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# 'Supporting Equality Through Inclusive Employment'

An Employment Strategy  
for People with Disabilities



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## Foreword

**As Minister for Employment and Learning, I am delighted to launch the ‘Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities’, which is all about promoting equality and inclusion in the working environment.**



For a truly successful, world-class economy, it is critical that we draw upon all of the talents in society, and it is vital that we give every person the opportunity to develop and achieve to their full potential.

At a time of unprecedented pressure on public funds, and in a climate of economic change as we attempt to create a more balanced employment base, it is essential that those people who may be more distant from the labour market, solely because of a life-long or acquired disability, don't just remain unforgotten but are rather fully integrated.

The ‘Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities’ is focused on supporting those people with the most significant disability related barriers to work, but who want to work, are motivated, and with the right type and level of support, will secure and sustain paid employment opportunities across every employment sector.

However, the strategy is also making a clear statement to society that goes beyond ‘finding a job’ - people with disabilities share the same ambitions and aspirations as everyone else, and are dedicated to realising their full career potential. This strategy is about enabling and empowering those aspirations, and in doing so, disabled people will make a significant contribution to our economy.

I wish to pay tribute to my department's Disability Employment Service, and its key partners from the local disability sector, in the development of this strategy over the past three years. Through this partnership approach, and the formation of a joint Strategic Working Group from the outset, they have strengthened the relationship between central government and the community and voluntary sector, and are an example of how true partnership working can help deliver.

The recent public consultation provided a positive endorsement for a lot of what had been proposed, and helped to identify other factors and contributors that need to be considered. I am confident therefore, that the strategy, with its key themes and proposals, will have a major positive impact on the lives of people with significant disability related barriers to work, and by extension, their circle of family, friends and of course, their future colleagues in employment.

The strategy aims to build on existing disability services, delivered through mainstream and community and voluntary sector programmes, however, it also presents a great opportunity to improve partnership working at all levels, and across a number of government departments. The new Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum seeks to bring key officials together, along with representatives from the disability sector, employers and of course people with disabilities, and together, they will monitor and positively influence the implementation of this very important area of work.

I trust therefore that my Executive colleagues, and all government departments who have a role to play, will offer their full support and commitment to the success of the 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities'. There can be no better way for the NI Assembly to demonstrate real leadership in tackling disadvantage in our society, and promoting equality and social inclusion for all.



**DR STEPHEN FARRY**

**Minister for Employment and Learning**

## Introduction

The Department for Employment and Learning is fully committed to supporting and empowering people to overcome a wide range of barriers in pursuit of their employment goals.

People with significant disability related barriers, such as a learning disability or difficulty, those with sensory or communication impairments, and people with serious physical and mental health conditions, undoubtedly face greater barriers and challenges than most others in society.

This strategy recognises those challenges, and outlines a range of possible solutions to enable people with disabilities to achieve and retain suitable paid employment in the open labour market.

Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) – Work and Employment (Annex A), covers a number of extremely important areas that are encapsulated in this strategy. However, the fundamental right, underpinning both Article 27 and the strategy is: ‘the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others’, including the opportunity to gain a living by work, freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities’.

The ‘Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities’ has been developed in partnership with the disability sector and other stakeholders, and has been informed by a pre-consultation exercise, as well as the responses to the more recent public consultation process - <https://www.delni.gov.uk/consultations/employment-strategy-people-disabilities-consultation>

The strategy outlines what the Disability Employment Service (DES), working in partnership with other government departments, the disability sector and many other interested parties, intends to do, in order to address the difficulties and inequalities that people with significant disabilities are attempting to overcome.

The Department for Employment and Learning has provided dedicated and enhanced support to enable people with disabilities to access educational, skills and employability programmes and services. Moving forward, it is essential that these continue, and that they deliver better employment outcomes for disabled people.

In order to achieve this, it will be important to ensure that the range of other strategies and policies, aimed at people with disabilities, align and complement the proposals within this strategy, and that this is demonstrated through visible commitment and practical partnership working.

## Current Employment Support

The Department for Employment and Learning has a dedicated Disability Employment Service, which provides and manages a range of pre-employment and in-work support measures, including:

- **Access to Work (NI)**
- **Workable (NI)**
- **Work Connect**
- **Occupational Psychology Service**
- **Job Introduction Scheme and**
- **Condition Management Programme**

The strategy consultation document: <https://www.delni.gov.uk/consultations/employment-strategy-people-disabilities-consultation> provides a comprehensive summary of what else is currently available by way of employment, educational, skills and other services, to people with disabilities. The consultation document also explained the rationale for a specific 'employment' strategy, along with a number of key themes and proposals.

The public consultation process has delivered a positive endorsement of the need for this strategy, and the partnership approach taken by the department and the disability sector. It has also provided the Department with additional information and points to consider, and these have been reflected in the revised commentary of this strategy.

## Strategic Partnership and Engagement

The Department and the local disability sector have a long standing positive working relationship. A Strategic Working Group, including key representatives from the sector, was established in 2013, to consider how best to take forward this significant piece of work. The Group has played a central role in helping the Department to develop the 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities'; and deserve much credit for doing so. Those who participated on the Strategic Working Group are listed at **Annex B**.

## The Target Client Group for the 'Strategy'

The 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' will target people who have significant disability related barriers to employment. People with significant disabilities feel excluded from many employment opportunities that others take for granted. 'Stigma' was a common thread of the consultation process, particularly by individuals who have a disability, and this strategy aims to address this problem.

In line with Article 27 of the UNCRPD, the aim of this strategy is to provide comprehensive and tailored disability employment services which will lead to greater access to, and participation in a range of pre-employment and employment options. Ultimately, the strategy's key objective is to increase the number of disabled people who will secure successful job and career outcomes.

The target group comprises people with learning disabilities and difficulties, long-term mental ill-health, sensory impairment, autism, neurological conditions, more severe sensory and physical disability. These are the people in our society who are at the greatest risk of economic and social exclusion.

The strategy and subsequent implementation plan will support people of all age groups, although certain interventions and the timing of such, will focus on young people. The intention is to prevent many people with significant disabilities, such as those referred to above, from becoming economically inactive and dependent upon welfare benefits, as well as health and social care for a large part of their adult life.

### **Supported Employment Delivery Model**

In order to make a significant, long-term difference to the lives and employment prospects of this particular client group, a key proposal of the strategy, which was unanimously endorsed by those who responded to the consultation, is to implement the Supported Employment model on a wider scale throughout Northern Ireland. This has been used successfully by local disability organisations, and is recognised internationally as the most appropriate delivery model to help the target group of this strategy. The model provides high quality, personalised, and often long term support to people with significant disabilities to secure, maintain and progress in paid employment.

### **Strategic Purpose**

The purpose of the 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' will be:

***To improve the job prospects and working careers of people with disabilities.***

### **Key Objective**

***To directly assist disabled people to find, sustain and progress within paid employment; or to start up a business.***

## Key Themes

The strategy is structured around five key themes, with a number of supporting proposals.

**Theme 1 – Empowering and supporting people to secure paid employment**

**Theme 2 – Job retention and career development**

**Theme 3 – Working with employers**

**Theme 4 – Research and development**

**Theme 5 – Strategic partnership and engagement**

### **THEME ONE – Empowering and supporting people to secure paid employment**

*To develop and implement a Disability Service that will enable young people and adults with a disability to make a successful transition into paid employment, including self-employment.*

#### *Proposals that will build upon and improve current practice*

- consider flexibilities and enhancements within existing programmes and services that will support more disabled people to move into work placements, employment or self-employment; and
- enhance the working partnership arrangements between government departments and the local disability sector, across relevant business areas, including Careers, Health, Education, Skills Training, and Employment services.

#### *Proposals that will introduce something new*

- formally adopt the model of Supported Employment for people with significant disabilities seeking to find and retain paid employment;
- implement an improved 'Pathway to Employment', including a clear sign posting and referral service for people with significant disability related barriers;
- develop management information systems that will enable the Department to track the progress of all clients who are being supported through the range of disability services and programmes; and
- establish accurate baseline figures and subsequent targets for the number of disabled people who move into paid employment, including self-employment.

## THEME TWO – Job Retention and Career Development

***To work with employers and disabled employees to support job retention and promote opportunities for progression, personal development, promotion and career enhancement.***

### *Proposals that will build upon and improve current practice*

- undertake a targeted campaign to promote and advertise the disability employment retention services and programmes that are currently available to employers and disabled employees across all sectors;
- promote examples of best practice – where disabled people have excelled in employment or their chosen career path, across all sectors of employment; and
- consider flexibilities within existing programmes and services that would make them accessible to more disabled people in part-time employment.

### *Proposals that will introduce something new*

- introduce a new element to the ‘review’ process for all clients who are availing of specialist in-work support programmes, ensuring that there is a specific focus on personal development opportunities and career progression, as appropriate;
- work with the disability organisations to target growth sectors of employment to ensure that disabled employees have an equal opportunity to develop a successful career path within those sectors; and
- make the Condition Management Programme available to disabled people, who are in employment, and being supported through specialist provision.

## THEME THREE – Working with Employers

***To encourage and influence employers to take positive action and promote equality for disabled people when creating job opportunities, recruiting, selecting, managing and developing staff.***

### *Proposals that will build upon and improve current practice*

- work with the Equality Commission and other relevant bodies to develop a clear understanding on what an employer is entitled or required to do in relation to taking positive action for people with disabilities.

### *Proposals that will introduce something new*

- develop a best practice recruitment support model with the Disability Sector that will be available to any employer who wishes to offer employment or work placement opportunities to people with a disability;
- organise and facilitate major Employer Events to promote and facilitate the employment of people with disabilities;
- organise and facilitate local or sector specific employer events;
- establish a network of Disability Advocates and Role Models who can help influence the attitudes and actions of employers towards the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities;
- design and implement a disability employment advisory service for employers via a range of channels, including a website, telephone and SMS text help-desk facility; and
- work with employers and employer representative groups, in partnership with the disability sector and others to build positive attitudes towards employment for disabled people.

## **THEME FOUR – Research and Development**

***To ensure that Northern Ireland is leading the way in terms of research, development and innovation on disability skills and employment issues at local, national and international level.***

*Proposals that will introduce something new*

- commission at least one research or evaluation project per annum that will provide additional and relevant information on disability employment issues;
- publish and publicise all disability research reports on the Department's website and other forums to ensure that people with disabilities and other key stakeholders have access to the data, including key findings, analysis and recommendations; and
- use new and relevant information to inform discussion and decision-making on future policy, strategy and operations affecting people with disabilities.

## **THEME FIVE – Strategic Partnership and Engagement**

***To develop a framework that will ensure continuous and meaningful engagement and collaboration between all of the key stakeholders, including people with disabilities.***

*Proposals that will build upon and improve current practice*

- make a formal commitment to ongoing communication and engagement with those in the community who are disabled but want to work or are supporting those with a significant disability towards and into employment.

*Proposals that will introduce something new*

- establish a new cross-departmental Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum that will monitor the implementation and achievements of the new strategy, and provide assurance on the alignment of the NI Executive disability strategies;
- ensure that the membership of this new Forum is fully inclusive of those who have a direct impact and influence on the employment prospects for people with disabilities; and
- ensure that people with disabilities, and representatives from the local disability sector are fully represented on the Forum.

The Disability Employment Service's key purpose is as follows:

- To assist people with disabilities to progress towards, move into and sustain paid employment; and
- To assist and support employers to recruit and retain people who have disability related barriers to employment.

This places a significant responsibility on the Disability Employment Service, as the statutory organisation, with this clearly defined remit, to achieve positive outcomes and results for the two main customer groups, disabled people and employers.

Whilst the Department, through the Disability Employment Service, has enjoyed good working relationships with many organisations across the disability sector, the establishment of the 'Strategic Working Group', to commence the development of work on this strategy, has strengthened these relationships. It has also confirmed the need for greater co-operation and collaboration within and between NI Executive departments, and with key stakeholders from outside of central government, if any of the current disability related strategies are to be successful.

The 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' can deliver change and positive outcomes in its own right, but it also aligns with other strategies and will contribute directly to their success.

### Related Strategies and Initiatives

The NI Executive, through the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister's Delivering Social Change Framework, published 'A Strategy to improve the lives of people with disabilities' in January 2013.

- **Executive Strategy – Improving the lives of people with disabilities:**  
[https://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm\\_dev/disability-strategy-2012-2015.pdf](https://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm_dev/disability-strategy-2012-2015.pdf)

This strategy emphasised the Executive's commitments to delivering on the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and was regarded as a key milestone in the Executive's intention to focus on growing the economy and tackling disadvantage, as outlined in the Programme for Government (PFG) 2011-2015 commitments.

The Executive Strategy has a number of key themes, one of which is, 'Employment and Employability'. The strategy states that, 'employment and employability are issues which require a number of government departments to work together to support people with disabilities to gain and retain employment'.

There is a clear alignment therefore, between the overarching Executive Strategy, which is about taking a collective responsibility for supporting and empowering people with disabilities to achieve their full potential in life, and this more specific initiative, led by the Department for Employment and Learning.

The development of this employment strategy coincides with the timing of other relevant and related strategies and commitments. The following provides a brief overview to illustrate the range of activity that is currently underway, with the intention of directly or indirectly supporting people with health, disability and other barriers to achieve their full potential in life.

- **Bamford Action Plan:** <https://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/publications/bamford-action-plan-2012-2015>

The Bamford Action Plan represents the Northern Ireland Executive's continued commitment to the development of mental health and learning disability services, and to the promotion of independence and social inclusion for those people within our community. This Action Plan has a truly cross-cutting agenda and requires commitment from all government departments in Northern Ireland.

There are a number of actions for which the Department for Employment and Learning has lead responsibility, including those related to careers advice, skills training and further and higher education. In addition, the Disability Employment Service has a specific action:

'Continue to deliver specialist employment provision to address the employment needs of those clients who have disability related barriers to finding and sustaining work'.

- **Transitions for Young People with Severe Learning Difficulties/ Disabilities – Action Plan:** <https://www.delni.gov.uk/publications/transitions-action-plan>

This Transitions Action Plan directly links in with the over arching Bamford Action Plan, and whilst the Department for Employment and Learning volunteered to chair the Sub-Committee to take this work forward, it is also an inter-departmental Action Plan, with various actions in relation to health, education and transport allocated to the respective lead departments.

The Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities is specifically referenced in the Transitions Action Plan, and will make a positive contribution to this group of young people, particularly through the delivery of the Supported Employment Model.

- **Enabling Success:** <https://www.delni.gov.uk/publications/enabling-success-northern-ireland-strategy-reducing-economic-inactivity>

This Executive strategy, aimed at reducing economic inactivity and helping more people back to work has three main target groups including:

‘People with work-limiting health conditions or disabilities’.

- **Youth Training Strategy:** <https://www.delni.gov.uk/publications/generating-our-success-northern-ireland-strategy-youth-training>

This strategy, which was launched in 2015, also references the new employment strategy and should align with the latter through the proposed Widening Access project and the associated policy commitment:

‘Support and flexibility will be provided for young people with additional requirements (including, but not limited to, individuals with a disability, caring commitments or those leaving care)’.

- **Further Education Strategy:** <https://www.delni.gov.uk/further-education-means-success>

The new strategy, ‘Further Education Means Success’ has a specific Theme on ‘Social Inclusion’, which includes a commitment to widening participation to further education at all levels, including to those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those who are furthest from the labour market.

- **Higher Education Strategy – Graduating to Success:** <https://www.delni.gov.uk/publications/higher-education-strategy-documents>

This strategy, published in 2012, is about widening participation. It supports the aim that any eligible individual in Northern Ireland should be able to gain access to the Higher Education that is right for them, irrespective of their personal or social background.

### **Alignment with the ‘Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities’**

It is clear therefore, that there is a clear alignment between the respective departmental initiatives, and this strategy aims to positively influence a more integrated and collaborative way of working. The culmination of these strategies, all emerging at this key time of structural change, provides an opportunity for government departments to lead by example, and to have a significant impact on the lives and future careers of people with disabilities.

This strategy will pro-actively target a cohort of people within the population, many of whom are active and motivated. Due to the nature of their disability, they will require additional, personalised, and often long term support, hence the Supported Employment Delivery Model (see Section 3).

### **The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)**

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) provides a robust legislative base for the strategy, particularly in relation to employment and access to employment. The Act is most notable for imposing a duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people to help them to overcome barriers that they may face in gaining and remaining in employment. This is relevant therefore to a number of the key themes of this specific disability strategy.

Article 27 of the UNCRPD recognises ‘the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others’. The Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities is making a clear statement of intent to uphold this right, and is sending a message to society that people with a disability, no matter the nature, share the same ambitions and aspirations as everyone else, and so long as they are given the right encouragement, support and advice, they are capable of realising their full economic and career potential.

A key proposal within the strategy therefore, is the introduction and implementation of the Supported Employment Model. The public consultation response provided unanimous approval for this methodology, in order to achieve paid employment outcomes for people with significant disability related barriers to work.

Supported Employment, as a delivery model, has been used successfully in Northern Ireland, through European Social Fund projects and through disability employment programmes such as Workable (NI). It has also been adopted in other countries and provides high quality, personalised and often long term support to assist people with significant disabilities to progress towards, secure, maintain and progress in paid employment in the open labour market. This latter point is very important, as Supported Employment should not be confused with ‘sheltered employment’, or the promotion of any form of segregated working environment. Supported Employment is about people with disabilities entering and retaining real jobs with employers across all sectors, as part of a fully inclusive, and integrated workforce. A summary of the Supported Employment Model is provided at **Annex C**.

In a recent research project, ‘Fit for Purpose – Transforming employment support for disabled people and those with health conditions’<sup>1</sup>, July 2014, the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion states, ‘There is unequivocal evidence that Supported Employment, when implemented effectively, can lead to significant positive impacts on employment.’

The report concludes that ‘those with more significant impairments, including those with learning disabilities, severe autism and mental illness – are unlikely to have their needs met through mainstream or even additional levels of support.’ The report strongly recommends the Supported Employment Model, through some form of vocational rehabilitation, as the required level of support for certain groups of disabled clients who are seeking to move into paid employment.

### Implementation of the Supported Employment Model

In order to deliver this Supported Employment service effectively throughout Northern Ireland, it requires sufficient numbers of specialist disability employment staff, working directly with disabled people and prospective or existing employers.

<sup>1</sup> “Fit for Purpose – Transforming employment support for disabled people and those with health conditions”, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, July 2014

The Department, having worked in close partnership with the disability sector, primarily through the Strategic Working Group, is clear on the design of the Supported Employment Model that will be implemented through this strategy. It will be targeted at those people, who, despite their disability related barriers, are motivated and capable of achieving paid employment in the open labour market.

Local disability organisations, through the European Social Fund projects, have been delivering the Supported Employment Model for many years. In 2015, 25 projects were awarded funding for the next 3 years to deliver skills and employment services to people with a full range of disabilities throughout Northern Ireland. It is envisaged that these projects, through their own Supported Employment delivery teams, will make a significant contribution to the achievement of the objectives of this strategy, particularly in relation to Theme One.

The Disability Employment Service, and others with responsibility for leading on this strategy, including the local disability sector, must work together to make the most effective use of the combined Supported Employment resources and programmes. Commitments have been made to create a positive network amongst all of the specialist disability projects during Year One of this strategy, and by doing so, this will maximise the employment related outcomes achieved for disabled participants.

### **Joined-up service delivery**

In order to ensure the most appropriate and effective use of the Supported Employment Model, there will be a need for the specialist disability employment officer cohort to work in partnership with the health professionals, particularly those providing vocational rehabilitation and condition management services, education transitions officers, careers advisers, Occupational Psychologists and Employment Service staff, to select the most appropriate people that they will commit to working with over a period of time.

One of the key priorities of this strategy is to establish a clear and simple pathway that will enable and empower people with disabilities to make choices that are best suited to their individual needs, as they progress towards and into employment.

It will include a range of tailored pre-employment options, as well as the ongoing in-work support, provided through Workable (NI), Access to Work (NI), as well as the reasonable adjustments required by employers.

There will be some disabled people for whom paid employment in the open labour market is not a realistic proposition at this stage in their life. These individuals most definitely require appropriate quality services that will address their particular needs. Some of these are outlined within other themes contained in the Executive Strategy – ‘to improve the lives of people with disabilities’, and other key initiatives such as the work being led by the Bamford Ministerial Group on Mental Health and Learning Disability.

The key issue to highlight is that the ‘Supported Employment Model’ will be targeted at those people who have significant disability related barriers to employment, but who want to work, are motivated to do so, and with the right level of support, will be capable of achieving and retaining paid employment in the open labour market.

This section contains five themes and the associated proposals that will shape the Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities over the next five years.

The themes are:

- Empowering and supporting people to secure paid employment
- Job retention and career development
- Working with employers
- Research and development and
- Strategic partnership and engagement

#### **4.1 Theme One – Empowering and supporting people to secure paid employment**

This theme underpins why the Department and its key stakeholders believe that this strategy is so important. This is about changing lives through positive job outcomes for people who have significant barriers to employment, as a direct consequence of their disability.

In addition to the person's disability, barriers also exist due to the associated attitudes and perceptions that having a disability can create for others. 'Stigma' was a common thread of the consultation response, particularly by those who have personal experience of this.

Therefore, Theme One of the strategy is about:

***Developing and implementing a Disability Service that will enable people with a disability to complete a successful pathway into paid employment, including self-employment.***

This statement recognises that people with disabilities, like everyone else, will undertake various pre-employment activities, in order to prepare them for their chosen occupation. This strategy will enable the department to link these services together, along with other services such as health and education, to deliver the additional support required in order to move more people with disabilities into employment.

# Creating an improved Employment Pathway for People with Disabilities

The Department for Employment and Learning has supported thousands of people every year, to help them achieve their learning and employment goals and aspirations.

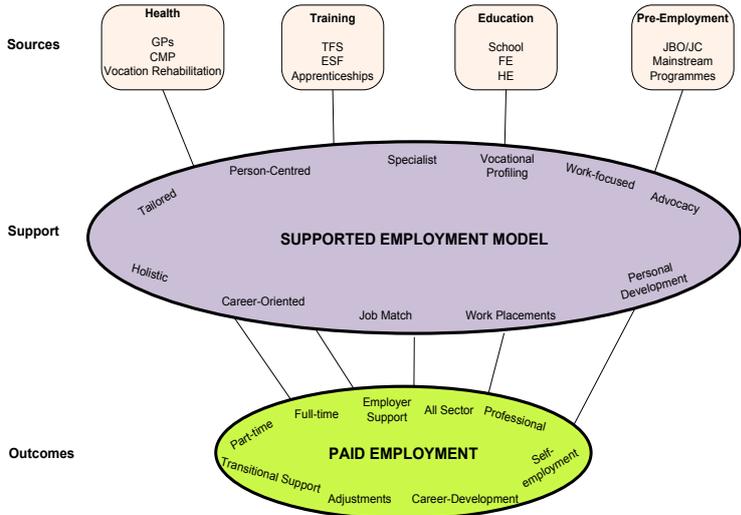
Across each of the department’s key areas of responsibility, there is significant additional and specialist support for people with disabilities, including those delivered through:

- the Employment Service;
- the Careers Service;
- vocational and skills training courses;
- further education colleges; and
- universities.

The diagram below illustrates the sources that already exist to target and then provide the appropriate advice, guidance, assistance, at a time when disabled people need it most. Of course, it is essential that the required level of support and expertise is available across each of these key transitional services, and this has been highlighted in some of the other strategic documents listed in section 2.

However, for those who decide that employment is the next stage of their progression, the supported employment model can enable and empower people with disabilities to make the right choice about their own future job and career pathway.

**Figure One**



To demonstrate how this employment pathway can work in reality, and also to highlight how an improved partnership approach can achieve real tangible success, the Disability Employment Service identified an opportunity to engage with the Further Education colleges in 2013, specifically the Discrete Learning Units within three of the college campuses.

### **Further Education partnership model**

The Discrete Learning Units primarily deliver Entry Level and Level One vocational training and qualifications to students who have a learning disability or difficulty, or who may have an autistic spectrum condition.

A concern was raised about the exit strategy for those students, who had gained their qualifications, were ready to start looking for work, but who needed additional assistance due to their disability. In the absence of such, it was believed that many would struggle to progress, and indeed, were more likely to lose the momentum they had gained from their time at the college.

The Disability Employment Service allocated a full-time resource to work with the college co-ordinators, along with a number of local specialist disability organisations, and through this partnership approach, were able to work with the students, identify suitable work placement or other opportunities, and this has resulted in more than forty students with a learning disability or autism moving into paid employment during the past three years.

It is envisaged that the implementation of this strategy, and the direct involvement of the local disability sector organisations, would enable a full geographical roll-out of this partnership approach.

Through this strategy therefore, the Department aims to ensure that key services that are available to people with disabilities complement each other and, in doing so:

- create optimum synergy between respective disability services;
- ensure that there is a clear pathway for people with a disability who want to work, but who need additional and tailored provision, and that these services are accessible, inclusive and easily navigated; and
- maximise the number of people with significant disability-related barriers who secure paid employment.

## Delivering the required level of support

This strategy aims to provide clear policy direction, as well as improved operational delivery of pre-employment and in-work support services for people with significant disabilities who want to work and are capable of taking up the offer of paid employment.

The Disability Employment Service, working in partnership with other government departments, including Economy, Health and Education, employers and disability organisations throughout Northern Ireland, intends to maximise the number of people within this target group who are offered the Supported Employment Model each year, and for those who take up this offer, that every effort is made to help them secure a suitable job outcome.

The service will be delivered in partnership with the disability sector, and co-ordinated by the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment, an umbrella membership organisation for many of the local disability organisations.

## European Social Fund Projects

The Department for Employment and Learning has managed the European Social Fund programme for many years, and the majority of the local disability projects have received additional match funding from the Disability Employment Service.

In addition to a range of mainstream disability programmes and services, this specific level of funding and other support underlines the strategic and financial commitment that the Department has given to this client group.

These projects are a key component of the Employment Strategy. They will help achieve many of the pre-employment and employment outcomes that will determine the success or otherwise of this strategy throughout its lifetime. A summary of the projects, including their key disability target group and projected outcomes, is included at **Annex D**.

## Focus on Youth

This strategy will support and empower people of all ages with disability related barriers, who want to work. There will be a particular focus on young people with a disability who are transitioning through other services, such as school, further and higher education, skills training, apprenticeships and employability programmes.

Disabled young people at the age of 16 share the same hopes, aspirations and career ambitions as their teenage peers. It is also a time in their lives when they have energy and attitude to make it a reality. However, by the age of 26, disabled people are four times more likely than their non-disabled peers to be unemployed.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The education and employment of disabled young people: Study by the London School of Economics, November 2005.

By this stage they may have become less independent, confident or motivated to look for work. In addition, their disability may have deteriorated, leaving many facing a lifetime on social security benefits. Through the proposed model, and the combined support provided through Careers Advisers, Education Transitions officers, Supported Employment teams, specialist staff from the Disability Employment Service, this strategy will provide appropriate, personalised support that will make a real difference to the future lives of young disabled people, and their families.

The 'Fit for Purpose' research project by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion supports the need to specifically target this client group. In its report of July 2014, it claims that 'There is clear evidence that young disabled people are particularly disadvantaged and suffer from poorer transitions from education to work. It is, therefore, a priority to support young disabled people to find and keep work'.

### **Services for Adults**

Whilst those exiting full-time education are likely to be younger disabled people, many adults with disabilities participate in the range of training, education and pre-employment programmes. The Department, along with its partners in the disability sector, will continue to offer available resources, expertise and provision to people of all ages.

The Supported Employment Officers from the disability sector, and specialist staff within the Disability Employment Service, will work with adults referred by the front-line Employment Service Advisers in the Jobs and Benefits Offices and Jobcentres, those exiting further and higher education courses, and the large number who will be participating on local disability training and employment projects supported through the European Social Fund.

It is important too, that close working relationships and suitable referral processes are established between Health Professionals, including those who are delivering vocational rehabilitation and condition management services, and the Supported Employment organisations and staff.

The Belfast Health Trust has been working with a local mental health organisation, through its vocational rehabilitation team on a pilot intervention, 'Individual Placement and Support' (IPS). This partnership approach has resulted in successful employment outcomes, and suggests a model that could be replicated in other Health Trust areas.

### **Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Model**

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust worked with a local mental health organisation to develop an Individual Placement and Support (IPS) programme in 2011. The programme is funded by the Health Trust and the European Social Fund (ESF).

Currently there are two IPS Employment Specialists (employed by the disability organisation), and this will soon increase to four. This IPS programme is designed to support individuals with enduring mental health problems from the Belfast Trust area, to find and remain in work. Participants are identified by mental health professionals from the Trust Community Mental Health Teams and the Early Intervention Team. The only criteria for participation is that the individual wants to access paid work.

Led by the Service User, IPS aims to match people to the career options of their choice, reflecting their hopes, aspirations, interests and skills. The Employment Specialist and the Trust's Occupational Therapists, as 'Vocational Champions', work within the clinical team to ensure a team approach to supporting people in employment. The service offers individuals support with compiling a CV, job search, and assistance with application forms and interviews. Expert Social Security Benefits advice is also provided to the individual. In the past 9 month period this IPS Programme has progressed 19 people into paid employment; 5 full-time and 14 part-time. It is another example of how the Supported Employment model can achieve real outcomes and affect positive change for its target audience.

The evaluation of the IPS pilot phase (Byrne – SHSCT, February 2013) stated "The IPS initiative not only exemplifies in practice the strategic direction of recovery orientated mental health services but is also what service users are saying they want and need to support their recovery."

The health and other related benefits associated with employment are well established and accepted. It is essential therefore, that departments, who have a responsibility for these mutually beneficial outcomes for society, work more closely to develop future policy and operational delivery of services to people with a full range of disabilities. The membership and remit of the proposed new Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum may provide opportunities to advance this strategic objective.

## **Self-Employment**

In Northern Ireland and elsewhere, self-employment is a popular option for disabled people. Of those in paid work, 13% of disabled people who are working are self-employed as their main job, compared with 14% of non-disabled people who are working. Self-employment is particularly attractive for some disabled people who may require more flexibility regarding working patterns and work load as a result of their disability.

It is important therefore that all of those people with responsibility for providing advice and guidance to people with a disability are aware of what support and assistance is available for those who might choose this route as their preferred option. This will include the Employment Service's own Enterprise Allowance Scheme, as well as Invest NI's start-up support programmes, aimed specifically at helping people with disabilities to think about developing their own business ideas.

The Disability Employment Service's own programmes, such as Access to Work (NI) and Workable (NI) are currently supporting disabled people to pursue their self-employment or entrepreneurial ambitions, as will their Supported Employment workers from the local disability sector.

## **Theme One – Empowering and supporting people to secure paid employment**

***To develop and implement a Disability Service that will enable young people and adults with a disability to make a successful transition into paid employment, including self-employment.***

*Proposals that will build upon and improve current practice*

- consider flexibilities and enhancements within existing programmes and services that will support more disabled people to move into work placements, employment or self-employment; and
- enhance the working partnership arrangements between government departments and the local disability sector, across relevant business areas, including Careers, Health, Education, Skills Training, and Employment services.

*Proposals that will introduce something new*

- formally adopt the model of Supported Employment for people with significant disabilities seeking to find and retain paid employment;
- implement an improved 'Pathway to Employment', including a clear sign posting and referral service for all people with significant disability related barriers;
- develop integrated management information systems that will enable the tracking and progression of all clients who are being supported through the range of disability services and programmes; and
- establish accurate baseline figures and subsequent targets for the number of disabled people who move into paid employment, including self-employment.

## **4.2 Theme Two – Retention and Career Development**

Support for people when they move into employment is an essential element of the service package for people with a disability and is an example of what makes it different from the mainstream Employment Service for non-disabled customers.

It is also a key stage of the Supported Employment Model. ‘Sustained Employment’ requires tailored in-work support for the individual and the employer. The latter is sometimes overlooked and this can have a negative impact in terms of job retention, as well as influencing the attitude of the employer to offer future opportunities to people with a disability. This is also addressed in Theme Three and is an integral part of the disability related package of support.

Theme Two however is primarily about maximising the potential of people with disabilities who are in employment, wish to remain so and want the opportunity to advance their careers:

***To work with employers and disabled employees to support job retention and promote opportunities for progression, personal development, promotion and career enhancement.***

### **Retention Provision for Disabled People Currently In Work**

The Disability Employment Service, in conjunction with its sector partners, provides extensive support to disabled employees throughout Northern Ireland and across all sectors of employment. The main disability programmes that help deliver this service are the Access to Work (NI) and Workable (NI) programmes.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015, approximately 1,300 employees with a range of disabilities were being supported through these programmes.

In addition, the Department, in partnership with a number of disability sector organisations, continues to support approximately 450 disabled employees under the Employment Support programme. This programme was replaced by Workable (NI) in 2006, but it will continue to support this group of disabled employees for many years to come

### **Access to Work (NI)**

Access to Work (NI) provides financial assistance towards travel to work, the purchase of special aids and equipment, adaptations to premises, independent professional assessments for people with a physical or sensory disability, as well as provision of a support worker resource, including interpreters. This programme has been described

as “Government’s best kept secret”, (Sayce 2011), and while there is merit in this statement, approximately 700 people in Northern Ireland are currently benefitting from this programme. Access to Work (NI) therefore, is making a real contribution to individuals, their employers and the local economy.

### **Workable (NI)**

Workable (NI), which replaced the Employment Support Programme in 2006, is delivered on behalf of the Department by a number of local disability organisations, and is currently supporting approximately 570 people with a range of disabilities. The programme is about early engagement and education for the employer and relevant staff. This can be followed by medium to long-term personalised support for the disabled employee, often through the provision of a specialist job coach or mentor. Similar to Access to Work (NI), Workable (NI) provides essential support to the individual, but it is also very much an offer of long term dedicated support to the employer.

Access to Work (NI) is predominantly assisting employees with physical and sensory type disabilities, whereas Workable (NI) is providing in-work support to people with a range of disabilities, but these are predominantly employees with a learning disability or difficulty, and people with mental ill-health.

Both programmes are supporting people across a wide range of occupational sectors such as retail, catering, agriculture, hospitality and manufacturing. They are also helping the careers of professional staff, such as teachers, lecturers, architects, IT software technicians, research staff and even self-employed sports coaches.

These programmes are making an invaluable contribution to the lives and employment of those people who are availing of the service and it is critical that they continue to do so as an integral part of this strategy. However more can still be done to promote these services and perhaps to develop them in order to keep more people at work.

The strategy will introduce flexibilities into these quality in-work support options, such as criterion around the minimum number of hours that a person needs to be working in order to qualify for the provision, along with the level of support required, and the corresponding duration of programme participation. This is consistent with proposals regarding Universal Credit, which will encourage people to avail of part-time work, and will respond to employer’s demand for more flexibility around the number of hours that they require new or existing employees to be contracted for.

This increased flexibility will also provide opportunities for more disabled people who perhaps need a short period of intense support and induction to help them make a successful transition into their new work environment, whilst also providing advice and, if necessary, specific disability training to the employer and colleagues of the new recruit.

Often, once this initial period of in-work support is provided, the employee will no longer need or wish to remain on an 'employment programme'.

### **Condition Management Programme**

Another consideration is to offer the Department's Condition Management Programme (CMP) to people who have a disability and are being supported in work, through a recognised disability employment programme, or by one of the local disability organisations.

This intervention, delivered by multi-disciplinary teams of vocational health professionals, on behalf of the Employment Service, would be extremely beneficial and would undoubtedly enable people to remain in work, or to make a speedy return to work, if they are encountering difficulties due to their health and disability. This would alleviate the risks associated with long term illness and absence, which can often lead to a person either leaving their job, or being dismissed due to inefficiency.

### **Linking in with Apprenticeships**

For young people and adults who move into employment via the apprenticeship route, these in-work disability support programmes are also available. Therefore, it should be an integral part of the support package that is offered to disabled people, availing of the growing number of apprenticeship opportunities, as well as the employers who are offering skills and employment options across a range of employment sectors.

Apprenticeships enable people to develop vocational and professional skills, as part of their early years of employment in their chosen field, therefore it is a very suitable target area of growth for the disability employment strategy.

### **Social Clauses**

With the projected increase in social clauses from large public sector contracts during the next number of years, more apprenticeship, as well as work placement and paid employment opportunities are likely to be ring-fenced for 'disadvantaged' groups. People with disabilities will be included in this targeted campaign, and with the existing in-work support that is available, through the aforementioned programmes, they present a very real opportunity for multiple employment related outcomes that the Department and the disability sector will pursue vigorously.

### **Proven Track Record**

With regard to job retention services, the Department and its partner organisations in the local disability sector have extensive experience and knowledge in delivering necessary and tailored in-work support. There is a dedicated and qualified staff resource that can provide appropriate and timely advice, as well as practical support to both employers and employees. The offer can include on-the-job coaching, tailored training interventions, mentoring and buddy type support-worker services. This will help address

any disability related barriers that could pose a risk to the retention or well-being of employees with a full range of disabilities.

With the introduction of more specialist disability employment staff throughout Northern Ireland to help people secure employment, it may be possible for the Disability Employment Service, and others, to establish a strong employee and employer advisory service. This would be particularly useful to address the needs of disabled employees who need short term interventions or advice if they are encountering difficulties fitting into the work environment, or indeed are looking to make a successful return to work following a period of absence. This personal advocacy service would be beneficial for the individual and it can also help the employer to better understand their role and responsibilities with regard to reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act.

### **Career Progression**

This theme is also about ensuring equality of opportunity for disabled employees in all aspects of their employment. Article 27 of the UNCRPD includes the following responsibility, 'Promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the labour market'.

An evaluation of the Workable (NI) programme in 2010 revealed that career progression and personal development were issues that many employees with a disability believed were not as available to them as they should have been. Many believed that the employer was not aware of their own personal ambition, or indeed their capability and capacity to take on more work or alternative responsibilities.

The consultation process revealed a number of possible or actual reasons for why this might be the case. Disabled employees believe that their employer often thinks that they are not interested in promotion or other developmental opportunities, and that they are just 'happy to have a job'.

This generalisation is often not the case, and is contrary to the idea of 'work on an equal basis', as depicted throughout Article 27 of the UNCRPD.

The strategy proposes further research and evaluation (see Theme Four), to ascertain why these attitudes prevail, and also to demonstrate the level and variety of jobs, professions and successful careers being enjoyed by disabled people in the local economy.

Tying in with Theme Three, there is a critical need for ongoing education and awareness raising for employers who have disabled employees in their workforce, so that they are not missing out on the potential of their existing employee base, and are meeting their obligations as a good employer.

Consideration is being given to enhancing the Workable (NI) provision and other in-work support packages to ensure that personal development, job enhancement and career progression become a formal and integral part of the individual's personalised action plan and annual appraisal process. This offers an opportunity for greater focus to be applied to the developmental and career enhancement aspects, in addition to job retention.

This strategy will not be fully successful if the Department, the disability sector and other stakeholders are just getting more disabled people into jobs, even if they are sustained. The success has to incorporate matching the ambition of those individuals who are capable of achieving more in employment, but who previously have not been afforded the opportunity to do so.

## **Theme Two – Job Retention and Career Development**

***To work with employers and disabled employees to support job retention and promote opportunities for progression, personal development, promotion and career enhancement.***

### *Proposals that will build upon and improve current practice*

- undertake a targeted campaign to promote and advertise the disability employment retention services and programmes that are currently available to employers and disabled employees across all sectors;
- promote examples of best practice – where disabled people have excelled in employment or their chosen career path, across all sectors of employment; and
- consider flexibilities within existing programmes and services that would make them accessible to more disabled people in part-time employment.

### *Proposals that will introduce something new*

- introduce a new element to the 'review' process for all clients who are availing of specialist in-work support programmes, ensuring that there is a specific focus on personal development opportunities and career progression, as appropriate;
- work with the disability organisations to target growth sectors of employment to ensure that disabled employees have an equal opportunity to develop a successful career path within those sectors; and
- make the Condition Management Programme available to disabled people, who are in employment, and being supported through specialist provision.

### **4.3 Theme Three – Working with Employers**

The role of employers with respect to the success or otherwise of any 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' cannot be over stated. This has been highlighted by disability organisations and those who work on behalf of disabled people who are trying to secure employment or stay in work. It was also a significant theme of the recent public consultation process, with an almost unanimous viewpoint expressed that the knowledge and attitude of an employer is often the single biggest factor in whether a disabled person gets the job or not.

People with a disability, in particular those people with a mental health condition, stated that there remains a 'stigma' associated with their disability and how it will impact on their ability to perform in a normal, busy working environment.

Through this theme of the strategy therefore, the Department, NI Union of Supported Employment and its member organisations, the Equality Commission, along with all other stakeholders, intend to transform the level of awareness that employers will have on the realities of employing people with a disability. The strategy, through proactive outreach initiatives, will provide ways to inform employers about the many success stories that already exist, the supports that are readily available to them at each key stage of the employment process, as well as their legal responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act.

The strategy will also aim to build and enhance working relationships between the aforementioned parties who will be advocating on behalf of the disabled community, and the local employer base, as well as employer representative groups, Invest NI etc. Tying in with key Theme Four, the Department will engage with employers from all sectors and of all sizes in order to ascertain their needs, concerns and experiences. In addressing all of these issues, it is envisaged that the strategy can help to achieve the following:

***To encourage employers to take positive measures and promote equality for disabled people when creating job opportunities, recruiting, selecting, managing and developing staff.***

The strategy will focus on positive real-life case studies to inform and educate employers, and to help answer questions they might have, such as:

- Why recruit disabled people
- How to recruit disabled people
- How to engage in Positive Action
- Reasonable Adjustments in the workplace and
- How to access additional support for disabled people in work

There is information available to inform employers about all of these. However, the consultation process revealed that more can be done to publicise this information. The strategy will ensure that such information is available in a suitable and easily accessible format and that it is promoted and shared on a more frequent basis.

## Promotion and Education

In conjunction with the business sector, the Department for Work and Pensions launched a Disability Confident campaign in Great Britain. The key purpose of this campaign is to work with employers to help remove barriers, to increase understanding of disability in the workplace and to ensure that disabled people have the opportunity to fulfil their employment potential. As part of this campaign, the Department for Work and Pensions has started to build a network of disability advocates. This network can help to influence the attitudes and mindset of a wider employer base, regarding the benefits that can be realised by giving more people with disabilities an opportunity to show their professional talent.

Employer engagement is also one of the core themes of the ‘Strategic Framework for Disabled People and Employment’, a ten year strategy that has been launched by the National Disability Authority in the Republic of Ireland.

Through the Northern Ireland strategy, a comparative study will be undertaken to determine how effective the Disability Confident campaign has been in Great Britain and any future development plans they have. Through the close relationships that exist between the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment, the Irish Association of Supported Employment, and the National Disability Authority, there will be invaluable shared learning, North and South, that can inform the most effective actions to take forward with the employer base throughout Ireland.

The collaboration with Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland will provide valuable shared learning and examples of best practice and success that will help shape and influence future policy, operations and interventions.

Listed below are some activities which have been identified as good practice elsewhere, as well as some of the suggestions arising from the consultation process:

- major seminar type events for employers and employer representative groups to raise awareness and create better and closer networks;
- small local events, aimed at specific employment sectors, or designed to promote employment for people with particular disabilities;
- a one stop portal and helpdesk facility for employers relating to disability employment related issues or queries;
- a publicity / marketing campaign for in-work support programmes that the Department and the disability organisations can deliver to help new and existing employees; and
- the identification of senior business leaders or renowned disability advocates – to promote, lead by example and be the public face of the employers’ campaign.

## Recruitment and Selection

The Department has worked with a small number of employers in recent years to advise and facilitate the inclusion of disabled clients during major recruitment exercises.

A successful model is beginning to emerge and this strategy will enable those involved to build upon these competitions and hopefully establish the model as a mainstream service offering to employers. The key features include:

- early engagement with the employer to let them know what support is available both during and after the recruitment process;
- a planned pre-recruitment stage to help potential applicants prepare;
- information sessions from the employer;
- possible pre-selection of candidates by the respective disability support organisations;
- training on enhanced or disability friendly interview techniques or other selection methods;
- appropriate reasonable adjustments being accommodated for those clients who need them;
- briefing for the panel members; and
- feedback mechanisms for disabled candidates, whether they are successful or not.

Support at this key stage of employment selection is very important to employers, especially for those who want to provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities but who are uncertain about what their responsibilities are, what adjustments can be made and what cost they may have to incur in order to put these in place.

The Department, working with Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment and many of its member organisations, has helped employers across a range of sectors to address all of these concerns, as well as providing the practical and financial support necessary to make the recruitment process run as smoothly as possible.

The employers who have engaged with the Department and the disability sector in this recruitment process, have been very impressed with the calibre of the clients, in terms of their ability, preparation and attitude to the recruitment process. This has proven to be beneficial as it is helping to raise employers' awareness and address some of the prejudice and stigma issues referred to earlier.

The ultimate success however has been the fact that a number of the disabled applicants are now employed in a range of job roles with these employers and are performing to a very high standard. It clearly demonstrates that real and practical employer engagement works and that it ties in closely with other aspects of this strategy, most notably, the pre-employment and in-work elements of the supported employment model.

The following case study illustrates how the disability recruitment model has worked in practice:

### **Case Study – Premier Inns**

Premier Inns Hotel chain intended to open a new hotel in the North West. The Cluster General Manager for this region contacted the Department for assistance with the recruitment process. Disability Employment Service staff were notified of this, and met with the Premier Inns Manager to request that she consider proposals that would enable people with disabilities to apply for the range of posts on offer.

Having indicated her openness to this proposal, Disability Employment Service immediately notified the local disability sector organisations via the umbrella organisation, NI Union of Supported Employment. Job descriptions were provided and this enabled the respective organisations to identify clients, being supported through their own employment programmes, who would be most suitable and capable for the job roles.

A meeting was then arranged between Disability Employment Service, representatives from the disability organisations and the Cluster General Manager from Premier Inns. At this meeting, the following proposals were agreed:

- a week of pre-employment training would be organised for all those disabled clients who were deemed suitable for the respective job roles that Premier Inns were advertising;
- the programme would require minor input from the employer but was mainly delivered by the disability sector employment teams and staff from the Department;
- a set time for ring-fenced interviews would be offered by Premier Inns;
- reasonable adjustments such as extra time, allowing a support worker or interpreter to accompany the applicant, phrasing of questions would be facilitated by the Premier Inns interview panels; and
- actual supports, such as the provision of support workers or interpreters, assistance with travel to and from the interview, and additional interview preparation would be provided by the respective disability organisation, and where funding was required, through the Access to Work (NI) programme.

Following on from this, the interview schedule was communicated and detailed preparations were made.

In total, 15 disabled applicants attended interviews for a number of posts in the catering, housekeeping, cleaning and administrative/receptionist areas. Two applicants were successful and commenced work with Premier Inns. The other candidates received feedback to say that they had performed very well and were encouraged to keep job searching.

This model has been proven to work for a number of employers from different sectors, and it is something that the Department, along with its disability sector partners, is keen to develop into a mainstream service offer during the first year of the new strategy.

### **Supporting Employers to Manage People with Disabilities**

Some employers have concerns about the ongoing support needs they are required to put in place for disabled employees and are apprehensive about the day to day management of staff who have a long term health / disability condition that meets the disability definition.

This is not the reality, as people with disabilities want to do their job to the highest possible standard. They are committed and loyal to their employer and, while they may require reasonable adjustments and some additional in-work support to address their disability related employment needs, there is good advice and practical support available to the employer.

Putting in place appropriate reasonable adjustments is a key aspect of helping an employer to provide an equal and fair work environment, without incurring any significant costs. The Department, along with its disability partners, Employers for Disability and the Equality Commission, will help more employers understand this and to know what 'reasonable' means in this context. It will also provide an opportunity for many employers, especially the small to medium size private sector employer base, to put in place proper policies and procedures to address the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

## Theme Three – Working with Employers

***To encourage and influence employers to take positive action and promote equality for disabled people when creating job opportunities, recruiting, selecting, managing and developing staff.***

### *Proposals that will build upon and improve current practice*

- work with the Equality Commission and other relevant bodies to develop a clear understanding on what an employer is entitled or required to do in relation to taking positive action for people with disabilities.

### *Proposals that will introduce something new*

- develop a best practice recruitment support model with the disability sector that will be available to any employer who wishes to offer employment or work placement opportunities to people with a disability;
- organise and facilitate major Employer Events to promote and facilitate the employment of people with disabilities;
- organise and facilitate local or sector specific employer events;
- establish a network of Disability Advocates and Role Models who can help influence the attitudes and actions of employers towards the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities;
- design and implement a disability employment advisory service for employers via a range of channels, including a website, telephone and SMS text help-desk facility; and
- work in partnership with the disability sector and others to address the specific issue of ‘stigma’ with employers and employer representative groups.

#### **4.4 Theme Four – Research and Development**

One of the key aims of this strategy is to ensure that Northern Ireland will be regarded as an example of international best practice on policy development and operational delivery of employment and skills provision for people with disabilities.

The collaboration between all of the key stakeholders will provide the opportunity to maximise the skills, employment and economic achievements for the client group. The strategy also provides the opportunity and incentive to look beyond the views of those who have direct responsibility for the development and implementation of the strategy itself.

Intelligent and targeted research projects can capture information and data from a range of sources and provide an evidence base and clear justification for new or different approaches to the supports or interventions that will help more people with disabilities move into and sustain employment.

This Theme therefore aims:

***To ensure that Northern Ireland is leading the way on research into employment issues and attainment for people with disabilities, at local, national and International level.***

The Department has a dedicated Analytical Services team that will support this strategy through expertise in statistical analysis and presentation of relevant information. In addition, they can support the commissioning of independent research projects. The Disability Employment Service has also been involved in some collaborative research work with local universities, and organisations such as Macmillan Cancer Support during the past number of years.

It is anticipated that there could be one research or evaluation project per year during the lifetime of the Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, and the outcome of each will provide much needed information and feedback that may help the Department to develop and test new interventions and services as appropriate.

The Department has also built up close working relationships with officials in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland who are taking forward their own respective strategies to improve the employment prospects and achievements of people with disabilities.

The Department and its key strategic partners will maintain these relationships and keep informed on any research that is being conducted elsewhere. It will explore opportunities for any cross-border research projects that could be of mutual advantage to both strategies, North and South.

The underlying commitment within this theme is to be proactive in identifying research projects that arise from national or international reports, the analysis of existing data, or from the discussions generated through the ongoing engagement at all levels.

The consultation feedback suggested a number of possible areas to consider, in relation to research or information gathering and analysis.

## **Theme Four – Summary and Proposed Actions**

***To ensure that Northern Ireland is leading the way in terms of research, development and innovation on disability skills and employment issues at local, national and international level.***

### *Proposals that will introduce something new*

- commission at least one research or evaluation project per annum that will provide additional and relevant information on disability employment issues;
- publish and publicise all disability research reports on the Department's website and other forums to ensure that people with disabilities and other key stakeholders have access to the data, including key findings and recommendations; and
- the Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum will consider the information arising from research and evaluation projects to inform discussion and decision-making on future policy, strategy and operations, in relation to disability employment services.

## **4.5 Theme Five – Strategic Partnership and Engagement**

Disability organisations and various disability user groups have been consistent in their call for meaningful and timely consultation and engagement, in relation to public policy and service delivery for people with disabilities, including those pertaining to employment.

The Department and the Disability Employment Service is not exempt from this criticism, although, there has been an increased level of engagement over the past number of years and the establishment of the Strategic Working Group that has informed this strategy, is a clear example of this move towards improved partnership working.

The organisation and facilitation of the pre-consultation engagement events helped the Group to develop the draft strategy document that was then issued for a more formal public consultation.

The Department, working with its partners on the Strategic Working Group, have engaged and consulted with a large number of interested stakeholders during the past two years, and most especially, people with a full range of disabilities.

Based on the overwhelming feedback from the public consultation exercise, there is more to be done in this area, however, there has been a recognition of the efforts made thus far, the direction of travel in this regard, and an acceptance that the development and implementation of this strategy can help achieve the following:

***To develop a framework that will ensure continuous and meaningful engagement between all of the key stakeholders, including people with disabilities.***

### **Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum**

The establishment of a new Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum will be implemented during Year One of the strategy.

It is proposed that the membership will consist of relevant senior officials from a number of NI Executive Departments to ensure that there is cross-departmental commitment and input into this important strategy. To reiterate the reference from the Executive's disability strategy, and the specific theme on, 'Employment and Employability', the strategy states that,

*'employment and employability are issues which require a number of government departments to work together to support people with disabilities to gain and retain employment'.*

This will also help to ensure that there is strategic alignment with other initiatives and strategies, being led by other departments, and aimed at people with disabilities.

By including senior representatives from the various government departments, including Health, Economy, Education and Communities, it will give the Stakeholder Forum direct access to a wide range of knowledge and expertise, and in turn, this will ensure that the needs of people with significant disabilities are fully understood by all of the key policy officials and their respective operational colleagues.

It will be important to include at least one employer or employer representative on the Forum, as well as key people from the local disability sector. The consultation process made it very clear that there must be **appropriate and sufficient** representation on the Employment Stakeholder Forum for people who have a disability. This will be necessary to ensure that the Forum has credibility with, and direct input from the people that the strategy is specifically targeted at. Any such members of the Forum who have a disability will be supported as appropriate, to ensure that they can play a full and active part in this important group.

The Forum will have a central monitoring role to ensure that the 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' is delivering against each of the Themes and associated Action plan. Through its membership and collective influence, it is envisaged that it will make a real impact on the way in which disability employment strategy and policy is developed, and how future services are delivered.

### **Future communication and engagement**

The need for ongoing engagement with disabled people has been another consistent theme throughout the development of the strategy, and was reinforced by the consultation response. The Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum can help inform how best to maintain this contact and communication, with one suggestion being that more local and regular engagement may be a preferred approach.

A number of active and representative 'user groups' already exist across the disability sector. Therefore, it would seem logical that there should be a clear communication line between members of the Strategic Stakeholder Forum and each of these specific disability groups, based throughout Northern Ireland.

One of the key aims of this strategy is to have a much more integrated and connected service. This is especially the case for those going through the pathway to employment journey, including those exiting education or skills training courses, those receiving careers advice or availing of other employment related services. There is also a need to engage with Health Professionals to establish closer links and working relationships that can help create a natural pathway from vocational rehabilitation services into the more employment focussed offer for those who are ready and suitable.

The Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum can influence how connected people with disabilities feel to the strategy through the proposed communication and engagement activities. Ultimately, like the strategy itself, the success or otherwise of the Forum may be determined by tangible outcomes, primarily evidenced by an increase in the number of disabled people who move into paid employment and achieve positive career progression over the duration of the strategy.

**Theme Five – Strategic Partnership and Engagement**

*To develop a framework that will ensure continuous and meaningful engagement and collaboration between all of the key stakeholders, including people with disabilities.*

*Proposals that will build upon and improve current practice*

- make a formal commitment to ongoing communication and engagement with those in the community who are disabled but want to work or are supporting those with a significant disability towards and into employment.

*Proposals that will introduce something new*

- establish a new cross-departmental Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum that will monitor the implementation and achievements of the new strategy, and provide assurance on the alignment of the NI Executive disability strategies;
- ensure that the membership of this new Forum is fully inclusive of those who have a direct impact and influence on the employment prospects for people with disabilities; and
- ensure that people with disabilities and representatives from the local disability sector are fully represented on the Forum.

The Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities presents a tremendous opportunity for the government departments, working with a range of key partners, to maximise the potential impact of existing public services for people with disabilities, be they in health, education, vocational training, or employment preparation and retention.

Through its key themes and subsequent proposals, it can help create a more cohesive and clear pathway to employment that will give disabled people a much greater chance to realise his/her employment and career goals. It also provides options for short, medium and long term in-work support options, tailored to the needs of the individual and his/her employer.

Looking ahead to the forthcoming departmental restructure, this provides a unique opportunity for the Executive departments to demonstrate real leadership through a positive cross-departmental approach to the implementation of this strategy.

Through better partnership working, better planning and co-ordination of existing services, and a determination to enable this client group to achieve their full economic potential, the Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities can make a major contribution to the NI Executive's overarching disability strategy.

### Implementation

The Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities is a five year strategy which will run until March 2021. The Disability Employment Service will have a clear lead responsibility for the implementation of the strategy. However, as the strategy progresses, there will be scope for the Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum to influence the various initiatives, actions and direction of the strategy.

The implementation of the strategy will be delivered through an annual action plan. The first year's action plan has been established by the Disability Employment Service, and agreed with members of the Strategic Working Group. The action plan for Year One is attached at **Annex F**.

For each subsequent year, the action plan will be developed by the Disability Employment Service and then shared with the membership of the Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum for consultation and agreement. This will enable direct input into the annual action planning process for people with disabilities, those who work on their behalf, as well as other key individuals from different government departments, and those representing the interests and views of employers.

## **ANNEX A**

### **UNCRPD Article 27 - Work and Employment**

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation, to, inter alia:
  - (a) Prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability with regard to all matters concerning all forms of employment, including conditions of recruitment, hiring and employment, continuance of employment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions;
  - (b) Protect the rights of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to just and favourable conditions of work, 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;
  - (c) Ensure that persons with disabilities are able to exercise their labour and trade union rights on an equal basis with others;
  - (d) Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training;
  - (e) Promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the labour market, as well as assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment;
  - (f) Promote opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship, the development of cooperatives and starting one's own business;
  - (g) Employ persons with disabilities in the public sector;

- (h) Promote the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector through appropriate policies and measures, which may include affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures;
- (i) Ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities in the workplace;
- (j) Promote the acquisition by persons with disabilities of work experience in the open labour market; and
- (k) Promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes for persons with disabilities.

## ANNEX B Strategic Working Group

**Terry Park** Head of the Disability Employment Service,  
Department for Employment and Learning

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**Liam Burns** Mencap

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**Gillian Clifford** Action on Hearing Loss

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**Edyth Dunlop** NI Union of Supported Employment

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**Ann Osborne** NOW

---

**Margaret Haddock** The Orchardville Society

---

**Arthur Savage** Ulster Supported Employment Ltd

---

**Laura McCartney** Disability Action

---

**Marcel Dummigan** Irish Congress of Trade Unions

---

**Wilfred Mitchell** Parkanaur Training College

---

**Kieran Molloy** The Cedar Foundation

---

**Billy Murphy** NI Association for Mental Health

---

**Peter Shields** Action Mental Health

---

**Myrtle Black** Disability Employment Service

---

**Vincent Donnelly** Disability Employment Service

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**Mark O'Hara** Disability Employment Service

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**Marina Smyth** Disability Employment Service

*Note:*

*A number of other delegates from the organisations above played an important role in the development of the strategy, and were then replaced by colleagues during this period.*

## **ANNEX C**

### **The Supported Employment Model**

At its heart this model has the notion that anyone can be employed if they want paid employment and sufficient support is provided. The model is a flexible and continuous process, designed to meet all anticipated needs. The European Union of Supported Employment has produced position papers and guides to the supported employment model, and has provided the following definition:

- **Providing support to people with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups to secure and maintain paid employment in the open labour market.**

The ethos of supported employment services is the development and integration of adequate mechanisms to secure long term sustainable employment.

#### **Customer Engagement**

Disabled people leave education every year with the hope of finding employment. In the past, professionals and families have had low expectations of people with disabilities finding sustainable work. It is important, therefore, that expectations of employment are raised.

#### **Vocational Profiling**

This is a “getting to know you” process where we identify the aspirations, learning needs, individual skills, former experiences and job preferences of the participant. The profile informs the practical job finding and makes it more likely that we find a high quality job match.

#### **Employer Engagement**

The third crucial element is the job brokerage process. This close engagement with employers helps them to overcome traditional recruitment and selection barriers.

Generally, the aim is to secure ‘employment and training’ rather than ‘training then employment’. This means that a participant gets a job from the beginning. By doing this we overcome the “job readiness” barrier where people can get stuck in permanent training. It also increases people’s motivation significantly because they see from the beginning that they are employed.

## **Job Matching**

Once the employer commitment is secured, a job analysis is usually undertaken. This examines out any assumptions made in the job description and thoroughly investigates the job on offer, including the work environment, health and safety etc. The job analysis might point towards ways of carving together parts of job descriptions that suit the worker's talents, or creating new job descriptions that suit the worker and are cost effective for the employer.

## **In-work Support**

The job analysis and profile ensure that support is properly considered and appropriate. Support is individually tailored and targeted where it is needed most ensuring a cost effective use of resources. It is important to offer appropriate levels of support and encourage the involvement of the employer and co-workers.

## **Career Development**

Not many people stay in the same job for the whole of their working lives. People with disabilities are no different in having to adapt to changing labour markets and wanting to improve their working lives. Supported employment should encourage the career development of individuals by promoting training opportunities and seeking options for increased responsibility.

## **ANNEX D**

### **European Social Fund Disability Projects**

Through the European Social Fund, 25 disability projects have commenced in 2015, and these will deliver a range of employability and vocational skills training, as well as dedicated pre-employment and in-work support services to people with a range of quite significant disability related barriers to employment.

The projects will be in place through to 2018 as a minimum, and it is envisaged that these projects will make a major contribution to the achievement of the Strategic Purpose and Objective.

The majority of these projects, through their specialist employment teams, deliver the Supported Employment Model, as well as specialist training in a secure, supportive learning environment for disabled participants.

Below is a summary of the Disability Projects to be funded over the next three years:

#### **Number of Disability Projects – 25**

Of these, approximately 50% are targeted at people with a learning disability/difficulty or those on the autistic spectrum. Others are aimed specifically at those with sensory disabilities, mental ill-health or acquired brain injury, whilst a number are offered on a pan-disability basis.

#### **Project Outcomes**

These include the following:

- attainment of self-confidence, greater independence, motivation, self-awareness, improved employability;
- employability skills, vocational skills, jobsearch skills;
- accredited qualifications at Entry Level, Level 1, 2 and 3;
- progression on to further education, other government training and employment programmes and higher education;
- work experience, work placements and voluntary work;
- supported employment; and
- paid employment, both part-time and full-time in the open labour market.

On this final and critical outcome, the European Social Fund projects have a target of approximately 750 people with significant disability related barriers moving into paid employment over the next three years.

This figure will be incorporated into annual projections and employment targets within this strategy.

## ANNEX E

### Action Plan – Year One (April 2016 – March 2017)

#### Theme One – Empowering and supporting people to secure paid employment

**OBJECTIVE:**

**To develop and implement a Disability Service that will enable young people and adults with a disability to make a successful transition into paid employment, including self-employment.**

Action	Target date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Through the official launch of the Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, the Department will formally adopt the model of Supported Employment for people with significant disabilities.</li></ul>	<b>March 2016</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In partnership with the disability sector, establish a referral and employment support offer for suitable students attending the Discrete Learning Units in all of the Further Education college areas throughout Northern Ireland.</li></ul>	<b>September 2016</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish accurate year one baseline figures for the number of disabled people who are in paid employment.</li></ul>	<b>March 2017</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pilot the offer of Access to Work (NI) support to disabled people on a work placement that will last more than 3 months, and where a job offer is a real possibility.</li></ul>	<b>March 2017</b>

## ANNEX E

### Action Plan – Year One (April 2016 – March 2017)

#### Theme Two – Job retention and career development

**OBJECTIVE:**

**To work with employers and disabled employees to support job retention and promote opportunities for progression, personal development, promotion and career enhancement.**

Action	Target date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make the Condition Management Programme available to disabled people, who are in employment, and being supported through specialist disability provision.</li></ul>	<b>July 2016</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduce a new element to the Workable (NI) and Access to Work (NI) formal 'review' process, ensuring that there is a specific focus on personal development opportunities and career progression, as appropriate.</li></ul>	<b>September 2016</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Open access to the new Workable (NI) programme, so that people with a disability, who are working ten hours or more per week in a paid job role, can receive specialist disability support, if this is deemed necessary.</li></ul>	<b>September 2016</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Initiate campaign to promote and advertise the disability programmes and services that are assisting people to retain and progress within paid employment.</li></ul>	<b>December 2016</b>

## ANNEX E

### Action Plan – Year One (April 2016 – March 2017)

#### Theme Three – Working with employers

**OBJECTIVE:**

**To encourage and influence employers to take positive action and promote equality for disabled people when creating job opportunities, recruiting, selecting, managing and developing staff.**

Action	Target date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work with NIUSE and the sector to develop a best practice recruitment / selection support model that will be available to any employer who wishes to offer employment or work placement opportunities to people with a disability.</li></ul>	<b>November 2016</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify a number of Disability Advocates and Role Models who can help influence the attitudes and actions of employers.</li></ul>	<b>December 2016</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Target at least three employers, to secure ring-fenced employment or quality work placement opportunities for people with significant disability related barriers.</li></ul>	<b>March 2017</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Organise and facilitate a number of local or sector specific employer events.</li></ul>	<b>January 2017</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Organise first major Employer Event.</li></ul>	<b>March 2017</b>

## ANNEX E

### Action Plan – Year One (April 2016 – March 2017)

#### Theme Four – Research and development

**OBJECTIVE:**

**To ensure that Northern Ireland is leading the way in terms of research, development and innovation on disability skills and employment issues at local, national and international level.**

Action	Target date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collate existing data and information to identify research priorities for the strategy.</li></ul>	<b>December 2016</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commission first research or evaluation project that will provide additional and relevant information on disability employment issues.</li></ul>	<b>March 2017</b>

## ANNEX E

### Action Plan – Year One (April 2016 – March 2017)

#### Theme Five – Strategic partnership and engagement

**OBJECTIVE:**

**To develop a framework that will ensure continuous and meaningful engagement and collaboration between all of the key stakeholders, including people with disabilities.**

Action	Target date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Establish clear Terms of reference and a clear line of authority for the new cross-departmental Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum.</li></ul>	<b>July 2016</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Appoint Forum members, ensuring that people with disabilities and representatives from the local disability sector are fully represented on the Forum.</li></ul>	<b>September 2016</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Convene inaugural meeting of the new Stakeholder Forum.</li></ul>	<b>October 2016</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Develop communication mechanism for wider disability sector and community.</li></ul>	<b>November 2016</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Stakeholder Forum to review the Year One Action Plan and will approve the Action Plan for Year Two.</li></ul>	<b>March 2017</b>



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This document is available in other formats upon request.



**INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE**

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