



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí Department of Social Protection

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‘Progression support initiatives for people with disabilities’

The Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton, TD, today, 13th February 2012, announced a number of initiatives to enhance the range of supports available for people with disabilities who are looking to take up employment or development opportunities.

The initiatives include the launch of the Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme and the launch of a new national identity - “EmployAbility Service” - for the former FÁS, now Department of Social Protection, range of employment services for people with disabilities.

On making the announcement, Minister Burton said: *“People with a disability face particular challenges being accepted for and taking up work opportunities. One of the benefits from the merger of FÁS with the Department of Social Protection is that we will now be able to integrate our activities to develop new and improve existing measures and initiatives and to help people build on their abilities to overcome the barriers to gaining and maintaining employment”.*

Partial Capacity Benefit

To help people build on their abilities, the Department will from 13th February 2012 provide a new Partial Capacity Benefit payment option for people with disabilities who are in receipt of an Invalidity Pension or who are in receipt of Illness Benefit for more than six months.

The Partial Capacity Benefit scheme will provide an opportunity for people with disabilities to have their capacity for work assessed and to receive an ongoing income support payment based on this assessment.

Any increase being paid in respect of a qualified adult or qualified children will not be affected.

They can then avail of employment opportunities, with no restriction on employment income, while continuing to receive their income support payment from the Department of Social Protection.

Participation in the scheme will be voluntary and the scheme will address a limitation of the current welfare system by explicitly recognising and responding to the reality that some people with disabilities will have a capacity to engage in employment while continuing to need some income support from the State.

The objective of the scheme is to assist and encourage people with disabilities to return to the workplace without fear of loss of their disability related social welfare payments.

Together with the range of *EmployAbility* services provided by the Department of Social Protection this new scheme will provide a new impetus to people with disabilities, and potential employers, to focus on their abilities and capacity to work rather than being pigeonholed as ‘incapacitated’.

Case Study – Partial Capacity Benefit

John, who is married with two children, had to leave his job as a painter and decorator having contracted MS. He qualified for Invalidity Pension and receives a weekly payment of €391.20 (comprising a personal rate of €193.50, a qualified adult increase of €138.10 and child dependent increases of €29.80 for his two children).

While John cannot work as a painter and decorator, he is able to do some light office work and has secured a job where he will work for five mornings a week, earning €200 per week. Under the



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Partial Capacity Scheme, John is assessed to have a moderate restriction on his work capacity and therefore continues to qualify for a weekly invalidity pension of €294.45 (comprising a reduced personal rate of €96.75, the qualified adult increase of €138.10 and child dependent increases of €29.80 for his two children). Gross household income therefore increases from €391.20 to €494.45.

EmployAbility

The consolidation of the programmes for people with disabilities as a national 'EmployAbility Service' gives the service a consistent identifiable nationwide identity.

The EmployAbility service which offers a range of supports, including workplace adaptation grants, wage subsidies and on-site job coaches and mentors, to people with disability and to employers, is key in supporting people with disabilities overcome the challenges not only of adapting to employment and being accepted in the workplace but in demonstrating their productive capability and ability to do the job.

The service also acts to reassure employers and give them the confidence to take what may be perceived to be the risk of employing a person with a disability. The new identity, by focussing on the positive benefits of "employing ability" rather than "supporting employment" will also help to address this misconception and will be instrumental in further promoting the programme among employers and people with disabilities.

Announcing the initiatives Minister Burton said: *"The Department of Social Protection is committed to supporting people to participate more fully in society and to become more self-sufficient by providing supports that address barriers that they may face. The initiatives outlined are examples of this commitment in action"*.

The Minister also confirmed the expansion of the European Social Fund /Department of Social Protection funded Disability Activation Project. A formal launch will take place later this month.

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Notes for Editors - Partial Capacity Benefit

Q1. When will the new scheme be introduced?

- Following on the introduction of the primary legislative provisions for the introduction of the scheme contained in the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2010, an extensive programme of work – involving drafting of regulations, developing appropriate medical assessments, and establishing administrative and information technology systems, has been completed. Applications from clients will be taken from 13 February 2012.

Q2. What will be the rate of payment?

- A person on an illness/invalidity payment currently receives an amount known as a personal rate (typically €188) plus additional amounts in respect of adult and child dependents. Under the Partial Capacity Benefit scheme the personal rate of payment will



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vary and will depend on the person's level of capacity for work. Payment rates in respect of qualified adults and/or children will not be affected in any way.

- Under existing illness/invalidity schemes people with disabilities are not, in general, allowed to earn any income from employment (except where this employment is short term in duration and is exempted as employment of a 'rehabilitative' nature). It is a condition of illness/invalidity schemes that payments are made on the basis that clients are considered completely incapacitated for work. With the Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme, claimants will be able to secure earnings from employment while continuing to receive an income support payment.
- Based on 2012 rates, a person assessed as having a severe restriction on his/ her capacity for work would receive €145.10 per week in the case of Invalidity Pension (reduction of €48.40) or €141 per week in the case of Illness Benefit (a reduction of €47).
- A person assessed as having a moderate restriction on his/ her capacity for work would receive €96.75 per week in the case of Invalidity Pension (a reduction of €96.75) or €94 per week in the case of Illness Benefit (a reduction of €94).
- Where a person is assessed as having a profound restriction on his/her capacity for work, there will be no reduction applied in the rate of payment.

Q3. How will the level of capacity be determined? And how will this work for illnesses that are hard to predict such as mental illness?

- Invalidity Pension and Illness Benefit customers who opt to apply for the Partial Capacity Benefit scheme in order to avail of employment opportunities will be required to undertake a partial capacity assessment by a Department medical assessor. On the basis of advice from the Chief Medical Advisor, they will be categorised as having either a profound, a severe or a moderate restriction on their work capacity and will be entitled to a personal rate payment on that basis.
- The assessment of employment capacity will be based on the best international practice in accordance with established evidence-based disability evaluation protocols. It will seek to take account of the particular difficulties faced by people with illness or disabilities which are episodic in nature.
- The Department's medical assessors have been familiarised with the approach to undertaking capacity assessments in order to ensure that a consistent approach is taken to this critical aspect of the scheme.

Q4. Will there be a right of appeal?

- Yes, decisions made on all aspects of entitlement, including the level of capacity, are subject to appeal to the independent Appeals Office.

Q5. Will applicants be stuck on the scheme even if they don't get employment? Will there be delays in reverting back to Illness Benefit or Invalidity Pension?

- Nobody will be stuck on the scheme. If a person has to revert to their full underlying illness/disability payment, this will be done without the requirement for further assessments and there will therefore be no delays involved.

Q6. Will exemptions still exist?



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- Yes, exemptions will continue to apply where a claimant of Illness Benefit or Invalidity Pension takes up training opportunities which aim to secure their re-integration into the workforce.

Q7. How often can a person avail of scheme? A person's capacity may diminish, then improve and then diminish again.

- It is recognised that some disabilities, notably in the area of mental health, may be episodic in nature. It is intended that the scheme will be sufficiently flexible to cope with such situations. More generally, the scheme is seen as a long-term option for those with a partial employment capacity. Subject to review and where the person's condition has not materially altered, it will be open to them to reapply and effectively continue on Partial Capacity Benefit.

Q. 8 How many people does the Minister envisage availing of the scheme?

- It is difficult to predict the level of take-up of the new scheme. Based on the numbers availing of exemptions under the existing arrangements to engage in open market employment, it could be expected that in the short term, some 2-3,000 people would choose to avail of the scheme.
- But the scheme will be a new scheme in its own right and will be highlighted as an option for people with disabilities who have a capacity to engage at some level in the open labour market and who are interested in doing so. In that light, it can be envisaged that the numbers availing of this scheme may well exceed the numbers currently availing of exemptions.

Q.9 What level of savings will be achieved on welfare expenditure as a result of the scheme being introduced?

- In the context of the overall spending of the Department, any savings arising from the introduction of the Partial Capacity Benefit scheme will be very small indeed. The level of any such savings will depend on both the level of demand for the scheme and the assessed employment capacity of those who apply to participate.
- More importantly, however, there will be important gains by way of better outcomes for people with disabilities. By enabling people to engage in work, with the continued underlying income support from the State, their own incomes will increase. In addition, it can be expected that their general health will also benefit from their participation in work and that the level of recourse to the health system will, accordingly, be reduced.

EmployAbility Service

The Department of Social Protection provides a range of services in support of people with disabilities and their employers.

These include:

- Wage Subsidy Scheme
- Employment Services
- Employer Supports
- Disability Awareness Training Support



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In addition the Department of Social Protection caters for people with disabilities in its Community Employment programme.

EmployAbility Service: Wage Subsidy Scheme valued at c €11m p.a.

Under the wage subsidy scheme employers receive a subsidy in respect of the salary cost of people with disabilities. The level of the subsidy varies on a sliding scale from up to €10,748 for a firm employing one person with a disability to €16,122 per employee with a disability in firms employing twenty three or more people with a disability. In addition employers can also qualify for a grant of €30,000 p.a. towards the cost of employing an Employment Assistance Officer. There are currently c 800 people availing of this service.

EmployAbility Service: Employment Services valued at c €9m p.a.

Employment services comprise range of supports provided via job coaches to help people with disabilities access and retain employment. The services provided include:

- Needs Assessment
- Job search and development
- On the job coaching and mentoring
- Aftercare/on-call support.

EmployAbility Service: Employer Supports valued at c €0.4m p.a.

Employer supports include a range of services, in addition to the Wage Subsidy Scheme, that assist employers in recruiting and retaining people with disabilities. These include:

- Disability Awareness Training: Grants of up to €20,000 towards the cost of training schemes to increase awareness of disability among employees generally.
- Employee Retention Grant: A grant of up to €15,000 towards the training and accommodation costs associated with retaining an existing employee who develops a disability.
- Workplace Adaptation Grant: A grant of up to €6,350 towards the cost of modifying equipment or accommodation on recruiting a new employee with a disability

Note: In addition to these *EmployAbility* services c 5,000 people with disabilities are also supported through the Department of Social Protection Community Employment Programme at a cost of c €75m p.a.

Expansion of Disability Activation Project

Is further information currently available?

The Application Form, Information, and Guidance Notes, on the Disability Activation Project will be available at www.welfare.ie and at www.pobal.ie from Tuesday 14th February.

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