training so they can continue in their current role or undertake a new role, using modified techniques. It has two stages: 1) Developing a Retention Strategy – 90% of costs to a max of €2,500 and 2) Implementing a Retention Strategy – 90% of costs to a max of €12,500

Finally EmployAbility is an open labour market programme, which facilitates the integration of people with disabilities into paid employment. It supports employers in relation to employees' recruitment and can assist with job design and assistive technologies. EmployAbility also provides information on financial and other supports available to enable the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities.

2.4 Education, Volunteering & Pursuing Employment

Paul Cudamore has been involved in football youth training in Cork on a voluntary basis for many years. It gave him great encouragement to keep at it and focus his mind to prove that just because you have a disability it does not stop you from doing what you really want to do.

By becoming involved in local youth sport Paul was able to become part of the able bodied community in Mahon. The team won the competition and he is still in contact with one or two of the team members.

From doing the volunteer work in the community centre he went on to work for the IWA in Cork. His role was mainly administration and dealing with inputting general service information. He went on a FAS scheme for 19.5 hours per week and this gave Paul a sense of purpose and achievement. He is still in contact with the IWA but has moved on to the Cork Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals on a voluntary basis.

Paul has also completed the Diploma in Disability Studies and has learnt more about the theory of disability, which has inspired him to do more. He is now doing a Diploma in Youth and Community work. The key message Paul would like to give people is - *if you are enthusiastic enough to do something and your mind is focused you need to persist and eventually you will achieve your goals.*

2.5 EmployAbility

Miriam Tighe (EmployAbility) works as Co-ordinator for EmployAbility in South West Dublin. EmployAbility provide a service through 23 centres across the country.

A lot of people who access the EmployAbility service have learning difficulties or mental health issues. They also have a relatively small number of people with physical or sensory

disabilities requesting support. In general what they find most is that people need accommodation in terms of their job description or hours.

In terms of barriers to employment people are often fearful about the impact on their Disability Allowance (DA) or other social welfare payment.

The type of work people are placed in is very broad and can vary from general operative to working in the music business.

2.6 Community Employment and the Job Hunt

Joe West explained how Community Employment (CE) schemes are DSP funded programmes that are open to all qualifying individuals. You have to be in receipt of a social welfare benefit and be eligible to work to access these schemes.

Joe has learned a lot of office administration skills and also manual and computerised payroll through his experience with CE. Before he became a CE user he had always said that he would hate to be an office worker but now he loves doing this work and has learned so much from it. This proves that people should be more open to their abilities and accepting of roles that they would not normally consider.

In terms of what he is going to do next Joe believes that it is difficult to get a job if you are a wheelchair user. However he will persist in his quest and if he does not secure employment he will continue to work on a voluntary basis.

2.7 Setting Up My Own Business

Paul Fagan (Training and Consultancy Services (TRACS)) has set up his own business and is also a lecturer in NUI Maynooth. Up to the age of 11 he was forced to go to special school. From that he went to mainstream school in London where he was told to 'just get on with it'. Paul left school with no qualifications and his career officer advised him to work in a nearby roadside café.

However Paul had dreams and aspirations and he went on to get an apprenticeship with a local accountant and had excellent peer support. Paul decided to set up his own business as he loves working with people and has received positive feedback both from both people he trained and his peers.

Paul was very well supported throughout his journey to self-employment by people in his circle and in particular Martin Naughton. As a self-employed person you are determining your own destiny – you can earn good money and have flexibility in working hours. However you have to rely heavily on your own ability. There is always pressure to provide and you do need to listen and network. You also need to know your own worth – Paul was once asked to deliver a course for free and it was the worst course he ever did as the lack of value placed on the work was impossible to overcome.

Paul believes that the only way to grow is to experience rejection and that can be difficult to face. However by pushing yourself beyond your ability you can see what you can really achieve.

2.8 Comprehensive Employment Strategy

Siobhan Barron (National Disability Authority (NDA)) attended the NLF event to listen to the solutions offered around employment. A lot of the context of the CES was covered already by previous speakers therefore Siobhan decided to just provide a brief overview.

The NDA was set up under legislation to undertake research and provide independent guidance to Government. The NDA gathers a lot of information about what is happening in an Irish context and they have a much broader remit than just disability and also have some degree of a role around statutory practice. The NDA combine legislation and the obligations of public bodies around their services.

The CES recognises the UN Convention and the rights of people with disabilities. It looks at giving people more choice and control over their lives. Despite the economic boom as a nation we actually went backwards in terms of the employment of people with disabilities over the past ten years. The NDA has done a lot of research into what has been working on the ground in Ireland and also what has not.

The NDA has identified 6 pillars for the CES these include:

- Remove disincentives and benefit traps
- Enhance capacity and effectiveness of the education, training & employment system
- Employers to implement informed policies – recruitment & retention
- Implement preventative strategy – reduce early school leaving, improve retention
- Systematic process of engagement with people with disabilities
- Diversity of programme provision – including those with severe disabilities

However the CES is also about people reaching their potential to enhance capacity and achieving that potential. It is also about veering people away from adult day services and toward employment. Where a person acquires a disability there must be options for them. Most importantly it is about ensuring that there is systematic consultation with people with disabilities.

The employment strategy was compiled by Minister Kathleen Lynch. She tasked the NDA with working with six Government Departments including: Jobs Enterprise & Innovation, Social Protection, Education and Skills, Health, and Public Expenditure & Reform. Engagement with people who make the jobs (IBEC) and the Unions was also important. The CES has been developed in consultation with the DSG who are also part of the national steering group chaired by the Minister. The end message is that a lot needs to be done to ensure that people do not end up unemployed into the future. Those targets need to be met and need to be realistic over the next ten years.

The vision for the strategy has already been agreed by a range of stakeholders. It is about looking at a person's ability and in doing so it is important to note that 15% of people working have a significant number of challenges to overcome and they are successfully working away. Strategic priorities are important from an early age and ideally we should be looking at what skills people need from primary level and up. All of the supports need to be there at that stage. Every year there is a panic about the Leaving Certificate students and the number of places in adult day care. However in reality they shouldn't even be an issue.

It is also about promoting job retention and re-entry into work. One of the actions is that the NDA are looking at is how medical and vocational rehabilitation are connected. It is also about engaging employers and addressing their fears. There are employers doing a wonderful job already and they are looking at the barriers to employment and how they can be overcome.

It is about independence and the opportunities for work placement even in secondary school. The importance of transition plans is also recognised. An individualised support system is needed. We are hearing that some social welfare payments are a barrier so we look at policies to see what can be done. It is also about looking closely at sharing information and promoting that amongst an organisations own members.

The NDA have received 47 submissions including one from CIL. A draft strategy has been discussed by the national steering group and will be further analysed by the DSG in Autumn and the NLF will have an opportunity to look at that with Gary Lee.

Because the CES comes in under the Action Plan for Jobs it will be reviewed and a bi-annual report developed. It will be monitored by a sub-committee of the national steering group for Action Plan co-chaired by the Department of an Taoiseach and monitored by National Disability Strategy Implementation Group (NDSIG). People should also note that the NDSIG meets 4 times per year. At least one thematic meeting is on employment.

As the CES is to be delivered over ten years it is likely to be frontloaded as it will be very difficult to know what is happening nine years from now.

2.9 CILs Role and the Consultation Process

Gary Lee emphasised that what will come out of this NLF event is working suggestions for what is essentially a draft document. CIL will be bringing that to the DSG and also a report from the workshops this afternoon will be presented to the Minister.

Section III: Leader Consultation Session and Feedback

People were asked to divide into four groups and each group was tasked with answering nine set questions on the CES. Additional feedback forms will also be circulated to individual people with disabilities who were unable to attend the event on the day. The feedback from the four workshop groups on these questions is outlined below.

3.1 Provide bridges and supports into work

Q: What supports are required for you to access employment or set up your own business?

- More workspaces that are physically accessible.
- Increased support for people in their place of work through Personal Assistance Services (PAS). People are being provided with a care service and not a PAS. A care service does not provide for support in the workplace meaning that people are not permitted to carry out elements of their job description that they could easily do with the support of a PA.
- Graduates with disabilities who leave college or further education and lose their PA service cannot get a new PA due to waiting lists. This can mean that people lose their connections made in college easily due to lack of transport and assistance while their able bodied peers all seem to have plans for what is next. They also do not have career paths and if they are not in TCD they do not have specialist career guidance.
- More readily accessible information on how to set-up your own business must be available. Access to information on the range of financial supports available to do so should also be readily available from one information point.
- The stigma that still exists around disability has to be overcome. Many people still believe that a person with a disability is not capable of carrying out the same role as a non-disabled person. Role reversal often works in these situations and more employee supports are needed within organisations to show that disability can have its limitations but these can be overcome.
- Access to appropriate assistive technology equipment is vital and the Workplace Adaptation Grant is useful in this regard. In general people have had a positive experience of accessing this funding support stream.
- Increased clarification is required around the current policy context within Government Departments.
- There needs to be increased public awareness of the existence of current services, such as EmployAbility, and their benefits to people who use them.
- Health and Safety should not be used by employers/agencies as an excuse to not offer a person with a disability employment.

“I know a mother of 3 kids who can’t get a job in a crèche because she’s a health and safety risk”.

- A central information point is needed for all information relating to disability. In most instances if you contact one Department/Agency you will be passed on to another who tells you a different story to the first one. Consistency is key as people

have enough barriers to overcome without accessing public information from several different sources.

“Irish people are so private we don’t want to lose our dignity by asking for help. We live in a country that doesn’t give information freely”.

3.2 Make work pay

Q: How can the Government address the fears around loss of allowances for those wishing to enter employment and what allowances do you think should be in place?

- The loss of the medical card has had huge implications for people with disabilities. If you have a condition that requires the purchase of equipment or large scale medical supplies it is not possible to survive without a medical card. The fear that the removal of the card has instilled in people is that this could happen again and returning to work could only jeopardize your chances of maintaining your card. The Government’s recent actions have effectively acted as a disincentive for people to work.
- Plain English and reduced jargon needs to be used on all information leaflets.
- The JobBridge system has been abused by employers and used as a source of cheap labour. In particular larger organisations use the scheme to hire people who they do not up-skill and use to conduct menial tasks that are of no benefit to the employee post scheme.
- Access to the JobBridge scheme is restricted for many people with disabilities based upon the type of allowances they are receiving. Two people with disabilities stated that they had been advised that there were not eligible, one person was on the disability allowance and the other one on the Blind Pension. This scheme should be readily accessible by all people with disabilities.
- People have also found the Community Employment (CE) Scheme to be of little benefit. Although they have a position through which they can access ‘work’ they are left with no transition path afterwards or no prospect of accessing other paid employment.
- There is a huge fear of the transition from allowances to paid employment. If a person accesses a paid role they immediately lose their entitlement to an allowance. If the position does not work out and they are let go or have to leave within a short space of time they are left with no allowances and no income. There must be a transition period put in place whereby people’s allowances are stepped back over their probationary period until they are in a position to move to a full income. In reality this payment would simply be made to promote equality and would encourage many more people with disabilities to seek employment.

3.3 Build skills, capacity and independence

Q: What support do you suggest the Government provide in terms of building the skills, capacity & independence of Leaders to access employment?

- Public awareness of disability needs to be increased. Ideally there should be an education scheme put in place at both primary and secondary level around disability. All teacher-training courses must also include a disability module. A person with

disabilities working as a productive member of society needs to become the norm not the exception.

- Disability should never be hidden and people need to view people with disabilities by their abilities not their condition.
- Principle Officers within Government departments do not understand disability issues and their education on disability needs to be included as part of their standard induction process.
- There is a need for Adult Career Guidance which takes into account the needs of adults with significant physical and sensory difficulties – with guidance staff aware of the needs of people who need PA's or may not have PA's yet.
- Day services have not encouraged people to go to work or further education outside of the disability sector. They warn people that they will not cope. *There is a pressing need to focus on potential and ability not the individuals disability.*
- The 3% of people with disabilities working in public sector positions are always found at the bottom of the organisational chart. This rule needs to be amended to include people with disabilities at every level of the organisation where possible.
- People should not be penalised for working.

"I worked in the HSE for 27 years I paid my taxes and then when I retired I was €5 over the threshold so I was entitled to nothing. My cerebral palsy never held me back but it would have been better in the end if I never worked. I worked hard all my life and now I'm left on the scrapheap. It's a culture of dependency and it's fostered by all of society".

3.4 Promote job retention and re-entry to work

Q: What would support people with disabilities to remain in or return to employment?

- People with disabilities returning to work need to be allowed to step-back into employment through a return to work scheme that allows them to maintain some of their allowance until after their probationary period ends. If they step-back out of employment they immediately return to full employment.
- It is important that employers understand the accommodation that people with disabilities need to undertake their role effectively. In many cases people with disabilities only need reasonable accommodation around working hours to allow them to perform as efficiently as their non-disabled peers.

"I have been offered so many unsuitable positions. One of the officers told me to go and work in McDonalds and my guidedog could lay on the ground as I took the orders".

- It should be expected that all people with disabilities who acquire a disability would return to work. With the appropriate range of supports available all people have the ability to become taxpayers again.

3.5 Enable travel to work

Q: What transport options can facilitate your access to the workplace?

- Transport that already claims to be accessible must work.
- All trains need more wheelchair accessible spaces.
- Access to free travel should be encouraged and supported by Government.
- Increased education needs to be available to people with disabilities that have a fear of using the public transport system. The Government needs to provide more financial support to schemes that are already there to offer this service to people with disabilities.
- Transport can really be viewed as rural and urban and the issues are different for both:

*“If I was offered my dream job tomorrow I would give up everything.
All the opportunities are in Dublin there’s no decent jobs or courses in my county.
The entire infrastructure including accessible transport is in Dublin”.*

- At a rural level people with disabilities have gone backwards over the past ten years. The Rural Transport Initiative (RTI) must be implemented. Public transport mechanisms including accessible taxis are often inaccessible outside of Dublin. People should not have to book a taxi a week in advance to ensure their travel.
- The DART must have electronic ramps. There are enough manual ramps available but not enough staff members available to assist in using them.
- More ready access needs to be given to the Motorised Transport Grant and more awareness raised about what it can offer people.

3.6 Provide co-ordinated and seamless support

Q: How can this support be implemented with no one Government department responsible for the strategy?

- A centralised public department needs to be appointed for disability. This would allow ease of access to all public information. This department should also be tasked with liaising with all other public agencies and bodies to ensure consistency in information. Most importantly people with disabilities themselves have to be involved in running these departments.
- Disability has become a non-identity. It is vital that disability becomes a full Ministerial post and not a junior minister position.
- People with disabilities are not victims. More education is needed and co-operation between people with disabilities themselves and Government departments. All committees established around disability should have the input of people with disabilities who have the direct knowledge and expertise required.

3.7 Engage employers

Q: How can employers be encouraged to employ people with disabilities?

- It is important that people with disabilities are considered for employment on their own merit and not because of their disability. All employers need to be made aware of the ability of people with disabilities to work.
- Once people with disabilities conclude a job scheme with an employer there must be a full evaluation of outcomes. In many cases although reports are submitted there is no follow-up to ensure outcomes are accurate or the positive/negative life impact on the person with a disability.
- People with disabilities have full ability to carry out tasks as effectively and efficiently as non-disabled people. The fear, stigma and lack of awareness around disability can be overcome with education.
- A sub-group of people with disabilities should be established that is tasked with talking to prospective employers who have a fear around employing a person with a disability.

3.8 Cost of Disability

Q: Do you think that the cost of disability should be factored in (regardless of means)?

- The cost of disability has been raised by the disability sector for over fifty years and the State has still not recognised it 20 years on from the Commission on the status of people with disabilities. The impact of having to purchase additional equipment, special food, increased electricity and water usage are so extreme, in many cases, that non-disabled people will never fully understand them. There is no disability that does not cost.
- The cost of disability must be viewed in relation to the level of need and disability.
- If you acquire a disability and receive due compensation this does not necessarily mean you are better off than someone else. It simply means that you can continue to purchase the equipment/services necessary for you to survive. It has in effect a zero impact on your income as you are simply returning to the same income state you were in prior to acquiring your disability – with one major difference your ability to work has changed. Therefore your entitlement to allowances must remain the same as a person who has not received a lump-sum payment.
- A benefit should be payable to people with significant support needs who are in work e.g. disability living allowance/personal independent payment in the UK.
- A person's family must not be taken into consideration when accessing means. Just because an individual's parents have access to finances does not mean that the individual has the same access. They must be assessed in their own right.

3.9 Additional Concerns

Q: What else needs to be included?

- There is a huge personal loss for a person who acquires a disability. This loss should not be added to through increased fear around income loss or lack of information around how to retain employment or re-enter the employment market.

- People with disabilities must be considered as active participants within our society. The current view of people with disabilities as passive dependents upon society needs to be changed.
- Employers should champion employment and a peer support network must be put in place by every employer to ensure people with disabilities have access to the full range of necessary supports required to continue their employment.
- Marketing campaigns need to include more people with disabilities to reduce the stigma attached to disability. People with disabilities have ability and they want to work.

“There should be an expectation that you will work rather than you won’t get a job”.

- Organisations that offer support to people with disabilities need to be encouraged to unify their member’s voice. Peer support is vital when accessing employment and the experience of others can be invaluable to a person who is returning to work or accessing work for the first time.
- It is vital that people with disabilities who champion the strategy lead the CES. It should also contain a list of challenges and a realistic implementation plan.

Section IV: Next Steps

4.1 Conclusion

Michael McCabe (Chairperson CIL) emphasised that at this NLF event we have heard a lot about employment and like everybody in the room Michael wishes that everybody with a disability should be able to get a job. However he is realistic.

Today the cost of disability was also discussed and Michael has been involved with organisations for over 40 years who have been talking about this for 40 years. It is vital that the Government finally realises that there is a very real cost associated with disability. Next year we will lose our VAT on diesel expenses, we have had the medical card issue and the mobility allowance. All of these combined have meant that we are going backwards. If you have a disability and don't have a medical card you have to buy your own equipment and even someone on a very high wage would have a difficulty with this. It is important that we come together and fight for against these challenges.

Michael thanked everyone for attending and in particular the members of the LF, the speakers and staff of CIL. A special word of thanks was offered to Rhona for facilitating proceedings and also to Naoise Cunningham, the NLF Coordinator, for organising the day.

4.2 Continued Consultation

All people with disabilities who did not attend the NLF Employment Event but who would still like to feed into the process will be invited to do so. The final consultation report will be forwarded both to the DSG and the Minister for Disability.

Appendices

A. Employment Strategy - Consultation Questions

Section 1: Provide bridges and supports into work

Q: What supports are required for you to access employment or set up your own business?

Section 2: Make work pay

Q: How can government address the fears around loss of allowances for those wishing to enter employment and what allowances do you think should be in place?

Section 3: Build skills, capacity and independence

Q: What support do you suggest the government provide in terms of building the skills, capacity & independence of Leaders to access employment?

Section 4: Promote job retention and re-entry to work

Q: What would support people with disabilities to remain in or return to employment?

Section 5: Enable travel to work

Q: What transport options can facilitate your access to the workplace?

Section 6: Provide co-ordinated and seamless support

Q: How can this support be implemented with no one government department responsible for the strategy?

Section 7: Engage employers

Q: How can employers be encouraged to employ people with disabilities?

Section 8: Cost of Disability

Q: Do you think that the cost of disability should be factored in (regardless of means)?

Section 9: Additional Information

Q: What else needs to be included?

B. Abbreviations

- CIL: Center for Independent Living
- NLF: National Leader Forum
- LF: Leader Forum
- CES: Comprehensive Employment Strategy
- DSG: Disability Stakeholders Group
- DFI: Disability Federation of Ireland
- UNCRPD: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- EU: European Union
- IL: Independent Living
- WSS: Wage Subsidy Scheme
- WEAG: Workplace Equipment/Adaptation Grant
- JIIGS: Job Interview Interpreter Grant
- PRGS: Personal Reader Grant Scheme
- ERGS: Employee Retention Grant Scheme
- DA: Disability Allowance
- CE: Community Employment
- TRACS: Training and Consultancy Services
- NDA: National Disability Authority
- NDISG: National Disability Strategy Implementation Group
- PAS: Personal Assistance Services
- PA: Personal Assistant



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