



FÁS Disability Policy and Development Unit Newsletter June 2003 – Issue 1

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FÁS Disability Policy and Development Unit (DPDU)

To facilitate a smooth transfer of services from the National Rehabilitation Board (in June 2000) FÁS established a new internal unit, namely, the Disability Policy and Development Unit (DPDU). The aim of the unit is to:

- Assist in the integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market;
- Maintain the focus on disability within the organisation and expand FÁS' services and programmes in this area.

DPDU works to promote policy implementation through the various functional divisions of FÁS. Its work remit has included design and development of new programmes for people with disabilities; assistance in implementing training and development initiatives; and the development of staff guidelines, handouts and resource material. It is based in Clyde Road in close proximity to the National Disability Authority, and its staff members have a broad and in-depth knowledge and experience of disability and equality issues.

This unit is one of the two units under the Director – Social Inclusion – Shira Mehlman, reporting to the Assistant Director General of Employment Services, Donal Sands. The unit is staffed by: Manager - Alan Chapman, Programme Officer - Tara O'Brien, Programme Officer (Work Sharing) - Mary Carmody, Programme Officer (Work Sharing) - Julie Keating, - Administrative Assistant -

Eunice Chapman and Faye Kinirons. Karen Mahon - Programme Officer is currently on Maternity Leave.

Some of the initiatives developed by DPDU into the organisation are:

- Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme (DATSS)
- Employee Retention Grant Scheme (ERGS)
- Supported Employment (National Pilot)
- FAS Guidelines on Supporting People with Disabilities in Training
- Good Practice in Working with People with Disabilities (Section 9: Disability Handbook), and others.

Current activities include preparing FÁS Guidelines on the use of Training Support Assistants and Sign Language Interpreters in FÁS Training Centres and the design and development of a Disability Support Service Pilot to be run in two regions.

As the work is not static but an on-going process, there are additional challenges to be addressed. The main challenge is one of communication wherein the DPDU must ensure that (a) FÁS staff are fully informed and resourced with on-going guidance and support to implement the requisite policy as it relates to labour market services for disabled people and (b) effective feedback is relayed back to the unit as to what works or what needs to be improved for disabled people. Additionally, it is anticipated that the proposed Disability Act 2003 will also present new challenges for FÁS. However, we are confident that by a continuous monitoring of our internal and external working environment, the DPDU will continue to assist in meeting the needs of both disabled people and staff with confidence and assurance.

Dual Launch of Employee Retention Grant Scheme and Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme

An Tanaiste, Mary Harney, T.D launched the Employee Retention Grant Scheme and the Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme in early April. These are two unique initiatives aimed at addressing the labour market exclusion experienced by people with disabilities in Ireland. The Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme provides funding so that employers can buy in training for their staff. Its aim is to re-focus employer and employee attitudes towards the ability of disabled people to be effective and productive employees and colleagues. The Employee Retention Grant Scheme is a unique approach within the EU to retaining and/or re-training employees who acquire a disability. Both of these schemes benefit employers and employees by providing opportunities to develop a greater appreciation of the value of people with disabilities as capable and productive co-workers. Mr Rody Molloy, Director General, FÁS stated that "FÁS will continue to demonstrate its commitment to mainstreaming by promoting these new initiatives to employers through our Services to Business offices and in tandem with the partnerships we have developed with so many stakeholders in the development of these grants".

Employee Retention Grant Scheme

When an employee becomes disabled, employers may need assistance with the challenge of adapting the job or work environment so that the staff member can be retained in employment. This new grant scheme provides 90% of costs up to a maximum of € 2,500 for obtaining a specialist assessment and recommendations for retaining the employee. A further €12,500 is available for implementing the recommendations, which may include, for example, retraining for redeployment. For further information contact FÁS Services to Business in your region.

Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme

A recent EU study found that while one in four Europeans has a family member with a disability, only 4% has a colleague with a disability. Raising awareness of the abilities of disabled people as workers is essential to breaking down the barriers they face in the labour market. The Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme provides funding so that employers can buy in Disability Awareness Training for their staff. The purpose of the training is to replace myths and misperceptions with clear and accurate information about disability. In so doing, it also aims to address questions or concerns employers and employees may have about working with people with disabilities. Grants of 90% of eligible training costs up to a maximum of €20,000 are available to companies in the first year and 80% in the second and subsequent years. For further information contact FÁS Services to Business in your region.

These schemes are part of a range of schemes and grants already operating by FÁS to assist people with disabilities to find and keep employment in the private sector, these are the Workplace Equipment/Adaptation Grant (WEAG), Employment Support Scheme (ESS), Job Interview Interpreter Grant (JIIG) and the Personal Reader Grant.

Disability Awareness Training in LES

All Local Employment Services (LES) centres have been provided with Disability Awareness Training in the first quarter of this year. Each programme took two days and thirteen were scheduled nation-wide. The training programme was designed in consultation with FÁS, and the LES, and covered topics such as exploration of disability including myths and attitudes, types of disability, learning difficulties, mental health difficulties and disability etiquette and good practice guidelines. Its aim was to assist LES staff in the exploration of personal, professional and social attitudes towards 'disability' through raising awareness and the promotion of equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities, and consequently assist LES Mediators in responding to the needs of people with disabilities. From the participants' perspective this training was hugely successful in terms of learning and was relevant to their needs. Orbis – Human Resources Development Ltd., on behalf of FÁS, carried out the training.

Employing People with Disabilities – New Publications

Ready, Willing and Able

This is an employers guide to hiring people with a disability. This guide has been produced by FÁS, in conjunction with IBEC and the Aisling Foundation and was introduced at the Ability 2003 conference. The guide is aimed at employers and answers questions and concerns about hiring people with disabilities. It also details state supports and useful contacts, as well as the benefits of employing a person with a disability.

Able To Work

This is a joint initiative between FÁS and ADM. This publication is intended to support the full inclusion to disabled people within the services for the Unemployed Measure of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme. It aims to highlight some of the main barriers to employment faced by disabled people in Ireland, and also to identify models of good practice, supports and grants available to both disabled people moving into employment and to employers seeking to employ a disabled person.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME

The key aspects of Supported Employment are: -

- ❑ **To facilitate the integration of people with disabilities into paid employment in the open labour market,**
- ❑ **To provide supports to assist with this integration process,**
- ❑ **To meet the requirements of employers.**

FAS launched the National Pilot Supported Employment Programme in 2000. To implement the Programme FAS awarded contracts to twenty- four, (24) consortia throughout the country. In 2002 an evaluation of the programme was conducted and the results show that the programme can assist people with disabilities into the open labour market. A total of 775 participants were placed in employment during the programme pilot phase. Employers expressed a high satisfaction rate with the programme and most employees were in receipt of the minimum wage or above. The results highlighted areas for improvement that FAS Community Services have addressed by developing new criteria for the programme. New guidelines have also been developed.

Recently, FAS Community Services called for submissions to qualify for funding under Supported Employment. The evaluation of these submissions is currently in progress and it is planned to award contracts in the near future.

The Supported Employment Evaluation report will become available at the end of June 2003.

For further information or to request and copy of the Supported Employment Evaluation report contact cathy.english@fas.ie

FÁS' National Advisory Committee on Disability (NACD)

The National Advisory Committee (NACD) was established in June 2002, to assist and advice FAS on matters relating to the development and provision of effective vocational training and employment services for people with disabilities. The Committee reports to the Executive Board. Its terms of reference are to:

1. Assist and advise on the provision and/or systems necessary for greater inclusion of people with disabilities on FÁS programmes and services;

2. Provide FÁS with assistance in identifying gaps and existing disincentives in regards to FÁS programmes and services, and providing advice on how these may be overcome;
3. Assist FÁS in promoting meaningful policies, processes and procedures that encourage the employment, retention and advancement of people with disabilities in the open labour market.

The 'National Advisory Committee on Disability' comprises of 13 members, including the Chair, who is Mr. Paul Hogan. It consists of organisations of and for people with disabilities, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Department of Health and Children, ADM, IBEC, ICTU and FAS. It meets approximately four times a year, and members serve a two-year term of office.

Some of the issues addressed by the NACD over the past year include: development of the Employee Retention Grant Scheme (ERGs); review of the Positive to Disability award; discussion on the benefits of the USA 'Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Programme (for disabled people)'; endorsing the 'Disability Customer Survey 2002'; and issues of concern in relation to mainstreaming, Community Employment and the Social Economy Programme.

One year following its establishment, the NACD invited Minister of State, Frank Fahey, TD, to meet the members of the Committee and receive an overview of its work to date, including achievements, outstanding items pending, and identify future work. The Minister, while posing challenges for FAS in meeting our remit in providing labour services for disabled people, congratulated FAS, and the Committee, on the work done to date and the amount of progress made. NACD members reported that the Committee contributes to co-ordination in the field and enables information to be fed to the different sectors, "while early days yet it was having an impact". FAS' Director General acknowledged the contribution that the Committee made and would continue to make in challenging FAS, and other Government Departments, in meeting the labour market needs of people with disabilities, and that "it has a vital role as an avenue to channel problems and seek resolutions" in meeting this remit.



The Disability portal has been designed to provide information on training and employment with particular emphasis on disability concerns. It can be found on both the FÁS Internet and Intranet homepages, and aims to be an easy point of reference for those affected by disabilities and for other people who may seek information concerning disability issues. The thinking behind the establishment of the portal is to create a "one stop shop", so that people need only access one point, which can then direct them on to further helpful links. The portal does not attempt to be a rubicon of information. It is intended that the portal will quickly become known as a start up or a springboard for people beginning to search for specific detailed information. The portal makes use of existing links to web pages on the FÁS Intranet and Internet sites and to other web pages whose

information is deemed relevant. The available information ranges from advocacy agencies to training and job sites.

It is important to ensure that the information on this website is accurate and up to date, should you find something remiss or know of a link which would be useful to others, please forward the information to disability@fas.ie

2003 SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD SUMMER GAMES

One of the highlights of the year was the hosting by Ireland of the Special Olympics. This provided a unique and unparalleled sporting and cultural experience for the athletes taking part, from approx 160 international delegations from all over the world, as well as their coaches, families, volunteers and sponsors, combining the excitement of sport with the opportunity for personal distinction, achievement and pride.

Whilst FÁS as an organisation had no discrete formal involvement with the Special Olympics, groups of staff members held collections to sponsor athletes along with the many individual staff members who also gave graciously and unstintingly of their flexi-time and/or annual leave to act as volunteers for the event.

Well done! to all those committed people.