



FÁS Disability Policy and Development Unit Newsletter January 2006 Issue 6

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Enable Ireland Conference – September 2005

Strength in numbers

In September 2005, Enable Ireland held a national conference - Ni neart go cur le cheile - at Croke Park. The title and theme of the day reflected their commitment to working together with partners from both within the disability sector and more significantly from those external to it.

Coinciding with this event, Enable Ireland has this year been awarded - at a national level - the EFQM Committed to Excellence Award. This is a significant landmark on their journey towards excellence. The (EFQM) Excellence Model has a very positive result orientated focus which helps to identify the organisation's goals and give guidance on how to achieve them. It also supports the quest for improvement by recognising that it is a continuous process - it provides a systematic framework to actually demonstrate continuous improvement.

Fionnuala O'Donovan, CEO of Enable Ireland, said “the adoption of the excellence model has provided the perfect framework for implementing, measuring and continually improving on our service delivery and support activities as laid out in our new strategic plan. It also reflects our commitment to working in partnership with people with disabilities to ensure that each individual using our services achieves optimum independence, choice and inclusion, whether at home, work or in society.”

Currently there are 42 teams nationwide across Enable Ireland (comprising of up to 12 people per team - approximately 500 staff members) actively engaged in the EFQM results setting process and it is their intention to involve everyone in the organisation in this process.

Terry Datson, National Director of Training & Quality for Enable Ireland, added “Ni neart go cur le cheile – the title of our conference - says it all; if we work together we are strong. As I see it, the two major challenges for the future for all of us are: doing

just that and creating an environment where excellence will be sustained in the long-term.”

Enable Ireland provides services to children and adults in 14 regional centres throughout Ireland.

For further information contact Terry Datson (National Director of Training & Quality) 021 429 0434, 087 2578902. email<tdatson@enableireland.ie>

Terry Datson – Enable Ireland

President McAleese on 5th October 2005, launched the Excellence through Accessibility Award

The National Disability Authority (NDA) in partnership with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is delighted to have launched the Excellence through Accessibility awards. Following commitments in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness and more recently the Disability Act 2005, the NDA has developed an award for improved accessibility to public services. This comprehensive award is based around the highest standards of accessibility for the internal and external customer in Quality Customer Services, the Built Environment and Information and Communication Technologies. This award is unique, as it has been developed following an extensive consultation process with people with disabilities, government departments, state agencies and voluntary and community bodies. Significantly, it is also built around a process of continuous improvement. All Departments and Agencies that have taken sustainable and measurable steps to make their organisations more accessible can thus be rewarded.

The case for making your organisation more accessible is a compelling one. It is not only a case of justice but it also makes good business and social sense. The benefits of the Excellence through Accessibility award to your organisation include:

Delivering more accessible services in an accessible environment - Removing barriers promotes equality and makes life easier and safer for everyone and that includes people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, older people and the young. Accessibility also enhances the quality of services provided for all sections of society.

Increased customer focus - Providing information and services in a user-friendly way to people with disabilities will increase customer satisfaction with the Department or Agency. A Department or Agency that understands the diverse needs of its customers will provide a better quality of service to its clients.

Improved staff morale - A more accessible environment increases the pool of potential new workers that an employer can tap into. It also helps organisations retain existing employees who may acquire a disability. What's more, higher staff satisfaction will also lead to improved productivity.

Recognition - Better access will not only improve customer and staff satisfaction but it will improve public recognition of the Department or Agency. This will result in better marketing, more recruitment and retention and a more equal society.

If you would like further information on the award or would like to demonstrate your commitment to accessibility and apply for an Excellence through Accessibility Award, please contact Heather O'Leary on ph/minicom: 01 608 0400 or holeary@nda.ie.

Paula Murphy – NDA

DFI Conference ‘Disability and Population Health’

DFI held a conference on Disability and Population Health on 5th and 6th October in The Heritage Hotel in Portlaoise. The conference was a huge success and was attended by around 75 delegates from voluntary disability organisations, HSE, DoHC and other agencies.

Population Health is an approach to health that aims to improve the health and well-being of the entire population and to reduce inequities in health status among particular population groups.

Why Disability and Population Health?

- Establishment of Population Health Directorate in HSE.
- Disability organisations are active in delivering Population Health services.
- Health Policy is about more than the provision of direct medical care and intervention.
- Current Government policies; Mainstreaming, National Disability Strategy.
- Emergence and development of the Social Model of health.
- Concept of Population Health centre stage in Irish health system reform.

A central aim of the conference was to set priorities for the development and expansion of Population Health initiatives for the benefit of people with disabilities, their families and carers. A wide variety of speakers presented their papers ranging from presentation of research findings to strategies for action and new approaches for the disability sector in relation to Population Health. In addition to plenary presentations, there were also a series of parallel sessions. Discussion groups were held around defining the issues for the disability sector in relation to population health and identifying strategies for action.

DFI have developed a discussion paper on Disability and Population Health, which outlines the disability interest regarding the Population Health approach to health policy. For a copy of the discussion paper, please log onto www.disability-federation.ie, or for further information please contact Maria Fox (0506 28632) or Aisling Walsh (01 4547978).

Aisling Walsh – DFI

Review of the Effectiveness of Part M of the Building Regulations

A recent report published by the National Disability Authority highlights significant evidence of the ineffectiveness of Part M of the Building Regulations that are designed to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities.

Part M accessibility standards came into effect in mid 1992 for non-domestic buildings, while the Part M standards have only been applicable for dwellings in most instances since 2001.

The study, “A Review of the Effectiveness of Part M of the Building Regulations” by Fionnuala Rogerson, was launched by Tony Reddy, President of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland on Monday 5 December 2005.

The report involved surveying people with disabilities, architects and other key informants in the building profession. Reviews of plans, the undertaking of site visits and an analysis of accessibility legislation in other countries were also pivotal to the research.

The study found that the existing Part M standards are not being fully implemented and that implementation is not being fully monitored. Furthermore, where non-compliance is found, remedial action is often not adequately enforced. A review of standards in other countries highlights how positive action is needed to bring Irish regulations into line with good international practice.

In addition to shortfalls in the regulations related to persons with mobility impairments, the study shows that the Part M Technical Guidance document does not contain guidance in relation to visual signage and audible communication, which are crucial to a building's safe use and evacuation.

Some of the problems with implementation were found to stem from the division between the Planning system and the Building Control system. Access issues, which could most easily be dealt with at the pre-planning stage, are often neglected and become a problem during construction.

The provisions introduced by the Disability Act 2005 require public buildings to be retrofitted to allow access by people with disabilities by 2015 and, where the regulations are amended, within ten years of such changes. Therefore, it is important that this is effectively monitored.

The report contains a series of recommendations to contribute to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's forthcoming review of Part M.

The report can be read online at the link below:

<http://www.nda.ie/cntmgmtnew.nsf/0/D7B9326DE8BF2CBA802570CF00348A4C?OpenDocument>

For further details on how to obtain a hard copy of the report, please contact Derek Beattie on (01) 6080400 or by email at dbeattie@nda.ie

Derek Beattie – NDA

Ability in the Workplace

FÁS WAGE SUBSIDY SCHEME (WSS)

On Tuesday, July 19th 2005 the Minister for Enterprises, Trade and Employment, Micheál Martin, TD launched the new FÁS Wage Subsidy Scheme, in the Alexander Hotel, Dublin. Rody Molloy, Director General was also in attendance and spoke at the launch.

The Wage Subsidy Scheme is the result of the work of Shira Mehlman Director, Social Inclusion and her staff in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment and the Department of Health. It is a very welcome and positive addition to the range of supports that FÁS already has in place to assist disabled people seeking employment. The scheme has been fully operational since September 2005 and will provide financial incentives to employers, outside the public sector, to employ disabled people who work more than 20 hours per week.

Besides offering incentives to employers, this Scheme has potential benefits for employees also. Disabled people who meet the qualifying conditions are able to avail of the **Back to Work Allowance (BTWA)** available through the Department of Social and Family Affairs. This means that secondary Social Welfare Benefits may be retained for up to three years - for those who qualify.

Subsidies available through this Scheme are structured under separate strands and employers can benefit under one or all, simultaneously.

- **Strand One** - is a wage subsidy payment dependent on productivity levels.
- **Strand Two** - applies where a company employs more than two disabled people. The company can avail of a top-up grant to cover the additional supervisory, management and other work based costs. The top-up is a % top-up of the wage subsidy only based on the overall number of employees
- **Strand Three** – this is where an employer employs 30 or more disabled workers, the employer can avail of a grant towards the expense of employing an Employment Assistance Officer.

Speaking at the launch, Minister Martin said this Scheme “represents a holistic approach to the challenges faced by both employers and disabled people in increasing the latter in the open Labour Market.” FÁS Director General, Rody Molloy noted that although “significant progress has been made...it is now time to ‘raise the bar’ to further ensure that disabled people have the same right of access as their non-disabled peers.”

Information and applications may be obtained from FÁS Employment Service Offices.

Joan Kavanagh – DPDU

Accessibility Practices – National Disability Authority

The NDA has produced a range of guidance documents designed to support the move to a more inclusive society where the environment, public buildings and services ensure are accessible to persons with disabilities thereby enhancing their participation in Irish society.

These include:

Guidelines for Access Auditing of the Built Environment

Developed in collaboration with the Office of Public Works and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, these guidelines include background information on access auditing, steps to carry out an audit and the typical structure of an audit report. They also offer advice for clients commissioning an audit of the built environment and advice for the auditor.

Access Handbook Template: A Tool to Help Manage the Accessibility of the Built Environment

An access handbook is an internal document for the use of management, maintenance personnel and all staff. Its purpose is to provide a user friendly way of listing and explaining the features and facilities of a building, which must be maintained and/or improved in order to ensure access for everyone. This template can assist organisations to design their own access handbook.

Guidelines for Purchasers of Disability Equality Training

The Guidelines aim to support public bodies in the procurement and delivery of disability equality training for their staff. They provide an overview of the content of training, the delivery and the organisational commitment needed to develop and manage a disability equality framework in an organisation.

If you would like to receive a copy of the Guidelines please contact:

Heather O’Leary, National Disability Authority @ 01-608 0400, Fax:01-660 9935

E-mail:holeary@nda.ie Guidelines are also available in alternative formats.

Paula Murphy

Graduates and Disability – Some Facts

While the Celtic Tiger has improved the employment prospects of some marginalised groups evidence suggests that the unemployment rate among disabled people has remained stubbornly high.

Recent research into unemployment and people with disabilities has targeted the low educational attainment of this cohort as not just representing a barrier to their entry into the labour market, but also to their advancement in employment when they have done so.

The most recent data indicates that while 18% of the overall population left education with primary education or less, the figure for people with disabilities is 46%. Even for those whose disability is physical, the gap is over 20% (Disability and Work: The picture we learn from the official statistics, NDA 2005).

But the converse of early educational drop out is the increasing numbers of students with disabilities now graduating from 3rd level colleges. There has, however, been a dearth of research as to how they have coped post graduation and it had to be assumed that research data from the UK also reflected the Irish experience.

A pioneering contribution to the meagre literature on this issue in Ireland has been the recent publication of **Towards Equal Outcomes: A survey of the Career Experiences of Graduates with Disabilities and Employer Responses to Diversity** by the Careers Service of the University of Limerick in September 2005.

This research project was undertaken in consultation with and funded by FÁS's Mid-West Regional Office.

The report presents results of a survey of employment patterns of University of Limerick (UL) graduates with disabilities in the period 1997 – 2003. More accurately, the findings are actually based on two surveys, one was a graduate survey and the second surveyed the views of employers.

The authors warn that the numbers of respondents is not large enough to arrive at sweeping conclusions; the report reflects the career experiences of 42 respondents from a total number of 70 graduates with disabilities who completed their studies in UL between 1997 and 2003.

Be that as it may, the figures they have extracted from the respondents challenge certain perceived assumptions. The numbers of graduates with disabilities in employment are higher than most people could have reasonably expected. In fact, when graduates for one year, 2003, were surveyed they were found to be marginally better than for the general graduate population.

The researchers found that 74% of respondents were in employment at the time of the survey. A further 17% continued with their education and 2% were not available for work. Some 7% were still seeking employment.

For the 2003 graduate sample surveyed, 63% were in employment, marginally exceeding that of the general graduate population figure of 59%. Staff in the Careers Service in UL are to be congratulated on the quality of support that has helped result in such positive outcomes.

Beneath the surface of these bare figures lie disturbing statistics however. One in particular should give rise to concern. Although it must be emphasised that the sample was not sufficiently large to reach valid conclusions under each category of disability, there is some evidence to suggest that only 20% of graduates with mobility difficulties or wheelchair users for the year 2003 were in full time paid employment. The employment figure for the total UL population was 59%. Is this figure related to restricted accessible transport in the Midwest region? If this turns out to be the case it highlights once again the crucial barrier that transport represents for disabled people getting employment. The further one moves from Dublin, the situation would appear to worsen and, if further research confirms this, the issue will need to be tackled.

Graduates with disabilities from UL also bucked the trend of gravitation towards the Dublin region to access employment; some 40% remained in the Midwest and only 20% moved to the east, including Dublin.

Other issues are also highlighted and give food for thought for people charged with the responsibility of building support services for disabled people. While they were in UL, most of these students had, maybe understandably, accessed the UL Career Support Service. But they made little contact with external support organisations such as AHEAD or Access Ability and the authors suggest that this may be because such services tend to be Dublin based and may have appeared remote to students in the Midwest. While only 14% of respondents used FÁS locally this low figure is hardly surprising since FÁS occupational guidance services are not geared for persons whilst still in full time education.

For FÁS, one statistic requiring attention is that 87% of respondents reported that they were unaware of labour market grants to assist them obtain or regain employment. While 30% of the 50 employers who responded to the survey indicated that they employed someone with a disability, only 4 had availed of any of the range of FÁS employer supports. Again, further research is required as to the reasons for this disappointing take up of some employer supports.

The research would appear to indicate that sizable numbers of graduates with disabilities have accessed employment independent of the support of state and voluntary agencies for disabled people.

However, if there is one overriding conclusion from the many offered by this report it is the value of disabled people remaining in education for as long as possible. 89% of respondents to this survey said that they felt their degree made them more employable.

People with disabilities who have the ability to cope in third level should certainly be encouraged to avail of this option. Third level institutions now offer a range of disability supports that were unheard of a few years ago. This started with the appointment of Disability Liaison Officers in most colleges and the consequent development of tailored Careers Support Services for students with disabilities in some colleges, including UL. A national support organisation to promote employment opportunities for disabled graduates, GET AHEAD, was formed in 2003 and is part funded by FÁS.

This report adds significantly to what we know about disabilities and employment. The authors emphasise that their survey is localised and dealt with a limited sample. However UL's Careers Office and FÁS deserve great credit to this contribution to the subject of disabilities and employment.

What is now required is a national survey on the employment status, and indeed employment requirements, of the larger population of graduates with disabilities. It would

be interesting to see if the UL experience is mirrored elsewhere and, if this is the case, the reasons for the success of graduates with disabilities in the job market can be analysed to the advantage of the wider disability community.

Copies of the report are available from the Careers Service, University of Limerick.
Mary Sweeney – Limerick University

Disabled People Twice As Likely To Be In Poverty

A recent NDA report documents inequalities across the board between the lives of people with disabilities and others. People with disabilities fare significantly worse, whatever measure is taken to look at their participation in Irish society. People with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty, 2½ times less likely to have a job, three times more likely to have left school below the minimum school leaving age, five times more likely to have no access to transport, either public or private, and significantly less likely to socialise outside the home, compared to non-disabled people.

These details emerged from a National Disability Authority report, which was launched on Tuesday 29th November 2005 by Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly, which is entitled

'How far towards equality?

Measuring how equally people with disabilities are included in Irish society'.

It brings together statistics from a variety of sources, including from the Census in 2002 and other official statistics, to the NDA's own surveys and special research commissioned from the ESRI.

The report traces how lower levels of education translate into lower employment rates and a higher risk of poverty. Over one in five young people with a physical disability have left school by the age of 15, which is below the minimum school-leaving age. Only 20% of young disabled adults who left school without a Junior Cert have a job, compared with 70% of young graduates with a disability. Improving the performance of the education system could raise employment rates and life chances significantly.

Lack of transport and inaccessible streets and buildings loom large as obstacles in many disabled people's lives. One in four adults with a disability has neither public nor private transport.

Disability is more highly concentrated among the elderly (over 40% are aged 65 plus) and among lower social groups. For people whose disability is less acute, the gaps in social participation primarily reflect higher age or lower income, but the experience of exclusion is magnified by disability for those whose disability is more restrictive in character.

The NDA has recommended that a regular score sheet be maintained to check what progress is being achieved in reducing the inequalities which have been documented in this report.

The report can be read online at the link below:

<http://www.nda.ie/cntmgmtnew.nsf/0/5419C80ECE72C05D802570C8003E1D36?OpenDocument>

For further details on how to obtain a hard copy of the report, please contact Derek Beattie on (01) 6080400 or by email at dbeattie@nda.ie

Derek Beattie – NDA

The Disability Act – 2005

The Disability Act, previously the Disability Bill 2004, was signed into law on the 8th of July 2005. Its aim, as part of the Government's National Disability Strategy, is to assess and provide for the needs of disabled people with regard to health, education, employment and accessibility and to promote equality and full social inclusion.

Implications for FÁS from this enactment are many and include specified areas for improvement with regard to accessibility to buildings and services.

Part 3 of the act places significant obligations on Government Departments and other public bodies to ensure that all access areas of public buildings are made accessible to people with disabilities. Full compliance with regard to building accessibility is required under section 25 and the deadline is 2015.

Under section 26, all public bodies will have to ensure that persons with disabilities have full access to mainstream public services and to this end, it will be necessary to have at least one officer to act in the capacity of "access officer". The Access Officer, who will have the responsibility of ensuring the full integration of all these services for people with disabilities, including services offered through a third party, should be in place.

Sections 27 and 28, which come into effect on the 31st December 2005, require that all goods and services are fully accessible to people with disabilities. This means public bodies will have to facilitate accessibility by ensuring all information and communication whether in electronic, published and/or verbal format are fully accessible and acceptable to people with disabilities. For example, websites will have to be compatible with equipment used by people with visual impairments, printed matter will have to be available in Braille if required and accommodation will have to be made for sign language. Each public body will need to provide an independent 'inquiry officer' to deal with complaints and the Ombudsman may review decisions made by the inquiry officer.

Further information on the Disability Act 2005, can be obtained from the following link:
<http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/bills28/acts/2005/a1405.pdf>

Joan Kavanagh – DPDU
