



**An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí**  
Department of Social Protection

# **Review of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and Disability Awareness Support Scheme**

Department of Social Protection

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**Plain  
English**  
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# Contents

Summary.....	4
1. Introduction .....	7
1.1 Aims and objectives of the schemes.....	7
1.2 Requirement for this review .....	8
1.3 Terms of reference .....	8
1.4 Policy issue and background to this review .....	9
2. The Reasonable Accommodation Fund and Disability Awareness Support Scheme .....	12
2.1 Overview of the schemes .....	12
2.1.1 Reasonable Accommodation Fund .....	12
2.1.2 Disability Awareness Support Scheme .....	14
2.2 Origins and historical context.....	14
3. Legislative context .....	17
4. Review approach and methods.....	18
5. What our administrative data shows .....	19
6. Public Consultation – what stakeholders say .....	24
7. Literature review – what international research has to say .....	32
8. Approaches to supporting reasonable accommodations in other countries .....	41
9. Conclusions .....	48
10. Recommendations .....	50
11. Longer-term .....	53
Appendix 1: Reasonable Accommodation Fund – current eligibility and operation.....	54
Appendix 2: Disability Awareness Support Scheme – Current eligibility and operation .....	58
Appendix 3: List of organisations who made a submission .....	59
Bibliography .....	60

## Tables

Table 1: Number of grant claims paid (number of claimants) 2012-2021.....	22
Table 2: Total expenditure (€) 2012 – 2021.....	22
Table 3: Average annual expenditure (€) 2012-2021. Average grant value (€) .....	23

Table 4: Range of grant value (Min-Max) (€) 2012-2021 .....	23
Table 5: Overview of current eligibility requirements and application process for the four Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants. ....	55

## Figures

Figure 1 Do you think these grants help people with disabilities? (could select more than one option).....	25
Figure 2 Employers asked - Why have you not received a Reasonable Accommodation Fund grant?.....	26
Figure 3 Can you tell us what reasonable accommodations you would usually need at work? .....	28

# Summary

## **About the schemes**

The Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme are support schemes offered by the Department of Social Protection. They aim to support the employment of disabled people in the open labour market. The Reasonable Accommodation Fund offers four grants to make the workplace more accessible. These grants are as follows:

1. Workplace Equipment and Adaptation Grant (WEAG)
2. Job Interview Interpreter Grant (JIIG)
3. Personal Reader Grant (PRG)
4. Employee Retention Grant (ERG)

The Disability Awareness Support Scheme offers workplace training about working with people with disabilities.

## **About the review**

Both the Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme have been in operation for decades and, while the work environment and target audience have changed significantly, there haven't been any meaningful changes to either scheme. Therefore, a review of the two schemes is timely to evaluate their effectiveness. It also aligns with our department's commitments under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities.

We conducted a policy review of both schemes in 2022/23. It involved a review on spending on the schemes over the last 10 years, a comprehensive public consultation, a literature review and an international comparison of similar schemes.

## Issues

### Low take-up and low spending

The Reasonable Accommodation Fund and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme are both demand-led schemes which means that the level of expenditure is based on the take-up of the schemes by employers and employees. They have shown consistently **low take-up**. The Reasonable Accommodation Fund has expenditure of around €100,000 a year helping fewer than 100 claimants, while expenditure on the Disability Awareness Support Scheme is only around €11,000 a year.

### Reasons for issues – what stakeholders say

The public consultation identified issues with the schemes that account for the low take-up and spending rates. These include:

- lack of awareness of schemes,
- their complex paper-based application and processing systems, and
- low funding levels.

Stakeholders call for an expansion of the services that could be funded and the types of employers, employees and prospective employees who could be eligible.

### Lessons from other countries

International research suggests that reasonable accommodations, while not the full answer, improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities when they match the needs of the individual with the demands of the job. Successful schemes in other countries include:

- funding for needs assessments,
- job coaches,
- mental health support services,
- special aids or equipment,
- awareness training,
- work-from-home supports, and
- onsite work travel costs such as taxis to work meetings.

### **This review's recommendations**

We know that the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme address just one aspect of the wider suite of measures that need to be considered from a whole-of-Government perspective. However, for these two department schemes to better meet the needs of people with disabilities who are either seeking employment or are employed, a number of changes are required. This review makes the following recommendations:

1. Combine both schemes and replace with a single flexible scheme.
2. Simplify the application process.
3. Provide approval in principle for employers and jobseekers to assist their planning.  
(Approval in principle is initial approval for grants.)
4. Extend the supports provided by the scheme to other employers – for example the community and voluntary sector and the commercial state-sponsored sector.
5. Extend the supports provided by the Employee Retention Grant to new recruits and employees with pre-existing disabilities.
6. Enhance the Disability Awareness Support Scheme to offer wider training that also includes employers who currently do not have a disabled employee on staff.
7. Increase the number of support hours (interpreter, in-work support, and so on) eligible for funding.
8. Support funding for blended working and full-time working from home.
9. Ensure extensive promotion of the reformed scheme.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Aims and objectives of the schemes

The Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme are key disability employment supports. Their aim is to support the employment of disabled people in the open labour market. They do this by lowering the financial barriers associated with the provision of reasonable accommodations to existing employees or potential employees, and disability awareness training to co-workers of an employee with a disability.

### **Reasonable Accommodation Fund**

The Reasonable Accommodation Fund aims to make the workplace more accessible by way of the following four grants:

1. Workplace Equipment and Adaptation Grant (WEAG)
2. Personal Reader Grant (PRG)
3. Job Interview Interpreter Grant (JIIG)
4. Employee Retention Grant (ERG)

### **Disability Awareness Support Scheme**

The Disability Awareness Support Scheme aims to make the workplace more supportive by funding training to provide clear and accurate information to employers and employees about working with people with disabilities.

## 1.2 Requirement for this review

The review was required as improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities is a government priority that necessitates actions to be taken across a wide range of Government departments<sup>1</sup>.

These actions are co-ordinated and monitored by the main national strategy in this area, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, both employer supports have not been reviewed in recent times and the legislative, technological, and social landscapes have changed significantly since they were originally developed. That is why, the Department of Social Protection made a commitment under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (Phase Two Action Plan 2019-2021)<sup>3</sup> to 'review the operation of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund' grants. We decided to review the Disability Awareness Support Scheme at the same time given their similar target audience.

This review builds on a related review carried out by the National Disability Authority under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy. <sup>4</sup>

## 1.3 Terms of reference

The terms of reference for this review were to:

1. Establish the historical context, aims and objectives of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme.
2. Establish if the aims, objectives, and grants/scheme are still relevant today.
3. Assess if the grants/scheme are achieving their aims and objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> Programme for Government: Our Shared Future. Dept of Taoiseach, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities. Dept of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2014

<sup>3</sup> Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities - Action Plan 2019-2021

<sup>4</sup> Reasonable Accommodations: Obstacles and Opportunities to the Employment of Persons with a Disability. National Disability Authority, 2019



4. Identify any shortcomings or barriers to access in the way the grants/scheme are currently administered.
5. Analyse the take-up of the grants/scheme and expenditure.
6. Undertake a public consultation and report on barriers experienced and recommendations put forward by stakeholders to improve the grants/scheme.
7. Conduct a review of international research, literature and similar schemes in other countries to inform recommendations and conclusions.
8. Provide conclusions and recommendations to inform how the effectiveness of the grants/scheme can be improved.

## 1.4 Policy issue and background to this review

In Ireland, around one in 10 people of working age have a disability, and disabled people are employed at about half the rate of the general working population.<sup>5</sup> The exclusion of people with disabilities from work puts individuals at an increased risk of poverty. In 2021, almost two out of five individuals who were not at work due to illness or disability were found to be at risk of poverty.<sup>6</sup> There is evidence that people with disabilities would like to take up work. A 2015 review of the means-tested Disability Allowance scheme<sup>7</sup> revealed that:

- 43% of recipients would like to engage in employment, given the right supports;
- 35% would take up part-time employment; and
- 8% were seeking full-time employment.

The Department of Social Protection provides a wide range of employment supports for people with disabilities who want to start work, return to work, or continue in work. These include Intreo services, specialist contracted employment services, reasonable accommodation grants, training grants and other financial support.

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<sup>5</sup> [Census of Population 2016 – Profile 9 Health, Disability and Carers](#), CSO 2017

<sup>6</sup> [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\) 2021](#), CSO 2022

<sup>7</sup> Department of Social Protection, [Report on Disability Allowance Survey 2015](#), Judge et al., 2016 pp 18

The Department of Social Protection also provides supports to private employers.

Examples of these include:

- the Wage Subsidy Scheme (which includes, in some cases, financial support for extra costs incurred by employers who employ people with disabilities),
- the Disability Awareness Support Scheme, and
- under its Reasonable Accommodation Fund, the Workplace Equipment and Adaptation Grant.

Reasonable accommodations means identifying and removing needless barriers to enable disabled people to participate in work and achieve their full potential. Typical reasonable accommodations include:

- inclusive recruitment,
- flexible working times,
- physical and/or technological adaptations,
- coaching and mentoring, and
- policies to promote workplace inclusion and integration.

In line with the social model of disability,<sup>8</sup> reasonable accommodation is now recognised as a fundamental right<sup>9</sup>. In over 100 countries<sup>10</sup> there is a legislative obligation on employers to identify and undertake reasonable and necessary adaptations. This is required to equalise opportunities between counterparts with and without disabilities, either to remain at work or take up a new position.

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<sup>8</sup> The Social Model of Disability holds that people with impairments are 'disabled' by the barriers operating in society that exclude and discriminate against them.

<sup>9</sup> [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), United Nations 2006

<sup>10</sup> [A Comparative Overview of Disability-Related Employment Laws and Policies in 193 Countries](#), Heymann et al., 2021

Most disabled people are not born with a disability. Instead, they become disabled during their lifetime as a result of an accident or illness.<sup>11</sup> Research shows that for many people with disabilities, working improves health and that reasonable accommodation provision significantly improves a person's ability to retain or obtain employment.<sup>12,13</sup> Therefore, employers should be informed and prepared to meet their obligations in relation to reasonable accommodation, as anyone can acquire a disability at any time. However, many employers remain unaware of what constitutes a reasonable accommodation, the advantages of inclusion, their legal obligations, and the supports available to them.

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<sup>11</sup> Census of Population 2016 – Profile 9 Health, Disability and Carers, CSO 2017

<sup>12</sup> The impact on health of employment and welfare transitions for those receiving out-of-work disability benefits in the UK, Curnock et al., 2016

<sup>13</sup> The Role of the Employer in Supporting Work Participation of Workers with Disabilities: A Systematic Literature Review Using an Interdisciplinary Approach, Jansen et al., 2021

## 2. The Reasonable Accommodation Fund and Disability Awareness Support Scheme

### 2.1 Overview of the schemes

The Reasonable Accommodation Fund and Disability Awareness Support Scheme are both non-statutory schemes that are funded by the Exchequer. Expenditure is demand-led, and the schemes are operated by our local Intreo offices.

#### 2.1.1 Reasonable Accommodation Fund

The Reasonable Accommodation Fund is made up of four individual grants. We provide an overview of each of these below. You can find more details on eligibility and how to apply for each grant in Appendix 1.

**Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant** provides funding to private sector employers who need to adapt equipment or the workplace to accommodate a disabled employee. The grant contributes towards the cost of an adaptation or equipment up to a current limit of €6,350 and covers minor building adaptations, such as ramps or accessible toilets, and assistive technology. Applications over this sum are considered on an individual basis up to a maximum of €9,523 if specialist training is required for the assistive technology funded under the grant.<sup>14</sup>

**Job Interview Interpreter Grant** is available to contribute to the costs of an interpreter where an interviewee or new staff member is deaf, hard of hearing or has a speech impediment and is attending job interviews with private sector employers. Funding is available for a maximum of three hours for an interview and an additional three hours for induction purposes. Interpreter travel costs are also funded as per public transport fare or a rate of €0.25 per km.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> [Operational Guidelines: Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant \(WEAG\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Operational Guidelines: Job Interview Interpreter Grant \(JIIG\)](#)

**Personal Reader Grant** is available to employees who are blind, visually impaired or are losing their vision, and as a result:

- need help with work-related reading,
- are in danger of losing their jobs,
- need retraining to other duties, or
- have their promotion prospects restricted.

The personal reader must not replace any reading help normally given by work colleagues, relatives or friends. The grant is paid based on a fee per hour that is typically in line with the national minimum wage.<sup>16</sup>

**Employee Retention Grant Scheme** is available to any private sector employer when an employee develops a disability. It provides funding to identify accommodations or training to enable the employee to remain in their current position or to re-train them to take up another position within the organisation. There are two stages to the scheme:

- Assessment: 90% of the costs of hiring a specialist to make an assessment and develop a retention strategy can be funded to a maximum of €2,500.
- Implementation of strategy: 90% of eligible programme costs can be funded to a maximum of €12,500.<sup>17</sup>

However, these supports are not currently available where a person is being recruited or where an employee has a pre-existing disability.

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<sup>16</sup> [Operational Guidelines: Personal Reader Grant \(PRG\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Operational Guidelines: Employee Retention Grant Scheme](#)

## 2.1.2 Disability Awareness Support Scheme

The Disability Awareness Support Scheme provides a maximum of €20,000 funding yearly for private sector employers to pay for disability awareness training for staff who work with a colleague who has a disability. The training should provide those taking part with an understanding and awareness of the issues surrounding disability and an overview of relevant anti-discrimination and equal opportunities legislation.

Funding of up to 90% of eligible costs is available in the first year and up to 80% of the costs in later years with a yearly limit of €20,000 payable to an organisation. The Department must approve the training being carried out by an organisation. You can find out details on eligibility in Appendix 2.

## 2.2 Origins and historical context

### Reasonable Accommodation Fund

The Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant, Job Interview Interpreter Grant and the Personal Reader Grant originated from the National Rehabilitation Board (1967-2000).<sup>18,19</sup> The Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant was in place by the early 1980s and was called the “Aid and Adaptations for the Workplace Grant”.

It made funds available to employers to adapt the working environment where this was necessary to enable a disabled worker to be employed. In 1985, the numbers availing of the grant was small with a total expenditure of £19,821.<sup>20</sup> By 1997 the number of grants awarded was 117 at a total cost of £163,000 and 87% of the applications were for equipment adaptations.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> S.I. No. 300/1967 - The National Rehabilitation Board (Establishment) Order, 1967

<sup>19</sup> S.I. No. 171/2000 - National Rehabilitation Board (Dissolution & Revocation) Order, 2000

<sup>20</sup> National Rehabilitation Board Annual Report 1985

<sup>21</sup> National Rehabilitation Board Annual Report 1997

A report in 1997 showed that the National Rehabilitation Board was covering the cost of sign language interpreters for Deaf job applicants, approving 96 job interview grants. They also provided personal reader assistance to people with visual impairments taking up new jobs.<sup>22</sup>

These three original grants transferred from the National Rehabilitation Board to Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS) in 2000. The Employee Retention Grant was introduced by FÁS in 2003 following recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Disability.

FÁS streamlined the application process for the four grants, and it merged their budgets under the name The Reasonable Accommodation Fund in 2009. The four Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants transferred from FÁS to the Department of Social Protection in January 2012 and have remained largely unchanged since that time.

### **Disability Awareness Support Scheme**

FÁS also introduced the predecessor to the Disability Awareness Support Scheme, the “Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme” in 2001. The aim of the original scheme was to “assist in the integration of people with disabilities into the workforce and eliminate mistaken perceptions about people with disabilities and their capacity to be productive and effective colleagues and employees”. This remains the fundamental aim of the current scheme.

Despite FÁS’s active promotion of the scheme through advertising and Workway – an Ibec/Irish Congress of Trade Union project to promote employment in the private sector for people with disabilities, take-up of the scheme remained low. The scheme transferred from FÁS to the Department of Social Protection in January 2012 and has remained largely unchanged since that time.

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<sup>22</sup> [National Rehabilitation Board Annual Report 1997](#)

## **Summary**

Over the years, the schemes' aims have remained the same and changes to the schemes have had little effect on take-up. Demand for the schemes is consistently low, despite evidence of promotion among employers.



### **3. Legislative context**

#### **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

According to this convention, legislation must specify that both public and private-sector employers are responsible for providing reasonable accommodation to individual employees with disabilities. However, it limits this obligation on employers where the provision of reasonable accommodation would impose a disproportionate or undue burden on them.

#### **European Union – Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC)**

The directive requires Member States to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of disability in employment, occupation and vocational training. It also requires employers to provide reasonable accommodation to employees and prospective employees with a disability to the extent that it would not impose a disproportionate burden on the organisation.

#### **Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015**

These Acts prohibit discrimination in employment and access to employment on the grounds of disability. They legally oblige employers to take reasonable steps to accommodate the needs of employees and job applicants with disabilities, except where to do so would impose a disproportionate burden on them. Denial of reasonable accommodation can amount to discrimination.

#### **Disability Act 2005**

These Acts place obligations on public bodies to, in so far as practicable, take all reasonable measures to promote and support the employment of persons with disabilities. They also require that these bodies meet compliance targets relating to their recruitment and employment of persons with disabilities.

#### **Irish Sign Language Act 2017**

This Act requires public bodies to prepare and implement Irish Sign Language action plans. It also places a duty on all public bodies to provide Irish Sign Language users with free accredited interpretation when using or seeking to access statutory entitlements and services.

## 4. Review approach and methods

The Department of Social Protection carried out this review.

### **Policy and expenditure focused**

It focussed on reviewing policy<sup>23</sup> as it can identify issues related to how policy is developed and provided. We also examined the expenditure and number of grants issued, their cost and take-up. (See Section 5.)

### **Public consultation**

We ran a detailed public consultation,<sup>24</sup> launched by Minister Humphreys on the 31 March 2022, to gather the views of key stakeholders. It ran for six weeks. The consultation focussed on the Reasonable Accommodation Fund, but over a third of submissions also gave feedback on the Disability Awareness Support Scheme. A summary of the main findings of the public consultation is included later in Section 6.

### **Literature review**

We also conducted a literature review of academic studies relating to reasonable accommodation provision, including the impact of disability awareness training among employers and co-workers. This review (Section 7) informed our recommendations.

In addition, we examined similar international schemes. You can read about these in Section 8.

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<sup>23</sup> [Public Spending Code Value for Money Review and Focused Policy Assessment Guidelines, DPER 2018](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Consultation Guidelines, DPER 2016](#)

## 5. What our administrative data shows

### Take-up of the grants and expenditure

The take-up of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme has been consistently low over the last decade.

- The Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants typically assists fewer than 100 people a year.
- The Disability Awareness Support Scheme has only been used 33 times in the last 10 years.

### Reasonable Accommodation Fund

Across the four grants 35% (three and a half out of every 10) of the claims have been for values less than €250. Analysis shows:

- individual grants are rarely awarded for the maximum amount allowable, and
- employers typically apply for funding that is below €1,500.

[Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant \(WEAG\)](#) – This grant's payments accounted for around one in three of the claims (Table 1) under the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and three quarters of the expenditure (€75,1330) over the last 10 years (Table 2). Payments ranged in value from between €14 in 2016 to €9,523 in 2017 (Table 4).

In any given year:

- half (50%) of Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant payments are typically below €1,500,
- three quarters (75%) of payments are below €6,500, and
- claims for more than €8,000 are rare, with only four occurring in 10 years.

[Job Interview Interpreter Grant \(JIIG\)](#) – this grant's payments accounted for:

- just under one in four of the claims under the Reasonable Accommodation Fund,
- only 4% (four out of every 100) of the expenditure over the last 10 years, payments ranged in value from €41 in 2015 to €475 in 2012 (Table 4).

In any given year, half of Job Interview Interpreter Grant payments are typically below €180 while three quarters of payments are below €390. Claims for more than €500 are rare, with only four occurring in 10 years.

**Personal Reader Grant payments (PRG)** – this grant's payments accounted for four in 10 of the claims under the Reasonable Accommodation Fund. (Table 1) They accounted for one fifth of the expenditure over the last 10 years (€20 for every €100 spent).

Payments ranged in value from €28 in 2017 to €6,642 in 2020 (Table 4). In any given year:

- half (50%) of the Personal Reader Grant payments are typically below €500, and
- three quarters (75%) of payments are below €1,300.

Claims for more than €2,000 are submitted occasionally, with 14 occurring in 10 years.

Many people who are eligible for the Personal Reader Grant submit regular claims throughout the year. Therefore, the number of individuals using this grant is much smaller than the number of claims. For example, six individuals availed of the scheme in 2021, which resulted in 55 claims. (See Table 1)

At an individual level annual expenditure typically ranged from €126 to €17,493 over the last 10 years.

**The Employee Retention Grant (ERG)** – This grant has only been used three times in the last 10 years at a total cost of €6,220. (Table 1)

### **Disability Awareness Support Scheme (DASS)**

This scheme's payments ranged in value from €630 to €15,106 in 2018 (Table 4).

- Only two grants were claimed between 2012 and 2016. (Table 1)
- The two years with the most claims were 2019 with 11 claims and 2021 with nine.
- The total expenditure over the last 10 years has been €111,724. (Table 2)
- Expenditure on the scheme is around €11,000 a year (though some years had no spend, for example 2016). (Table 2).

## Summary

Overall, this analysis shows that these schemes have very low take-up. Claims under the Reasonable Accommodation Fund are often small and claims for the full amount allowable are rare. As a result, fewer than 700 people have been supported by the Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants in the last 10 years at a cost of just under €1 million. (See Table 1)

If the Disability Awareness Support Scheme is added, the total cost of both schemes amounts to just over €1.1 million.

The following tables show you information on each scheme. We used abbreviations for names. Here they are again to remind you:

- Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant (WEAG)
- Job Interview Interpreter Grant (JIIG)
- Personal Reader Grant payments (PRG)
- The Employee Retention Grant (ERG)
- Disability Awareness Support Scheme (DASS)

**Table 1: Number of grant claims paid (number of claimants) 2012-2021.**

Grant	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total number of claims
ERG	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
WEAG	33	42	31	35	39	41	44	40	41	29	346
JIIG	42	23	10	32	21	25	36	24	23	15	251
PRG *	49 (6)	67 (7)	45 (5)	36 (5)	48 (4)	56 (5)	35 (5)	26 (4)	28 (6)	55 (6)	445 (53)
DASS	1	0	0	1	0	2	5	11	4	9	33
<b>Total RAF</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>1,069</b>
<b>Total RAF &amp; DASS</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>1,102</b>

\*The figures in brackets shows the number of people who claimed. Individuals could have multiple claims in a year.

**Table 2: Total expenditure (€) 2012 – 2021.**

Grant	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
ERG	€4,320	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€1,900	€0	€0	€0	€6,220
WEAG	€73,735	€86,511	€61,776	€58,108	€58,472	€81,635	€100,023	€81,984	€83,968	€65,118	€751,330
JIIG	€6,355	€2,767	€1,589	€4,816	€3,083	€4,295	€6,361	€4,269	€4,027	€2,878	€40,440
PRG	€27,274	€27,526	€14,499	€11,866	€16,537	€31,619	€12,129	€10,903	€18,970	€27,572	€198,895
DASS	€2,430	€0	€0	€1,260	€0	€16,404	€20,214	€49,934	€5,598	€15,884	€111,724
<b>Total RAF</b>	<b>€111,684</b>	<b>€116,804</b>	<b>€77,864</b>	<b>€74,791</b>	<b>€78,091</b>	<b>€117,549</b>	<b>€120,747</b>	<b>€97,157</b>	<b>€106,964</b>	<b>€95,568</b>	<b>€897,219</b>
<b>Total RAF &amp; DASS</b>	<b>€114,114</b>	<b>€116,804</b>	<b>€77,864</b>	<b>€76,051</b>	<b>€78,091</b>	<b>€133,953</b>	<b>€140,961</b>	<b>€147,091</b>	<b>€112,562</b>	<b>€111,452</b>	<b>€1,108,943</b>

**Table 3: Average annual expenditure (€) 2012-2021. Average grant value (€)**

Grant	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>ERG</b>	€2,160	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€1,900	€0	€0	€0
<b>WEAG</b>	€2,234	€2,060	€1,993	€1,660	€1,499	€1,991	€2,273	€2,050	€2,048	€2,245
<b>JIG</b>	€151	€120	€159	€151	€147	€172	€177	186	€175	€192
<b>PRG</b>	€557	€411	€322	€330	€345	€565	€347	€419	€677	€501
<b>DASS</b>	€2,430	€0	€0	€1,260	€0	€8,202	€4,043	€4,539	€1,399	€1,765

**Table 4: Range of grant value (Min-Max) (€) 2012-2021**

Grant	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>ERG</b>	€1,710 - 2,610	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€1,900	€0	€0	€0
<b>WEAG</b>	€142 - 8,033	€106 - 6,400	€126 - 6,350	€137 - 6,350	€14 - 6,349	€69 - 9,523	€84 - 9,523	€299 - 9,523	€86 - 6,350	€24 - 6,350
<b>JIG</b>	€90 - 475	€60 - 220	€100 - 333	€41 - 346	€43 - 236	€110 - 314	€116 - 406	€120 - 288	€126 - 272	€100 - 390
<b>PRG</b>	€104 - 2,180	€35 - 1,836	€35 - 2,268	€104 - 1,404	€104 - 714	€28 - 5,586	€37 - 621	€115 - 3,520	€118 - 6,642	€163 - 1,261
<b>DASS</b>	€2,430	€0	€0	€1,260	€2,295-14,109	€2,250-4,491	€630-15,106	€765-1,800	€630-4,050	€0

## 6. Public Consultation – what stakeholders say

A wide-ranging public consultation was conducted during April and May 2022 to capture the views of:

- people with disabilities (and their representatives),
- employers,
- Department of Social Protection staff, and
- Public Employment Service (PES) staff.

These views were captured through online surveys and written submissions from Disabled Persons Organisations, representative organisations and individuals.<sup>25</sup>

Below is a summary of the main findings from that analysis. Some of the issues raised and suggestions for improvement were about services that are outside of the remit of the Department of Social Protection. We have shared the feedback with the relevant government departments.

### **Key Issues identified for both schemes**

In general, the Reasonable Accommodation Fund seems to be important for:

- helping people gain employment (81% of employers agreed and 43% of people with disabilities),
- performing well in their job (52% of people with disabilities agreed), and
- staying in that employment (49% of people with disabilities agreed with this and 70% of Public Employment Service (PES) and department staff agreed).

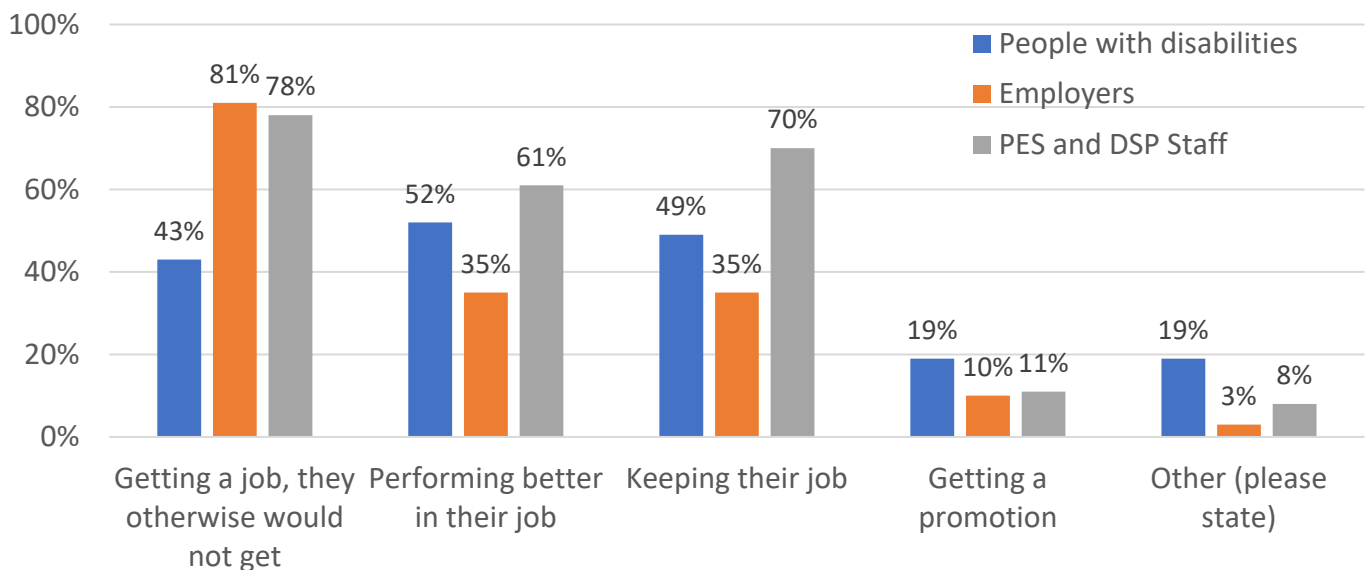
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<sup>25</sup> The Department received 33 submissions and 912 survey responses from a wide range of individuals, organisations and companies.



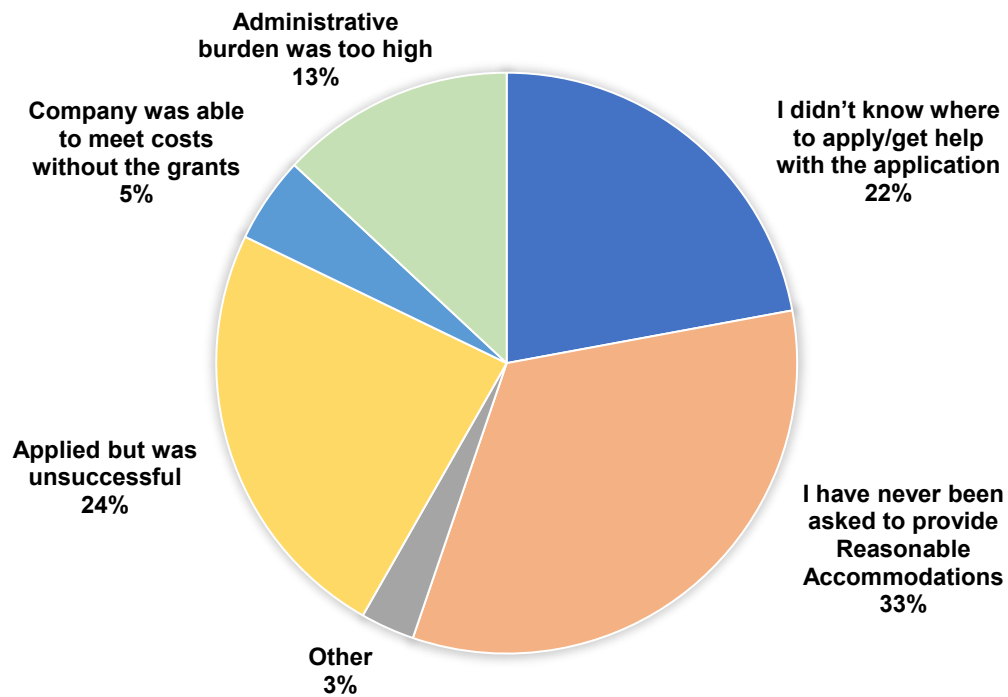
However, the Fund seems to be less successful at helping people with disabilities get promotions. (See figure 1 below). For example, just 19% of people with disabilities thought the Fund helpful in getting a promotion.

**Figure 1 Do you think these grants help people with disabilities? (could select more than one option)**



Despite the importance of the schemes, respondents generally showed little awareness or use of either scheme. About two thirds (65%) of employers and 40% of people with disabilities had not heard of the Reasonable Accommodations Fund. Of those who said they did know about the schemes many outlined difficulties in applying for them. They suggested that low awareness combined with complex paper-based application and processing systems lead to low take-up of both schemes. Figure 2 below outlines the responses from employers about not availing of the Reasonable Accommodations Fund. A third (33%) were never asked to provide reasonable accommodation and about a quarter (24%) applied for funding but were not successful.

**Figure 2 Employers asked - Why have you not received a Reasonable Accommodation Fund grant?**



Accordingly, stakeholders called for better promotion by the Department of the schemes and a simpler application process.

Common suggestions were to:

- make the application process more accessible,
- combine the two schemes into one scheme,
- give applicants approval of funding in principle. (Approval in principle gives applicants confidence around applying for a reasonable accommodation, subject to meeting all conditions of the grant.)

For the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and despite the relatively low value of claims received, the low funding levels was also considered a key issue. Therefore, there were also calls to increase the funding provided under this scheme.

## **Barriers to employment for people with disabilities**

Respondents identified barriers to employment. These included:

- attitudes, where people can be fearful of disclosing their disability in case they are treated differently by their employer or peers or because it might damage their future promotion opportunities,
- recruitment processes, where inaccessible information or complex application forms are a pre-employment barrier, and
- employers' awareness of their reasonable accommodation obligations.

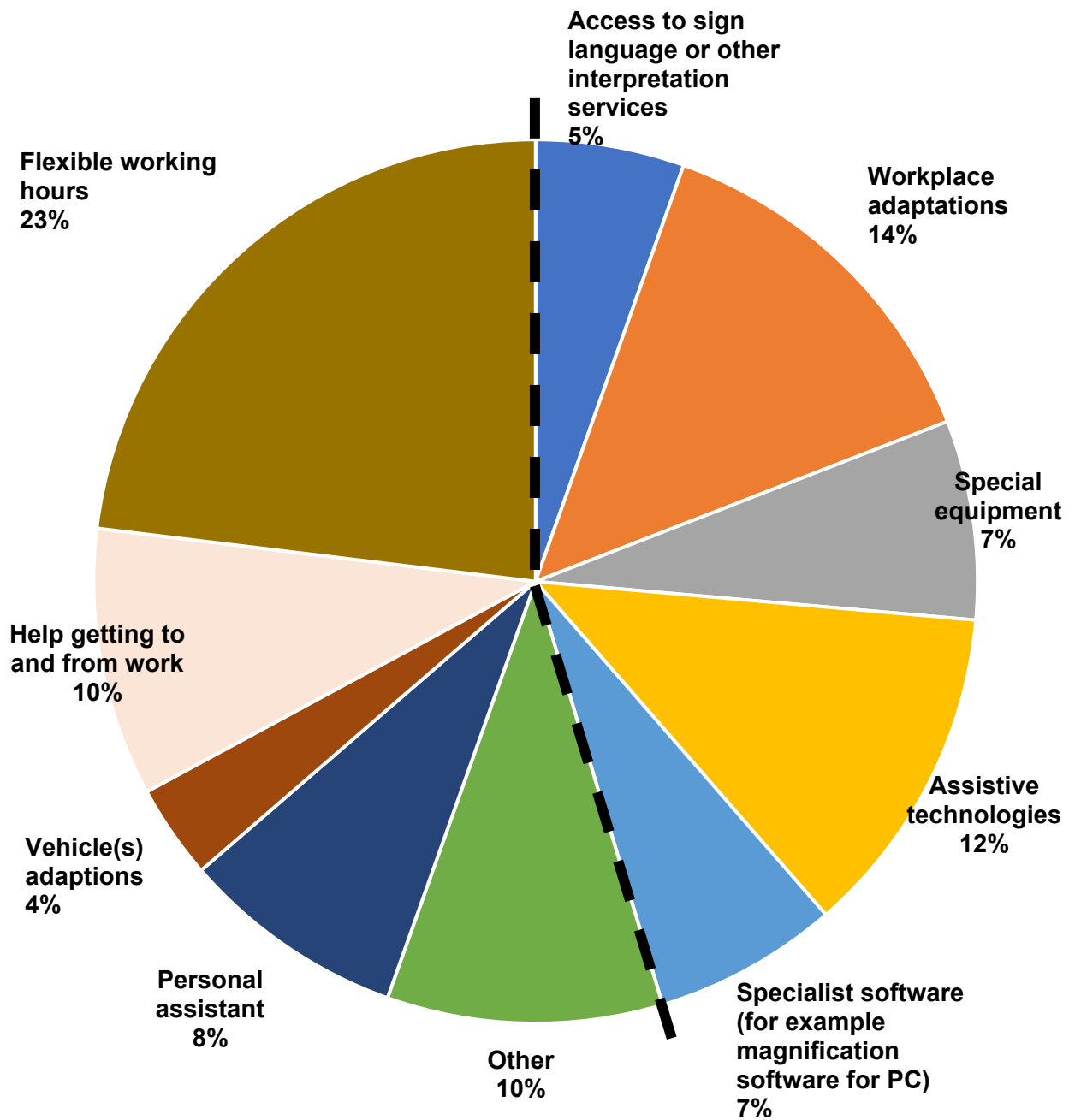
Many suggested that changes to the Disability Awareness Support Scheme could help address these barriers. There were calls to expand the supports of the scheme to employers without a disabled employee. For example, to provide funding for training on:

- inclusive recruitment,
- specific disabilities, and
- Irish Sign Language for co-workers of a d/Deaf employee.

## **Accommodations needed**

The survey of disabled people indicates that almost half of the accommodations typically needed are already within the scope of the four existing Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants. Figure 3 below shows the responses from people with a disability when asked what accommodation they would require at work. The dashed line divides the supports on the right that are currently available under the grants (such as special equipment – 8%) from those on the left that are not available such as flexible hours 23%.

**Figure 3 Can you tell us what reasonable accommodations you would usually need at work?**



The needs on the left of the figure which are outside of the scope of the fund generally require support from employers or from the Department of Health and the Department of Transport.

Written submission mostly called for increasing disability awareness and additional supports, particularly for those with:

- hidden disabilities,
- hard of hearing challenges or deafness,
- neurodiversity, or
- mental health issues.

## **Adjustments that could bridge the gap**

Respondents suggested adjustments to the existing Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants that could help bridge the gaps outlined in the responses.

### **Working from home**

For example, it was suggested that support for working from home could help those with transport issues. In some cases, this might also remove the need for other reasonable accommodation measures at an employer's premises.

### **Expand range of supports**

Overall, stakeholders called for expanding the range of supports offered. They believed the effectiveness of the grants was primarily limited by:

- the range of supports available, and
- how certain supports were offered to some groups but not others.

For example, funding for workplace needs assessment and in-work support like job coaches are only available to employees who acquire a disability while in that employment. They are not available for new recruits or employees with pre-existing disabilities.

Also, personal assistance with a work task (like reading) is only available for blind or visually impaired people.

There were also calls for the sign language interpretation service to be extended beyond interview and induction to include in-work support for meetings and training events.

## **Grants need to be broader**

Stakeholders thought the current grants were geared more towards people who were physically disabled, blind/visually impaired or deaf, hard of hearing. They thought that the grants did not provide enough support to people with intellectual, developmental disabilities, or mental health issues.

The fact that the schemes are limited to private employers was identified as a barrier to those seeking employment in the public and the community and voluntary sectors.

There were also calls to ensure self-employment and hidden disabilities were properly supported.

Stakeholders held that the schemes needed to use the human rights based social model of disability. This is set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>26</sup>.

Accordingly, there were calls for eligibility to be based on need rather than medical criteria. It was suggested that these changes would ensure a wider range of supports across disability types.

Finally, many stakeholders felt that putting in place a scheme that is similar to the UK 'Access to Work' scheme could address these issues and more. See Section 8 for more details on this UK scheme.

## **Summary**

Overall, the consultation suggests that the supports provided are important and are generally consistent with the needs of people with disabilities. Respondents believe the Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants help disabled people get jobs, keep jobs, and perform better in their jobs. They did identify some key issues relating to the awareness and administration of the grants, funding levels and gaps in the supports available.

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<sup>26</sup> [United nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

Analysis of the gaps identified, and the respondents' recommendations indicate that the effectiveness of the grants could be greatly improved by:

- Combining the two schemes.
- Changing eligibility criteria to extend supports to a wider range of employers, stages of employment and disability types.
- Modernising the administration of schemes.
- Increasing funding levels.
- Promoting schemes.

## 7. Literature review – what international research has to say

This section presents the findings of the literature review as follows:

- Disability inclusive employment (including reasonable accommodation)
- Reasonable Accommodation – International legislative framework
- Effective practices and factors affecting access to reasonable accommodations
- Gaps in provision
- Conclusions to inform policy and practice

### **Disability inclusive employment (including reasonable accommodation)**

This refers to recruitment and workplace policies and practices that welcome and enable disabled people as applicants and employees. These policies and practices provide them with the same opportunities as others to secure ‘decent work’ (International Labour Organization, 2015) matching their aspirations and skills (Shaw, 2022).

This concept also assumes that people will be employed in ‘mainstream’ workplaces. Separate or segregated settings are contrary to Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Creating an environment for disability inclusive employment is determined by the employer. If the employer is inclusive, they show positive employer attitudes towards disability, and they provide reasonable accommodations.

Reasonable accommodation means identifying and removing needless barriers to enable everyone to participate in work and achieve their full potential. Typical reasonable accommodations include:

- inclusive recruitment,
- flexible working times,
- physical and/or technological modifications,
- coaching or mentoring, and
- policies to promote workplace inclusion and integration.



In practice, successful accommodations need to match the specific functional needs of the individual to the demands of the job on an ongoing basis. This is because disability is not fixed. It is an interaction between impairments and an environment, both of which may change. Gaining access to accommodations requires collaboration between the employer and the employee and typically involves the following steps:

**Step 1:** the disabled person makes a request

**Step 2:** the employer evaluates the request

**Step 3:** the employer puts accommodation in place

**Step 4:** ongoing review of needs and accommodation provision

(National Disability Authority, 2019).

Many studies have found clear evidence that reasonable accommodations improve:

- employment outcomes for people with disabilities (Solovieva et al., 2011, Clayton et al., 2011 and Gignac et al., 2014, Jensen et al., 2021),
- overall employee productivity and morale (Hill et al., 2016 and Job Accommodation Network, 2020), and
- employers' profitability (Lindsay et al., 2018).

### **Reasonable Accommodation – International legislative framework**

Reasonable accommodation legislation exists in more than 100 countries, (Heymann et al., 2021).

The legislation places a duty on employers and comprises two parts.

#### **Fair access to employment**

**Part 1** typically obliges employers to identify and undertake reasonable and necessary adaptations so that both those with or without disabilities can remain at work. They must also take reasonable measures to make sure that new positions are open to people whether or not they have a disability.

## Fair to employer

**Part 2** makes sure that the accommodations the employer must make do not place an unfair burden on employers, (Poposka, 2019). The things that are considered when assessing the burden typically include:

- financial costs,
- resources available (including public subsidies),
- company size (in its entirety),
- third-party benefits (for example, benefits to customers),
- negative impacts on other people, and
- reasonable health and safety requirements.

## Legislation changes alone are limited

This type of legislation attempts to equalise employment opportunities. However, the ability of legislation alone to change employer behaviour is limited. This is due to the complexity of the issue and enforcement issues. Issues that make it complex include diversity of:

- employers,
- workplaces, and
- disabilities.

Enforcement issues can add to the difficulties. Indeed, it has been suggested that obliging employers to provide accommodations without offering supports could make this legislation ineffective at best, and at worst act as a disincentive, (Heymann et al., 2021, Clayton et al., 2012).

For this reason, many countries offer supports and incentives that improve employers' willingness to provide accommodations. These incentives also strengthen enforcement because the availability of public funding is often considered when adjudicating on a reasonable accommodation case, (World Health Organization, 2011).

In Ireland the Employment Equality Acts, the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court are important as they support inclusive employment. They enforce the law that employers must carry out reasonable accommodations.

The Reasonable Accommodation Fund, the Disability Awareness Support Scheme and the Wage Subsidy Scheme are designed to support employers so they can provide reasonable accommodation.

### **Effective practices and factors affecting access to reasonable accommodations**

Research shows that access to reasonable accommodation is influenced by a range of legal and non-legal factors that occur and interact at individual, workplace and societal levels. These factors include:

- individual characteristics of employers and employees (for example, competences and attitudes),
- the work environment,
- disclosure of disability,
- the nature of the job and disability, and
- availability of supportive services and funding (Vornholt et al., 2017 and Dong et al., 2010).

### **Individual characteristics**

For employers, the decision to provide accommodations is primarily affected by:

- a manager's attitude towards employees with disabilities (Telwatte et al., 2017),
- knowledge of disability legislation (Brohan et al., 2010),
- previous contact with individuals with disabilities (Scherbaum et al., 2006), and
- financial burden concerns, (Kaye et al., 2011 and Chen et al., 2016).

### **The work environment**

The size of the company, type of industry, and availability of supports also play a role in the employer's decision about providing an inclusive workplace. Large- and medium-sized companies hire and retain disabled people at a higher rate than small companies, (US Dept of Labor, 2020).

Furthermore, larger companies are more likely to actively recruit disabled people (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012 and AHEAD, 2021).

Research also shows that small- to medium- sized companies are more concerned about costs. They are less likely to put in place disability inclusion practices, (Chan et al., 2021) and offer accommodations than larger ones (Sepulveda, 2021).

This may be because large- and medium-sized companies tend to have more resources in place than small ones. This includes:

- advanced human resource teams,
- formal disability inclusion policies and procedures, and
- more experience in providing accommodations.

Also, by law, company size can be used to determine what is considered reasonable. Accordingly, the level of public funding made available to help cover costs often varies by company size, (Poposka, 2019).

### **Companies better at retaining than hiring disabled people**

Irrespective of company size, employers are better at retaining disabled employees and providing reasonable accommodations than they are at hiring new employees with disabilities, (Linkow et al., 2013).

A survey of employers who contacted the US Job Accommodation Network about accommodations found that more than three-quarters were seeking to retain a current employee, (Hartnett et al., 2011).

Also, when employers are asked for reasonable accommodations by existing employees, they felt confident in their ability to do so. They also recognised the associated organisational benefits, (Erikson et al., 2014). This may be related to the employers' loyalty to employees, the wish to avoid the cost of hiring and training a new employee, or a recognition that inclusion is good for the company.

Furthermore, a survey of US employers found that no-cost external problem-solving, subsidised accommodations, tax breaks, and mediation in cases of formal complaints or lawsuits were the preferred public policy approaches of employers, (Kaye et al., 2011).

### **Disclosure**

Disabled people must disclose their disability to access the supports they need at work. Several factors affect peoples' decisions to disclose and request reasonable accommodations. These include workplace policies, work relationships, self-confidence, fear of discrimination, self-advocacy skills, disability type and severity, type of industry, working conditions and availability of support, (Colella et al., 2011, Lindsay et al., 2016, Ameri & Kurtzberg, 2022).

### **Barriers influencing the impact of employment support**

Overall, research indicates that the impact of employment supports is limited by structural (inaccessible built environment, transport, communication) as well as attitudinal barriers (ideology, culture) that persist in society (Folmer et al., 2020). For example, the key barriers to entering the workforce reflect the wider attitudinal barriers at play in society that spill over into the workplace. These include discrimination by the employer, stereotyping and stigma or being treated differently by co-workers' and supervisors' (Colella et al., 2011) and low self-perceptions of work-readiness.

### **Gaps in provision related to the nature of disability**

An analysis of Ireland's 2011 census data found that after accounting for age, education, and ethnicity, people with psychological, physical, intellectual, and learning difficulties are closely correlated with self-reported unemployment and inability to work due to permanent sickness or disability, (Sakakibara, 2020).

Census 2016 data and survey data collected for this review show this unemployment trend continuing (CSO, 2017). There is a need to develop appropriate supports for the growing number of working age people with autism (Dept. of Health, 2018). This information suggests that additional supports tailored to the needs of these groups are likely to be required.

There is strong evidence that ongoing support and work-related social skills training, both before and during competitive employment helps people with mental health disabilities. There is moderate evidence to support the use of assistive technology to increase work participation for persons with intellectual disabilities, neurological/cognitive disabilities, and autism, (Smith et al., 2017).

There is also some evidence that remote working can have advantages for people with autism, such as limiting sensory overload and intensive interpersonal contacts, indirect interpersonal communications, and flexible work hours (Tomczak et al., 2022).

For people with physical disabilities, technological and physical adaptations, workplace flexibility, remote working and autonomy (independence), as well as strategies to promote workplace inclusion and integration were important, (Padkapayeva et al., 2016 and Schur et al., 2020).

### **Conclusions – Inform policy and practice**

Disability-inclusive employment can benefit businesses, customers and disabled workers (Curnock et al., 2016, Burton, 2006 and Aichner, 2021). Despite this many people with disabilities or chronic illnesses still experience discrimination and struggle to obtain and retain employment.

The literature shows that employers' concerns generally relate to their lack of knowledge and experience with disability and their financial, HR, and managerial capacities.

These concerns may arise from a fear of the unknown (including fear of impact on profit) and they vary by company size.

## **Reasonable accommodations is a key part to employment for disabled people**

There is strong evidence that reasonable accommodations enable disabled people to work. There is also evidence that public funding that supports providing accommodations for disabled people is effective and may particularly benefit smaller companies. The evidence also shows the importance of providing public funding to support the anti-discrimination objectives of reasonable accommodation legislation and its enforcement.

The evidence discussed above points to several ways the Reasonable Accommodation Fund could be changed to:

- improve its efficacy, and
- expand its grants' impact to a wider range of disability types.

## **Disabled people need more support**

There was evidence to suggest that in Ireland, people with psychological, intellectual, neurodevelopmental, and physical disabilities need more support.

The literature review indicates ways to address labour demand-side issues. These include:

- developing policies and schemes that support employers of all sizes,
- providing and offering certainty around financial assistance so people can plan ahead, and
- providing information, advice, training, and support to employers that are easily communicated and understood.

Labour supply-side issues (employees or potential employees) could be addressed by:

- policies that provide one-to-one supports to boost confidence and self-advocacy skills,
- guidance about disclosure and accommodation requests (Corbière et al., 2014).

These one-to-one supports should also support employers and co-workers so that they can overcome bias and negative attitudes. This would help disabled people to access inclusive employment and reasonable accommodations. These policies should provide for differing needs according to disability type and severity.

### **Supporting employers is just one factor**

Finally, the literature implies that public programmes that support employers so they can make reasonable accommodations are important. However, they are only a small part of the equalising employment opportunity puzzle.

Research shows that while barriers to participation in society prevail, targeted employment supports like the Reasonable Accommodation Fund are likely to have a low take-up, (Folmer et al., 2020). Even in the UK where a large, comprehensive, accessible, well-funded scheme exists (Access to Work), take-up represents a low percentage of the working age disabled population.

Accordingly, it is unlikely that changes to the Reasonable Accommodation Fund alone will have a significant impact on the national employment rate of disabled people. That is why it is important to continue to work across government to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We need to do this to make sure society and workplaces are open to people with disabilities.

That said, the scheme can be very effective for individual participants and help employers to overcome barriers to employing people with disabilities.



## 8. Approaches to supporting reasonable accommodations in other countries

In this section, we briefly set out approaches to providing public funding for reasonable accommodation in the United Kingdom, Canada, United States of America and Australia. We refer to programme evaluations (specifically 'What worked') where available.

### United Kingdom

The United Kingdom provides funding on an ongoing basis through a long-standing scheme.

[Access to Work](#) – The scheme that operates in England, Scotland and Wales is a broad support scheme that can help residents over the age of 16 get, or stay in, paid employment if they have a disability, illness, or health condition. The support given depends on needs and a person can apply using an accessible online process.

Through Access to Work, a person can get a grant to help pay for:

- A Workplace Needs Assessment
- Support Worker such as a note taker or job coach (most expenditure)
- Communication support for interviews (interpreters, lip readers)
- Travel to work such as taxi to work
- Travel in work such as transport to meetings
- Special aids and equipment
- Adaptation to vehicles
- Adaptation to premises
- Mental Health Support Service (a tailored plan, one-to-one sessions with a mental health professional)

A person does not need to be diagnosed with a condition to apply for mental health support but must provide evidence if they apply for help with transport costs.

### **Most of the funding goes to employ support worker**

Almost three quarters of the expenditure under the scheme in 2021/2022 was associated with the cost of a “support worker”. Under 7% related to special aids and equipment, adaption to premises and communication support for interviews.

The scheme may pay grants of up to 100% of the cost of the accommodation to self-employed people and people who have been working for less than six weeks when they first apply. (The employer may have to share the cost if the person is with them for more than 6 weeks.) It may also pay grants of up to 100% for:

- the Mental Health Support Service,
- support workers,
- additional travel to work and travel in work costs, and
- communication support at interviews.

In other circumstances, employers are asked to contribute. When cost-sharing between the employer and the scheme applies, the scheme will refund up to 80% of the approved costs between a certain level – ‘a threshold’ - and £12,000. Any balance above £12,000 will normally be met by the scheme. The amount of the threshold will depend on the number of employees the employer has.

The workplace can include a person’s home if they work from there some or all the time. Some costs are paid up front by the employer or disabled person and claimed back later.

Access to Work does **not** fund civil servants or reasonable accommodations that an employer is legally obliged to make.

### **Northern Ireland**

The Northern Ireland Access to Work scheme has a broadly similar structure to the United Kingdom scheme. However, the Northern Ireland scheme does not provide a Mental Health Support Service.

The service is contracted to organisations based on different disabilities (visual disabilities, hearing disabilities and physical disabilities).

**Has this approach worked?** The British Access to Work scheme appears to be an effective and well-liked programme that supported 37,170 people in 2020/2021 at a cost of £109.3 million.

A 2002 evaluation of the scheme estimated that 45% of recipients would be out of work but for the scheme and that it yielded a positive return for the exchequer. A 2011 review outlined improvements like:

- increasing awareness of the scheme,
- providing support to those with conditions that fluctuate in their symptoms, and
- the development of an accessible online portal<sup>27</sup>.

## **Canada**

Canada provides funding using select projects that respond to an annual call for proposals under various funds.

[Enabling Accessibility Fund – Workplace Accessibility Stream](#) – provides funding to support small- and medium-sized employers to support reasonable accommodation provision. Activities supported by this stream include:

- setting up accessible and effective work-from-home measures,
- expanding online training opportunities,
- creating inclusive workplaces (virtual or physical),
- connecting persons with disabilities and employers,
- training for in-demand jobs, and
- wage subsidies (financial support to employers who employ people with disabilities).

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<sup>27</sup> [Getting in, staying in and getting on: Disability employment support fit for the future](#), (Department for Work and Pensions, 2011), p. 79.

[Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities](#) – is delivered by partner organisations who provide a full range of employment programmes and services. This includes needs assessments and job coaches to assist with inclusion.

**Has this approach worked?** An evaluation of the Enabling Accessibility Fund found that the Workplace Accessibility Stream positively impacted employment opportunities for people with disabilities<sup>28</sup>.

A thorough review of the Opportunities Fund<sup>29</sup> found that the programme helps transition people with disabilities into the labour market and the impacts of this have been positive and long-term.

It is not possible to evaluate the impacts of the reasonable accommodation provisions. However, overall, it showed that participants had:

- higher earnings,
- higher rates of employment, and
- less reliance (albeit small) on social assistance benefits.

A cost-benefit analysis estimated that for every dollar invested over the 10-year period after the intervention there was a \$1.70 return. The highest return (\$4.40) was for the “Skills for Employment” stream which enables participants to undertake short-duration training and develop skills.

## **United States of America**

Supports in the United States are delivered through the tax system.

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<sup>28</sup> [Evaluation of the Enabling Accessibility Fund - Canada](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Technical Report: Estimating the Net Impact of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities Program - Canada](#)

[Architectural/Transportation Tax Deduction](#) – there is a yearly deduction of up to \$15,000 for expenses to any business for removing certain architectural or transportation barriers. Expenses covered include removing barriers such as steps, narrow doors, inaccessible parking spaces, restroom facilities. It may also be used for adapting vehicles.

[Disabled Access Credit](#) – a yearly credit of up to \$5,000 for small private sector businesses that incur costs for providing access to a disabled person.

[Personal Assistance Service](#) – the US Department of State provides Personal Assistance Services to employees who require such services due to a listed “Targeted disability.”<sup>30</sup> Targeted disabilities include developmental disability, deafness, blindness and missing extremities (such as fingers and toes).

[Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#) – is the leading source of free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues across the United States and is used by some other countries. JAN provides free one-on-one guidance and technical assistance on job accommodation solutions.

**Has this approach worked?** A 2020 survey of employers found that the unknown cost and actual cost of providing reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities were both in the top five concerns regarding hiring a disabled person. Only about a third (30%) considered tax incentives that encourage companies to hire people with disabilities an advantage.

A review of government supports found that the Architectural/Transportation Tax Deduction and Disabled Access Credit are underused, outdated and in need of reform. The review suggested that they be merged into an expanded Disabled Access Credit, and made available to all businesses, with gradual phase-out based on business size or profit levels.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> [Self-identification of disability SF-256 \(opm.gov\)](#)

<sup>31</sup> [The State of 21st Century Financial Incentives for Americans with Disabilities | NCD.gov](#)

## **Australia**

Australia provides funding on an ongoing basis across several schemes.

**Employment Assistance Fund (EAF)** – funds many initiatives to support employees.

These include:

- physical changes to the workplace,
- communications technology,
- Australian Sign Language interpreting,
- disability awareness training for staff,
- specialist support for people with mental health conditions or learning disorders, and
- modifying work vehicles.

Funding caps apply to the different supports. Cost AUD\$11.7 million in 2019-2020.

**Work Assist** – provides supports for employees unable to fulfil their job requirements due to the impact of their injury, disability or health condition. Assistance available includes:

- job redesign advice,
- workplace assessment,
- free workplace adaptations and/or special equipment,
- support to manage the workplace impact of injury, disability, or health condition, and
- other therapeutic interventions. (For example: physiotherapy, occupational therapy).

**Work Based Personal Assistant** – An employee who needs regular personal help (to eat a meal, use the toilet or take medication) at work due to their disability or medical condition may be able to access help with costs.

**Mobility Allowance** – An employee who is unable to use public transport may be eligible for funding to cover the costs of travel to and from home for paid work, voluntary work or training as well as travelling for work-related activities.

## **Has this approach worked?**

A 2019 evaluation found that the stakeholders value the Employment Assistance Fund and believe it helps people with disabilities to remain in their job, be more productive and keep their job<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> [Evaluation of JobAccess Service, 2019](#)

## 9. Conclusions

The key conclusions of the review are as follows:

### 1. Scheme take-up and expenditure are consistently low

The aims of the schemes remain relevant. However, their take-up is very low. The Reasonable Accommodation Fund has expenditure of around €100,000 a year helping fewer than 100 claimants, while expenditure on the Disability Awareness Support Scheme is only around €11,000 a year. This low-take up is due to:

- poor awareness,
- an overly complex application process, and
- the limited scope of the grants.

### 2. Separate scheme grants are barriers

Significant barriers for people with disabilities seeking employment, or in employment, include the use of separate grants (rather than a simplified single grant). Also, currently there is no approval in principle which is a barrier. For example, if approval in principle was given, applicants would have more confidence to apply for reasonable accommodation.

### 3. Limited range of employers is a barrier

The take-up of schemes among eligible employers in Ireland is very low. There is a need to consider including other employers outside the public sector – for example, the community and voluntary and commercial state-sponsored sector. Schemes in some other countries that fund a wider range of employers and employees and circumstances have demonstrated positive impacts on the employment of people with disabilities and have been good value for money.



#### **4. Employee Retention Grant assessments and supports are too limited**

Workplace needs assessments and in-work supports under the Employee Retention Grant are currently only provided to retain employees who develop a disability. These assessments and supports are not available to new recruits or employees with pre-existing disabilities, even though they have a similar need. Extending the assessments and supports would assist in the recruitment of disabled people.

#### **5. Scope of the Disability Awareness Scheme too narrow**

The scope of the Disability Awareness Support Scheme is too narrow. It only applies to employers who currently have disabled employees. It does not apply to employers that may recruit disabled employees in the future. Its range of training topics is also too narrow – for example, it does not include a requirement to cover inclusive recruitment, the rights of people with disabilities, and specific disabilities.

#### **6. Interpreter hours for employees with disabilities can be inadequate**

The number of in-work interpreter hours currently provided can be inadequate resulting in communication and integration issues for those who need this service.

#### **7. Funding limits are not reviewed regularly**

The funding limits for individual components of the schemes have not been examined in some time and should be reviewed. This would ensure they are adequate to provide the level of support required by those with the greatest need.

#### **8. Blended work needs support**

The Reasonable Accommodation Fund does not reflect blended working where accommodations may be required outside an office environment.

# 10. Recommendations

This section lists nine recommendations and suggests an action or actions for each one.

## **1. Combine both schemes and replace with a single flexible scheme**

**Action 1:** Create a single scheme that combines the current Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme into one scheme, with standardised eligibility criteria, for example regarding eligible work, age, and residency.

## **2. Simplify the application process**

**Action 2:** Review the application process with a view to making it less complex, user-friendly and to ensure that it is aligned with a needs-based approach.

## **3. Provide approval in principle for employers and jobseekers to assist their planning**

**Action 3:** Set out a formal approval in principle process so that employers and jobseekers can have greater certainty regarding funding within a particular set of circumstances. The Department would grant final funding approval once all the necessary requirements of the scheme were met. This recommendation will help employers to have a more inclusive mindset and feel confident about recruiting and retaining disabled people. It will also empower jobseekers to ask about reasonable accommodations.

## **4. Extend the supports provided by the schemes to other employers**

**Action 4:** Clarify the eligibility criteria to include employers and employees – for example, in the community and voluntary sector and commercial state-sponsored sector.

## **5. Extend the supports provided by the Employee Retention Grant to new recruits and employees with pre-existing disabilities**

**Action 5:** Extend the Employee Retention Grant so that it also available to new recruits and employees with pre-existing disabilities. This will provide in-work supports such as workplace needs assessments, specialists, and job coaches for both new recruits and all existing employees. The needs assessment should provide clear guidance to employers about their employee's workplace needs. This would help employers to confidently help disabled workers get the supports they need.

**Action 5 (2):** Make the needs assessment part of the eligibility criteria for certain components, such as the job coach or specialist or where high levels of funding are required.

## **6. Enhance the Disability Awareness Support Scheme to offer wider training that also includes employers who currently do not have a disabled employee on staff**

**Action 6:** Extend the disability awareness training to employers who do not currently have a disabled employee on staff. This will allow employers to provide more supportive workplaces for existing employees that may have an undisclosed disability and help employers prepare for recruiting disabled employees.

**Action 6 (2):** Provide funding towards training on inclusive recruitment, the rights of people with disabilities, and specific disabilities. It is important that we broaden the types of information that must be covered and to allow the tailoring of courses to ensure that the training is relevant to each workplace. This will ensure that employers and co-workers will receive training that is most appropriate to their needs.

## **7. Increase the number of support hours (interpreter, in-work support, and so on) eligible for funding**

**Action 7:** Increase the number of interpreter hours available as well as the in-work support hours such as job coach hours provided to new recruits.

## **8. Support funding for blended working and full-time working from home**

**Action 8:** Allow for equipment, software, and assistive technologies to be made available where the need arises, including blended working arrangements and full-time working from home arrangements. This will particularly help those who experience barriers relating to travelling to and from work.

## **9. Ensure extensive promotion of the reformed scheme**

**Action 9:** Develop a communication plan to ensure targeted and accessible promotion of the reformed scheme. This will include:

- the development of a public information campaign to include media advertising on a range of channels targeted to reach the relevant audience, as well as the development of promotional materials in accessible formats, and clear accessible online information published on gov.ie,
- promotion of the scheme through the Department's Intreo's early engagement process for people on disability income support payments, and
- promotion at employer engagement events.

## 11. Longer-term

Taken together, these recommendations will go a long way towards addressing the findings of this review and supporting disabled people in their working lives.

However, the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme address just one small aspect of the wider suite of measures that need to be considered from a whole-of-Government perspective. These wider measures cover transport, health, education and disability services.

The new single scheme should be regularly reviewed and improved if required. Over the longer-term, the new scheme could move towards a more comprehensive scheme, such as the UK Access to Work scheme (see Section 8 on page 41).

Given that the current level of take-up and expenditure on these schemes is very low (about €100,000 a year) it will be very difficult to assess the impact of these reforms on take-up and cost. Therefore, we propose to implement these recommendations subject to a yearly maximum of €1m on expenditure and a review after 3 years to take account of expenditure, take-up and impact.

# **Appendix 1: Reasonable Accommodation Fund**

## **– current eligibility and operation**

Generally, the four grants in the Reasonable Accommodation Fund have the same eligibility requirements. However, there are some differences in relation to the eligible circumstances and disability requirements.

The grants are aimed at assisting employers and employees in the open labor market. Therefore, they have limitations that exclude most state-funded employment, where such accommodations are expected to be funded through the ordinary budget.

In addition, the Fund aims to reduce costs incurred from a specific individual's disability often at a specific occasion. This means they do not apply to general or specific adaptations.

**Table 5: Overview of current eligibility requirements and application process for the four Reasonable Accommodation Fund grants.**

<b>Grant</b>	<b>Disability requirement</b>	<b>Eligible circumstances</b>	<b>Applicant</b>
Employee Retention Grant	An illness, condition or impairment which impacts current ability to work	Acquiring disability (Retention) – 4 weeks' absence, or when impacting employability.	Employer
Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant	In line with the Disability Act 2005. Medical Cert required.	Starting employment; acquiring a deterioration of disability (Retention)	Employer and Employee
Job Interview Interpreter Grant	Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Speech Impediment	Job interviews; induction training	Employee and Employer
Personal Reader Grant	Vision impairment	In job need.	Employee and Employer

**Continued on next page:**

Applicant steps	Department of Social Protection Steps	Steps after payment for the original successful applicant
<p><b>Employee Retention Grant</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contract specialist to supply written retention strategy.</li> <li>2. Apply for Stage 1 funding.</li> <li>3. Await Department of Social Protection approval.</li> <li>4. Received retention strategy.</li> <li>5. Apply for Stage 2 funding to put the strategy in place.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Process grant application.</li> <li>2. Reimburse costs of developing retention strategy (stage 1). To a maximum of €2,500 or 90% of eligible programme costs</li> <li>3. Pre-approve Strategy.</li> <li>4. Process grant application.</li> <li>5. Reimburse costs of putting retention strategy in place (stage 2). To a maximum of €12,500 or 90% of eligible programme costs</li> </ol>	None.

**Continued on next page:**



Applicant steps	Department of Social Protection Steps	Steps after payment for successful applicant
<b>Workplace Equipment Adaption Grant</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Application with Medical Cert.</li> <li>2. Equipment list (quotes), and justification</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Case Officer appraisal.</li> <li>2. Manager (AP) approval</li> <li>3. Set up payment</li> </ol>	Claim VAT returned.
<b>Job Interview Interpreter Grant</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seek pre-approval with Intreo. Source Interpreter.</li> <li>2. Complete application form at job interview.</li> <li>3. Signed off by jobseeker, interpreter and potential employer.</li> <li>4. Submit application.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pre-approve with client.</li> <li>2. Process application and pay interpreter.</li> </ol>	None
<b>Personal Reader Grant</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Apply.</li> <li>2. Negotiate hours with Department of Social Protection and employer.</li> <li>3. Source Reader.</li> <li>4. Submit monthly claim form (employer, employee and reader).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Process grant application.</li> <li>2. Negotiate hours.</li> <li>3. Process monthly claim form.</li> </ol>	Submit monthly claim form

## **Appendix 2: Disability Awareness Support Scheme – Current eligibility and operation**

The Disability Awareness Support Scheme provides a maximum of €20,000 funding for private sector employers to arrange and pay for disability awareness training for staff who work with a colleague who has a disability. The training is aimed at providing those taking part with an understanding and awareness of the disability-related issues and covers:

- the relevant anti-discrimination and equal opportunities legislation;
- disabilities and abilities focusing on mobility and sensory issues;
- perceptual awareness exercises that aim to dispel common myths;
- disability etiquette to clarify appropriate language and behaviour;
- dealing with mental health issues in the workplace.

### **Eligible Programme Costs:**

- Fees paid for external training programmes or courses;
- Fees for in-house training by external trainers;
- Fees for Open Learning or Computer/Web-based training programmes;
- Cost of learning materials (manuals, books, videos/DVDs) that are clearly associated with the relevant training and available at a maximum of €650 per programme.

### **Ineligible Programme Costs:**

- Cost of mandatory training to comply with regulations or legislation;
- Cost of taking part at conferences, trade exhibitions, seminars and workshops;
- Cost of apprenticeship training;
- Cost of purchasing hardware equipment or software systems;
- Capital expenditure associated with training;
- Cost of consultancy type projects associated with providing or using equipment, installation and maintenance of systems and procedures.

## **Appendix 3: List of organisations who made a submission**

Ability Focus

ADHD Ireland

AHEAD

AsIAm

Bridge Interpreting Ltd

Chime

Citizen's Information Board (CIB)

Council of Irish Sign Language Interpreters (CISLI)

Disability Federation of Ireland

Dyslexia Association of Ireland

Dyspraxia Ireland

Enable Ireland

Epilepsy Ireland

Ibec

Inclusion Ireland

Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI)

Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)

Irish Deaf Society (IDS)

Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA)

Mental Health Reform

National Council for the Blind in Ireland (NCBI)

National Disability Authority (NDA)

Open Doors Initiative – Employers Perspectives

Open Doors Initiative – Persons with Disabilities Perspectives

RehabGroup

St Patrick's Mental Health Services

Seven submissions from individuals were also received.

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