

RehabGroup

Investing in People, Changing Perspectives

Leave No One Behind in 2021: A Budget Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities



Rehab Group's 2021 Budget Submission

We make the following key calls for Budget 2021:

Income Supports

A Cost of Disability Payment should be introduced in Budget 2021 to address the inadequacy of income support for persons with disabilities

People with disabilities on low incomes should be properly protected against increases in the Carbon Tax



Better Learning Opportunities



Additional funding should be assigned to address the “Digital Divide” to ensure that people with disabilities and other disadvantages are not left behind during the pandemic

Additional support should be provided for specialist training providers, such as National Learning Network, and the model of funding should be reviewed

Better Job Opportunities

The Wage Subsidy Scheme should be improved to boost employment opportunities for people with disabilities

Follow through on the commitment to double the target for employment of people with disabilities in the public service to 6%



Ensure Strong Social Care Provision



Government should clearly commit to fully implementing the Catherine Day Report on the role of voluntary organisations in the provision of public services, and provide sufficient funding to address pay inequality among Section 39 workers

Leave No One Behind in 2021: A Budget Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities

Rehab Group's Budget 2021 Submission

Overview

Rehab Group supports over 10,000 people each year through a wide variety of social care, specialist training and other services. We especially focus on services for people with disabilities and people experiencing disadvantage.

This pre-Budget submission seeks to give voice to the concerns of the people who use our services and concentrates on four key areas:

I. Income Support for People with Disabilities

II. Boosting Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

III. Ensuring Strong Social Care Provision

IV. Creating Better Learning Opportunities for People with Disabilities

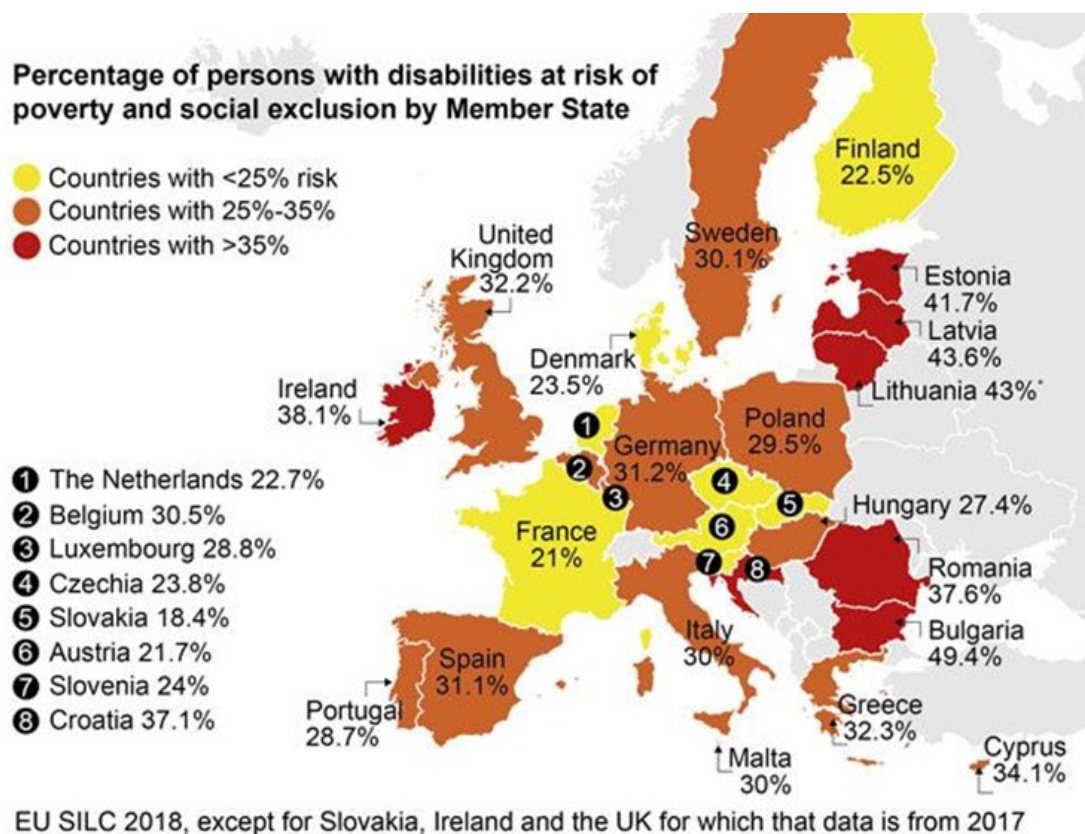
Section I: Income Support for People with Disabilities

For very many people living with a disability in Ireland, incomes are very low. And far too many live on the margins of our society.

Two in five people with disabilities in Ireland go without basic necessities. This is the highest for any group in Irish society other than one parent families.

It is not surprising then that Ireland compares dreadfully with other countries.

[Statistics produced by the European Disability Forum](#) in April of this year, shown below, highlights that Ireland has the highest “at risk of poverty” rate for people with disabilities of any western European country. In other words, people with disabilities living in Ireland experience some of the greatest income inequality in Europe. This has major implications for the quality of their lives and the level of social exclusion they face on a daily basis.



The last Government produced a strategy on poverty. It is called, Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 -2025 Ambition, Goals, Commitments. This strategy includes targets to reduce poverty levels among people with disabilities.

However, the specific target for disability is “To reduce at risk of poverty for people with disabilities to 28.7% for the year 2025 and to no more than 22.7% by 2030.” These targets are too modest and all too accepting of a high rate of poverty among people with disabilities. These targets do not reflect a state that is fully committed to implementing the UNCRPD.

That’s the context for many of the people who use Rehab services. Several thousands of people who use our services depend on social welfare supports to make ends meet. In the main, this is through disability allowance but also through illness benefit, jobseeker payments and other income and training supports.

In July and August of this year, we invited people who use our services to tell us about some of the main issues affecting them. We received strong feedback and key insights from this research on the challenges they face living on this income. We also asked them to tell us about some issues and concerns arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. Our summary points and conclusions are set out below:

1. Income inadequacy is a big issue, especially for people who live independently

We asked people what it was like living on the income they had. Many of the comments highlighted the challenges faced and reflected the struggle to make ends meet:



Of particular note in our survey were the struggles faced by people with disabilities living independently.

People living independently were twice as likely to say that it was difficult or very difficult to live on the income they had. They were three times more likely to tell us that prescription charges were a significant burden. And they were three times more likely to have high weekly transport costs.

Indeed, a general theme in our survey is the extent to which people who use our services are dependent on families and especially parents.

All this means that the cost of independence is very high, the barriers to independence are considerable, and the burden and costs pushed on to families is significant.

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What we are asking for in Budget 2021

- 1. A Cost of Disability Payment should be introduced to reflect the acute poverty levels faced by people with disabilities. This payment should be a supplement to basic social welfare rates and benchmarked each year against a reliable measure of adequacy.**
- 2. Budget 2021 should be poverty-proofed – particularly in relation to the possible effects of increased carbon taxes. See further discussion on this below.**
- 3. The poverty reduction targets set out in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion are too modest and should be revisited by the new Government.**

2. Secondary Benefits are just as important as Primary ones


We note the Government's commitment in the Programme for Government that core weekly social welfare rates will not be reduced.

However, we would urge the Government not to cut back secondary benefits, such as medical cards, fuel allowance, bus passes etc, in lieu of this - as happened in the last recession. These are just as crucial to the living standards of people with disabilities and their ability to participate fully in Irish society. They are integral to household budgets.


Indeed, a growing issue for people who use Rehab's services is the loss of the Rehabilitative Training Allowance (RTA). RTA is a training support to help students meet the costs of participating in further education. In 2019, the Government decided to no longer pay that allowance to anyone starting a new course.

The withdrawal of that allowance, worth €31.80 per week, has already hit some students and will begin to hit many more as they complete their current courses. And in the context of a Budget when the Government will be weighing up new activation measures, it makes little sense that students with disabilities or disadvantages will lose such a key activation measure. In many cases, the loss of the allowance will mean that the cost of participating will largely use up any income support participants receive, leaving participants dependent on family for other expenses or unable to participate at all.

Some feedback we received on the Rehabilitative Training Allowance from our survey include:




I find it very difficult to pay rent, buy food and essentials without the extra income from the centre.



I use this allowance for essentials like lunch etc. but I also buy things like clothes, shoes and so on. It is my bit of independence while I am at my course.

We would also strongly urge the Government to make good its commitment to reduce prescription charges. This was due to occur in July 2020 but has not yet materialised. Prescription charges can be very high for some people with disabilities, and if they are on a basic social welfare rate the maximum payment of €20 per month, can be a considerable burden.



I take a lot of medication. Some weeks it leaves me with very little money after I pay my rent.

Finally, we would highlight the issue of carbon taxes.

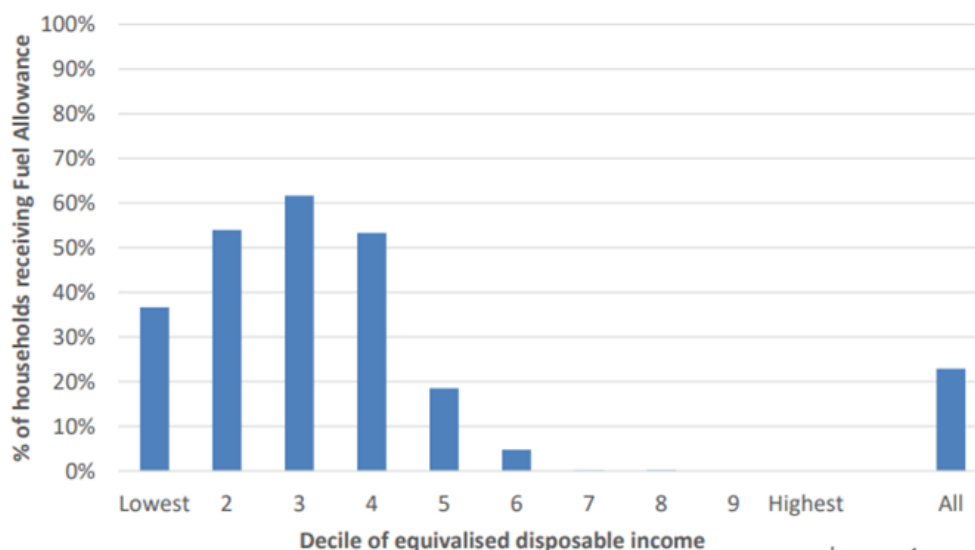
The Programme for Government says that tax increases will focus on Carbon Tax, as the government identifies it as 'a tax of negative behaviours'.

Persons with disabilities tend to have higher central heating costs than those without a disability, as they tend to require a well-heated home for their own health. Increases in the Carbon Tax will target and negatively impact persons with disabilities if the state does not provide offsetting measures to ensure persons with disabilities can adequately heat their homes.

The offsetting measures introduced as part of Budget 2020 were insufficient to protect many of those on the lowest incomes from the inflationary impact of carbon tax increases.

ESRI research highlighted this fact. The chart below from the ESRI showed that over 60% of households on the lowest incomes received no benefit from the offsetting measure announced in Budget 2020 (a flat-rate increase in fuel allowance). Indeed, a greater percentage of households in the third income decile gained from the offsetting measure introduced in Budget 2020 than did in either of the bottom two income brackets. Fuel Allowance or similar may or may not be the best way to achieve a fair offset of increased carbon taxes but if it is being used, then a much more targeted and nuanced approach is required so that those least able to absorb the increased costs associated with the Carbon Tax are protected.

... but €2 increase in the Fuel Allowance won't compensate the lowest-income households



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Source: https://www.esri.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2019-10/barra_slides.pdf

In Budget 2021 we are urging the Government to ensure that people with disabilities are properly protected against increases in Carbon Tax, and that the overall Budget is poverty-proofed.

What we are asking for in Budget 2021

1. Reverse the Rehabilitative Training Allowance cut.
2. Do not cut secondary benefits or impose extra charges such as higher prescription charges.
3. Fully protect people on low incomes against any increase in carbon taxes.

3. Address the “Digital Divide”

Our survey of students and service users also highlighted the “digital divide” problem that many people with disabilities face. This issue is particularly relevant in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and it especially impacts the learning division of Rehab Group, National Learning Network (NLN), which caters for about 7,000 students each year. NLN engaged in extensive remote learning over the first months of the pandemic using a variety of approaches and it became obvious to many staff members that the digital divide was exacerbating disadvantages for many people who use our services.

Our survey of people who use our services showed that:



20% had no access to broadband



Only 51% told us they had very reliable broadband



39% told us they did not have full day access to a PC, laptop, tablet with 20% of all respondents having no access at all

I work my laptop from my phone - getting broadband in would mean an extra bill in the household.



I had to buy a computer which put me out two weeks pay, so Covid affected my connection with college and tutors through the internet dramatically.



Despite these issues, 93% were satisfied or very satisfied with the level of contact from Rehab staff during the Covid crisis. And while a sizeable 31% were happy to have remote learning as part of their course, 69% said their first preference was in-centre face-to-face tuition.

The Government recently announced extra supports for people who were struggling with the digital divide. These are welcome and timely and will make a big difference for those who are able to access assistance. However, the amount of funding set aside will not nearly be enough to cater for everyone affected by the digital divide and needs to be re-visited. We are looking for a commitment in Budget 2021 to boost funding for ICT so that people with disabilities are not left behind in the pandemic.

Another key issue for many of the people who use our services is how much they missed their friends and the social aspect of learning or social care. Typical comments, repeated often by respondents in our survey, included:

It's nice to have personal time but it's also nice to see friends and mix with fellow service users.

The survey also revealed the social impact of the pandemic on people with disabilities. As the country went into Lockdown, changing face-to-face support to remote supports led to a knock on effect for people with disabilities. Almost all respondents said the social aspect of attending a centre was something they valued, while 60pc indicated that it was a critical part of their programme.



I was just beginning to make progress and now I'm almost back to where I started because again, I'm isolated. I need a lot of help with social interaction and social skills.



This highlights the importance of centre-based delivery in disability services and will be important to factor into any future consideration of policy on social care and Specialist Training Provision. It also shows the importance for people with disabilities who attend day services of getting back to as close to normal as quickly as possible. We would urge Government to make this a clear priority in the months ahead and in 2021.

What we are asking for in Budget 2021

1. The recent fund of €15m for ICT for disadvantaged students was very welcome. However, it will not be enough to ensure that all disadvantaged students can access it. Additional funding should be assigned to address the “Digital Divide” to ensure that people with disabilities and other disadvantages are not left behind during the pandemic.
2. We would also call on the telecoms regulator, COMREG, to explore the possibility of price caps for certain cohorts of users to address the costs associated with remote learning. We note that the UK’s energy regulator has three price caps in place for that market covering three different cohorts. We believe such an approach should be adopted in Ireland for people with disabilities.
3. Make the continued reopening of centres and day-services a clear priority for the winter months and for 2021.

4. Transport

We asked people to tell us their experience of using public transport, with the majority of people (77.6%) saying they take the bus, followed by the train (23.4%), and the third largest group indicated that they don’t use any public transport (22.7%).* Just over a fifth of people are using other means to get around, such as driving, walking, cycling, taxis, or they rely on lifts from a family member.

Despite the vast majority relying on public transport to get from A to B, over half indicated that they found public transport unreliable, and with just under half saying that it is easily accessible.

*Respondents could select more than one means of transport for this question.

The lack of accessible and frequent public transport in rural areas was also highlighted by survey participants, and how this in turn impacts on the person's independence and ability to get from A to B.

We also asked how much it cost weekly to travel to and from colleges or centres. Many said that there was no cost, as they have a travel pass - something they value highly. However, there was a significant difference in cost between those who live independently and those who do not. People who live independently were three times more likely to have high weekly transport costs.

Due to no bus service in my area, I'm relying on family and friends to bring me to all my appointments.



It's disgraceful that in this day and age I have to give three days' notice to use the train for the provision of ramps and lifts - even then there is no guarantee that the lifts or stations will be manned.



Due to the inaccessibility or unreliability of public transport, many persons with disabilities rely on family members to give them a lift to and from services, or they pay for taxis. This comes at a cost to persons with disabilities who have little income to spend on the cost of taxis. It also puts financial pressure and time restraints on family members who are relied upon for lifts.

This is sure to be exacerbated by the current Covid-19 restrictions on public transport. Many survey participants expressed their reservations about using public transport in general:

It may be harder to get a seat so you can't depend on it.



Finding it hard with my breathing and claustrophobic problems which bring on anxiety...



Many also indicated that they intend to use an alternative form of transport to get to their RehabCare or NLN centre, so as to avoid public transport. This has the potential to put further pressure on persons with disabilities and their family members.

There is no doubt that as long as Covid-19 persists, transport will be one of the main challenges facing people who wish to access disability services.

My family now take me to and from my centre and have to arrange work around my schedule.



With the reopening of centres, it is critical that the HSE and transport providers are provided with sufficient financial support from the Government to help break down these transport barriers for people using disability services, and that no-one is left behind. It is also critical that mobility allowance is finally re-opened to new applicants – a long-outstanding issue that is even more critical in the context of the pandemic.

What we are asking for in Budget 2021

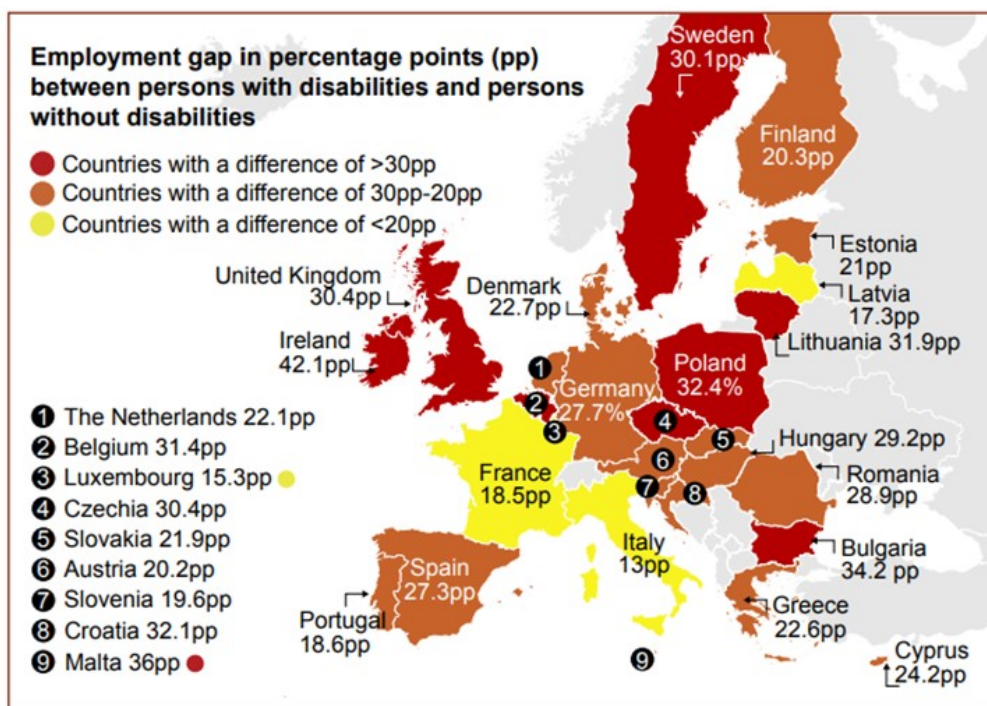
- 1. Development of reliable and accessible public transport in rural areas, and the implementation of disability friendly policies across all public transport in the state.**
- 2. Reintroduce the mobility allowance to all new applicants, particularly people with disabilities who are unable to use public transport for physical and/or mental health reasons during the Covid-19 restrictions.**
- 3. Address the need to run more buses at peak times to address over-crowding to ensure that persons with disabilities can reach their centres.**

Section II: Employment for People with Disabilities

One of the main divisions of the Rehab Group is a social enterprise called Rehab Enterprises (RE Ltd). Our mission is to provide sustainable employment for people with disabilities in commercial business units.

RE Ltd provides ISO Quality Assured Recycling, Logistics and Retail business solutions from 19 locations throughout Ireland (Dublin, Navan, Portlaoise, Galway, Limerick and Cork) and at Lodz, Poland. We provide a unique model of integrated employment for people with disabilities and employ some 300 people, of which about 50% are people with disabilities. This means we have one of the largest workforces for people with disabilities in Ireland.

However, Ireland itself is not doing well in terms of employment for people with disabilities. According to the latest comparative research, Ireland has the lowest rate of employment among people with disabilities of all European countries (32.3%). As evidenced in the graphic below, Ireland also has the highest employment gap between people with disabilities and the general population (42 percentage points).



Source: European Disability Forum - Human Rights Report 2020 quoting EU SILC

https://mcusercontent.com/865a5bbea1086c57a41cc876d/files/ad60807b-a923-4a7e-ac84-559c4a5212a8/EDF_HR_Report_final_tagged_interactive_v2_accessible.pdf

By any measure, this is an unacceptable position for Ireland to find itself in. And addressing this problem requires the support of every Government Department.

In the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020, Ireland has set itself the target of increasing the employment rate of people with a disability. However this target will not be met unless there is a sea-change in the approach of public authorities to employment supports for people with disabilities.

There are three key measures we would like to see taken in Budget 2020. Firstly, improve support under the Wage Subsidy Scheme for people with disabilities; secondly, improve public procurement opportunities for enterprises employing large number of people with disabilities; and thirdly, double the target for employment of people with disabilities in the public service to 6% - a key element of implementing the UNCRPD.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

The Wage Subsidy Scheme for people with disabilities (WSS) is crucial to sustaining employment opportunities. Indeed, we note that the Programme for Government makes a commitment to “fine-tune and expand targeted employment schemes such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme and the Ability Programme to help more people with disabilities stay in the workforce”.

RE Ltd has accessed the Department’s Wage Subsidy Scheme for people with disabilities for many years. Along with other employers, we have found this to be a vital support. It resolves two of the main concerns that employers have in relation to employing people with disabilities by recognising that a person may experience decreased work productivity and that they may require additional support to carry out their role.

The problem is, however, that the level of subsidy available to employers under the scheme has not increased since the last recession. This has very significantly undermined the sustainability of employing people under the scheme.

When it was first established, the Wage Subsidy Scheme’s link to the National Minimum Wage (NMW) was considered crucial to ensuring that people with disabilities were supported to get meaningful and gainful employment in the open labour market. Before its introduction, employment opportunities for people with disabilities focused very much on sheltered workshop, community employment and other sheltered occupational services. Any loss or diminution of the linkage between the Wage Subsidy Scheme and the National Minimum Wage reduces this recognition by the state of the contribution that people with disabilities can make to the open labour market with appropriate support. In practical

terms, it means that as the Minimum Wage rises and therefore labour costs rise, the level of support under the scheme stays the same. This means that there is an ever-increasing gap to be filled by the employer.

In the past few years, the level of the WSS has fallen out of alignment with the National Minimum Wage, due to it not being increased in line with NMW increases. In 2008, the subsidy was 61% of NMW and this has fallen to 52% today (2020 Minimum Wage is now at €10.10 per hour, Wage Subsidy Scheme still at €5.30 per hour). This drop may seem relatively small but it represents a huge challenge to social enterprises such as ourselves and to other employers of people with disabilities. If this continues, the scheme will become less and less attractive to companies considering employing people with disabilities. This is particularly important for people with disabilities in the context of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the huge increase in general unemployment.

We would strongly urge that the rate per hour for the Wage Subsidy Scheme for people with disabilities is increased in Budget 2021 to a level greater than 60% of the Minimum Wage.

Public Procurement

Article 20 of the EU Public Procurement Directive allows public procurers to reserve contracts to encourage the employment of people with disabilities and disadvantages. Article 20 was meant to herald a new dawn for employment opportunities for people with disabilities. However, Article 20 is simply not being used in Ireland. A survey of local authorities conducted by Rehab earlier this year found no evidence of use of the Directive since 2017.

From our operations in Scotland, we can see a very successful model of public procurement that has been an enormous success for people with disabilities. Under this model, the Scottish Government worked with the social enterprise sector to carve out areas of operation that could be served by enterprises that employed large numbers of people with disabilities. We would urge the Government to adopt a similar model in Ireland.

Unlike in Ireland, activity under Article 20 is legally required to be reported by public procurers in Scotland so that it can be tracked and targets set. Also unlike in Ireland, there is an explicit policy that every public body should have at least one contract with “a supported business” (a business where the workforce is made up of at least 30% people with disabilities/disadvantages), and private sector companies are encouraged to buy goods and services from them too.

There is no reason why the model in Scotland, with a similar population and economic profile to Ireland, cannot be adopted here. It would make a huge difference to the sustainability of disability-focussed social enterprises in Ireland and could provide thousands of additional job opportunities to people with disabilities.

What we are asking for in Budget 2021

- 1. Follow through on the commitments made in the Programme for Government in relation to the Wage Subsidy Scheme. Increase the rate per hour for the Wage Subsidy Scheme for people with disabilities in Budget 2021 to a level greater than 60% of the Minimum Wage.**
- 2. Change Public Procurement policies so that Ireland adopts the Scottish model of Public Procurement.**
- 3. Follow through on the commitment in the Programme for Government to double the target for employment of people with disabilities in the public service to 6% - another key element of implementing the UNCRPD.**

Section III: Social Care for People with Disabilities

For large disability service providers such as Rehab, and especially as a Section 39 organisation, the question of funding and our relationship with the HSE is paramount.

In Ireland, two-thirds of disability services are delivered by not-for-profits. In total, 35% of the entire disability budget is spent by Section 39 providers – so the State is heavily reliant on our sector to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

However, Section 39 providers face particular challenges associated with the funding model and how Budgets are set. These challenges were acknowledged in [the report examining the relationship between the voluntary sector and the state by Dr. Catherine Day](#), published in February 2019. That report set out a number of key recommendations on funding and relationships that we believe should be fully implemented.

Some of the key recommendations include:

1. Manage Deficits

The Departments of Health and Public Expenditure and Reform should undertake a review of the financial position of voluntary organisations that would include an analysis of surpluses/deficits over the last five years and the main drivers and put forward proposals for resolving any deficits identified.

2. Multi-annual budgets

There should be a move to multi-annual budgets for 3-5 years in duration to facilitate strategic service planning and reform of services.

3. Pay Full Cost of delivery of Services

Full cost prices for delivery of these services should be agreed centrally.

4. Set up a Forum and include voluntary sector

A Forum should be established to facilitate regular dialogue between the relevant State representatives and the voluntary sector to ensure their full involvement in future policy and strategic developments.

5. Mechanism for resolving disputes

An independent process should be put in place to resolve disputes (excluding the negotiation of budget allocations) between the HSE and voluntary organisations.

Another key issue is that many organisations are struggling to retain staff because of the differences in pay between Section 39 organisations and Section 38/HSE. These differences arise from the fact that Section 38 organisations and the HSE have gone through a process of pay restoration. The same process has only partially been completed for Section 39 organisations. Only fifty Section 39 organisations have received any funding for pay restoration, and even then, there is a significant shortfall as this funding does not include associated pension costs, the wages of some part-time staff and increases in employers PRSI. This means that Section 39 workers in identical roles are paid less. It is patently unfair.

The differences in pay also add to training, recruitment and agency staff costs as staff migrate to better positions elsewhere.

Most importantly, the higher attrition rates can lead to interruptions in key relationships people with disabilities enjoy with key-workers.

Finally, there is an issue with capital funding. At the moment, there is virtually no capital budget for the purchase and development of facilities to run day services and children's disability services. This means the state is very reliant on private providers to fund capital investment. This will cost the exchequer more in the long run than if the state were to provide the capital investment itself. In previous years, fundraising activity has allowed the Rehab Group to fund capital investment but Covid-19 has substantially impacted our ability to fund-raise making a state capital programme ever more important.

What we are asking for in Budget 2021

- 1. Implement in full all the recommendations of the Catherine Day Report.**
- 2. Provide for full pay parity for workers in Section 39 organisations - to include cost of pensions, all part-time staff and Employers' PRSI.**
- 3. Provide an adequate capital budget for day services and for children's disability services.**

Section IV: Training and Employment Support Opportunities for People with Disabilities

National Learning Network (NLN) is the training, education and employment access arm of Rehab Group. Each year National Learning Network provides personalised inclusive education programmes and supports to over 7,000 students across Rehabilitative Training, Specialist Training in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector and Inclusive Education Supports in a number of Higher Education organisations.

We support students with disability and those experiencing significant health challenges to access, stay engaged and progress in their lives and in their chosen fields of learning.

We work to remove barriers and to provide accommodations to ensure equity of opportunity for all students to participate in education and work.

Our challenge in 2021 relates primarily to the services we run in over 50 centres around the country which are funded by the Education and Training Boards (ETB) and the HSE.

Funding Model

For Budget 2021, we would like to see the Government make a commitment to improve funding to Specialist Training Providers and to review how the model of funding works.

At the moment, the funding model for these services is not fit for purpose.

The funding mechanism for these courses is based on an historic per capita fee for service basis: Funding is only paid when students attend. There is no funding guaranteed to cover on-going core costs.

In practice, the use of this per-capita-fee-for-service funding mechanism means that the provider is only paid when a student attends their programme/course. This funding system does not fully allow for the student profile we cater for where there is arguably a far greater likelihood of a break in participation. If a student has to discontinue attending for any reason, e.g.: due to disability complications, due to family circumstances, due to participation costs, due to an offer of employment, then the service provider does not get paid until the student returns or a new student starts. This causes fluctuations in demand which impacts negatively on the funding to the provider.

This funding mechanism fails to recognise that providers have large fixed costs in terms of staffing, infrastructure and transport which remain constant regardless of numbers attending or in-year fluctuations in demand.

This system of funding makes it exceptionally difficult to adequately plan services and to ensure sustainable provision to people who most need it.

In addition, the per capita fee for services system provided through the ETBs has not been increased since 2010 when it was reduced by 8% in line with public sector pay cuts. Indeed, no funding for pay restoration has ever been provided by Solas/ETBs.

Furthermore, the fee for Rehabilitative Training has also decreased as it has been subject to a number of cuts over the same period, and it is insufficient to cover the full core costs of service provision.

Capital Funding

There is currently no capital fund available to Specialist Training Providers such as National Learning Network through Solas/ETBs. (The HSE does provide some capital investment for school leaver services).

This leaves providers reliant on fundraising in order to invest in their infrastructure. Fundraising is significantly down due to Covid-19. This means that students who attend NLN, some of the most disadvantaged people in our Further and Higher Education system, are further disadvantaged.

Impact of Covid-19

These disadvantages are further pronounced in a year as turbulent as 2020 - indeed, our services have already been badly disrupted due to restrictions imposed by Covid-19 and continuity of services is under significant threat.

Students in National Learning Network have struggled throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to stay well and to stay engaged with more remote learning delivery methodologies. This is understandable given their particular needs and circumstances. We have worked really hard to ensure the wellness of all students and have gone to great lengths to deliver learning opportunities including loaning out equipment, providing one-to-one learning sessions, using Teams and providing 7-day week psychological supports.

As we have emphasised in early sections of this submission, quite a large number of students do not have access to the necessary ICT equipment to enable them to engage fully with revised blended delivery models necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

There is an urgent need to prioritise ICT funding for disabled and disadvantaged students attending National Learning Network to ensure that they are not left behind in the pandemic.

What we are asking for in Budget 2021

- 1. The model of funding for “Specialist Training Providers” is not fit for purpose. We are requesting extra funding to be set aside for the sector and for the funding mechanism to be reviewed to include core costs on a multi annual basis.**
- 2. Budget 2021 should set aside capital funding for better investment in the Specialist Training Provider sector.**
- 3. Investment in ICT is urgently required to facilitate blended delivery in the Covid period and to ensure that people with disabilities and other disadvantages are not left behind in the pandemic.**
- 4. Pay Restoration should commence for Solas/ETB funded services in line with other organisations providing services on behalf of the state.**

Who Are Rehab & What Do We Do?

The Rehab Group is the largest not for profit organisation in Ireland providing specialist services to persons with a disability and people who are at a disadvantage. We provide direct services to over 10,000 people including children and adults. We champion the values of diversity and inclusion for persons with a disability or disadvantage in their communities throughout Ireland.

Our mission is to help change the lives of the people we serve by helping them to become more independent and more included in their communities, by empowering them with the skills and confidence to be active in the workforce, and supporting them to be in charge of their health and wellness. The Rehab Group is comprised of RehabCare, National Learning Network and Rehab Enterprises. We specialise in residential, supported accommodation, respite and day services, home support services, further education and training and employment for individuals with a disability and people who are disadvantaged.

Funded by the HSE, RehabCare is the care division of the Rehab Group providing 52 residential/supported accommodation services, 70-day services including resource and outreach centres, 10 respite services for adults and children, and home support services to both children and adults across Ireland.

National Learning Network (NLN) is the education and training division of the Rehab Group specialising in individualised, person-centred training and education with a specific focus on persons with a disability. We support over 7,000 students each year, between the ages of 16 and 65 who have experienced a setback, an accident, a mental health issue, an illness, an injury or have a disability to progress to further education and training or employment. NLN is funded through the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and the HSE.

Rehab Enterprises provides sustainable employment for persons with a disability. It operates a unique integrated model of employment, where employees with disabilities work alongside employees without disabilities across a number of sectors. Our enterprises employ 300 people, approximately fifty per cent of whom have a disability.