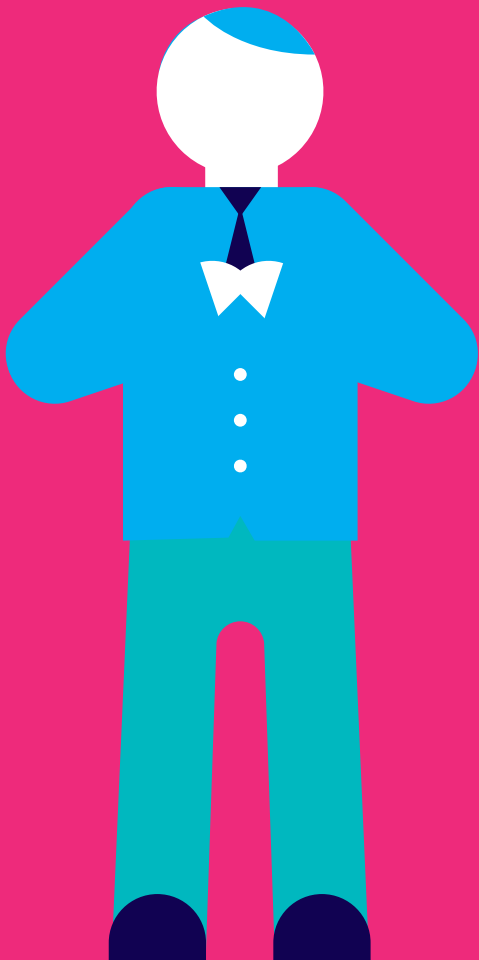




**Make Work Pay** for People with Disabilities  
**Executive Summary 2017**





## Executive Summary and Key Recommendations

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## 1. Background

In 2010, the OECD found that:

“Too many workers leave the labour market permanently due to health problems or disability, and too few people with reduced work capacity manage to remain in employment.”

This statement also applies in Ireland, where people with disabilities are only half as likely to be in employment as others of working age.

Currently there are over a quarter of a million people with disabilities receiving a social welfare illness or disability weekly payment in Ireland. Almost half of these are receiving Disability Allowance. Across all disability and illness schemes, almost 80% do not claim for dependent spouses or children.

Ensuring people with disabilities are supported to achieve their employment ambitions is one of the most significant labour market and social policy challenges for policymakers today. To this end, the Government’s ten-year Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities was launched by An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny T.D. in October 2015. The strategy’s six priority areas are:

- i. Build skills, capacity and independence
- ii. Provide bridges and supports into work
- iii. Make work pay
- iv. Promote job retention and re-entry to work
- v. Provide coordinated and seamless support
- vi. Engage employers

This Report represents the findings and recommendations of the Make Work Pay Interdepartmental Group<sup>1</sup>, ('the Group'), which was established to address Strategic Priority iii, "Make work pay". The Group from the outset adopted a cross-departmental approach. Specifically, the Report considers:

"The complex interaction in the benefit system, including the Medical Card, the additional costs of work associated with disability, and the net income gains in employment, with a view to devising workable solutions to difficulties identified."

## 2. Methodology

The Group, in the first instance, agreed a set of policy principles – client focused; simple and transparent; fair; promoting early intervention; and cost-effective and efficient – which guided its deliberations and subsequent recommendations.

There is a complex range of income, health and other supports available to people with disabilities, with different eligibility criteria and definitions of disability applying across different schemes. This reflects the incremental evolution of supports, designed across different Departments, to meet the diverse needs of persons with disabilities. The Group examined the main income and eligibility criteria. Among the key benefits at risk if someone leaves the welfare system or if earnings rise above a threshold are the Medical Card, Free Travel, and the Household Benefits Package.

The Group examined the strategies and current range of measures across OECD countries to enhance incentives to work for people with disabilities. The Group also reviewed the international research evidence on the impact of these approaches on employment participation by people with disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

The Group compiled the existing research and statistical data for Ireland on factors affecting such work participation, including findings from the National Disability Survey, the Department of Social Protection's 2015 survey of Disability Allowance recipients, and research from the National Disability Authority. The main categories of social welfare disability payment recipients were profiled. A detailed technical background paper<sup>3</sup> contains an analysis of the differences between net incomes for people on

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1 See Appendix 2 for a full list of group members.

2 A background paper "Making work pay for people with disabilities – a review of the international evidence" is published alongside the Report.

3 This paper "Examination of the Financial Incentive to Participate in the Labour Market of Disability and Illness Schemes", which summarises the work undertaken to inform the Group, is published alongside the Report.

welfare and in employment, computing replacement rates and the proportion of any extra earnings a person with a disability would get on taking a job or increasing hours of work. This analysis of an extensive range of representative case studies covered different disability payment schemes, family types, and earnings situations. It drew on evidence sourced from the Department of Social Protection's record systems on patterns of work history and earnings of disability scheme recipients. The analysis used the benefit rates in force in 2016, at the time the Report was written, however using the 2017 rates would make no material difference to the findings and recommendations.

The Group conducted an extensive consultation process with stakeholders, representing the main disability groups and umbrella bodies, and reviewed the findings on the 'make work pay' theme of similar consultations ranging back to the early 2000s. Together, these suggested a set of consistent key messages in relation to the barriers to employment faced by people with disabilities.

The Report presents a synthesis of the main findings of the Group's research, analysis and the feedback from consultation. The twenty-four recommendations are based on the Group's findings and seek to address the main barriers identified to 'making work pay' for people with disabilities. In the case of each recommendation, the responsible bodies (Departments/Agencies) are identified and the associated time frames for proposals and implementations are set out.

## **3. Key Findings**

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The key findings of the analysis are grouped under three headings:

1. Raising employment rates of people with disabilities is an international policy goal
2. Ireland's incentives to work are generally in line with those in other countries
3. There is positive interest in work among people with disabilities in Ireland

### **3.1 Raising employment rates of people with disabilities is an international policy goal**

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the World Health Organisation's World Report on Disability, the OECD, and the EU Disability Strategy all emphasise the importance of raising employment rates for people with disabilities. Across the developed world, there is no 'stand-out' approach taken to this issue with countries adopting a range of policies and strategies. While a variety of different approaches have been adopted in OECD countries, experts are agreed that:

- **Social inclusion**, through access to employment, is particularly important for people with disabilities, and brings wider personal and social benefits as well as being a protection against poverty. Society can also gain from the social and economic contribution people with disabilities can make when enabled to work according to their capacities.
- **Financial incentives** (the key focus of this Report) are not, of themselves, enough to make a significant difference to participation in employment by people with disabilities, and the scale of response to improved incentives is muted. Rather, positive financial incentives may be considered an important enabling condition. A disincentive to work is just one of a range of barriers to raising employment of people with disabilities, and action is needed across a number of different fronts if there is to be real progress.
- **Continuity and security of support**, in the form of an adequate income and access to key supports and services, are very important for people living with a disability. People with disabilities are reluctant to give up the security of their welfare payments and health supports when they are unsure of the impact of returning to work on their income.
- **Perceived, not just actual disincentives affect behaviour**, so that if people perceive they will be barely better off or even worse off in a job, their decisions about work are affected, even in cases where actual calculations would show otherwise.
- **Early intervention is critical**, as joblessness soon becomes virtually permanent; once people with a disability become long-term jobless, only a tiny minority ever take up employment. Therefore, early intervention is critical to support initial employment or early return to work before joblessness becomes established. For those who want to and are able to work, critical points are when young people with disabilities leave education, or when an adult experiences onset of a disability in the course of working life.
- **Incentives to work and adequate social protection need to be balanced**, particularly as many people with disabilities have significant health challenges or severe functional difficulties which could rule out employment.



### 3.2 Ireland's incentives to work are generally in line with those in other countries

Ireland is broadly in line with other OECD countries in terms of the financial incentive measures deployed to assist people to fulfil their employment ambitions. Measures such as the Disability Allowance “earnings disregard” and partial capacity type payments are found in the majority of developed economies. The current system of financial incentives in Ireland for people with disabilities on social welfare is generally well-designed to ensure that a person (without dependants) is financially better off working. The key features of the system can be summarised as follows:

- **Work for most disability recipients pays better than social welfare**  
About 80% of recipients of illness or disability payments do not claim for dependants. In cash terms, our analysis shows they would be financially better off working than on welfare.
- **Family income can be affected if young people with disabilities take up work**  
Depending on family circumstances, for example, if a parent is in receipt of Carer's Allowance, overall family income could actually fall if a young person on Disability Allowance takes a job, depending on what they earn.
- **Work is financially relatively less attractive for people with families**  
Disability welfare payments, like all weekly social welfare payments, have additional allowances for dependent partners and children, while wage rates are not related to family size. This feature of the system means that people who move off welfare altogether because they are working forfeit any such additions, and this affects the extent to which work is financially attractive particularly at lower wages. Social welfare rules also make for complex interactions between the income of the person with a disability and his/her partner's earnings, which can affect total family income.
- **Loss of secondary benefits can become an issue for people as they earn more**  
People who move off welfare altogether into a job would lose social welfare secondary benefits, such as the Household Benefit Package<sup>4</sup> and Living Alone Allowance (worth together about €43 a week to those who get these), and Free Travel. For a single person on Disability Allowance, who

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<sup>4</sup> The Household Benefits Package comprises the Electricity or Gas Allowance, and the Free Television Licence.

would finally move off welfare at an income of €423 a week, this would represent up to a 10% fall in income at that point. Even more significantly, the means test for the Medical Card means that single people on Disability Allowance would lose long-term entitlement once earnings reach €120 a week, even though there generally is a temporary entitlement to retain the Medical Card for three years after taking up work.

- **People who combine welfare and work tend to keep their weekly earnings at or below €120**

Our findings are that people who combine work and Disability Allowance generally do so only up to earnings of about €120 a week, although they could still retain a proportion of their Disability Allowance over a significant range of earnings beyond this point. This behavioural response may be more to do with the loss of a Medical Card at that income level, than with the structure of the Disability Allowance earnings disregard. It may also reflect perceptions or misperceptions about what social welfare reductions apply at earnings over €120. This finding is in line with international evidence that people with disabilities are reluctant to leave the security of the welfare system altogether, and in particular to forfeit any health entitlements.

### 3.3 There is positive interest in work among people with disabilities

Encouragingly, many people with disabilities in Ireland would be interested in a job in the right circumstances.<sup>5</sup> Given health and stamina issues, part-time work is likely to be the choice of most of those not currently working. In particular, significant numbers of people in receipt of Disability Allowance would be interested in part-time or full-time employment if the conditions were right.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the experience of those who have availed of employment supports and financial incentives to return to work has been very positive.

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5 According to the National Disability Survey 2006, about a third of those not working would be interested in a job in the right circumstances.

6 Department of Social Protection, Disability Allowance Survey 2015 <https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/DSPReportonDisabilityAllowanceSurvey2015.pdf>

## 4. Key Barriers Identified

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The Group identified the main barriers which impede people with disabilities from fulfilling their employment ambitions.

- **Risk of losing the Medical Card**

Successive reports have identified the potential loss of the Medical Card as the single most important disincentive to taking up employment. All our analysis, which is in line with international evidence, shows that potential withdrawal of the Medical Card is the single greatest barrier to 'Making Work Pay' for people with disabilities. This emerges from the findings of the Disability Allowance Survey; from our analysis of sample case studies; from previous expert reports; and from the Group's consultations with disability organisations.

The consultation with stakeholders reaffirms that this is the major issue of concern for those persons with a disability who would like to work. This is unsurprising since people with disabilities have poorer health on average, so the Medical Card is a particularly significant support. Ireland (along with the US), appears to be unusual amongst OECD countries in that taking up work may trigger a loss of medical entitlement, which occurs at relatively low levels of income.

While people who have been on a disability payment for at least a year can retain a Medical Card for a further three years on return to work, people with lifelong conditions generally do not see this temporary retention as sufficient, in that it does not offer the security of continued access to the Medical Card, and the supports it brings.

As well as giving entitlement to free healthcare and specialist therapies, the Medical Card also confers eligibility to essential disability aids/assistive technology (such as wheelchairs or hearing aids) free of charge, where they are prescribed. Many of these are expensive items for anyone who would otherwise have to buy them at intervals from their own pocket.

Another practical issue for people with disabilities who hold a Medical Card and who wish to work is that work undertaken must be certified as being of a rehabilitative nature. This certification may create delay and have the effect of discouraging people with disabilities to take up work.

- **The combination of the Medical Card and the Disability Allowance earnings disregards at €120 creates a significant disincentive**

In terms of the most significant financial support, Disability Allowance, there is evidence that in the most common case, a single individual with no dependants, the combination of the phased reduction in the Disability Allowance payment above earnings of €120 a week, and of the Medical Card means test threshold at the same earnings level, appears to act as a significant disincentive to work beyond this point. Those on disability-related payments who do work, tend to do so only up to the earnings disregard limit, despite the fact that the system ensures that they continue to get a significant net benefit from additional hours worked. The decision facing the individual is further complicated by the potential withdrawal of secondary benefits, with a common perception that secondary benefits may be lost if the person takes up any work.

- **Loss of access to transport supports**

The research also identifies access to transport supports as an issue for persons with disabilities seeking to fulfil their employment ambitions. In particular, people on long-term disability payments lose their entitlement to Free Travel immediately if they move off welfare altogether into employment. While there are several transport supports available for persons with disabilities, responsibility for administering these supports is spread across a number of Government Departments and Agencies with differing qualification criteria. Some people who have significant transport needs, could, if they were to work, fall between different schemes of supports. Others may find their entitlement difficult to understand or navigate. These features of the present system can act as a barrier to taking up employment.

- **Complexity makes it hard to decide if you would be better off in a job**

The current system of supports for people with disabilities, across a range of schemes provided by government departments and other state agencies, is a complex one. It reflects the variety and span of different needs people with disabilities can have, as well as the separate evolution of the different schemes. The outcome is that people find the system difficult to navigate. It is hard for individuals to calculate accurately and understand fully the implications of any earnings for their net incomes and entitlements.

The consultation process has identified the value of a ready reckoner, and of the assignment of a dedicated case officer in the local Intreo Office, as important measures to guide the person with disabilities to the appropriate

benefits available and the impact of taking up employment. The support of family and friends in their search for suitable employment was also highlighted as a significant factor.

- **Perception that it takes time to get benefits restored if a job does not work out**

Taking a job may not work out, for one or more reasons. The job may not be suited to the individual's health and capacities, or the individual could experience a health setback, or the employer may run into economic difficulties. People with disabilities, particularly those with intermittently-occurring symptoms, have real concerns about how difficult and how quickly they could get their different benefits (including the Medical Card) restored in a situation where employment does not work out. The fact that there are often several agencies or different schemes involved add to this concern, which can impede a person's willingness to seek or take up employment.

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## **5. Fundamental reform should focus on early intervention**

Having identified the barriers to employment, the Group concluded that there could be a compelling case for a more fundamental reform of the existing system of social welfare disability payments. Detailed recommendations in relation to such a fundamental reform lie outside the Group's terms of reference, but the Group decided that it would be appropriate to suggest that any such reform should focus on early intervention for everyone (including young people) who has the capacity for, and interest in, work. This may entail a restructuring of the disability welfare system, across different schemes, to address key objectives such as early intervention, supporting those who have the capacity for and interest in work, and simplification of complexity.

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## **6. Summary of Key Recommendations**

The principal recommendations in this Report which address the issues identified by the Group are categorised under four broad headings as follows:

- i. Reconfiguring the system of payments and supports to ensure that work pays
- ii. Promoting early intervention
- iii. Communicating effectively that work pays
- iv. Future-proofing

**i. Reconfiguring the system of payments and supports to ensure that work pays**

This set of recommendations seeks to improve the alignment of the various supports in place across different departments and agencies with the overall objective to make work pay.

The Group's recommendations are:

1. Raise the Medical Card earnings disregard from its current level of €120 per week for people on Disability Allowance or on Partial Capacity Benefit associated with Invalidity Pension. This reflects the Group's view that this is the single most significant barrier for people with disabilities, and that the disregard should be increased substantially. *Responsible Department/Agency: Department of Health/HSE*

- Recommended time frame for proposals: Q4 2017
- Recommended time frame for implementation: Q4 2018

2. a. Dispense with the requirement that work be of a 'rehabilitative nature' for Medical Card earnings disregard purposes. *Responsible Department/Agency: Department of Health/HSE*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q4 2017

- b. Dispense with the requirement that work be of a 'rehabilitative nature' for the Disability Allowance earnings disregard. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q4 2017

3. Develop and bring forward proposals to address access to or affordability of necessary aids/ appliances/ assistive technology required for everyday living for those people with disabilities whose entry, retention or return to work could be jeopardised by being unable to afford these items, given the level of employment income, and whose needs are not met by other schemes of assistance. *Responsible Departments/Agencies: Department of Justice and Equality, with support from the National Disability Authority,*

*and in collaboration with the Department of Health, HSE, and the Department of Social Protection*

- Recommended initiation date: Q2 2017
- Recommended implementation time frame: Q4 2018

4. Allow people on a long-term disability payment who move off the payment to get a job to retain entitlement to the Free Travel Pass for a period of three years, similar to the current entitlement to retain a Medical Card. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q1 2018

5. Undertake a review of transport supports encompassing all Government funded transport and mobility schemes for people with disabilities, to enhance the options for transport to work or employment supports for people with disabilities, and to make proposals for development of a coordinated plan for such provision. This Plan should have regard to making the most efficient use of all available transport resources. *Responsible Departments/Agencies: Department of Justice and Equality, in partnership with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, and with support of the National Disability Authority, Department of Health, HSE, Department of Social Protection, Pobal, Department of Finance, Revenue, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform*

- Recommended initiation date: Q2 2017
- Recommended time frame for proposals: Q4 2017

6. The Transport Support Scheme currently being developed by the Department of Health should seek to avoid creating financial barriers for people with disabilities who will be eligible under that scheme and who wish to access employment supports or further their employment ambitions. *Responsible Department/Agency: Department of Health, HSE*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q4 2017

7. a. Put in place and promote a system for fast-track reinstatement of the Medical Card for people with disabilities who have lost it on return to work, and have subsequently had to leave their job within one year. *Responsible Department/Agency: Department of Health, HSE*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q1 2018

- b. Put in place and promote a system for fast-track reinstatement of Disability Allowance, Illness Benefit or Invalidity Pension to people with disabilities who have returned to work, and have subsequently had to leave their job within one year. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q1 2018

8. Establish a formal protocol in the Department of Social Protection/Intreo service that an enquiry from a person on a long-term disability payment about taking up or returning to work will not result in a review of their current entitlements. Communicate this message through all appropriate channels and face-to-face with disability claimants. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*

- Recommended implementation time frame: Q4 2017

## ii. Promoting early intervention

This set of recommendations seeks to introduce new processes to ensure that individuals who wish to work can engage at the earliest possible time with the support systems.

The Group accepts the arguments made by the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare<sup>7</sup> that the minimum age for payment to the individual be raised to age 18, in line with normal completion of second level schooling, and the minimum age for other weekly payments.

The Group noted that these proposals have not been implemented, and acknowledged that there were/are a number of valid concerns that need to be addressed before any

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<sup>7</sup> "Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare (2013) Second Report: Review of Budget 2012 Proposals Regarding Disability Allowance and Domiciliary Care Allowance. Dublin: Department of Social Protection".



such change can be introduced. However, when considering the best interest of the young person, the Group holds the view that the award of disability allowance at age 16, before the young adult has had time to develop his or her full employment potential through education and training, does not support the young adult to achieve his or her employment ambitions. Moreover, as this Report clearly demonstrates, such an award at a young age will, in the vast majority of cases, lead these young adults to a lifetime outside the workforce. The Group is of the view that the State should proactively make available the range of education, training and other supports to the young adult with disability at this critical point in their life, to enable them to fulfil their employment ambitions, similar to their peers.

However, the Group also recognises that the current system may create an expectation amongst parents, of even very young children, that disability allowance will be awarded at age 16. Considering the fact that this proposal has been made previously, the approach recommended for implementation will require wide consultation with disability advocacy groups and parents to ensure that the focus remains on achieving the best possible outcomes for the young people involved.

The Group's recommendations are:

9. Reconfigure the Disability Allowance scheme for new entrants to give effect to the principle of early intervention, as follows:
  - a. Support for 16-18 year olds with significant support needs, which is currently paid by means of Disability Allowance, to be paid via Domiciliary Care Allowance up to 18 years of age;
  - b. Explore possibilities for the reform of the structure of the Disability Allowance for those between the ages of 18-22 to focus on participation in education, training and/or social inclusion according to individual capacity.  
*Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q4 2018

10. Apply the principle of early intervention across all illness and disability schemes, adapting existing schemes where necessary to give effect to this principle. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*

- Recommended initiation date: Q2 2017
- Recommended implementation time frame: Continuous

11. Offer case officer support and other supports to people with disabilities through the Intreo service at the earliest possible opportunity, and work with them to develop a personal progression plan. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q4 2018

12. Implement the recommendations of the Department of Social Protection's Report on the Review of the Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme which focus on capacity, early intervention and back to work planning, subject to Government approval. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q4 2018

### iii. **Communicating effectively that work pays**

This set of recommendations seeks to address the importance attached internationally of ensuring that people with disabilities have better information available to them on the benefits of taking up employment, where they would be interested in so doing.

The Group's recommendations are:

13. Develop a basic ready reckoner to enable people with disabilities to calculate the likely net monetary value of taking up or going back to work. This would cover basic tax and welfare entitlements, and indicate whether the person would be eligible on income grounds for a Medical Card. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q2 2018

14. Develop a proactive and ongoing strategy to communicate clear, simple, and accurate information in a user-friendly way on what benefits people with disabilities will keep if they are in employment. This strategy should include the following steps:

- Provide clear information on the website of the Department of Social Protection as the lead Department in this area, with cross-links to relevant information from other Departments (e.g. on Medical Card entitlement) and to [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie). Include information on fast-track return to benefits.
- Develop dedicated information on [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie) and on the microsite [www.gettingbacktowork.ie](http://www.gettingbacktowork.ie) around employment for people with disabilities and associated benefits that would be retained.
- Provide for the information to be available in accessible formats as required, such as Easy to Read, and a signed video with subtitles.
- Provide training for Citizens Information Centres in the operation of the Ready Reckoner, and how to build on this to provide a more personalised individual assessment of a wider range of benefits in more complex circumstances.
- Ensure front-line staff in Intreo Offices are trained to know how to access the relevant information, how to operate the Ready Reckoner, and how to refer a client to the local Citizens Information Centre for assistance with a more detailed financial and benefits assessment of complex circumstances.
- Agree formal referral paths from Intreo Offices to local Citizens Information Centres or the Citizens Information Phone Service. Develop information leaflets/messages targeted at people leaving long-term disability payments to enter a job.
- Develop some simple clear messaging around 'It pays to work'.

Engage with the national disability organisations, including those representing individuals themselves and parent and sibling organisations, and with disability service providers, around where to get this information, and around how to communicate it to people with disabilities through their normal channels. *Responsible Department/Agencies: Department of Social Protection, Citizens Information Board, National Disability Authority*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q1 2019

15. Extend inter-agency protocols, where relevant, to include referral of people with disabilities to authoritative sources of information and guidance on the financial and other aspects of employment. *Responsible Departments/Agencies: Department of Social Protection, Citizens Information Board, Department of Health, HSE, Department of Education and Skills, Education*

*and Training Boards, Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Local Authorities, Disability Service Providers*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q1 2019

16. Develop and strengthen the capacity of the Department of Social Protection Intreo Service to support people with disabilities to get and maintain employment by:

- Designating Intreo as the first point of contact for people with disabilities interested in work. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*
- Developing the Intreo Service as a welcoming and supportive environment for people with disabilities, with a personalised approach to each case. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*
- Facilitating the attendance of a family member, friend or advocate to support the person with a disability throughout the engagement, if the person desires. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*
- Training Intreo Service Case officers and other front-line staff to work with people with disabilities, to identify their needs, and support them to fulfil their employment ambitions, in accordance with their capacity. *Responsible Departments/Agencies: Department of Social Protection, Citizens Information Board, Department of Health, HSE, Department of Education and Skills, Education and Training Boards, Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Local Authorities*
- Designating named case officers at Intreo Centres to support people with disabilities interested in taking up work. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*
- Provision by the Intreo Service of a continuum of support to the person with disability as they transition into work. *Responsible Departments/Agencies: Department of Social Protection (Lead), EmployAbility, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Health, HSE*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q1 2019

17. Develop a suite of protocols with the range of State-funded Disability Service Providers to work in partnership with Intreo offices to advance common objectives, and support people with disabilities to fulfil their employment

ambitions, in accordance with their capacity. *Responsible Departments/Agencies: Department of Justice and Equality and the National Disability Authority to facilitate development of the protocols, working with the Department of Social Protection and The Citizens Information Board*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q1 2019

18. At local level, review and revise existing protocols and service level agreements with State service providers (including HSE offices, Education and Training Boards, EmployAbility, Local Enterprise Offices, Local Employment Services, Jobs Clubs, Community Resource Centres) to reflect the opportunities now available at Intreo Offices. *Responsible Departments/Agencies: Department of Social Protection, EmployAbility, Department of Health, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, HSE, Local Authorities*

- Recommended implementation time frame: By Q1 2019

19. Provide clear information on the procedures for fast-track return to benefits, any paperwork the individual must supply, and the target timescale for restoration of a person's benefits. Provide clear information on any interim arrangements (e.g. payment of Supplementary Welfare Allowance while awaiting award of the substantive payment). Communicate this information: on the Department of Social Protection and HSE websites; through Intreo case officers working with individuals; through direct communication with individuals exiting a welfare payment to take up work; through disability organisations; and through Citizens Information Centres. *Responsible Departments/Agencies: Department of Social Protection, Citizens Information Board, Department of Health, HSE*

- Recommended initiation date: Q2 2017
- Recommended implementation time frame: Continuous

#### iv. Future-proofing

This set of recommendations seeks to identify future actions to ensure that the changes introduced on foot of this Report are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that Ireland does not fall behind in the policies it puts in place to support employment by people with disabilities in a changing policy world.

The Group's recommendations are:

20. Formally proof all new schemes or reforms at design stage to minimise complexity, and ensure that a person with a disability, who is interested in work, is supported and is not financially disadvantaged by taking up employment. *Responsible Departments/Agencies: Department of Social Protection, Department of Health, HSE, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Local Authorities, Revenue*

- Recommended initiation date: Q2 2017
- Recommended implementation time frame: Continuous

21. Review the Disability Allowance earnings disregards at regular intervals, taking into account developments in the wider economy. *Responsible Department: Department of Social Protection*

- Recommended initiation date: Q2 2017
- Recommended implementation time frame: Continuous

22. Every five years, conduct an evaluation of policies in relation to income and other supports for people with disabilities (including earnings disregards, Medical Cards) from an employment perspective. *Responsible Departments: Department of Social Protection, Department of Health*

- Recommended initiation date: Q2 2017
- Recommended implementation time frame: Continuous

23. Continue to strengthen data collection efforts and the research and evaluation capacity to inform policymaking in this area. *Responsible Departments/*

*Agencies: Department of Social Protection, Department of Health, HSE, National Disability Authority, Department of Education and Skills*

- Recommended implementation time frame: Continuous

24. Incorporate an annual review of delivery of actions recommended in this Report and the outcomes achieved in the reviews of progress under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024.  
*Responsible Department: Department of Justice and Equality*

- Recommended initiation date: Q4 2017, and annually thereafter in accordance with the time frame in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities.

## 7. Conclusion

The Group is strongly of the view that the implementation of the recommendations in this Report, taken together with the other actions in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy, will make a real difference to people with disabilities, who have the capacity and interest, to participate in employment. The challenge for policymakers, working across government, is to ensure that the conditions are right to support people with disabilities to achieve their employment ambitions and potential.

