



Department for
**Employment
and Learning**
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TO SUCCEED

Employment for People with Disabilities

Consultation on a Strategy for
**‘improving the job prospects
and working careers of
people with disabilities in
Northern Ireland’**

October 2015

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Foreword

Helping and supporting people with disabilities to achieve their full potential in life is a duty and responsibility for all government departments and other actors in civil society. The Department for Employment and Learning can be pivotal in this regard.

It is for this reason that I have fully supported the Disability Employment Service and its key partners from local disability and other stakeholder organisations, as they have worked on the development of this strategy over the past two years. In doing so, they have strengthened the working relationship between my department and this extremely important sector, and the Strategic Working Group is a very positive example of how true partnership working does exist.



This strategy, and the current proposals therein, is focused on supporting those people with the most significant disability related barriers to work, and that despite this, the key objectives are about helping this very group to achieve real paid employment outcomes. The strategy is making a clear statement of intent in sending a message to society that people with disabilities, no matter what they might be, share the same ambitions and aspirations as everyone else, and provided they are given the right support, advice and assistance, they are capable of realising their full economic and career potential.

The strategy aims to build on existing disability services, delivered through mainstream and community and voluntary sector programmes, however, it also contains a number of proposals that will improve partnership working at all levels, that will introduce new services to individuals and will engage and educate employers in a much more meaningful manner.

I therefore invite views, opinions and ideas on the consultation document, so that the 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities', when implemented, will make a real difference to the lives and working careers of people with a full range of disabilities.

DR STEPHEN FARRY
Minister for Employment and Learning

1. Executive Summary

Introduction

The Department for Employment and Learning is fully committed to helping and supporting people to overcome a wide range of barriers in their pursuit of their employment goals. This strategy focuses on some of the greatest challenges faced by many individuals, groups and stakeholders in this area; helping people with disabilities to achieve and retain suitable paid employment in the open labour market.

The 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' contains proposals that will help the Department, working in partnership with others, to address the difficulties and inequalities that people with significant disabilities are attempting to overcome.

The Department also provides dedicated and enhanced support to enable people with disabilities to access educational and skills programmes and services. Additional support has been woven through a range of existing Departmental strategies and policies.

Current Employment Support

The Department 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**
- **Work Connect**
- **Occupational Psychology services**
- **Job Introduction Scheme**
- **Residential Training**

Employment Service

Across its network of 35 Jobs and Benefits and JobCentre offices, Employment Service Advisers also work with people with disabilities to assist them retain or find employment.

European Social Fund Projects

With financial support provided through the Department's European Social Fund, local disability organisations throughout Northern Ireland are delivering quality training, employment and employability services to hundreds of disabled people each year. The method of delivery, adopted by many of these specialist projects, is the Supported Employment Model, and it is proposed that this model will be implemented on a wider scale through this new employment strategy.

It is evident that the Department, in conjunction with others, is already doing much to help and support people with disabilities. The need for a dedicated strategy however, is based on the fact that a critical gap remains in relation to how disability services link with each other, and specifically at key transition points between education and/or skills training, and the critical stage of active job search. There is a need for additional specialist support for people with disabilities to help them prepare for and move into employment, or for those already in work, who want to develop their career so that they can fulfil their full potential.

This Strategy aims to address the gap that exists and will build upon and improve what the Department and others currently deliver for people with disabilities. The Strategy will also establish appropriate measures and targets, and performance against these will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that results and outcomes are being achieved for people with significant disability related barriers to work.

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 2012, 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'. Those who participated on the Strategic Working Group are listed at **Annex A**.

The strategy has also been informed by a number of positive engagement events, targeted primarily at people with disabilities but also including support workers, community and voluntary sector organisations, and employers, (**see Section 2**).

The Target Client Group for the 'Strategy'

The 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' will target and support people who have significant disability related barriers to employment. People with significant disabilities feel excluded from many employment opportunities that others take for granted. The aim of this strategy is, therefore, to provide comprehensive and tailored disability employment services which will lead to greater access to, and participation in a range of pre-employment support 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.

While the strategy and subsequent implementation plan will support people of all age groups, there will be a particular focus on young people. The intention is to prevent 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 is to adopt the principles of and implement the Supported Employment model on a wider scale throughout Northern Ireland. This has been used successfully, both locally, through the European Social Fund projects and programmes such as Workable, as well as in a number of other countries. The model provides high quality, personalised, and often long term support to people with significant disabilities to secure, maintain and progress in paid employment.

In order to deliver a Supported Employment service to more disabled people, the strategy, and those charged with the responsibility for its success, will require additional resource. Therefore, a number of Supported Employment Officers have been recruited in advance of the strategy launch. The additional staff are employees of Disability Action funded through the Department's European Social Fund, with match funding provided by the Disability Employment Service. The new service has been fully endorsed by the Strategic Working Group and is being delivered with direct input of the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment (NIUSE). The new staff will be required to work very closely and in collaboration with staff from the Department's Careers Service, as well as its front-line and specialist staff from the Employment Service.

The Supported Employment Officers will also complement the service being delivered by many of the local disability organisations throughout Northern Ireland, and these organisations will remain key partners and delivery agents for all aspects of the new 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities'.

Employers

The Department and others can develop and deliver the best pre-employment services and programmes available, however, unless there are real jobs and employment opportunities to help people prepare for and attain, there will be little benefit or outcomes to be gained.

The strategy therefore has a particular focus on working with employers, to make them aware of the support that is available for new or existing disabled employees, to reassure them in relation to legal requirements and legislation, and to convince them of the benefits that employing people with disabilities will bring to their organisation, including their bottom line.

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 Strategic Working Group identified five key themes for the strategy, with a number of supporting proposals within each theme.

Theme 1 – 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 1 – SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO SECURE PAID EMPLOYMENT

To develop and implement a Disability Service that will help 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

- flexibilities and enhancements within existing programmes and services that would support disabled people in work placements or employment;
- development of the working partnership arrangements between the Department and the local disability sector, across all relevant business areas, including Careers Service, Further and Higher Education, Youth Training, Apprenticeships and the Employment Service.

Proposals that will introduce something new

- an additional cohort of Supported Employment Officers;
- formally adopting the model of Supported Employment for people with significant disabilities seeking to find and retain paid employment;
- implementation of a new 'Pathway to Employment', including a clear sign posting and referral service for all people with significant disability related barriers;
- development of robust 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;
- establishment of annual targets for the number of disabled people who move into paid employment, including self-employment.

Theme 2 – 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

- undertaking 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;
- considering flexibilities within existing programmes and services that would support disabled people in part-time employment;
- developing and promoting examples of good practice in employing and developing disabled people across all sectors, including the public sector.

Proposals that will introduce something new

- introduction of 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;
- working 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.

Theme 3 – 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

- working 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;
- developing stronger links between the disability sector, through the NI Union of Supported Employment, and the employer work that the Department and InvestNI lead on, including Job Fairs and recruitment events;
- maximising the benefits to people with significant disability related barriers through appropriate use of 'social clauses' with employers.

Proposals that will introduce something new

- developing a Best Practice recruitment support model with the Disability Sector that will be available to any employer who wishes to offer people with a disability employment or work placement opportunities;
- organising and facilitating a major annual Employers Event / Employers' Seminar to promote and facilitate the employment of people with disabilities;

- establishing a network of Disability Advocates who can help influence the attitudes and actions of employers towards the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities;
- identifying a senior business leader to promote, lead by example and be the public face of this issue for employers;
- designing and implementing a Disability Employment one-stop-shop service for employers via a single interactive website and telephone help-desk facility.

Theme 4 – 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

- commissioning at least one major research project per annum that will provide additional and relevant information on disability employment issues;
- publishing and publicising all disability research reports on the Department's website and other forums to ensure that all of the key stakeholders have access to the data, including key findings, analysis and recommendations;
- using the information to inform discussion and decision-making on future policy, strategy and operations affecting people with a disability who are not suited to, or ready for, mainstream employment provision;
- conducting a cost-savings evaluation to demonstrate the long term financial savings that will be achieved through the implementation of a strategy that focuses on supporting people with significant disabilities into sustained employment.

Theme 5 – STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

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

Proposals that will build upon and improve current practice

- committing 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

- establishing a new Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum, the membership of which needs to be fully inclusive of those who have a direct impact and influence on the employment prospects for people with disabilities.

2. The Consultation Process

The Department has long and well established relationships with the disability sector throughout Northern Ireland. It was a logical decision therefore to establish a Strategic Working Group, consisting of key personnel from many of the leading disability organisations, along with officials from the Disability Employment Service, in order to take forward the development of a new disability strategy.

Conscious that this strategy addresses barriers preventing people accessing the world of work, the Department was keen to have an employee voice represented and therefore also invited the umbrella organisation representing trade unions, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, to nominate a representative to join the group.

The Department recognises the major contribution that disability organisations make and the role they will play in helping to address all of the key priorities outlined above. A number of the disability organisations involved in the development of this strategy provide vocational and employability training courses, as well as pre-employment and in-work support programmes.

The Department, through the Strategic Working group, has engaged directly with people who have a disability, as part of the pre-consultation process. Many disabled people avail of existing departmental support services. The objective, however, of the engagement was to maximise the number of people who know about the services available, or who can inform both the statutory and non-statutory organisations about what is missing and what could be improved upon, to help them achieve their employment goals in life.

Five large regional engagement events were held, involving people with a disability who have in the past or are currently using disability employment and training services, and those people with disabilities who have not or do not use these services. There were also three smaller meetings, organised for specific disability groups, due to the nature of their disability. In total, more than 300 people, most of whom had a disability, attended these events.

In addition, a separate event, targeted at employers, was organised, to understand the issues when recruiting and supporting people with a disability. One of the most common issues raised was the lack of awareness of what already exists by way of disability support to both the employer and their employees.

An outline programme used for each of the engagement events, and a summary of the findings is published on the Department's website and can be accessed via the following link.

www.delni.gov.uk/employment-and-skills-strategy-for-people-with-disabilities-consultation

A hard copy is also available and can be requested by contacting the Disability Employment Service, contact details:

Email: des@delni.gov.uk

Post:

**Disability Employment Service
2nd Floor, Gloucester House
57-63 Chichester Street
Belfast
BT1 4RA**

Telephone Contact: Marina Smyth (028 90252085)

Next Steps

This consultation document is intended to provide a broad understanding of the context and rationale for the development of an employment strategy for those people who have significant disability related barriers to work, but who, with the right level of tailored and flexible support, could move into, remain and progress within paid employment.

During the public consultation period, further engagement events will be organised. Details of these events will be available on the Department's corporate website.

The Public Consultation Process

A number of questions have been posed throughout the document, the majority of which pertain to the proposals aligned to the five themes in Section 5. The Department invites opinions on these, as well as alternative ideas and suggestions to address the employment related needs of this client group. For ease of reference, the full set of consultation questions are listed at **Annex B**.

For each of the consultation questions posed, you are invited to provide additional comments, and to offer any final comments or contributions at question 17.

The consultation is available on the Department's website:

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/consultation-zone>

It will run for eight weeks from 29 September 2015. An online response document can also be accessed on the website.

If a printed version of the consultation or response document is required, please contact Marina Smyth to request a copy (contact details below). Requests for these documents in alternative formats or languages will also be made available.

All responses not submitted electronically via the online response document on the website must be made in writing and be attributable so there is an objective record of the views expressed. Your name, address and organisation name, if appropriate, should be clearly stated.

The responses to the consultation must be received **no later than 5pm on Friday 27th November.**

**Consultation responses should be emailed to:
des@delni.gov.uk**

**Alternatively, please post to:
Disability Employment Service
2nd Floor, Gloucester House
57-63 Chichester Street
Belfast
BT1 4RA**

Contact: Marina Smyth (028 90252085)

Responses by telephone cannot be accepted.

Freedom of Information

The Department will publish a summary of the responses following the conclusion of the public consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed upon request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please consider the information below regarding confidentiality of consultations and guidance on the legal position regarding any information given by you in response to this consultation. The Department will handle any personal data you provide appropriately and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

The Freedom of Information Act gives the public the right to access any information held by a public authority, namely the Department for Employment and Learning in this case. The right of access to information includes information provided in response to a public consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential, any information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, the Department does have a responsibility to decide whether any information about your identity should be made public or treated as confidential.

3. Strategic Context

A strategic review of the Disability Employment Service was commissioned in 2012 because of the need to reflect what was working well for people with disabilities who require help and support and what areas need to be improved and enhanced. The outcomes of the review will inform the future role, responsibility and position of the Disability Employment Service.

Related Strategies and Initiatives

The development of the strategy comes at a time when other relevant and related strategies and commitments are in progress. The following provides a brief overview to illustrate the range of activity that is currently underway, to support people with health, disability and other barriers to education, training and employment.

- **Enabling Success**

The Department, in partnership with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), has developed a strategy, aimed at tackling the major societal problem of Economic Inactivity. This was agreed by the Executive in April 2015.

Enabling Success seeks, through a range of tailored projects and solutions, to help three large economically inactive groups:

- individuals with work-limiting health conditions or disabilities;
- lone parents;
- individuals with caring commitments.

It is a long-term strategy, which is reflected in the overall strategic goal – 'to contribute towards a stable and competitive employment rate of over 70% by 2030 through a reduction in the proportion of the working age population classified as economically inactive'.

- **Youth Training Strategy**

The outcome of the Department's review of youth training and its final policy position, was the publication of 'Generating our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Youth Training' on 30th June 2015. This strategy identified the forthcoming 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' as a key strategic initiative in supporting the new youth training system. Working together, these two strategies now present an opportunity to establish a collaborative and cohesive approach to creating a pathway that supports progression into sustained employment for young people, including those with significant disability related barriers.

- **Apprenticeship Strategy**

A new NI Strategy on Apprenticeships (Securing Our Success) was published in June 2014. Implementation of the strategy will deliver a step-change to the system of apprenticeships providing a huge opportunity to facilitate economic and social progress, raising the skills levels at which apprenticeships are offered, extending them into a wider range of occupational areas and facilitating progression into further and higher education.

Measures will be put in place to ensure that the two main beneficiaries of apprenticeships, employers and apprentices, are adequately supported to engage and participate. The strategy recognises the importance that the 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' will play in addressing barriers to participation for those with a disability with the aim of opening up apprenticeship opportunities.

- **Further Education Strategy**

The Department invests a lot of financial and other support to ensure that people with disabilities have access to the six Further Education (FE) colleges, based throughout Northern Ireland. In recent years, this investment has increased, notwithstanding the financial pressures on budgets, and there has also been a greater strategic alignment between the educational provision and the employability development of the disabled student journey towards work.

A pilot with three of the FE College Discrete Learning Units resulted in more than forty students with a learning disability or autism moving into paid employment, and it is envisaged that the introduction of the new Supported Employment officers would enable a full geographical roll-out of this partnership.

Students on mainstream and discrete learning courses can avail of additional support, funded through the Department's Additional Support Fund.

Additional Support Fund allows colleges to provide students with technical assistance; e.g. specialist software and personal assistance e.g. interpreters, as well as facilitating the delivery of smaller classes with dedicated support staff for students who cannot participate in mainstream provision, primarily those students with learning disabilities or difficulties.

A new draft Further Education strategy is currently out for public consultation.

- **Higher Education**

The Department has a number of initiatives in place to ensure that people with disabilities and learning difficulties receive appropriate support when they transfer to higher education.

Disabled Students' Allowances

Disabled Student Allowances can be awarded to students who have a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty which affects their ability to study. The allowances help students with the extra costs they may incur while studying their course as a direct result of their disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty.

In financial year 2014/15 the Department provided Disabled Student Allowances to almost 2,000 full-time and part-time undergraduates and post graduates.

The Disability Employment Service and local disability sector organisations have recently worked with Queen's University to implement the 'Inclusive Employment Scheme'. This work placement scheme enabled twelve people with a range of disabilities working at the university for a twelve month period, providing them with a fixed term paid contract, as well as providing a valuable work experience opportunity for each individual.

The Need for a Specific Employment Strategy

The key target group for the 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' is more specific than those of the wider departmental initiatives and proposed services above. This strategy pro-actively targets a smaller cohort of people within the population, many of whom are active and motivated. However, due to the nature of their disability, they will require additional, personalised, and often long term support, hence the Supported Employment Delivery Model, and the additional Supported Employment Officers (see Section 4).

This strategy aims to build upon existing programmes and, a more integrated and collaborative way of working between various departmental business areas, and the community and voluntary sector. It provides an opportunity for the Department to lead by example, and to have a significant and positive impact on the lives and future careers of people with disabilities.

The 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' will complement the proposals contained within other Departmental strategies and initiatives aimed at helping people to achieve skills, qualifications and employment. It will go a step further in relation to specialist disability support.

The Department and its key disability stakeholders will establish realistic and ambitious baseline targets for successful employment outcomes. These will be used as the basis for measuring and evaluating the success of this strategy year on year. In addition to improving the quality of life and well-being of every individual with a disability who is supported into employment, there is the potential to deliver real value for money through a new, more cohesive, seamless and tailored approach to help people with a range of significant disability related barriers to prepare for work and to achieve their employment goals.

Targeting the support at the majority of this client group at a time when they are actively participating in education, training and pre-employment services, will prevent many with significant disability related barriers from becoming economically inactive, dependent upon welfare benefits and the care and support of others, including professionals in the health and social care services.

When implemented, it will deliver significant financial savings to the wider public service budget. The quantitative data will be reported on during the lifetime of the strategy.

4. The Supported Employment Delivery Model

A key proposal within the draft strategy is the introduction and implementation of a specialist Supported Employment Model.

Supported Employment, as a delivery model, has been used successfully in Northern Ireland, through the European Social Fund projects and through disability employment programmes such as Workable. 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 significant 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'¹, 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 throughout Northern Ireland, a number of specialist disability employment staff have been recruited.

While many countries acknowledge that the Supported Employment Delivery Model has proven to be very effective, in helping people with more significant disabilities into sustained employment, few have implemented it as a mainstream employment service.

Issues such as unit cost, i.e. high resource intensity for such few numbers per population, and a lack of clarity or understanding of what the model aims to achieve, and for whom, what constitutes real economic employment, are some of the reasons why it has not been widely embraced.

1 '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 a person-centred, tailored, specialist and potentially long term offer of support, 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. Approximately 25 projects have been awarded funding for the next 3-5 years to deliver skills and employment services to people with a full range of disabilities throughout Northern Ireland. It is envisaged that these projects will make a significant contribution to the achievement of the objectives of this strategy, particularly in relation to Theme One.

The addition of the new Supported Employment Officers will enhance this service and the department's capacity to work directly with the target client group.

Gateway Service

In order to ensure the most appropriate and effective use of the Supported Employment Model, there will be a need for this new resource, working in partnership with the department's Careers Advisers, Occupational Psychologists and other specialist disability Employment Service staff and organisations, to select the people that they will commit to working with over a period of time. These disabled job seekers will become part of the caseload of clients for each of the Supported Employment Officers.

Similarly, staff from across the disability sector will continue to work with departmental staff, as well as their partner organisations, to identify suitable clients to support towards and into employment, using the Supported Employment Model. This may be through their own pre-employment offer, as well as the ongoing in-work support, provided through Workable (NI) and Access to Work (NI).

Alternative Services and Sign-Posting

For those people who have health and disability related barriers that impact on their ability to find and retain employment, but for whom, the more intense and personalised Supported Employment Delivery Model is not deemed necessary, there will be a need for clear and correct advice and sign-posting.

This will be another element of the role for the new Supported Employment Officers, the Employment Support staff working in the local disability organisations, along with the department's Employment Service Advisers who are based in the network of Jobs and Benefits offices and Job Centres. The implementation of this strategy offers the Employment Service Advisers the opportunity to work with the Supported Employment Officers and other disability specialist staff to develop their own knowledge and skills. This will assist them to deliver a more tailored work focused package of support to their own clients who have health and disability related barriers to work.

Disability Services Outside of Scope

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 will require a more appropriate service that will address their particular needs.

This may include access to quality day care services, suitable leisure and other community facilities, support with transport and promoting independent living. All of these disability services are essential for those who need this specific support. They do not, however, fall within the remit or scope of this 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' or the 'Supported Employment Model' and are the responsibility of other Government Departments.

Transitions for Young People with Severe Learning Difficulties/Disabilities – Action Plan

Over recent years, there has been significant interest in the issue of transitions to adult services for young people with severe learning difficulties/disabilities (SLDD).

The Minister for Employment and Learning raised the issue with the Bamford Ministerial Group on Mental Health and Learning Disability (the 'Ministerial Group'). This Ministerial Group, with representatives from eight different government departments, was asked to consider gaps in provision relating to the transition to adult services for young people with severe learning difficulties/disabilities (SLDD).

The Group engaged with a range of organisations, including parents and carers, who represented the interests of young people with severe learning disabilities in order to hear about their concerns and to better inform the work of the group.

Following on from this process the Group has developed an Action Plan for young people with SLDD leaving school into adult services. It has identified a range of key issues, including:

- lack of awareness among young people and parents/carers about transition process;
- lack of post-19 opportunities for young people;
- levels of consistency with existing transition support / services throughout Northern Ireland;
- potential improvements needed in applying best practice models of transition from school to adult life.

The Action Plan outlines a range of proposed actions to address the above issues of concern, many of which will require cross departmental work, in order to deliver improvements to current services. Progress against these actions will be monitored by the Ministerial Group.

5. KEY THEMES

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:

- Supporting people to secure paid employment
- Job retention and career development
- Working with Employers
- Research and Development
- Strategic partnership and engagement

5.1 THEME ONE – SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO SECURE PAID EMPLOYMENT

This theme underpins why the Department and its key stakeholders believe that this strategy is so important. It will also present the most difficult challenge throughout the five years of this strategy, as it is about achieving positive 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. Therefore, Theme One of the strategy is about:

Developing and implementing a Disability Service that will assist young people and adults 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, and to deliver the additional support required in order to move more people with disabilities into employment.

A New Employment Pathway for People with Disabilities

The Department for Employment and Learning supports 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 range of connected services listed above highlights the central lead role and responsibility that this Department has for the development of young people and adults throughout Northern Ireland, all of whom are striving to achieve a career or job of choice. A summary of the current and proposed disability services across the various areas of departmental responsibility is provided at Annex E.

Through this strategy, 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 the Department's respective services;
- ensure that there is a clear pathway for people with a disability who want to work, but who need additional and tailored support, and that this support is accessible, inclusive and easily navigated;
- maximise the number of people with significant disability-related barriers who are supported into paid employment.

Figure 1 below sets out a proposed model to accommodate and support people with disabilities throughout their journey, towards and into employment. It includes the range of services that people will commonly avail of, depending on their age, or their distance from the labour market, and it attempts to outline how they will be supported at each stage.

Figure 1 - Pathway to Employment for people with significant disability related barriers

Person with a disability currently in Full-time Education (for young people with special educational needs, this is usually up to the age of 19)

- Engagement with Careers Adviser
- Careers Adviser provides informed advice and guidance on the range of education, training and employment options available to the young person

Current and potential options

Further Education	Training programmes and other services	Employment Service	Community & Voluntary projects	Higher Education
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All options will include an offer of disability specialist support via:

- Additional Finance/Funding
- Dedicated Support worker
- Workplace mentor
- Reasonable and Funded Adjustments to ensure disabled participants have equal access to suitable education, training and employment opportunities

Caseload Management

A key proposal within this Strategy is that a number of disabled people, at any given time, would be supported by a local Supported Employment Officer. For many young people, a dedicated Careers Adviser will also be directly involved. These staff will provide appropriate and timely advice about all of the available options open to the disabled person, and to provide professional guidance on each.

The Supported Employment Officers, Careers Advisers, and other Employment Support staff from the sector, will work together to help the individual to realise his/her full potential, with the ultimate aim of securing rewarding and sustainable employment. They will assess his/her achievements to date, identify areas for development and programmes or services that will help them achieve these. They will provide placement and in work support to help them secure and progress their career.

Personal Action Plans

Each disabled person will have an agreed Personal Employment Action Plan that will be used by the Supported Employment Officers and other staff who are directly supporting the individuals. The key purpose of having this ‘Personal Employment Action Plan’ is to ensure that the disabled person’s progress is tracked from start to finish, that progression is achieved, and also to ensure that duplication is avoided if the person is moving from one service option to another, for example, moving from a Community and Voluntary training programme on to a similar course delivered through Further Education.

Exiting the options – on completion of course/programme or as a referral

Further Education	Training	Employment	Community and Voluntary	Higher Education
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The Supported Employment Officer

The Supported Employment Officers will be one of the main referral options for disabled people within their geographic location, who require additional, personalised support. Employment teams from specialist disability organisations throughout Northern Ireland, particularly those funded through the Department’s European Social Fund will be another obvious, and perhaps more suitable option, depending on the nature of the disability.

It is anticipated that the majority of clients will come from the above sources, although the list is not exhaustive.

The Supported Employment Officers, like their counterparts within the disability sector, will have the flexibility to work with their clients to tailor, source and provide the support that best meets the need of each individual, in order to achieve a successful employment outcome.

Elements of the Pathway to Employment model depicted in Figure 1 currently exist, however, the consistency and coverage of the service throughout Northern Ireland is not guaranteed. This strategy aims to identify and address any gaps in provision.

Delivering the Required Level of Support

The Department is responsible for the strategy, policy and 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 challenge within this specific strategy, is to ensure that the Department, through the Disability Employment Service, working in partnership with the disability organisations throughout Northern Ireland, maximises 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.

It 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 all of the key disability organisations throughout Northern Ireland.

European Social Fund Projects

The Department manages the European Social Fund programme, and the majority of these local projects receive additional match funding from the Disability Employment Service.

In addition to the range of programmes and services the Department already funds and delivers, this additional commitment underlines the strategic and financial commitment that the Department is giving to this particular client group. These projects are a key component of the Employment Strategy and they will feature in the Implementation Plan, along with associated targets. They will help achieve pre-employment and employment outcomes in their own right, and they will also be a key two-way referral source for the Supported Employment Officers. A summary of the projects, including their key disability target group and projected outcomes, is included at **Annex F**.

Focus on Youth

This strategy will help 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 further and higher education, skills training, apprenticeships and employability programmes (see Figure 1).

Disabled young people at the age 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.²

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 advice, the Supported Employment Officers, specialist staff from the Disability Employment Service and its partners in the disability sector, this strategy will provide appropriate, personalised support that will make a real difference to the future lives of young disabled people, and their families.

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

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

The Supported Employment Officers will target disabled people from the sources outlined above. 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, specialist staff within the Disability Employment Service, and the Employment teams in the disability sector organisations, will work with adults referred through 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 also anticipated that a large number of disabled adults will be targeted for the pilots under the forthcoming Economic Inactivity Strategy, 'Enabling Success'. It will, therefore, be important for the Supported Employment Officers to be involved in the delivery, the nature of the provision, and the profile of disabled clients taking part.

The Supported Employment Model will apply to all clients and, as the strategy develops over the first few years, new disability programmes or interventions may be considered, in order to support more disabled people into employment, or back to work.

Existing Disability Employment Programmes and Services

The Disability Employment Service, in conjunction with its sector partners, is currently providing support to many disabled employees throughout Northern Ireland and across all sectors of employment.

These programmes are making an invaluable contribution to the lives and employment status of those people who are availing of the service. More can be done to promote these services and, in doing so, improve the employment prospects of those looking to get a first start in the labour market.

In addition to the specialist programmes, the Disability Employment Service has a strong team of dedicated professionals, many of whom have spent most of their careers supporting people with disabilities to find and retain work. The Disability Employment managers in the Disability Employment Service will support the Supported Employment and work with them on specialist recruitment exercises and other project work, while the Access to Work (NI) Advisers in the Disability Employment Service will directly complement the work of the new specialists, especially when a disabled person is applying for, or has secured a new employment opportunity.

Another key support for the Supported Employment Officers is the Department's Occupational Psychology Service (OPS). This team of professionals in the area of disability and work carry out a range of employment assessments, leading to recommendations such as the most suitable types of job roles, pre-employment support that will help address the individual's barriers or adjustments that will be required by the employer to help the disabled employee in his/her new or existing job. The input of the Occupational Psychology Service team will provide added value and contribute to the success of those with more complex disabilities achieving and retaining work.

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.

THEME ONE – SUMMARY AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

Supporting people to secure paid employment

To develop and implement a Disability Service that will help 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

- consideration of flexibilities and enhancements within existing programmes and services that would support disabled people in work placements or employment;
- enhancement of the working partnership arrangements between the Department and the local disability sector, across all relevant business areas, including Careers Service, Further and Higher Education, Youth Training, Apprenticeships and the Employment Service.

Proposals that will introduce something new

- provision of an additional cohort of Supported Employment Officers;
- introduction and formal adoption the model of Supported Employment for people with significant disabilities seeking to find and retain paid employment;
- implementation a new 'Pathway to Employment', including a clear sign posting and referral service for all people with significant disability related barriers;
- development of robust 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;
- establishment of annual targets for the number of disabled people who move into paid employment, including self-employment.

Consultation Questions 1-4: Theme One - Supporting people to secure paid employment

Summary: This first Theme underpins everything that this strategy is trying to achieve, i.e. to increase, year on year, the number of people with significant disability related barriers who are moving into the labour market and into secure paid employment.

(Please feel free to make additional comments in response to each question).

- 1. Do you agree with the specific target group for this strategy; people who have significant disability related barriers, but who are capable of progressing towards and moving into paid employment?**
- 2. Do you agree with the sources identified to specifically target people with disabilities for employment support; schools, Further Education Colleges, training programmes, universities, community and voluntary projects and the Jobs & Benefits offices / Job Centres.**
- 3. Do you agree with the proposed role of the Supported Employment Officers and the implementation of the Supported Employment Model in helping to achieve employment outcomes within this strategy?**
- 4. Do you agree that the Department and the disability sector should set annual targets for the number of disabled people who secure employment as a direct result of this strategy?**

5.2 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 jobseekers.

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), Workable (NI) and Work Connect programmes.

As of 31 August 2015, more than 1,200 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 500 disabled employees under the Employment Support programme. This programme was replaced by Workable (NI) in 2005, 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 and their employers.

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 or consortia, and this programme 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.

Work Connect

Work Connect was launched in September 2012, and whilst it is predominantly a pre-employment disability support programme, it also provides short-term support when people successfully move into a new job.

This transitional support, for up to the first six months of employment, can be very important in helping the new employee to settle into their working environment and pattern, whilst providing advice, reassurance and if necessary, training to the employer or colleagues of the new disabled recruit. If it is determined that the employee requires longer term support, even for an extra year, there can be a seamless transfer on to the Workable (NI) programme.

These programmes and corresponding supports 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 look to explore the flexibilities that could be built into these invaluable support options, such as criterion around the number of hours that a person needs to be working in order to qualify for such support.

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 such attractive skills and employment options across a growing 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 this disability strategy.

Many disabled people are better suited to learning new skills and gaining qualifications whilst carrying out the job, as opposed to the traditional class room environment. Therefore, an apprenticeship would be very attractive to enable the disabled person, not only to move into employment, but to flourish during the early years, and gain the knowledge, skills and experience that will help to sustain the job and encourage career progression.

Proven Track Record

The Department and its partner organisations in the local disability sector have extensive experience and knowledge in delivering in-work support. There is a dedicated and qualified staff resource that can provide appropriate and timely advice and support to both employers and employees. Such support can include on-the-job coaching, tailored training interventions, mentoring and 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 a specialist disability employment resource throughout Northern Ireland to help more 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 support 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.

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. It is intended to carry out further research and evaluation (see Theme Four), to ascertain if this is still the case. Tying in with Theme Three, there is a need for ongoing education and awareness raising for employers who have disabled employees in their workforce.

Consideration will be given to enhancing the Workable (NI) provision and other in-work support packages to ensure that personal development, job enhancement and career progression become an integral part of the individual's personalised action plan and annual appraisal process. Whilst this is built in to the existing Workable (NI) provision, the strategy, through a revision to the existing 'Action Plan', offers an opportunity for greater focus to be applied to these developmental and career enhancement aspects, in addition to job retention.

The Supported Employment Officers, Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment, along with the Disability Employment Service and other disability sector staff, will have a significant role to play in helping to influence a positive relationship between the employer, line manager and the employee. All of the relevant personnel need to understand their responsibility and obligations to treat employees who are disabled, as they would anyone else, to commit to the full terms and conditions of employment, and to maximise the potential of their fellow colleague.

Tailored and more personalised induction training, the help of an internal support worker, as well as other natural supports should be encouraged to help a new employee settle in quickly and to enable them to perform their job to a satisfactory level, as quickly as possible. It will be important, therefore, that the Supported Employment Officers and other Disability advocates remain in contact with the individual and the employer for a period once the individual commences work. This will help alleviate minor issues or misunderstandings that might arise during those early stages and highlight the need for any medium- to longer-term support through in-work programmes or alternative methods.

Where an employee is availing of formal in-work support, such as Workable (NI), the Supported Employment Officer for that programme can make a major contribution to the career development and progression of the employee over a much longer period. Under this strategy, it is proposed that there will be much better tracking of all disabled clients, from the pre-employment support stage, through to those working in a range of occupations and sectors. This tracking information will be monitored, with regular reports produced to identify trends including, how disabled employees are performing and progressing in their respective jobs, how many are changing jobs to develop their careers, and how many are being promoted or directly recruited into higher level jobs or professions.

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 – SUMMARY AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

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

- undertaking 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;
- consideration of flexibilities within existing programmes and services that would support disabled people in part-time employment;
- development and promotion of examples of good practice in employing and developing disabled people across all sectors, including the public sector.

Proposals that will introduce something new

- introducing 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;
- working 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.

Consultation Questions 5-8: Theme Two - Retention and Career Progression

Summary – This theme recognises the fact that, for those disabled people who are successful at finding employment, their support needs might well continue for some time, possibly throughout their career.

(Please feel free to make additional comments in response to each question).

- 5. Do you agree with the proposal to promote and advertise the disability employment retention services and programmes that are currently available to employers and disabled employees?**
- 6. What other measures would assist disabled people to stay in employment?**
- 7. Do you agree that people with disabilities face additional barriers to progression and career development as a result of their disability? If so, why do you believe this is the case?**
- 8. What supports or assistance do you think would help disabled employees to access greater opportunities for progression, including promotion, throughout their careers?**

5.3 THEME THREE – 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 is highlighted by disability organisations and those who work on behalf of disabled people who are trying to secure employment or stay in work. Their unanimous viewpoint is that the knowledge and attitude of an employer is often the single biggest factor in whether a disabled person gets the job or not.

Through this theme of the strategy, 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 benefits of employing people with a disability. The strategy, through very proactive outreach initiatives, will provide ways to inform employers about these benefits, 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 Department, Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment, the Equality Commission and the wider disability sector with employers and employer representative groups. 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
- How to support disabled people in work
- How to access support for disabled people in work

There is extensive information available to inform employers about all of these. The strategy will also ensure that such information is available in a suitable and easily accessible format and on a more frequent basis.

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

is helping to influence the attitudes and mindset of a wider employer base, regarding the benefits that they can realise by giving more people with disabilities an opportunity to show their professional talent.

Employer engagement is also one of the themes of the Strategic Framework for Disabled People and Employment, which 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. 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 will help us to decide on the most effective actions to take forward with the employer base throughout Ireland.

This collaboration with Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland will provide valuable learning and some best practice examples that will allow the Department to tailor interventions and actions to the employer and labour market situation in Northern Ireland.

Listed below are some areas which have been identified as good practice elsewhere:

- high profile events for employers and employer representative groups;
- a new one stop portal and helpdesk facility for employers relating to disability employment related issues or queries;
- a concerted marketing campaign for the in-work support programmes that the Department and the disability organisations can deliver to help new and existing employees; and
- the identification of a senior business leader – 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 on 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;
- 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 competitions that have been completed thus far have enabled many people with a disability to compete on equal terms for a range of full-time and part-time jobs. This opportunity has provided them with invaluable experience for future applications. Moreover, the employers have been very impressed with the calibre of the clients, in terms of their ability, preparation and attitude to the recruitment process. This in itself has proven to be beneficial as it is helping to raise employers' awareness and perhaps address some misconceptions they may have had previously. The ultimate success however has been the fact that a number of the disabled applicants are now employed with these organisations in a range of job roles.

This proves 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 this 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;
- 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 used on a number of occasions over the past few years, and with employers from different sectors. It has been proven to work for all parties and it is something that the Department, along with the disability sector and others, are very keen to develop into a mainstream service offer.

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 – SUMMARY AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

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 people with a disability employment or work placement opportunities;
- organise and facilitate a major annual employer's event / seminar to promote the employment of people with disabilities;
- establish a network of high profile disability advocates who can help influence the attitudes and actions of employers towards the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities;
- identify a senior business leader to promote, lead by example and be the public face of this issue for employers;
- design and implement a disability employment one-stop-shop service for employers via a single interactive website and telephone help-desk facility.

Consultation Questions 9-12: Theme Three – Employers

Summary: Employers are vital to the success or otherwise of this strategy. Encouraging employers to give disabled applicants a real opportunity to compete for jobs and make reasonable adjustments, as they are required to do, will enable the Department and the disability sector to put in place any additional support that may be required.

(Please feel free to make additional comments in response to each question).

- 9. Do you agree with the development of a specific recruitment model to assist employers to employ more people with disabilities? What practical supports do you think employers need?**
- 10. Do you think that a major employer event would help promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities?**
- 11. Do you agree that the Department should introduce a disability employment one-stop-shop service for employers?**
- 12. Do you agree with the proposal to have a network of high profile disability advocates to help influence the attitudes and actions of employers?**

5.4 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 major research 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

Within Theme One, the introduction of the local Supported Employment Officers and a greater focus on young people with disabilities transitioning into employment is a change from the status quo. However, Theme Four provides a clear intention to try other new methods and approaches, informed by what is happening in other parts of the world or what is being suggested closer to home.

The Department has also built up close working relationships with officials in Great Britain who are working on the Department for Work and Pensions Disability Employment Strategy. As this strategy develops, it will be important to monitor any new services or provisions that come into effect, with a view to considering the merits or otherwise of introducing them in Northern Ireland. The same could apply to the Republic of Ireland where the National Disability Authority, in conjunction with a number of government departments, is developing a ten year strategic plan to improve the employment

prospects and outcomes for people with disabilities. Therefore the Department and its key strategic partners will keep a close eye on what is happening in other jurisdictions, without having to follow any specific delivery model. Opportunities for cross-border research projects that will be of mutual advantage to both strategies, North and South, will also be explored.

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.

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 major research project per annum that will provide new 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 all of the key stakeholders have access to the data, including key findings, analysis and recommendations;
- use the information to inform discussion and decision-making on future policy, strategy and operations affecting people with a disability who are not suited to, or ready for, mainstream employment provision;
- carry out a cost-savings evaluation to demonstrate the long term financial savings that will be achieved through the implementation of a strategy that focuses on supporting people with significant disabilities into sustained employment.

Consultation Questions 13-14: Theme Four – Research and Development

(Please feel free to make additional comments in response to each question).

13. Do you agree with the proposal to carry out targeted research and evaluation projects on 'employment' provision and issues for people with disabilities?

14. What specific areas of research do you think that the Strategy needs to prioritise?

5.5 THEME FIVE – STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

One of the criticisms that disability organisations and indeed various disability user groups have raised with government over the years, has been the lack of meaningful and timely consultation and engagement, which in turn, may have led to a lack of apparent joined up thinking or delivery in relation to public services for people with disabilities.

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 the most obvious example of this move towards a partnership approach.

The organisation and facilitation of the eight regional engagement events, along with the discussion session for employers, is another tangible example of the genuine willingness to listen to those people who know best about what the barriers are and subsequently, what solutions may work best to address these.

Previously, the Department had in place a Disability Liaison Group that met on a quarterly basis. This group, which consisted mainly of staff from the Disablement Advisory Service (now Disability Employment Service) and representatives from the main disability organisations served a useful purpose and carried out some valuable pieces of project work in its time.

The group ceased to exist around 2010 and ideas and proposals were made to establish a more strategic group, consisting of a greater cross-section of Departmental officials, along with a representation of senior managers or executives from the disability sector organisations.

With the development of this strategy, the Department believes this is an ideal opportunity to revisit this proposal and in doing so, achieve the following:

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

One priority therefore is to establish a new Disability Stakeholder Forum at the earliest opportunity. The membership will consist of senior officials from the Department and senior management representatives from the disability sector, as well as other government departments. It will be important to include an employer representative, a local disability champion who can speak with authority on behalf of those we are collectively trying to help and support, and at least one person who has a disability and therefore understands exactly what is required to overcome the barriers that people face. The consultation process may inform the Department and its partners regarding the best method of attracting a person or people with a disability on to this important forum.

The need for ongoing engagement with disabled people has been consistent throughout the development of the strategy and it is therefore incumbent upon the Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum to decide how best to maintain this contact and communication.

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 that the Department has responsibility for.

By including senior officials from the various business areas, 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 developers in this area.

The Disability Employment Stakeholder 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.

Ultimately the success of the Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum will be determined by how people with disabilities feel connected to the strategy and its out workings, primarily evidenced by a marked increase in the employment outcomes for disabled people over the duration of the strategy.

THEME FIVE – SUMMARY AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

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

Proposals that will build upon and improve current practice

- commit to ongoing communication and consultation 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 Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum, the membership of which needs to be fully inclusive of those who have a direct impact and influence on the employment prospects for people with disabilities.

Consultation Questions 15 - 16: Theme Five - Strategic Consultation and Engagement

15. What methods of consultation and communication do you think would work best to ensure that people with significant disabilities and their support workers can continue to have their opinions listened to?

16. How can the Department ensure that there is meaningful representation for people with disabilities on the Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum?

6. Conclusions and Next Steps

The Department, in conjunction with key partner organisations from the disability sector believe that the development of an Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities is the right thing to do and now is the right time to do it.

It presents a tremendous opportunity for the Department to lead the way by maximising the potential of existing educational, vocational and training provision for disabled people, and translating this into positive job outcomes for as many of this client group as possible. It can create a more complete pathway to employment journey that does not cease until the individual has realised 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.

The Department has a unique opportunity to offer this seamless package of disability support due to the number of related services which it currently has responsibility for. This can be achieved through better partnership working, better planning and co-ordination of existing services, and a determination to help this client group. In the current climate, it is a major advantage that this strategy will not require a substantive new budget or additional resource.

By adopting and implementing the supported employment model, Northern Ireland would be leading the way in providing disability employment support. The strategy would enable the model to be truly tested against projected job outcomes, with robust monitoring and evaluation throughout the timeline of the new strategy.

The Consultation

The purpose of this public consultation is to ensure that everyone who has an interest in having more disabled people move into employment and then flourish within a supportive and inclusive working environment has an opportunity to express their views and opinions.

The consultation questions will help stimulate thoughts on some of the issues but there is also the opportunity for everyone to suggest alternative ideas or proposals that can be further explored during the analysis of the responses.

It is hoped that this consultation process will provide the mechanism for an extensive and informed response. In doing so, it will help shape the detail of the final Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, which is scheduled for publication early in 2016.

Consultation Question 17: Your Contribution

17. Please outline any other comments or proposals that you have for the Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities?

Annex A

STRATEGIC WORKING GROUP

Terry Park	Head of the Disability Employment Service, Department for Employment and Learning
Liam Burns	Mencap
Deborah Cochrane	Action on Hearing Loss
Edyth Dunlop	NI Union of Supported Employment
Pauline Fitzsimons	NOW
Margaret Haddock	The Orchardville Society
Sam Humphries	Ulster Supported Employment Ltd
Laura McCartney	Disability Action
Alan McClure	Action on Hearing Loss
Berni McCrea	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
Mark O'Hara	Disability Employment Service
Marina Smyth	Disability Employment Service

Annex B

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Questions 1 - 4: Theme One - Supporting people into employment

- 1. Do you agree with the specific target group for this strategy; people who have significant disability related barriers, but who are capable of progressing towards and moving into paid employment?**
- 2. Do you agree with the sources identified to specifically target people with disabilities for employment support; schools, Further Education Colleges, training programmes, universities, community and voluntary projects and the Jobs & Benefits offices / Job Centres.**
- 3. Do you agree with the proposed role of the Supported Employment Officers and the implementation of the Supported Employment Model in helping to achieve employment outcomes within this strategy?**
- 4. Do you agree that the Department and the disability sector should set annual targets for the number of disabled people who secure employment as a direct result of this strategy?**

Questions 5 - 8: Theme Two – Job Retention and Career Progression

- 5. Do you agree with the proposal to promote and advertise disability employment retention services and programmes that are currently available to employers and disabled employees?**
- 6. What other measures would assist disabled people to stay in employment?**
- 7. Do you agree that people with disabilities face additional barriers to progression and career development as a result of their disability? If so, why do you believe this is the case?**
- 8. What supports or assistance do you think would help disabled employees to access greater opportunities for progression, including promotion, throughout their careers?**

Questions 9-12: Theme Three – Employers

- 9. Do you agree with the development of a specific recruitment model to assist employers to employ more people with disabilities? What practical' supports do you think employers need?**

10. Do you think that a major employer event would help promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities?
11. Do you agree that the Department should introduce a disability employment one-stop-shop service for employers?
12. Do you agree with the proposal to have a network of high profile disability advocates to help influence the attitudes and actions of employers?

Questions 13-14: Theme Four – Research and Development

13. Do you agree with the proposal to carry out targeted research and evaluation projects on 'employment' provision and issues for people with disabilities?
14. What specific areas of research do you think that the Strategy needs to prioritise?

Questions 15-16: Theme Five - Strategic partnership and engagement

15. What methods of consultation and communication do you think would work best to ensure that people with significant disabilities and their support workers can continue to have their opinions listened to?
16. How can the Department ensure that there is meaningful representation for people with disabilities on the Disability Employment Stakeholder Forum?

Question 17: Your Contribution

17. Please outline any other comments or proposals that you have for the Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities?

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.

The model is equally applicable to supporting job retention. 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

JOB DESCRIPTION FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT OFFICER

Objective of the Job Role

To continuously work with an active caseload of disabled clients, ensuring that:

- each client makes significant and measurable progress towards employment;
- successful paid employment outcomes are achieved for as many of the active caseload as possible within twelve months of engagement.

Key Activities of the Job Role that will help achieve the objectives

- sourcing suitable clients from a range of the Department for Employment and Learning and other transitions services, i.e. Careers, Further Education, training programmes, Higher Education and Community and Voluntary projects etc.;
- deciding upon suitable referrals from Employment Service Advisers across the Jobs and Benefits offices and JobCentre network. This decision will determine whether to support or signpost to alternative provision, such as training or education courses, local employment projects, dependent upon nature of health and disability related barrier to work;
- providing appropriate and tailored pre-employment support to each client, including vocational profiling, suitable job/occupation matching, and personal advocacy on behalf of the client;
- when moving people into employment, work with disability sector organisations and Disability Employment Service colleagues to help decide what in-work support is most suitable, i.e. Workable, Access to Work or both;
- ensuring that progression on to alternative provision will enhance the disabled client's employment prospects, avoiding duplication or repetition during the transitions process, unless this is deemed appropriate;
- tracking of all case loaded clients, using departmental or other management information systems;
- marketing of disability employment services to clients, employers and other key stakeholders.

Anticipated Caseload

Approximately 30-40 active clients per Supported Employment Officer, per annum.

Annex E

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING - CURRENT SPECIALIST SUPPORT

Support provided to people with disabilities by the Department for Employment and Learning includes:

1. Careers

The Department offers an all-age, all ability service that provides guidance on education, training and employment. Careers have implemented a social inclusion policy, which focuses on addressing the needs of people who are most vulnerable to social exclusion – including those with a range of disabilities.

Through the Disability Employment Strategy, the Careers Service is committed to ensuring that every young person with a disability and who wishes to progress to Further Education, Training and/or employment will be supported by a Careers Adviser, working in partnership with the new Supported Employment Officer.

The Careers Adviser will work closely with the Supported Employment Officer to ensure a seamless transfer of responsibility so that the young person is supported through the transition from full time education through to and including a successful achievement of paid and sustained employment.

2. Skills Training

Through its flagship **Training for Success** programme, aimed at 16-17 year olds, the Department permits extended eligibility, up to age 22, for young people with a disability. The Department also provides pre-entry support for young people with a disability. Whilst participating on the programme, trainees can be supported by contracted Disability Support Suppliers. Travel costs for taxis are also payable where public transport is not a suitable option for a trainee, due to their disability.

Disability Support Suppliers

Disability Support Suppliers are contracted by the Department to work in conjunction with training suppliers delivering programmes.

Examples of support provided by Disability Support Suppliers include:

- pre-entry assessment and identification of support requirements;
- one-to-one mentoring;
- job coaching;
- advocacy with potential employers; and
- disability awareness training for employers and colleagues of people with a disability.

Apprenticeships

The Department's **ApprenticeshipsNI** programme offers a disability supplement of up to £1,560 per person, to allow training suppliers to provide additional support or purchase equipment. Specialist Disability Support Suppliers (see above), work in conjunction with training suppliers to offer specialist support as necessary.

'Generating our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Youth Training'

Proposals contained within the Review of Youth Training document, with regard to additional support for young people with additional barriers, including those with a disability are:

- structured work-based learning, through employment or work placements;
- additional pastoral support to assist young people with a disability to complete their training and progress into employment;
- workplace mentors provided by employers to assist young people with disabilities to develop their employability skills and achieve their learning outcomes
- support and flexibility for young people with additional requirements, including those with disabilities or those leaving care;
- branding and marketing for youth training to be fully inclusive and reflective of young people with disabilities;
- where appropriate, online technologies will be used to assist those with a disability to engage and participate;
- industry consultants to engage with employers to encourage them to offer work placements to young people with disabilities.

3. Further Education (FE)

Students on mainstream and discrete learning courses can avail of additional support, funded through the Department's **Additional Support Fund**.

Additional Support Fund allows colleges to provide students with technical assistance; e.g. specialist software and personal assistance such as interpreters. They may also facilitate the delivery of smaller classes with dedicated support staff for students who cannot participate in mainstream provision, primarily those students with learning disabilities or difficulties.

The Additional Support Fund is currently £4.5 million and has increased by £1 million (from £3.5m) over the last two years.

The Additional Support Fund enables additional support to be provided throughout the student's course of study and the support is reviewed twice yearly to ensure it remains appropriate and effective. This is done through an individual learning agreement and all changes to the levels of support (increase and decrease) are in agreement with the student. The aim is to ensure success for the student in gaining the qualifications and skills necessary to help them secure employment.

Proposals to Enhance Disability Support

Further Education Policy proposes introducing a 'transport assessment element' to the Additional Support Fund assessment process. This would provide a mechanism to establish if transport is a barrier and work with colleges to resolve the issue.

Further Education Policy also proposes to encourage a sector-wide approach to the provision of independent travel training which has already seen success in some colleges. This has been identified by colleges, students, parents and disability groups as essential for development and progression into employment and greater independence. This should increase collaboration with local disability groups.

Ensure the curriculum is accessible, varied and relevant; and meets the potential requirements of future employers.

Through engagement with the Learning Support groups ensure appropriate assessment and awareness training is provided to all teaching and support staff engaging with these learners, to maximise the experience and learning potential for students.

Establish a system for monitoring, reviewing and reporting on retention and achievement for these learners.

4. Higher Education

The Department has a number of initiatives in place to ensure that people with disabilities and learning difficulties receive appropriate support when they transfer to higher education.

Disabled Students' Allowances

Disabled Student Allowances can be awarded to students who have a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty which affects their ability to study. The allowances help students with the extra costs they may incur while studying their course as a direct result of their disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty.

In financial year 2014/15 the Department provided £3,375k in Disabled Student Allowances to almost 2,000 full-time and part-time undergraduates and post graduates.

Register of Support Providers

Through Disabled Students Allowances, the Department also provides funding to meet the administration costs of a Register of Support Providers in each of the two Northern Ireland universities. These support providers are recruited and trained to provide one to one personal support to students with disabilities.

Support from a register is available to all students with disabilities and learning difficulties on affiliated higher education courses in further education colleges.

Access to Success

The Department is currently implementing **Access to Success**, the regional strategy to widen participation in higher education. Launched in 2012, the strategy identified students with disabilities and learning difficulties as a key target group for additional support in higher education. Significant progress has been made on a range of measures in the strategy aimed at increasing the participation in higher education of the specified groups.

Future Enhancements

As one of the key projects within both **Access to Success** and **Graduating to Success**, the higher education strategy, the Department is working closely with all of the higher education institutions to encourage the development of an agreed regional programme for a standardised route of exceptional application to higher education for disabled persons.

This project aims include the following proposals:

- institutions to set aside a self-determined number of places on identified courses for recruitment of disabled persons;
- should be regionally based – ideally to include all higher education institutions;
- must not breach institutional autonomy in recruitment/selection;
- offers based on reduced points/grades;
- applicants must meet minimum points/grade requirements and meet all other course entry requirements, including fitness to practise considerations;
- programme to be open to all applicants to higher education and to be independent of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service;
- eligibility to be based on multiple indicators of medical, social and academic disadvantage related to disability;
- centralised expert panel to determine acceptance of candidates based on educational disadvantage arising from disability condition;
- regionally agreed appeals procedures.

5. Employment Services

Specialist disability programmes/support measures include:

- **Job Introduction Scheme** - A job-trial lasting up to 13 weeks to enable a person with a disability and a potential employer to work together to consider if this or work in general is an appropriate way forward for each individual;
- **Access to Work (NI)** - Access to Work provides individually assessed support to assist people with a disability find and keep suitable employment. A range of one-off or longer term, often indefinite, supports are offered. The supports include: assistance with travel to and from work; the provision of a support worker; provision of equipment and adaptations to premises. Additional assessment services are available from Occupational Therapists and Assessment professionals who specialise in sensory disabilities;
- **Workable (NI)** - This programme provides a flexible range of long term supports to assist people

with a disability with substantial barriers to employment to find and keep employment. Workable (NI) is delivered by a range of organisations with extensive experience of meeting the vocational needs of disabled people. The support needs of each individual are assessed and the provision can include supports such as: a Job Coach to assist the workers with a disability and their colleagues adapt to the needs of the particular job; development costs to the employer; extra training; and disability awareness training. Employees with a disability can avail of Workable and Access to Work support concurrently;

- **Residential Training** - An option for young adults leaving Special Schools is the facility at Parkanaur College, Dungannon. Disability Employment Service funds residential training opportunities at Parkanaur for people with a disability who are not ready to access mainstream training. Each individual's suitability for this training and his/her future potential for progression towards or into employment is assessed by the Department's Occupational Psychology Service;
- **Condition Management Programme** – This is a work-focused, health rehabilitation programme, lasting up to twelve weeks, which is designed to help people who are unemployed to manage their health condition and symptoms, improve their confidence and well-being, and by doing so, help improve their chances of obtaining and sustaining employment. Participation on Condition Management Programme is voluntary and the programme is delivered on behalf of the Department by teams of health care professionals from Health and Social Care Trusts, working in partnership with the Disability Employment Service and Employment Service Advisers;
- **Work Connect** - Work Connect is a specialist employment programme which aims to help people overcome their health and/or disability related barriers to work and to support them make the transition from welfare into employment. Work Connect has three key elements: Pre-employment; Work Entry; and Sustained Employment. These elements include quality interventions and support to enable clients to enhance their employability skills and prepare themselves for work, to help them make a successful transition from welfare into work and then to sustain employment;
- **Occupational Psychology Assessment Services** - Occupational Psychology Services provide an assessment service to people with disabilities who are seeking work. Through the assessment service the individual's strengths and weaknesses are assessed and the individual is helped to identify appropriate work that meets their interest and capabilities. Support needs are defined which will help the individual to secure employment and progress in their chosen career path.

Annex F

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND DISABILITY PROJECTS

Through the European Social Fund, more than 20 disability projects are now in position to 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 throughout the duration of this strategy and 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;
- open paid employment part-time and full-time.

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 will be a great achievement for the individual projects. The aim of this strategy therefore is to enhance those into-work figures through the active caseloads of the new Disability Supported Employment Officers, and also by creating more partnership working and subsequent referrals between other departmental services, such as the Employment Service Advisers, the Careers Advisers and these local disability projects.

The European Social Fund projects will also play a major part in other key themes, especially in relation to Employers and Strategic Consultation.



Department for
**Employment
and Learning**
www.delni.gov.uk



THE DEPARTMENT:

Our aim is to promote learning and skills, to prepare people for work and to support the economy.

This document is available in other formats upon request.

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