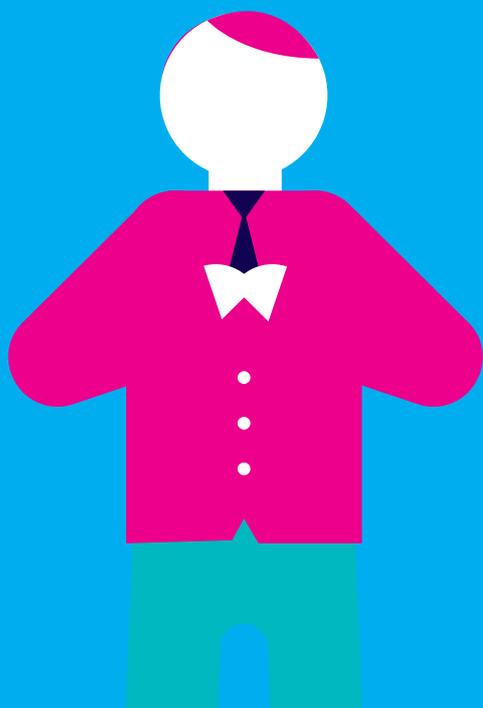




Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities

Plain English Summary 2017





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About this booklet

This booklet is a plain English summary of a report called 'Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities'.

The 'Make work pay' report provides recommendations that, **if** agreed to by Government, would make it easier for you to start working and stay in work.

We have done our best in this summary to explain the main recommendations from the full report.

This is a very complex area, so if you are unsure about any part of this booklet, please refer to the full 'Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities' report for more detail. You can find the full report at www.welfare.ie.

Background

The Government wants people with disabilities to be able to work if they want to. In Ireland, if you have a disability you are less likely to be working than a person without a disability. In fact, people with disabilities of working age are only half as likely to work as other people of working age.

Many people with disabilities would like to work. And for most people who get disability payments, work actually pays better than social welfare.

Most people with disabilities who are on social welfare are either single or do not claim extra for a spouse or children. In these cases, a person will normally get more money overall if they are working than if they are not. But many people worry about losing their Medical Card and other extra benefits. While this does not always happen, it might happen if you earn more than €120 a week.

Recommendations to make work pay

It is important that Government policy helps **make work pay** for people with disabilities. As part of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, a group named the Make Work Pay Interdepartmental Group (the Group) looked into how to make work pay for people with disabilities.

The Group produced a report with 24 recommendations which the Group thinks will help. The Group believes that these recommendations, **if** agreed to by the Government, should make it easier for you to start working and stay in work.

It is now up to the Government to examine these recommendations.

What happens if the Government agrees with the recommended changes?

The Group has made 24 recommendations.

If the Government agrees with these recommendations and the recommendations are put into action, four things will happen.

1. Disability payments and supports will be changed to help make sure work pays.
2. Programmes will help people as early as possible to prepare themselves for work and help them get work.
3. Information will clearly explain that work pays.
4. Changes will be reviewed regularly to make sure that these policies are successful and up to date.

What are the recommendations for change?

This section tells you what the recommendations of the Group are and when changes might take place. There are 24 recommendations in all. They are organised under four headings of **expected changes**. These changes will happen **only** if the Government agrees to act on these recommendations.

1. Changing disability payments and support to make sure work pays

These recommendations will help make sure that programmes and supports make it easier and more attractive to start work. There are eight recommendations in this area (recommendations 1-8).

1. Increase the earnings limits for a Medical Card.

When you apply for a Medical Card or your Medical Card is reviewed, there is a **means test**. A means test looks at how much money you get each week through allowances, benefits and work. Some money is not included in the means test.

Right now, if you are on Disability Allowance or Partial Capacity Benefit, you can earn up to €120 each week and it will not be included in your Medical Card means test. Any money you earn from work that is over €120 will be included in the means test.

Many people with disabilities worry about losing their Medical Card, and this is the biggest thing stopping them from looking for and taking work.

The Group's recommendation

A higher amount of income from work should be allowed for people with disabilities so they can keep their Medical Card.

This increase should happen by the end of 2018.

2. Include earnings from any type of work in the amount of income that is ignored in a means test for Disability Allowance and for a Medical Card.

Right now, if you want to work and keep your Medical Card and the social welfare payment called Disability Allowance, you must get a letter from your doctor to say that work will help you.

The Group's recommendation

This rule should be got rid of. This means that you will not have to prove that work will help you to get better.

This change should happen by late 2017.

3. Make it easier to get aids, appliances or assistive technology.

If you have a disability, you may need aids, appliances or assistive technology to help you at work and in your everyday life.

Sometimes people with disabilities cannot start working or cannot stay in work because they cannot afford these items or they could lose their entitlement to these items.

The Group's recommendation

The departments and agencies that provide or fund these items should develop proposals to make sure everyone who needs these items for work can get them. These proposals need to consider:

- how to make these items affordable and available, and
- whether new schemes are needed.

These proposals should be ready by the end of 2018.

4. Let people who start work keep their Free Travel Pass.

Travel supports are very important for people with disabilities who want to start working.

Right now, if you get a job and you stop getting welfare payments, you also lose your Free Travel Pass.

The Group's recommendation

People with disabilities who start working should keep their Free Travel Pass for three years after they start work.

This change should happen in early 2018.

5. Review transport supports to make them better.

There are many Government-funded transport and mobility schemes, and many departments and agencies are involved in providing transport schemes. This can make it difficult for people to find out what travel schemes are available and how to access them.

Also, some people with disabilities who start working may need help to get to work. Even though there are lots of transport schemes, sometimes these people cannot get the right support.

The Group's recommendation

There should be a complete review of all transport schemes that are provided by all departments and agencies. This review should:

- look for ways to improve supports or transport to work for people with disabilities, and
- develop proposals for a coordinated plan for supports that makes the best use of all transport services.

This review should be finished by the end of 2017.

6. The planned Transport Support Scheme should take into account what people with disabilities who are interested in work need from transport schemes.

The Department of Health is developing a new Transport Support Scheme for people with disabilities.

The Group's recommendation

This scheme should be designed so it does not put unneeded barriers in the way of people with disabilities who wish to start working or to continue working.

This scheme should be ready by the end of 2017.

7. Make it easier to get your benefits back if you have to leave work.

Taking a job may not work out. Like many other people with disabilities, you might worry about how long it will take to get your benefits back if you have to leave work. People whose symptoms come and go worry about this a lot.

The Group's recommendation

If you have to leave work within one year of starting work, you should be able to quickly get back your Medical Card, Disability Allowance, Illness Benefit or Invalidity Pension.

A system should be put in place to make it easier to get back these benefits if a person with a disability has to leave work within a year of taking it up.

This system should be in place early in 2018.

8. If you ask about going to work, you should be confident that your payment will not be reviewed because of this.

Like many people with disabilities, you might be afraid to ask about going to work. You might worry that this will cause your disability payments and supports to be reviewed.

The fear of losing supports and payments can prevent a person from looking for suitable work or training.

The Group's recommendation

The Department of Social Protection should set up a procedure for the Department and the Intreo employment service. This procedure should make sure that:

- all employees in the Department of Social Protection and Intreo understand that asking about employment and training will not result in a review of current disability benefits and supports,
- this is made clear to people with disabilities in face-to-face meetings with the Department of Social Protection and Intreo, and
- this is made clear through other information sources such as leaflets, forms, social media and other means.

This procedure should be in place by the end of 2017.

2. Creating programmes to help people as early as possible to prepare themselves for work and to help them get work

In general, when a person with a disability is unemployed for a long time, they are unlikely to start working or to go back to work.

These recommendations will help make sure that people with disabilities get help at a young age or soon after they become disabled so they can start working or go back to work if they are able to. There are four recommendations in this area (recommendations 9-12).

9. **Change the Disability Allowance scheme for new entrants so it helps young people with disabilities to continue their education and prepare themselves for work.**

The current system of income supports for young people with disabilities may not help them get the education or employment skills they might need.

It is important that disability advocacy groups and parents are consulted and included in making decisions about this change.

The Group's recommendation

Any change to supports and payments for young people must focus on getting the best results for young people with disabilities.

There are two parts to this recommendation.

- a. Change the age limit on the Domiciliary Care Allowance for children with significant support needs. Right now Domiciliary Care Allowance ends at age 16. It should end at age 18.
- b. Review how the Disability Allowance for people between 18 and 22 can help them focus on education, training and social inclusion according to their own ability.

These changes should be in place for new entrants by the end of 2018.

10. **Change existing schemes so they help people as early as possible.**

If you have a disability and you want to work, you should get help as early as possible to get a job or to keep your job.

The Group's recommendation

All existing illness and disability schemes should be reviewed to make sure that they help and support people with disabilities to start working or to stay in work.

In the future, these schemes and supports should be regularly reviewed to make sure they help people start or return to working.

11. At the Intreo employment service, offer supports for people with disabilities.

The Group's recommendation

Intreo should offer people with disabilities:

- a case officer to help them,
- other supports, and
- a plan that suits each person.

Intreo should offer these supports by late 2018.

12. Make the recommended changes to the Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme.

The Department of Social Protection has reviewed the Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme. The recommendations from this review focus on:

- helping people with disabilities to develop their skills and ability to work,
- providing supports and other help as early as possible, and
- helping with back to work planning.

The Group's recommendation

Subject to Government approval, these changes should be put in place by late 2018.

3. Providing clear information that work pays

If people think it doesn't pay to take a job, even if that is not the case, it can stop a lot of people from looking for work. That is why it is very important that people with disabilities have accurate information that is easy for them to understand.

These recommendations will help develop better information in Ireland. There are seven recommendations in this area (recommendations 13-19). Some are quite detailed.

13. Develop a ready reckoner to help people work out how much they will benefit by going to work.

A ready reckoner is a tool on a computer that helps you work out how much money you are likely to have if you start working or go back to work.

The Group's recommendation

The Department of Social Protection should develop a ready reckoner that shows you what money you would get if you were working, taking account of:

- the welfare supports and payments you would keep or be eligible for,
- what tax, PRSI or Universal Social Charge you would pay, and
- if you can keep or get a Medical Card.

This ready reckoner should be ready by the middle of 2018.

14. Develop a communications strategy

The Group's recommendation

There should be a communications strategy that sets out how you can learn about the supports and benefits that you can keep if you start working or go back to work. The strategy should do a number of things.

Provide clear information on the website of the Department of Social Protection, including information on getting your benefits back quickly, and provide links to:

- other departments and agencies that provide supports, and
- www.citizensinformation.ie.

Develop special information on:

- employment for people with disabilities, and
- the benefits that a person with disabilities will keep if they start working or go back to work.

Put this information on:

- www.citizensinformation.ie, and
- www.gettingbacktowork.ie.

Make information available in accessible formats such as:

- Easy to Read, and
- videos with sign language and subtitles.

Train people in Citizens Information Centres to:

- use the Ready Reckoner, and
- use the information from the Ready Reckoner to make individual calculations for each person. These calculations should show a wider range of benefits for more complex circumstances.

Train staff in Intreo employment offices on:

- how to find information for people with disabilities who are interested in working,
- using the Ready Reckoner, and
- how to refer a client with complex circumstances to the local Citizens Information Centre for help to make a more detailed financial and benefits assessment of their situation.

Develop a procedure for referring people from the Intreo employment service to the Citizens Information Centres or the Citizens Information Board helpline.

Develop information leaflets and messages for people who are leaving long-term disability payments to enter a job.

Have simple, easy-to-understand publicity around 'It pays to work'.

To make this happen, national disability organisations and disability service providers should contribute to this communications strategy. They will be able to provide advice on how best to get information to people with disabilities.

This communications strategy should be completed by early 2019.

15. Make sure that all departments and agencies know about the information and supports that other organisations offer.

Many departments and agencies work with people with disabilities. Different departments and agencies offer different benefits and supports. It is very important that **all** departments and agencies know about the benefits and supports that other organisations offer.

The Group's recommendation

There are already procedures for referring people with disabilities to other organisations. These should be reviewed and updated.

This review and update should be completed by early 2019.

16. Improve the ability of the Intreo employment service to help people with disabilities to start working and continue working.

If you want to start working or go back to work, the Intreo employment service is an important service to use.

The Group's recommendation

These recommendations will improve the service that Intreo can offer.

- Make Intreo the first place people with disabilities go when they want to find out about starting work or going back to work.
- Make Intreo welcoming and supportive to people with disabilities.
- Personalise the service for each person.
- Include a family member, friend or advocate in all meetings if the person with a disability would like that.

- Train Intreo Service Case Officers and other staff to better work with people with disabilities. All staff should be able to:
 - > identify needs, and
 - > support a person with a disability to start work that suits their abilities and interests.
- Have a case officer at every Intreo centre who works with people with disabilities.
- Provide ongoing supports as someone moves from benefits to work.

These changes in the Intreo employment service should be completed by early 2019.

17. Promote cooperation between all State-funded disability service providers and the Intreo employment service.

All disability service providers should know about the services Intreo offers. They should work with Intreo to encourage people with disabilities to start working if they can.

The Group's recommendation

There should be clear, well known procedures to help other organisations and service providers to work with Intreo.

These procedures should be developed by early 2019.

18. Review and update procedures and agreements for local services.

Local organisations that provide services for people with disabilities include:

- HSE offices,
- Education and Training Boards (ETBs),
- EmployAbility,
- Local Enterprise Offices,
- Local Employment Services,
- jobs clubs, and
- community resource centres.

The Group's recommendation

All of these organisations should know about the opportunities available through Intreo.

The review and update of procedures and agreements for local services should be done by early 2019.

19. Provide clear information to people with disabilities about how they can get their benefits back quickly if they need to leave work.

The Group's recommendation

Provide clear information on:

- how to get benefits back quickly,
- what paperwork people need to include in an application, and
- how long it is likely to take to get benefits back.

Provide clear information on what payments and supports are available while a person waits for their disability benefits.

Make this information available:

- on the websites of the Department of Social Protection and the HSE,
- through Intreo case officers,
- to people with disabilities when they return to work,
- through disability organisations, and
- through Citizens Information Centres.

Making this information clearer and easy to get should start immediately. In the future, information should be regularly reviewed.

4. Reviewing changes regularly to make sure policies are successful and up to date

Changes to services and support need to be reviewed regularly so that what government bodies do matches what their policies say they should do. There are five recommendations in this area (recommendations 20-24).

20. **Check new schemes and changes to schemes when they are being designed.**

Over time, new schemes are introduced, and changes are made to existing schemes.

The Group's recommendation

When these changes are being planned, the Government should look at whether these changes will make it easier or harder for a person with a disability to take a job or remain in work.

In the future, schemes should be regularly reviewed to make sure they help people start working.

21. **Regularly review the limits on how much a person with a disability can earn before it reduces their Disability Allowance.**

The Group's recommendation

A review of the limits on income in relation to Disability Allowance should be started at the earliest opportunity. These limits should be reviewed regularly. All reviews should consider what else is happening in the economy.

22. Every five years, evaluate all policies on disability to make sure they help people start work or go back to work.

The Group's recommendation

A review should take place again in five years' time of all schemes of income supports for people with disabilities, and of other supports, like the Medical Card, to make sure the schemes help people get or keep a job.

23. Improve information collection and research so it can contribute to Government policy.

The Group's recommendation

Every department and agency should continue to improve how they collect data, do research and evaluate programmes and services that help people with disabilities to start working, stay in work or go back to work.

24. Every year, review the progress in achieving these recommendations.

The Group's recommendation

At the end of every year, there should be a review of how departments and agencies are acting on the recommendations in this booklet.

The first review should take place at the end of 2017. There should be regular reviews of progress after the first year.

What happens next?

Remember, the recommendations are just recommendations. The Government will now consider these recommendations.

How can I learn more?

Where can I get more information about these recommendations?

If you would like to know more about these recommendations, the full Make Work Pay report is available on the website of the Department of Social Protection.

To get a copy of the report, go to www.welfare.ie

How can I find out more about starting or going back to work?

If you would like more information on starting or going back to work, contact your local Intreo employment service.

