



**Transitions from Education and Training to  
Employment for People with Disabilities**

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## **Glossary of terms**

CE	Community Employment
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCU	Dublin City University
DFI	Disability Federation of Ireland
FET	Further Education and Training
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
Ibec	Irish Business and Employers Federation
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Act
IEP	Individual education Plan
NDA	National Disability Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
WHO	World Health Organisation
WAM	Willing Able Mentoring

## Executive Summary

### Background

For most people, there is an expectation that education and training will lead to entry into the labour market, paid employment, and economic production.

In the Irish context, employment remains a key marker of adulthood and citizenship, as well as acting as the primary mechanism for economic well-being. This expectation persists despite two key contextual changes. On the one hand, there have been changes resulting from the recent Irish recession in the wake of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, which severely compromised employment opportunities, particularly for those people moving into the labour market for the first time. On the other hand, there have been changes that reflect a new educational pathway in the context of globalisation. Here, it is increasingly understood that people can no longer expect to make one transition from education into a stable career.

In this context, many employees will experience new career forms and an on-going requirement to engage with learning so as to meet employer needs for flexibility. While this context offers both opportunities, and risks, people with disabilities have additional complexities to manage in making the transition to employment and in remaining resilient in the face of likely employment changes. The complexity of this is borne out in statistics confirming the under-representation in employment of people with disabilities.

This report presents research undertaken early in 2015 by a team based at Dublin City University, Ireland. The research aims to capture the perspectives of people with a disability who were in transition from education and training to employment; it includes a sample of people with a disability who had made the transition to employment. The research also sought the perspectives of Irish employers on employing people with a disability. Thus, the aims of the research were:

1. To provide a comprehensive view of the complexities of the transition to employment from education and training for people with disabilities
2. To identify what enables or disables the transition process
3. To examine what constitutes good practice to facilitate the transition process
4. To include the perspectives of employers on their attitudes, knowledge, and experience in employing people with disabilities
5. To place the findings within a policy /practice context on transition from education and training to employment for people with disabilities.



## Data and Methods used

The study utilised a mixed methods approach and generated data through three primary mechanisms. First, a literature review was conducted through academic databases such as Academic Source Complete, Business Source Complete, British Educational Index, Education Full Text, and Education Research Complete. The review was limited to research related to Ireland, published between 2005-2015, and using keywords 'disability' and 'employment' in the Abstract. Full-text articles in English, from peer reviewed publications, were sought. In a second review, the keywords 'people with disabilities' and 'transition' were used, with the same limits, but, given the lower results rate, it was not limited geographically. In a third review, the keywords 'disability' and 'apprenticeship' were used, again, not limited geographically. In addition, a search was completed of relevant publications from global policy actors, including the OECD.

The second method was qualitative, comprising semi-structured interviews with 36 people with disabilities, who were in the process of, or had completed the process of, transition from education and training to employment. An interview schedule (Appendix 1) was developed for the study and covered five inter-related themes:

- Exploration of Past Experiences
- Current Preparation,
- Access (Way into Employment)
- Support
- Progression

Interviews were conducted with 36 participants between February and May 2015. In some cases (n = 23), two interviewers were present; the remaining interviews were one-to-one. One participant subsequently withdrew from the research.

The third method was quantitative, comprising an anonymous on-line survey (see Appendix 3). The survey's 17 questions sought demographic information and included questions probing awareness of, experience in, and attitudes to employing people with disabilities. The final survey question was open-text and asked respondents to state the single most important factor that would make a difference to their organisation in being able to recruit, select, and progress an employee with a disability. The survey was circulated by Ibec to their membership and the project team initiated a strategy to enhance engagement. The survey was open from April to August, 2015. 45 employers completed the survey, however, one response was excluded, given its incompleteness. For a full overview of the method, please see Appendix 5.

## Key Findings

The research illustrates a broad range of experience, ability, and expectation amongst both employers and for the participants experiencing the process of

transition from education and training to employment. For the participants, skills and qualifications were of consequence but so was their age, the age of onset of disability, and prior experience of employment. For the employers, there was no one sector, size or governance model that meant an organisation would excel in the recruitment, selection, and support of employees with a disability. Highlights of the findings are presented under the headings education and training; work preparation; work environment; and employer perspectives.

## **Education and Training**

In line with population trends, over a third (n = 14) of the participants have, or are working, towards a primary degree, and, in some cases, further professional training; three have gone on to obtain a Masters level qualification, and one Masters is near completion. A further third (n = 14) of our participants are currently undertaking, or have recently completed courses at QQI level 5 or lower.

In line with trends in the general population in the context of globalisation, the once traditional, linear pathways, from school and further education to work, have been complicated for many participants. Many participants had worked in the past; a return to education and a 'new' transition phase has occurred for a combination of reasons, including a change in health status, necessitating a period out of work, or a change in work type and, in some cases, redundancy. This opportunity was seen positively for some participants. For instance, aspirations could be enhanced or healthier employment options explored.

The research suggests that some students were somewhat 'stalled' in education, taking courses that did not always match their interests or prior experiences or that provided a 'back door' to where they aspired to be. In some instances, this indicated a lack of adequate transition planning; in other instances, it appeared as a strategic approach that recognised that transition can be a phased process towards a desired profession or, at least, in an industry related to that profession. However, the employer findings suggested some sense that employees with a disability did, at times, lack the necessary skills and knowledge.

## **Work Preparation**

A common theme was the lack of direct involvement with potential employers in the context of education. The emphasis on preparing students for work varied between settings and the extent, and quality, of work placements varied considerably. While work placements allow people to 'test' if the industry or role is one that is right for them, the findings suggest that work placements would also allow an employer to explore their capacity to provide appropriate accommodations for people with disabilities and to identify where they might need to build capacity. In a tight employment context, the importance of unpaid work in offering the opportunity for work placement was noted.

With regard to work preparation, the question of the 'preparedness' of employers is a concern. The majority of employers self-assessed as having medium levels of personal awareness of disability issues; for those assessed as having high levels of personal awareness, the majority were based in large, public sector organisations. In regard to self-assessment of knowledge of legislation (such as the Employment Equality Act and the Equal Status Act), employers were relatively even in assessing themselves as having high, medium, and low levels of knowledge. The majority of respondents indicated disagreement with the statement that their organisation provided sufficient and useful disability awareness training.

## **Work Expectations**

While a full-time job was considered to be the optimum goal for some of the qualitative participants, working part-time was the preferred option for others. A preference for part-time work was considered one way to manage the stress and fatigue experienced in previous jobs. However, the data suggest a fear of losing social security benefits, which inhibits some participants from seeking work or moving from part-time to full-time. Interview participants indicated a perception that realignment of benefits, should full-time work not succeed, would not be an easy process.

That work, not only provides financial independence and psychosocial well-being, but is also a source of identity and social status, was reflected by the majority of the respondents. The research supported earlier research, where participants feared employers may misinterpret gaps in a CV due to illness or other issues negatively, reducing the possibility of being called for interview. Against that, some participants were aware that a disability could be perceived positively by employers who had a commitment to social inclusion. The employer survey supported this, with 53 percent (n= 23) of survey respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that there was a corporate image benefit in the recruitment, selection, and retention of people with a disability. While two respondents disagree with this none strongly -none strongly disagreed.

Only 41 (n=18) percent of survey respondents indicated that their organisation had formal policies for recruiting people with disabilities; 16 percent (n=7) did not know if there was a policy or not. In terms of informal policies, only 27 percent (n=12) agreed that their organisation did a good job of recruiting people with disabilities. The results were slightly more favourable in regard to the retention and career progression of people with disabilities, with 38 (n=17) percent agreeing that their organisation did a good job. There was no organisational effect apparent in this finding: disagreement with the statement was evident in multinational, large public, large private, and medium private organisations. However, there was a very high level of agreement with the statement that employees with disabilities were valued workforce members.

## **The Work Environment**

Several participants discussed the difficulties associated with what might be the best time to discuss their needs with a potential or actual employer; their perceptions were generally negative, even in the absence of evidence that disclosure would be damaging. Employers were asked to comment as to whether wage subsidies were necessary for the retention of employees with disabilities; this statement was overwhelmingly rejected, with only five respondents agreeing that they were necessary. They represented both large and small organisations.

The employer survey suggests that employers identified an intellectual disability as the most difficult disability to accommodate. Concerns were expressed here about the need to find 'suitable' work for a person with an intellectual disability, the fear of saying something wrong (that is, lack of awareness of issues related to intellectual disability), industry issues (that is, roles in logistics, professional services and manufacturing, or in organisations working globally, can require high levels of cognitive ability). Employers also noted the highly competitive environments of some industries as a potential problem in accommodating staff with an intellectual disability. However, employers clearly disagreed with the statement that employees with disabilities require accommodations whose financial costs would be too great for their organisation.

Employers noted that, while employees may wish not to disclose a disability, given their desire to be treated equally, a lack of disclosure could lead to a misinterpretation on the part of the employer around performance issues that might have been managed from the outset. At the same time, a lack of disclosure could undermine the commencement arrangements available for new staff which, in turn, could undermine self-esteem. Not having the right support in place at the point of transition into employment can create situations that are difficult to retrieve, both from the employer and employee perspectives.

The research highlighted that flexible working practices can help to ensure that people with a disability are able to perform at their full potential. The employer survey explored perceptions as to whether people with disabilities were absent from work too often; 63 percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

## **Employer Perspectives**

Employers were asked what one thing would support them in recruiting, selecting, and supporting people with disabilities as employees. The data indicate the importance of building awareness and capacity within their organisations. The potential for this was comprised of two dimensions: the lack of applications from people with disabilities and the low levels of awareness of capacity-building organisations such as EmployAbility.

There was a strong theme that the employment of people with disabilities should become 'normed'; the provision of accommodations being no different from accommodations provided to non-disabled co-workers. The limits of existing buildings and infrastructure were noted: these may involve a cost burden for some disabilities; at the same time, smaller accommodations can also be sought within existing structures. At the same time, there was a theme that any capacity-building must occur alongside a stronger economic context where employers can confidently recruit new staff.

## Recommendations

- The development and enactment of a national framework for facilitating transition from education to employment for people with disabilities
- Formal transition policies are required between education/training practitioners and employers to build robust transition links
- A bridge of tailored support and efficacy building targeted at prospective employees to facilitate applications for employment and transition into employment
- Access to career guidance professionals to guide and support people who experience the late onset of disability to retrain and re-enter the workplace
- The provision of current disability awareness programmes should be reviewed to ensure that they are meeting the needs of employers and people with disabilities to facilitate disclosure at the point of transition
- Development of guidelines for meaningful work experience placements that are matched to individual needs and which contribute to the development of both industry and job specific skills and generic employability skills
- The development of 'flexicurity' policies that can meet the needs of employers in a competitive environment, as well as providing sufficient protection for employees, including the particular needs of employees with disabilities
- The EmployAbility service needs to be extended and better marketed to facilitate capacity-building around the recruitment, selection and retention of employees with disabilities
- Current funding mechanisms, such as wage subsidies to support people with disabilities in the workplace, need to be reviewed. Consideration should be

given to a refocusing of the wage subsidy provision towards the expansion of a capacity-building services

## **I. Introduction**

### **I.1 The Context**

In parallel with rights based approaches, “... in many countries disability policy has advanced considerably during the past decade. However, changes in outcomes have not kept pace with changes in policy development” (OECD 2010, p. 3). The report also states that people with disabilities are chronically underrepresented in employment: “Employment rates of people with disability are 40% below the overall level on average, and unemployment rates are typically twice the overall level” (p. 10). In line with international developments, the Irish government published a ten-year comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities (Government of Ireland, 2015). The strategy sets out a 10-year approach which aims to ensure that people with disabilities, who are able to work and who want to work, are supported and enabled to do so. This will be facilitated through a series of cross-departmental measures which aims to increase the employment rate of people with disabilities by 15% from its 2011 level, with an increase in the employment rate from 33% to 38% by 2024. This modest increase compares with the labour force part rates of 61.9% of the total population (Central Statistics Office, 2012).

The principles of the strategy are embedded in the previously identified barriers to employment that people with disabilities experience, such as level of education and skills, low expectations, loss of benefits and more critically the evidence of what works in addressing these barriers. An overarching focus of the strategy, directly relevant to this current study, is to stem the flow in to joblessness of young people leaving school and those who acquire a disability later in life. Given that education and training has been identified as crucial to allow individuals enter the workforce, little evidence exists as to the specific transition outcomes from education and training to employment for people with disabilities within the Irish context.

### **I.2 Transition in the Context of Employment**

Transition is commonly defined in reference to some form of passage from youth to adulthood, with adulthood involving a number of indicators. Employment is one indicator commonly used to signify adult status. In the current context, the labour market for all young people has contracted significantly; young people, as a group, are marginalized in gaining sustainable employment with prospects for advancement. For young people with disabilities, these challenges are magnified, due to the nature of their disability and the influence it may have on their transition to employment.

Accordingly, the definition in this research is of 'transition to employment as process'. That is, transition is not positioned as a linear event along a predefined pathway, from one state (a primary engagement with education) to another (a primary engagement in employment). The focus will be on resilience in the context of the current labour market, illuminating the complexity of the process of transition to employment for the thirty six participants and portraying how they imagine, construct, and sustain the individual 'pathway' towards sustainable employment.

### **1.3 Defining Disability**

Within the Irish context, disability is defined by the Disability Act 2005 as

a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment (Oireachtas, 2005 p. 6).

However, this definition is viewed as being somewhat limited, in that it is intended to allow resources and support to be directed to those in most need. In other words this definition serves to define who is eligible for particular services such as transport and specific therapies amongst others. Therefore, the Act is intended to allow resources and supports to be invested into the area of most need. Conversely, however, the Act also creates new opportunities for those individuals who present with disabilities in accessing employment, by placing an obligation on public sector employers to employ people with disabilities. In addition, the Act it promotes employment of people with disabilities, for instance under the Act there is a 3% target of employees with disabilities in the Public Sector. (Disability Act, 2005).

In order for the researchers to capture the experiences of participants along the continuum of disability, the definition by WHO (2001) will be employed for the current study; that is, disability as defined under the International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health:

Disability is a decrement in functioning at the body, individual or societal level that arises when an individual with a health condition encounters barriers in the environment (WHO, 2001).

In line with international practice in facilitating the voice of people with disabilities on issues that are critical to their well-being, and operating within a client centered approach, the research seeks to explore the experiences of people with disabilities who are planning to make, and who have made, the transition from education/training to employment.

The primary aim of this research is to identify and explore the structural, contextual, and personal factors that may impact on people, along the continuum of disability during transition from education/training to employment.

## **1.4 Participation rates in employment for people with disabilities**

While acknowledging the 3% employment target for people with disabilities in the public sector as progressive (NDA, 2012), and, in line with the ongoing concerted efforts to develop policies for increasing these figures, the National Disability Survey 2006 (CSO, 2010) indicated that of the adults with a disability who were working, over half (52%) worked in the Private sector and about one-third (31%) in the Public sector. The percentages were similar when considering the younger age group separately (18-34 years), with 56% in the Public and 24% working in the Private sectors.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Qualitative Research**

The perspective adopted for this research is that transition to employment concerns both the readiness of the young person and the readiness of the employer. Consequently, this research employed a mixed methods and client centered approach within the framework of a cross-sectional study in one region in Ireland, namely, Leinster. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to provide a comprehensive overview of the critical components involved in the process of transition from education and training to employment for people with disabilities and employers.

The search strategy conducted for the literature review involved a systematic search of electronic databases (PubMed, PsycInfo, ERIC, CINAHL, Scopus, and Google Scholar) and was limited to articles published in the last 25 years (1990 - January 2015). Searches were limited to literature published in English. Reference lists were also screened of relevant articles to identify any additional literature. The databases were searched using the following keywords and MeSH terms: 1) transition AND (disabl\* OR learning disabilit\* OR physical disabilit\* OR mental health OR chronic illness\*) 2) transition AND (educ\* OR train\*) 3) transition AND (employ\* OR work\* OR vocation\*). In a third review, the keywords 'disability' and 'apprenticeship' were used, again not limited geographically. In addition, a search was completed of relevant publications from global policy actors, including the OECD.

#### **2.1.1 Qualitative Research: Interviews with people with disabilities**

##### **Participants**

Eligible participants were adults of working age (over 18 years), who have a disability, as defined by the World Health Organisation:



Disability is a decrement in functioning at the body, individual or societal level that arises when an individual with a health condition encounters barriers in the environment (WHO, 2001).

Potential participants were either undertaking education or training and were expected to make the transition to employment or had already made that transition. In total, 36 people consented to participate in the interview process. Participant's ages ranged from 21 to 59 years and had a variety of disabilities and previous work experience. Table 2.1. presents an overview of the age diagnoses and disability for each participant. A more detailed table is provided in the appendices (Appendix 8) which gives a comprehensive overview of their current status; age; diagnosis, and previous paid work experience.

### **2.1.2 Recruitment**

The sampling framework was divided into four approximated geographical areas, including urban and rural, in the Leinster region. Recruitment to the study was facilitated across a variety of settings in an attempt to ensure a broad range of abilities and experiences were represented.

Information about the study was initially distributed to key gate-keepers (e.g., programme co-ordinators, managers of centres, and heads of training centres, post – primary schools, and access offices in two universities). Within the ethical principles of conducting research with vulnerable populations, an 'ethics as process' approach (Ramcharan & Cutcliffe, 2001) was adopted and resulted in a staged approach for recruitment (Appendix 3). Access to participants who had already made the transition was made through employers and was generated through contacts with peak organisations such as Ibec and the Dublin Chamber of Commerce.

### **2.1.3 Data Collection**

A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 4) was developed specifically for this study and covered five inter-related themes: Exploration of Past Experiences, Current Preparation, Access (Way into Employment), Support, and Progression. The interview schedule was reviewed by the reference group.

The interview schedule was piloted with six participants, with a variety of disabilities, and the preliminary findings indicated that no changes need to be made to the schedule. However, as indicated earlier, the ethical approach adopted ensured that the schedule was adapted according to the abilities of the participants.

Interviews were conducted with 36 participants between February and May 2015. In 33 cases, two interviewers were present to facilitate precise recording and understanding, where required. Three interviews were conducted over the telephone to accommodate people who could not meet with the interviewer directly. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim; one

participant with a hearing impairment provided written responses to an adapted interview schedule.

The individual transcripts were returned to the participant for review and to enable them to confirm that the content could be used for analysis. One participant withdrew from the study at this stage. Every attempt has been made to preserve confidentiality for the participants and no real names (either people or employers) have been used in this report or any other associated publication.

#### 2.1.4 Ethical Considerations

Full ethical approval was received from The Dublin City University Ethics committee to conduct the research (Appendix 5). Every effort was made to ensure that both oral and written information was provided in a format that was fully accessible for each individual participant.

Participants were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary and were afforded the ongoing opportunity to negotiate consent, take breaks, have a support worker present during the interviews if required, and were advised that they could withdraw from the interview at any stage. In order to ensure confidentiality all of the names illustrated in the qualitative findings are pseudonyms.

**Table 2.1. Overview of age and diagnosis, of participants**

Type of disability	20-29 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	50 years and over
Physical	1	2	2	
Sensory	3	1		
Mental health		1	2	1
Intellectual disability	1	3	4	
Autism Spectrum Disorder	4			1
Acquired brain injury		2	1	
Learning difficulty	2		1	
more than one disability			2	

Note: one participant did not disclose their disability

## **2.2 Quantitative Research**

### **2.2.1 Quantitative Research: Employers Survey Participants**

44 employers completed the survey (45 are shown to have completed but one respondent skipped multiple questions and has been excluded from the analysis). The breakdown of respondents is shown in Appendix I.

### **2.2.2 Recruitment**

The online survey was piloted with four employers. This resulted in no changes being made to the survey. The live version of the employer survey was launched in April 2015 and an email link, and covering text, was provided to both Ibec and Chambers Ireland. As negotiated, Ibec circulated the survey to their membership list but were not in a position to put it on their website.

This approach was not as fruitful as had been anticipated; there were delays in the survey being activated and the response rate was weak. Given the delays and the low response from the Ibec approach, the decision was taken to extend the survey timeframe. Further strategies were employed to enhance engagement (Appendix 2). The survey closed on 31 August 2015.

### **2.2.3 Data Collection**

The online survey was designed to be completed within ten minutes, while being sufficiently wide-ranging to ensure the research had benefit (see Appendix 6). The survey was conducted using DCU's account for Survey Monkey; access by employers was by way of an email link. On activating the link, the first page of the survey introduced the topic, explained what engagement involved, and confirmed anonymity (unless the respondent wished to identify themselves). Contact details for the researcher were provided. Completion of the survey was taken as indicating informed consent to participate.

The online survey focused on five key themes:

- The attitudes of employers to the recruitment and selection of young employees with disabilities
- The knowledge of employers, as to the dimensions and impact of disability on individuals
- What experiences employers have had in working with young employees with disabilities and the impact of those experiences in terms of their attitudes and knowledge
- Barriers that employers perceive in the recruitment, selection, and retention of young employees with disabilities

- What support employers would find effective and what would make a difference in their attitude towards, and ability, to recruit, select, and retain these employees.

Each theme contained three questions, with the final theme being a fixed choice category, followed by an open text comment.

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1 Introduction

One of the challenges of the current context of transition to employment is that both education systems, and employment processes, are in flux. Vickers (2008) argues that the interface between education and employment has changed, in effect, taking the form of a new educational settlement. An educational settlement is an agreement, reached after a period of negotiation, about the taken-for-granted or dominant ways that things should be done in education (Vickers, 2008). The agreement is accepted as legitimate by most stakeholders: governments who fund education, students and teachers who are the subjects of educational policy, and by parents, and employers, who are the beneficiaries of the outputs of the education system. From this perspective, we are now in a third educational settlement where the boundaries between school and work are blurring and young people now combine these two life domains: gaining work experience while they study and continuing to study while they work. In this, transition to employment needs to be seen more as a shift from a dominant engagement in formal education to a dominant engagement in employment (Haase, Heckhausen & Silbereisen, 2012) rather than a one-off event.

This has a number of implications. On the one hand, it underscores the importance of meaningful workplace learning as part of any programme of study. Workplace learning opportunities not only build employability skills, they also connect employers to prospective employees, an 'essential' component of successful initiatives in Brazil (Rodrigues, Luecking, Glat & Daquer, 2013). On the other hand, it highlights the need to understand transition(s) to employment as process. As Brzinsky-Fay (2014) argues, while the established discourse of transition is one of a single status change between education and employment, this discourse overlooks important dimensions of a life-course trajectory, where transitions occur in a given context and can take place several times over a working career.

This chapter provides an overview of recent literature in regard to the transition of people with disabilities to employment. The literature reviewed was drawn from a search through the academic databases, electronic databases (PubMed, PsycInfo, ERIC, CINAHL, Scopus, and Google Scholar) and was limited to articles published in the

last 25 years (1990 - January 2015). The review was limited to research related to Ireland, published between 2005-2015, and using keywords such as 'disability' and 'employment' in the Abstract. Full-text articles in English, from peer reviewed publications were sought. In a second review, the keywords 'people with disabilities' and 'transition' were used, with the same limits, but not limiting the search geographically. In a third review, the keywords 'disability' and 'apprenticeship' were used, again not limited geographically. In addition, a search was completed of relevant publications from global policy actors, including the OECD.

The chapter is organized into a number of sub-sections: disability in the context of paid employment; educational attainment and individual aspiration; employer issues and attitudes; and, finally, policy responses.

### **3.2 Disability in the context of paid employment**

Despite the policy focus, both in Ireland and beyond, the overall rates of people with disability in paid employment have not improved; in the late 2000s, unemployment across the OECD was typically twice as high for people with a disability as for those without (OECD, 2010). In 2011, 6.2 percent of people in paid employment in Ireland had a disability. Of the total number of people aged 15 and over with a disability, 30 percent were at work, compared with 61.9 percent of the rest of the country and unemployment was highest (43.9 percent) amongst those with a difficulty in learning, remembering, or concentrating, and lowest (25.3 percent) amongst persons who were deaf or had a serious hearing impairment (CSO, 2012).

Research in the wake of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis demonstrated that people with a disability experienced a threefold increase in unemployment over the period 2004-2010 (Watson & Maitre 2013). This increase was in line with increases in unemployment of the general population. By the time this research was completed, the labour market context had begun to improve in Ireland, however, the Irish unemployment rate remains about the European average (Eurostat 2016, O'Dwyer, 2015).

In September 2016, the proportion of people out of work in Ireland was 8.3 percent close to the EU average of 8.6 percent. However, 21 percent of those aged under-25 were out of work, a statistic that highlights the severity of the challenge for those people with a disability who have yet to make any form of transition to employment. Schur et al. (2014, p. 594) argue that this is both a social and an economic concern, given that people with disabilities "comprise one of the largest underutilized labour pools and can help fill expected labour shortages", a point also argued by the World Health Organization (2011).

Not only are people with a disability less likely to be in employment, they are also more likely to be low paid, compared to those without a disability, even when they have the same qualification (MacInnes et al, 2014; World Health Organization, 2011).

In a pre-budget submission for 2014, the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) stated that disabled people in Ireland are twice as likely to live below the poverty line as the rest of the population; disabled people also experience more consistent levels of poverty at 11 percent, in comparison to 2 percent of all those at work. The high rates of poverty may reflect the extra costs associated with having a disability, as well as work-related factors. In Ireland, these additional costs, such as health care, assistance, aids, and devices, have been estimated to be a third of average weekly income (Cullinan, Gannon, & Lyons, 2011).

The benefits of having paid employment go beyond financial independence; employment enhances psychological well-being, and in Western developed economies, work is a central source of identity, roles, and social status. A lack of paid work can lead to social exclusion, poor health, and lower job satisfaction in later life (Waddell & Burton, 2006); this is particularly the case for young people who can lack any form of work experience. For the OECD (2013), a lack of engagement with employment at the point of first transition to employment can 'scar' the individual: increasing the chance of being unemployed in later life, and having a negative impact on earnings in later life.

Research from Germany suggests that workers with a disability value non-financial characteristics of their employment more than their non-disabled colleagues; these characteristics include a healthy environment, appropriate work, opportunity to learn, and good relationships with colleagues and supervisors (Pagan, 2014). However, in a scoping review of the literature on community-based employment for people with intellectual disabilities, Lysaght, Cobigo & Hamilton (2012) highlights that there is a lack of evidence on which aspects of employment are important (e.g. sense of belonging, reciprocity, and need fulfilment).

Research into the employment experiences of young people with chronic conditions highlights that employment challenges are associated with a combination of factors: the fluctuating nature of their condition, negative perceptions in society, and the fact that the onset of a condition often occurs before an employment history can be developed (Bevan et al, 2013). Respondents in this research noted how factors associated with their condition (poor results, disrupted study, and employment gaps) could all be misinterpreted as personal deficiencies (such as laziness) by prospective employers.

Given a generalized increase in flexible employment policies in the face of increasing competition in a globalized context, finding stable employment with career potential and long-term prospects is now unlikely for many young people (Vuolo, Staff & Mortimer, 2012) and even more so for young people with a disability (MacIntyre, 2014). In this competitive context, people with a disability can make strategic decisions not to disclose their condition to a prospective employer, a point which is revisited later in the chapter.

### **3.3 The significance of educational attainment and individual aspiration**

The discrepancy in employment rates between the disabled and non-disabled has been explained in part by the lower average levels of education amongst people with a disability when compared to the rest of the population (OECD, 2010). The education levels of people with a disability in Ireland are substantially lower than those of their non-disabled peers. CSO (2011) figures indicate that, within the age range of 15-49, 84 percent of individuals, with one or more disabilities continued their education after primary level, compared to 95 percent of the general population of Ireland. These differences in educational attainment, between those without and with a disability, continue at second (78 percent versus 85 percent) and third level education (61 percent versus 75 percent).

Even when people with disabilities gain qualifications they can struggle with getting employment (OECD, 2008; ANED, 2010). This indicates that the labour market context is as influential for people with a disability as it is for the population in general. Nevertheless, skills and qualifications can make a difference to outcomes, and data from the UK in 2012 revealed that 71 percent of disabled graduates had gained employment, compared to 42 percent of disabled non-graduates (Labour Force Survey Q 2 cited by O'Toole, 2014).

One explanation for the lower educational achievement of people with disabilities is that a disability that emerges early in life has an impact on the opportunity to maximise educational attainment (Watson et al, 2015) and completion of full-time education (Watson & Nolan, 2011). For example, young people with a disability in mainstream schools were found to be more likely than other students to report not liking school (McCoy, Smyth & Banks, 2012). Young disabled people are less likely to access higher education and more likely to face disruption to their studies (Ebersold, Schmitt & Priestly, 2011). Access and choice in higher education for individuals, with one or more disabilities, can be also compromised by factors such as a competitive education system, the availability of supports, and the nature of the disability (Scanlon, McGuckin & Shevlin, 2014).

Another factor in the transition to employment for people with disabilities concerns individual aspirations and expectations (see Banks et al 2016). A lack of self-confidence, low levels of numeracy and literacy, and difficulties understanding workplace rules can present particular problems for people with an intellectual disability in gaining meaningful employment (McGlinchey, McCallion, Burke, Carroll & McCarron, 2013). Research with young people in general has indicated that having high aspirations regarding their future is associated with better education and employment outcomes (Burchardt, 2005).

Research in the UK suggests that, at age 16, the aspirations between disabled and non-disabled young people are broadly similar. But, by age 26, disabled people are more likely to be out of work and more likely to feel hopeless and less confident of the strengths they could bring to the world of work (Burchardt, 2005). A lack of fulfilment in finding work, and assumptions made regarding the job-readiness or otherwise of an individual on the basis of their disability, can reinforce negative messages of low expectations and poor aspirations (Sayce, 2011; MacIntyre, 2014) which, in turn, can influence job seeking behaviours. Research from the United States suggests three key areas for those who are supporting people with disabilities in transition to employment. These areas are: first, that they ensure people are aware of their legislative rights; second, that they ensure people are aware of the positive and negative consequences of not disclosing a disability or not requesting accommodations; and, third, that they ensure that those in transition build self-determination skills (Madaus, Gerber & Price, 2008).

Research in the UK with young people with chronic conditions suggested that more than a third of the young people in their survey of 247 young people aged 18-25 were unlikely to disclose their situation to a future employer (Bevan et al, 2013). This research suggests that, even in the absence of personal experience of discrimination, these young people anticipated negative treatment by employers. This, in turn, was argued to influence the job seeking behaviours of the young people and their beliefs around the jobs available to people with disabilities. The research by Bevan et al (2013, p.22) suggest that 'self-stigma plays an important role in individuals' expecting negative experiences as job seekers'. They argue that 'deteriorating self-efficacy' will have a cumulative negative impact over time.

### **3.4 Employer issues and attitudes**

Research concerning employers' attitudes towards individuals with a disability shows mixed and inconsistent findings. For example, in the UK, research suggests employers favour employing non-disabled people (Needels & Schmitz, 2006). However, favourable attitudes to employing people with disabilities have been noted among employers with experience in working with people with disabilities; employers who are large organisations; female employers, and employers who have higher levels of education (Millbank Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation, 2003).

Australian research with small to medium size employers indicates that, even if employers are open to the idea of recruiting people with a disability, they can lack the confidence in their own knowledge, understanding, and capacity (Waterhouse, Kimberley, Jonas & Glover, 2010). The employers in this research did not want training but, rather, "assistance in building their capacity to support the productive employment of people with a disability" (Waterhouse et al, 2010, np).



Employers who are not aware of the issues surrounding disability may not be willing to consider employing someone with a disability if there is a suitable candidate who has no disclosed impairment (Piggott & Houghton, 2007). In addition, there is a tendency to consider people with a disability as a homogenous group rather than as individuals with specific skills, abilities, and talents, and who will require very different accommodations.

Given this lack of awareness, being labelled as someone with a disability can negatively influence prospective employer's perceptions about ability, safety issues, and work performance (Shier, Graham & Jones, 2009). In addition, where supervisors and co-workers have negative attitudes this can affect the socialisation of new employees and limit the ability for them to be fully accepted members of the workforce (Schur et al, 2005). In a review of forms of supported employment and employment outcomes, De Urris et al., (2005) highlight the criticality of a fit between a role and a worker, and the timing and type of support and accommodations that are provided. Yet research suggests that a lack of familiarity with agencies and programmes to support employers in working with people with disabilities (Millbank Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation, 2003).

Employers can find it more challenging to accommodate individuals with complex needs, including fluctuating mental and physical health conditions (Sayce, 2011). In Australia, a key concern for employers was a lack of disclosure, especially in relation to mental health issues (Waterhouse, Kimberley, Jonas & Gover, 2010). Older research suggests employers express greater concerns over employing people with mental or emotional disabilities than employing those with a physical disability (Unger, 2002; Millbank Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation, 2003); a perspective that is supported by statistics on the employment of people with various disabilities in Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Canada (Government of Ireland, 2015; Central Statistics Office, 2012; Hall & Wilton, 2011).

The poor employment outcomes associated with people with mental health issues may act to reinforce the stereotypes that they do not make good candidates for employment (Shankar & Collyer, 2003). There is little consensus about workplace accommodations and how they might impact on employment-related outcomes for people with mental health problems (McDowell & Fossey, 2015). A recent review of workplace accommodation, provided for employees with a mental illness, found that the most common adjustment involved the assistance of an employment support worker during hiring -or on the job- to facilitate communication or training of staff in how to support the employee with a mental health problem (McDowell & Fossey, 2015).

Schur et al (2014) undertook intensive and extensive research, involving surveys of over 5,000 employees, and interviews and focus groups with 128 managers and workers with disabilities in the United States. The research found people with

disabilities were more likely than their co-workers without disabilities to require accommodations, but the type and reported costs of accommodations were similar across disability and non-disability.

This research supported earlier evidence that most accommodations are inexpensive (Millbank Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation, 2003) and that, while definite figures are impossible to estimate, monetary benefits are likely to equal or exceed costs in over two thirds of cases (Schur et al, 2014, p.614). The limitations of this research (undertaken in eight large companies) limit the potential to generalize for other contexts. However, it does highlight the importance that any discussion of accommodations should be framed in the context of accommodations provided for all employees.

### **3.5 Policy responses**

There have been a number of policy approaches to support the integration of people with disabilities in employment (NDA, 2009a and b). The OECD have broadly classified these as “Anglo-American”, with strict medical assessments for benefits, supported employment, and back to work incentives, and the “Scandinavian” model, with generous benefit levels and a strong rehabilitation programme. Interestingly, the relationship between policy and employment level is weak, and the OECD conclude that the strongest predictor of employment levels of persons with a disability is the employment rates of the general population (OECD, 2003, cited by NDA, 2009b). With little evidence to suggest that reforming benefit policies improves employment rates amongst those with a disability (MacInnes, Tinson, Gaffney, Horgan & Baumberg, 2014).

The World Health Organization (2011) categorize a number of policy approaches. Of relevance to the current research, they note the following. First, legislation is often poorly enforced and not well known. Second, the assumption that quotas can correct labour market performance of people with disabilities has not been established empirically; quotas can be unpopular with employers and can be argued to diminish the perceived value of the worker with a disability. Third, advice and funding to support accommodations can minimise any additional cost of job seeking to both employer and employee. Fourth, social enterprises have an important role to play, perhaps more so than sheltered employment. Fifth, there is a changing role for employment agencies, involving a shift to a person-centered approach that is mindful of the interests and skills of the person with a disability.

Research demonstrates that the current policy focus in Ireland on revitalizing apprenticeship is one that could benefit people with disabilities. Forms of work based training, including apprenticeship, have been found to be effective in enhancing employability outcomes for vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities (Hutchinson et al, 2011; Luftig & Muthert 2005). In Brazil, in a manner similar to

other contexts, the imposition of quotas has failed to lift employment opportunities for people with disabilities, however, customized employment within an apprenticeship framework has proved effective for young people (Rodrigues, Luecking, Glat & Daquer, 2013). Research on the employment and economic outcomes for apprenticeship and traineeship graduates with a disability in Western Australia found the economic outcomes achieved by apprenticeship and traineeship graduates with disabilities were broadly comparable to a control group without disabilities (Cocks, Thoresen & Lee, 2013); longitudinal research, on post-course outcomes of 253 apprentices and trainees with disabilities, also in Western Australia, argues that well-informed approaches to apprenticeship, developed collaboratively between employers, trainers and disability support services, can equalise outcomes for people with disabilities (Lewis, Thoresen & Cocks, 2011a; 2011b).

For MacIntyre (2014), in a study of the experience of transition(s) to employment for young people with intellectual disabilities the key recommendation for policy is to move away from policies that do not value difference and the different types of contribution that people make. This highlights the right of people with a disability to make a contribution (Morris, 2005) and the responsibility of others to ensure any additional and personalized support required for engagement in various and diverse forms of employment including, but not limited to, competitive employment. Research on forms of participant experiences of supported employment in the UK highlights the importance of broad-based interventions that equip the individual, as well as focusing on the organisation of work (Lewis, Dobbs & Bidle, 2013).

Hall & Wilton (2011, p. 868) support this position, arguing that a key problem has been a policy focus on employability skills for people with a disability, rather than “the inaccessibility and the inappropriate social and spatial organisation of work (despite the enactment of legislative measures)”. In this, they argue for a range of activities that will forge more accommodating workplaces: stronger labour union links for people with disabilities; more social enterprises; and a valuing of other forms of work beside paid, full-time employment.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of both the qualitative data, that is, the one to one interviews with participants with a disability, and quantitative data derived from the employer survey.

The qualitative analysis was conducted using qualitative data software (MAXQDA). The transcribed interviews were imported into the software for review. Preliminary categories were created to enable the identification coding of the demographic details of the participants, (age, gender, diagnosis), education and employment

histories. The interviews were re-read, with the aims of the research in mind (e.g., looking for factors that enabled or hindered the process of transition).

A deductive approach was employed and initial codes, such as 'supports' and 'work readiness', were attached to text passages that seemed to be relevant to the research question. Selective coding continued this process as other categories that reflected the experiences of the participants emerged (e.g., 'disclosure'; 'fatigue'); this involved scanning all of the texts for passages that illustrated the category. Coding continued through an iterative process until saturation was reached.

The qualitative results indicate that the experiences of the participants were very mixed, although some common issues emerged. These experiences and issues are discussed in relation to education and training, work preparation, the work environment and employer perspectives

## **4.2 Qualitative Findings**

The findings indicate that the experiences of the participants were very mixed, although some common issues emerged. These experiences and issues are discussed using the following headings:

- (1) Meaning of work and expectations
- (2) Preparing for work
- (3) Education as a route to employment
- (4) Changing circumstances – second transitions
- (5) Assistance in getting a job
- (6) When to disclose?
- (7) What might help the transition?

### **4.2.1 Meaning of work and expectations**

The comments of the participants reflected the importance of work in providing more than financial independence, it also contributed to psychosocial well-being, a source of identity and social status. Work was, therefore, associated with a sense of recovery, normality and being able to contribute to society.

“I am willing to contribute to society as long as I get some sort of monetary value in return. It doesn't have to be a lot as long as I can pay my bills, because I want to contribute both financially and morally back to society because I do

not want to be a dead weight, I would rather be a positive than a negative” (Nigel, aged 55 with Asperger’s).

For some, it was more about having a routine and adding structure to the day,

“But I will apply for jobs in the future, I need a job and that is helpful for me and I feel when I get the job I feel like in good form... Busy and I have something to do and my time is not boring!” (Hassan, aged 44 with schizophrenia).

While a full-time job was considered to be the optimum goal for some of the participants, working part-time was the preferred option for others. There was a realisation that the desired flexible working pattern may not always be possible

“The employer predicts the hours but you can’t tell them what hours you can’t work and what hours you work” (Nathan, aged 45 with schizophrenia).

There are a number of possible explanations for this preference for more flexibility, including reduced hours. Firstly, this was considered one way to manage the stress experienced in previous jobs, a particular concern for those with mental health concerns. Secondly, fatigue was an issue for those with a chronic illness:

“but you see the thing is with me - I get very tired sometimes and especially after lunch. So I don’t know how I would perform in a job as such because I get so tired but then again maybe I would get used to it” (Barbara, 30’s with ABI).

A third possible explanation is that the fear of losing social security benefits may prevent some participants from seeking work or moving from part-time to full-time.

“No I have to do part time because I’m under the disability allowance, so if I do full time that’s gone, so it has to be part time” (Brienne aged 32 with ID).

While none of the participants described any personal experience associated with a loss of benefits, if a job did not work out, there was a perception that this would not be an easy process. Similarly, the changes to the exemption schemes in relation to working while on invalidity pension may inhibit a move to even part-time work for some:

“I’ve always done courses and CE schemes, even when I, after I was sick and everything. And the exemptions made it worthwhile, for a married man with a child, like, there’s no way I could go under the system that’s there now, and spend twenty or forty hours a week working, pay travel costs, lunches and

everything else, and live on what I get on the invalidity pension alone” (Ultan, aged 59, bi-polar).

#### 4.2.2 Preparing for Work

The emphasis on preparing students for work varied between settings. The experience of those students who have been to university suggests that, while they were supported in their learning, there was less emphasis on preparing them for the world of work.

“College doesn’t really set you up for the work, it kind of in theory, it’s all theoretical, but when you actually go out and try for yourself, it’s quite difficult” (Stephen, aged 25 with visual impairment).

Support for students with a disability was available in the universities but tended, in the case of our participants, to be related to academic issues or practical supports (e.g., use of assistive technology), rather than advice regarding future employment. Degrees that include an internship/work placement component can provide supported work preparation, although none of our participants had a formal work placement. Nevertheless, gaining work experience while studying was viewed as an important asset:

“I did a fair bit of preparation work because I knew that it would be more of a challenge – compared to ordinary people – to land jobs. In every summer in between the years of my degree I worked for companies for little pay and in the recession years no pay. I didn’t mind as the work experience, even though they weren’t part of my respective course requirements, enabled my knowledge to stick, i.e., I could understand how things work” (Finn, aged 30 with hearing impairment).

The participants in the training centre commented positively on the support and guidance they received from the staff. Additionally, the work placements that were arranged as part of the courses were generally valued as an important opportunity to get experience and find out what a particular job might entail. However, placements did not always provide much opportunity for learning or integration with other workers:

“Like I could work with [another student] or I could do my own rooms. We do say ‘hi’ when we see each other and stuff [other staff]. But it’s just literally

like... We do kind of talk but it's nothing in common" (Euan, aged 28 with Asperger's).

"I'm in ..... shop since last April and I wasn't trained on that till yet. She has threatened to train me but, but I think I'm just getting fed up of that shop" (Nathan, aged 45 with schizophrenia).

In some cases, the work placement did not directly match the course the student was taking:

"There is one placement as part of my course, but I'm not going to get work placement in the field...a lot of people have ended up doing work placement for the sake of work placement some of them even do it here in the college because they can't get it anywhere else" (Ultan, aged 59, bi-polar).

In addition work placements were challenging for some participants:

"I was doing work experience and I felt it was very stressful and I am only back here on a four day week [training centre] and I am not doing work experience until I get my health back in order". (Mandy, aged 44 with a dual diagnosis).

One participant had a 6-month internship with a very well-known multi-national after her degree, and, while she feels this had helped her get called for interview, it has not led to full-time employment.

"I find I still get interviews, but then nothing comes of it. So I don't know are they just interviewing me for the sake of it, for the statistics or the like" (Saoirse, aged 29 with visual impairment).

However, when placements do work well, participants were able to gain valuable links with the industry they hoped to work in:

"It is going well. Yeah and I am hoping well either to get an apprenticeship or something because I love the people I am working with, they are so nice and friendly" (Polly aged 21 with a learning difficulty).

Several participants described their voluntary work, for example, with the local church. For some, this seemed to be more about establishing a routine and 'having something to do', rather than a way to gain skills and experience to help with getting paid work. For others, the voluntary work had additional benefits:

"it's great that I'm using some aspects of my Masters for that and how to do research, minutes and how to write proper reports and so-called academic

you know methodologies I'd have never learned or sort of long forgotten from the degree" (Eddie aged 47 with ABI).

It is notable that no one mentioned transition planning, per se, but one participant explicitly mentioned the importance of planning for the future:

"Have a plan, try and have a plan before you leave [school]. Because I didn't have a plan, I was kind of stuck and it wasn't until I got to [...] that I discovered what I really wanted to do" (Brianne aged 32 with ID).

### **4.2.3 Education as a route to employment**

The choice of course or subject to study is of critical importance to a sustainable career and there are clear differences between those who went straight home from school to University and mature students

The participants who went straight from school to university appear to have thought through their possible career choices and studied subjects that have/had the potential to lead to what they perceived as 'real' jobs, e.g., engineering., management, and business.

Whereas for the mature students, a period of unemployment and the need to re-think job prospects was seen as a positive opportunity for the three participants who are currently in university for the first. Nevertheless, participants who had either graduated or were studying towards a degree at the time of the interviews, recognised that a primary degree may not be enough to secure employment; in some cases, their chosen career required additional postgraduate qualifications. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis and changed labour market posed additional challenges:

"I realised that an arts degree especially with the banking crisis and recession, it wasn't going to guarantee you a job ...I realised unless I got a big break further study would have been required" (Michael, aged 27, dyspraxia).

Some of the participants who have gone back into education have found the 'right course' for them almost by chance, rather than through any deliberate planning on their behalf. For example, one participant, who was diagnosed with dyslexia and dyspraxia in his early 40's is now in his final year of a science degree, described how, when he became unemployed, he found a course that:

"seemed like something I'd like to have a bash at...a lab technicians course... I had no idea, but it just looked more interesting than learning how to weld or



drive a forklift truck which is all well, but it wasn't where I saw myself" (Oscar, aged 49).

At one training centre, students are able to try out courses to find out those that may suit their abilities and interests. However, some participants were taking multiple courses that did not necessarily match their job aspirations.

"I'm doing Business and Finance at present... The only reason I got into that course is because I'm good at maths... I don't really want to work in typing or computers" (Keith, aged 47 with dual diagnosis).

"I found this one, a [ ... ] course. It's kind of a tenuous link but it's the closest link to what I want to do" (Euan, aged 28 with Asperger's).

This could mean that some students are being prepared for a long period of training rather than a move into the workplace. For example, Euan, who has yet to get his first paid job, has been to 3 different training centres before starting his current course, and plans to continue training at a PLC.

Several participants described how their experiences of being out of work had led to a loss of confidence and self-esteem, and these psychosocial factors can have an impact on how well an individual is able to make transitions in the future. Moving from course to course was seen as a way to build confidence and improve mental well-being, as well as providing the necessary skills before transitioning into employment:

"the original plan was maybe to go on and do level 6 and go on to further education but I don't think I'm strong enough to do it at the moment" (Keith, aged 47 with dual diagnosis).

There was also a perception that skill-based courses may not be sufficiently targeted to meet the needs of prospective employers and bridge the gap between training and work making the possibility of a successful transition seem far off.

"the whole [...] system is based around getting people onto courses, not getting people off of courses and into employment. There's no follow up, there's no interaction with employers to find out what employers want" (Ultan, aged 59, bi-polar).

#### **4.2.4 Changing circumstance – Second transitions**

Thirteen participants had been in paid employment before returning to education/training and were therefore planning a second transition into the workforce. They described varying patterns of employment history; some had

worked consistently in well-paid skilled jobs, but a sudden onset of disability (i.e., brain injury), or the development of a chronic illness (e.g., multiple sclerosis), have interrupted their careers. Others have had a less stable employment record (primarily those who developed a mental illness in early on -mid adulthood) and have worked in a variety of manual or service occupations.

Return to education occurred for a combination of reasons. These included a change in health status necessitating a period out of work or a change in work type, and for some, redundancy. Re-training can be a necessary step to finding a job, by enabling an individual to adapt to a change in abilities and circumstances. The new situation has meant that, for some, expectations and aspirations have had to change, as they learnt to cope with their illness, re-think career possibilities, learn new work-based skills, and regain lost confidence.

For example, two participants with an acquired brain injury (ABI) had made a good recovery but recognised that they could not return to the type of job they had before their accidents, and would need to re-train.

“I am fit for a number of jobs but not absolutely everything and it’s not because I don’t want anything it’s just that I have to be mindful of what I am fit for” (Linda, in her 30’s with ABI).

Others commented that their earlier jobs had contributed to stress, with negative consequences for their mental-health, and returning to education/training gave them a chance to recover and re-evaluate their plans for work.

“I had a couple of breakdowns and that was it. And since then...I haven’t worked in a permanent job since because I’ve avoided putting myself under the sort of stress that I was putting myself under” (Ultan, aged 59, bi-polar).

Returning to education or training has associated financial implications and the Further Education and Training allowance, at the same rate as the disability benefit, enabled some participants to take up training courses; a couple of participants commented that the loss of the additional training bonus for new entrants could act as a disincentive for others in a similar situation in the future.

#### **4.2.5 Assistance in Getting a Job**

Though work preparation is vital it is also important to secure the all-important first job. The assistance provided at the training centre in terms of ‘getting a job’

appeared to be limited to CV preparation, mock interviews, and help with searching for vacancies:

“you see what happens is I’d say they keep an eye on the internet to see if there is any jobs and they say ‘listen get your CV out there’, ‘get it updated’...’get yourself ready” (Wendy, aged 21 with autism).

Participants described their frustration when sending out multiple CVs, only to get no response or even an acknowledgement of their applications.

“I applied a few weeks ago for [...] and [...] and not a word back on any of them and that was about three or four weeks ago and no phone call or nothing back” (Nathan, aged 45 with schizophrenia).

From the participants’ perspective, there seemed to be a lack of direct involvement with potential employers in the training centre. Indeed, the trainees did not describe any contact with employers beyond their work placements.

A few participants have been successful in finding short-term contract work and, while this has enabled them to build experience, they are concerned as to how future employers might perceive this movement between jobs:

“So I had about 10 short term positions but I haven’t had any full-time positions, which is killing me...I have got good organisations on my CV but again it looks like I am jumping ship all the time” (James, aged 38 with muscular dystrophy).

Family members or other personal contacts were mentioned only occasionally in the context of finding employment.

“I had family members that are there....and even through [they could have helped with] the hiring process, I said look I prefer that it’s my first job; I want to make sure I can go out and do it myself” (Stephen, aged 25 with visual impairment).

And one participant mentioned that he was able to get his first summer job because of the personal experience of a senior employee whose son had the same disability and:

“The job, looking back, led me on an upward plan of growth, knowledge and confidence” (Finn, aged 30 with hearing impairment).

#### **4.2.6 When to Disclose?**

Deciding if and/or when to disclose their disability to potential employers represented a major concern for most of the participants; would they be

discriminated against (whether intentionally or inadvertently) when applying for a job?

“they’re not even going to look at your CV when they see that you’ve got a medical problem or when they see you’ve been to [...], you know what I mean, or if you mention special education or special needs or anything” (Ultan, aged 59, bi-polar).

“Yeah I think it’s scared of the unknown. Or it’s like, if I go for an interview and another sighted person goes, why would they take the time and effort to learn about how I could do it when they could just take the sighted person?” (Saoirse, aged 29 with visual impairment).

Several participants discussed the difficulties associated with what might be the best time to discuss their needs with a potential or actual employer; their perceptions and experiences seem to be consistently negative:

“If I say it to them that might in some way inhibit my chances of getting a full-time job with them...” (Frieda, aged 23 auditory processing difficulty).

“I think at the interview I wouldn’t say I have muscular dystrophy, I think it is a bit too early. I think when you are in the door you mention it. So, I would be just too afraid you know because there are so many people unemployed at the moment” (James, aged 38 with muscular dystrophy).

“I was determined to obtain a job and... if I had disclosed my disability I didn’t think I would have received a position” (Michael, aged 27, dyspraxia).

I am constantly on my PC looking for work... I went to [...] and they recommended I should tell the agencies about my condition. So I did that and then they wouldn’t return my phone calls.” (James, aged 38 with muscular dystrophy).

Yet, based on his experiences, one participant advised:

“I suppose if I suggest disclosing the disability at the interview have two or three either symptoms or positives of your condition so that they can see that it’s not all doom and gloom and that they don’t tilt the head in sympathy with you” (Michael, aged 27, dyspraxia).

## **4.2.7 What might help the transition?**

### **4.2.7.1 Flexibility**

Participants acknowledged that it might take them longer, in some circumstances, to learn the routines and requirements of a new job. Participants have often developed

strategies that work for them, but may need a longer induction or training period to help them settle into the work:

“it may take me longer to take a skill that someone else may take for granted so for example whenever I’m learning something new whatever it is I write down literally step by step because that just works for me” (Michael, aged 27, dyspraxia).

“you have your steps in place and they are broken down... I have written down steps to have and just to revise things. And things that my supervisor has said ‘This is the way you do things’, so I wrote that down...if I do come across any issues like that I can always revise and I go back to the notes” (James, aged 38 with muscular dystrophy).

The need for flexible working arrangements was of critical importance for several participants to enable them to manage fatigue and symptoms of stress.

“I’m more than willing but I have worked in jobs since the accident where I have thought how am I going to get home...because your energy levels are maybe different to what they were, fatigue is one of the elements and because you drive yourself” (Linda, in her 30’s with ABI).

Reduced working hours can be helpful in preventing loss of productivity and the exacerbations of symptoms.

Only a few of the participants were in paid employment at the time of the interviews, but several have had experience of working with a disability with varied levels of success. For those whose disability was acquired relatively recently, it has been important to acknowledge that some jobs may not be suitable for them:

“I spoke to her again this week [recruiter] explaining you do understand we spoke last year and just to clarify that I am fit for a number of jobs but not absolutely everything and it’s not because I don’t want anything it’s just that I have to be mindful of what I am fit for” (Linda, in her 30’s with ABI).

The balance needed to maintain their health has led some participants to develop strategic ways of working; the need to take time off can be accommodated with some forward planning:

“work to support yourself but try not to get sick while supporting yourself... if something does happen, the project or the job or the task doesn’t drop...for example the team I’m working with at the moment, if they have to complete for me

[they] had access to all my documentation, so rather than start at the beginning continue on” (Nessa, in her 30’s with epilepsy).

The need for flexibility may explain why some participants are considering becoming self-employed, which can also help the person to feel in control:

“I’ve always wanted to set up my own business, that’s all I’ve wanted to since day dot and be in control because then if they want to discriminate they can’t because I’m in control” (Stephen, aged 25 with visual impairment).

#### **4.2.7.2 Reasonable accommodations**

The NCBI and the Dyslexia Association were specifically mentioned as organisations that have helped individuals adapt to their workplace. The type of accommodation required depends on the nature of the job, and relies on the willingness and understanding of the employer

“there were no adaptations required in my job although there was heightened Health and Safety awareness on my part and the employers ... as construction is an inherently dangerous industry, my deafness meant I had to be extra vigilant” (Finn, aged 30 with hearing impairment).

In his current, more office based job, the same participant has been approved for a grant (in the UK) for eight hours a week of electronic note taking operators for some meetings, and the employers will be installing induction loops.

Another participant described his reluctance to ask for the adapted equipment he needed; the equipment was only provided when he admitted to himself that he was struggling to keep up, and even then the equipment that was produced was far from ideal:

“I thought the less they have to do, the more they’re not going to see that I’m causing a problem... this is kind of a quick fix job but maybe something better will come and then they got a stand in so it got a little better but it was always like as if is that enough? Will that do?” (Stephen, aged 25 with visual impairment).

It seems that some participants are putting themselves at a disadvantage by not explaining their needs early in their employment:

“It was unfortunately the mistake I made was I didn’t declare my disability and it was six months or nine months down the line when you know things weren’t going too

smoothly... pressure disclosed the disability whereas I should have started it at the beginning” (Michael, aged 27, dyspraxia).

Clearly, having a good relationship with a responsive job coach can make all the difference:

“I have a job coach...who I basically can meet with...she comes into the shop to check on myself and the other people with disabilities in the employment but I have no hesitation in, you know, contacting her if I’m having difficulties” (Michael, aged 27, dyspraxia).

#### **4.2.7.3 Attitudes of employers and co-workers**

Participants commented on their negative experiences and how the attitudes of employers affected their transition to employment and the ability to work to their full potential.

One participant had enjoyed working in a small family business. When that business closed, she worked briefly in several large organisations but felt that:

“the other people hadn’t got time for me, they didn’t want anybody who were slow. I noticed that they’d give all the jobs to people who are not slow” (Marie, aged 42 with ID).

She now considered herself to be retired, as she does not want to risk being exposed to any perceived discrimination again.

Not having the right support in place from the beginning can create situations that are difficult to retrieve both from the employer and employee perspectives:

“I don’t mind competing but there’s a difference between competing and fighting against someone that wants you out because they don’t, they feel that they’ve made a mistake, they’ve dropped a baton and they don’t want to pick it up because they feel it’s too much for them” (Stephen, aged 25 with visual impairment).

Poor awareness about the impact of disability can hinder workplace adjustments. One participant described how a lack of knowledge about her condition affected the employer’s behaviours:

“I’ve worked in other places where I wasn’t allowed up or down stairs, people weren’t sure whether I should be sitting in front of a computer” (Nessa, in her 30’s with ABI).

In contrast, another employer asked her to speak about her condition at a staff meeting, and give then a demonstration about what to do in specific circumstances,

and who to contact. This openness reduced any concerns and her disability was no longer an issue.

Interestingly, one participant described his own previously negative attitude towards employing a person with a disability when he was working as a senior manager, but now that he finds himself in that situation:

“like I know when I was working... I would have been of that tough, austere mind-set myself that I’d have said listen I don’t want a disabled person as part of my team, I’ve enough challenges” (Eddie, aged 47 with ABI).

A few participants commented that employers seemed to have had little experience, or knowledge of the support schemes available to them if they hire a person with a disability or if a member of their staff acquires a disability:

“There’s lots of supports out there to help them but I don’t think the companies are fully aware of the potential of taking on some with disability and the supports out there what they can get the not 100% aware of I don’t know whether it’s that they’re not interested” (Stephen, aged 25 with visual impairment).

### 4.3 Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analysis was conducted in two phases. The initial analysis of all closed questions was conducted using Survey Monkey and garnered the raw survey responses. Each question was then filtered to focus on specific data sets and identify trends across organisational type. The second analysis was conducted manually, where individual responses were scanned to qualify responses based on respondent type. The final survey question, which was an open question, was analysed manually, with responses being coded and used to cross check the propositions developed in the first phase analysis.

#### 4.3.1 Survey respondents

44 employers completed the survey (45 are shown to have completed but one respondent skipped multiple questions and was excluded from the analysis; where fewer respondents responded to a question this is indicated in the commentary). The breakdown of respondents is as follows:

**Table 4.1: What is your role in the organisation?**

	%	Number
<b>Human Resource Professional</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>17</b>



<b>Executive Team</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Front Line Management</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>11</b>
		<b>44</b>

The table indicates that the majority of respondents held human resource positions in the organisation. The 'other' category included diversity officers (3), account managers (2), administrator/personal assistant (2) and one each of health promotion, financial controller, design team and corporate social responsibility officer (4 in total).

In terms of organisational type, all organisational types other than micro (one person only) organisations were represented by the respondents. 9 percent of respondents (n=4) were in small private organisations and 2 percent of respondents (n=1) were in small public organisations. In medium size organisations (between 10 and 50 employees), 11 percent of respondents (n=5) were in the private sector and 5 percent of respondents (n=2) were in the public sector. 52 percent of respondents (n=22) were based in large (over 50 employees) organisations with 12 respondents in organisations in the private sector and 11 respondents in organisations in the public sector. The remaining 9 respondents (20 percent) were based in multi-nationals.

The organisations were based in all counties of Ireland, with 35 (80 percent) reported as also having a base in Dublin. The counties with the most respondents were Dublin (n=35), Cork and Galway (n=11 each), Westmeath (n=9) and Kildare (n=8). The counties with the lower number of respondents (n=5) were Roscommon, Monaghan and Cavan.

The respondent industries included engineering, retail and hospitality, health, utilities with the majority based in education (23 percent), ICT (14 percent) and professional or financial services (21 percent). One person responded from each of the arts and entertainment, manufacturing and primary sectors; three respondents responded from the health, engineering and utilities sectors. As such, the survey attracted a broad range of sectorial representation.

Respondents were equally balanced in terms with 50 percent indicating no experience of directly supervising the work of a person with a disability and 50 percent of respondents did have direct experience of supervising the work of a person with a disability.

23 respondents could not answer the question of the types of disability of current employees; those that could respond (n=21) indicated that current employees represented all forms of disability listed (physical impairment, sight, hearing or speech

impairment, intellectual disability, mental health condition, a combination of disabilities). Most often, respondents (particularly in large organisations) suggested staff with disabilities all had a ‘combination of disabilities’. Given the limitations of the data, it is difficult to read too much into the findings; the data may suggest that people with disabilities are categorized as ‘disabled’ rather than their individual characteristics being identified. However, it is clear from the data that in all instances the disability most often cited as the most difficult to accommodate was intellectual disability. This data is presented later in the section.

### 4.3.2 Knowledge of issues related to the employment of people with disabilities

**Table 4.2: How would you describe your personal awareness of disability issues?**

	<b>High</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Low</b>
<b>%</b>	36	55	9
<b>Number</b>	14	24	4

In self reporting personal awareness of disability issues, the majority of respondents who identified as having a high level of awareness came from large, public sector organisations (18 percent) with 9 percent coming from multi-nationals, and 5 percent coming from large, private sector organisations. The majority of respondents who identified as having a medium level of awareness were based in large, private organisations (18 percent), while 9 percent were based in multi-national organisations and large public sector organisations. The four respondents with self-assessed low levels of personal awareness of disability issues were based in a multinational, a large, private sector organisation, a medium private sector organisation and a small private organisation. No large or medium public sector respondent indicated a low level of personal awareness.

**Table 4.3: Self-rated knowledge of legislation that deals with equality in the employment of people with a disability**

	High	Medium	Low
<b>Private</b>	5	9	7
<b>Public</b>	8	5	1
<b>Multinational</b>	3	2	4
<b>Number</b>	16	16	12
<b>%</b>	36	36	27

Table 3 presents data on self-assessed knowledge of the legislation (such as the Employment Equality Act and the Equal Status Act) that deals with equality in the employment of people. Analysis of the location of the respondents indicates that those who were highly aware were mainly working in large public organisations (n=7) with respondents in roles as human resource professionals and two being diversity officers. The next highest scores were reported in large private organisations, again with the presence of human resource professionals being evident (n=6). Multinationals reported mixed results: respondents were equally spread across low and high levels of knowledge of the legislation. However, where high levels were reported, they were reported by staff in roles as human resource professionals (one of whom indicated low levels of personal awareness of diversity issues).

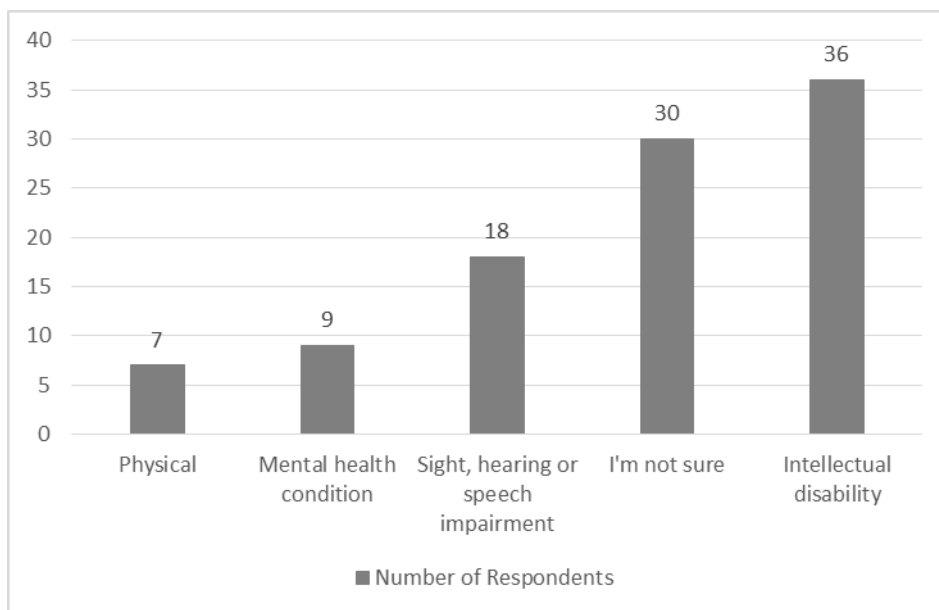
Only one public sector employee (a front line manager in a medium sized organisation) indicated a low level of knowledge of the legislation. The lowest levels of awareness of the legislation were reported by employees in large, private sector organisations and in multinationals (each indicated by four respondents). However, this may reflect that the respondents included members of the executive team, front line managers, corporate social responsibility officers and a personal assistant whose positional responsibilities may have coloured the results.

**Table 4.4: Provision of sufficient and useful disability awareness training for all employees**

	<b>Strongly Agree/ Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree/ Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>%</b>	32	18	50
<b>Number</b>	14	8	22

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement, with regard to their business providing sufficient and useful disability awareness training for all employees. Employees who strongly agreed (n=5) were employed in a large private and a small public organisation; employees who agreed that their organisation provided sufficient and useful disability awareness training were employed in a multi-national organisation, in large public organisations, and in a large private organisation.

**Figure 4.1: Which disability is, or would be, most difficult to accommodate in your organisation?**



Respondents were asked to give a reason for their response to the question of which disability would be most difficult to accommodate in the workplace.

- In regard to physical impairment, respondents (three from education and one from healthcare) noted the built environment could be a limiting factor in providing for reasonable accommodations

- In regard to mental health conditions, respondents noted this demanded that employees self-disclose. In the absence of disclosure, work issues that arise may be assumed to be performance-related rather than health-related (education respondent). One respondent (multi-national ICT) noted that hiring managers can require support in overcoming any potential stigma in selecting employees with a disclosed mental illness
- For sight, hearing, or speech impairment, some industries (in this case, hospitality) were deemed to present health and safety risks. Other respondents indicated that their systems, client group, or floor layout would be a barrier (financial services, education and two respondents from retail). Respondents also indicated some lack of awareness of support for accommodations that are readily available for sight and hearing impairments (professional services and education).

For the majority of respondents, who indicated intellectual disability would be most difficult to accommodate, comments referenced

- The need to find 'suitable' work (engineering), fear of saying something wrong (that is, lack of awareness of issues related to intellectual disability was noted by three respondents in the utilities industry), industry issues (that is, roles in logistics, professional services and manufacturing or in organisations working globally that were deemed to require high levels of cognitive ability)

In the employer survey, we asked respondents to rate their agreement with the statement - 'Our organisation believes that employees with disabilities are good for our corporate image'. Table 3.3 presents the findings which clearly show that just over half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there was a corporate image benefit in the recruitment, selection, and retention of people with a disability. No respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, while two respondents disagreed (5%). These respondents were based, first, in a large, private organisation working as a governing body and, second, in a multinational working in the ICT sector.

#### **4.3.3 Employer policies**

We asked respondents to rate their agreement with the statement 'our organisation believes that employees with disabilities are good for our corporate image'. Table 5.1 presents the findings which indicate that just over half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there was a corporate image benefit in the recruitment, selection, and retention of people with a disability. No respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, while two respondents disagreed. These respondents were based, first, in a large, private organisation working as a governing body and, second, in a multinational working in the ICT sector

**Table 4.5 Employing people with disabilities is good for our corporate Image**

	<b>Strongly Agree / Agree</b>	<b>Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree/Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>%</b>	53	41	5
<b>Number</b>	23	18	2

Alongside this sense of ‘corporate image’, respondents were asked whether their organisation had formal policies for hiring people with disabilities, the results of which can be seen in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6 Formal policies for hiring people with disabilities**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don’t Know</b>
<b>%</b>	41	43	16
<b>Number</b>	18	19	7

When asked about unwritten policies – that is norms and precedents- respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement ‘our business does a good job of recruiting people with disabilities’ – see Table 4.7

**Table 4.7 Our business does a good job of recruiting people with a disability**

	<b>Strongly Agree / Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree/Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>%</b>	27	41	32
<b>Number</b>	12	18	14

The results were slightly more favourable for the question which probed agreement with the statement ‘our business does a good job of retaining and supporting the career progression of employees with disabilities’ – see Table 4.8. Analysis indicates that there was no grouping in this process, disagreement with the statement was

evident across all organisational types: multinational, large public, large private, and medium private organisations.

**Table 4.8 Our business does a good job of retaining and supporting the career progression of employees with disabilities**

	<b>Strongly Agree / Agree</b>	<b>Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree/Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>%</b>	38	41	20
<b>Number</b>	17	18	9

The final question in this section asked respondents to rate their agreement with the statement ‘our organisation believes that employees with disabilities are valuable members of our workforce’. There was a high level of agreement with the statement. Respondents who disagreed (n=3) with the statement were drawn from a range of sectors: a small private engineering company, a small private retailer, and a large public education provider.

**Table 4.9 Our organisation believes that employees with disabilities are valuable members of our workforce**

	<b>Strongly Agree/Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree/Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>%</b>	68	25	7
<b>Number</b>	30	11	3

#### 4.3.4 People with a disability as employees

The issue of whether employees with a disability were expected to be ‘absent from work too often’ was featured in the employer survey. The 43 completed responses are presented in Table 4.10. The single respondent who agreed that employees with disabilities are absent from work too often was based in a medium sized private organisation, working in the ICT industry; 27 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

**Table 4.10: Absence from work and dependable workers**

<b>Employees with disabilities are absent from work too often</b>		
<b>Strongly Agree/Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree/Strongly Disagree</b>
2 %	35 %	63 %
<b>Employees with disabilities are dependable workers</b>		
High dependability	Medium	Low dependability
77%	19%	5%

With 63 percent of respondents disagreeing that employees with disabilities are absent from work too often, it is unsurprising that the employer survey also indicated an appreciation of employees with disabilities as being dependable workers. Respondents strongly rated the dependability of employees with disability with 33 of 43 respondents (77 percent) either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement and only two respondents disagreeing. These respondents were based in the construction industry (large private ownership) and the education sector (large public ownership).

43 respondents answered the question that probed whether people with a disability often lacked necessary skills and knowledge. No respondents strongly agreed with this statement and the majority of respondents disagreed.

**Table 4.1 I: Employees with disabilities often lack specific and necessary job training**



	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>%</b>	0	21	37	28	14
<b>Number</b>	0	9	16	12	6

#### 4.3.5 Accessing support

Question 15 probed respondents’ professional links and familiarity with available supports. Results indicated limitations around awareness of this support: only 20 percent of respondents indicated a great deal of familiarity with existing programmes and agencies that would offer support in the recruitment, selection, retaining and progression of employees with a disability.

**Table 4.12: Links with programmes and agencies that offer support**

	<b>High familiarity</b>	<b>Some familiarity</b>	<b>No familiarity</b>
<b>%</b>	20	52	27
<b>Number</b>	9	23	12

Employer respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement ‘wage subsidies are necessary for us to retain employees with disabilities’. The findings, presented in Table 4.13 indicate a high level of disagreement with the statement.

**Table 4.13: Wage subsidies are necessary for us to retain employees with disabilities**

	<b>Strongly Agree/Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree/Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>%</b>	12	25	63
<b>Number</b>	5	11	27

43 respondents answered this question. The five respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that wage subsidies were necessary were from a range of industries

(hospitality, manufacturing, utilities, education, and retail) and were both large and small (two multinationals, two small private organisations, and one large public organisation).

Employer respondents were also asked to rate their agreement with the statement that ‘employees with disabilities require accommodations whose financial costs are too great for the organisation’. 42 respondents answered this question and the results are presented in Table 4.14. The respondents who agreed with this statement were based in small, medium, and large organisations, but also included one multinational working in the hospitality sector.

**Table 4.14: Financial implications of accommodations being too great for the organisation**

	<b>Strongly Agree/ Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree/ Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>%</b>	10	21	69
<b>Number</b>	4	9	29

69 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement that the accommodations required for employees with disabilities would be too great for their organisation to bear. The 10 percent of respondents who agreed with the statement were based in small, medium and large organisations but also included one multinational working in the hospitality sector.

#### **4.3.6 Open comments from employer respondents**

The final survey question asked respondents to state the single most important factor that would make a difference to their organisation in being able to recruit, select, and progress an employee with a disability.

The raw data indicates the importance of building awareness and cultural receptivity, as well as some implications for education and training providers regarding pre-employment skills development.

##### **4.3.6.1 Attitudes and level of knowledge**

- A number of respondents (ICT; Education) noted that the single most important factor in this regard was attitudes and levels of knowledge of staff with recruitment and/or line management responsibilities

- Respondents (Professional Services) indicated the need for greater awareness and information among staff with recruitment responsibilities that a workforce should be representative of a given community and customer base
- However, it was noted by one respondent (Healthcare) that the organisation simply does not get applications from people with a disability. This may reflect the form of recruitment mechanisms; at the same time, it may also reflect supply factors, in that people with disabilities do not put themselves forward for whatever reason.

#### **4.3.6.2 Education and training**

- Some form of education and training could support in “pushing” staff involved with recruitment to strongly focusing their recruitment processes towards people with a disability and ensuring recruitment occurred through appropriate channels (ICT)
- One respondent (Utilities) suggested such education and training could be online, and must be “easy to access” and focused on “unconscious bias”
- One respondent (Retail) underscored the work that is to be done to challenge norms that stand in the way of the recruitment and selection of employees with disabilities, by contributing that “We do not have employees with disabilities, we never have had, not deliberately either”.

#### **4.3.6.3 Reasonable Accommodation**

- One respondent (Professional Services) suggested that employers can best support the commencement and progression of employees with a disability by making sure that “everyone is treated equal”. For example, a respondent in an education setting noted that the lack of physical accommodations meant some roles were, quite simply, not accessible to employees on an equal basis, no matter what the legislative context or organisational policy might be
- However, a number of respondents noted that equity for people with disabilities in progression requires difference – a “flexible approach to work duties” (Healthcare) and “finding roles that would suit someone with a disability” (Professional Services) or “matching people to roles appropriate to skills”

Against this, two respondents noted that there are limits to such approaches.

- One (Manufacturing) indicated that the person must have “competence to do the job” as it stands; the other (Professional Services) suggested that the single biggest factor was that the person was “able to work without much guidance as resources can be stretched”

- One respondent (Professional Services) indicated they were, at this time, too small to employ any staff at all; another indicated that they would require “more head count” to make progress. This respondent, a human resource professional in a large, private organisation, highlighted the limitations of the current economic context: “whilst in theory we are very supportive, with braille on signage, disabled loos, policies in place and full support of management - we are really only playing lip service as we do not have the capacity to do all we say we would do if...”.

#### 4.3.6.4 Accommodations

Responses in regard to accommodations that employees with disabilities would require were noted by some respondents. As noted already,

- One respondent (Education) noted that existing buildings can place structural barriers in the way of employment and progression for people with disabilities
- Another (Education) indicated “our facility is second floor based, major improvements to structure needed for physical disabilities”
- A third (Education) indicated that they needed “appropriate space”.

Removing such physical barriers can have fiscal implications that, for public organisations, would need to be borne by the government in its pursuit of inclusive policies. For both private and public organisations, the lingering effects of the recession will create additional challenges to a determined effort to enhance the employment levels of people with disabilities. However, smaller accommodations can also be sought.

- One respondent (Hospitality) noted that the key consideration was that people “be safe in their working environment” and the “importance of an easy process and ability to defer extra costs”
- A further respondent (Community Services) noted that “resources and support are critical”
- Three other respondents adopted a different approach. The first (Retail) argued that “ability to do the job, being a team person and [the employee’s] ability to integrate into the workplace” was the most important factor; the second (Education) noted “for us the persons qualifications and ability to do the job should be enough and we don't need a particular factor to influence us other than these” while the third (Retail) suggested the key to the successful employment of people with

disabilities lay in a “focus on ability rather than disability”.

These comments resonate with the literature which will be discussed in the following section.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The findings illustrate that there is a considerable range of experiences, abilities and expectations amongst the participants, current or prospective employee and employers - reflecting the complexity of the transition process. For example, issues and concerns may well differ between young people and older working-aged people with a disability (Honey, Kariuki, Emerson & Llewellyn, 2014), and the interviewees were not only older than those usually considered in the transition literature, but many were making their second or third transition from education to the work place.

Furthermore, there was variability in this cohort in terms of the onset of disability, which ranged from birth to mid-adulthood, with potential differences in how people may have adapted to their disability. In addition, the findings are limited to some extent as only a few of the participants had made the actual transition into the workplace.

At the same time, the employer survey highlighted that there is no one sector, or organisational size or governance model, that excelled in the recruitment, selection, and support of employees with a disability. Nevertheless, there are a number of common factors for both the individual, and the employer, that may facilitate or limit the transition process and they are: transition planning, building work readiness, enhancing work experience.

### **5.2 Transition Planning**

Formal transition planning has been seen as a key response to enable people with some disabilities to make a successful move into further education and the workplace (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking & Mack, 2002). Importantly, the critical components that underpin and enable a seamless transition including, supports, co-ordination of services, and support for employers are emphasised in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (2015) ideally delivered through a cross-governmental approach.

However, there was little evidence of formal transition planning among the participants, who did not describe any specific structures or processes to suggest

that such plans were in place for them. For those still in training, the emphasis appeared to be on supports for learning and well-being, including in some settings individual education plans (IEPs). These IEPs, according to the participants, tended to focus on their current situation rather than any plans for supports that may be needed if they were successful in getting a job. Best practice would suggest that if IEP's are to be used for transition planning, the process should capture current and future transitional events (OECD, 2011; Redpath et al, 2013). Indeed, IEPs provide a mechanism at key transition points for recording strengths and challenges which are focussed not only on the "here and now" but also facilitates anticipated transitions which allows for a more fluid process (Desforges & Lindsay, 2010).

A possible explanation for the lack of formal transition planning could be that some participants expected to stay in training for a number of years, and plans had not been developed nor implemented at the time of our interviews. The notion that participants appear to be staying in training as opposed to moving to employment is worrying. The factors contributing to this situation will be explored further below.

When planning for transition, people with disabilities cannot be viewed as a homogeneous group but rather as individuals who all have their own strengths, weakness and experiences. International evidence suggests that such planning is most effective when, amongst other things, it is person-centred, includes active student involvement and real work experience, underpinned by interagency collaboration (Powers et al, 2005), and facilitated by staff skilled in finding and matching jobs to people (Beyer & Kaehne, 2010). While these kinds of initiatives rightly focus on the needs of the individual person looking to move into work, attention must also focus on supporting the employers who are at the 'end point' of the transition process. Involving the employer early in the process enables them to provide any necessary accommodations and to identify and address any potential the gaps in that support.

For people with complex needs occupational guidance counsellors, with specific skills and experience would help to provide a bridge of support between the training/education facility, the individual and the employer. Critically, in order to enable people with disabilities to engage with the transition process, there must be a framework in place which informs them on how to move forward.

For example, it was noted that while some participants were concentrating on the 'here and now' they were also considering their options for the future. However, they did not describe any specific supports available to them in relation to transition planning, beyond Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) but they had not, as yet, sought such information in this regard.

It was not within the remit of this research to explore how Further and Higher education institutions provide support for people with disabilities during their transition in moving to employment. While some research has been (conducted within the Irish context i.e. Landers & Sweeny, 2005, Redpath et al. 2013) it would

seem prudent that this aspect of transition from Higher Education Institutions warrants further exploration and research.

Furthermore, the findings from the current study suggest that it is important to identify those who are at risk of taking multiple courses without a clear prospect of work, and equally, those who are at risk of long-term unemployment, so that early interventions can be put in place. Put simply, effective transition planning can accommodate these concerns and provide a framework for sustainable employment.

### **5.3 Transition: Individual Differences**

As alluded to earlier, people with disabilities should not be viewed as a homogenous group, and should be facilitated according to their individual needs as opposed to their group status. Individual characteristics were noted in the qualitative research, where a small number of participants ( $n = 4$ ) described themselves as determined, stubborn, 'fiercely independent', with a desire for control in their lives. These participants were more likely to be younger, whose disability had been diagnosed early in childhood, in employment, or to have gained some temporary work since leaving training/education, a point which aligns with findings by the ESRI (Watson, Banks & Lyons, 2015).

Importantly, self-determination has been identified as an important characteristic of successful transition (Wehmeyer, Gragoudas & Shogren, 2006), and is defined as a set of "skills, knowledge and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behaviour" (Shogren, 2013, p.5). Other personal attributes such as self-confidence; self belief; self-advocacy and autonomy are also crucial factors for individuals to achieve a successful transition (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Lewis, Parsons & Robertson, 2007).

As such, there does appear to be a need to expand mentoring services and/or educational programmes, and promote greater involvement in transition planning to help others develop the necessary skills associated with self-determination and personal attributes. This is particularly important for people who have lost confidence in their own abilities as a result of the onset of a disability and associated life changes, and those with an ID, to enable individuals to exert more control, including a sense of work-readiness (Corrigan et al, 2009).

### **5.4 Transition: Re-entering the workplace**

Research on transition planning has mainly focused on young people with disabilities leaving school for the first time (e.g. McGuckin et al. 2013; Redpath et al. 2013; McConkey and Smyth, 2001). There is less evidence of what constitutes best practice for those who are making the transition back into work for the second or even third time. This is the case for fifteen of our participants, who have previously been in paid employment and returned to training/education because of changes in their health status.

This research challenges the traditional notion of the definition of transition that is generally understood as a one off event and supports the authors concept of 'transition to employment as a process' which was employed for this study, that is, transition is not positioned as a linear event along a predefined pathway, from one state (a primary engagement with education) to another (a primary engagement in employment).

This suggests that some consideration needs to be given to the notion of transition, not only as a process, but also what underpins that process (i.e. individual needs and employer needs) and how this influences the individual who is returning to the workplace or taking up a novel career.

For example, consider how the effect of an event, such as the sudden onset of an illness or disability, puts more demand on an individual who is seeking to re-enter the workplace after such an event. The influences of these events can create an environment of uncertainty and upset in what is perceived to be the normal pathway of transition (Baltes & Smith, 2004). In other words, it may have life changing implications for them and infringe on their social status and identity within society and result in them making multiple transitions.

Additionally, it has been established that prolonged periods out of work, and changes in health status, can result in the loss of self-esteem and confidence (Bevan et al. 2013). Several participants described how their experiences of being out of work had led to a loss of confidence and self-esteem. Taken together, these psychosocial factors can have an impact on how well an individual is able to make transitions in the future. This finding supports the suggestion in the literature of the potential of unemployment 'scarring', a potential that increases the likelihood of future unemployment as well as wage differentials (Scarpetta & Sonnett et al. 2012).

As noted earlier some of our participants were taking multiple courses rather than moving into employment, and it may well be that this was fulfilling this function for them at this particular stage in their life. Engaging in consecutive courses may help to rebuild that perceived loss in skills but more specifically improve well-being which no doubt would contribute to their resilience and sustaining their capacity for future work. An interdisciplinary system of support will be required to enable our participants and those in similar situations to re-enter the workforce in a seamless fashion. For example, it has been suggested that people with mental health issues who are already in the workforce need a number of workplace interventions, accommodations, and counselling to help them sustain employment (Shankar et al. 2014). Such considerations would also help those returning to work following the onset of a recurrent or new disability to settle quickly and effectively in their new role.



These considerations have been noted in the Community Employment (CE) Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2015) under strategic priority 4 which seeks to “promote job retention and re-entry to work “(pg. 19).

### **5.5 Building Work-Readiness for Transition**

All but one of the 28 participants who were not working at the time of the interviews expressed their desire to gain paid employment. Yet, eight of those still in training felt they would not be ready to enter the workforce by the end of their current course. This was related to a perception that they did not have the required job-related skills, but there was also, as mentioned in the previous section, an associated lack of self-confidence and possible loss of self-esteem and self-efficacy, particularly for those with a history of mental illness (Corrigan et al, 2009). Indeed, research has indicated that, for some people with disabilities, experiencing successive failures within mainstream education can lead to determinism – the sense that a material world designed for the abled self is one over which they cannot exert control; a belief which may affect their employment seeking activities (Scanlon, Shevlin and McGuckin, 2013) and ability to critically appraise their personal capability to participate in, engage and experience the world of work (Scanlon et al, 2013).

Further complexity arises where individuals for example, with chronic illness, experience a sense of self-stigma, that is applying the perceived stereotype of people with disabilities to themselves (Corrigan, Larson and Rusch, 2009), which ultimately impacts on help-seeking behaviours (Munir, Leka, and Griffiths, 2005). Taken together these factors can be seen to influence an individual’s “job seeking behaviours” especially around their beliefs about the type of jobs that are available to them and what they will be able to sustain (Bevan et al. 2013).

For example, six of these participants had worked before, and described how they had to leave their jobs because of a deterioration in their mental health. As highlighted earlier in the report, this could contribute to an increased anticipation of future discrimination in the workplace; indeed, research commissioned by Amnesty International revealed that over two-thirds of respondents had decided to stop working because of how they thought others might react to their mental health problems (MacGabhann et al, 2010). It is still the case that people with chronic mental health problems do not tend to continue in employment and stigma surrounding mental health difficulties remains a problem in the Irish context (National Economic and Social Forum, 2007).

Interestingly one of the respondents noted in the employers’ survey stated they did not select people with a disability because they never received applications from people with a disability. This situation could be affected by a number of related issues including disclosure which will be explored further in the report and the job seeking behaviours of people with specific disabilities. In this regard, there are indications from the qualitative research that individuals may benefit from one-to-one support as

noted earlier that has promoted decision-making and goal-setting abilities - important features of work-readiness.

### **5.6 Job Related Skills**

A key feature of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (2015) focuses on delivering increased employment which is dependent on three factors, the performance of the economy, requirements of employers i.e. skills and competencies and what people with disabilities have to offer the workplace. This research indicated that there was a perception that the skills learnt on some of the vocational courses did not always translate into skills needed by employers. In part, this can reflect the accelerating pace of change in industry settings which make it difficult for curricula to meet current and emerging needs of employers.

The policy focus on the development of skills necessary for the workplace goes some way to addressing this need, through equipping students with the ability to go on learning in the workplace and to cope with change. In labour markets of highly-globalized countries, such as Ireland, the likelihood of any individual being able to train just once for a 'job for life' is remote; all employees are likely to face redundancy, job realignments, or demands for flexibility.

People with disabilities in the mainstream labour market need to be as prepared for these changes in career as any other employee. However, earlier research by Smyth and McConkey (2003) has suggested that there does seem to be room for a better alignment between training courses for people with disabilities and the needs of employers. Greater collaboration between educational settings and industry is key to achieving this alignment, a point that is completely in line with current policy across education policy arenas (Comprehensive Employment Strategy, 2015).

The authors would contend that Enterprise Education has the potential to address some of these challenges by developing students' ability to act in innovative ways in a variety of contexts (Bridge et al., 2010). Enterprise Education aims to develop transferable attributes, skills and behaviours such as: opportunity recognition and exploitation (Rae, 2007); building and initiating (Kirby, 2004); tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty (Kirby, 2007); creativity and innovation (Seelig, 2012); risk-taking (Caird, 1991); initiative (Hegarty & Jones, 2008); and the confidence to propose ideas (Gibb, 2007). Evidence suggests that embedding enterprise education in existing education programmes can develop these skills in students (Tiernan, 2016; Lepistö & Ronkko, 2013). Incorporating these skills into current education and training programmes for people with disabilities should be explored further.

### **5.7 Enhancing Work Experience**

Several participants have had placements in the workplace, as part of their training, Community Employment (CE) scheme, Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) placement. These are undoubtedly valuable, with benefits both to the individuals and employer,

when the placement helps to consolidate learning or provide an insight into the specifics of a job. Indeed, the more valued placements for the participants were ones that closely matched their interests and career choices.

However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that a work placement, which did not align with course content, lacked any value. Work placements can build capacity in industry specific skills (for a particular job), industry generic skills (for a particular sector), and employability skills if they are managed effectively.

Two participants reported being insufficiently challenged during their placements during training, with limited opportunity to learn new skills. This situation is not unique to people with a disability: the limits of work experience undertaken by second level students has been highlighted in earlier research (Kamp & Black, 2013).

Additionally, the CE and WAM placements had not led to employment at the time of the interviews. Nevertheless, other participants have indicated that they hoped that places on (WAM) scheme would be increased, as they had been unsuccessful in their applications to the scheme.

Twenty-nine of our participants have, at some point, been in paid employment; twelve of those still in training/education or currently unemployed indicated that they would need to consider a different type of job in the future because of the change in their health status. It is unclear how their employment background will be viewed by employers as may have concerns about the relevance of their earlier work history (Snape, 1998). Similarly, an early onset of an illness/disability may prevent or delay the opportunity to build a relevant “work history” (Bevan et al, 2013 pg. 20).

Paid or unpaid work experience during education has been consistently identified as a predictor of future employment for young people with a disability (Landmark, Ju & Zhang, 2010). This notion is supported in the 2015 strategy, (Comprehensive Strategy Employment Strategy, 2016). Nevertheless, there is a need to ensure that employers and trainers work together to develop realistic, meaningful placements, and that these placements are matched to individual needs. Additionally, career guidance remains crucial for those whose disability has meant they have needed to change from the type of work they had prior to entering training/education or those who have been forced into new parts of the labour market by economic factors.

## **5.8 Enabling Transition**

### **5.8.1 Disclosure**

Legislation requires employers to provide reasonable workplace accommodations to enable prospective employees with disabilities to fulfil the requirements of a job (The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2011). Whilst this is clearly of critical importance in achieving a successful transition, the discussions with our participants suggest that there can be some delays in ensuring that specific needs are met in a timely fashion.

This may, in part, be related to the concerns of some participants related to full and early disclosure of their disability. Subsequently, if employers are not made aware of the accommodations required then they cannot be put in place (Inge and Targett, 2008 in NDA, 2009b). In other words, employers cannot be held responsible for provision if they are unaware of what that provision should be.

Disclosure is a complex issue and is affected by a number of factors including; the type of disability; the culture present in the working environment and the policies and procedures that facilitate the process (NDA, 2009a). Disclosure for many people with disabilities is accompanied by a genuine fear that their work status will change, promotional opportunities will be denied, they will be labelled, or experience other adverse consequences particularly from their colleagues (for full review see NDA, 2009a).

The disabilities of most of the participants in the qualitative research were not obvious, and many expressed their reluctance to disclose their disability to prospective employers. The provision of effective workplace accommodation relies on the person disclosing their needs, yet, until discrimination, real and perceived, is tackled and reduced, it seems likely that the reluctance to disclose will persist, and, therefore, individuals may not be able to maximise their work-ability, nor will employers be granted the opportunity to maximise their 'employer-ability'.

Research has indicated that having a job coach makes it more likely that an employee will disclose their disability, particularly a mental illness, and makes it easier to identify accommodations during the hiring process or early on in the job (Granger, 2000, cited by McDowell & Fossey, 2015). However, the needs of the employer in the process of disclosure and how they will be supported by management needs to be considered.

### **5.8.2 Accommodations**

While some of our participants require, specific equipment to be able to do their work effectively (e.g., text to speech software, induction loops), others require more general accommodations, such as modifications to training schedules and additional supervision, at least initially. Employers may be more familiar with meeting the needs for people with physical disability rather than other types of disabilities, and their knowledge of the range of possible workplace supports can be limited (McAlpine & Warner, 2002; Unger & Kregel, 2003).

This was in part reflected in our survey findings, which found that employers across all sectors indicated that people with a physical disability would be easier to accommodate, whereas those with an ID would be the most difficult. Respondents cited a number of reasons in this regard, but awareness of issues related to ID was noted and will be explored further in the report.

The need for flexible scheduling and/or reduced hours was found to be a significant accommodation sought by the interviewees. Several participants indicated that they would prefer part-time work, as this was viewed as a way to manage fatigue and stress-related conditions. This is consistent with other research indicating that reduced working hours have been identified as a key variable in terms of retaining individuals with depression and anxiety in the workplace (Plaisier et al. 2012).

Concerns related to losing social security benefits may also mean that part-time working is preferred by some individuals. It has been suggested that that working part-time can hinder on-the-job training opportunities and career progression, whilst also marginalizing income security (Schur, 2003). Nevertheless, despite these drawbacks part-time work may enable some people with disabilities to join the work force who otherwise would not be employed (Schur, 2003).

Furthermore, such a perspective could align with the needs of employers for a flexible labour force. For example, greater flexibility in work - e.g., reduced hours/part-time/work from home might benefit people with a disability and may also make workplaces more family friendly. This however should only be considered providing it occurs within the context of adequate industrial relations arrangements and reasonable opportunities to regain social protection as and when it is required. There is also a need for specific training and supports for those who wish to become self-employed.

While the evidence is limited, the vast majority of workplace accommodations for this population are not associated with direct costs (McDowell & Fossey, 2015), a point supported by the survey findings where 29 respondents (69%) of the sample disagreed that accommodations required for employees with disabilities would be too great for their organisation to sustain.

The provision of high job supports and reduced working hours have been identified as a key variable in terms of retaining individuals with depression and anxiety in the workplace (Plaisier et al. 2012). While it is laudable to note the increase of mental health awareness practices at a national level in the workplace, a broader programme aimed at facilitating people with specific needs warrants further exploration.

#### **5.8.4 Workplace Culture**

A key facilitator for people with disabilities to retain employment is embedded in a number of complex issues including the attitudes, knowledge and awareness of disability issues in the workplace (WHO, 2011). Notwithstanding the documented evidence that working is good for mental health and contributes to a number of attributes including, identity, purpose and personal growth (Harnois & Gabriel, 2000; Raphael, Bryant, & Rioux, 2010) experiencing a job of “poor psychological quality” is not (Bevan et al, 2013 pg. 36).

At a structural level, and in spite of actually obtaining employment, some of the participants commented on their negative experiences in the workplace, which ultimately affected their transition and their ability to sustain employment. In short, the attitudes of co-workers and employers contributed to feelings of, discrimination; lack of support; poor awareness of disability issues and impressions that employers possessed limited knowledge on the supports available to them in employing people with disabilities.

Given the themes that emerged from the literature review specifically relating to the attitudes knowledge and awareness of disability issues, this research sought to gain some insight from the employer's perspective in an effort to contextualise participant's experiences. Interestingly, the findings suggest that a lack of personal awareness of disability issues is not limited to any particular organisational type.

For example, respondents in multi-nationals exhibited high to low levels of awareness whereas large public sector organisations reported the highest levels of personal awareness, but only slightly more than multi-national respondents. While the sample is too small to indicate any correlation, the fact that no public-sector employer declared a low level of awareness may indicate some organisational effect related to the context of disability in the workplace. This may in part be due to the provision of disability awareness training in the public sector as opposed to other types of employers.

The profile of responses in relation to levels of awareness of the equality legislation was somewhat different. Employees in large organisations (both multi-nationals and large public organisations), who reported high levels of awareness, were all human resource professionals and/or diversity officers. Multi-nationals and large private organisations also made up the majority of respondents who indicated low levels of legislative awareness, including staff with executive or diversity responsibilities. These findings highlight the presence of fragmented knowledge amongst employers across a number of sectors on key areas of importance, to enable them to employ and support people with disabilities. There appears to be a need to develop customised organisational responses to build awareness of disability issues.

#### **5.8.5 Developing Disability Awareness**

The research indicates that employers in all categories are falling short in terms of sufficient and useful disability awareness training which supports the sentiments expressed by some of our participants. As might be expected, given policy initiatives and higher levels of public scrutiny, public sector organisations responded more favourably than either private sector or multi-nationals in this regard. However, just as many public-sector respondents disagreed with the statement as those who agreed with it. These findings resonate with a larger study conducted by FAS in 2007, which found that 35% of those employers surveyed (N=1000) felt that they did not know enough about disabilities.

The notion that prejudice and stigma impacts on how individuals interact with each other in society is well documented (Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes, 2013; Steele and Morawski, 2002). Indeed, researchers in this area have argued that unconscious sources play a key role in perceptions, beliefs, preferences and actions (Scanlon, 2007). These actions are informed by the attitudes and stereotypical views that one group holds about another, for example employer's attitudes to people with mental health problems (Cockburn et al. 2006).

Consequently, traditional Disability Awareness programmes which appear to be concerned primarily with creating awareness amongst staff may not be effectively targeting any negative attitudes of employers and their employees. Additionally, the NDA suggest that training needs to be supported by policies and procedures and will be of little use if it delivered "in a vacuum" (NDA, 2005 pg. 6).

The participants in this research felt that employers simply did not perceive the complexity of issues that may surround specific disabilities, in particular mental health issues. It could be argued that it would be difficult for employers to respond effectively to employee retention and progression support needs if there is no awareness of what those needs might be.

Taken together, at a broader organisational level, a disability awareness programme which focusses on changing attitudes is cited as being critical in order to change the culture in the work environment (NDA, 2009a).

### **5.8.6 Recruitment and Progression**

Notwithstanding that the Equality Legislation provides a framework for equal opportunities in the workplace the research with employers indicated that there is room for improvement in terms of how organisations prioritize the recruitment of people with disabilities and their progression through the organisation.

Less than half of respondents were able to estimate the number of employees presently in their organisation with a disability. None of the respondents strongly agreed that their organisation did a good job in relation to recruitment and career progression. One employer noted that the most important thing they could do to enhance the employment of people with a disability was to actually employ some people with a disability so that the organisation 'just got used to it' - the 'halo' effect. While a FAS study in (2007) concluded that larger companies were more likely to employ people with disabilities there was no indication from our survey (albeit a smaller sample) that this was the case.

In contrast to the research presented in the literature review, concerning the reservations of employers to recruit and select people with a disability, this research suggests a more positive perspective, given that only a third of employers indicated that they did not have the capacity to make workplace accommodations. It may be that this reflects the gradual recovery from a recessionary context at the time of this

research, in contrast to the 2009 literature presented. However, it should be noted that the experiences alluded to earlier by participants in the workplace may impact on retention in employment and progression in the workplace.

In seeking employment, it was noted that a prospective employer may view any gaps in a curriculum vitae, due to illness or other issues, negatively, which can reduce the possibility of being called for an interview. While the limitations of this research do not allow a causal link to be established between a respondent not being short-listed for an interview directly to their disability, this is how the participants tended to interpret their situation. Such attributions may, for some, undermine a sense of self-esteem; for others, it may evoke a sense of empowerment and determination (Corrigan et al, 2009).

A number of initiatives are available to employers when employing people with disabilities. This research indicated that the resources available, such as Employability schemes may not be used as effectively, as familiarity with the schemes was generally low. While wage subsidies are available, they were not highly valued, with some respondents suggesting that they were unnecessary. Again, this resonates with the FAS 2007 report which indicated that employers did not see hiring people with disabilities impacting on their costs.

Those respondents who did see the need for wage subsidies and who did see the cost of necessary accommodations as a barrier, included a multi-national, where, it might be assumed, resources are relatively high. Given such findings, the research highlights that there can be no assumptions about which types of employer, or industry offers the best potential in increasing the recruitment, selection and retention of people with disabilities.

### **5.8.7 Funding mechanisms**

The research indicated that enhancements could be made to funding mechanisms that are part of the transition-to-employment system. From the point of view of the interviewees, a social welfare payment offers some sense of security in the face of a context where work - even for those employees who do not have a disability - is precarious.

Even where employment has been secured, few employees in the context of Western developed labour markets and the 'flexible' workforce can be assured that that work will be available for as long as it is desired. For people with a disability, the ability to embrace an entrepreneurial spirit and move confidently from opportunity to opportunity can be more difficult; in the face of potential job losses, the knowledge that a disability benefit will be re-implemented efficiently can make the idea of pursuing employment less risky.

The employer research suggests it could be beneficial to focus on processes that lift employment across all sectors. As one respondent noted, in a recessionary context,



it is difficult to do anything for anyone; at the same time, the research suggests that even small employers do not necessarily see wage subsidies as an enabler or the cost of accommodations as a barrier. This is in keeping with the literature that suggests a focus on lifting employment buoyancy across the board. Simultaneously building employer awareness of available capacity-building resources, which should be well-funded and become a policy focus.

Payment processes for training courses can prioritise filling training places over the genuine, negotiated, needs of the prospective employee. In terms of wage subsidies, the research suggests that these were not vital to the recruitment and selection of employees with a disability. This investment may be more effectively focused on linking more employers to existing supports, such as EmployAbility, raising employer awareness and capacity. Together, this may promote a generalised enhancement in the post-compulsory education, training, and employment sectors in responding to the needs, and maximising the benefits, of employees with disabilities.

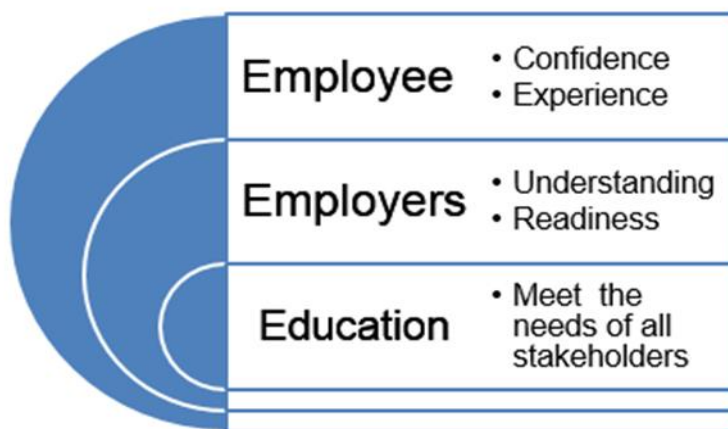
This, coupled with investments to build employment opportunities across the board, and increased targets to employment of people with disabilities, could result in a generative cycle of opportunity and achievement.

#### **5.8.8 Capacity Building**

A recurring finding throughout the research is the need for capacity-building for people with disabilities educators and employers. The research highlights the value of work placements, but also reinforces findings that suggest that the potential benefits of these placements for learning on the part of all stakeholders - potential employee, education coordinator, existing employees - is not structured for success. Consider for a moment Figure 5.1 below, which illustrates how a 'deep' integration based on collaborative planning would;

- Enhance the experience and confidence of the prospective employee
- Enhance the understanding and readiness of the employer
- Would enable the education coordinator to build capacity to meet the needs of all stakeholders.

**Figure 5.1: Capacity Building**



Kamp and Scanlon, Dublin City University. 2016

The expansion of the EmployAbility initiative to extend this coordinator service would be beneficial, particularly given the finding that only 20 percent of employer survey respondents indicated a great deal of familiarity with existing programmes and agencies that would offer support in the recruitment, selection, and progression of employees with a disability.

A further point for consideration is that of aspirations. While this research highlights that there is a need, and receptivity, for capacity-building within and across workplaces, the literature also highlights the importance of capacity-building for people with disabilities in regard to their work endeavours. These considerations are duly noted in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (Government of Ireland, 2015). Labour markets of the 21<sup>st</sup> century demand that education providers ensure that graduates can demonstrate industry-specific skills to meet current labour market opportunities; graduates must also be able to demonstrate transferable skills such as team work and communication that employers look to utilize in the face of changing market requirements.

However, the research indicated the importance of also ensuring graduates have aspirations and a sense of self-efficacy. Employers in this research indicated a willingness and readiness to support people with disabilities in joining their organization but had not received applications for advertised opportunities. While this could reflect a lack of disclosure, this research supports earlier research that suggests a role for self-stigma which becomes self-fulfilling – employers cannot select applicants who do not present for selection.

## 5.9 Conclusion

In the Irish context, notwithstanding the impact of a recent recession on labour market opportunities for all Irish people, paid employment remains as a primary mechanism for economic well-being and social inclusion. Engagement in employment is not only a marker of adulthood and citizenship; it also contributes to psychosocial well-being and social status. In this research, people with disabilities who are in processes of transition from education to employment and employers have offered a range of insights into the complexities of the transition process.

The research illustrates a broad range of experience, ability, and expectation amongst both employers and for the participants experiencing the process of transition from education and training to employment. For the participants, skills and qualifications were of consequence but so was their age, the age of onset of disability, and their prior experience of employment. For the employers, there was no one industry sector, size or governance model (private or public) that ensured an organisation would excel in the recruitment, selection, and support of employees with a disability.

In line with global trends, the once dominant, linear transition model from a primary engagement with education to a primary engagement in employment no longer exists. Recent economic events have further troubled this transition for all young people. Thus, the context for transition is far more competitive. At the same time, some employers have, over recent times, been constrained in recruiting any staff at all. In this, only the improvement of the economy will improve opportunities for all.

However, a number of current practices can readily be enhanced in preparation for an improvement in this context: transition planning processes by education providers; links between education providers and local employers; raised awareness of existing capacity-building support that is available to employers. The research highlighted that, for the majority of employers, capacity-building initiatives would be of greater value than wage subsidies in creating a context where all levels of staff had enhanced understanding of, and ability to respond to, organizational commitments to increase the recruitment, selection and progression of employees with disabilities.

For potential employees, the need for both industry-specific and transferable employability skills was highlighted. While disclosure is perceived to be a risk and people with disabilities wish to be treated equally in the recruitment and selection process, employer respondents indicated the importance of this for understanding and supporting people with disabilities that wish to join, or might already be, in their employ. Employers recognised that the cost of accommodations for people with disabilities were often no greater than the cost of accommodations for any staff member. In this regard, both employers and people with disabilities aspired to a situation when the presence and progression of people with disabilities was part of

‘business as usual.’ The research suggests the following recommendations in support of that agenda:

- R1 The development and enactment of a national framework for facilitating transition from education to employment for people with disabilities
- R2 Formal transition policies are required between education/training practitioners and employers to build robust transition links
- R3 A bridge of tailored support and efficacy building targeted at prospective employees to facilitate applications for employment and transition into employment
- R4 Access to career guidance professionals to guide and support people who experience the late onset of disability to retrain and re-enter the workplace
- R5 The provision of current disability awareness programmes should be reviewed to ensure that they are meeting the needs of employers and people with disabilities to facilitate disclosure at the point of transition
- R6 Development of guidelines for meaningful work experience placements that are matched to individual needs and which contribute to the development of both industry and job specific skills and generic employability skills
- R7 The development of ‘flexicurity’ policies that can meet the needs of employers in a competitive environment, as well as providing sufficient protection for employees, including the particular needs of employees with disabilities
- R8 The EmployAbility service needs to be extended and better marketed to facilitate capacity-building around the recruitment, selection and retention of employees with disabilities

- R9 Current funding mechanisms, such as wage subsidies to support people with disabilities in the workplace, need to be reviewed. Consideration should be given to a refocusing of the wage subsidy provision towards the expansion of a capacity-building services

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**Appendix I: Breakdown of the Participant Groups in the Employer Survey**

	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>
Human Resource Professional	39	17
Executive Team	18	8
Front Line Management	18	8
Other	25	11
Total	-	44

## **Appendix 2: Strategy employed to enhance engagement**

The project team initiated a strategy to enhance engagement. The survey link was added to all email signatures and LinkedIn pages. The team made individual contact with all organisations listed in the 2015 Best Workplaces in Ireland survey (16 large employers, 23 medium employers, 20 small employers); the survey was also circulated to organisations connected to DCU and to organisations connected to the research Reference Group. During August, reminders were circulated on LinkedIn and via Twitter.

## Appendix 3: Ethics as Process Approach

### Stage 1

Prior to the interview being conducted, the researchers (Drs Geraldine Scanlon & Andy Cochrane) met the participants at a time suitable to the participants to introduce them to the study and answer any questions they may have. It will also be established at this stage if the participants will enquire any further support to participate in the interview process (e.g. sign language). It was also recognised that key support workers and other professionals may be required to assist in this regard and these professionals may be interviewed to support and help articulate the views of the participants. This, however, will be agreed upon with the participant. The researchers then made an appointment to meet with the participant and also gave them a copy of the questions that will be asked in order to alleviate any potential anxiety and help them to prepare. The interviewer will also collect information on their age, disability, education, and qualifications.

### Stage 2

The researcher made contact with the participants who had contacted her the day before the agreed interview to make sure they were still comfortable to go ahead with the scheduled interview. Arrangements were also finalized for the next day. Given that the working definition of transition is being viewed as a 'process', it may be necessary to go back and interview participants again with their consent. This will be clarified at the end of the first interview.

### Duty of Care

All of the researchers involved maintained a duty of care towards all participants throughout the research. When gathering data from students or adults who may have difficulties with communication or understanding, the researchers employed the following framework

- ❖ Used language that recognised and supported the participant's autonomy
- ❖ Made clear the voluntary nature of participation and the right of the participant to opt out of the research
- ❖ Checked understanding by encouraging participants to summarise information in their own way and check interpretation of data
- ❖ Provided time to allow participants (if they wished) to discuss the project in more detail;



- ❖ Provide contact details for the research team so as to facilitate opportunities for the participant or their supporter to contact at a later date should they require further information;

## Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

Begin with Name; DOB, Disability. Current course/training type

### **Theme 1. Exploration of Experience**

- Previous Education History
- Employment History
- Getting ready for Employment
- Actually getting to Employment

### **Theme 2. Preparation**

- What factors/ people / support have been enabling
- What factors/ people / lack of structure support have been disabling
- What opportunities have you availed of
- How have these prepared you for getting a job
- What has been helpful
- What has not been helpful

### **Theme 3. Access - Way into Employment**

- Choice - how varied -
  - What is it they actually want to do
- Where do they see the entry point for them into employment - this might be in the form of supported employment or doing a few hours etc.
- Where do you think you will find a job (e.g. through family connections)?
- What would success look like

### **Theme 4. Support**

- Who has supported you to date
  - Within Education
  - Within Training
  - Within the family ( if appropriate)
  - Other social supports

### **Theme 5. Progression**

- What will come next
- How confident are they that they will make the transition
- What are their aspirations for getting a job
- What will it mean to them

**Appendix 5: Letter of Ethical Approval and all of the material relevant to ethics consent forms**

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University



Dr Geraldine Scanlon  
School of Education Studies

19<sup>th</sup> December 2014

**REC Reference:** DCUREC/2014/247  
**Proposal Title:** Transitions from education/ training to employment for people with disabilities  
**Applicant(s):** Dr Geraldine Scanlon, Dr Annelies Kamp

Dear Geraldine,

Further to expedited review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal. Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Donal O'Mathuna'.

Dr. Donal O'Mathuna  
Chairperson  
DCU Research Ethics Committee



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**Title of the research:**

**Transitions from Education and Training to Employment for People with Disabilities**

**Please read these carefully**

<p>I have had this research explained to me.</p> 	
<p>I have been able to ask questions and have them answered.</p> 	<p>I would be happy to talk to another person if I have any big concerns.</p> 
<p>I understand what is expected of me.</p> 	<p>I am happy to have the meeting tape recorded</p> 
<p>I can stop being involved at any stage of this project</p> 	<p>I agree to take part in this project.</p> 

**Transitions from Education and Training to Employment for People with Disabilities**

<p>Participant sign here:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Print name:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Date:.....</p>	<p>Witness:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Print name:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Date:.....</p>
--	--

Do I have to take part and do the interview



- No you do not have to take part if you don't want to.

What will happen to the things that we talk about



- All of the information we receive from you and the other people in the project will be put in a report.
- We will not use your name unless you would like us to.
- We will give the report to the National Disability Authority .
- They will use it to try and make things better for people with disabilities to get jobs.



Are you finishing up your course this year and looking for a job?

If so we would like to tell you all about a research project that we are doing at Dublin City University and why we would like you to take part.

**The Research Project is called  
The Experiences of People with Disabilities moving from  
Education or Training to Employment**

**The Research Project is funded by the National Disability Authority**



### What is this Project about?

- We would like to ask some questions about
- How you are getting ready to leave your course
- What kind of job you want to
- Who is helping you



### What will you have to do?

- Ger, Andy or Aoife will make an appointment to do an interview with you in your centre
- They will give you a list of questions that you can be thinking about before you do the interview
- They will ask you the questions and they will use a voice recorder to record what you say
- If would like to have somebody with you during the interview to help you answer questions you can ask one of your teachers or trainers to be with you
- If you get tired you can take as many breaks as you need
- If you want to stop answering questions you can stop whenever you want and not take part anymore
- The interview will probably take about one hour or less

### Why are we doing this?

We want to know

- How hard or how easy is it for you to get a job
- What will you miss
- What are you looking forward to.
- We want to understand how to help you get a job
- We want to try and change things



### Why Do We Want You?



- Because what you have to say is important to us
- We would like to include your opinion about your experience's
- We want employers to know how good you are



### How will the interview help me?

- The interview will give you the chance to tell your story about moving to your new job

## Appendix 6: Employer's Survey

### Transitions from education and training to employment for people with

This research is being conducted on behalf of the National Disability Authority and seeks information on Irish employers' knowledge, experience and attitudes to employing people with disabilities.

The research involves a short survey of 17 questions that should take around ten minutes to complete. Your answers are completely anonymous unless you opt to provide your contact details at the end of the survey. Your submission of the survey will be taken as consent to participate.

If you have any questions you'd like answered before you complete the survey, please contact Dr Annelies Kamp at Dublin City University on [annelies.kamp@dcu.ie](mailto:annelies.kamp@dcu.ie). Please feel free to advise your business connections of this important research - the survey will remain open until the end of May, 2015.

Thank you for your support.



## Transitions from education and training to employment for people with

### 1. What is your role in the organization?

- Human Resource Professional
- Executive Team
- Front Line Management
- Other (please specify)

### 2. How would you categorize your organization?

- Micro (just me)
- Small (less than ten employees), private
- Small (less than ten employees), public
- Medium (between ten and fifty employees), private
- Medium (between ten and fifty employees), public
- Large (more than fifty employees), private
- Large (more than fifty employees) public
- Multi-national

### 3. In which County is your organization based? Select all that apply.

- |                                  |                                   |                                    |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Carlow  | <input type="checkbox"/> Kilkenny | <input type="checkbox"/> Offaly    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cavan   | <input type="checkbox"/> Laois    | <input type="checkbox"/> Roscommon |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clare   | <input type="checkbox"/> Leitrim  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sligo     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cork    | <input type="checkbox"/> Limerick | <input type="checkbox"/> Tipperary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Donegal | <input type="checkbox"/> Longford | <input type="checkbox"/> Waterford |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dublin  | <input type="checkbox"/> Louth    | <input type="checkbox"/> Westmeath |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Galway  | <input type="checkbox"/> Mayo     | <input type="checkbox"/> Wexford   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kerry   | <input type="checkbox"/> Meath    | <input type="checkbox"/> Wicklow   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kildare | <input type="checkbox"/> Monaghan |                                    |

**Transitions from education and training to employment for people with**

**4. What is your organization's primary industry?**

Arts or entertainment  
 Education  
 ICT  
 Manufacturing  
 Retail  
 Hospitality  
 Other (please specify)

**5. Do you have direct experience of supervising the work of a person with a disability?**

Yes  
 No

**6. How many people with a disability are currently employed by your organization?**

**If you aren't sure, leave this question blank. If you do know, put the number of employees in the box.**

Physical impairment	<input type="text"/>
Sight, hearing or speech impairment	<input type="text"/>
Intellectual disability	<input type="text"/>
Mental health condition	<input type="text"/>
A combination of disabilities	<input type="text"/>

**7. How would you describe your personal awareness of disability issues?**

Awareness Level

How would you describe your awareness of disability issues?

**8. How would you rate your knowledge of legislation (such as the Employment Equality Act and the Equal Status Act) that deal with equality in the employment of people with a disability.**

Level of Knowledge

How would you rate your knowledge of the legislation?

**9. Please rate your agreement/disagreement with the following statement.**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Our business provides sufficient and useful disability awareness training for all employees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Transitions from education and training to employment for people with

**10. In your opinion, which of the following disabilities is, or would be, most difficult to accommodate in your organization?**

- Physical Impairment
- Sight, hearing or speech Impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Mental health condition
- I'm not sure

**11. In regard to the previous questions, can you say why this disability is most difficult to accommodate?**

### 12. ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

**Does your organization have a formal policy for hiring people with disabilities?**

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

**13. Thinking about unwritten policies, please rate your agreement/disagreement with the following statement.**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Our business does a good job of recruiting people with disabilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**14. Thinking about unwritten policies, please rate your agreement/disagreement with the following statement.**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Our business does a good job of retaining and supporting the career progression of employees with disabilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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**15. Thinking about your professional links with programmes and agencies related to employees with disabilities, how familiar are you with expertise and support available in your community such as EmployAbility?**

- A great deal of familiarity
- Some familiarity
- No familiarity at all

**16. Please rate your agreement/disagreement with the following statements.**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Our organization believes that employees with disabilities are valuable members of our workforce.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employees with disabilities are absent from work too often.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employees with disabilities often lack specific and necessary job training.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wage subsidies are necessary for us to retain employees with disabilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employees with disabilities are dependable employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employees with disabilities require accommodations whose financial costs are too great for our organization.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our organization believes that employees with disabilities are good for our corporate image.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**17. A final question: What is the single most important factor that would make a difference to your organization in being able to recruit, select and progress an employee with a disability?**

**Transitions from education and training to employment for people with**

**18. Thank you for your assistance with this survey.**

**This survey is anonymous. Should you wish to put your name forward for a short interview with one of the research team to further contribute to the research please provide your name, organization and email contact details in the text box below.**

**If you do not wish to contribute further, please submit the survey now.**

## Appendix 7: Methodology

### Sampling

Access to participants for the purpose of this study were requested through key education and training centres for people with disabilities. The criteria to participate in the study was

- (1) Participants must have some form of a disability and they also must be either making the transition from education or training to employment or
- (2) had already made that transition from education or training to employment.

30 participants were recruited to participate in the study; 20 of which were in the process of making the transition from education or training to employment, and 10 of which had already made the transition and were currently in employment.

There was no age restriction in terms of recruiting participants, however, as the sampling criteria suggests, participants were required to be engaged in education and/or training in the hope of making the transition to employment or had already made that transition and had been employed at the time of the study.

The definition of disability that was employed for this particular study was originally developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO):

Disability is a decrement in functioning at the body, individual or societal level that arises when an individual with a health condition encounters barriers in the environment (WHO, 2001).

It was this specific definition that was used as a determinant of who may was suitable to partake in this research study and who may not, with regard to each specific disability.

In order to generate substantial findings and to obtain a broad understanding of the experiences of individuals with disabilities transitioning from education and/or training to the workplace, participants with all types of disabilities were given an equal opportunity for involvement in the study.

### Recruitment

In keeping with the ethics as process approach, the recruitment of participants was developed under a staged approach. Information regarding the project was distributed to a number of key sites and included; education and training centre/organisation/association, and colleges of further and higher education. A number of centres and colleges contacted the researchers and arrangements were

made for the research team to visit and give an overview of the project to potential participants in each centre/college.

### **Stage 1**

Each member of the research team visited the key sites in order to introduce themselves and speak directly to potential participants about the project, what their participation would involve and answer any queries that they may have had. Any participants within each centre who was interested in involvement in the study provided the research team with their name and email address for further contact.

### **Stage 2**

A member of the research team made contact with each potential participant at a later date in order to confirm their interest in involvement, and arrange a time, date and venue to conduct the interview as part of the qualitative aspect of the study. It was also identified prior to the interview whether any participants would require any extra support services such as a sign language interpreter. Participants were also given a copy of the questions that were going to be asked in order to alleviate any potential anxiety and help them to prepare.

### **Stage 3**

The researcher made contact with the participants who had contacted her the day before the agreed interview to make sure they were still comfortable to go ahead with the scheduled interview. Arrangements were also finalised for the next day.

### **One to One Interviews**

The research team and the participants met up at the agreed time and venue in order to conduct the interviews. The venue of the interview for each participant was arranged in order to minimise travel distance and expenses for them and to ensure that it was a comfortable setting where each participant felt at ease.

Prior to the interviews, each participant was given a plain language statement and consent form. On arrival at the interview, participants were further briefed about what their involvement in the research study would entail. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions and, once their queries were answered, they signed a consent form. Participants were also made aware of various aspects of the interview for ethical reasons, such as the interview would be recorded and if they wanted to end the interview at any time that they would be able to do so without penalty. The interviews lasted for approximately 30-50 minutes and were guided by the Preliminary Interview Schedule. The interview was semi-structured, and participants were asked questions by a member of the research team.

Participants were also provided the opportunity to elaborate on various points at any stage of the interview if they wished. Each interview was audio recorded on a dictaphone and was later transcribed by the research team. The interviewer also

collected information on their age, disability, education, and qualifications (See Table I.1 in main report).

Participants were sent a copy of their corresponding transcript and were given the opportunity to alter, omit, or withdraw completely any information that they did not wish to be included in the overall final report. All participants were thanked for their participation and contribution to the research.

### **Duty of Care**

All of the researchers involved maintained a duty of care towards all participants throughout the research. That is they

- Used language that recognised and supported the participant's autonomy
- Made clear the voluntary nature of participation and the right of the participant to opt out of the research
- Checked understanding by encouraging participants to summarise information in their own way and check interpretation of data
- Provided time to allow participants (if they wished) to discuss the project in more detail
- Provided contact details for the research team so as to facilitate opportunities for the participant or their supporter to contact at a later date should they require further information.

### **Ethics as Process**

Within the ethical principles of conducting research with vulnerable populations, an 'ethics as process' approach was employed throughout the research project. This particular process was central to the methodology employed for the research. This approach allowed participants the ongoing opportunity to negotiate their consent to participate, to take breaks when and where was required, and also the opportunity to withdraw from the interview process at any stage they wished.



**Appendix 8: Overview of participant information.**

No	Name	Age	Diagnosis	Current Status	Previous paid work experience
1	Harry	33	Bipolar	In training	Yes, IT
2	Nigel	55	Asperger's	In training	Yes, management
3	Hassan	44	Schizophrenia	In training	Yes, catering
4	Mandy	44	Depression/epilepsy	In training	Yes, office work
5	Barbara	30's	Traumatic Brain Injury	In training	Yes, retail
6	Keith	47	Epilepsy	In training	Yes, hospitality; manual
7	Nathan	45	Schizophrenia	In training	Yes, manual
8	Ultan	59	Bi-polar	In training	Yes, management
9	Wendy	21	ADHD, autism	In training	No, unpaid work experience only
10	Euan	28	Asperger's	In training	No

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11	Stephen	25	Visual Impairment	Unemployed (1:1 support scheme)	Yes, admin, retail, IT
12	Niamh	25	Spina Bifida	In training (1:1 support scheme)	CE placement only
13	Brian	23	Autism	3 <sup>rd</sup> level (1:1 support scheme)	Yes part-time: IT; retail
14	Bobby	21	Autism	Unemployed (1:1 support scheme)	No, unpaid work experience only
15	Polly	21	Learning Difficulty	In training (1:1 support scheme)	No, unpaid work placement only
16	Nessa	30's	Epilepsy	Contract project work	Yes, admin; management
17	Eddie	47	Traumatic Brain Injury	Unemployed	Yes, senior management
18	Saoirse	29	Visual Impairment	Unemployed	Work placement only
19	Breda	48	Muscular dystrophy	Part-time education	Yes, call centre
20	Keith	36	Did not disclose	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level	Yes, mixed
21	Oscar	49	Dyspraxia	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level	Yes, self-employed
22	Betty	40's	Chronic pain	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level	Yes, nursing
23	Linda	30's	Traumatic Brain Injury	Unemployed	Yes, admin
24	Michael	27	Dyspraxia	Retail	Yes, retail
25	James	38	Muscular dystrophy	Work placement	Yes, admin
26	Finn	30	Hearing Impairment	Management trainee	Yes, engineer/management

**Transitions from Education and Training to Employment for People with Disabilities**

27	Frieda	23	Auditory Processing Disorder	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level	No
28	Kevin	30's	Intellectual Disability	P/T catering	Yes, catering
29	Katie	22	Intellectual Disability	Not working	No, unpaid work experience only
30	Orla	38	Intellectual Disability	P/T office work	Yes, office work
31	Marie	42	Intellectual Disability	Not working	Yes, catering, retail
32	Nora	40	Intellectual Disability	P/T retail	Yes, retail
33	Peter	40's	Intellectual Disability	Not working	Yes, service industry
34	Larry	40's	Intellectual Disability	P/T tourist industry	Yes, tourist industry
35	Brianne	32	Intellectual Disability	P/T childcare	Yes, childcare

Note: 'in cases where the participant had more than one diagnosed disability we have classified them according to their primary disability (as indicated by the participant themselves)