

National Platform of Self-advocates (NPSA)



Improving Access to Paid Employment for People with Intellectual Disability

Supplementary Report

October 2020

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Executive Summary

The National Platform of Self Advocates (NPSA) is an independent organisation run by people with intellectual disability for people with intellectual disability. The group is founded on the right of people with intellectual disability to be included as equal citizens with rights as outlines in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In seeking to achieve this aim the NSPA have had a history of seeking to enhance their own understanding of barriers, challenges and solutions to key policy and practice issues such as housing and transport. Research has become a cornerstone of the NSPA approach in devising and delivering advocacy and seeking policy change that negate people with intellectual disability full participation and inclusion in society. In 2019, the NSPA successfully engaged a research grant under the Human Rights and Equality Grant Scheme under the theme of Decent Work¹.

The purpose of the NPSA research provided for under this grant was to explore the perceptions and perspectives of people with intellectual disability in accessing paid employment. The NSPA commenced work in September 2019 by establishing a Research Sub Group to guide the development of study and analyse the outcomes and undertook a training workshop on research methods and study design specially devising the research questions.

The study participants were recruited through advertising the study across the NSPA network of members. As a result focus group sessions in four geographical regions of the country were held. These areas were County Mayo (West), Dublin (2) (East), County Limerick (Mid-West) and County Waterford (South). The focus group questions were delivered in 'easy' language and tailored to the communication needs of the participants.

The profile of focus group participants who were in paid employment were all in part-time positions and could be categorised as entry-level positions in retail, hospitality, cleaning or food services. For those looking for work the focus was also on entry-level positions. In the focus groups the tasks that participants most commonly described were in retail and included check out work, stocktaking and "stacking shelves". Less frequently mentioned was advising customers on the location of items in-store. In the hospitality sector the most commonly mentioned position was kitchen work such as washing dishes, cleaning tables and repacking condiments. Less commonly mentioned was table waiting, welcoming customers or no participant described tasks involving supervising or supporting other staff.

Members of the NPSA facilitated the focus group sessions and an independent researcher documented the voices of the participants verbatim. The focus group participants were encouraged to 'tell their story' of employment or unemployment, their reasons for seeking paid employment, their perceived benefits of paid employment and the challenges of seeking and staying in paid work and also for those in paid work identifying the facilitators in gaining employment. A second element of the research included exploring with a small sample of employers (N=25) employers from a range of sectors their perceptions and perspectives employing people with intellectual disability.

The experiences highlighted by the focus group participants were sorted into themes and each theme arising was reviewed by the NSPA Research Sub Group and conclusions and recommendations were devised based on the study outcomes.

¹ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission IHREC (2019) *Guidance Manual for Grant Applications*

Employment Outcomes

An important area that focus group participants commented on was the perceived benefits and outcomes of participating in paid employment. While some participants only revealed one aspect of employment outcomes, most participants mentioned multiple outcomes. All of their outcomes were linked to in some way to quality of life, social and economic participation, and social inclusion outcomes.

Overall, participants highlighted that they place a high value on being paid because pay is linked to material wellbeing and to participating and being treated as an equal in relationships and wider society. **Getting paid** was important for material wellbeing in many ways, including providing essential items for daily living such as paying bills, as well as providing funds for enjoying life and leisure activities and allowing people to participate as an equal such as in kind ship and/or friendship relationships. A considerable number of participants did criticise the pay arrangements. Some were unsatisfied with their pay, some stated they had no awareness or little of the amount they were paid. Participants who had left paid employment were more likely to comment in retrospect on being unhappy with the low pay rate. Participants cited a range of benefits related to **participation** as an outcome from their paid work. The value the participants placed on **“getting out of the house”** speaks to the experience of a group that is often socially excluded and disengaged, the productivity and participation involved in work was cited a valuable feature of their lives, as it counteracts social exclusion.

Positive **relationships** with work colleagues were one of the valued employment outcomes. Working thus gave participants who were in work or had previous work experience or anticipated work experience **access to peers, friends, mentors and the wider community** which they emphasised as valuable. The workplace could also be a major source of frustration for participants. Some focus group participants talked about leaving paid employment because of poor attitudes and lack of support from co-workers. Poor attitudes from or conflicts with supervisors, managers and other staff were revealed as ‘dislikes’ of paid work across all focus groups

Finding and Maintaining Paid Work

Participants spoke extensively about the ways they found employment, or received assistance finding employment. Methods of finding paid work were **mainly centred on assistance from disability support services, and/or preparatory experiences**. Some participants cited a range of people who helped them to find work including families (mainly in rural environments) making potential connection with employers, and support workers from disability support services.

Many participants felt that the ‘business’ circumstances of a potential employer was a key variable influencing their employment outcomes. While this factor would potentially enable or constrain the whole workforce of a community, participants felt that a downturn in local businesses did especially impact negatively on people with intellectual disability suggesting people with intellectual disability feel particularly **vulnerable in an economic downturn**.

The **feeling of boredom** frequently appeared in these findings with participants wanting more of a challenge or wanting more variety in work tasks. Participants spoke about wanting more of a

challenge or wanting more variety in their work and commented that they either disliked the repetitive nature of their work or the prolonged nature of some tasks, or that they felt they had more to offer and did not like doing one basic task or working by themselves

Broader life circumstances also influenced whether or not participants maintained paid employment. Some participants made **their own decision** to cut back their own hours or leave due to health issues, family challenges or problems with transport. **Rights and entitlements** were raised across all focus group session including the issue of the **lack of contracts** and there was a lot of questioning around what contracts should have in them. Associated with contracts was how participants received information on their rate of pay and **payment arrangements** was raised in two focus groups especially where pay slips were provided on an electronic basis prohibiting access to this information for participants with poor access or low IT literacy skills.

Changing Jobs and Progression

Some focus group participants spoke a lot about changing their employment mentioning that they had several jobs over time. The participants who stated that they were unhappy with either their current experiences of paid employment or past experiences spoke a lot about wanting to change their employment. A noted reflection within one focus group was that though some participants had changed jobs in the past and commonly switched between roles however this is usually due to circumstances outside their control. There was comparatively **little reflection of participants actively going out and seeking to change their paid employment as a means of altering their work circumstances – rather it was mainly about coping in the circumstances.** It was much less common for participants to actively seek to change their employment. Sometimes this was because they were happy in their roles or felt secure there, while for others it was because they did not believe they would find or be accepted in another job or role. This was revealing in that that many participants in the study simply did not envisage changing their employment at all. Thus, while many people expressed no direct barriers to changing jobs, it would appear that it was nevertheless still not an option for the participants and that unarticulated barriers may be in place.

Progression opportunities within paid employment such as higher pay, better working conditions, supervision of other workers and having more of a challenge were identified by some participants. Yet again it was notable that none of the participants who voiced these wishes had either plans or saw a pathway to achieving these types of progression within employment.

Few participants were involved in volunteering or study when in employment. It appeared that it was usually either be involved in paid work or volunteering or study not a combination of the two. However the implication of this pattern could impact negatively on helping them to change jobs or roles more tailored to their skills or interests within paid employment in the future.

Supports for Finding and Maintaining Paid Employment

Focus Group participants spoke about conditions that either supported them or were required to enable them to find and maintain paid employment. Overall many of the **participants were assisted to find and maintain their paid employment through practical help with managing tasks.** Some

people were able to draw on their **own personal agency and efforts** to manage in their work tasks. It is important to acknowledge that personal qualities that especially helped participants who were in paid employment to maintain paid work included implied qualities such as their own **resilience, confidence, work ethic and commitment to carrying out tasks correctly**.

Participants across all focus groups agreed that it was important to **provide substantial assistance to people with intellectual disability to find and maintain their paid employment** recognising that when supported well they can draw on some of their own skills and resources to continue in paid employment.

While finding and starting paid work raised challenges for the focus group participants maintaining paid employment appeared to be more complex for some participants. Being able to **draw on aspects of the disability support services to maintain paid work** and where participants wanted to change jobs or tasks was deemed to be very important.

Self-Employment

Participants across all focus groups had no aspirations to engage in self-employment and it appeared that it had never been presented as an option by or for them. Thus, while many participants expressed no direct barriers to self-employment, it would appear that it was simply not an option for the participants and again that unarticulated barriers may be in place.

Employer Perceptive and Needs

The majority of employers in the sample **did not employ people with intellectual disability (65%)**. Of the 23% that did employ people with intellectual disability all were in **the retail sector**. In respect to employers who had recruited employees with intellectual disability all employers stated that employees came through work placement as a result of **“working with disability support organisations or a school”** and as such on foot of this work placement employees were offered a paid position. This in all cases was with the continued support or **“check in”** from the disability support services. All employees were in entry level part-time jobs within the retail sector all of which were either local small supermarkets or chain supermarkets.

Information

Employers were asked what types of information would persuade them to recruit people with intellectual disability. Employers responded with multiple answers. The majority responded (87.5%) **“Information that addresses any concerns about costs”**, 75% stated that information on satisfactory job performance, attendance and retention of people with intellectual disability. A further 75% stated that information showing how hiring people with intellectual disability has benefited other organisations/business in their sector and 42.6% information showing how hiring people with disability has benefited nationally recognised organisations/businesses.

Challenges

In respect to the perceived challenges in hiring people with intellectual disability employers raised a number of concerns. The nature of the work is such that it could not be effectively performed by

people with disabilities was a major challenge for 29% of employers while 58% felt that it wasn't a concern at all. Not knowing how much accommodations would cost featured as somewhat a concern amongst 50% of those employers that participated in the study. Discomfort or unfamiliarity regarding hiring people with intellectual disability was somewhat a challenge for 50% of employers amongst the sample. A smaller but significant number of employers (37.5%) identified a lack of knowledge or information about people with intellectual disability as somewhat a challenge in hiring. The attitudes of co-workers and supervisors towards hiring people with intellectual disability were identified by 29% of employers. However 71% of the sample indicated that this was not a challenge. A small number of employers stated that the attitudes of 'customers' was a major challenge in hiring people with intellectual disability.

Staff support for the inclusion of people with intellectual disability in their workplace generated a myriad of responses. The majority of employers (75%) have some concern that supervisors are not sure how to take disciplinary action for a person with intellectual disability. This theme was reiterated through both the survey and the interview process with 50% of employers stated that supervisors/staff were 'somewhat' not comfortable managing people with intellectual disability; while 12.2% indicated that it was a major challenge however 37.5% felt it wasn't a challenge at all. Similarly, 50% of employers were also 'somewhat' concerned that 'supervisors are not sure how to evaluate a person with an intellectual disability' in respect to work performance.

In respect to skills 57% of employers were 'somewhat' concerned that people with intellectual disability *'lack the skills and experience to do our work'* and for 14% of employers this was a major concern.

The issue of costs was raised with 50% of employers stating that it was somewhat of a concern, perceiving that *'it costs more to employ workers with intellectual disability than those without disabilities due to accommodations, additional management time, or healthcare and insurance costs'*. Many reasonable accommodation measures would not necessarily have a cost implication – such as flexible work arrangements or facilitating part-time work. When asked about the assumption that a person with an intellectual disability may not require accommodations such as physical accommodations e.g. building changes **there was clear confusion as to different experiences of disability.**

Strategies and Supports

Strategies that some organisations/businesses nationally and internationally have used when hiring, retaining and advancing the progression of people with intellectual disability in paid work were posed. Employers were asked what was they perceived to be most helpful. A disability targeted **internship programme, assistive technology, and a flexible work schedule** were considered to be the most help (86.7%). Using a **recruiting source that specialised in placing people with intellectual disability and visible top management commitment to supporting people with intellectual disability** in paid employment was also seen as a help (75% of the sample).

Disability awareness training and training of existing staff was seen as helpful by 71% of employers in the sample. A centralised accommodations fund for things like assistive technology or *"on the job support"* if it was required was identified by 70% of employers while 57% felt that employer tax

credits and incentives would be helpful in encouraging employment of the people with intellectual disability.

In identifying supports that they required to support the engagement of people with intellectual disability in employment employers were asked about what supports would be most useful to them. **Job task analysis** to formally identify knowledge skills and abilities to specific jobs was identified by 62.5% of employers as most useful. In addition employers identified assistance in **customising training plans** for new employees with intellectual disability was identified by 50% of the sample as was **placement support services** (50%).

Local and individual measures such as local recruitment fairs (57%) and an offer to train current employees (63%) in disability awareness were identified as most helpful.

Employers also raised issues in respect to Covid-19 recognising that people with intellectual disability were perhaps more likely to have health conditions, were less able to ensure physical distancing, and so face accessibility barriers. These barriers have grown with the pandemic measures not just for workers but their employers.

However, based on the sample of employers who participated in this study there appears to be lack of confidence and for a minority “*fear*” in respect employing a person with an intellectual disability and for some there remains a negative stereotype of people with intellectual disability. Congregated settings and separation in schools and institutions seems to reinforce many negative stereotypes the have about people with intellectual disabilities especially beliefs that capacity for their participation in paid work is limited. The strongest impression arising from the employer sample involved in the study is the lack of recognition and awareness amongst the majority of employers that people with intellectual disability often have developed a great deal of resilience, commitment and perseverance in all their day to day activities due to imposed structural barriers throughout their lives. These qualities as employers agreed were deemed to be exceptional qualities in any employee.

Conclusion and Recommendations

People with intellectual disability experience more barriers to finding and maintaining their employment. Across all focus groups none of the participants identified a ‘regular’ process of access to paid employment all were supported through disability support services. Employers also acknowledged the important role of disability support services in negotiating pathways for their employment of a person with intellectual disability. However, despite these supports people with intellectual disability remain more exposed to the turbulent conditions of the labour market, **including low job stability, predominance of low entry position and low pay, and lack of clear pathways to progression within the workplace.**

The findings arising from this study underlined the fact that people with intellectual disability are at greater risk of material poverty, social exclusion, poor access to information and assumptions that their rights are somehow “***a little bit different from other people looking for work***” (employer). The employment of people with intellectual disability in paid work is not only a disability specific issue but needs to be considered within the broader context of the labour market and labour market conditions and policies. For instance, improving paid employment outcomes should be considered

one of the reasons for and factors in improving conditions in the entry-level and/or low skilled end of the labour market in general.

Across all focus groups **participation, building relationships and getting paid/achieving material wellbeing** were the most important employment outcomes to people with intellectual disability. People with intellectual disability should have both personal and systemic-level support in finding and maintaining employment. The latter requires the environment to change for the person not the person change for the environment.

The following recommendations are based on the reflections of the participants in the study and include:

Getting paid was an important component of material well-being for participants across all focus groups. While most people were conscious of balancing their pay so that they could also remain on disability support payments a small number of participants indicated that *“it was not enough to live on”* (on its own) for achieving material well-being and quality of life. Therefore **on the one hand government policy is to support independent living while pay does not always support independent living.**

While many participants did not criticise their pay arrangements for some this was because they were satisfied with their pay while a number of participants appeared to be unaware of the details of their pay arrangements. In this respect **people with intellectual disability working need to access to accessible information and advocacy support in relation to their rights and issues of respect and equity in the workplace especially in respect to pay. In addition there is a need to have support and accessible information provided to them to make informed decisions in respect to their pay.**

In facilitating people with intellectual disability to find work there needs to be **a range of employment opportunities available to them when seeking paid employment with support in choosing between options and successfully assisted to find work where there were both supports for their job search.** In addition while support services and families have been instrumental in supporting people with intellectual disability in finding paid work it is imperative that they are **supported in making informed choices and supported choices about that work.**

Staying in paid work is best aided where people had practical help with tasks at work, supportive relationships in the workplace, characterised by practical assistance and trust and assisted in continuous personal development and confidence building. **Employers and disability supports services should ensure that continuous connections and support with those in paid employment is maintained.**

People with intellectual disability **need to know that it is acceptable to change jobs if they wish to and to be encouraged to do so or progress or expand role within a job.** They need to have support available to further develop their confidence to ensure that they are making informed and supported choices about changing their employment or roles within employment. In addition there is a **need for further education, training, volunteering roles etc. available to further develop their confidence for finding and progressing to new roles within employment.**

Supports centred on **encouraging self-employment as an option for people with intellectual disability is required from enterprise and business development support agencies and should be a focus of all employment and disability supports services in the provision of options and opportunities for people with intellectual disability.**

Employers need further encouragement to appreciate and understand how critical both personal supports for workers with intellectual disability and education towards cultural change in the broader workplace to enter and maintain paid work in the workplace. To this end support should be provided to employers in focusing on *'Recruit-ability'* by exploring different ways of recruiting people with intellectual disability, devise and deliver training for employers and staff on how to support people with intellectual disability in the workplace and showcase how having a diverse workplace can really make a positive difference to the work place.

Employers need support in building workplace relations to ensure that positive relationships are fostered and maintained between employees, colleagues, supervisors and support staff. Encouragement of employers and workers within organisations responsible for recruitment as well as co-workers **to undertake awareness disability training** be they public (public sector duty ensure that this should happen) or private sector.

1. Introduction

Employment is a central feature of life for the majority of adults in Ireland. Participation in the labour market provides an opportunity for economic independence, promotes social connectedness to others in society, contributes to increased self-esteem and confidence, and serves as a means of self-expression. There are also economic benefits from employment that accrue to society, reflected in lower support costs and income from tax revenues paid by those earning over the minimum wage. However, reported employment rates in the Ireland, reflect that people with intellectual disability are under-represented in the labour force thereby limiting opportunities to access such economic, personal, and social benefits that much of the wider adult population can enjoy.

The recent European Commission Country Report for Ireland (2019)² revealed that Ireland has one of the lowest employment rates for people with disabilities in the EU (26.2 % compared to 48.1 % in the EU in 2017). Ireland also has one of the highest gaps between people with and without disabilities (45.1%) in employment. The Report indicated that *“People with disabilities are still facing considerable challenges, although support is being enhanced”*. These support advances include *The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024*³ which aims at increasing the statutory target of 3% of employees with disabilities in the public sector towards 6 % by 2024. Also cited was the 16 million euro funded Ability Programme (2018-2021) investing in the employability of people with disabilities aged 15-19 years which is due for completion in June 2021. Recent announcements in Budget 2021⁴ evidence that Government have committed resources to increased employment supports for people with disabilities such as the extension of the training support grant of €1,000 extended to jobseekers with disabilities whom avail of the Employability Service and €2.5million for specific activation and training supports for groups most distant from the labour market.

In Census 2016⁵, 66,611 persons representing 1.4% of the population, have an intellectual disability, 8,902 higher than in 2011 representing a 15.4% increase. For males between the ages of 6 and 18 there were close to a 1,000 persons in each age with an intellectual disability, more than double that of females for the same ages. Among this group the most common second disability was difficulty with learning and remembering with 47,390 (71.1%) followed by psychological issues which affected 24,024 persons.

Central Statistics Office figures also demonstrate that people with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than people without a disability. The most common type of difficulty experienced by those with an intellectual disability was difficulty with a job, business or attending school or college, this affected 37,658 persons (56.5%), with 37,048 (55.6%) having difficulty going outside the home. The labour force participation rate for people with an intellectual disability was 21.4%.

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-ireland_en.pdf accessed September 2019

³ <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/>

⁴ [https://www.citizensinformation.ie/Budget 2021](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/Budget%2021)

⁵ [https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ Profile 9, Health, Disability and Carers](https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/Profile%209,%20Health,%20Disability%20and%20Carers)

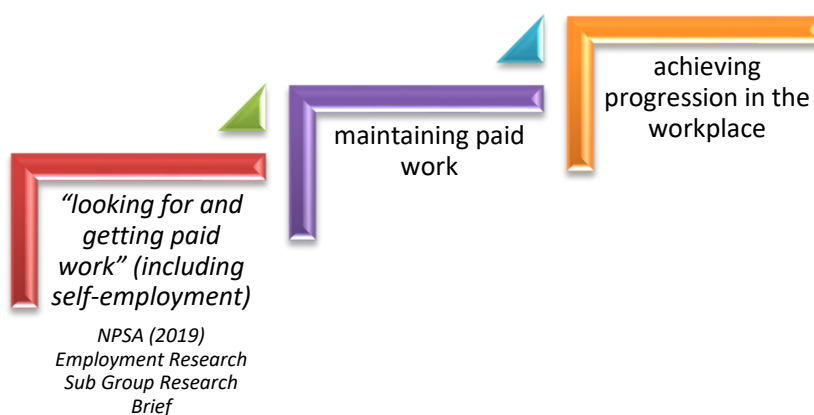
1.1 Background to the Study

The National Platform of Self Advocates (NPSA) is an independent organisation run by people with intellectual disabilities for people with intellectual disabilities. The National Platform of Self Advocates is:

“Founded on the right of people with intellectual disabilities to be included as equal citizens with rights as outlines in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Platform aims to be the nationally recognised spokes organisation on policy and issues affecting the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. It aims to be involved through representation by its members in local and national policy making groups”⁶.

In pursuing its aims the NSPA have had a long history of seeking to enhance their own understanding of the barriers, challenges and solutions to key policy and practice issues. Research has become a cornerstone of the NSPA approach in devising and delivering advocacy and seeking policy change that negate people with intellectual disability full participation and inclusion in society. A constant theme explored by The National Platform of Self Advocates (NPSA) since its foundation in 2012 has been inclusion of people with intellectual disability in the labour force. In 2019, the NSPA successfully engaged a research grant under the Human Rights and Equality Grant Scheme under the theme of Decent Work⁷.

While the NSPA recognised that many people with intellectual disability are being supported into employment there remains a significant cohort of their members and as reflected in Irish and EU statistics have and continue to experience challenges in the following areas:



Success in engaging IHREC funding in 2019 allowed the NPSA to undertake research in the area of paid employment. The study focused on understanding the perception, perspectives and experiences of people with intellectual disability in finding and staying in paid employment/decent work and self-employment. A second focus of the study was to explore employer’s experiences and perspectives on employing people with disability in their workplaces.

To this end the study explored the following research questions:

⁶ <http://thenationalplatform.ie/>

⁷ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission IHREC (2019) Guidance Manual for Grant Applications



1.2 Objectives of the Study

Supporting people with disabilities away from support models such as sheltered employment or unpaid work which were previously core features of employment support into more mainstream employment settings suggests a significant policy trend towards a more integrated and inclusive workforce. While policy and resources may slowly be increasing in support of inclusion of people with disabilities in mainstream employment settings the actual practice may reveal less favourable outcomes especially for those with intellectual disability. There remains a paucity of research in respect to people with intellectual disability own perceptions, perspectives and experiences of this shift in focus to mainstream paid employment.

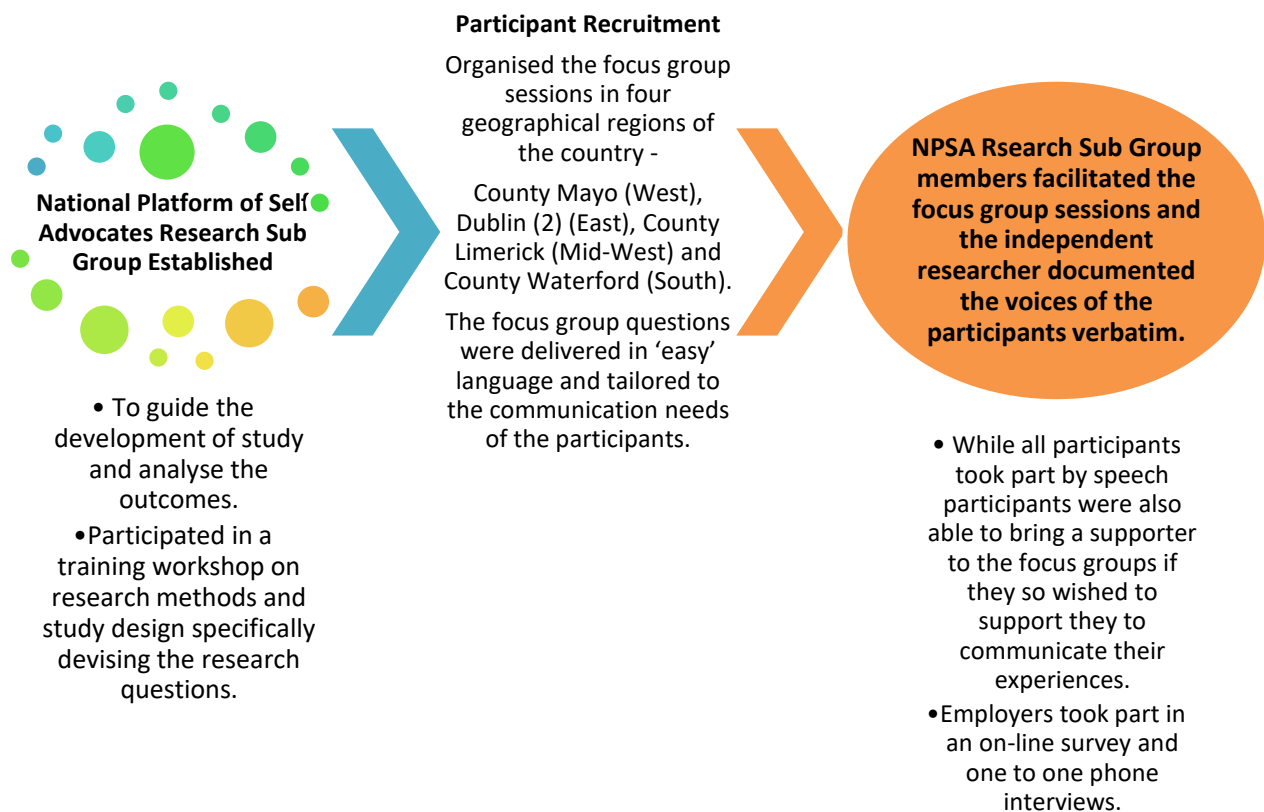
The objectives of this study by the National Platform of Self Advocates were to determine the experiences of people with intellectual disability in seeking and maintaining paid employment or self-employment. The National Platform of Self Advocates also sought the views of the employers on their experiences of employing people with intellectual disability to determine perceived and actual awareness of the sources of support and challenges which must be considered when promoting a more inclusive and integrated workplace.

1.3. Research Methods

Research has become a cornerstone of the NSPA approach in devising and delivering advocacy and seeking policy change that negate people with intellectual disability full participation and inclusion in society. The core focus of study was to document the experience and perceptions of people with intellectual disability of accessing and maintaining paid employment. As such, a qualitative study was designed by the National Platform of Self Advocates with the support of an independent researcher.

As a result of involvement in previous research the NSPA has an established expertise in designing and leading the study therefore accessibility and inclusivity were a key focus of the methodology.

The study process undertaken included:



In total one hundred and eleven people took part in the study comprising 86 ($n=86$) participants in the focus groups and twenty five ($N=25$) employers from different sectors and workplaces.

The focus group participants were encouraged to **'tell their story' of seeking and staying in paid work**, the perceived benefits of paid employment and the challenges of looking for and maintaining paid employment. Also for those who had experience of paid work they were prompted to identify the key facilitators in gaining employment.

On completion of the focus group sessions the experiences of the participants were sorted into themes and each theme arising was reviewed by the NPSA Research Sub Group and conclusions and recommendations were devised based on the study outcomes.

Due to the Covid-19 public health crisis the NPSA direct interface with employers was not possible. The Research Sub Group guided the independent researcher in devising an on-line survey and phone interview questions. The questions posed were guided by the focus group outcomes thereby exploring further the perceptions and challenges experienced by people with intellectual disability in finding and maintaining paid employment.

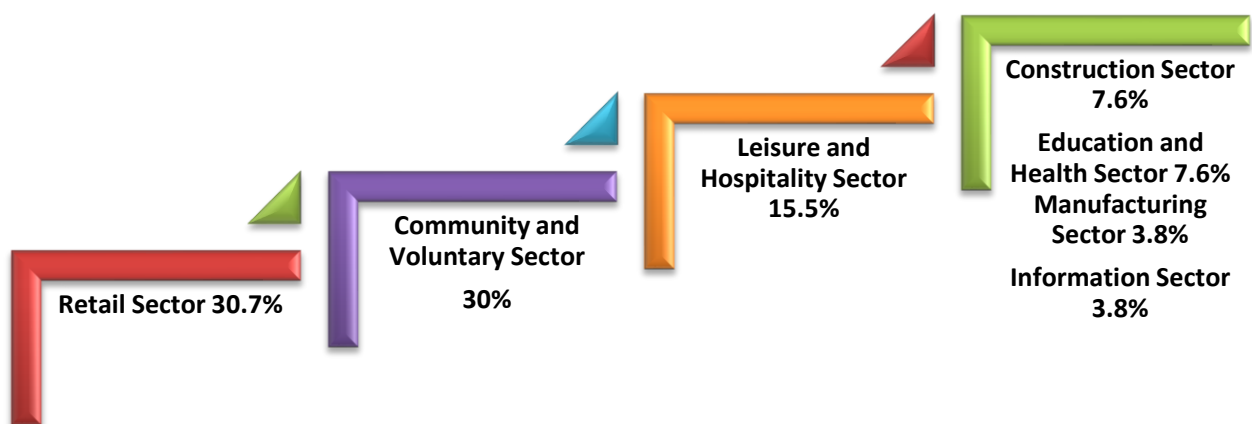
Employer perspectives were captured via an on-line survey, of which 16 employers responded from a cohort of 30 which garnered a response rate of 53.3%. A further 10 employers participated in phone interviews using the same set of questions. The independent researcher presented the findings to the NPSA Research Sub group and again analysis of the themes arising took place.

1.3.1 Profile of the Study Participants

Eighty-six people with intellectual disability took part in the focus groups. Significant attention was paid to ensuring the study captured the diversity of experiences including people in paid employment, those seeking paid employment, those who previously were in paid employment, and those who never gained paid employment. None of the participants in the focus groups were self-employed.

Some of the participants who were seeking work had previously or were currently volunteering, had participated in sheltered employment or had participated in employment support projects and in many cases all categories. Those participants in paid work were all in part-time positions and could be categorised as entry-level positions in retail, hospitality, cleaning or food services. For those looking for work the focus was also on entry-level positions. In the focus groups the tasks that participants most commonly described included check out work, stocktaking and “*stacking shelves*”. Less frequently mentioned was advising customers on the location of items in-store. In hospitality the most commonly mentioned tasks were kitchen work such as washing dishes, cleaning tables and repacking condiments. Less commonly mentioned was table waiting, welcoming customers and no participant described tasks involving supervising or supporting other staff.

In respect to the employers who took part in the study the majority had 1-5 employees (53.8%), 30.7% had 6-20 employees, 2 had greater than 101 employees while the remaining 7.6% had between 21 and 100 employees. The profile of employer sample by sector included:



The majority of employers did not employ any people with intellectual disability. However **23% of the sample did employ people with intellectual disability all of whom were employed in the retail sector.** A significant cohort indicated that they ‘did not track’ if they employed a person with intellectual disability (15.3%), while 3.8% stated that they did not know if they employed a person with intellectual disability.

1.4 Report Structure

The National Platform of Self Advocates through the development and delivery of this qualitative study hope to inform advocacy and guide steps towards addressing the perceived and real challenges to achieving inclusive paid employment for people with intellectual disability.

The aim of the report is to share what the NPSA learned about the direct experiences of people with intellectual disability and their success or non-success in participating in paid work. The findings from the study answer the research questions and are detailed in later sections of this report.

The findings are divided into four sections. Following on from the introduction the second section presents the experiences, opportunities and barriers that people with intellectual disability perceive in choosing, finding, maintaining and progressing in paid employment. It also includes participant's perceptions of the outcomes arising from paid employment including the contribution that paid work has made or potentially may make to social inclusion, social and economic participation and quality of life.

The third section of the findings presents employers perceptions of including people with intellectual disability in their work force and the perspectives on barriers to greater inclusion.

The final section provides a conclusion and a set of recommendations for practice and policy makers based on the research findings.

1.5. Terminology

This report uses the terms 'decent work', 'employment', 'employee', 'self-employment' and 'wages' to refer to key focus in the study. Accordingly, Table 1 defines each of the terms as they are used in the report and highlights other terms which are used in general for the same terms.

Table 1: Terminology

Term	Description
Decent Work Job Employment Work	Involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protections for families, better prospects for personal develop and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affects their lives and equality of opportunities and treatment for all women and men. (International Labour Organisation Definition of Decent Work – 2019 ⁸).
Employee Worker	An employee is someone works for someone else in return for payment.
Part-time employee Worker	An employee whose normal hours of work are less than the normal hours of work of a comparable full-time employee.
Self Employed Working for Yourself	Someone who carries on their own business and is not an employee .
Wages Pay Salary	Wages are the money paid to you by your employer for your work.

⁸Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission IHREC (2019) Guidance Manual for Grant Applications

2. Participants Experiences and Perceptions of Paid Employment

Across the different focus groups the participants described their everyday experiences of choosing, looking for and maintaining paid work. For most participants they told *'their story'* of how they try to access paid work – the challenges that they face and for those who were in paid work or had previously being in paid work they shared information on the tasks they did, their working days and hours and their pay arrangements. The participants experiences of these areas are detailed in the sections below, as well as highlighting additional themes that arose during the focus group discussions.

2.1 Employment Outcomes

An important area that focus group participants commented on was the perceived benefits and outcomes of participating in paid employment. These comments arose throughout the focus group discussions from both participants in paid employment and those not in paid employment. While some participants only revealed one aspect of employment outcomes, most participants mentioned multiple outcomes. All of their outcomes were linked in some way to their own personal **quality of life, social and economic participation, and social inclusion outcomes**.

All benefits identified by participants are comparable to those of the wider population. Focus groups participants detailed perceived benefits of participation in paid employment namely the sense of feeling *"useful"*, *"valuable"* and *"staying busy"*, making social connections with co-workers, *"feeling important"* and having *"more money"* (increased income). The following section describes in more detail participants reflections on the three most commonly mentioned benefits.

Material Wellbeing: The most commonly cited benefit of paid work across all focus groups was the increased income it generated - *"I like getting paid"*.

The participants spoke about spending their income on daily expenses (e.g. food, rent, electricity, costs of transport (e.g. taxi) as well as clothes and entertainment (e.g. cinema, concert tickets etc.) and the expenses involved in maintaining social relationships such as paying *"for my own cup of tea when I go out with my friends"* or *"saving to go on holiday with friends"*. In this sense, getting paid was important for material wellbeing in many ways, including providing essential items for daily living, providing funds for enjoying life and leisure activities and allowing people to participate as an equal such as in friendship and kinship relationships.

In accounting for their material wellbeing, several participants spoke about the importance of balancing their pay from their employment with remaining on disability support payments. Some participants mentioned that remaining on disability support was important for providing them with entitlements to medical care, pharmaceutical costs, public transport etc. While they enjoyed earning money or potential earning money from their paid work there was a strong reflection across all focus groups of a *"worry"* or fear about losing their social entitlements due to paid work. Others highlighted that disability supports went to living experiences and their pay from working was money to be enjoyed or saved such as going on a holiday or having a pet.

A considerable number of participants did criticise the pay arrangements.

Some were unsatisfied with their pay, some stated they had no awareness or little of the amount they were paid, several people said that *"I don't know what I get paid"*.

"I don't know what I am paid it's sent by email and I don't know how to use email" (Dublin Participant).

Participants who had left paid employment were more likely to comment in retrospect on being unhappy with the low pay rate – *"I didn't get enough..."*, *"I was working really hard but wasn't worth paying for a taxi to get to work..."*. There was no suggestion that there was a lack of equality in the pay rate compared to other colleagues doing the same job however again the most common phase associated with this theme when it arose was *"I don't know..."*

A noted feature of those participants who were involved in advocacy with and on behalf of people with intellectual disability was that work was always unpaid.

Overall, participants highlighted that they place a high value on being paid because pay was linked to material wellbeing and to participating and being treated as an equal in relationships and wider society.

Participation: Many of those who participated in the focus groups had often had long period of unemployment or no employment, underemployment and/or social and economic disengagement prior to taking up their current job. As such, they appreciated being engaged in paid employment and *"having sometime to do"*. They made comments such as it *"gets me out of the house"*, *"it give me something to do"*, *"better than staying at home"* or *"having a routine"* whether or not they liked their tasks at work, and the availability of the work hours and days they wanted. The value the participants placed on *"getting out of the house"* speaks to the experience of a group that is often socially excluded and disengaged, the productivity and participation involved in work was cited a valuable feature of their lives, as it counteracts social exclusion.

Relationships: Positive relationships with work colleagues were one of the valued employment outcomes. Working thus gave participants who were in work or had previous work experience or anticipated work experience **access to peers, friends, mentors and the wider community** which they emphasised as valuable. Across all focus groups participants most commonly mentioned that they enjoyed the relationships involved in their working lives – *"its great craic"*, *"they are really nice and have lots of chats..."* Most participants mentioned positive relationships with supervisors, managers and other staff. They frequently cited relationships with co-workers whom they commonly referred to as *"friends"* as a key aspect they enjoyed about work.

The workplace could also be a major source of frustration for participants. Some focus group participants talked about leaving paid employment because of poor attitudes and lack of support from co-workers. Poor attitudes from or conflicts with supervisors, managers and other staff were revealed as 'dislikes' of paid work across all focus groups - *"she is always too busy to show me what to do...just tells me to do it"*. Some participants mentioned conflict with work colleagues, mostly referring to small-scale personality conflicts, but in a number of instances participants described conflict that appeared to involve consistent conflict – *"she is always annoying me...she just doesn't stop even when the boss says it to her"*.

2.2 Finding Paid Work

Participants spoke extensively about the ways they found employment, or received assistance finding employment. Methods of finding paid work were mainly centred on assistance from disability support services, and/or preparatory experiences. Some participants cited a range of people who helped them to find work including families (mainly in rural environments) making potential connection with employers, and support workers from disability support services.

The majority of participants who were in paid employment said that they had the opportunity to decide where they were working or going to work which pointed to strong decision making supports from disability support services and families. One of the significant points commonly made across all focus groups was that participants included other life factors in their decision making about paid employment – for example, consideration of their health being the most common factor and family circumstances such as caring for older parents another frequently mentioned factor. All participants who were in employment stated that they **received assistance to make decisions about taking up paid employment opportunities**. Disability service support workers were the main source of this advice and assistance. Support workers also emerged as key facilitators of the employment process with the employer as opposed to the participant directly seeking the work opportunity. A small number of participants spoke about the support systems that helped them find paid work. This included assistance with administration, assessment of skills, personal plans, participated in a range of preparatory experiences (e.g. volunteering, work experience, preparing for job interviews etc.). Of particular note was a significant number of the study participants in one focus group spoke about lack of support in finding employment after leaving school.

There were some examples of volunteering positions which participants indicated were beneficial in *“getting used to working”* or *“tried it out to see if I would like it”*. Another support identified by participants was work experience supporting connections with employers who for some offered paid employment. A frequently mentioned scenario was that few participants were involved in volunteering or study when in employment. It appeared that the choices were usually either be involved in paid work or volunteering/study not a combination of the two.

Across all focus groups those participants that were in paid work worked on a part time basis (e.g. two to three times per week) and often in the morning or afternoon rather than full days. Reasons for this included health related issues but also fear that any more hours *“might stop their social welfare”*. For some participants they stated that they would like to work full time but that it was never presented as an option to them.

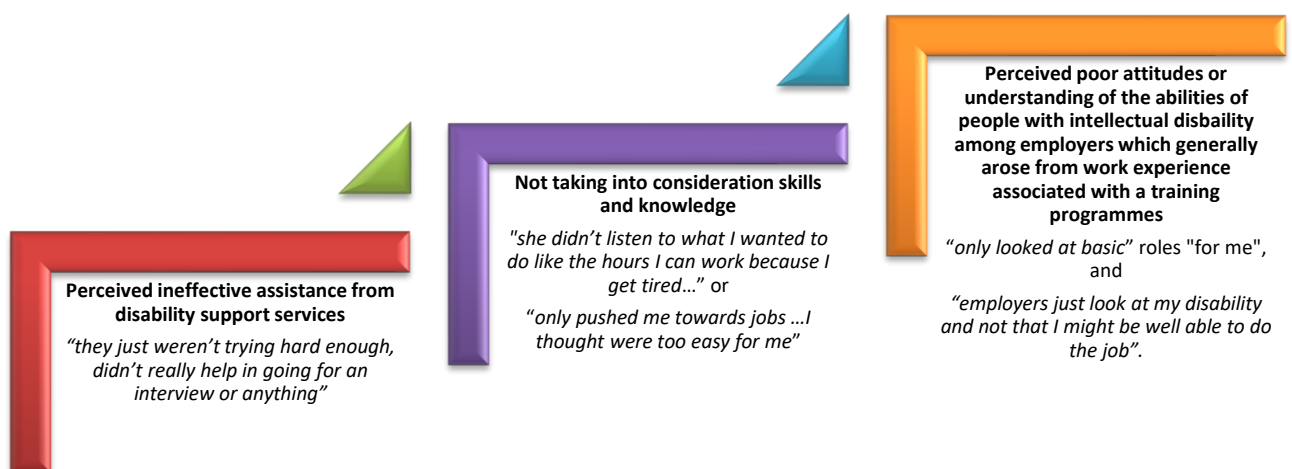
An important caveat to these findings is that several participants in the focus groups were **not sure or did not know how they found paid work**. This suggests that work was arranged for them, without significant input from them. In addition a small number of focus group participants stated that **they had no choice about where they worked**. Some participants suggested that the choice was made for them by family members or disability support organisations. This may have been because there may have been a lack of available work options due to structural barriers such as transport, living in an isolated rural area and dependence on *“someone to bring me”*. However, this reflection by a small number of participants was **not conducive to personal decision making** where

others were making decisions in respect to paid employment on their behalf. This small cohort of participants spoke about being presented with one possible option/employer to choose from, and while the participants said that they were keen to take the job *“it was the only option to choose from”*. Participants in one focus group spoke about the experience of ageism by employers and how it limited opportunity to participate in paid employment - *“he told me I was too old!”*

While instinctively participants knew this to be unacceptable and unequal treatment, they were at a loss as to how to address it or as one participant articulated did the employer think that *“saying I was too old was better than saying I couldn’t have a job because of my disability”*

2.3 Barriers to Paid Employment

While discussion of what helped focus group participants find work was common across all focus groups, participants also spoke about barriers to finding employment. It was mainly participants who had sought, but not successfully found paid employment who spoke of barriers. While several people in the focus groups had successfully found paid work and were happy there, there were also a substantial number of participants who had sought paid employment, but were unable to find positions. For this group there were a clear set of perceptions to which they attributed their unsuccessful search including:



The **application process** associated with accessing paid employment was also seen as a prohibitive with most participants feeling that they needed help in applying for paid work and if that help was not there it was seen as impossible to get paid work. As previously mentioned, participants felt that the level and kind of direct assistance to people with intellectual disability impacted on whether or not they were able to find their preferred paid employment.

Participants were acutely aware that opportunities for paid employment in local communities and the related contextual factors such as how viable or vibrant a business was or not in a community impacted on their potential in *“getting paid work”*. Many participants felt that the ‘business’ circumstances of a potential employer was a key variable influencing their employment outcomes. While this factor would potentially enable or constrain the whole workforce of community participants felt that a downturn in local businesses did especially impact negatively on people with intellectual disability. One participant articulated this view in stating - *“why would someone employ me when they could have someone without a disability”*

An important reflection from a rural focus group was that participants recognised that there were some benefits to living in a rural community indicating that it was easier to find paid employment in a rural community because *“everyone knows everyone”*.

2.4 Barriers to Maintaining Paid Employment

Overall, the experiences of the focus group participants in the study highlighted that there are a range of barriers to maintaining paid work. The impact of these barriers was that there were several people in the study who had worked in paid employment for short periods of time, but had not sustained the paid work - *“there were lots of short jobs and then finished”*.

Overall the barriers that participants experienced led to a sense among participants of feeling disrespected, undervalued or unacknowledged for their work meant that people did not continue with their paid work. The barriers mentioned were less *“say”* or control over their work environment. Some of the common barriers to maintaining paid employment included:



A significant theme that arose across all focus groups was that their work tasks or role did not extend the full potential of the person, as one participant articulated:

“I thought that I would be helping customers, but it was just filling shelves which I didn’t really enjoy doing all the time and anytime I asked to do something else they would just ignore me”.

The **feeling of boredom** frequently appeared in these findings with participants wanting more of a challenge or wanting more variety in work tasks.

“I don’t want to be doing the same work forever...it gets boring!”

However, none of the participants who raised the issue had the issues resolved and a common scenario described by participants was a lack of response to participants request to change tasks to alleviate boredom:

“Never let me try something else...promises but don’t let me...”

“She (supervisor) wasn’t too interested, I told her I was bored but she said that she hadn’t anything else for me to do...I think I’ll leave after the summer”.

“I asked to be moved to register”

“Once I got the job I wasn’t asked if I would like to do something else”

“Just because I do the work I have doesn’t mean I wouldn’t like to try something else”

Participants spoke about wanting more of a challenge or wanting more variety in their work and commented that they either disliked the repetitive nature of their work or the prolonged nature of some tasks, or that they felt they had more to offer and did not like doing one basic task or working by themselves – *“I’m left on my own I don’t get to speak to the other lads”.*

Broader life circumstances also influenced whether or not participants maintained paid employment. Some participants made **their own decision** to cut back their own hours or leave due to health issues, family challenges or problems with transport:

“My mum can’t bring me anymore so I have to get the bus and that didn’t suit my hours...”

Rights and entitlements were raised across all focus group session including the issue of the **lack of contracts** and there was a lot of questioning around what contracts should have in them. Associated with contracts was how participants received information on their rate of pay and **payment arrangements** was raised in two focus groups especially where pay slips were provided on an electronic basis - *“I can’t use a computer so I don’t know how much I’m paid”.*

One participant involved in advocacy work was very clear about what unions do in supporting people to access their rights and entitlements but stated that most people don’t know about them which raised questions within the focus group as to *“what do unions do?”*

2.5 Changing Paid Employment and Accessing Progression Opportunities:

Some focus group participants spoke a lot about changing their employment mentioning that they had several jobs over time. It was clear from their reflections that the experience of managing change such as meeting new people, learning new tasks and getting used to a new routine posed a challenge. The participants who stated that they were unhappy with either their current experiences of paid employment or past experiences spoke a lot about wanting to change their employment. A noted reflection within one focus group was that though some participants had changed jobs in the past and commonly switched between roles however this is usually due to circumstances outside their control. However, there was comparatively little discussion of participants actively going out and seeking to change their paid employment as a means of altering their work circumstances – rather it was mainly about **coping in the circumstances**. It was much less common for participants to actively seek to change their employment. Sometimes this was because they were happy in their roles or felt secure there, while for others it was because they did not believe they would find or be accepted in another job or role. This was revealing in that that many participants in the study simply did not envisage changing their employment at all. Many participants had no aspirations to ever change jobs and it appeared that another role had never been a consideration by or for them. In some cases this was because they had only ever had one role, which they never questioned leaving, while in others it was because they had had a number of unsuitable roles previously and then when they found one job that they were happy in, they never wanted to leave. Thus, while many people expressed no direct barriers to changing jobs, it would appear that it was nevertheless still not an option for the participants and that unarticulated barriers may be in place.

Progression opportunities within paid employment such as higher pay, better working conditions, supervision of other workers and having more of a challenge were identified by some participants. In some cases participants equated *“because I want to work with people other than people with disabilities”* with progression. Yet again it was notable that none of the participants who voiced these wishes had either plans or saw a pathway to achieving these types of progression within employment.

Few participants were involved in volunteering or study when in employment. It appeared that it was usually either be involved in paid work or volunteering or study not a combination of the two. However the implication of this pattern could impact negatively on helping them to change jobs or roles more tailored to their skills or interests within paid employment in the future.

2.6 Supports for Finding and Maintaining Paid Employment

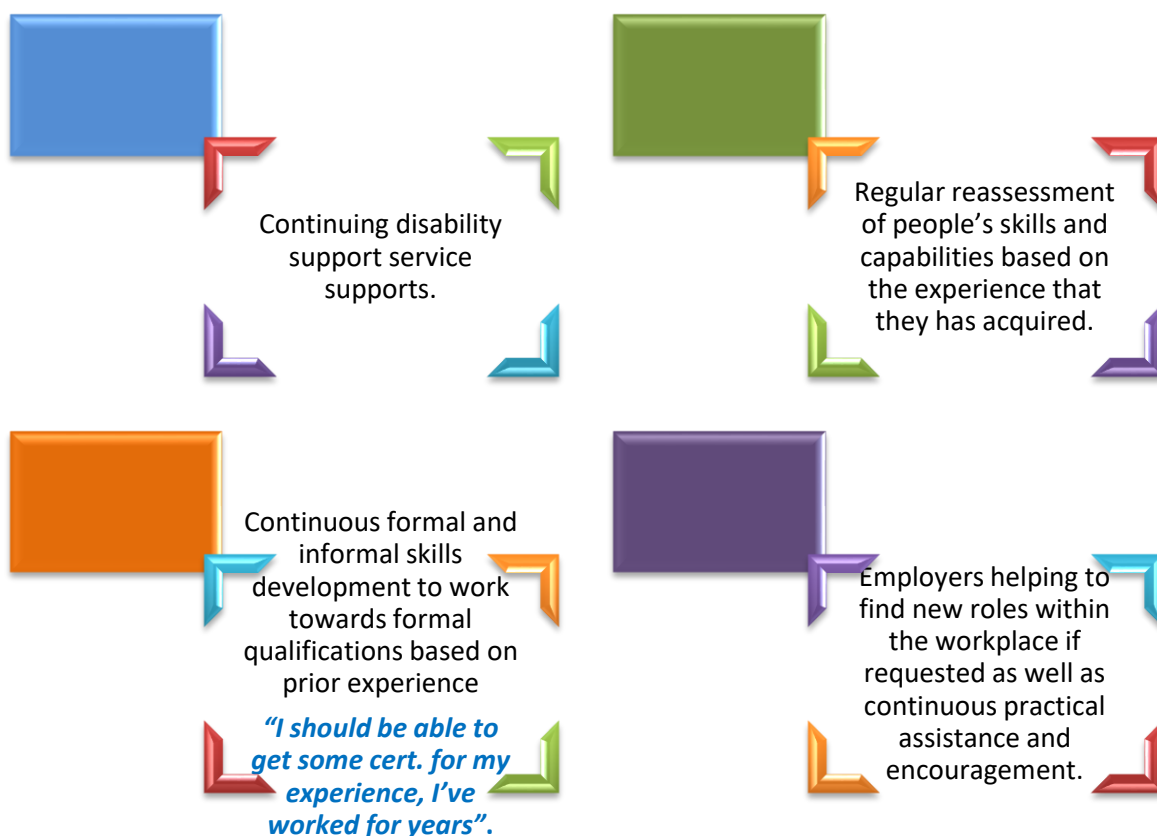
Focus Group participants spoke about conditions that either supported them or were required to enable them to find and maintain paid employment. Overall many of the participants were assisted to find and maintain their paid employment through practical help with managing tasks. Some people were able to draw on their own personal agency and efforts to manage in their work tasks. It is important to acknowledge that personal qualities that especially helped participants who were in paid employment to maintain paid work included implied qualities such as their own **resilience, confidence, work ethic and commitment to carrying out tasks correctly**.

Participants across all focus groups agreed that it was important to provide substantial assistance to people with intellectual disability to find and maintain their paid employment recognising that when supported well they can draw on some of their own skills and resources to continue in paid employment. These conditions identified by the participants in the focus groups included:

- **Practical help with work tasks:** To learn how to do new tasks, complete tasks and gain help in carrying out difficult tasks. The support often involved being shown how to do a new task, having lead in time to learn a new task, building their tasks over time or having the confidence and opportunity to ask a co-worker or supervisor for support. This helped them to maintain their role over time. Having the right support from a person who knows how to help was deemed as crucial such as a job coach / people who are trained to help and *“listen to what we want”*.
- If tasks were difficult or tasks “boring” they were changed. The opportunity to change or adjust tasks thereby functioned as a means of supporting wellbeing, interest and preventing boredom in the workplace.
- **Development of resources:** To help participants remember what to do such as the use task cards outlining what to do and when, picture cards, phone apps and having a specific routine.
- **Supportive workplace relations:** Relationships that are supportive in that they offer a combination of practical assistance and trust that they could do the job or when in paid employment other staff having time to help them or willingness to help them with practical tasks. Peer support from other employees was also a feature of some of the participant’s experiences such as the use of a formal support system e.g. having a ‘buddy’. In addition, having a specific person *“ask for help”*, or clarification on tasks, or supportive relationships with other colleagues and customers in the workplace who allow the person to be upfront about their support needs without *“feeling embarrassed in asking for help”*. Getting emotional support from support worker, families and colleagues that enabled them to build their confidence in firstly seeking work and secondly staying in work.
- **Continued visitation** from supporters who may have assisted in supporting them to find work in the first place was also identified as really important to participants. Someone in work and someone outside of work to talk problems through if needed. This process of *“calling in to see how I was getting on”* was seen as important as it encouraged a three way communication process between the employer/supervisor, the supporter and the person. This was helpful in preventing problems accumulating and that may result in someone leaving a paid position. In a small number of cases participants indicated that this was helpful where other employees *“weren’t very nice to me and she came and sorted out with him (the employer)”*.
- **Communication skills:** Need a familiar other to interpret communication if required. Respect right to use their own unique means of communication. Having electronic devices including person’s own phone was identified as really helpful to carrying out their work,

word based or picture based communication boards, sign language and gestures, body language and words and phrases (*“keeping it simple”*) were all elements of support that were identified by participants. Easier to communicate with one person who understands *“me if I have a problem”*.

While finding and starting paid work raised challenges for the focus group participants maintaining paid employment appeared to be more complex for some participants. In addition to the need for supportive relationships as suggested above, being able to draw on aspects of the disability support services to maintain paid work and where participants wanted to change jobs or tasks was deemed to be very important and required the following supports:



2.7. Self-Employment

Participants across all focus groups had no had no aspirations to engage in self-employment and it appeared that it had never been presented as an option by or for them. Thus, while many participants expressed no direct barriers to self-employment, it would appear that it was simply not an option for the participants and again that unarticulated barriers may be in place.

“It’s not really seen as something I could do”.

However, the discussion prompted participants to consider what they would require to explore self-employment as an option for them leading to considered, pertinent and succinct ideas in respect to the supports that would be required, including:

- Someone to talk to about their idea such as the Local Enterprise Offices, local partnership companies and employment support services.
- Be taken seriously.
- Help in building confidence to start own business.
- Have access to money to start the business.
- That funders and supporters understand that it might take a bit longer to set up a business.
- Being part of a network to provide peer support and advice and guidance.

3. Employers Perceptions and Perspectives

Twenty-six employers participated in the study of which 16 undertook an online survey and 10 participated in one to one interviews. The composition of the sample is detailed in Table 2 by sector type

Table 2: Employer Sampling Frame

Sector	Survey	Interview	Total
Construction	2	-	2
NGOs	8	-	8
Retail	2	6	8
Education and Health	2	-	2
Leisure and Hospitality	2	2	4
Manufacturing	-	1	1
Information	-	1	1
Total	16	10	26

The number of employees in the sample within an organisation ranged from 1 to 101+. The majority of organisations employed 1-5 employees (53.8%), 30.7% employed 6-20 employees, 3.8% employed 21-50 people and 3.8% employed 51-100 people and 7.8% employed 101 plus people.

Attention was paid to ensuring diversity across a range of sectors in the small sample including how many people were employed overall, how many people with intellectual disability were employed if any. The rationale for involving employers who did not employ people with intellectual disability was to ascertain their reasons for not employing people with intellectual disability.

The majority of employers in the sample **did not employ people with intellectual disability (65%)**. Of the 23% that did employ people with intellectual disability all were in **the retail sector**. In addition, 15.3% of employers responded that they did not capture that “*type*” of demographic and 3.8% of employers stated that they did not know if any of their employees had an intellectual disability. One employer who did not capture that type of data or track their employee’s demographics stated that they did not track cultural, linguistic or ethnic backgrounds either.

3.1 Recruitment of People with Intellectual Disability

Employers who already employed people with intellectual disability and those who did not employ people with disability intellectual disability currently were asked about how they recruit or would recruit people with intellectual disability.

In respect to employers who had recruited employees with intellectual disability all employers stated that employees came through work placement as a result of “***working with disability support organisations or a school***” and as such on foot of this work placement employees were offered a paid position. This in all cases was with the continued support or “*check in*” from the disability support services. All employees were in entry level part-time jobs within the retail sector all of which were either local small supermarkets or chain supermarkets.

Both the on-line survey and one-to-one interview process presented employers with a range of options (multiple responses) to ascertain what they were more likely to use in recruitment of people

with intellectual disability. The responses are detailed in Table 3 with the majority stating that their main recruitment choice was contacting employment support organisations such as Employability.

Table 3: Employer Recruitment Strategies

Employer Recruitment Strategies	Total
Creating partnerships with disability related advocacy or support organisations	2
Contacting employment support organisations	4
Schools, colleges and universities when vacancies arise	1
Establishing internship/mentoring programmes targeted at people with intellectual disability	2
Total	11

Five employers felt that they didn't know if they would use any of the options, eight respondents indicated that they did not proactively recruit people with intellectual disability and four stated that they had *"never thought about using any of the options posed to them"*. None of the employers thought about including people with disabilities in diversity recruitment goals, posting job announcements in disability related publications or websites, posting job announcements and/or hosting a table at job fairs or specific disability jobs fairs.

3.2 Information

Employers were asked what types of information would persuade them to recruit people with intellectual disability. Employers responded with multiple answers. The majority responded (87.5%) *"Information that addresses any concerns about costs"*, 75% stated that information on satisfactory job performance, attendance and retention of people with intellectual disability. A further 75% stated that information showing how hiring people with intellectual disability has benefited other organisations/business in their sector and 42.6% information showing how hiring people with disability has benefited nationally recognised organisations/businesses.

3.3 Challenges in hiring, retaining and advancing the progression of People with Intellectual Disability

In respect to the perceived challenges in hiring people with intellectual disability employers raised a number of concerns. The nature of the work is such that it could not be effectively performed by people with disabilities was a major challenge for 29% of employers while 58% felt that it wasn't a concern at all. Not knowing how much accommodations would cost featured as somewhat a concern amongst 50% of those employers that participated in the study. Discomfort or unfamiliarity regarding hiring people with intellectual disability was somewhat a challenge for 50% of employers amongst the sample. A smaller but significant number of employers (37.5%) identified a lack of knowledge or information about people with intellectual disability as somewhat a challenge in hiring. The attitudes of co-workers and supervisors towards hiring people with intellectual disability were identified by 29% of employers. However 71% of the sample indicated that this was not a challenge. A small number of employers stated that the attitudes of customers were a major challenge in hiring people with intellectual disability.

Staff support for the inclusion of people with intellectual disability in their workplace generated a myriad of responses. The majority of employers (75%) have some concern that supervisors are not

sure how to take disciplinary action for a person with intellectual disability. Interviewees expanded somewhat on this concern stating that there - *“is a fear of legal action...though I don’t know a case of this happening”*

“My staff simply wouldn’t know how to deal with a person with an intellectual disability who wasn’t doing their job...or coming in late...”

This theme was reiterated through both the survey and the interview process with 50% of employers stated that supervisors/staff were ‘somewhat’ not comfortable managing people with intellectual disability; while 12.2% indicated that it was a major challenge however 37.5% felt it wasn’t a challenge at all. Similarly, 50% of employers were also ‘somewhat’ concerned that ‘supervisors are not sure how to evaluate a person with an intellectual disability’ in respect to work performance.

In respect to skills 57% of employers were ‘somewhat’ concerned that people with intellectual disability *‘lack the skills and experience to do our work’* and for 14% of employers this was a major concern.

The issue of costs was raised with 50% of employers stating that it was somewhat of a concern, perceiving that *‘it costs more to employ workers with intellectual disability that those without disabilities due to accommodations, additional management time, or healthcare and insurance costs’*. During the interview process employers were asked if they had experience of this in the past. All of the ten employers who participated in the interview process felt that this was a perception rather than based on their direct experience other than building modifications. One employer talked about having to *“put wheelchair access in...”* though agreeing that this was for customers as well as workers. When asked about the assumption that a person with an intellectual disability may not require wheelchair access **there was clear confusion as to different experiences of disability.**

3.4 Strategies and Supports

Strategies that some organisations/businesses nationally and internationally have used when hiring, retaining and advancing the progression of people with intellectual disability in paid work were posed. Employers were asked what was they perceived to be most helpful. A disability targeted **internship programme, assistive technology, and a flexible work schedule** were considered to be the most help (86.7%). Using a **recruiting source that specialised in placing people with intellectual disability and visible top management commitment to supporting people with intellectual disability** in paid employment was also seen as a help (75% of the sample).

Disability awareness training and training of existing staff was seen as helpful by 71% of employers in the sample. A centralised accommodations fund for things like assistive technology or *“on the job support”* if it was required was identified by 70% of employers while 57% felt that employer tax credits and incentives would be helpful in encouraging employment of the people with intellectual disability.

In identifying supports that they required to support the engagement of people with intellectual disability in employment employers were asked about what supports would be most useful to them. **Job task analysis** to formally identify knowledge skills and abilities to specific jobs was identified by 62.5% of employers as most useful. In addition employers identified assistance in **customising**

training plans for new employees with intellectual disability was identified by 50% of the sample as was **placement support services** (50%).

Local and individual measures such as local recruitment fairs (57%) and an offer to train current employees (63%) in disability awareness were identified as most helpful.

Employers also raised issues in respect to Covid-19 recognising that people with intellectual disability were perhaps more likely to have health conditions, were less able to ensure physical distancing, and so face accessibility barriers. These barriers have grown with the pandemic measures not just for workers but their employers.

The Employment Equality Acts obliges employers to make reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities. An employer must take ‘appropriate measures’ to meet the needs of disabled people in the workforce. This means they must make arrangements that will enable a person who has a disability to:

- *have equal opportunities when applying for work*
- *be treated the same as co-workers*
- *have equal opportunities for promotion*
- *Undertake training.*

However, based on the sample of employers who participated in this study there appears to be lack of confidence and for a minority “*fear*” in respect employing a person with an intellectual disability and for some there remains a negative stereotype of people with intellectual disability.

Congregated settings and separation in schools and institutions seems to reinforce many negative stereotypes the have about people with intellectual disabilities especially beliefs that capacity for their participation in paid work is limited. The majority of employers in this sample were unaware that when interviewing a person with a disability, that they ‘can’ ask the same job related questions as any other applicant focusing on ask abilities rather than thinking about what the person cannot do or that there are no special procedures for firing or disciplining a worker with an intellectual disability. The employer’s level of awareness in respect to their obligations to provide anything that the person would normally provide for themselves was limited. Many reasonable accommodation measures would not necessarily have a cost implication – such as flexible work arrangements or facilitating part-time work.

The strongest impression arising from the employer sample involved in the study is the lack of recognition and awareness amongst the majority of employers that people with intellectual disability often have developed a great deal of resilience, commitment and perseverance in all their day to day activities due to imposed structural barriers throughout their lives. These qualities as employers agreed were deemed to be exceptional qualities in any potential employee.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

People with intellectual disability experience more barriers to finding and maintaining their employment. Across all focus groups none of the participants identified a 'regular' process of access to paid employment all were supported through disability support services.

"I got my job because of [support service] I wouldn't have got it otherwise"

"I couldn't stay in the job without help [from support service]"

Employers also acknowledged the role of disability support services in negotiating pathways for their employment of a person with intellectual disability.

"To be honest only for [service] I don't think we would have considered it in the first place but also it really important to us and [name] in keeping the job".

However, despite these supports people with intellectual disability remain more exposed to the turbulent conditions of the labour market, **including low job stability, predominance of low entry position and low pay, and lack of clear pathways to progression within the workplace.**

The findings arising from this study underlined the fact that people with intellectual disability are at greater risk of material poverty, social exclusion, poor access to information and assumptions that their rights are somehow *"a little bit different from other people looking for work"* (employer). The employment of people with intellectual disability in paid employment is not only a disability specific issue but needs to be considered within the broader context of the labour market and labour market conditions and policies. For instance, improving paid employment outcomes should be considered one of the reasons for and factors in improving conditions in the entry-level and/or low skilled end of the labour market in general.

Across all focus groups **participation, building relationships and getting paid/achieving material wellbeing** were the most important employment outcomes to people with intellectual disability. Outcomes such as personal wellbeing, rights, respect and equity, and self-determination were also deemed important. People with intellectual disability should have both personal and systemic-level support in finding and maintaining employment. The latter requires the environment to change for the person not the person change for the environment.

The following recommendations are based on the reflections of the participants in the study and include:

Getting paid was an important component of material well-being for participants across all focus groups. While most people were conscious of balancing their pay so that they could also remain on disability support payments a small number of participants indicated that *"it was not enough to live on"* (on its own) for achieving material well-being and quality of life. Therefore **on the one hand government policy is to support independent living while pay does not always support independent living.**

Pay for working also appears to have an important role in allowing people with intellectual disability enough money to pay for aspects they enjoyed as well as their daily living expenses. While many participants did not criticise their pay arrangements for some this was because they were satisfied with their pay while a number of participants appeared to be unaware of the details of their pay arrangements. While none of the focus group participants highlighted differential pay arrangements that made them feel like they were being treated differently to other workers in respect to pay, the question remains when they have not adequate access to pay slips this limited their knowledge of their rate of pay compared to other workers. In this respect **people with intellectual disability working need to access to accessible information and advocacy support in relation to their rights and issues of respect and equity in the workplace especially in respect to pay. In addition there is a need to have support and accessible information provided to them to make informed decisions in respect to their pay.**

In facilitating people with intellectual disability to find work there **needs to be a range of employment opportunities available to them when seeking paid employment with support in choosing between options and successfully assisted to find work where there were both supports for their job search.** In addition while support services and families have been instrumental in supporting people with intellectual disability in finding paid work it is imperative that they are supported in making informed choices and supported choices about that work. 'Starting your own business' should always be included as a choice and option when looking people with intellectual disability are seeking paid work.

Staying in paid work is best aided where people had practical help with tasks at work, supportive relationships in the workplace, characterised by practical assistance and trust and assisted in continuous personal development and confidence building. **Employers and disability supports services should ensure that continuous connections and support with those in paid employment is maintained.**

People with intellectual disability **need to know that it is acceptable to change jobs if they wish to and to be encouraged to do so or progress or expand role within a job.** They need to have support available to further develop their confidence to ensure that they are making informed and supported choices about changing their employment or roles within employment. Individual planning meetings to look at their employment tasks and plan for future change or progression within a role should be facilitated with employers on a regular basis through annual appraisal, support and supervision as with other employees. In addition there is **a need for further education, training, volunteering roles etc. available to further develop their confidence for finding and progressing to new roles within employment.**

Supports centred on **encouraging self-employment as an option for people with intellectual disability is required from enterprise and business development support agencies and should be a focus of all employment and disability supports services in the provision of options and opportunities for people with intellectual disability.** These supports should include information on 'starting your own business' that is easy to read and understand. Furthermore awareness raising training should be undertaken by business support organisations, banks and credit unions on the

rights of people with intellectual disability and the delivery of a specific information and promotional campaign for people with intellectual disability on 'starting your own business'.

Employers need further encouragement to appreciate and understand how critical both personal supports for workers with intellectual disability and education towards cultural change in the broader workplace to enter and maintain paid work in the workplace. To this end support should be provided to employers in focusing on '*Recruit-ability*' by exploring different ways of recruiting people with intellectual disability, devise and deliver training for employers and staff on how to support people with intellectual disability in the workplace and showcase how having a diverse workplace can really make a positive difference to the work place.

Employers need support in building workplace relations to ensure that positive relationships are fostered and maintained between employees, colleagues, supervisors and support staff. Encouragement of employers and workers within organisations responsible for recruitment as well as co-workers **to undertake awareness disability training** be they public (public sector duty ensure that this should happen) or private sector.