



INCLUSION IRELAND

National Association for People with an Intellectual Disability

Submission on the Community Employment (CE) scheme

**To the Department of
Employment Affairs and Social
Protection**

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Ireland plain English guidelines**

Easy to read summary



The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection are asking for people's views on the Community Employment (CE) scheme.

The Community Employment scheme is a programme to give people work experience and training so that they can get a job.



These are inclusion Ireland's recommendations on how to make the scheme work better for people with intellectual disabilities.

- Continue to support people with different kinds of support needs.



- Provide information on how many people with disabilities use the scheme and how many get jobs after it



- The aim of the scheme should be to help people find jobs so the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection should continue to run it. It should not be changed to another government department.



- Supports such as job coaches, would help people with higher support needs to find and keep a job

About Inclusion Ireland

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

The vision of Inclusion Ireland is that of people with an intellectual disability living and participating in the community with equal rights.

Inclusion Ireland's work is underpinned by the values of dignity, inclusion, social justice, democracy and autonomy and we use the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) to guide our work.

Introduction

The Community Employment (CE) scheme is the largest employment programme run by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, with 21,832 recipients of CE scheme payment in 2017.¹

Following a review of the CE scheme in 2015, the scheme was categorised into two strands, Social Inclusion and Activation. According to the DEASP, Social Inclusion placements are aimed at adults who need additional supports, for example some people with a disability and the activation placements are more directly related to the labour market relevant work experience.

Inclusion Ireland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Interdepartmental Group's (IDG) discussions on the CE scheme and to set out some of the key issues experienced by people with intellectual disabilities seeking employment. As part of this submission, Inclusion Ireland consulted with people who have participated on the CE scheme and their supporters and their views are contained throughout.

¹ DEASP (2019). annual statistical report 2017

Current context

Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities affirms the right of “persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others”.

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2015-2024 sets out a 10 year, whole of government plan to ensure that people with disabilities are supported and enabled to work. Action 5 focuses on ensuring a coordinated policy approach to support people with high support needs to obtain and retain employment.

In reality, people with disabilities experience barriers to working, including financial barriers, negative societal attitudes, environmental barriers, the education system and lack of opportunity and support.

All of this is reflected in the low numbers of people with disabilities in employment. Just 36% of people with disabilities of working age and 17% of people with an intellectual disability are in employment.²

The DEASP’s own survey indicates that a significant number of people with disabilities in receipt of Disability Allowance want to work either full or part time. Employment programmes, such as the CE scheme are one mechanism by which the Department can support people with disabilities into employment.

CE scheme and disability

The DEASP operates a number of employment support programmes, of which the CE scheme is the largest. It is not clear how many of the 21,832 recipients of the CE scheme payment in 2017 were people with disabilities, or indeed people with intellectual disabilities.

From Inclusion Ireland’s advocacy work, we have met many people with intellectual disabilities who have reported that the DEASP’s employment support schemes are not open to them because they are not ‘job ready’.

² CSO (2017). Census 2016.

From this perspective, it is useful that the CE scheme provides Social Inclusion placements to those people who may require additional supports.

A 2015 analysis of the CE scheme found that nearly a quarter (24%) of participants overall progressed to employment upon completion of the scheme. For people with disabilities taking part in the social inclusion stream, a relatively comparable 18% progressed to employment with a further 5% progressing onto further training.

Recent Dáil debates have raised questions around which government department should retain responsibility for the social inclusion part of the CE scheme³. It is the view of Inclusion Ireland that the focus of the scheme should remain on supporting people into employment, whether this is full or part time and therefore the CE scheme in its entirety should remain within the remit of DEASP.

The DEASP's own report cautions that "care needs to be taken not to overlook the activation potential of participants on this [social inclusion] element of the programme".⁴

CE scheme operational matters

The IDG are examining a number of operational matters in relation to the scheme. One of the questions posed by the IDG is whether social inclusion placements should have a distinct focus.

A distinct focus can sometimes be very helpful for participants of the CE Scheme, particularly if they have a particular skill they want to develop. A young man in Cork told us:

"I chose to go on a CE scheme because I wanted to learn the skills of catering, I am not ready for a job yet but I want to get ready."

While a singular focus for some might be good, some participants reported leaving the scheme with a narrow set of experience on their CV

³ For example, Minister Regina Doherty, Tuesday, 2 April 2019, PQ [14968/19]

⁴ DEASP (2015). P.65

and so end up still not ready for the job market. To rectify this, it would be good to have a partnership between the social inclusion and activation elements of the scheme so that participants may opt for more than one placement and widen the opportunities available to them after the scheme.

The IDG are also examining how places on the scheme are filled. Places on the scheme should be filled in a person-centred way rather than to fill the gaps that exist in the roles available on the scheme. Individuals should apply if they are interested in the scheme with a set of areas of employment in which they are interested and places could be filled effectively this way. Inclusion Ireland spoke to a job coach in an intellectual disability service who explained:

“Too often people avoid CE schemes because they don’t fit exactly in the box required. That is why a person-centred approach is important. A lot of the time, someone with an intellectual disability might need a little more flexibility or support than a job description would allow and so they lose out.”

From our advocacy work in Inclusion Ireland we hear that sometimes people with intellectual disabilities avoid CE schemes because they are afraid of getting stuck in the same placement for a long period of time. Particularly in times of good economic growth, placements can be extended beyond a period where they are useful to the individual. Participants then become disillusioned and give up on their career path because there is no progression.

Employment supports

While the progression rate is positive, there is also potential to improve it and the IDG should consider how the CE scheme experience can be improved for people with disabilities.

A mix of training and supervision as well as an element of targeted career guidance would be beneficial for participants. When a participant is working in a role, it is important that they are well supervised by a CE scheme supervisor so that they have back up and support from someone

at all times when needed. A lack of supervision and support can cause participants to feel as though they are not progressing or achieving. The transition from school to education, training or employment can be challenging and so, accessible information, clear points of contact, clarity around benefits and good support at transition points will lead to more success. A job coach we spoke to said:

“We need to raise our expectations of what CE schemes can do for people with disabilities. They need to be more than a place to go, something to do or a gap to fill. They need to offer participants a clear path, guidance and support for the duration of the scheme with good training and experience. A variety of experience should be offered and job coaches or support employed where needed. There should be an expectation that a job will follow participation in the scheme”.

The IDG could also examine what works from other employment support programmes with a view to improving the experience of CE schemes for people with intellectual disabilities.

Recent research by Inclusion Ireland indicates that those with complex needs can obtain and keep a job, with the right supports.⁵ A job coach can be one such support.

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy also sets out the value of individualised support from a job coach in supporting people with intellectual disabilities to find and keep jobs. The job coach works to prepare a person for employment, makes links with employers, and supports the person in the workplace in settling in and managing tasks.⁶

The recently launched Ability Programme funds projects that are aimed at supporting young people with disabilities who are not currently job ready through the provision of a range of person-centred supports. Though it is too early in the lifetime of the project to measure success, the DEASP should consider the findings when it is being evaluated and incorporate what is working into the CE scheme.

⁵ Magee, C., Murphy, T., Turley, M., Feely, M., García Iriarte, E., McConkey, R. and Inclusion Ireland (2019). 19 Stories of Social Inclusion – Ireland: Stories of belonging, contributing and connecting. <http://www.inclusionireland.ie/sites/default/files/attach/basic-page/1673/19-stories-social-inclusion-ireland.pdf>

⁶ Government of Ireland (2015). Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024.

Finding employment is only one part of the process, workplace supports are crucial to sustaining employment. Supports such as personal assistance and training on an ongoing basis, if required, would be beneficial to persons with intellectual disabilities in sustaining employment for the medium and long term.

Conclusion and recommendations

People with intellectual disabilities have a right to employment and to the relevant supports to find and keep jobs. The focus of employment support schemes should be on making sure that this can happen. It is important that employment support programmes are not an end in themselves but translate into real jobs for persons with disabilities, with good support when transitioning into the open labour market.

The CE scheme should be one of a range of employment supports offered to people with disabilities and progress should be monitored as part of the monitoring of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024.

Recommendations:

- The CE scheme should continue to support people with diverse needs and should provide statistics on the number of people with disabilities accessing the scheme and progressing to employment.
- The Department should recognise both full and part time work as valid, positive outcomes from completion of CE schemes.
- The focus of the scheme should remain on supporting people into employment and, therefore, should remain within the remit of DEASP
- There should be policy coherence and the IDG should consider the recommendations in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy and how the CE scheme can advance those recommendations.

- Targeted measures, such as the availability of job coaches, are required to ensure those who may have higher support needs can obtain and retain employment

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