

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS

Outline Sectoral Plan under the Disability Bill 2004

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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	7
Context	8
DSFA's Role in Meeting the Needs of People with Disabilities	10
Description of Schemes	11
Eligibility Conditions	12
Employment Supports for People with Disabilities	13
Claim Processing Times	15
Complaints Procedure	16
Financial Resources	17
Consultation with People with Disabilities	18
Access to Departmental Services	21
Role of Comhairle in Meeting with Needs of People with Disabilities	23
Appendix A	26
Appendix B	41

Preface by Minister for Social and Family Affairs

It is a great pleasure for me to publish the Outline Sectoral Plan of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. This Plan demonstrates our record and our ability in implementing policies that will make real changes in the lives of people with disabilities.

The Plan will ensure that the social welfare system responds effectively to the needs of people with disabilities. We will continue to utilise the consultative processes that we have established within the Department. This consultation enables us to pro-actively seek the views of people with disabilities who are customers of the department and helps us to enhance the services we provide for them.

One of the high level goals identified in our Statement of Strategy, 2003-2005 entitled "Promoting a Caring Society" focuses on improving access to education, training and labour market programmes specifically for people with disabilities.

The years ahead will I'm sure, present fresh challenges. I intend to meet those challenges with genuine commitment and energy and so ensure that the Department of Social and Family Affairs delivers on the goal of supporting people with disability which facilitates their full participation in society.

1 Introduction

This Sectoral Plan aims to ensure that the Departmental schemes and services which support people with disabilities do so in a manner which facilitates their full participation in society and which meets the mainstreaming principle of the equality agenda.

There has been considerable policy and institutional change in recent years in relation to services for people with disabilities with the aim of improving their quality of life. Disability continues to be a major issue from both a policy development and service delivery perspective.

2 Context

The current Mission Statement of the Department is “to promote a caring society through ensuring access to income support and related services, enabling active participation, promoting social inclusion and supporting families.” The Department’s current Statement of Strategy 2003-2005, under the title of “Promoting a Caring Society”, provides the framework for the Department to progress and develop its services to all our customers within that timeframe.

The provision of a range of income supports, comprising both social insurance (PRSI based) payments and social assistance (means-tested) payments has traditionally been the core business of the Department. That income support work impacts on the lives of almost every person in the State with over 938,000 people receiving weekly payments and about 1.7 million claims processed annually. People with disabilities comprise a significant portion of that volume.

The needs of people with disabilities are also recognised in moving the Department forward. One of the high level goals identified in the Statement of Strategy is to facilitate and improve access to education, training and labour market programmes for people with disabilities.

Under this objective, four tasks are outlined:—

- (a) to identify an appropriate range of options (including schemes already available through other Departments or Agencies) to assist people with disabilities who are in receipt of social welfare payments, to take up employment.
- (b) to review the application of rules for continuing entitlement to sickness and disability payments, to ensure that they are appropriate to the needs of customers in a changing labour market.

- (c) to pilot specific employment initiatives for people with disabilities, initially people in the 16-25 age group who qualify for long-term disability payments, and
- (d) to review the application of the Back-to-Work Allowance scheme and related supports to people with disabilities and bring forward proposals for any necessary changes.

3 DSFA's Role in Meeting the Needs of People with Disabilities

The following paragraphs set out a brief description of the range of Departmental schemes and services designed to meet the income support needs of people with disabilities. In each case, eligibility conditions which are provided for in law must be satisfied.

4 **Description of Schemes**

Social Insurance Payments

PRSI based weekly payments to people with disabilities include disability benefit, invalidity pension and occupational injury benefits. The occupational injuries benefit scheme applies to people who are injured or disabled in the course of their work and comprises four different elements, viz, injury benefit, disablement benefit, death benefit and costs of medical care.

Social Assistance Payments

Social assistance weekly payments are available to people with disabilities who satisfy a means test. They include disability allowance (formerly known as the disabled person's maintenance allowance), blind pension, supplementary welfare allowance and the blind welfare allowance administered by the Health Boards. Supplementary welfare allowance is administered by the Health Boards on behalf of the Department and is designed as a support scheme for those who have an immediate financial need and who do not qualify for any other social welfare payment. In addition to a basic weekly payment, the scheme also provides for additional payments to cover rent and mortgage supplements, special heating or dietary needs, exceptional needs payments and urgent needs payments. Supplementary welfare allowance may also be paid pending the determination of entitlement to other social welfare payments.

Further details of the range of both social insurance and social assistance payments is included in Appendix A.

Future Developments

The future development of income support schemes aimed at people with disabilities may involve not only annual improvements in the weekly rates of payment but also the development of new schemes and the broadening out of eligibility for existing schemes. Such developments are matters for consideration in a budgetary context having regard to commitments in Sustaining Progress and the Programme for Government.

5 Eligibility Conditions

Statutory contribution and other eligibility conditions apply to each of the income support schemes described above. In the case of the PRSI based payments, certain contribution conditions must be satisfied which require a minimum number of contributions paid since first entry into social insurance as well as a certain minimum number of contributions paid or credited in a recent contribution year or years. In addition, claimants must satisfy certain medical criteria which may require the submission of medical evidence of incapacity for work at the initial claim stage and on a regular basis during the claim. Claimants may also be requested to attend for medical examination by one of the Department's Medical Assessors.

In the case of the social assistance payments, claimants are required to undergo a means test which takes account of any income or assets which the claimant or his or her spouse may have. The family home is excluded for the purpose of the means test.

Further details of the statutory contribution and other conditions applicable to the social insurance and social assistance payments described above are set out in Appendix A.

6 Employment Supports for People with Disabilities

The principal supports available to people who are unemployed or who have a disability and who wish to return to the work force are the Back to Work Allowance and the Back to Education Allowance.

Back to Work Allowance Scheme

The Back to Work Allowance is a weekly Social Welfare payment available to people with a disability who are in receipt of certain disability payments. It is paid in addition to wages and provides financial help to people with a disability in returning to work. Persons in receipt of Disability Allowance, Blind Pension, Invalidity Pension for 15 months (or for 12 months if over 50 years of age) or Disability Benefit for 3 years who take up approved employment can, in addition to their wage, keep a percentage of their weekly Social Welfare payment for up to 3 years. The rate of the Allowance is 75% in year 1, 50% in year 2, and 25% in year 3. Secondary Benefits (for example rent allowance, medical card) may also continue to be paid subject to certain conditions.

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme

This scheme is similar to the Back to Work Allowance Scheme. It assists certain Social Welfare customers wishing to take up self employment. For example, persons in receipt of Disability Allowance, Blind Pension, Invalidity Pension for 12 months or Disability Benefit for 3 years, can take up self-employment which is approved, in advance, by the local Jobs Facilitator and, in addition to their earnings, keep a percentage of their weekly Social Welfare payment for up to 4 years. The rate of the Allowance is 100% in year 1, 75% in year 2, 50% in year 3, and 25% in year 4. In addition to this there are other financial supports available. Secondary Benefits may also continue to be paid subject to certain conditions.

Back To Education Allowance Scheme

This scheme assists certain Social Welfare customers, including people with disabilities, to return to full-time education. Persons aged 18 years or over and in

receipt of Blind Pension, Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension or Unemployability Supplement for at least 6 months can apply for the allowance for an approved second level course of study or after 15 months they can apply for an approved third level course. Persons in receipt of Disability Benefit for at least 3 years can apply for the allowance for an approved second or third level course of study.

The Allowance is paid instead of the normal Social Welfare payment. The rate of payment also brings people on reduced personal rate up to the maximum standard rate of their particular Social Welfare payment. The Allowance is not means tested. Secondary Benefits may also continue to be paid subject to certain conditions. Persons also receive Euro 254 at the beginning of each year they are on the scheme to help cover the cost of books etc;.

Future Developments

The extension in recent years of these employment support schemes to people with disabilities in receipt of certain social welfare payments has greatly assisted them in getting a foothold in the jobs market either directly or through improved educational attainment. The future development of these initiatives will continue to have regard to the employment needs of people with disabilities and the requirements of mainstreaming access to services for people with disabilities.

7 Claim Processing Times

In line with the Department's objectives as set out in its Statement of Strategy and in line with the overall SMI vision, the Department is committed to delivering income support and related services to the highest possible standards. In terms of impact on our customers, every effort is made to keep claim processing times to the absolute minimum in the knowledge that many of our customers are dependent on our services for their weekly income.

Accordingly, the Department has developed a series of standards for claim processing times and they have been published in the Department's Statement of Strategy 2003-2005. The standards are currently under review in the context of the development of a management information framework which is currently underway within the Department.

The current performance standards for all Departmental schemes is set out in Appendix B.

Future Developments

The development of performance standards are as relevant to the needs of people with disabilities as they are to all social welfare customers who depend for their financial needs on the Department. The performance standards are monitored on a monthly basis and will continue to be published in the Department's Annual Report.

8 Complaints Procedure

The services for which the Department is responsible provide essential supports to people, including people with disabilities, who have recourse to them. In that context, one of the guiding principles identified in the Department's Statement of Strategy is the recognition of the need for fairness and mutual respect through having an independent adjudication system for those who are dissatisfied with a decision made on their entitlements or the insurability of their employment.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office provides that independent system. Any person who is dissatisfied with the decision given in their case can appeal to that Office where their case will be dealt with by an Appeals Officer. In addition to catering for decisions given on statutory schemes and services for which the Department is responsible, the Social Welfare Appeals Office also includes a right of appeal in respect of certain decisions made by Health Boards in regard to Supplementary Welfare Allowances.

Future Developments

The operation of the current complaints and redress systems in the Department will continue to be kept under review so as to be in a position to respond to the needs of customers including people with disabilities.

9 Financial Resources

The financial resources required by the social insurance and social assistance payments aimed at people with disabilities is provided by way of the annual Departmental estimates process. In addition, where new schemes or improvements to existing schemes, such as increases in the weekly rates of payment, are announced in the Minister for Finance's Budget Statement, the necessary additional financial resources are provided in the revised post-budget annual estimates. The schemes and services aimed at people with disabilities are essentially demand led and, consequently, the issue of financial allocations becoming exhausted during the financial year does not arise.

Future Developments

Improvements in scheme services, including increases in weekly payments, are issues for determination by Government in a budgetary context. Every effort continues to be made by the Department to provide best estimates of likely demand for its disability targeted services with a view to providing Government with accurate financial forecasts.

10 Consultation with People with Disabilities

Two specific measures have been put in place for the purpose of consulting with and seeking the views of people with disabilities who are customers of the Department's services.

(1) Disability Consultative Forum

This forum comprises representatives of the principal disability organisations and service providers and meets on a quarterly basis. It acts as a channel to communicate the views of such organisations to the Department and also provides a mechanism to review and make recommendations which can influence policy formulation. In addition, the Forum reviews the operation and administration of income and employment support services delivered by the Department.

The Forum was established in October 1996 when responsibility for the Disabled Person's Maintenance Allowance was transferred to the Department and subsequently integrated into the Disability Allowance. Since 1996, a wide range of issues have been discussed within the Forum including—

- All arrangements with regard to the transfer of the DPMA scheme from the Health Boards to this Department.
- The delivery of income support services for people with disabilities and the implementation of improvements to schemes made via successive Social Welfare Acts.
- The delivery of information services in mediums which are accessible and user friendly for people with disabilities.
- The arrangements for the transfer of vocational and non vocational training and employment services from the National Rehabilitation Board to FAS and the Health Boards.
- Consultation on the introduction of the Back To Work Allowance and Back To Education Allowance schemes for people with disabilities.

- Consultation on the Department's policy/expenditure review on the operation and future direction of secondary benefits (i.e. Free Schemes).
- Updates on the Reach Project and electronic delivery of Government Services.
- Access to Departmental offices for people with disabilities.
- Progress reports on the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities.

As a result of this ongoing consultation initiative, the Department has gained a better appreciation of the issues faced by people with disabilities and their representative organisations. Over the period of the Forum, there have been significant improvements in the delivery of income support services to people with disabilities, in the manner in which information is disseminated through appropriate mediums for people with disabilities, and in the extent to which formal disability awareness training for Departmental staff has been introduced.

In addition, the Forum provided advice to the Department in the preparation of a recent customer satisfaction survey of Disability Allowance recipients. This survey elicited a response rate of 60% and overall indicated a very high level of customer satisfaction.

(2) Customer Panels

The Strategic Management Initiative identified a set of Quality Customer Service Principles for the customers and clients of the public service. In line with those principles, the Department is committed to providing a structured approach to meaningful consultation with and participation by our customers in relation to the development, delivery and review of services. Customer panels have proven to be an effective means through which social welfare customers of particular schemes have an opportunity to give their views on all aspects of the administration of their payments.

A national customer panel for recipients of disability payments was in operation from 1998 to 2000 based in the Longford Social Welfare Services Office. The work of this panel concluded in 2000 as it was considered that a more localised approach was desirable. Consequently, customer panels for recipients of disability payments are currently held in the Department's North East and South East Regions.

Among the range of issues discussed by the customer panel have been:

- the provision of information services including customer service booklets,
- the design of application forms and information leaflets,
- payment methods for people with disabilities,
- accessibility of public offices, and
- integration of services between Health Boards and this Department.

Similar to the Disability Consultative Forum, the primary benefit for the Department arising from this form of customer consultation has been a better appreciation of the issues faced by recipients of the various illness/disability payments. In addition, assistance has been provided in the design of application forms and information leaflets for people with disabilities, in improving payment methods and in addressing information deficits and take-up of income support schemes.

Future Direction

The Department is committed to fostering and developing a strong customer consultation ethos through mechanisms such as the Disability Consultative Forum and the disability payments customer panels. These initiatives will continue to provide the Department with a valuable insight into the views and concerns of our customers so that the vital income and other support services delivered by the Department can take account of those views.

11 Access to Departmental Services

Physical access to buildings

Access to Departmental buildings for people with disabilities, whether customers or staff, is kept under constant review in conjunction with the Office of Public Works which has primary responsibility in this area. A programme of office refurbishment, including disability access, is currently underway.

Future Developments

Developments in this area will be further enhanced by the requirements of the forthcoming Disability Bill which is due to be published shortly.

Assistance to visually impaired customers

A number of improvements have been introduced for visually impaired customers which centre on a communications medium that best suits the customers. A data bank of Blind Pension customers has been developed to indicate which medium suits best whether it be braille, audio cassette, e-mail, large print, telephone, etc. Applications for Blind Pension can now be accepted over the phone on a dedicated Lo Call phone number. The use of improvements in technology has been of particular benefit in overcoming the barriers to service access for people with disabilities.

Assistance to hearing impaired customers

A range of measures has been introduced with the aim of meeting the requirements of customers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Those include:—

- Funding has recently been provided to the National Adult Literacy Agency to engage a Development Worker who is evaluating all the Department's forms and leaflets to ensure that they meet the information requirements of all our customers, including those with special needs.

- A comprehensive range of training and awareness raising programmes has been developed to support staff who deal with the public and to date has been delivered to over 2,600 staff with a particular emphasis on deaf awareness.
- Staff who wish to pursue Sign Language training are supported and during 2003 42 members of staff availed of this opportunity.
- An initiative involving the use of video technology has been introduced to help people with hearing difficulties access our services. This facility is based in the Social Welfare Local Office in Cork and operates in co-operation with the Cork Association for the Deaf and the National Association of the Deaf.
- The Department's website, which is fully compliant with international disability standards, has a link to the National Association for Deaf People (Ireland) and we also have an e-mail address, **info@welfare.ie**, for social welfare enquiries.
- The installation of Counter Loop Systems is included as part of the planned upgrade of all of our Local Offices. Four Local Offices, Ballyfermot, Ballymun, Kilbarrack and Arklow, have so far been upgraded with the Counter Loop System.

In addition, Comhairle, which operates under the aegis of the Department, is committed to the delivery of fully accessible information, advice and advocacy services for all citizens. It continues to ensure that its information products and services are disability, poverty and equality proofed. Publications are currently available in a variety of formats and the production of information videos in Irish Sign Language is being pursued. Comhairle offices and the network of Citizens Information Centres around the country have portable loop systems installed.

Future Developments

The progress made in recent years in improving access to services by people who are visually or hearing impaired will continue to be developed as advances in technology permit.

12 Role of Comhairle in Meeting the Needs of People with Disabilities

Comhairle was established under the Comhairle Act 2000 and comes under the aegis of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The core function of Comhairle is to support the provision of, and where appropriate, provide directly to the public independent information, advice and advocacy services relating to social and civil services. It has a statutory commitment to assist and support people, particularly those with disabilities, in identifying and understanding their needs and options and in accessing their entitlements to social and civil services.

The range of services provided by Comhairle which are targeted at people with disabilities or otherwise have a disability orientation may be summarised as follows:—

- **Citizen's Information Centres** — Comhairle supports the country-wide network of Citizen's Information Centres (CICs) which provides information and advice on civil and social matters to the general public. Disability services are catered for by:—
 - CICs include disability information in the service they provide and many Centres have established links and working relationships with local disability organisations.
 - An access improvement scheme for CICs is in place and provides a budget targeted at improving physical and sensory access in CIC premises.
 - The Citizen's Information Call Centre is a LoCall based information service whose staff are geared, inter alia, to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.
 - The Mobile Vehicle Service operated by CIC staff provides outreach services to rural and isolated communities and has one of its three vehicles disability accessible since 2003.
- **Information Databases** — Comhairle is responsible for two important web based databases providing public service information. OASIS is a disability friendly public service information website designed for use by the

general public with a disability content. The Citizen's Information Database is designed for both information providers and the general public and also has a significant disability content.

- **Information Grants Schemes** — Comhairle administers an annual grants scheme which supports initiatives aimed at innovative developments designed to improve access to rights and entitlements. Disability oriented projects have been consistently funded since this grants scheme was established.
- **Assistive Technology** — Comhairle provides information on assistive technology services through two media: (i) the Disability Resource Centre located in North Great George's Street, Dublin, which provides limited information and advice on assistive technology products and which normally involves referral through health professionals; and (ii) Assist Ireland (fully operational in late 2004) which is an online resource and helpline accessible by telephone or internet and providing information on products, suppliers, entitlements, service providers and disability organisations.
- **Training Services** — Comhairle provides disability awareness and dedicated training for disability bodies as part of its central and regional training programmes.
- **Regional Information and Advocacy Grants** — each of Comhairle's five administrative regions funds local information and advocacy initiatives which include disability oriented projects.

Future Developments

Comhairle will continue to build on the significant progress it has made since it was established in 2000 having regard to the objectives articulated in its Strategic Plan 2003-2006 and the continued provision of appropriate resources to enable it to meet those objectives.

It is proposed to amend the functions of Comhairle, via a Comhairle (Amendment) Bill, so as to confer enhanced and additional functions on Comhairle involving, inter alia, the introduction of a personal advocacy service specifically aimed at people with disabilities. The Comhairle (Amendment) Bill, in conjunction with the Disability Bill, is a key element of the Government's legislative programme for improving services for people with disabilities.

Personal Advocacy Service

It is envisaged that the new personal advocacy service to be administered by Comhairle will provide for the assignment of a personal advocate to a person with a disability who is unable or who has difficulty in obtaining a social service without the assistance or support of the personal advocate. The main function of the personal advocate will be to assist, support and represent the person with a disability in applying for and obtaining a social service and also in pursuing any right of review or appeal in connection with that service.

Sign Language Interpretation Service

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs has power in the Comhairle Act, 2000 to request the Board of Comhairle to design schemes relating to social services in order to address needs identified by the Minister concerning such services. It is proposed, therefore, that the Minister will request Comhairle to prepare such a scheme relating to sign language interpretation services and to submit it for her approval.

Appendix A

Social Insurance Payments

1. DISABILITY BENEFIT

Disability Benefit

1.1 Disability Benefit (DB) is a PRSI based weekly payment payable to qualified insured people aged under 66 years who are unfit for work due to illness. This payment is administered by DSFA.

Contribution Conditions

1.2 To qualify, a person must have—

- at least 52 PRSI contributions paid since first starting work, and
- at least 39 contributions paid or credited (at least 13 of which must be paid) in the relevant tax year, or
- 26 weeks PRSI paid in the relevant income tax year and 26 weeks PRSI paid in the tax year immediately before the relevant income tax year.

Proof of Incapacity for Work

1.3 Medical certificates from the claimant's doctor confirming incapacity for work must be submitted on a regular basis (usually weekly) and claimants may also be requested to attend for medical examination by a Medical Assessor of the DSFA.

Duration of Payment

1.4 DB is paid on the basis of a 6-day week (Sundays are not included). Normally DB is not payable for the first 3 days of illness (known as “waiting days”). Where a person has less than 260 PRSI contributions paid (5 full years), DB is payable for a maximum period of 52 weeks. However, where at least 260 PRSI contributions have been paid since first starting work, DB can continue to be paid for as long as the person remains unfit for work and under age 66.

Rates of Payment

1.5 The rate of DB payable depends on the claimant's family size, circumstances and earnings. Payment is made up of a personal rate in respect of the claimant and additional increases in the case of qualified adults and qualified children. The current weekly rates of payment are — Personal Rate: €134.80; Increase for a qualified adult: €89.40; Increase for each qualified child: €16.80. Where a claimant's spouse or partner is not a qualified adult, increases in respect of qualified children are generally payable at half-rate, depending on the exact circumstances. However, where the spouse or partner earns over €300 there is no increase for a qualified child.

Where the claimant's average weekly earnings are below €150, the personal rate of DB and the increase in respect of a qualified adult are payable at reduced rates. Full-rate DB is payable where the claimant's average weekly earnings are €150 or over.

If a person is in receipt of a Widow/er's Pension, a One-Parent Family Payment or an analogous payment, then DB can be paid in addition for a period of up to 15 months. DB is paid at $\frac{1}{2}$ the personal rate in these circumstances and no increase in DB is payable in respect of qualified children. In addition, if a person is getting either Blind Pension or Orphan's Pension, then DB can also be paid in full for the duration of the illness.

Taxation of DB

1.6 Disability Benefit payments (excluding any increases for qualified children) are regarded as taxable income. However, DB payments for the first 36 days (6 weeks) in any tax year are exempt from tax.

2. INVALIDITY PENSION

Invalidity Pension

2.1 Invalidity Pension (IP) is payable to qualified insured people who are permanently incapable of work. This payment is administered by DSFA.

Contribution Conditions

2.2 To qualify, a person must have—

- at least 260 PRSI contributions paid since first starting work; and
- at least 48 contributions paid or credited in the last complete tax year before the claim is made.

Proof of Permanent Incapacity for Work

2.3 In order to be regarded as being permanently incapable of work, a person must have been incapable of work for at least one year and likely to remain so incapable for at least a further year. In most cases applicants would have been in receipt of DB prior to claiming IP. Where a person can show that they are likely to remain incapable of work for life, IP may be paid to persons who have been in receipt of DB for less than one year.

Duration of Payment

2.4 Invalidity Pension is payable for as long as a person remains permanently incapable of work. Payment ceases, however, if the person is awarded another social welfare pension, e.g. Old Age (Contributory), Retirement or Widow/er's (Contributory) Pension.

Rates of Payment

2.5 The rate of IP payable depends on the claimant's family size and circumstances. Payment is made up of a personal rate in respect of the claimant and additional increases in the case of qualified adults and qualified children. The current weekly rates of payment are — Personal Rate: €140.30 (under 65 years), €167.30 (65 and over); Increase for a qualified adult: €100.00 (under 66 years), €129.20 (66 and over); Increase for each qualified child: €19.30. Where a claimant's spouse or partner is not a qualified adult, any increases in respect of qualified children are generally payable at half-rate. Additional allowances of €7.70 and €6.40 respectively, are payable to Invalidity Pensioners who are living alone and pensioners aged 80 or over. An allowance of €12.70 is payable to Invalidity Pensioners who are living on certain offshore islands.

Taxation of IP

2.6 Income from Invalidity Pension is assessable for income tax purposes. However, if IP is the person's only income, it would be below the thresholds for the payment of income tax.

3. OCCUPATIONAL INJURY BENEFITS

3.1 The Occupational Injury Benefits (OIB) scheme is administered by DSFA and comprises a range of payments for people who are injured or disabled in the course of their work, or who contract an occupational disease, as follows—

- Injury Benefit;
- Disablement Benefit;
- Death Benefits;
- Cost of Medical Care.

Contribution Conditions for Occupational Injury Benefits

3.2 There are no contribution conditions applying to the OIB schemes. Once the accident or disease arises out of and in the course of employment which is insurable for OIB purposes, the person is covered for Occupational Injury Benefits. In addition, accidents which occur while a person is travelling directly to or from work are deemed to be occupational accidents.

3.3 Injury Benefit

3.3.1 This is a weekly payment payable to people who are unfit for work due to an accident at work or who have contracted a prescribed work-related disease.

Proof of Incapacity for Work

3.3.2 Medical certificates from the claimant's doctor confirming incapacity for work must be submitted on a regular basis and claimants may also be requested to attend for medical examination by a Medical Assessor of the DSFA.

Not all accidents at work result in immediate illness or disablement. In such cases, in order to protect future rights to benefit, a person can apply for a declaration that the accident happened at work.

Duration of Payment

3.3.3 As in the case of Disability Benefit, Injury Benefit is not normally paid for the first 3 days (known as "waiting days"). Payment can last for a maximum of 26 weeks from the date of the accident or the onset of the disease. People who are still incapable of work after 26 weeks may be entitled to Disability Benefit or, if they do not qualify for DB or IP and are permanently incapable of work, they may be entitled to Unemployability Supplement (see section 3.5 below).

Rates of Payment

3.3.4 The rates of Injury Benefit payable are the same as the rates of payment for Disability Benefit, including the increases for qualified adults and qualified children (as outlined in paragraph 1.5 above). Unlike Disability Benefit, the rates of Injury Benefit are not affected by the level of the claimant's earnings.

If a person is getting a Widow/er's Pension, a One-Parent Family Payment or other analogous payment, then Injury Benefit can be paid in addition. Injury Benefit is paid at $\frac{1}{2}$ the personal rate in these circumstances and no increase in Injury Benefit is payable in respect of child dependants.

If a person is getting either Blind Pension or Orphan's Pension, then Injury Benefit can also be paid in full for the duration of the illness or 26 weeks, whichever is the shorter.

Taxation of Injury Benefit

3.3.5 Injury Benefit is taxable on the same basis as Disability Benefit.

3.4 Disablement Benefit

3.4.1 Disablement Benefit is paid where an insured person suffers loss of physical or mental faculty as a result of an accident at work or through contracting a prescribed occupational disease. The level of the payment awarded depends on the degree of loss of faculty, which is medically assessed. Assessments of less than 20% are generally paid by way of a lump sum (known as a Disablement Gratuity) and assessments of 20% or more are paid by way of a pension (known as Disablement Pension). Disablement Benefit differs fundamentally from other social welfare income support payments in that it is not an income maintenance payment. Accordingly, Disablement Benefit can be paid in addition to other social welfare payments such as DB and IP and can also be paid where a person continues to work.

Loss of Faculty

3.4.2 All claimants for Disablement Benefit must be examined by a Medical Assessor to determine the degree of disablement. This medical assessment is specially designed to determine loss of faculty by comparing the client with a person of their own age and sex in normal health.

Even if the person is not immediately incapacitated as a result of the occupational accident or disease, claimants can safeguard their future right to Disablement

Benefit by notifying their employers about the accident or disease and by applying to the DSFA for a declaration that the accident or disease arose out of or in the course of employment.

Duration of Payment

3.4.3 If a person is unable to work as a result of the occupational accident or disease, then Injury Benefit should be claimed for the first 26 weeks. Disablement Benefit is not payable during this 26 week period. However, if a person continues to be unable to work following the occupational accident or disease, Disablement Benefit can be paid from the Friday after the 4th day subsequent to the accident or contraction of the prescribed disease.

Rates of Payment

3.4.4 Disablement assessments of less than 20% are normally paid by way of a lump sum Disablement Gratuity. Assessments of 20% or more are paid by way of a weekly or monthly Disablement Pension. The maximum Disablement Gratuity which is paid for life awards of 19%, is €11,610. Proportionate Disablement Gratuities are paid for assessments of between 1% and 18%. The maximum Disablement Pension, which is paid for awards of 100% is €165.90 a week. Proportionate Disablement Pensions are paid, in 10% bands, for assessments of between 20% and 90%. For life awards of between 10% and 19%, a Disablement Pension can be awarded in lieu of a Disablement Gratuity.

Increases in Disablement Pension

3.4.5 Increases in Disablement Pension can be paid in certain cases—

- If a Disablement Pensioner is permanently incapable of work and does not qualify for DB or IP, an Unemployability Supplement may be payable (see section 3.5 below).
- If an Unemployability Supplement is paid to a Disablement Pensioner, further increases may be paid in respect of a qualified adult and qualified children.
- If a Disablement Pensioner requires constant care and attention, a Constant Attendance Allowance may be payable (see section 3.6 below).

Taxation of Disablement Benefit

3.4.6 Disablement Gratuity payments are exempt from tax. However, income from Disablement Pension is fully taxable.

3.5 Unemployability Supplement

3.5.1 Unemployability Supplement (US) may be paid as an increase in Disablement Pension if a person is permanently incapable of work as a result of an occupational accident or disease and does not qualify for any other social welfare payment, such as Disability Benefit, Invalidity Pension or Disability Allowance.

Duration of Payment

3.5.2 Unemployability Supplement is payable from the date of qualification for Disablement Pension and continues for life, provided the person remains permanently incapable of work as a consequence of the occupational injury or disease.

Rates of Payment

3.5.3 The rate of payment for US is the same as for Disability Benefit (see paragraph 1.5 above). Where a person in receipt of US has qualified dependants, then the Disablement Benefit which that person is receiving, may be increased in respect of those dependants. The rates of increases for qualified adults and qualified children in this case are the same as those applying under the Disability Benefit scheme. In addition, an allowance of €7.70 a week is payable to a recipient of Unemployability Supplement who is living alone. An allowance of €12.70 is also payable to recipients of Unemployability Supplement who are living on certain offshore islands.

If a person is in receipt of a Widow/er's Pension, a One-Parent Family Payment or other analogous payment, then US can be paid in addition for a period of up to 15 months. US is paid at $\frac{1}{2}$ the personal rate in these circumstances and no increase is payable in respect of child dependants.

If a person is getting either Blind Pension or Orphan's Pension, then US can also be paid in full for the period of incapacity.

Taxation of US

3.5.4 Income from Unemployability Supplement payments is fully taxable.

3.6 Constant Attendance Allowance

3.6.1 Where the degree of disablement is assessed at between 50% and 100% and the person has been certified as being in need of constant care and attention, an increase in the weekly Disablement Pension, known as Constant Attendance Allowance, may be payable.

Duration of Payment

3.6.2 Constant Attendance Allowance continues to be paid for as long as the person requires constant care and attention. However, payment ceases for any period during which the claimant is an in-patient in a hospital or similar institution.

Rate of Payment

3.6.3 Constant Attendance Allowance is payable at a rate of €149.70 a week.

Taxation of Constant Attendance Allowance

3.6.4 Constant Attendance Allowance payments are taxable.

3.7 Death Benefits

3.7.1 If a person dies as a result of an accident at work or as a result of an occupational disease, Death Benefit may be payable to that person's dependants. In addition, Death Benefit may be paid, regardless of the cause of death, if a person was getting Disablement Pension assessed at 50% or more at the time of death. Death Benefits include Widow's, Widower's and Orphan's Pensions and a Funeral Grant. In addition, a Dependant Parent's Pension may be paid where a parent had been wholly or mainly maintained by the deceased. A Dependant Parent's Pension may be paid in respect of each parent and the rate of pension payable depends on whether the deceased was single or married.

Rates of Payment

3.7.2 The current weekly rate of Death Benefit Widow/er's Pension is €163.60 for those under 66 years and €171.70 for those aged 66 and over, €173.70 (from May 2004) for those aged 80 or over, with increases of €21.60 in respect of each qualified child. The maximum rate of Death Benefit Dependant Parent's Pension is €163.60 (€171.70 for those aged 66 or over) with a reduced pension of €74.30 payable depending on the circumstances. An additional €7.70 a week is paid where the pensioner is aged 66 or over and living alone. Recipients aged 66 or over and who live on certain off shore islands receive an additional payment of €12.70. The weekly rate of Death Benefit Orphan's Pension is €109.90. A Funeral Grant of €635.00 is payable in a lump sum towards the cost of funeral expenses.

Taxation of Death Benefits

3.7.3 Death Benefit Pensions for Widows, Widowers, Orphans and Dependant Parents are fully taxable. However, the funeral grant is not taxable.

3.8 Cost of Medical Care

People who are injured at work or who contract a prescribed occupational disease can claim the cost of certain expenses in respect of medical care and attention, which are not already covered by the Health Boards or under the Treatment Benefit Scheme operated by the DSFA. These expenses include costs incurred in visiting doctors and on prescriptions, the cost of certain medical appliances and certain dental and optical treatment.

Social Assistance Payments

4. DISABILITY ALLOWANCE (FORMERLY DPMA)

Disability Allowance

4.1 Disability Allowance (DA) is a means-tested payment which is administered by DSFA and paid to people between the ages of 16 and 66 years who, by virtue of a specified disability, are substantially disadvantaged in undertaking work which would otherwise be suitable, having regard to the person's age, experience and qualifications. A specified disability is defined in regulations to mean an injury, disease, congenital deformity or physical or mental illness or defect, which has continued or may be expected to continue for at least one year. Unlike other social welfare payments, entitlement to Disability Allowance can be affected by the person's residency in an institution. However, since August, 1999, existing recipients of Disability Allowance who are living at home and who move into residential settings are entitled to retain their DA payments.

Proof of Substantial Disablement in Undertaking Employment

4.2 This is normally done through the submission of medical reports from the claimant's doctor, with supporting consultants' reports, where necessary. The claimant may also be required to attend for a medical examination by a Medical Assessor of the DSFA.

Duration of Payment

4.3 Disability Allowance continues to be paid up to the age of 66 years, as long as the person continues to satisfy the qualifying conditions.

Rates of Payment

4.4 The rate of payment depends on the claimant's family size, circumstances and means. The current maximum rates of Disability Allowance are the same as the maximum weekly rates of Disability Benefit, outlined in paragraph 1.5 above. An additional allowance of €7.70 is payable to recipients of Disability Allowance who are living alone. An allowance of €12.70 is also payable to recipients of Disability Allowance who are living on certain offshore islands.

Taxation of DA

4.5 Disability Allowance is not taxable.

5. BLIND PENSION

Blind Pension

5.1 This is a means-tested pension which is administered by DSFA and payable to blind or partially sighted people who are 18 years and over and are so blind that they cannot perform work for which eyesight is essential or cannot continue in their ordinary occupation.

Proof of Blindness

5.2 Registration with the National Council for the Blind (NCBI) is usually accepted as satisfying the blindness condition. Where a person is not registered with the NCBI, they are required to submit a medical report from an ophthalmic surgeon.

Duration of Payment

5.3 Blind Pension continues to be paid for as long as the claimant satisfies the qualifying conditions. However, Blind Pension ceases if the person is awarded certain other social welfare pensions, e.g. Old Age (Contributory), Retirement or Invalidity Pension.

Rates of Payment

5.4 The rates of payment depend on the claimant's family size, circumstances and means. The current maximum personal rate is €134.80 in the case of a person under 66 years of age and €154.00 where the person is aged 66 and over. An increase of €89.40 is payable in respect of a qualified adult where the claimant

is under 66 years of age and €89.40 where the claimant is aged 66 or over. €16.80 is payable in respect of each qualified child. Where a claimant's spouse or partner is not a qualified adult, any increases in respect of qualified children are generally payable at half-rate. Additional allowances of €7.70 and €6.40, respectively are payable to Blind Pensioners who are living alone and pensioners aged 80 or over. An allowance of €12.70 is also payable to Blind Pensioners who live on certain offshore islands. A Blind Pensioner who has sufficient PRSI contributions may also be entitled to receive Disability Benefit, Unemployment Benefit, Maternity Benefit, Adoptive Benefit or Health and Safety Benefit in full in addition to their Blind Pension. In addition, a Blind Pensioner can receive Widow/er's and Orphan's Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension or One-Parent Family Payment in full in addition to their Blind Pension.

Taxation of Blind Pension

5.5 Blind Pension is fully taxable.

6. SUPPLEMENTARY WELFARE ALLOWANCE

Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA)

6.1 SWA is a means tested payment for people whose means are insufficient to meet their needs. This scheme, which is administered by the Health Boards on behalf of DSFA, provides income support for people who have an immediate financial need and who do not qualify for any other social welfare payments, or whose needs are not met by social welfare payments generally. SWA is not normally paid to persons in full-time employment, full-time education or who are directly involved in trade disputes. In addition to a basic weekly payment, there are also a number of additional payments covered under the SWA scheme, including—

- rent and mortgage supplements,
- supplements for special heating or dietary needs,
- exceptional needs payments,
- urgent needs payments.

The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance scheme also operates in parallel with the SWA scheme.

While not specifically targeted at people who are sick or people with disabilities, the SWA scheme nevertheless provides income support for those who are short-term ill and who do not qualify for DB or Invalidity Pension. In addition, SWA can be paid pending the payment of other social welfare payments, such as DB, IP, DA etc.

Proof of Illness

6.2 Medical certificates from the claimant's doctor confirming incapacity for work must be submitted on a regular basis to the Community Welfare Officer.

Duration of Payment

6.3 Payment of SWA can continue for as long as the claimant continues to fulfill the conditions.

Rates of Payment

6.4 The rates of payment depend on the claimant's family size, circumstances and means. The current maximum personal payment is €134.80 per week, with increases of €89.40 for a qualified adult and €16.80 for each qualified child.

Taxation of SWA

6.5 All payments under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, whether by way of basic SWA payments, rent and mortgage supplements, exceptional needs payments etc., are not subject to income tax.

7. INFECTIOUS DISEASES MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE

7.1 The Infectious Diseases Maintenance Allowance (IDMA) is a means-tested payment which is available from the Health Boards for people aged 16 years and over and who are unable to make reasonable and proper provision for their own maintenance or the maintenance of their dependants because they are undergoing treatment for a specified infectious disease.

Proof of Infectious Disease

7.2 Notification from the claimant's doctor confirming that the claimant has a specified infectious disease is required.

Duration of Payment

7.3 The Infectious Diseases Maintenance Allowance continues to be paid for as long as claimants are undergoing treatment to the satisfaction of the Health Board and are thereby prevented from making reasonable and proper provision for their own maintenance and the maintenance of their dependants. It is also available to carriers of infectious diseases who, through taking precautions against the spread of infection, are rendered incapable of carrying out their ordinary occupation and are therefore, unable to make reasonable and proper provision for their own maintenance and the maintenance of their dependants. However, this Allowance ceases if the person is awarded another social welfare payment, e.g. Old Age Pension at 66 years of age.

Rates of Payment

7.4 The rate of payment of the IDMA depends on the claimant's family size, circumstances, means and whether the claimant or the spouse is receiving inpatient services. The current maximum personal rate is €134.80, with an increase of €90.00 paid in respect of a qualified adult and €16.80 in respect of each qualified child under 16 years. €52.40 is paid in respect of a dependant (other than a spouse) aged 16 and over. Additional increases may be paid in certain cases where a helper is employed to take care of dependants or towards housing costs.

Taxation of Infectious Diseases Maintenance Allowance

7.5 The Infectious Diseases Maintenance Allowance is fully taxable.

8. BLIND WELFARE ALLOWANCE

8.1 This is a means-tested payment available from the Health Boards to provide supplementary financial support to unemployed blind or visually impaired persons aged 16 years and over receiving certain social welfare payments, e.g. Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Blind Pension, Old Age (Non-Contributory) Pension or Disability Benefit or an equivalent payment from another country. The Health Boards operate this scheme in conjunction with the National Council for the Blind of Ireland. The allowance is not paid to people in full-time residential care.

Proof of Blindness

8.2 Registration with the National Council for the Blind is usually accepted as satisfying the blindness condition. Where a person is not registered with the National Council for the Blind, they are required to submit a medical report from an ophthalmic surgeon.

Duration of Payment

8.3 The Blind Welfare Allowance continues for as long as the claimant satisfies the qualifying conditions.

Rates of Payment

8.4 The rate of allowance depends on the claimant's family size, circumstances and means. A supplementary allowance of €5.00 a week is payable in addition to Disability Allowance to blind people over 16 years and under 18 years in respect of a qualified adult, while €3.90 a week is payable in respect of each qualified child. A supplementary allowance of €41.90 a week is payable in addition to a Blind Pension, Disability Benefit, Invalidity Pension, Disability Allowance etc., in the case of a blind pensioner aged 18 and over, €83.80 is payable in the case of a blind couple and €4.40 is payable in respect of each qualified child.

Taxation of Blind Welfare Allowance

8.5 The Blind Welfare Allowance is fully taxable.

9. SPENDING ALLOWANCE FOR PERSONS IN LONG-STAY INSTITUTIONS

9.1 This is a means-tested payment, which is made on a discretionary basis, to provide basic spending money for disabled people who are not eligible for Disability Allowance and are in Health Board run long-stay institutions (e.g. residential accommodation). This spending allowance meets the cost of basic necessities such as newspapers, toiletries, sweets etc.

Proof of Disablement

9.2 No specific proof of disablement is required, but permanent residence in the long-term care institution determines eligibility.

Duration of Payment

9.3 The payment continues for as long as the person remains in residential care and has no other source of income.

Rates of Payment

9.4 The current rate of payment is €23.00 per week.

Taxation of Allowance

9.5 This allowance is not taxable.

Payments made in Other Long-Stay Institutions

9.6 Discretionary payments are also available to certain residents of other long-term institutions. However, the level and frequency of these payments can vary.

Appendix B

Current Organisational Targets

Activity	Standards	
New Claims Context	Clearance Time (1)	Volume
Old Age Contributory Pension	55% in 6 weeks	14,000
Retirement Pension	80% in 5 weeks	14,000
Widow/ers Contributory Pension	80% in 5 weeks	8,500
Old Age Non-Contributory Pension	65% in 8 weeks	11,500
Blind Pension	65% in 8 weeks	220
Widow(er) Non-Contributory Pension	75% in 8 weeks	1,300
One-Parent Family Payment (Widow)	75% in 8 weeks	600
One-Parent Family Payment (Unmarried)	55% in 8 weeks	13,560
One-Parent Family Payment (Separated Spouse)	65% in 13 weeks	6,440
Carers Allowance	80% in 8 weeks	6,000
Free Electricity/Gas Allowance	70% in 7 weeks	39,000
Free Telephone Allowance	70% in 7 weeks	49,000
Free Travel — new pass	90% in 4 weeks	16,000
Free Travel — replacement pass	90% in 2 weeks	10,000
Unemployment Benefit	85% in 2 weeks	120,000
Unemployment Assistance	70% in 2 weeks	120,000
Disability Benefit	90% in 1 week	200,000
Occupational Injury Benefit	80% in 4 weeks	18,000
Treatment Benefit(2)	90% in 2 weeks	684,000
Child Benefit	90% in 1 week	168,000
Maternity Benefit (before commencement of Benefit period)	80% —	28,000
Family Income Supplement	70% in 3 weeks	18,000
Invalidity Pension	70% in 9 weeks	7,500
Disability Allowance	70% in 9 weeks	12,000

Activity	Standards	
New Claims Context	Clearance Time (1)	Volume
Telephone Service Replies to Public Representatives Issue of Contribution Records to members of public Customer Satisfaction	90% of calls to be answered within 10 seconds 80% within 3 working weeks 60% in 5 days 90% overall satisfaction with service delivery	
Arrears PSO Longford	80% within 3 weeks of claim being put in payment 80% within 3 weeks of claim being put in payment	54,000 24,000

Notes

- (1) Clearance time means the elapsed time from date of receipt of claim to date of decision.
- (2) This relates to all optical claims and 40% of dental claims where pre-treatment claims are submitted.
- (3) Volume context relates to annual claim volume.