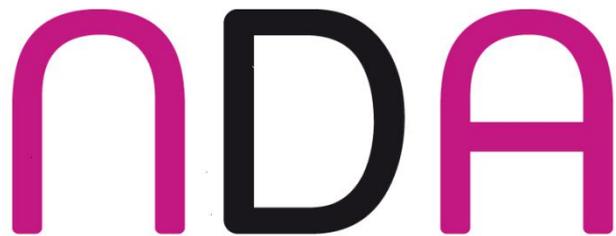


# Retaining employees who acquire a disability

**Niamh Fawl**

**Policy and Public Affairs**



Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais  
National Disability Authority

# Purpose of Guide

- Provide employers with practical advice on how to support and retain employees who acquire a disability
- The facts and figures show that it makes good business sense to retain employees who acquire a disability.
- About half of all disability is acquired age 18-64
- Incidence rises with age
- Most common causes of disability work absence
  - Mental health problems (33%)
  - Back pain/arthritis (30%)

# Rationale for retention

- 81,000 on Illness Benefit + 51,000 on Invalidity Pension
  - Over half are on Illness Benefit 1 year +
  - 1/3<sup>rd</sup> on Illness Benefit 3 years +
- Already out of a job
  - 40% of those on benefit 6 months
  - 60% of those on benefits 12 months
- Just 1 in 4 employers has a Job Retention policy

# Findings from review of literature

- Business sense to keep people at work
- Managers play key role
- Integrate retention into other HR policies – inclusive workplace, workplace wellness policies
- Early intervention is key
- Tipping point after 6 weeks' off work
- Integrated, co-ordinated approach works best – person, their doctor, occupational health person, line manager, colleagues
- Most 'reasonable accommodation' costs are small – often reorganisation of tasks or times

# How guidance was developed

- Review of literature (with assistance of AccessAbility)
- Guidance based on evidence
- Input from broad Advisory Panel who read successive drafts
- Employer, union, private sector and statutory bodies

# What's in the Guidance

## Summary of the law

- Can't dismiss someone on grounds of disability where they can do the essentials of the job if given reasonable accommodation
- No discrimination in employment, training or promotion on grounds of disability
- No harassment on grounds of disability
- Must provide reasonable accommodation – where cost is proportionate
- Not required to provide something people can do for themselves, e.g. glasses
- Information provided on unfair dismissal and minimum notice
- Not a legal interpretation of any Act. See [www.nera.ie](http://www.nera.ie); [www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie)

# FÁS supports

## Private sector employers

- Employee retention grant
  - Stage 1 - 90% of cost of developing retention strategy for any individual, up to €2,500
  - Stage 2 – 90% of cost of implementing retention strategy, up to €12,500
- Reasonable accommodation fund
- See [www.fas.ie](http://www.fas.ie)

# Social Protection Partial Capacity Scheme

- Launched in February 2012
- People may work and receive a proportion of their benefits
- To apply to
  - Those on illness benefits 6 months +
  - Those on Invalidity Pension
- See [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)

# What's in the Guidance - Good practice

## Focus on capacity

- Focus on a person's capacity
- Disability does not mean unable to work
- Fit for work vs completely cured
- Return to work can be part of the recovery process
- Staged return where that is appropriate

# What's in the Guidance – good practice

## Set out HR policies in writing

- Develop or update written HR policies and procedures
  - Accommodating disability – such as flexible working hours, assistive technology, accessible work premises
  - Sickness/disability absence
  - Return to work procedures after absence
- Set out responsibilities of employer and of staff members
- Health/wellbeing policy for all staff
- Employee assistance scheme (own/contracted out)
- Communicate to staff
- Build up know-how through training

## Steps to retain staff

### Keep in touch. Plan together for return to work

1. Early intervention/contact to provide any necessary supports
2. Keep in touch. Update with social news at work
3. Return to work assessment, based on job tasks
4. Develop return to work plan. Partnership between individual, their doctor, and employer

# Steps to return to work

## Reasonable accommodation

- Adjustments to enable performance of the job
- Working arrangements, equipment, facilities
  - Different start or finish times
  - Redistribution of work tasks
  - Assistive technology e.g. screen reader, special keyboard
  - Workstation e.g. special chair, height of desk
  - Premises e.g. handrails, accessible WC
  - Personal evacuation plan
- Most have low/no cost. FÁS grants
- Specialist advice available

# Steps to return to work Reintegration

- Possible phased return to work
- Mentoring and support in initial period back
- What colleagues need to know

# Back in work

- Manage performance against goals set as with other workers
- Maintaining good health
- Training and development
- Progression and promotion

# If it doesn't work out

- First point of call – can someone return to own job, with suitable accommodation of disability
- Next, can person be deployed to another job in the organisation
- Person may no longer be able to work in the same company - but possibly in another sector
- Research the options and follow procedures

# NDA Guidance

- Flyer with key retention steps.
- Guidance document on web – please download
- Printed version to be available in 2012