
Case Studies on Employment of People with Disabilities in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

Ireland

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**EUROPEAN FOUNDATION
for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions**

**CASE STUDIES ON EMPLOYMENT
OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN
SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES**

IRELAND

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is intended to contribute to an overall understanding of the factors influencing decision-making around recruitment of people with disabilities in the environment for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). The report is based on the results of case studies carried out in four Irish SMEs; it is one of several completed in different EU Member States.

Policy Context

While the main focus of the research has been at enterprise level, relevant policies and legislative frameworks also act as important influences in each context. Section 1 of the report introduces the research and presents the general policy and institutional context for the employment of people with disabilities.

The Irish system, it is found, is notable for its lack of emphasis on formal, effective and enforceable measures in this regard. In the absence of a formal legislative framework, it is apparent that there are a number of examples of good practice, but there is also widespread agreement that awareness amongst employers in general is not what it should be and that the issue is typically seen as one of economic cost rather than one of the social or productive benefits to the work process.

Conditions around receipt of a key means of financial support for people with disabilities, now titled the Disability Allowance (DA), are widely regarded as creating a ‘disincentive to work’.

Methodology

The difficulty in constructing a ‘representative sample’ of enterprises was acknowledged from the outset. Indeed, the reason for adopting a case study approach was mainly in the potential it offered for contributing to the understanding of the real dynamics at work. The selection had to allow for useful comparisons to be made between different kinds of enterprise, such as, companies of varying sizes, in different sectors, and employing people with different disabilities.

An initial list of twelve possible companies was drawn up, from contacts made with agencies representing people with disabilities as well as placement agencies. These sources were seen as the most likely to have a knowledge about companies that have a record of employing people with disabilities. A final four were selected to provide a range of experiences according to the criteria above.

While the majority of these companies had fewer than 70 employees, they were somewhat weighted in favour of engineering and electronics companies. The vast majority had employed people with a learning disability, as opposed to a physical disability or mental illness. Furthermore, some were not indigenous SMEs.

The process resulted in limitations arising through the confinement of the choice of company to those who had employed a person with a disability through an agency rather than the open market. Self-advocacy organisations, while aware of larger firms with the reputation of being equal opportunity employers, were unable however, to suggest an SME.

The companies selected are detailed in the table below.

Table 1: Companies selected

Trading activity (Firm number)	Location	Number and gender of employees	Number of employees with disability	Type of disability	Research contact organisation
Electrical switch gear manufacturer (Firm 1)	Co. Kildare, small town	50 total 46 male 4 female	1 male	learning disability, slight physical disability	NRB
Contract cleaning and grounds maintenance (Firm 2)	Sandyford, Co. Dublin	19 total 12 male 7 female	2 male	learning disability	STEP Enterprises
Manufacturer roof lights, plastics, glass curtain walls (Firm 3)	Clondalkin, Co. Dublin	60 total 49 male 11 female	1 male	mental illness	Worklink, Schizophrenia Ireland
Bakery and food manufacturer (Firm 4)	Cookstown Co. Dublin	70 total 60 male 10 female	2 total 1 male 1 female	1 learning disability, 1 epilepsy	Rehab

The following interviews were held within the four companies:

Table 2: Number of interviews held

Firm No.	Owner or MD	General Manager	Production Manager	Trade Union Official	Supervisor	Employee with a disability
1			1		1	1
2	1					2
3			1	1		1
4		1				2

The Case Studies

Sections 3 and 4 outline the four case studies in detail and present some of the key lessons emerging. Barriers to the employment of people with disabilities identified included:

- health and safety fears, and how these might relate to supervision needs (and costs) and the potential for litigation;
- staff relations concerns, about the ability of employees to hold their own in potentially difficult situations and integrate;
- lack of skills or confidence to progress, and the value to a small company of a person potentially unable to develop or cross-train;
- fear of the unknown: a person with a disability might be an unquantifiable extra liability to be avoided.

Barriers to employment from the point of view of employees with disabilities included lack of confidence and a negative attitude of employers towards people with a disability. Only one of the six employees interviewed reported having looked for work on their own behalf.

Notable characteristics of employees and their circumstances that appeared to have a bearing on successful recruitment and employment included:

- the age range of employees interviewed was relatively narrow: 22 to 38 years, with a mean average of 28;
- all four enterprises had overwhelmingly male workforces, and the work conditions within several were thought by their management to limit women's employment opportunities. Women with disabilities may therefore face additional problems;
- people with disabilities tend to have low levels of educational attainment. People with disabilities, regardless of educational ability, were commonly educated at 'Special Schools' without a second level curriculum;
- placement agencies and the support they provide can overcome lack of self esteem and problems arising through fear or experience of rejection. However, all studies considered only cases where people were placed by specialist agencies;
- most employees interviewed still retained benefits as they were within the terms of supported employment schemes. Despite lacking information about their entitlements, most employees would like to give up their benefits and receive full salaries. A 'benefit trap' would make this undesirable for many;
- there was some indication that the experiences of employees with more severe disabilities were not as positive as those reported by the six interviewees.
- Factors relating to the employer and workplace that have a bearing on success include:
 - a positive attitude: in three of the four cases arising from a personal experience of people with disabilities
 - small size, with the consequence of simple and quick recruitment procedures and the potential for a positive personal attitude to influence a decision. In addition, sick leave and other commitments to employees are generally fewer, enabling a greater degree of risk taking;

- medical examinations and questions about health or disability status can lead to opportunities to discriminate. In the case studies, this did not arise, despite the planned introduction by two enterprises of hearing tests;
- low levels of discrimination by supervisors or employees;
- the need for appropriate facilities.

Placement and support agencies had a clear role with very specific advantages for employers, in their matching of candidates with jobs, trial periods, employee support and coaching and employer subsidies. Each of these factors reduced the employers' risk.

Unionisation in the SME sector is relatively low, with no indications from this study that trades unions play an active role in promoting the employment of people with disabilities.

Implications for Future Action

- employers and agencies alike stressed the need for disability awareness education, for employers and work colleagues in particular, in order to change negative attitudes;
- the possibility of developing joint training and supported employment opportunities between FAS and the specialist training agencies should be investigated;
- Route Counselling: A broadening and deepening of a route counselling approach and, perhaps, amore integrated approach within mainstream services could increase success;
- a wide range of employers' subsidies and incentives are available from the National Rehabilitation Board, but employers lack awareness. Information should be more widely disseminated;
- Supported Employment Schemes are a beneficial form of training to remove barriers to employment. Funding should be made available to extend Supported Employment nationally;
- difficulties with the present Social Welfare System have been confirmed in this study: the need to eliminate the 'benefits trap' and introduce more flexibility have emerged as priorities;
- more part-time or flexible work opportunities;
- the Health and Welfare at Work Act should not be used to impede access to employment. The rectification of this information gap, could form part of awareness training programmes.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the results of case studies carried out in four Irish SMEs; it is one of several completed in different EU Member States. It is intended that research results from all participating countries will contribute to an overall understanding of the factors influencing decision-making around recruitment of people with disabilities in the SME environment. While the main focus of the research has been at enterprise level (in order to get an insight into the practical day-to-day influences upon employers especially) relevant policies and legislative frameworks also act as important influences in each context.

This section contains a brief overview of the relevant policy environment and legislative framework in the case of Ireland. The information has been gleaned from a review of relevant literature, and from interviews with experts in relevant fields (see Methodology Section for list of experts interviewed).

1.1 General Legislative Framework

The Irish system is notable for its lack of emphasis on formal, effective and enforceable measures in this regard.

Definition of Disability

The Department of Health currently defines disability according to the World Health Organisation International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (1980). This allows for a medical understanding of disability. The Department of Social Welfare also uses a medical model (according to their Chief Medical Advisor).

Employment Quotas

A quota of 3% for the employment of people with disabilities has been in existence since the mid-1970s. However:

- The quota is restricted to Public Service employment;
- Its implementation is on a voluntary basis, and is not legally enforceable;
- Quota targets have never been met by the broader public sector (although they have been met within civil service occupations).

People must be registered with the National Rehabilitation Board (NRB) to qualify under the 3% public service quota and special competitions are held for entry to the civil service to the grades or roles of clerical officers, clerical assistants, executive officers or blind telephonists.

Employment Placement Arrangements

There is no statutorily recognised employment placement agency for people with disabilities. The National Rehabilitation Board (NRB) has held the most significant role in this respect but it is not formally recognised or resourced as the statutorily recognised placement agency at a national level.

Benefits and Entitlements

The system of statutory benefits and entitlements has long been identified as a further barrier to entry into the workforce for people with disabilities. Voluntary organisations and organisations of people with disabilities have especially highlighted this. The principal benefit received by people outside the workforce – the Disabled Persons Maintenance Allowance or DPMA, now re-titled the Disability Allowance (DA) – is not an unemployment benefit.

There is no coherent policy of income support at national level. Income support payments are currently administered either by the Department of Social Welfare or by the Department of Health, through the Regional Health Boards. They are accompanied by an array of free schemes, grants and allowances aimed at augmenting income or addressing specific problems faced by people with disabilities, such as mobility difficulties. The division of responsibility between the two departments owes more to historical accident than to rational planning (A Strategy for Equality p.124).

In the context of this study, a lack of coherence and uniformity amongst income support mechanisms makes it even more difficult to develop effective linkages with mainstream labour market employment opportunities.

Payments are related either to income or to costs. They can be broadly categorised into the following groups:

- Disability Benefit and invalidity pension;
- Occupational injuries benefits;
- Blind Pensions;
- Department of Health payments, for example; rehabilitation allowance, blind welfare allowance, mobility allowance, motorised transport grant, infectious diseases maintenance allowance and the Disability Allowance (re-titled since its transfer to Department of Social Welfare in October 1996). The Disability Allowance is payable to persons aged between 16 and 66 years who satisfy both a means-test and a medical assessment.

Under the DA regulations, a person is entitled to earn up to £35.20 from training or employment which, in the opinion of the NRB, is in the nature of rehabilitative employment or training and retain his/her full DA. Persons taking up employment other than rehabilitative training and employment lose their entitlement to DA. A person whose employment ceases is entitled to go back on their DA subject to the Department of Social Welfare being satisfied that they remain eligible.

Despite this stated flexibility, many of the employees whom we interviewed and some employers reported a fear that if the employees gave up their DA in order to take up full employment, they may not be able to go back on DA if they subsequently lost their jobs. Furthermore, the NRB, amongst others, have produced research to confirm that conditions around receipt of DA are such that a ‘disincentive to work’ can be created.

The principal reason for this is the fact that secondary benefits (such as allowances for medical treatment or accommodation rental costs) can be threatened if the person takes up work. There can be delays in reclaiming these benefits (including the DA itself) should the person decide to leave work or lose their job. Even a short delay in this respect, according to some agencies interviewed, can cause hardship and can therefore be sufficient to discourage some people to take the risk of becoming employed.

Physical Access

Physical access (both in terms of transportation and workplace design) was identified by most respondents as a further issue with both policy and legislative implications. On the transportation side, payments are seen as inadequate or inflexible (within the context of a public transportation system that has not prioritised the issue of disability).

A 1992 Buildings Regulation (Section M) stipulates that “All new buildings used by the public must be accessible”. However, there is no regulation to provide for the adaptation of old or existing buildings.

In fact the general public policy framework can be summarised as one that has been notable for the announcement of policy statements, but weak on formal and consistent mechanisms through which these policy aspirations can be met. The Irish Government has, for example been a signatory to various international covenants (notably the UN Standard Rules on Equalisation of Opportunity for People with Disabilities) but no compulsory implementation measures have accompanied these commitments.

1.2 Training and Educational Provision

It is in the field of training for people with disabilities that some of the most significant developments have taken place in recent years. FAS (the national training agency) do not have a specific brief in relation to the provision of such training. The responsibility in Ireland rests with the Department of Health, and particular measures in the statutory field are carried out principally by the NRB. As well as training delivered directly by the NRB itself, much work is contracted out to specialised trainers on a nation-wide basis. The NRB is directly responsible to the Department of Health (although their funding comes from the Department of Enterprise and Employment).

Funding from the European Social Fund has been a very significant factor in Irish training initiatives of recent years. The high level of voluntary organisation and activity is undoubtedly one reason for the significant uptake of different opportunities (not only from mainstream ESF sources, but also from other programmes such as Horizon and Helios). In each of these cases, Ireland applied for significantly more funds than were available, in contrast to many other

countries that were under-subscribed. It has also led directly to more innovative approaches being taken, in some cases, at the interface between training and employment.

These have been mainly in the area of supported employment, which has become an increasingly important part of the Irish approach in the last three years. Instead of the more traditional approach (where people are trained at a particular centre and then work is sought for them) this model allows for more emphasis on 'on-the-job' training, together with ongoing support for the person in the job. This model is progressively being used by more agencies (those dealing with a wide range of disability, including learning disabilities, schizophrenia and motor disabilities). The most notable in terms of throughput are 'On Job Training' initiatives run by the NRB, whereby a trainee is given specific skills training by someone in the company according to a training programme specification. Afterwards, the trainee has developed skills and may move on to another employer.

Despite these developments (seen as being progressive in all quarters) some drawbacks in the current training system were also identified by agencies we consulted. These include, for example, the low numbers of trainers who themselves experience a disability (some organisations take the view that peer training can offer a more effective and relevant response in many cases).

With regard to education, the vast majority of people with disabilities in Ireland have gone through a 'Special Education System'. This does not incorporate standard second level educational curricula and, in reality, means the continuation of primary standard education until the age of 16 years. Employment opportunities in skilled trades and professions are limited also by the lower participation by people with disabilities in third level education. Less than 1% of people currently participating in third level education have a disability.

1.3 Employment Initiatives

Several support schemes and initiatives are in operation to assist people with disabilities obtain work:

Employment Support Scheme (ESS) is one of the two main initiatives of the Department of Health in regard to the employment of people with disabilities and is administered by the NRB. Developed over the last three years, it is designed to cater for people whose disability results in a significantly reduced capacity to operate to full productivity standards. Under this scheme, employers are paid a subsidy based on reduced productivity. It is a new model of working. Instead of people being trained at a Centre and then attempting to place them, people are trained at the job and help is given in maintaining the job 'Place-Train-Maintain'. A whole programme of support is given. The person is trained by a job coach and personal development and ongoing support is also provided by the agency. Both employers and employee know that help will be provided if any problems arise at any stage. Our case studies have found that this commitment to ongoing support is a crucial factor in allaying prospective employers' fears regarding people with a disability. Another advantage of ESS is that the candidate circumvents the hurdles of the normal application system and has a chance to demonstrate their suitability on site, giving them a good chance of being taken on after the scheme ends.

Part-Time Job-Incentive (Dept. of Social Welfare): This enables people registered with the NRB, and certain other unemployed people, to take up part-time work and receive a special income supplement. The supplement paid will not be affected by income from the part-time work. Those registered with the NRB are allowed to work more than 24 hours per week. The scheme lasts initially for one year.

Employment Incentive Scheme (FAS): The aim of this scheme is to increase employment through the payment of lump-sum premiums to employers to raise the level of employment in their businesses. Employers in the public and financial sectors are not covered by the scheme. People registered with NRB and certain other unemployed people are eligible.

Employment Subsidy Scheme (FAS): The aim of this scheme is to support the creation of additional jobs. Employers are paid a weekly subsidy for each additional employee, on condition that the normal wage is paid and that the employment involved is full-time and insurable. People registered with NRB and certain other unemployed people are eligible.

Workplace/Equipment Adaptation Grant: This scheme assists employers who wish to employ or are employing a person with a disability but whose workplace or premises needs to be adapted. It also assists self-employed people with a disability. Grants of up to £5000 are available for adaptations such as ramps, modified toilets, alarm systems for deaf people, voice synthesizers for visually impaired computer operators or other machinery adaptations.

The NRB provides other services such as the **Equipment on Loan Scheme** which provides a short term loan of equipment to improve performance, the **Personal Reader Service** which provides a grant towards the cost of a personal reader to give reading help to visually impaired workers who are required to do extra reading, **Job Interview Interpreter Grant** which provides a grant towards the cost of providing an interpreter for people with hearing or speech impairments attending job interviews.

Pilot Programme for the Employment of People with Disabilities (Dept. of Health, Dept. of Enterprise and Employment). The Pilot Programme for the Employment of people with Disabilities (PEP). The PEP is administered by the Department of Health with the assistance of the Department of Enterprise and Employment. Introduced in 1994, it is designed to run for an initial three year period. The PEP has an employment support fund, which is a subsidy payable for each employee with a disability, and is related to the productive capacity of each employee with a disability (assessed by the NRB). Eligibility for participation in PEP is confined to viable enterprises in which people with disabilities comprise at least 50% of the workforce. Participants are entitled to retain their secondary benefits.

Community Employment Scheme (FAS): This scheme aims to provide employment to people aged over 25 years who have been unemployed for one year or more. People registered with NRB and certain other unemployed people are eligible. Workers may be employed for up to one year under the scheme.

Sheltered Employment (ie employment in a non-integrated setting with full contract of work, legal entitlements etc), is available in one centre only: The Board for the Employment of the Blind. Many people with disabilities whose productivity is significantly below what is considered acceptable in open employment are employed in a Sheltered Work environment. They receive their benefit, such as DA, and a small supplementary payment, generally in the

range of £10 to £30 per week. There is an acute shortage of such places and they are currently available almost exclusively to those who have completed training programs.

1.4 The Role of Social Partners and the Voluntary Sector

The design and delivery of placement and support services in Ireland (as is traditionally the case with disability development issues in general) displays a very high level of involvement by the voluntary sector. This has been typified by a broad range of NGOs, in direct receipt of statutory and EU funding as well as their own independent resources, involved in a wide range of development activities and service provision. The profile of voluntary involvement has also reflected a very broad spectrum of organisational aims and orientation – from those delivering professional services to the disabled as a ‘target group’ to those made up mainly of people with disabilities and more centrally focused upon lobbying work and the pursuit of rights.

More significant developments with regard to this sector in recent years have been:

- the increasing importance of people with disabilities themselves as the central movers in voluntary sector development; concurrent with a movement away from the more traditional ‘charitable’ development model;
- the related development of a ‘partnership’ approach to planning and implementation of development strategies generally; as witnessed by the inclusion of disability as a specific ‘social exclusion’ focus in local area plans¹, as well as the involvement of voluntary and statutory organisations as partners in deciding upon future development priorities nationally².

The Trade Union stance with regard to employment of people with disabilities has been clear in principle since 1981 - when the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) was one of the first to publish a Charter of Rights for People with Disabilities. The ICTU currently favour the establishment of a 3% quota for the private sector in this respect. Trade Unions have also been actively involved in negotiations around the extension of the Employment Equality Act to include people with disabilities, and around the introduction of an Equal Status Act (see following).

However, the absence of a formal legislative framework up to now has meant that the implementation of stated policy at firm level has varied greatly amongst different sectors and individual firms. The same is true for employers in this regard. Consultation with all interest groups confirmed:

- a number of examples of good practice, on the one hand, where specific employers have implemented a positive policy of recruitment and support for people with disabilities in a holistic manner; but
- on the other hand, a widespread agreement that awareness amongst employers in general is not what it should be; that the issue is typically seen as one of economic cost (with

¹ The ‘Local Area Development Programme’ in Ireland includes a sub-programme to tackle disadvantage and social exclusion, the implementation of which is the responsibility of partnerships at the local level (bringing together various interest groups including organisations of people with disability).

² Principally through the Government Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities which reported at the end of 1996.

misinformation around insurance being a significant factor) rather than one of the social or productive benefits to the work process.

Forward planning at the national level is further hampered by the fact that there are no figures as to the number of people with disabilities in employment. In their report, 'A Strategy for Equality', the Commission for the Status of People with Disabilities stresses the importance of improvements in this respect:

“The opportunity to determine accurate figures in the next census of population should not be missed” p.7. and “pending the next census of population, the Central Statistics Office should carry out a survey of the extent of disabilities in Ireland and establish a system to ensure that relevant data is regularly updated” p.8.

1.5 Current Developments

Notwithstanding the shortcomings noted above, a number of recent and evolving developments are important to note in the Irish case. The most significant of these are:

- The establishment, and subsequent reporting, of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities. The Commission was set up by the Department of Equality and Law Reform, and 60% of its membership are representative of people with disabilities. It has produced a comprehensive report on priorities for future development in the disability field in Ireland, after nearly two years' deliberations. The report represents an important milestone in the development of a co-ordinated approach across various services, programmes and organisations responsible for them;
- The extension of the Employment Equality Act in Ireland to include people with disabilities (currently going through the Irish Parliament). It proposes to bring 'rights to claim and not be discriminated against' on the ground of disability.
- The introduction of an Equal Status Act, which will ban discrimination on a range of grounds, including those of disability. The legislation is significant in the context of this study in that it will offer legal redress to people discriminated against in the workplace on grounds of disability.
- The establishment of a Review Group on Services for People with Physical and Sensory Disabilities. This was set up to examine and make recommendations on health services for these client groups. Amongst other things, it is expected to recommend the establishment of a national database of persons with a physical or sensory disability.

The key test of success in the context of all these developments will be whether consistency and coherence between different measures and initiatives is achieved; and whether the aspiration of equal access can be copper-fastened by the introduction of effective enforcement mechanisms.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the general approach taken and specific methods used in carrying out the Irish case studies.

2.1 General Introductory Interviews

Prior to selecting firms for inclusion in the research, it was decided that contacts should be made at the level of general policy development in Ireland. This was seen to be desirable for a number of reasons:

1. Firstly, contact with at least some of the main ‘stakeholders’ in the disability field could make a useful contribution to building a profile of the current policy environment; and to increasing understanding of the key priorities for future development as defined by these stakeholders.
2. Secondly, initial contacts could also prove to be of practical use in identifying possible channels of contact for potential case study enterprises (for example, through placement agencies).
3. Thirdly, consulting individuals with relevant experience and expertise could provide a very direct input into the subsequent interview process, helping to define particular issues for specific actors within the firm.
4. Finally, given that results from this research are intended as a way of practically informing future interventions, it was felt that initial contact with key individuals would be a useful way of informing them of the study; as well as involving them in the research to some extent.

Given these aims, it was felt that some initial contact should be made within the disability sector (self-advocacy) itself, within the NGO sector, and within the statutory sector. It was also sought to gain direct feedback from people involved in work placement, as well as ensuring some spread of disability within the experts consulted. Interviews were therefore carried out with the following:

1. a member of the Commission on Status of People with a Disability (who was also a Disability Consultant).
2. a representative of the Schizophrenia Ireland, who was centrally involved in ‘Worklink’ (the Association’s Placement Service).
3. An Area Manager with the National Rehabilitation Board, who was personally involved in the placement of people with all forms of disability and dual disabilities.
4. a member of the National Forum of People with Disabilities.

2.2 Selection of Companies

The difficulty in constructing a ‘representative sample’ of enterprises was acknowledged from the outset. Indeed, the reason for adopting a case study approach was mainly in the potential it offered for *contributing to the understanding of the real dynamics at work in the placement process*, so a totally representative sample was not essential. However, the selection should allow for useful comparisons to be made between different kinds of enterprise, for example, companies of varying sizes, in different sectors, employing people with different disabilities.

An initial list of twelve possible companies was drawn up, and then four were selected in such a way as to provide a range of experiences according to the above criteria.

In compiling the initial list of twelve, contacts were made with agencies representing people with disabilities as well as placement agencies. These were seen as the most likely to have a knowledge about companies that have a record of employing people with disabilities. The following agencies were contacted:

- STEP Enterprises (an NGO responsible for placing people with disabilities on behalf of St. John of God’s). We spoke to the manager, who also chairs the Irish Union of Supported Employment;
- NRB: we spoke to the person responsible for placing people with disabilities in some of the Dublin areas;
- The Centre for Independent Living (an NGO);
- The Disability Forum of Ireland, who are not involved in placement, but who service relevant voluntary organisations;
- Rehab: a Placement Officer;
- Worklink (Schizophrenia Ireland): a placement service.

These interviews assisted in drawing up a short-list of possible enterprises. For example, STEP furnished us with a list of ten possible companies, NRB with five, Rehab a further seven, and Worklink a further ten.

While the majority of these companies had fewer than 70 employees, they were somewhat weighted in favour of engineering and electronics companies, and the vast majority of companies had employed people with a learning disability, as opposed to a physical disability or mental illness. Furthermore, some were not independent Irish-owned SMEs.

We were also aware of the limitations of confining the choice of company to those who had employed a person with a disability through an agency as opposed to on the open market. The self-advocacy organisations, while aware of larger firms with the reputation of being equal opportunity employers, were unable however, to suggest an enterprise which satisfied this criterion.

An alternative approach would have been to seek out a person with a disability who is employed in an SME and ask them if we might approach their employer. This was not considered appropriate. It was felt that there could be implications for the employee in such a situation, for instance, drawing attention to their disability as opposed to their abilities in a

climate which is already prejudiced against the employment of anyone perceived to be ‘different’.

Our final choice of enterprises reflects the difficulties of meeting our preferred criteria and also the inaccuracy of the information given to us by the agencies regarding the companies. For example, a company which we selected on the basis of employing 200 people turned out to employ only 70.

We felt it was important to interview employees with diverse disabilities, including mental illness and physical disability. To ensure that a mental illness case was included, Worklink, linked to the Schizophrenia Ireland, were invaluable for their suggestions. Interestingly, many of their clients have been placed at various levels both with very small enterprises with fewer than eight employees, and in charitable organisations. From their list, we chose to interview a company of about 60 employees which employs a person with schizophrenia as an planner programmer.

Table 1: Companies selected

Trading activity (Firm number)	Location	Number and gender of employees	Number of employees with disability	Type of disability	Research contact organisation
Electrical switch gear manufacturer (Firm 1)	Co. Kildare, small town	50 total 46 male 4 female	1 male	learning disability, slight physical disability	NRB
Contract cleaning and grounds maintenance (Firm 2)	Sandyford, Co. Dublin	19 total 12 male 7 female	2 male	learning disability	STEP Enterprises
Manufacturer roof lights, plastics, glass curtain walls (Firm 3)	Clondalkin, Co. Dublin	60 total 49 male 11 female	1 male	mental illness	Worklink, Schizophrenia Ireland
Bakery and food manufacturer (Firm 4)	Cookstown Co. Dublin	70 total 60 male 10 female	2 total 1 male 1 female	1 learning disability, 1 epilepsy	Rehab

2.3 Interviews at Firm Level

The table below summarises the number of interviews held with stakeholders in each enterprise as part of the case studies.

Table 2: Number of interviews held

Firm No.	Owner or MD	General Manager	Production Manager	Trade Union Official	Supervisor	Employee with a Disability
1			1		1	1
2	1					2
3			1	1		1
4		1				2

In each case, our intention was to follow a line of questioning that would:

1. Establish the general operational background to the firm.
2. Obtain details on the firm's current policy in relation to employing people with disabilities.
3. Construct a profile of how this policy has worked in practice (both in the past, and in relation to current employees).
4. Find out about barriers (from the point of view of employer and employee) to successful recruitment and employment practice.
5. Obtain feedback from respondents on what changes may be needed.

In cases where enterprises employed a person with a particular disability we enquired as to any possible barriers to employing people with other disabilities (we used the example of a person with epilepsy, mental illness or a learning disability).

The approach to interviewing is further elaborated for each case in the next section.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF CASE STUDIES

3.1 *Enterprise 1: Electrical Switches Manufacturer*

3.1.1 Methodology

Details of this firm were secured from the NRB. The Production Manager was first contacted to explain the research, and subsequently sent a fax with further details. He agreed to participate and to allow the employee with a disability to be interviewed.

A letter guaranteeing confidentiality in the report and within the company was provided. The Production Manager was interviewed, as was the Supervisor because he had a good working knowledge of the recruitment process, as well as the employee. The employee was also consulted and interviewed.

The company is unionised (SIPTU), but the interviewer was not permitted to interview the union. Three reasons were given by the Production Manager for this refusal:

1. such an interview might 'expose the employee'.
2. the union was believed to be 'not relevant to the company's decision to employ a person with a disability'.
3. The shop steward was only recently elected and was not familiar with their union's policy regarding equal opportunities.

While this reasoning was questioned, there was little practical choice but to omit interviewing the shop steward.

3.1.2 Background to the Enterprise and Worker(s) with Disability

This firm is involved in the manufacture of electrical switch gear and is located in a small town in Co. Kildare. It is an autonomous company with financial backing from two major companies who buy their products (including the ESB, the State-owned electricity service). They have their own name and brand and have traded for 25 years. They employ approximately 50 people (46 male, 4 female).

The work sectors are divided as follows:

- Metal Fabrication (16 males);
- Welding (4 males);
- Assembly (14 males);
- Research and Development (2 males);
- Office Administration (3 females);
- Production Manager (1 male);
- Office Manager (1 male);
- Canteen (1 female).

Most staff are employed on a permanent basis, after 13 weeks trial period. This year was exceptional: due to increased demand for products, they took on a number of temporary staff on 6 months contracts. These staff have the statutory entitlements regarding holidays but no pension or sick pay. The company is attempting to implement a pension plan among the staff and gives bonuses a few times each year.

The staff gender balance is also an important factor to note. The Production Manager stated that the company gets very few applications from women, and also that recruitment of women on the shop floor would necessitate the introduction of new facilities (for example, toilets).

In terms of wheelchair accessibility, there is a ramp at the main staff entrance at the back of the building, so entry is no problem. However, the toilet facilities would not be accessible.

Employee with Disability

The employee in this case is male, aged 23 or 24 years. He has a slight coordination problem and, according to the NRB, a slight learning disability. He left school at 17 years old and, apart from a period of six months' unemployment, has been working since then. Most of his previous jobs were work experience placements through FAS (the national training agency) two of them in manufacturing enterprises.

He heard about the vacancy in this company through KARE (Midland Health Board, Tullamore) about eighteen months ago. He was recruited first on a part-time and subsequently a full-time basis. He works as a factory operative, making pillars.

3.1.3 Recruitment Policies

The company does not need to engage in a proactive programme of staff recruitment: 'Applications pour in from the local town'. They have low staff turnover: some employees have been with them for twenty five years.

The Production Manager is responsible for the recruitment of all staff except office staff, who are recruited by the Office Manager. In the case of the current and previous employees with a disability, the Managing Director himself decided to take them on.

The enterprise uses an official job application form which is sent out when requested. Applicants are then called for interview. The application form specifically mentions disability.

The company has not previously requested a medical examination of prospective employees, but is about to introduce one in the next few months. This will especially test hearing and eyesight to establish whether the applicant has a problem already. The justification given in this context is the fear of litigation; the company was particularly concerned that, in the case of claims for damaged hearing, they would be able to show that the damage was not caused by the working environment. This would not stop them taking on someone who, for instance, had no hearing in one ear, this fact would have to be noted.

If a person with a disability come in directly to the company with no support from a placement agency, the company ‘would have to look at safety issues’. In the case of persons with a physical disability that might impair their ability to carry out specific functions, another position would be offered ‘if there is a suitable vacancy’.

According to the Production Manager, the trade union representative in the firm was aware of ‘their stance regarding their employment of people with disabilities’ and fully accepted it. The trade union is not officially involved in the recruitment process, but is informed about decisions taken. No dispute between management and union had so far emerged over recruitment or subsequent employment issues for people with disabilities.

The contract of employment for an employee with disability is exactly the same as for other workers in the same position: ‘same rules, same time, same pay’.

The overriding concern for the company is with ‘looking for the people with the best skills’. Candidates with disabilities may not have the required standard of skills (for example they are now in the process of recruiting someone with skills in technical drawing).

High value is also placed on good personal skills and personal motivation:

“interested in further learning, in bettering themselves, pro-active people who see themselves as working with – as opposed to for – the company” (Production Manager).

3.1.4 Record of Recruiting People with a Disability

The company has recruited two men with disabilities previously. They both had their disability prior to their employment, and both worked as operatives, sometimes in general assembly and sometimes in fabrication. They were both recruited through KARE, who approached the Managing Director. In one case, the agreement was that the employee would begin on a work experience basis.

The enterprise’s experience of placement and support schemes is limited to their direct relationship with KARE. The KARE scheme is a job placement rehabilitation program, whereby a person is taken on with no initial cost to the company. After one year, the company pays a full salary to the worker but receives a 60% refund from KARE.

There were three phases to this placement process:

1. A representative of KARE first visited the company and interviewed supervisors about skills and experience required for performing a job.
2. KARE then arranged for training to rectify any shortcomings in their prospective candidate’s capacity to take up the job.
3. The company then transferred the employee onto the payroll, subsidised by KARE.

It is clear that personal motivation on the part of the Managing Director was an important factor in the decision to recruit people with disabilities. While he did not have any personal experience of disability, according to the Production Manager, he:

“wanted to do something towards equal opportunities for people with disabilities; wanted to give a person an opportunity and see how it would work out.”

The fact that there would be no financial risk was also seen as important (as the company did not have to pay the people initially). The company would benefit from the – initially free – productivity of the employee, but there also appeared to be a conscious understanding of the potential for mutual benefit.

3.1.5 Barriers or Problems Initially Envisaged

Two main issues dominated this discussion with both the Production Manager and the Supervisor.

The first was about *safety*: the concern being that a particular disability might lead directly to an accident, thus endangering the person themselves and possibly fellow workers:

“The safety aspect is a priority in the factory for everyone. If you forget what you are doing for a second, or lose concentration, you could have an accident.”
(Supervisor).

The second was about relationships with other workers, and the potential for conflict arising out of a lack of understanding on the part of fellow workers. It is especially important to acknowledge the ‘culture’ of communication within the workforce. Much of this is based on what is known in Ireland as ‘slagging’ – a situation where fun may be made of fellow workers without a personal insult being necessarily intended. The fear is that, in the case of a person with a disability, the comments may be interpreted (justifiably or not) as being a personal attack on their capacity to do the work:

“It was scary taking someone on, what would they be like? They might lose control of themselves in social situations; for example could he cope with slagging from others, which is the norm in the company ?” (Production Manager).

The level of success in overcoming these perceived barriers was different for the two cases in question. The first employee, who had a learning disability and was originally employed on a trial basis, was eventually replaced for reasons of safety:

“His mind was not on his job, he would lose concentration, go for a stroll. If he had a power drill in his hand, he could forget and have an accident. It is not possible to supervise constantly. His work was also slow and lackadaisical.”
(Supervisor).

In the case of the second employee, the main disability was physical ie he has a mild co-ordination problem, and a slight learning disability. Safety did not become a problem in this case (he is able to concentrate while holding drills etc.). He did, however, find it hard to accept

the slugging: even though he publicly gave the impression of becoming involved in the joke-making, he was hurt by it. A representative from KARE, as well as the Supervisor, tried to help him with this. This solved the problem to some extent, but, according to the Supervisor:

“He sometimes loses motivation, starts to drift, looking around, waiting to be slagged. This happens every few months, but the I speak to him about his behaviour. He would agree about it and his attitude would pick up. Overall, he has no problems and has a good quality of work. I would have no hesitation in recommending him for another job if he wished to leave.” (Supervisor).

KARE provided a job coach to stay with the employees initially; tasks were explained to her and she passed on the training. Her role was phased out gradually, although she remains available to help with any ongoing problems. This was certainly a major factor in the successful integration of the second employee.

3.1.6 Perceived Employment Benefits

Despite the drawbacks, both the Production Manager and the Supervisor saw the situation as being of mutual benefit (to the employer and the employee). The reasons given were:

1. It creates employment for disabled people;
2. It increases public faith in the company. The enterprise is located in a small community and 85% of employees are local. Both interviewees considered it to be an advantage to the company locally if it is ‘seen to be looking after disabled people’;
3. The company gains from the productivity contribution of the employee;
4. It develops a link with KARE for the future placement of people with a disability.

3.1.7 Lessons Emerging

A number of learning points have emerged from interviews with all interviewees. These include:

The Initial Job Application

The production manager felt that more could be done to encourage people with disabilities to apply for vacancies and to help them through the application procedure. He noted that, of more than 20 applications received in the past six months, not one was from someone with a disability. Since none were from women either, it is likely that certain preconceptions about the job or the firm could be involved. If people lack confidence, the Production Manager suggested, perhaps a parent or employment agency could apply on their behalf ?

Assessment of Candidates: ‘The Right Person for the Right Job’

The Supervisor and Production Manager both attached considerable importance to ensuring that the job being offered was commensurate with the person’s capabilities. Where jobs are high risk and demand high levels of concentration, certain disabilities are not only barriers: they can also be a threat to health and safety. For example, this company connect switch gear used

by the ESB and, if lack of concentration leads to the wrong assembly, then the result could lead to electrocution and fatalities.

They feel that understandable fears in this regard can be allayed greatly by the full involvement of a placement and support agency. In trying to get 'the right person for the right job' they would feel more confident dealing with an agency experienced in assessment than with 'people coming in off the street'.

The employee in question placed great emphasis on the need for people to build consistency in their work. He saw his own prospects improving considerably through this job (where he was able to plan ahead, buy a car) and this would not have been possible where he was skipping from job to job as he had done in the past.

Supervision

For all people with disabilities recruited, there was a need for a more intensive supervisory input at the beginning of the job. This tended to ease as the period of employment progressed.

Safety was this company's biggest fear. Since most of the work is physically demanding, employees must be physically fit. A minor co-ordination disability presents no problem; but people with major disabilities will need more supervision, with allowances made for this at the outset.

Training and Ongoing Support

The important part played by KARE was acknowledged by all respondents. All cases involved a longer, slower learning process than was the case for other employees so pre-training and additional support at the early stages of employment was highly valued.

KARE also gave ongoing personal support to the employee. The approach taken appeared to be more effective in that it involved a more holistic view of the employee's welfare, rather than a narrow view of his role as a worker. For example, there was an effort made to get to know the person's family and KARE helped him make a decision about whether to carry on with the company, even though it meant that he lost his benefits. It seems likely that the employee would not have taken this risk without ongoing support and advice.

The existing employee himself acknowledged the central importance of ongoing contact and support, from both the agency and his supervisor. He also confirmed that he would not have taken the risk of losing his benefits (especially his state medical entitlements) had he not felt that this support was on hand.

Increasing Awareness and Breaking Down Prejudice

Respondants felt that one of the strongest ways to address the concerns and prejudices of employers is by involving employers themselves. For example, companies like themselves who had experience of employing people with disabilities could supply a full 'reference', showing how successful the experience has been for them. This could then be used by placement agencies in their dealings with less enthusiastic employers.

The employee with disability in this case felt that his ability to cope with ‘slagging’ from work colleagues had improved greatly through ‘just being able to chat to someone about it’.

3.2 Enterprise 2: Contract Cleaning and Gardening

3.2.1 Methodology

Enterprise 2 was contacted through STEP Enterprises.

After an initial phone call, a fax explaining the aims of the study was sent to the owner and when they agreed to participate, a time and place was agreed.

The owner of the company was interviewed first. He then explained the purpose of the study to the two employees with disabilities and they agreed to be interviewed on site the following day. They were given a letter explaining the aims of the study and assuring total confidentiality, within the company and in the report.

The company is a small one with no union representation, so it was not possible to ascertain a trade union perspective.

3.2.2 Background to the Enterprise and Worker(s) with Disability

The enterprise, established only in February 1996, is a service provider to property management companies. The services provided are contract cleaning and grounds maintenance. Its central office and store is located in Sandyford Industrial Estate in the southern suburbs of Dublin city; but the services are delivered in a range of locations around the city in town houses, apartments and other sites.

It is an independent company, set up by the owner, employing 19 staff (12 males and 7 females). There are three work sectors:

1. Gardening/grounds maintenance (8 male employees including 2 supervisors);
2. Mobile contract cleaning (1 male, 2 female employees supervised by the owner);
3. Janitors, each responsible for a particular block of apartments (2 female, 6 male employees, supervised by the owner).

All employees are employed on eleven month contracts, with the basic entitlements of a temporary contract. The contracts are renewable and, after two years, the employees will be taken on permanently. They work a 39 hour week and are entitled to a day and a half holiday leave per month. There is no sick leave available, and the company gives two weeks notice of dismissal.

Employees with Disability

At present, the company has two employees with disabilities, both male and both with a learning disability. One works in cleaning, the other in gardening. They have been with the company from the start (i.e. for nine months). Their contracts are a bit looser than the other

employees in that they are permanent unless they want to leave. Both work a full 39 hour week and are in receipt of DA. They receive the maximum that they are allowed to earn without losing this entitlement.

Both employees came from STEP Enterprises. The owner of the company previously worked for STEP Enterprises and one employee came directly with him to the new company. The other is now on a Horizon placement, and has the support of a job coach who visits once a month for half an hour.

Employee 1 is male, aged 31. He has a slight learning disability. He works in the contract cleaning section, and also drives the company van to bring the other cleaners to their places of work. He has a driving licence which he obtained through STEP. He has access to the van for personal use as an incentive, and he does gardening work once a week.

He has been with the company for 7 months, since it started, and is delighted with the job. He left school at 16 or 17 years old with no qualifications. He went straight from school into STEP Enterprises. He didn't look elsewhere for work, as he 'had no confidence and was afraid prospective employers would make a fool of him if he applied'.

STEP arranged experience for him in a small firm making fishing tackle. He maintains that this job constituted a danger to his health (it involved making lead weights for fishing rods with hot metal without protective gloves, and he received burns to his arms). He left the job because of the danger and went back to STEP. The company owner, who had worked in STEP, offered him the job when he set up the company. He has a job coach from STEP, to whom he can go 'if he has any problems'. He wants to come off DA, but the employer is doubtful about whether he might 'last in open employment'.

Employee 2 is also male, aged 38. He has a slight learning disability. He works in gardening and grounds maintenance.

He left school at 13 or 14 years with no qualifications. He joined Rehab (sheltered employment) through the NRB where he made school bags. He moved from there to STEP where he was trained in gardening, and subsequently worked in gardening and grounds maintenance for about two and a half years. He then asked the current owner for a job in 'his new company' and joined in February 1996. He tried to qualify for participation on a project in the Horizon program, but was not accepted. He has no job coach in this job. He did not like to apply for work himself; he feared going 'outside', and 'mixing with people'. He is on no medication, and visits the doctor about 2 or 3 times a year.

3.2.3 Recruitment Policies

As this is a new company, the owner thought that he would reduce costs in the first few years by employing unemployed people under the 'Back to Work Scheme'. Under this scheme the employee retains 75% of their unemployment assistance, all associated benefits for three years and, in addition, gets a wage from the company. Hence, general recruitment has been through FAS and Social Welfare Offices.

The applicant contacts the company and is called in for an interview. The owner 'does not bother with application forms'. He himself is totally responsible for recruitment. Applications for work tend to be gender-specific: for example, women generally apply for cleaning work, and none have applied for gardening work.

The company does not have a formal policy regarding the employment of people with disabilities but he does try to continue the work which he did in STEP. He takes on new people as staff are needed. He does not actively seek out people with disabilities but is known by the various placement and support agencies (STEP, Headway Ireland, Worklink) They will typically ask him to employ people on a few months' work experience.

The owner operates from a policy of 'having lower expectations' in terms of output for people with disabilities and 'puts less pressure on them than on other employees'.

The company does not require a medical examination of employees. It does require Garda (police force) clearance for employees, as the work involves access to people's residences and could present a security risk. There is no union in the company.

3.2.4 Record of Recruiting People with a Disability

Personal motivation on the part of the owner is clearly a major factor in this company's history of recruiting people with disabilities. As already stated, the owner previously worked in STEP Enterprises. He was with them for over seven years, working up from Supervisor to Contracts Manager. He wished to set up his own company doing contract work similar to that done in STEP and wished to continue working with people with disabilities. He was popular in STEP and when he left, about 25 employees wished to join him. He took on two of them, both with slight learning disabilities.

The owner stressed that it is 'his desire to continue his work with people with disabilities' that motivates him to employ them, as opposed to any financial incentive. It is extremely difficult for the company to compete on the open market with Disability Agencies providing the same service who receive a high level of subsidy. For example, only a quarter of budget of such an Agency comes from commercial sales, while about half comes from the £5,000 subsidy per annum paid per person on their schemes, along with administrative supports etc.

The company has employed a total of five people with disabilities over the last eight months (2 male, 3 female employees), all of whom had a disability prior to commencing employment. One employee worked in cleaning, the other four in the grounds/gardening sector.

Each of the three women who took placements came from Headway and had experienced head injuries. One employee had, in addition, a slight hand problem. They came to get experience of a work environment and were paid an allowance by Headway with job coaches who helped them and checked on their speed and standards. The individuals found it tough work, were married with children and 'under pressure to be at home'. They stayed for only one or two months.

The owner is aware of other schemes which facilitate and support the employment of people with disabilities, but does not avail of them as such (except for the one employee who is on a

Horizon program and has a job coach). He thinks that employees do not need much additional support from outside agencies, as he is in a position to provide that support himself.

3.2.5 Barriers or Problems Envisaged Initially

The main problem foreseen by the owner prior to hiring people was about the need for more supervision. He was able to provide this as he had worked as a Supervisor in STEP, but it would place an extra demand on his own time.

Reasons for the employment of people with disabilities not working out in the past also highlights some of the practical barriers in this case. The three people in question had head injuries, and one of them also had a slight hand problem. The owner identified 'lack of personal initiative;' as the principal barrier. This meant that:

“Everything had to be explained repeatedly to them. The supervisors get worn down” (Owner, Enterprise 2).

The financial cost of employing people with disabilities is low, but the cost in terms of management and supervision can be high. He always has to check their work and finds that, even though mistakes are corrected, they recur again and again. Everything must be clearly stated as their level of initiative can be low. For instance, everything listed in a room would be cleaned but the most obvious thing, such as scribbling on a wall, would not be cleaned as it was 'not on a list'. The owner, from his own experience, feels that 'supervisors getting worn out' presents perhaps the greatest barrier in most enterprises, and most would prefer not to work with people with disabilities.

More specific barriers relate to the nature of the work and the nature of the disability. For example, the owner in this case found that personal mobility acted as a restriction in many parts of the work: Getting in and out of the commercial van can be a major problem. The work is quite physical, involving steps, lifts, planters etc. The owner had experience of transporting people in wheelchairs for this type of work in STEP, but without success.

There were no perceived barriers to employing someone with epilepsy (who was taking medication) as a member of a crew. But it would not be suitable to have someone working on their own, as they 'would need support in the case of having a fit'. In fact the STEP model does allow for the full incorporation of people with epilepsy in these circumstances: they do gardening, cleaning, and restaurant work. But, in this case, they must sign a waiver (regarding any injury they might suffer due to their disability) and must get a letter from their doctor saying whether they may use machinery, and drive tractors. There have been fairly frequent interruptions to the work process through people experiencing seizures.

3.2.6 Perceived Employment Benefits

The owner in this case insists that 'personal satisfaction, the ability to help people by providing a job and treating them with respect' is the main benefit from his own personal point of view. There is, of course, a financial incentive, but this must be weighed against the extra supervision input needed. He is convinced, for this reason, that the enterprise could just as easily survive without the subsidies in question.

3.2.7 Lessons Emerging

Assessment of Candidates: 'The Right Person for the Right Job'

The owner in this case saw it as important to recognise the extent to which productivity is lower for employees with disability; and consequently the extent to which a full wage would be a subsidy from the company. He estimated, for example, that the DA (plus benefits) is worth £110 weekly. With £35 from the company giving £145 net. If the employer were to pay £200, 'he would need a full output'. This type of 'realistic accounting' is necessary if an open and productive relationship is to be established.

Janitorial work had proven to be unsuitable for persons with a learning disability, especially insofar as it requires some maintenance work to be carried out based on individual initiative.

Income and Income Subsidies

This is a very clear case of an enterprise that actually could pay more to its employees with disability, if it were not for the current regulations surrounding entitlement to DA. The employer in this case is in the position of wanting to pay more than the current rate, but is legally unable to. He cannot, therefore, offer them extra incentives such as overtime.

This is particularly borne out by the experience of both employees interviewed. At the moment both receive their DA plus 'top-up' payments from the employer. One wants to come off the DA, but knows that he would lose his benefits – medical card and the bus pass – as a result. The only way that he can see to increase his earning power is therefore by also increasing his insecurity.

A raising of the ceiling for 'top-up' payments would therefore make a very real difference in this case.

The employer also questions why the person with a learning disability should not have the same status as the long term unemployed person, and thus qualify for the Back to Work Scheme (administered by the Department of Social Welfare). The point was also made by one of the employees interviewed:

“People with a disability should be allowed onto a Back to Work Scheme. They should be allowed to earn more money - that is very important. The Back to Work Scheme is a better one than this situation” (employee with a disability).

Training and Ongoing Support

The job coaching approach has proved successful and there are visible signs of consequent progress. For example, the job coach in this case began by meeting with the employee two or three times per fortnight at the start. Now, she sees him only once a month as 'he doesn't really need her'.

Experience from this enterprise would suggest that a direct subsidy to the employer for supervision might also be an equitable and effective way of encouraging integration. Levels of

financial support could then be calculated on the basis of the nature and extent of supervision needed on a case-by-case basis.

Increasing Awareness and Breaking Down Prejudice

This case study is somewhat exceptional in that the owner has had a long history of working with people with disabilities. The extra commitment has been evident in the time given to employees when needed. This is recognised by both employees with disability interviewed. Both felt that they could approach the owner if they needed to and they could be confident of getting help from him.

One employee felt that the difference between getting a job in this case and other situations was that:

“People don’t judge you here by the way you look. Everybody needs to be given a chance – people should be given a go. Let the person try to do the job, if they can do it, well and good. But people are turned away because of how they look” (employee with a disability).

The second employee also pointed to prejudice as being the main reason for his lack of success in securing employment in the past:

“Employers think that there is something wrong with you. I had a C.V. from STEP and got interviews for jobs through STEP; but once they heard that you were in STEP, their attitude changed towards you. It is caused by ignorance” (employee with a disability).

3.3 Enterprise 3: Plastics Manufacturer

3.3.1 Methodology

Contact was made with Enterprise 3 through Worklink, the training wing of Schizophrenia Ireland. Interviews were held with the Operations Director and the employee who has a disability.

Permission was requested to interview the shop steward. This was granted by the Operations Director but, as he felt the employee would not be comfortable with this and the shop steward did not know about his disability, questions were only posed in a general nature with confidentiality guaranteed.

3.3.2 Background to the Enterprise and Worker(s) with Disability

Enterprise 3 is a company which manufactures roof lights, glass curtain walling, plastic products; and also merchandises and installs plastic products. It is an independent, limited company but is owned by two shareholders, one a very large construction company and the other a multi-national company. This ownership structure did not become apparent until during the on-site fieldwork.

The company has been in existence for thirty years. It is situated in an industrial estate in Clondalkin, a suburb at the edge of Dublin city.

It employs sixty people (eleven females and forty-nine males). It is divided into two sectors:

1. One dealing with production, comprising twenty nine male and one female employee;
2. The other dealing with the clerical side of the operation, comprising ten females and twenty males.

A Managing Director and five Heads of Department run the various activities of the company with two Sales Directors, a Purchasing Director, a Materials Manager, an Operational Director and a Financial Controller. Each Head of Department is responsible for recruitment to their particular section.

Employees working in administration (except for the person with a disability) are on an agreed salary with additional days leave per year of service. All factory workers receive the same hourly rate of pay. All staff are entitled to at least 25 days per year annual leave and there is a sick pay scheme. The budget for staff is worked out annually, at which time it is decided whether or not to renew temporary contracts.

Employee(s) with Disability

The company currently employs one person with a disability. He is aged 35 years and has a degree in Production Engineering and a Diploma in Computer Science. He works in the clerical sector and is on a twelve month contract, taken on nine months ago. He is employed under the 'Techstart' Programme – run by Forbairt and aimed at getting recent university graduates into the workplace. It is not specifically designed for people with a disability.

The employee did not meet the age requirements of the programme, but the company has close links with a person in Forbairt who completed the application judiciously so as to allow him to participate. Under the programme, the company pays 50% of his salary while Forbairt pays the remainder. There is also a grant for technological training courses of up to £2,000 although, according to the Operations Director, 'there is much paperwork, and delays in recouping this'.

The employee was diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia at the end of 1991. He completed a course with Worklink and was placed as a Planner/Programmer in the company, following an interview with the Operations Manager, on a one year contract.

His job is a new job. The company happened to need someone to adapt a complicated computer program to their needs just as he was made known to them. He has done a very good job of adapting the program and is now responsible for programming work schedules and assessing the actual hours spent on jobs. The Operations Manager hopes to be able to renew his contract when all staff contracts will be up for renewal. In order to do this he will have to justify that he is still needed, even though the task of modifying the software has been completed by him.

Only those working closest to him know of his diagnosis.

Employee's Previous History

This person was placed in a firm based in England, under a Graduate Training Scheme which was to last for two years. After only eight months he had secured a permanent job with the company. However, it was at this stage in 1990 that his illness began and, unaware of what was wrong with him, he left the job and worked temporarily in London until his family brought him home.

He was diagnosed at the end of 1991 as having schizophrenia and given medication. In 1992/93 he did a year's contract work with a company which builds pharmaceutical plants (in which he had previously worked). Subsequently he worked in a US-owned company, but 'he was not on the right medication and it did not work out'.

The main problem which he has come up against is the fact that he cannot explain the gaps in his C.V. without reference to his illness: Employment Agencies and prospective employers cannot otherwise understand why 'someone would leave a permanent job with a good company'. However, when he mentioned his illness to one employment agency he was told that "companies do not like people who have been sick". He no longer mentions his illness, but then lacks an explanation for the gaps in his career and his apparent decision to leave 'a good job'.

The main route into employment for engineers is through agencies who pass on career details to prospective employers; they then call people to interview if interested. As agencies do not use application forms (they ask questions verbally) applicants never have to fill out a form until they reach the interview stage. It is at this point that the person must account for their work history.

This person has applied to about ten agencies in Ireland, and directly to about six companies. But he finds it more difficult to get called to an interview in Ireland than in England:

"There (in England) you can visit a recruitment fair and meet about eight relevant employers who conduct screening interviews on the spot."

He felt that English employers did not understand why he has done so much contract work, which is more the norm in Ireland.

Accessibility

The whole factory is on the ground floor, with roller shutter doors, so there would be no problem for wheelchair users, although there is a three inch step up to the front door. There are no accessible toilet facilities.

3.3.3 Recruitment Policies

The company does not have a specific policy regarding the recruitment of people with disabilities. Their general recruitment policy is to advertise vacancies internally first on their notice board. This is at the behest of the Union in the company (SIPTU). If the vacancies are still unfilled, they will contact FAS and place newspaper advertisements.

The selection procedure involves completing an application form, on which basis people are selected for a first interview with the Head of Department. Depending on how they perform they will be called to a second interview, this time with the Managing Director.

Despite the fact that the company describes itself as an equal opportunity employer in its advertisements, the manager does not think that any people with disabilities have ever applied directly for work. Nor do many women apply for the factory work: in twenty years they have only employed two women on the factory floor.

The company has not, until now, required a medical examination of applicants, but shall shortly be introducing one. The reason for this is that the company's insurer now insists that people be tested before beginning to work on the factory floor. The company saves £20,000 per annum in insurance costs by carrying out such testing procedures. The Operations Manager believes that this new insistence on testing by the insurers is inspired by new Health and Safety Legislation. The focus for the company in this respect is mostly on the testing of employees' hearing – the factory floor sound level exceeds the safe level and thus ear protection is provided. The company must assess hearing levels annually to see whether there is any health risk to the employees, and also to establish responsibility in the case of damage (for example, checking the employee was wearing the ear protection provided).

The Operations Manager, although aware of the agencies which place people with disabilities (such as Worklink) was not aware of the actual schemes under which Worklink could arrange work experience. He has no awareness of other Government schemes.

3.3.4 Record of Recruiting People with a Disability

The company employed no-one with a disability before the Operations Manager came to the company six years ago. Since then, he has been personally responsible for taking on two people with disabilities, one for work experience. Both employees were taken on as the result of an approach by agencies working with people with disabilities (that is Worklink – the training wing of Schizophrenia Ireland – and STEP Enterprises).

The Operations Manager has a personal connection with Worklink as his wife was personally involved in setting it up. He also has personal experience of schizophrenia in his own family and he wished to help in some way on a personal basis.

The person previously employed on work experience had multiple disabilities. He was blind, deaf and had a learning disability. The company was found to be 'not a suitable environment for him' as his sensory disabilities left him in serious danger of an accident. To walk from his desk to the canteen he would pass a saw blade. He was also subject to 'sniggering and whispering by a few co-workers due to his poor speech'. The staff had not received any special training in disability awareness prior to his joining it.

It was also felt that he was not able for the work, even though it was menial, involving counting parts. An employee in the company would normally have many different and varied tasks to perform, involving moving around the factory floor and so it is not considered possible to train staff to perform these tasks in a repetitive, rote way. The job coach involved thought that the placement was not appropriate and it was discontinued.

The current employee described his attitude to the company as ‘very good - they accepted him even though he has an illness’.

3.3.5 Barriers or Problems Envisaged Initially

Both the Operations Manager and the Managing Director were concerned about the following:

- Safety, as the factory floor requires vigilance at all times (because of power saws and other heavy machinery) and a person with severe disabilities might pose additional concerns. They did not manage to overcome this problem with the first employee and this was one of the main reasons that the person was not kept on;
- Staff relations: The Operations Manager also feared that the person might be the victim of taunts from some staff members. The workforce were not educated about disability and he was not sure that they were positive about it. Disharmony would lead to problems for both management and the shop steward. This also proved to be the case for the first employee.

Because the Operations Manager has experience of people with schizophrenia he was not himself worried about the current employee, but others who knew of his diagnosis were afraid that “he might go wobbly” tomorrow or become violent. He has been able to allay these fears and there have been no problems.

The Manager also thought that there may be additional barriers facing women with disabilities in this case. The factory work is of a type which would not appeal to many women - physical, semi-skilled, lifting - and is traditionally more geared towards men. A woman with a disability would probably have to work in the clerical or sales side. Should a woman with epilepsy apply for such a position, the manager did not think there would be a problem if she were the better candidate, provided it was proved that she was medically able to do it. However, if it were a choice between two equal candidates, one with a disability and one without, he feared that the person without the disability would get it. The alternative would be an added level of risk and awareness of the disability might override their value.

3.3.6 Perceived Employment Benefits

The current employee is very well qualified technically. He has been able to extract and modify a difficult piece of software and introduce a new planning system, which was a big step for the company.

The fact that half of his salary would be paid by Forbairt was very important in getting the managing Director to agree to taking him on. In future, ‘more penetrating’ questions will be asked about his position as there will be no grant aid, although the Operations Manager will argue strongly in his favour.

3.3.7 Role of Trade Unions

The company has never received any policy document regarding the employment of people with disabilities, nor have the shop stewards ever raised it with them. The Operations Manager has the view that the unions put out, in effect, ‘a double message’:

“The Area Representative and SIPTU headquarters put out policies regarding improvements etc., but on the ground different messages filter down to the shop stewards”

Nevertheless, he does not foresee any major issues. In his view:

1. The union would fight for the same pay for the employee if they were capable of the doing the same work;
2. If the person has severe disabilities, they may be concerned for their safety and that of their fellow workers, as workers rely on each other for safety;
3. Where the workforce are not very positive to a person who has severe disabilities, this raises problems for management and union alike

The assistant shop steward, when interviewed, was unaware of the union’s policy regarding disability and confirmed that they had played no role in the recruitment of employees with disability, except to consent when asked by management.

There is, therefore, no indication in this enterprise, as with the other three, that the trade union is taking a proactive role in these issues at firm level.

3.3.8 Lessons Emerging

Recruitment Decisions

The importance of personal motivation in deciding to employ a person with a disability is again underlined in this case. Here the personal motivation was on the part of the Production Manager, but it was also aided by:

- a supportive Managing Director; and
- sufficiently profitable times for the company;
- the high level of appropriate qualifications on the part of the employee concerned;
- grant aid made available by Forbairt under the Techstart Programme.

Employment Incentives

The Production Manager felt fairly strongly that tax allowances could provide a very important incentive for companies to employ people with disabilities as a way of compensating for any reduced productivity. It is notable also that his personal motivation to employ a person with a disability is not here stated as affecting company policy:

“The primary policy of any company is to make money. If multi-nationals can make more profit in the third world they will go there. Indigenous companies also aim to

make the maximum amount of profit for themselves. They are not doing it to make jobs for people. Therefore, they do not want to employ too many people. They will maybe take on one or two people with a disability. But if there is lower productivity, which means extra expense for the company, they will not keep them on. Not that many people with a disability will achieve the average productivity. Hence, tax aid or some other incentive should be available.” (Production Manager).

He also feels that the level of incentive should be graded according to the degree of the severity of the disability:

“It is easy to take on someone with only slight disabilities, but is a much bigger commitment to take on a person with severe disabilities.” (Production Manager).

Income and Benefits

Before getting his current job, the employee in this case told us that it took a full year for the relevant authority to process his request for DA. By the time it was granted, he had found a job. He was, however, on unemployment assistance.

His only benefit is the medical card which he is about to lose. This covered the total cost of his medication, currently £3 per day. He will now go onto a Drugs Subsidisation Scheme which will pay for drug costs exceeding £30 per month. He will have to pay for visits to his GP which are very infrequent. He already pays for his own psychiatrist at £60 every three months as he did not wish to change to one on the free Medical List. He believes that he would be charged in any case as he is in employment.

There are, therefore, some financial costs associated with managing a disability which he has to cover without specific financial support.

Training and Ongoing Support

In the case of the original, multiply disabled employee on work experience the ongoing support provided led to his withdrawing from the workplace due to safety fears and the level of extra supervision and support needed.

In the case of the current employee, issues are recognised around integration into the workforce. The manager in this case felt that the employee might suffer through isolation or redundancy if he found it difficult to diversify in his work and develop his capabilities: where a person is not able to progress and diversify, a question will be raised in the longer term as to the profitability of retaining them, particularly if salaries increase annually. In this company, while it is performing well, staff positions are secure, but the industry is volatile and only three years ago significant cutbacks were made. Training and support measures should therefore take account of this need to develop.

In this case study, there was a personal connection with Worklink in addition to a high level of motivation to employ people with disabilities. The Manager was, however, not aware of other schemes available to the employer to facilitate the employment of people with disabilities.

Neither was the employee himself aware of such schemes in Ireland. Although he registered with NRB in order to participate in Worklink, he was not aware that NRB can fulfil this role itself. He was, on the other hand, more aware of support and placement mechanisms in England (and that ‘a number of companies in England take on a percentage of people with a disability’).

Increasing Awareness and Breaking Down Prejudice

The current employee with disabilities has had no problems with his specific job; ‘he has done it very well’. However, the manager had hoped that he would ‘integrate with staff better’. This would increase his chances of being kept on, perhaps being seen as someone who could progress in the company. He feels that this could have happened had the manager been able to spend more time with him.

The issue of discrimination in his workplace does not arise for the employee himself because he believes that ‘no one knows of his illness’ (in fact, a number of co-workers do know of it). The manager felt that there should be an education policy in schools, and maybe in the workplace, regarding disability:

“Unless you have personal contact with a person with a disability you will not understand what is involved.” (Production Manager)

The employee also pointed to the need for an awareness to be developed at a broader level:

“The stigma in society around mental illness has to be changed. People think that you “go around killing people”. More awareness is needed.” (Employee)

3.4 Enterprise 4: Bakery

3.4.1 Methodology

We contacted this company through the National Training and Development Institute (NTDI), Rehab. We faxed some information to the General Manager and discussed the project with him by phone. He agreed to participate, but it took quite a while to arrange an interview because of his work schedule. He agreed that the two employees with disabilities could be interviewed and explained the study to them.

The interviewer also gave a letter to both employees, explaining the project and guaranteeing confidentiality. There is no union in the company.

3.4.2 Background to the Enterprise and Worker(s) with Disability

This enterprise is a bakery and food manufacturer located in a west Dublin suburb. It is a limited company and family-owned. However, it is established as a subsidiary of a larger confectionery company (which runs two retail outlets). The company has been in business for 50 years.

The company employs 76 staff (60 male, 16 female). The work sectors are as follows:

1. Stores (2 males);
2. Production (17 males, 8 females);
3. Packing (10 males);
4. Cleaning (8 males);
5. 'Night-fresh production' (18 males, 2 females);
6. Dispatch (6 males);
7. Office (1 male, 6 females), plus the General Manager (male).

All bakery shop-floor workers are entitled to the statutory entitlements: 15 days holiday in the first year, 20 days holiday from the second year onwards. Starting pay is about £140 per week, reviewed annually. Sick pay operates on the basis of a doctor's note after three days absence. Compassionate leave is extended for bereavement.

Current Employees with Disability

There are currently two employees with disabilities working for the company (one man and one woman) both of whom are bakery operatives:

- Employee 1 is male (aged 22 years) and suffers from epilepsy. The NRB pays 40% of his wage.
- Employee 2 is female and is paid £140, with no financial support from the NRB. She has a slight learning disability. The company had extensive consultation with the NRB and it was agreed that her performance is equal to that of other staff in the same job.

They were both recruited through NTDI.

Previous History of Employees with Disability

Employee 1 has had a physical disability since he was aged 6. It was originally thought that he was suffering from fluid on the brain but discovered in 1987, as a result of a brain scan, that in fact he had epilepsy. He was able to continue schooling and his epilepsy is now under control, although he does not receive warnings of seizures.

The employee left school at 16, after which he completed an NTDI Work Preparation Course. This involved attending weekly for 3 months. He completed a multi-skills course and some training in engineering. He then undertook a three months' work experience placement. He only applied for 3 or 4 jobs when he was in the Training Centre, mainly because he thought his chances were not good:

'If I had not got the epilepsy I might have gone on. I dreamed of being a train driver, but the epilepsy would stop me, if they knew about it.' (Employee 1)

The vacancy in the bakery was communicated to him through the NTDI. He was shown around by the General Manager and introduced to the Supervisor.

Employee 2 has a slight learning disability. She attended a 'Special School' until she was 18 years old. After this, she went to Rehab, where she took a catering course for 3 years. The Rehab supervisor told her that there was work experience available for two weeks. She was

allowed to visit the company 'to get used to it' and met the General Manager who showed her around so that she would know what to do. She was told she had the job.

Physical Accessibility

The working environment is not accessible for wheelchairs. There are steps into the main production area, the canteen and the bakery.

3.4.3 Recruitment Policies

The General Manager and the Production Manager are responsible for recruitment. The Production Supervisor and the Production Manager inform the General Manager about vacancies. They normally approach FAS or NTDI. They make a special effort to employ locally as the hours are difficult. They are in contact with FAS or NTDI regularly, and these agencies contact them directly should they have a suitable candidate.

They advertise in the local and national press without stating that they are an Equal Opportunity Employer. They normally receive a great response for bakery operatives.

Candidates typically telephone the company and the receptionist takes down their details on an internal form - they do not use an application form. The General Manager short-lists the candidates based on age, previous experience and previous wage. The most appropriate candidates are felt to be in their late teens or early twenties with some previous experience in the food industry. They keep the names of unsuccessful candidates for future vacancies. Both the General Manager and the Production Manager interview the candidates where possible.

They are about to set up a training and induction programme for the company, together with employee handbooks and an application form that will formalise procedures somewhat.

The company does not have a specific policy regarding the recruitment of people with a disability, but they are actively involved with NTDI.

The company does not require a medical examination of candidates but questions about personal health are important. For instance, a person could have asthma and be allergic to flour. Health questions have not been asked so far. One lady had problems handling cream; her hands were flaking. These are standard considerations in the food industry.

The company's connection with NTDI happened by chance. They had problems with high turnover and a business connection suggested that they try NTDI. An NTDI representative described their services and how they could answer their recruitment needs. Their experience with NTDI has been 'good since then'.

As far as other support schemes are concerned, the General Manager is only aware of the Employment Support Scheme which is operated through the NRB. He is not aware of grant schemes for building modifications. His employees have not received any training or support from NTDI.

3.4.4 Record of Recruiting People with a Disability

The company has employed 6 people with disabilities in the past (1 male and 5 females). Five were bakery operatives. All had their disability prior to seeking employment and were recruited through NTDI. The NRB subsequently consulted with them about possible salary subsidies.

No one with a disability has ever applied directly for work on their own behalf; they have always come through an agency.

The practice of employing people with a disability is driven by the General Manager. Some members of his family have epilepsy and he has a liberal view of disability:

“If someone can do a job and is willing to do it, why should a mental or physical disability stand in their way?” (General Manager)

The company policy is to ‘get the best staff possible for production’. The rebate of wages or subsidisation is certainly not a major factor. Some of the 6 employees with disabilities were being subsidised by the NRB, for example, but others were not.

While all of these six placements worked well, location was a problem. All six had begun working in the company when it was based in the city centre. When the company relocated to the outskirts of the city, it was no longer convenient for four of them. It is known that at least one of these workers has found a position in another bakery.

3.4.5 Barriers or Problems Envisaged Initially

Very few barriers were identified in this case. According to the GM, the agency was very professional in identifying both the potential and the limitations of all six candidates, and this made the integration process fairly easy.

Subsequent difficulties, where they emerged in the case of the two employees interviewed, were overcome without too much difficulty. For example, Employee 1 has a mild form of epilepsy, which has a very low risk of seizures if the person is on medication:

“He would stop and become motionless as if in a day-dream. He told the Supervisor not to fuss, let him go to the canteen and play it down. He needed more direct supervision than other employees, as an increase in pressure could bring on a seizure.” (General Manager)

It had to be ensured that problems were dealt with immediately and that tasks were not causing any distress.

Employee 2 has a slight learning disability and is not necessarily as fast as the others in her work:

“It is up to the Supervisor not to expect too much from her. She had some difficulties at the start as she was in the cream room. She was switched to the finishing room as there is some skill in finishing the cakes, but not the same level of

detail. It takes time for anyone to learn a new skill and it takes her a little bit longer to learn a task.” (General Manager)

In this case, the response has been to give the employee tasks where speed is not a factor, for example, by putting her at the end of the process on such tasks as wrapping and labelling.

“She can work to her own speed. She can do a good job now. No other staff are aware of her disabilities.” (General Manager)

Problems were well anticipated and monitored; and appropriate responses were put in place promptly.

3.4.6 Perceived Employment Benefits

According to the General Manager, people with a disability tend to have:

“more motivation and appreciate the opportunity to work; they value their work highly, and their commitment has been first class” (General Manager)

The GM also believes that his employees with disabilities tend to be more punctual than other workers, and their attendance is very good. There is, according to him, a constant willingness to help out:

“If they are asked to do overtime, they do it without question. They try harder to be part of the team. Once they enjoy what they are doing and are capable of it, there are no problems whatsoever”. (General Manager).

3.4.7 Lessons Emerging

Applying for the Job in the First Place

Speed of recruitment is of the essence in this particular company. If there is one vacancy on the production line, it needs to be filled quickly. They use a recruitment company which sends temporary workers to fill the gap until they make more long-term arrangements. There are obviously many people with disabilities who would be suitable for these positions, but the employer readily admits that the temptation is to ‘go for the quick fix through the press’. The implication is that there is room for the relevant agencies to become more proactive (for example by visiting employers in an attempt to match candidates with vacancies).

But the conviction that prospective employers will discriminate against a person with disability acts as a very real barrier to people applying for a job in the first place:

“Companies are afraid to take the risk of hiring someone with a disability. Some people do not want to know anyone with an illness. They don’t want to treat you same as a normal person even though you could be better. Once they hear the word ‘illness’, you can forget about it.” (Employee 2)

Financial Incentives

The benefit of financial incentives was acknowledged in this case: But it was also strongly felt that this should not be the company's only reason for employing people with disabilities. The GM points out that they have twice employed people with no financial support, and the maximum they have received in any situation is 50% of an employee's wages.

Training and Ongoing Support

Feedback from the employees with disability confirms the positive assessment made by management of the support offered by NTDI. One employee 'goes back two or three times to chat to Carol':

“Once to sort out tax as I had been on emergency tax for four months; Once to get my Travel Pass back. At first, they wanted me to keep the DPMA [now DA] and get a top-up, they did not want me to go on ESS.” (Employee with Disability)

It is clear that this type of support is a crucial facilitating factor in the employee's ability to pursue their own income and contractual needs, as well as in the performance of everyday tasks associated with their particular job.

Increasing Awareness and Breaking Down Prejudice

Awareness amongst employers about the availability of various schemes and grants is a clear need to emerge from this study (as well as from the others). This employer stumbled across NTDI by chance, and there is an obvious need to increase knowledge about the different mechanisms that currently exist to support willing employers.

They also acknowledge that they would need more information and advice about how to make the workplace more accessible, and whether this would affect the production process. However, according to this employer, broader public awareness is even more important:

“There should be more media coverage to get rid of the stigma around disability. Irish society is turned off by the word ‘disability’. Employers fear substandard work.” (General Manager)

Despite what is clearly a supportive environment, there were clear examples of harassment from fellow workers in this case: sometimes the disability being blamed for accidents that were not the person's fault; other times, more general ‘slagging’.

The support of the supervisor and manager clearly made the difference in encouraging one employee to stay on:

“They are very helpful and good to me. They always encourage me to talk about my problems. If you are not well, you tell them and they let you go home” (Employee 1).

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

4.1 Barriers to Employment of People with Disabilities

4.1.1 Fears of Employers Prior to Employing people

Safety

Fears around safety was a major motivating factor in three of the four case studies, with the two manufacturing companies listing it as their chief concern.

- Enterprise 1 feared that lack of concentration while operating a power drill would endanger both the employee and other staff. This fear was realised in their opinion in the case of one employee who was let go, partly because he lacked the necessary concentration. However, the other employee was judged to be able to concentrate well and they no longer worry about safety in his case.
- Similarly, Enterprise 3 feared the potential dangers of the power saws on the factory floor. This problem was not overcome in the case of one employee who, having severe sensory disabilities, would have needed constant supervision to ensure that he did not wander into the path of such machinery. This was the main reason that the employee was not kept on. The company had no safety concerns for the other employee, who has schizophrenia and works in the office.
- While Enterprise 2 did not mention safety as a concern, they did admit that they would not consider employing someone with epilepsy unless they were in a team situation. They believed it important, for safety reasons, to have someone around to assist the person should they have a seizure.

Safety issues are considered as a top priority in the manufacturing companies mentioned, for all staff. Apart from their concern for the employees themselves, other staff members may feel at risk. There are also cost implications if more supervision is required.

This bears out the experience of support agencies who are frequently told by companies that they are unwilling to employ people with a disability for safety reasons.

Staff Relations

The two manufacturing companies both listed staff relations as a potential problem area.

- Enterprise 1 said that ‘slagging’ is the norm on the factory floor: would the employee with a disability be able to cope with this, or would they lose control of themselves in social situations? This problem did arise for one employee but was overcome with help from the support agency and advice from the Supervisor.
- An employee in Enterprise 3 was subjected to whispering and sniggering because of his poor speech. The Manager felt that such behaviour can lead to disharmony among staff and staff relations problems. Some staff members who knew of a different employee’s

schizophrenia had feared that he may be violent; but the Production Manager was able to allay their fears and there have been no staff relations problems for him.

- While Enterprise 4 did not list this as a fear, both employees said that staff relations were a problem for them from time to time. One employee felt harassed by a staff member (not necessarily related to his disability) and the other reported that the Supervisor was shouting at her and picking on her because she was ‘not fast enough’, as a consequence of her disability.

Lack of Skills and Confidence

The two manufacturing companies mentioned the importance of finding employees who wish to progress in the company, to undertake further learning, and to integrate with staff.

- Enterprise 3 was disappointed that the employee has not integrated more as this would increase his chance of being kept on. And this was linked by the manager to the employee’s reluctance to widen his skills base. People at his level are expected to diversify and to nurture promotional prospects.
- Enterprise 2 mentioned that employees with a learning disability are often unable to take the initiative, to notice for themselves what needs doing; Hence more supervision is needed, with extra cost implications. Enterprise 1 mentioned that higher levels of skills are required in their factory now, such as technical drawing. The implied concern was that people with a disability might not have such skills – a factor backed up by the low rates of participation in second and third level education by people with disabilities.

Fear of the Unknown

The Production Manager in one company said that another person with responsibility for hiring people might take the view that a person with a disability is an extra liability to be avoided. Many of these fears, apart from showing a negative image of people with disabilities, seem to have to do with the fear of the unknown.

4.1.2 Barriers to Employment From the Point of View of Employees with Disabilities

Only one of the employees interviewed reported having looked for work on their own behalf, and this was the person with third level education and whose illness was only diagnosed in 1991. Two of the employees said that they lacked the confidence to do so, were afraid they would be made a fool of, while four referred to the negative attitude of employers towards people with an illness.

One employee reported that when prospective employers saw the name “STEP”, their attitude changed. One agency actually told one of the employees that “companies do not like people who have been sick”. His main problem in trying to hide his illness was the gaps in his C.V. incurred due to his disability. Operating in his favour was the fact that agency applications are the norm in his career area, and one can reach interview stage without having to complete application forms.

4.2 Employee Characteristics having a Bearing on Successful Recruitment and Employment

While the issues above were very strongly represented across all case study findings, situations differed according to a range of personal characteristics, including the method of placement, age, gender, educational background and, most especially, type of disability.

4.2.1 Method of Referral and Placement

In analysing this data one must be aware that the case studies are limited to instances of companies who have employed people through the specialised “disability” agencies. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which this reflects the overall picture of people with disabilities in employment. All six of the employees have been employed on some kind of Employment Support Scheme with the result that their situations are to some extent different to those people with disabilities who have secured employment on the open market.

4.2.2 Age

It is interesting to note that the age range of employees was narrow (ranging from age 22 to 38, with a mean age of 28). This probably reflects the average age of people who are with the various agencies - they have had a number of years training and are ready to be placed in employment.

It may also reflect the fact that the Employment Support Scheme is a recent innovation. In the case of Enterprise 4, the young age also reflects the age at which it seeks to take in new employees – late teens or early twenties. This issue certainly raises the question about the prospects of older people with disabilities finding work.

4.2.3 Gender

All four enterprises have overwhelmingly male workforces, with a male/female ration ranging from 2:1 to 6:1. It is not too surprising, then, that of the six employees interviewed only one was female. The representative of the Forum of People with Disabilities whom we consulted has reported that unemployment is a big issue for women with a disability; that women are often doubly discriminated against on grounds of gender and disability.

- Enterprise 1 stated that they do not get applications from women for the factory floor. Employing women could present difficulties for them in terms of the language used by existing employees and the adequacy of their present toilet facilities.
- Enterprise 3, also manufacturing, said that the work, being of a physical, semi-skilled nature is traditionally more geared towards men and that perhaps the clerical or sales end might be more appropriate.

Of the remaining two enterprises, the janitorial work of Enterprise 2 would involve some heavy work.

It is interesting to note that in Enterprise 2, three women who were placed by Headway did not last more than a few months because, according to the owner, it was tough work and they were married with children and under pressure to be at home.

In 1995, 43% of referrals to the NRB in the Dublin West Area were women, as opposed to 55% men.

4.2.4 Education

Most of the agencies interviewed gave the low level of educational attainment of people with a disability as a major barrier to accessing employment. According to one respondent, the vast majority of people with a disability have gone through the special educational system, a system which does not usually follow a second level curriculum. Children with a physical disability may have missed school through hospitalisation and were commonly sent to special schools, regardless of ability. Third level education is not a choice without a second level qualification. Thus, training is the main option for people with a disability. The NRB state that less than 10% of their clients would have attained a Leaving Certificate.

Four of the six employees in the four Irish case studies left school with no qualifications. They all have a slight learning disability and would have received some training from the specialist agencies which later placed them in the enterprises. The person whose illness was diagnosed as recently as 1991 had previously attained a degree in Production Engineering and a Diploma in Computer Science. The sixth person, who had epilepsy, attained a Group Certificate.

This low standard of educational attainment obviously further limits the range of opportunity open to people with disabilities, even in situations where supportive recruitment and employment practices are in place.

4.2.5 Lack of Self Esteem/Experience of Rejection

Several respondents commented on how difficult it is to 'keep applying for work' when you are so frequently refused an interview on the basis of your disability. There is also the perception that, with unemployment so high among the general population, there is little hope for someone with a disability. The Forum of People with Disabilities have added that the negative messages which people receive from the outside severely affects the level of confidence and self-image of the people themselves.

Only one of the employees in our case studies reported having looked for work on their own behalf, and this was the person with third level education whose illness was diagnosed only in 1991. Two of the employees said that they lacked the confidence to do so or were afraid they would be 'made a fool of'; while four referred to the negative attitude of employers towards people with an illness.

The fact that none of the enterprises reported ever having had an application from a person with a disability on their own behalf, despite the fact that at least one enterprise describes themselves as an 'Equal Opportunity Employer' in their advertisement, must comment on the low expectations of success of people with disabilities.

4.2.6 'Benefits Trap'

People with a disability who are unemployed receive the DA (worth £64.50 per week), and are allowed to earn £35.20 per week on top of that. With the added value of a bus Travel Pass and a Medical Card, the total benefit package is estimated at £120 per week. In order for someone to come off benefit, they would have to earn over £150 per week merely in order to maintain their standard of living.

People with a learning disability will typically have no second level qualifications and therefore will enter the job market at the lowest entry point of £110 or £120 per week. Enterprise 2 said that if he were to pay a full wage of £200 he would need to get a full output of work from the employee, which may not be possible.

Most of the employees interviewed in the case studies still had their medical cards as they were in the first year of a supported employment scheme, but thought that they may lose them after their first year. One employee who is about to lose his medical card will go onto a Drugs Subsidisation scheme which will cover the cost of his drugs, except for the first £30 per month.

One striking factor was the lack of information amongst employees about their entitlements.

Most employees gave the impression that they would like to give up the DA in favour of being on a full salary in the company. It is unclear to them, however, whether or not they could ever return to it. Worklink have pointed out that there can be delays in getting back on DA if people lose their job, delays which might cause personal hardship. Furthermore, they stated that people with schizophrenia experience more health problems than others – digestive problems, influenza, bronchitis – and thus particularly need their medical card.

4.2.7 Type of Disability

Four of the employees in question have what was termed a 'slight learning disability', and one of these also has a slight co-ordination problem. One person suffers from mental illness (schizophrenia), and the last has epilepsy.

The question must be asked whether the type or severity of disability is a factor in terms of access to employment. The numbers in this study are too small to be able to generalise from, but there was some indication that the experience of employees with more severe disabilities were not as positive as those reported by the six interviewees:

- Enterprise 3, for instance, employed a person with *multiple sensory disabilities and a learning disability*, but a combination of factors lead to his not being retained - the factory floor was too dangerous an environment for a person with severe sensory disabilities, the tasks were too varied for him to learn and the staff taunted him.
- Both manufacturing enterprises emphasised the need for employees to be fit and able for heavy physical work on the factory floor, by implication ruling out anyone with a severe *physical disability*.
- Enterprise 3, speaking about *epilepsy*, pointed to the danger that a person with epilepsy might have a seizure while lifting a pillar: 'they could perhaps work in the stores'. Enterprise 2 would take on a person with epilepsy who was on medication, but only to

work in a team setting. Enterprise 4 said that there would be no problem if the NTDI thought them suitable to the task, the person were on medication and not likely to have an incident on the floor which would expose them in front of staff.

- Both NRB and Worklink reported that the label *schizophrenia* carries such stigma in Ireland that it is particularly hard to place someone with this illness in employment. The image created by the media of people with schizophrenia being violent is one which is widely held in Irish society. The crucial role played by the personal experience of employers is evidenced in this study by the fact that Enterprise 3 had no worries about employing a person with this diagnosis, as he has personal prior experience of people with this illness.

In conclusion, the case studies would seem to suggest that enterprises may be more open to employing people who have a slight physical or learning disability, than people with more severe levels of disability or who have a mental illness.

Furthermore, the fact that the workplaces in these cases were not accessible to wheelchair-users automatically ruled out employing people with mobility disabilities.

4.3 Factors Relating to the Employer and the Workplace that have a Bearing on Success

4.3.1 Attitude of Employer

There are far more similarities than differences in the experience of people with disabilities seeking employment. The common barrier to employment which all people with disabilities have to overcome is the negative attitude of prospective employers to disability.

All agencies interviewed as part of our background research reported negative attitudes of employers as the chief barrier to employment for people with a disability (NRB, STEP, Worklink, Forum for People with Disabilities, Disability Consultant). This was described by the NRB as ‘a lack of knowledge and information regarding disability which caused employers to make decisions based on myths and false perceptions’. Worklink described it as a fear of the unknown and, in the case of schizophrenia, ‘prejudice arising from the negative portrayals in the media of people with this illness’.

Prospective employers fear that the person with a disability will be a liability, an extra problem to the company. Their fears range from practical issues of health and safety for the person and their co-workers, possible insurance problems and possible extra costs due to sick leave requirements, to perceptions of the person with a disability as unable to integrate with co-workers, to take the initiative, to deal with pressure and to progress within the company. These perceptions are based on a lack of knowledge about disability, exacerbated by the general lack of integration in Irish society.

That the attitudes of employers is a major factor regarding the employment of people with disabilities is borne out in the case studies. In three of the four enterprises, the person with responsibility for employing people with disabilities had had personal experience of disability. It was not possible to ascertain whether this was also true of the Managing Director of the fourth enterprise. This was given as their primary motivation for employing such a person – they did

not share any general misconceptions about disability because of their personal experience and they also wished to ‘give a person a chance’.

There was also a conformity among the agencies regarding ways of changing negative attitudes to disability. These involve a long-term policy of integrated schooling as a means of preventing these attitudes arising in the first place, as well as the need for Disability Awareness and Disability Equality education for employers, in particular, and amongst the public at large. Furthermore, one respondent recommended that people with disabilities should be involved in delivering these courses.

4.3.2 Size of Enterprise

Size of the enterprise seems also to be a significant factor in the employment of people with disabilities. There are no figures available, but the feeling of those working in placement agencies is that, apart from large companies with stated Equal Opportunities policies, the smaller company is much more likely to employ someone with a disability.

The reason for this is that for small companies the decision to employ someone can usually be done quickly and by one person, whereas in larger enterprises the recruitment process is more structured and formal and ‘there are more hoops to jump through’. Where the manager of a small company is personally motivated to employ someone and can do so without reference to others, this clearly adds to the case.

These case studies would seem to bear out the importance of company size. In all cases, the person who was motivated to employ someone with a disability could do so without having to go through any elaborate procedures, although in at least one company the person who makes the decision must also make the argument to his Managing Director as to why that person should be kept on when an initial grant or subsidy expires.

It is also possible for placement agencies to build up a relationship with smaller companies – most of the enterprises which we interviewed had taken on more than the one person with a disability from the agency they dealt with. This flexibility is not seen in larger companies it seems, unless they developed a specific policy regarding disability equality.

One agency thought that smaller companies who do not offer many commitments to their staff regarding sick leave and other benefits can be more willing to take a chance with an employee as they have less to risk. It was also reported that some employers cite the company’s union in as a reason not to employ someone – that there would be hassle in securing their agreement. The case studies cannot confirm this as the managers of the two unionised enterprises stated that they had no problem in securing union agreement (SIPTU, in both cases).

4.3.3 The Application Process

Application forms frequently ask about the health or disability status of the applicant. This can diminish the possibility of getting to interview. One expert interviewed reported that, of 85 recent applications made, only one resulted in an interview.

Only two of the four enterprises studied used formal application forms which asked about health/disability of applicant. Applicants to the other two companies telephoned and gave details over the phone, on the basis of which they were called to interview. This less formal procedure may make it easier for persons with a disability to secure an interview without reference to their disability.

However, the reality is that none of the employers reported ever having received an application from a person with a disability through conventional recruitment channels. One employee reported that going through a recruitment agency, the norm in his field, meant that he did not have to fill out any forms before getting to interview, a distinct advantage for him.

Another problem for some people with disabilities can be the gaps which may be in their curriculum vitae related to their disability. This was a major concern in interviews for the person with schizophrenia, and meant that questions about his disability could not be avoided.

An employee with a learning disability stated that an interview would be going well until the employer saw STEP in his curriculum vitae and then they lost interest - this relates to prejudice regarding disability.

4.3.4 Medical Tests

Some employees had the perception that, if prospective employers know of their disability, they would not have any chance. The existence of a medical test could be seen as another stumbling block to accessing employment.

None of the four enterprises require medical tests, although it is interesting to note that two manufacturing enterprises are about to introduce testing of applicants in order to establish a baseline regarding their health, with particular reference to hearing. This is not motivated by the desire to exclude people with hearing problems, according to the employers, but in order to prevent claims by employees that their workplace has caused such problems. One enterprise stated that they are saving £20,000 per annum in insurance costs by introducing such tests.

According to the NRB, the applicant may need support for the interview itself, such as an interpreter in the case of a person with a hearing problem, and the room must be accessible to wheelchairs and people using crutches. Often personnel officers are not trained to raise the issue of disability in a positive way: they either ignore it or deal with it in a negative way. This can be very difficult for the applicant. Although the NRB does provide a grant for the use of an interpreter in interviews, companies do not appear to know about these or other grants which they could avail of.

4.3.5 Discrimination within the Enterprise

By Employers and Supervisors

None of the employees reported discrimination by their employers. Quite the reverse was the case - they all reported a high level of support from the employer. This is not surprising as the employer was the one who had taken the initiative to employ a person with disability and was motivated to make the placement work. However, one instance of discrimination on the part of a supervisor was reported.

By Employees

None of the employees stated that they had been discriminated against by fellow employees, nor was it always clear whether co-workers were aware of the person's disability.

One clear instance of discrimination was reported by the manager about a previous employee in Enterprise 3, where the person, who had severe disabilities, was whispered about and laughed at behind his back. Two employees reported difficulty with 'slagging' by co-workers, in one case directly related to his medical condition. It is difficult to say, particularly in the case of the second employee, whether the 'slagging' is motivated by prejudice against the person with a disability or is part and parcel of the usual banter which goes on between workers. In his case, although he reciprocated with others, he was sensitive to being targeted himself. With support from his supervisor and job coach has learned to cope with it.

4.3.6 Infrastructural Problems

The 1992 Buildings Regulation states that all new buildings used by the public must be accessible, but does not cover the adaptation of old buildings (Mulcahy).

All enterprises studied had problems with physical accessibility to a greater or lesser extent. None of the employers involved professed to having basic information about the assistance they could call on to adapt their buildings and facilities. This lack of awareness is even more significant considering that the employers interviewed were committed to the principal of equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.

Transport is a major problem for people with physical disabilities. Many buses are not accessible for wheelchair users. One respondent gave an example of one employee who earned £150 net per week and who had to pay £75 per week for transport.

4.4 Role of Placement and Support Agencies

As has already been stated, the findings of this study are somewhat biased as placement and support agencies were chosen as the route to selecting case study enterprises. However, it is clear that the agencies were a crucial factor in the employment of people with disabilities in our four companies. With the exception of Enterprise 2 – which is unusual in that a former employee in such an agency went out on his own and continued the work of the agency himself – all of the other employers recruited their employees with disabilities exclusively through agencies.

The employers were very specific about the advantages they saw in working with such agencies. These can be summarised as:

- The agencies made the initial contact with them, offering to match candidates to specific jobs. Achieving a good match between the person's ability and the particular job was seen by employers as being of crucial importance, and they were all confident of the particular agency's expertise in this regard.

- The candidates typically joined the company on work experience programmes, which meant that both employees and employer could use it as a trial to assess suitability without any commitment. The advantage of this approach, according to the NRB, is that it circumvents the problems of the application process mentioned above, and gives a person a good chance of being retained. The advantage to the employer is that they are not taking too great a risk initially.
- Employees are typically placed by the agencies under the Supported Employment Scheme which provides job coaches to train the person on site, personal development and ongoing support for both employee and employer. This support can greatly increase the employee's capacity to settle into the job, and it reassures employers that if problems arise in the future there will be support in dealing with it. Given that 'fear of the unknown' underlies the attitudes of many employers, this structured support would seem to be a crucial factor in their decision to take a chance.
- These schemes also mean a subsidy to the employer to make up for any shortfall in the employee's productivity. While the subsidy was not seen as the main reason for recruiting people with disabilities, it did make it easier for two of the enterprises to do so. For example, the Operations Manager in Enterprise 3 reported that the 50% grant from Forbairt was very important in his effort to convince his Managing Director to take on the person with a disability. Enterprise 1, which did not have to pay its employee for the first year at all, said that this removed the financial risk involved in employing someone with a disability but emphasised that it was a matter of mutual benefit. Three of the enterprises recommended that incentives be provided to prospective employers to make up for any fall in productivity and/or higher management and supervision costs. Two of the enterprises were employing people with disabilities without receiving a subsidy but, in one case, they only topped up the DA to the legal limit - which is effectively a wage subsidy. They both stated that the financial incentive was not really a factor in employing people with disabilities; one because they found that the people with disabilities were more highly motivated and committed than other staff, and the other because the lower financial cost was offset by higher supervision costs.

4.5 Role of Trade Unions

Whereas ICTU have a progressive proactive policy on disability, there are no indications from our study that unions play an active role at SME company level.

Two of the enterprises had no union. Of the other two enterprises, the interviewer was permitted to interview only one union representative. This shop steward was unaware of his union's policy regarding disability and had played no role in the recruitment of employees with disability, except to consent when asked by management. The Manager in this case said that he had never received any information from SIPTU regarding disability equality.

The Operations Manager of the other unionised company reported a similar situation: that the union played no role in deciding to take on someone, would not know the union policy and merely gave it the okay when asked by management.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

5.1 Disability Awareness Education

Employers and agencies alike were united on the need for disability awareness programs, for the public in general and employers in particular, in order to change negative attitudes towards disability. The suggestion was made that this should be included as part of all IBEC training. The programmes would preferably be taught by people with disabilities.

A long-term approach to prevent the formation of negative attitudes generally is to have more emphasis on *integrated schooling*, instead of the special school system for people with disabilities. The other result of this would be to raise the educational attainment levels of people with disabilities, and increase the range of learning and work opportunities open to them.

The need for disability awareness for the workforce is also clearly evident from the results of these studies. There is a question about whether induction training should be provided for work colleagues prior to the placement of a person with a disability. Although this question was not directly put to the employees interviewed in this study, it was clear that they had a strong preference to be treated like everyone else, certainly with no attention being drawn to their disability. Yet, in cases where the disability is more severe or visible, the attitude of co-workers is crucial in terms of integration and long term success.

5.2 Integrated Training and Placement

The possibility of developing joint training and supported employment opportunities between FAS and the specialist training agencies should be investigated.

This would obviously improve integration, but would also help to avoid the stigma which is attached to attending special training agencies. It could cater for a group which seems to fall between the two systems, who are unable to keep up with FAS mainstream training, but wish to avoid the stigma of 'Special Training'.

Running a pilot scheme like this would have specific funding implications, since Special Training Agencies cannot provide 'mainstream' training and FAS cannot stray from the mainstream. A new and more flexible approach is therefore needed.

5.3 Route Counselling

The role of the placement agency is clearly a crucial one for many people with a disability, or at least for those who cannot, for one reason or another, compete equally on the open market. Both agencies and employers have emphasised the importance of matching the appropriate job to the individual.

The concept of route counselling begins at the level of the person seeking work and, on a one-to-one basis, designs a career plan to suit that person's interests and abilities which may include further education, training and placement. The agency would also work at the level of the employer to access suitable placements for the individual. Many of the disability agencies already engage in various aspects of this approach. The evidence from these studies strongly suggests that a broadening and deepening of this approach could increase success.

The question must still be raised about whether a specialist placement agency for people with a disability is the best solution, rather than a more integrated approach within mainstream services.

5.4 Subsidies / Incentives

A wide range of subsidies and incentives to employers are available from the NRB, but employers seem to be largely unaware of their existence. Information regarding these schemes should be widely available to all employers.

5.5 Extension of the Supported Employment Schemes

At present, most EU funding for training for people with disabilities is given to Centre-based training. The Supported Employment initiatives are mainly funded on a pilot-scheme basis by Horizon.

This study affirms the benefits of this form of training as a means of removing barriers to employment for people with disabilities. Funding should be made available to extend Supported Employment nationally.

5.6 The Social Welfare System

Much has been written elsewhere about the need for basic reform in the social welfare system as it relates to people with disabilities seeking work (notably by the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities). Difficulties with the present system have merely been confirmed in this study, and the need to eliminate the 'benefits trap' and introduce more flexibility have emerged as particular priorities.

Access to other schemes (especially those for the long-term unemployed) would also be an advantage in several of the individual cases we studied. It is important to note (as confirmed by FAS) that people with a disability are allowed participate on schemes for the unemployed. Indeed, people registered as having a disability with the NRB will be given priority.

However, this is not the perception of many of those interviewed. Part of the problem may be that the person with a disability may have been in training rather than unemployed as such. But clearly the availability of full information on such opportunities is paramount.

5.7 Part-time or Flexible Work Opportunities

Worklink have made the point that, while many people with schizophrenia are employed in the open market with no problems whatsoever, part-time work or work with flexible hours would be particularly desirable for some. This might also apply to many people with a chronic or cyclical illness, as they could work during their periods of health and take adequate health care when unwell.

5.8 Health and Safety

There is a need to ensure that the Health and Welfare at Work Act is not used to impede access to employment for people with disabilities. This would appear largely to be an information gap, and its rectification could form part of awareness training programmes.