



Education, training and employment for people with disabilities

Disability Information Factsheet 4

Education

All children in Ireland have a constitutional right to free primary education. Children with special educational needs have the right to free primary education up to age 18 and are entitled to free post-primary education in the same way as other children. People with disabilities are entitled to compete for and access third-level education places and education services on the same basis as others.

Pre-school education

Pre-school children do not have a specific right to education. However, they are entitled to certain health services which are related to education. Assessments of need are carried out under the assessment of need provisions of the Disability Act 2005 (see Factsheet 2: *Health services*). When the children go to primary school, the responsibility for psychological services is transferred to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). There are a small number of special pre-school class units, attached to primary schools, for children with autistic spectrum disorders.

National Educational Psychological Service

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is a service funded by the Department of Education and Science. NEPS psychologists work with primary and post-primary schools and they are concerned with learning, behaviour, and social and emotional development. Each psychologist is assigned to a group of schools. Schools which do not have access can commission private assessments under a scheme administered by NEPS.

You will find more details about commissioning individual psychological assessments on the Department of Education and Science website, www.education.ie

National Council for Special Education

The National Council for Special Education plays a key role in the development and delivery of services for people with special educational needs through its nationwide network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs). Each SENO is responsible for schools within their area. All applications for resources for children with disabilities who have special educational needs go through the school's SENO (at both primary and post-primary level). You will find a full list of SENOs on the website of the National Council for Special Education, www.ncse.ie

Home Tuition Programme

This programme provides funding to parents to provide education at home for children who are unable to attend school. The scheme is also available to children with special educational needs who are awaiting a suitable educational placement and to preschool children on the autistic spectrum who need early educational intervention. Application forms and further details are available from the Special Education Section of the Department of Education and Science.

Supports in schools

Children with special educational needs may get help from learning support and resource teachers and from special needs assistants. Schools may be able to get funding from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to buy equipment to help children with special needs.

Learning support teachers give extra teaching to children who may have difficulty with the curriculum. Resource teachers provide individual support to pupils with 'low incidence' disabilities. Special needs assistants provide non-teaching support such as help with going to the bathroom or help for children with behavioural difficulties.

Post-primary education

Children with disabilities may be educated in mainstream post-primary schools or in special classes in such schools or in special schools. The policy is to provide mainstream education where possible.

Resource teaching posts, special needs assistant posts and additional teaching hours are allocated to post-primary schools to cater for pupils with special needs. Each case is considered on its merits and additional allocations are made on the recommendation of NEPS. There is an independent appeals board for teacher allocations to post-primary schools. The Department of Education and Science has produced *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines* for school management and teachers in post-primary schools.

Examinations

Students with specific disabilities may be exempt from part of the examination in a particular subject at Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate level. In such cases, the certificates awarded may note that the student has not taken an element of the examination. There are also arrangements in place for reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities sitting examinations. Contact the State Examinations Commission: www.examinations.ie

Third-level education

Students with a disability may apply for admission to a third-level institution through the normal process – you apply to the Central Applications Office (CAO). Some institutions reserve a number of places for people with disabilities and you must apply directly to the individual institution for such a place. The direct admission system varies from one institution to another, and you need to find out what the closing date for such applications is and what the criteria for a place are. You may apply

through both systems (CAO and direct) for the same academic year. If you get an offer in each system, you may choose whichever suits you best.

Most third-level institutions have Disability Liaison Officers or Access Officers and some institutions reserve a number of student accommodation places for students with disabilities.

Grants and other supports

Students with disabilities are eligible for third-level grants on the same basis as other students. There are some grants specifically for people with disabilities.

The *studentfinance.ie* website gives details of financial support available for further and higher education.

A special fund to help third-level students with disabilities is administered by the Department of Education and Science. You should apply directly to the third-level institution at the beginning of the academic year (September/October). The National University of Ireland (NUI) also has a fund for students with a physical disability taking a primary degree course at an NUI college.

AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access and Disability) is a voluntary organisation working to promote improved access to third-level education for people with disabilities: www.ahead.ie

Education schemes

Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA), administered by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, is paid to adults on certain disability payments who decide to return to second-level or third-level education. They may also retain other benefits such as Fuel Allowance and Rent Supplement. You receive a standard rate of payment. If you are currently getting a reduced rate of payment, your allowance is brought up to the maximum rate of your current payment. In addition, you are also paid an annual Cost of Education Allowance of €500.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)

The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) allows people aged 21 or over who have been receiving certain social welfare payments for at least six months to take up a full-time vocational education course. You are paid the equivalent of the maximum rate of your unemployment payment. If you are getting Disability Allowance, Illness Benefit, Invalidity Pension or another social welfare payment, you continue to be paid by the Department of Social and Family Affairs at a rate equivalent to the maximum rate of your current social welfare payment and you keep extra benefits such as Fuel Allowance. However, your Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement may be affected by additional income.

Training and sheltered work

Rehabilitative training focuses on the development of an individual's core life skills, social skills and basic work skills and aims to enhance the trainee's quality of life and general work capacity. It is generally provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE) or by specialist agencies on its behalf. If you have a disability, you will be assessed by your Local Health Office to establish what level of rehabilitative training is appropriate for you. The HSE has teams of guidance counsellors who offer information, advice and guidance on HSE training and sheltered work services.

Vocational training aims to equip trainees with specific skills which help them to secure employment. Most vocational training is provided by FÁS (the National Training and Development Authority) or by specialist agencies under contract to FÁS.

Payment during training

If you are on a means-tested payment – Disability Allowance or Blind Pension – your social welfare payment is suspended and you are paid a FÁS Training Allowance at the same rate as your social welfare payment. In addition, you are also paid a training bonus of €31.80 per week.

If you are on a social insurance payment – Illness Benefit or Invalidity Pension – you get the standard FÁS Training Allowance (currently €204.30) and you also continue to be paid your social welfare payment (including any increases for dependants). You do not receive the training bonus.

People with a disability who do not receive a social welfare payment are paid the standard FÁS Training Allowance and the weekly training bonus of €31.80.

Sheltered work

Sheltered work for people with disabilities is provided (or arranged) by the HSE. Sheltered work gives people with disabilities the opportunity to take part in daily work in a sheltered setting where they receive personal support services. Trainees may produce goods with a commercial value. In general, this is not regarded as normal employment in the sense that the employees are not insurably employed and are not entitled to the full range of employee benefits.

Employment

People with disabilities are eligible for the full range of back-to-work supports including the Community Employment scheme and Community Services Programmes. People with disabilities may also carry out rehabilitative or therapeutic work with the permission of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and keep their social welfare payment.

Back to work options for people with disabilities

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme

The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance supports social welfare recipients who wish to become self-employed, including people on certain disability payments. The scheme provides financial support to people who wish to set up a business (the business plan must be approved in advance by a jobs facilitator), by allowing them to retain part of their weekly social welfare payment in addition to their earnings. Other financial supports are also available, including grants for training, market research and business plans. Extra benefits may also be retained, subject to certain conditions.

Revenue Job Assist

A special tax allowance is available for people who take up a job after having been unemployed for one year or more. People with a disability are eligible if they have been getting Disability Allowance, Blind Pension or Invalidity Pension for at least 12 months or more or Illness Benefit for three years.

Community Employment

The Community Employment (CE) programme is operated by FÁS. It is designed to help people who are long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people to get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities. Participants are paid weekly by their sponsor.

There are two different categories of Community Employment, each with its own set of eligibility requirements. These are the Part-time Integration Option and the Part-time Job Option. You can participate in either of these options but not in both at the same time.

The Part-time Integration Option is for people aged over 25. You can participate from age 18 if you are getting a disability-related payment. With most social welfare payments, people must have been on them for a year or more to qualify. However, people getting disability-related payments (Disability Allowance, Blind Pension and Invalidity Pension) do not have this condition. For Illness Benefit, you must have been getting it for at least six months to qualify.

The Part-time Job Option is for people who are 35 or over. You must have been getting a social welfare payment for three years or longer. This condition does not apply if you are getting a disability-related payment, except for Illness Benefit which is six months as above.

Community Services Programme

The Community Services Programme (which evolved from the Social Economy Programme) aims to support local community activity in Ireland to address disadvantage and provide local employment opportunities for certain groups of people, including people with disabilities.

Rehabilitative work and disability payments

If you are getting a disability payment such as Disability Allowance, Blind Pension, Invalidity Pension or Illness Benefit, you may be allowed to do work that is considered rehabilitative or therapeutic. This may include participation on a FÁS training course or Community Employment scheme. You must apply to the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) for approval.

For Disability Allowance, Blind Pension and Invalidity Pension there is no minimum period of time for which you must have been getting your payment before you can apply. For Illness Benefit, however, you usually must have been receiving payment for at least six months before you will be considered for approval.

Earnings from rehabilitative employment (including Community Employment) may affect your disability payment, and any extra benefits you may be getting. This depends on how much your earnings are and whether you are getting a social assistance (means-tested) or a social insurance (PRSI-based) disability payment.

Social assistance (means-tested) payments

If you are getting Disability Allowance or Blind Pension, you may be allowed to earn up to €120 per week from rehabilitative employment or self-employment without it affecting your social welfare payment. This is provided the work has been approved by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. However, you may lose your medical card.

If you earn between €120 and €350, 50% of your earnings over €120 are taken into account in the Disability Allowance or Blind Pension means test. You retain some extra benefits such as Free Travel and the Household Benefits Package. If your earnings are over €120, your Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement will be affected.

All earnings over €350 will be assessed as income and your entitlement to Disability Allowance or Blind Pension will be reduced in line with the appropriate reduced rates of payment.

Social insurance payments

Invalidity Pension and Illness Benefit are social insurance (PRSI-based) payments. If you are getting Invalidity Pension or Illness Benefit and take up rehabilitative work which has been approved by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, you can keep your payment in full but you may have to pay income tax on your total income.

For Illness Benefit, the rehabilitative work must not exceed 20 hours a week. The Department also operates a limit of 20 hours work a week for people getting Invalidity Pension. If you are getting an Invalidity Pension and intend

to work more than 20 hours a week you may be encouraged to apply for the Back to Work Allowance. If you take up this option and the employment does not continue for any reason, you can return directly to the Invalidity Pension.

Working with a disability

There are a range of employment supports in Ireland aimed at assisting employees with a disability to gain and keep employment (all provided by FÁS). From the employee's perspective, the onset of a disability or the progression of an existing disability does not mean the end of employment. Instead, with some changes to the nature of your employment, your work practices or amendments to your role, you may be able to continue in your existing job. For employers, the onset of a disability or the progression of an existing disability may affect the way in which the employee works and his or her work performance. Adaptations may be required to the workplace and also perhaps to the job specification.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

This scheme gives financial assistance to employers to encourage them to employ people with disabilities, with productivity levels below 80% of usual performance, for more than 20 hours per week.

Job Interview Interpreter Grant

FÁS will pay a standard fee (check their website www.fas.ie for the current rate) for a three-hour period for an interpreter to accompany a person with a speech or hearing impairment to a job interview. In addition, there is a set rate for the interpreter's travel costs.

Personal Reader Grant

This grant provides funding in line with the national minimum wage, for a maximum of 640 hours a year, to employ a personal reader to assist someone who is blind or visually impaired in their work.

Workplace/Equipment Adaptation Grant

This grant provides funding (€6,348.70 maximum) for a person with a disability who is starting or already in employment in order to make their workplace more accessible or equipment easier to use.

Supported Employment Programme

This programme helps people with disabilities to get and keep employment. It operates through a range of organisations and provides for job coaches who assist in the employment of people with disabilities.

Disability awareness training for employers

FÁS also provides grants to employers to assist with the cost of staff training. It is aimed at integrating people with disabilities in the workplace and addressing the concerns that employers and employees may have about working with people with disabilities.

Employee Retention Grant

The purpose of this grant is to assist employers to retain at work employees who become disabled through sickness or injury. Using this grant, such employees can be offered retraining so that they can undertake alternative duties or continue to work at their existing duties, using modified techniques.

Discrimination in employment

It is illegal in Ireland to discriminate against any employee on the basis of disability and this right is set down in legislation (Employment Equality Acts 1998-2004, and Equal Status Acts 2000-2004). In the Acts, discrimination is defined as the treatment of one person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated. An employer may not discriminate on grounds of disability but that does not mean that the employer must recruit or promote someone who is not willing to do or fully capable of doing the job in question. A person with a disability may be capable of doing a job if special services or facilities are provided. If this is so, the employer may not consider him/her incapable provided those special facilities or services can be supplied without imposing a disproportionate burden on the employer. Contact the Equality Authority for more information on 'disproportionate burden'. The Workway website, www.workway.ie, describes reasonable accommodation that can be made for different disabilities.

Useful addresses

AHEAD

East Hall, UCD
Carysfort Avenue
Blackrock, Co. Dublin
Tel: (01) 716 4396
Email: ahead@ahead.ie
www.ahead.ie

Department of Social and Family Affairs

Information Services
College Road, Co. Sligo
Lo-call: 1890 66 22 44 (for general
information)
www.welfare.ie

Disability Allowance Section

Social Welfare Services
Ballinallee Road, Longford
Tel: (043) 334 5211
Lo-call 1890 92 77 70

For enquiries re:
Disability Allowance
Invalidity Pension
Disablement Benefit
Carer's Allowance/Benefit

Home Tuition Unit

Special Education Section
Department of Education and
Science
Cornamaddy, Athlone
Co. Westmeath
Tel: (090) 648 3751

FÁS

Head Office
27-33 Upper Baggot Street
Dublin 4
Tel: (01) 607 0500
Email: info@fas.ie
www.fas.ie

National Council for Special Education

1-2 Mill Street, Trim, Co. Meath
Tel: (046) 948 6400
Email: info@ncse.ie
www.ncse.ie

National Educational Psychological Service

Frederick Court
24-27 North Frederick Street
Dublin 1
Tel: (01) 889 2700
Email: neps@neps.gov.ie

State Examinations Commission

Cornamaddy, Athlone
Co. Westmeath
Tel: (090) 644 2700
www.examinations.ie

Equality Authority

Birchgrove House
Roscrea, Co. Tipperary
Lo-call: 1890 245 545
Tel: (0505) 24126
www.equality.ie

The Citizens Information Board is the statutory body which supports the provision of information, advice and advocacy on the broad range of social and civil services to the public. It provides the Citizens Information website and supports the voluntary network of Citizens Information Services and the Citizens Information Phone Service.

Factsheets in this series

- 1 Disability payments**
- 2 Health services for people with disabilities**
- 3 Supports and entitlements for carers**
- 4 Education, training and employment for people with disabilities**
- 5 Housing for people with disabilities**
- 6 Transport and travel for people with disabilities**
- 7 Income tax for people with disabilities**

You can find more information on all the entitlements covered in this factsheet in the booklet *Entitlements for people with disabilities* (available from your local Citizens Information Centre) or on www.citizensinformation.ie

Citizens Information 

LOG ON

www.citizensinformation.ie

LO-CALL

1890 777 121

Mon to Fri, 9am-9pm

DROP IN

260 locations nationwide

2009