



INCLUSION IRELAND

National Association for People with an Intellectual Disability

Opening statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committees on Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Health and Education and Skills.

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Ireland plain English guidelines.**

Introduction

Chairperson, deputies and senators, Inclusion Ireland would like to extend its thanks for the opportunity to address you here today.

Established in 1961, Inclusion Ireland is a national, rights based advocacy organisation that works to promote the rights of people with an intellectual disability.

The vision of Inclusion Ireland is that of people with an intellectual disability living and participating in the community with equal rights as citizens, to live the life of their choice to their fullest potential. Inclusion Ireland's work is underpinned by the values of dignity, inclusion, social justice, democracy and autonomy.

In schools

There is a chronic shortage of places for children with autism in autism classes in schools. This is especially prevalent in second level where the number of class spaces is about ¼ of that at primary level where there are also black spots. There is legislation going through the Oireachtas at present (Education (Admissions to Schools) Bill) that could solve this problem.

Recommendation: The NCSE should have the power to direct a school to open autism class so every child who has this support need may attend their local school if this is their wish. Obviously, resources would have to flow to the school.

A lack of ambition

A lack of ambition and flexibility in the 'system' starts early for people with a disability, especially young people with an intellectual disability. For example, there is no career guidance in special schools as it is assumed responsibility for these young people will transfer the HSE at 18 years of age. If a person would like to try employment, training or higher education it is unclear where career guidance may be sought.

At present the Department of Education and Skills is conducting a review of career guidance in schools. Special schools are not included in the terms of reference of the review such is the lack of ambition for young people with disabilities within the Department of Education and Skills. The review will examine the guidance services in second level, further education and higher education but not the complete absence of a career guidance service in special schools.

Recommendation: Special schools must be included in the review of career guidance services as a matter of urgency.

Special schools are constituted as primary schools meaning there is often little or no access to a Leaving Cert or Leaving Cert Applied due to an absence of subject specialist teachers. This has a significant impact on the young person's progress.

For example: Inclusion Ireland held an event on education for people with a disability over 18. One young man Jason presented. He attended a special school and left with no formal qualifications. Jason was linked in with a service called WalkPeer, Louth who encouraged him to pursue his dream of further education. He had a great love of computers and wanted to enrol in Drogheda Institute of Further Education on a QQI level 5 post leaving cert course. He could not enrol as he did not have the minimum requirement of a Leaving Cert Applied. Not deterred, Jason took a year to complete a Leaving Cert Applied supported by WalkPeer and then enrolled. He graduated from the level 5 course and has now completed his level QQI level 6 in IT. Jason told us how he was hoping to enrol in a degree course in IT in Dundalk Institute of Technology.

There are other initiatives in higher education run by disability services. For example, Kare pioneered the 'Inclusive Learning Initiative' in NUI Maynooth. People with intellectual disabilities were supported by Kare to attend undergraduate programs in the university. One young man told the Inclusion Ireland conference of how he was half way through completing an Arts degree specialising in his love of traditional music. However, funding for the Inclusive Learning Project has ceased and it is set to discontinue.

Many examples of good inclusive practice as highlighted in these two examples are founded on 'seed' or 'project' funding. Regardless of them being a success they are discontinued and the learning on how to support young people with disabilities to achieve the same goals as their peers is lost. Good practice is rarely brought into the mainstream. Dreams are dashed.

Recommendation: People with a disability must have access to supports to engage in mainstream further education and training. Examples of good practice must be supported and their learning incorporated into services such as Intreo, Solas, etc.

A lack of flexibility

When young people with a disability do leave school they may come into contact with a Guidance Officer in the HSE. The only options for discussion are HSE funded day services.

As recently as Friday 13th April, the HSE reported to the National Disability Inclusion Strategy Stakeholders Group (chaired by Minister Finian McGrath, TD) that “The Guidance Service to support adults with disabilities has been completely depleted and therefore the provision of appropriate guidance and the facilitation of transition planning is seriously curtailed. Furthermore, there is no cross-sectoral structure in place to support transition planning between Health and Education”.

If a person would like to try employment or further education & training they must look elsewhere for guidance and information and with no guidance counsellor in special schools, it is unclear where such guidance can be sought. Once a person is no longer a school leaver they are not a priority for the HSE. If employment or education do not work out there is an almost zero possibility of accessing a HSE funded day service at a later stage. The current situation is discouraging young people with disabilities from taking a ‘risk’ of trying employment as support from the HSE services will have evaporated if work proves to be a difficult option.

Recommendation: other school leavers may defer a college place if the wish; a similar accommodation must be available for school leavers with a disability in relation to a HSE funded service.

A lack of ambition + a lack of flexibility =

For the 1500 school leavers in 2018 with disabilities the only option they will receive is access to a HSE funded day service and a life on Disability Allowance. On average this costs about €25,000 (15k for the day service and 10k for the Disability Allowance) per annum for a segregated life for the person with a disability that bears little resemblance to anything their peers experience.

In the HSE’s New Directions report from 2012 people with disabilities said they were often bored, engaged in meaningless tasks and had very little scope for progression in a day service. Yet we continue to funnel them into this system regardless of the person’s dreams and ambitions.

Support to access work, training and education leads to longer term gains for all.

Access to training

One of the main barriers to employment, and further education and training is that there are very few courses at QQI level 3 and 4. Courses at this level are accessible to people with intellectual disabilities and they

can then build upon this training to achieve real jobs. The whole area of apprenticeships and traineeships is underdeveloped for people with disabilities.

At an Inclusion Ireland conference on education after 18 years of age the disability service provider Kare presented on a traineeship program they have piloted: 'Project Search' in Naas General Hospital. Project Search gives young people with a disability a chance to learn on the job over a 9-month internship period. The people on the internship learn real skills in a real working environment to enable them to take up real jobs. This is only one example of apprenticeships or traineeships that can prepare people with a disability for real employment. At present such examples are the exception rather than the norm.

Recommendation: At present Solas are undertaking a review of training and apprenticeships. This review should include training for jobs that is suitable for people with intellectual disabilities that leads to real jobs paying a real wage.

Employability is the government agency tasked with assisting people with a disability to find employment. It must be noted their scope is narrow in that they assist 'job ready' people only. If a person requires on the job training or support or a PA this is not available.

Recommendation: where a person with a disability has a desire to work the appropriate service and support should be made available to assist them to realise their employment goals.

Cost of disability

Many people with a disability enter the disability allowance scheme and never leave it due to a historical lack of engagement by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Many people with a disability experience poverty at rates more than double the population as a whole. There is a cost to having a disability and attaining the same standard of living as people who do not have a disability. Additional costs include: additional heat, prepared foods, transports costs, specialist aids and equipment, etc. Studies have put the cost of living with a disability in Ireland at between €207 - €276 per week.¹

The cost of disability, especially relating to accessible transport, has a significant impact on people taking up work. The Motorised Transport Grant and the Mobility Allowance were closed to new entrants in 2013. Despite promises, no replacement scheme has been established. These

¹ The private economic cost of disability in The Economics of Disability, Cullinan J & Lyons, S (2015)

allowances made getting to work possible for many people with disabilities. While all recipients of Disability Allowance have a free travel pass, accessible transport and indeed transport itself are not always available.

During Inclusion Ireland's consultation with disabled people for Budget 2018 people noted the following:

"Reinstatement of the mobility grant. This had left families in desperate financial distress and has left many disabled people in rural areas without transport."

"More bus routes for people living in rural areas. More frequent buses in towns. Community life is essential for good mental health and social interaction."

Recommendation: the establishment of a commission to examine the true cost of disability in Ireland.

Make advancement of the Health (Transport Support) Bill a priority for the Oireachtas.

Personal budgets

Inclusion Ireland welcomes the imminent introduction of personal budgets. While the introduction of personal budgets is welcome news, we believe it is wrong to exclude children from having access to a personal budget with no rationale for this.

In addition to this, the introduction of personal budgets will be a landmark change in the way that persons with disabilities are supported in Ireland. The final report to the Minister McGrath contains a narrative of mistrust of people who receive a personal budget. The report is framed in language that puts an emphasis on the potential for wrongdoing which is mean-spirited.

Personal budgets are a key enabler of good lives for people with disabilities and the focus on outcomes in the report of the Task Force on Personalised Budgets is most welcome. These outcomes must include employment and valued participation in social and civic life.

The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

All government departments and the HSE are required to have regard to the public sector duty in all activities as provided for by Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014.

Recommendation: Inclusion Ireland would encourage the DEASP, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Health and the HSE to ensure that all decisions and supports made in relation to supports for people with a disability are in line with this duty by being proactive in promoting equality, ensuring human rights are realised and eliminating discrimination.

Conclusion

The question must be asked, why are we spending so much money on putting young people with disabilities through an education system that does not see them as adults progressing into further education, training or employment but as objects of charity to transition into our Health and Social Services systems?

Good services are not more expensive than poor services. They are just better.