

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND
EMPLOYMENT

Outline Sectoral Plan under the Disability Bill 2004

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH
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Preface by An Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment

I am very pleased to publish my Department's Outline Sectoral Plan to coincide with the publication of the Disability Bill 2004 and the Outline Sectoral Plans produced by a number of other Government Departments.

Mainstream service provision was a significant change in the way we support people with disabilities, following the transfer of responsibility for vocational training and employment from the Department of Health and Children to my Department. In this context this Outline Sectoral Plan highlights three key areas where policy is being implemented:

- developing the skills of people with disabilities to enable them to access employment;
- stimulating awareness amongst employers of the contribution which people with disabilities can make to their businesses and encouraging companies to more actively consider recruiting people with disabilities; and
- providing specific employment supports for people with disabilities and employers.

I am committed to ensuring that people with disabilities get every opportunity possible to reach their full potential in the open labour market, thereby increasing their independence and allowing them to play their full part in the world of work. We must also ensure that society can benefit from their abilities.

I would like to invite the views of all interest groups and relevant stakeholders on the commitments entered by my Department and its agencies, as set out in this Outline Sectoral Plan. I intend that these commitments will be closely monitored and reviewed, taking full consideration of any such views received, and revised as necessary to reflect changing economic and other conditions.



Mary Harney T.D.
Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment

1 High level goal

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is committed to working with all stakeholders to provide the maximum support to people with disabilities in accessing services falling within the remit of this Department. The key focus for the Department is to facilitate and improve access to vocational training and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, in the belief that employment offers the best means for them to participate fully in the social, cultural and economic life of the country.

2 Mainstreaming

The Department, under the Government's policy of mainstreaming services to people with disabilities, will continue to develop policy in this area under three broad headings:

- developing the skills of people with disabilities to enable them to access employment;
- stimulating awareness amongst employers of the contribution which people with disabilities can make to their businesses and encouraging them to recruit more people with disabilities;
- providing specific employment supports for people with disabilities and for employers.

The Department's objective in the period ahead will be to consolidate and progress vocational training and employment services for people with disabilities since assuming policy responsibility in this area under the Government's mainstreaming policy relating to services for people with disabilities.

3 Planned labour market policy initiatives in support of people with disabilities

Consistent with commitments under Sustaining Progress aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for people with disabilities the following specific actions are being undertaken by the Department:

3.1 Review of Vocational Training Provision

A comprehensive review of the overall effectiveness and efficiency of vocational training provision for people with disabilities has been undertaken by consultants commissioned by the Department, including an assessment of the potential for more integrated training. FAS is engaged in active consultations with relevant stakeholders in response to the recommendations of the report. When these consultations have been completed, FAS will publish a strategy in 2005 on future vocational training provision for people with a disability.

3.2 National Supported Employment Programme

Following a review of the National Supported Employment Programme undertaken by FAS, new criteria for the provision of Supported Employment services will be implemented in 2004 to ensure more effective integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market, leading to greater independence and career progression.

3.3 Workway Project

The Workway project, which was initiated under the PPF and funded by the Department, aims to increase awareness and address barriers to employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the private sector. Funding for the project ended in the first quarter of 2004, and the project is currently being reviewed. FAS has contracted with the Social Partners to implement a separate new phase of Workway over the period ending in the first quarter of 2005.

3.4 Sheltered Employment

A proposal for a more mainstream approach to ensuring better employment opportunities for people with disabilities, including those in sheltered employment, is being advanced in the Department. The aim is to introduce a new Full Time Employment Support Scheme (FTESS) for the employment of people with disabilities that would provide incentives to both employees and employers.

4 Collaboration with Other Government Departments

The Department will continue to work with the Departments of Social and Family Affairs, and Health and Children to ensure that no undue obstacles are placed in the way of people with disabilities entering employment, retaining their job or occupation, or returning to the open labour market.

5 **Scope of Outline Sectoral Plan and Policy Response to the Disability Bill**

The Department has developed this outline sectoral plan and policy response to the Disability Bill in consultation with the agencies under its remit. This is in addition to the Department's responsibilities in labour market services for people with disabilities. The Department will consult with relevant interest groups representing people with disabilities in the preparation of the Sectoral Plan.

6 Commitments entered into in the light of the Disability Bill

6.1 Disability Awareness Training

The Department will ensure that key staff within its responsibility, and the agencies under its remit, undergo disability training by 2005 in order to assist people with disabilities in accessing services. This will be provided at all levels of the organization.

6.2 Physical Access

The Department will promote physical access, as far as practicable, to all public spaces and buildings occupied by the Department or agencies under its remit by 2007. This will include structures such as doorways, steps, etc., customer information counters, signage, non-visual guides, and health and safety information.

6.3 Information Provision and Access

The Department and its agencies will ensure that all information available to the public in general is available to people with disabilities in alternative formats as required and on request. The Department will also review the manner in which people with disabilities are represented in public literature, captioning on corporate videos, audio loops, and e-information.

6.4 Complaints and Redress

Complaints and redress procedures currently in operation will be reviewed to ensure that they respond to the needs of people with disabilities. Where no procedures exist, the Department will ensure that the agencies concerned develop internal systems for handling complaints relating to issues of 'disability'. These procedures should comply with the Ombudsman's Guide to Internal Complaints Systems.

7 Implementation of Outline Sectoral Plan

The Department and the agencies under its remit will within twelve months of the publication of the Disabilities Bill consult with stakeholders and draw up a Sectoral Plan to give effect to the commitments and objectives set out above. The Department, and the agencies under its remit, will have regard to the funding and staffing resources available to them for implementation.

8 Monitoring

The Department will establish a system for monitoring progress on the implementation of the Sectoral Plan. Each agency under the Department's remit will submit an annual report on the progress achieved.

9 Review of Sectoral Plan

Implementation of the Sectoral Plan will be reviewed periodically and amended as necessary.

10 Labour Market Services for People with Disabilities

10.1 Provision of Schemes and Grants to Assist Private Sector Employers

The Department, through FAS, will continue to prioritise training and employment supports for people with disabilities, within available resources. This includes a range of schemes and grants aimed at promoting or facilitating the employment of people with disabilities within the private sector, including:

Employment Support Scheme — wage subsidies for employers who employ people with disabilities with reduced productivity levels

Workplace Equipment/Adaptation Grant — grant assistance for employers who have to adapt their workplace or equipment for an employee with a disability

Job Interview Interpreter Grant — available to people with a hearing or speech impairment attending job interviews

Personal Reader Grant — available to people who are blind or visually impaired and who may need assistance with job related reading

Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme — grants available for employers to cover the cost of disability awareness training for their organisation's staff and personnel

Employee Retention Grant Scheme — grant assistance to employers to retain employees that acquire a disability that jeopardizes their employment.

10.2 Other Labour Market Programmes

In addition to the above, FAS also operates on behalf of the Department:

Pilot Programme for Employment of People with Disabilities (PEP) — grant assistance for commercially viable enterprises of which at least 50% of the employees are people with disabilities

Supported Employment Programme — an open labour market initiative that works towards the placement of and support of people with different types and varying degrees of disability who need the initial support of a Job Coach to obtain or maintain employment.

10.3 Review of Labour Market Services

The Department, in conjunction with FAS, will keep under regular review the range of supports it provides to people with disabilities and will introduce, where necessary, changes to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing schemes and, where circumstances appear to warrant it, new schemes or supports to improve the employment prospects for people with disabilities.