



## **Adapted Physical Activity – The Situation in Ireland**



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# **1. Introduction to Ireland**

## **Regions of Ireland**

Ireland is an island located along the western face of the European Union. It is divided into provinces, of which there are four: Connaught, Leinster, Munster and Ulster. These are further sub-divided into counties, thus giving Ireland a total of thirty-two counties. Historically, Ireland was colonized by the British therefore the island itself is split in two. Twenty-six of the aforementioned counties comprise the Republic of Ireland while the remaining six counties account for Northern Ireland.

The country has a total area of 70,282sq.km and a coastline of 3,172sq.km.

Ireland has a temperate maritime climate

## **Population and Distribution of the population**

According to the Census 2006, a total of 4,239,848 people reside in the Republic of Ireland. Dublin, its capital, has 1,187,176 inhabitants. Dublin is situated in the province of Leinster. The population in each of the provinces differs quite significantly. Connaught has a population of 504,121, Leinster has a population of 2,295,123, Munster has a population of 1,173,30 and Ulster (results are from the counties in the Republic) has a population of 267,264. Limerick city and county, home of the University of Limerick, has a population of 184,055.

88.4% of Irish inhabitants are Roman Catholic, 3% Church of Ireland, 1.6% other

Christian, 1.5% other, 2% unspecified, and 3.5% claim not follow any religious order.

### **Situation of persons with disabilities in the country**

There are a total of 393,785 people with disabilities in the Republic of Ireland. This accounts for 9.3% of the total population (Census, 2006).

Only some of the findings of the 2006 Census have been published to date. Volume 11, which is concerned with disability, careers and voluntary activities, will be published on November 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. It is anticipated that this will convey a more comprehensive analysis of disability in the Republic of Ireland. The chart below is the most recent data on the statistical breakdown of the disabled population.

### **Persons, Male and Females with a Disability Classified by Age Group and Percentage Disabled, Census 2002.**

Age Group	Males	Females	Total Per sons	% of Relevant Age Group		
				Males	Females	Total Per sons
0-4 years	1,107	922	2,029	0.8	0.7	0.7
5-9 Years	4,536	2,481	7,017	3.3	1.9	2.7
10-14 years	5,284	2,981	8,265	3.6	2.1	2.9
15-19 years	5,029	3,806	8,835	3.1	2.5	2.8
20-24 years	6,022	4,868	10,890	3.6	3	3.3
25-29 years	6,110	5,332	11,442	3.9	3.4	3.7
30-34 years	6,569	7,010	13,579	4.3	4.6	4.5
35-39 years	7,505	8,173	15,678	5.2	5.6	5.4
40-44 years	8,624	8,887	17,511	6.4	6.5	6.4
45-49 years	9,841	9,855	19,696	7.9	7.9	7.9
50-54 years	12,211	11,076	23,287	10.5	9.7	10.1
55-59 years	13,475	11,592	25,067	13.5	11.9	12.7

60-64 years	13,720	10,995	24,715	17.7	14.3	16
65-69 years	11,948	11,569	23,517	18.3	17	17.6
70-74 years	11,554	14,587	26,141	22.3	24.1	23.3
75-79 years	11,547	18,741	30,288	30.9	35.7	33.7
80-84 years	9,337	18,510	27,847	41.9	50.6	47.3
85 years and over	7,387	20,516	27,903	59.2	70.2	66.9
Total	151,806	171,901	323,707	7.8	8.7	8.3

(National Statistics Office)

Limited information is available on the breakdown of different types of disabilities in Ireland and to date only estimates are available. Registers for service planning and treatment records are used to provide details regarding disability types. This is not the ideal situation as only those who attend the treatments are recorded on file.

The National Intellectual Disability Database recorded in 2004 that 25,416 people were registered in having a intellectual disability. The rate of mild intellectual disability is 2.30 per 1,000 with moderate, severe and profound intellectual disability being 3.75 per 1,000. The second annual report of the National Physical and Sensory Disability Database (2006) details 22,429 registrants. Physical disability was claimed by 70% of these people, 6.9% reporting hearing loss/deafness, 5.6% reporting visual disability, 1.4% reporting primary speech and language disability and over 7% reporting a combination of disabilities.

Often people with disability are less like to participate in sport as there are various restricting factors in their way, some of these restrictions are:

- Non-available transport services

- Accessibility issues
- Poor financial assistance
- Lack of public services
- Insufficient specialists supports and service
- Inadequate education and training

The first National Disability Survey took place in 2006 but the results of this survey have not been released. Hopefully these results will provide us with a more detailed analysis of the status of disability in Ireland.

### **Target Groups for APA**

Adapted physical activity is an issue that does not solely refer to physical educators or sport scientists. It impacts on other areas such as health and rehabilitation. An interdisciplinary approach needed to be adopted. Various professions are heavily involved with the broader picture of APA. The professions involved are Dietician, Occupational Therapist, Physiatrist, Physical Therapist, Prosthetist, Psychologist, Recreational Therapist, Rehabilitation Nurse, Social Worker and Vocational Counselor. Jakeman & MacDonnacha, two lecturers in the University of Limerick identified the following as target groups for APA in the Republic of Ireland:

1. Neuromuscular disorders – Cerebral palsy, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, M.S., rheumatoid arthritis
2. Chronic obstructive pulmonary Disease – Asthma, exercise induced asthma, bronchitis, cystic fibrosis
3. Physical impairments – Cerebral palsy, spina bifida, amputation, spinal cord injuries, body mechanics

4. Cognitive/sensory impairments – learning disabilities, mental illness, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, hearing impairment
5. Metabolic disorders – obesity, diabetes
6. Ageing – Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s disease, Osteoarthritis, Osteoporosis
7. Psycho-social – eating disorders
8. Cardiac conditions.

### **Elite Sports and APA**

*“Sport’s value in promoting health, physical strength, endurance, social integration and psychological well-being is of little doubt. It is not difficult to understand why sport is important for the well-being of people both with, and without, a disability”*

Chawla (1994) cited by [www.ibsports.ie](http://www.ibsports.ie) 18/08/07



## **Paralympic Council of Ireland**

The Paralympic Council of Ireland was founded in 1987. Its foundation at the time was as a committee for the Seoul Paralympics in 1988, and from this then developed into the national representative organisation. The PCI now sanction many

events throughout Ireland, some of these are:

- Paralympic Games (multi sport / multi disability)
- World Championships (sport specific / multi disability)
- European Championships (sport specific / multi disability)
- National contact for all information from International Paralympic Committee (IPC), European Paralympic Committee (EPC) and all Sports Sections within IPC & EPC
- National contact for all multi disability International Sport Specific events.

[www.pcireland.ie](http://www.pcireland.ie)

There are many associations working closely with the Paralympics Council.

Membership of PCI includes

- Organisations that are disability specific but multi sport
  - Irish Wheelchair Association – Sport
  - Cerebral Palsy Sport Ireland
  - Irish Blind Sports
- Organisations that are mainstream sport specific but include multi disabilities

Cycling Ireland

Equestrian Federation of Ireland

Irish Sailing Association

Shooting Sports Association of Ireland

Tennis Ireland

Irish Amateur Rowing Union



## **Irish Wheelchair Association**

The Irish Wheelchair Association is the National Governing body for wheelchair sport in Ireland. Their policy is to “to develop and promote opportunities for people with physical disabilities to participate in sport at a level of their choice. We encourage everyone to participate regardless of age ability or disability.”

The IWA has been based in heir sports centre since 1981. The Oliver Murphy sports and recreation centre is the National Sporting Headquarters for the Irish Wheelchair Association Sport. It is a state of the art facility which provides fully accessible sporting facilities and this in turn help to promote participation in physical activity.

## **Cerebral Palsy Sport Ireland**

Cerebral Palsy Sports Ireland is the National Governing Body for people with Cerebral palsy and sport. CPSI works closely in coordination with the PCI. The main sports training is organized at the enable Ireland premises in South Dublin. They also have various other venues throughout. The CPSI trains team to compete all the way up to

international level. The sports that they are mainly involved with are:

- Athletics
- Swimming
- Boccia.



### **Irish Blind Sports**

Irish Blind Sports is the National governing Body responsible for organising sporting events for people who are blind or are visually impaired. The organizations mission statement is “To enable all blind and visually impaired people in Ireland to participate fully in organized sport or recreation.” The organisation focuses on increasing levels of sport participation with people who are blind or visually impaired. They believe that it will increase their quality of life through being part of a health enjoyable sporting sociable event. The sports that the IBS works with are:

- Angling
- Athletics
- Chess
- Equestrainism
- Football
- Goalball
- Golf

- Judo
- Snow-skiing
- Swimming
- Tandem Cycling
- Tenpin Bowling
- Walking
- Water-skiing



### **Irish Deaf Sports Association**

The Irish Deaf Sports Association is the National Governing Body responsible for organising sports for those who are deaf or have a hearing impairment. The IDSA was founded in 1968. The focus of the IDSA is based around their belief that “through recreational opportunities, sports training, and competition, deaf and hard of hearing people can benefit physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually in an environment of equality, mutual respect, and acceptance.” ([www.irishdeafsports.net](http://www.irishdeafsports.net))

The aims and objectives of the IDSA are outlined below:

- To be the main voice of Deaf sport in Ireland
- To show that sport is for everyone and is a right not a privilege, for Deaf people.

- To influence providers to include sport in all Deaf grassroots to excellence sports development plans.
- To campaign for increased sporting choices and opportunities for Deaf people.
- To expand sporting opportunities for Deaf people and actively increase the number of Deaf people involved in sport.
- To increase the effectiveness of Deaf sport structures
- To provide professional service in sport for Deaf people

([www.irishdeafsports.net](http://www.irishdeafsports.net))

The Irish Deaf Sports Association offers the following sports,

- Badminton
- Ladies Basketball
- Mens Football
- Ladies Football
- Waterpolo
- Swimming



## Special Olympics Ireland

The Special Olympics are the National Governing Body responsible for creating sporting opportunities for those with intellectual disabilities. The Special Olympics were founded in 1978. They offer a year round sports training and competition programme for children and adults. They offer a wide variety of Olympic type sports. The participant can participate at their own level in each of the sport. Each year over 6,000 volunteers are needed to run local Special Olympic programmes. The official sports that the Special Olympics offer are:

Alpine Skiing	Athletics	Aquatics
Badminton	Basketball	Bocce
Bowling	Equestrian	Football
Golf	Gymnastics	Table Tennis

The sports that they are currently developing but do not have at a competitive level yet are:

Cycling	Tennis	Kayaking
Pitch and Putt		

The Special Olympics were held in Ireland in 2003. It was the first time that the Special Olympics were held outside of Ireland. Ireland adopted a host town programme which created a huge awareness and education about the Special Olympics throughout Ireland. Over 30,000 people were needed as volunteers and many more applied for the positions. It was a huge boost in Ireland's general awareness and brought about greater participation of those with an intellectual disability.

## **2. Education and Professional Development Opportunities in APA**

Currently there are no full time courses in Ireland specifically in Adapted Physical Activity. Some third level educational institutions do however provide modules of APA as part of their courses.

### **Third Level Education**

University of Limerick (UL)- The physical education degree programme here contains two modules of APA both of which are mandatory. The first is completed in the third year of study and it incorporates the following:

- An introduction to integration and Adapted Physical Activity (APA).
- An overview of the terminology, definition, history aims and objectives of the APA movement.
- A synopsis of Irish legislation in relation to disability.
- An overview of the various categories of disabilities together with the aetiology and incidence of disabilities.
- The issue of integration and inclusion in schools and the community.

- The programming, principles, content and implementation of adapted physical activity.
- The implications for public facilities adaptations for disabled individuals.
- The area of sport and disability.
- The physiological aspects of growth, posture and development in the normal child.
- The effects of injury, injury rehabilitation and the role of exercise in rehabilitation.

The second module of APA does not entirely consist of APA. Instead, APA simply accounts for the practical aspect of a module entitled “Pedagogy, Exercise and Children’s Health”. The aims of this practical element are as follows:

- To understand how APA programmes, organisations and resources are managed.
- To create an adapted physical activity programme and implement it for different disabilities in visits to schools and centres, which cater for individuals with disabilities.

The University of Limerick are currently producing a teacher support package in APA for use in second level schools by qualified physical education teachers. In addition, the staff of the Physical Education and Sport Science (PESS) department is continuously involved in research relating to people with disabilities. UL is also a partner university in the Erasmus Mundus Masters in Adapted Physical Activity and is a member of the Thematic Network and Social Integration of Persons with a Disability through Adapted Physical Activity (THENAPA) and thus this university has very strong links with the development of APA.

Dublin College University (DCU)-In its Sports Science degree programme, DCU provides two modules associated with APA. The first of these modules is completed in the first year of study. This aims to introduce students to the area of inclusiveness and adaptation within physical activity for people with disabilities. Some of the areas covered by this module include:

- International terminology, definitions and objectives of the adapted physical activity movement.
- The structure of disability sport in Ireland at local, regional and national levels.
- The differences among and between the different models of disability.
- Societal attitudes toward people with disabilities participating in sport.

The second module of APA is completed in the third year of study. The aim of this module is to prepare students for working in the physical activity domain with people who have disabilities. Areas covered by this module include:

- The philosophical aspects of APA together with the issues and legislation affecting the lives of people with disabilities in Ireland.
- The aetiology of different conditions and their implications for planning, implementing and evaluating physical activity opportunities for people with disabilities.
- The primary policy documents relating to people with disabilities in physical activity.
- Hands-on work experience with people with disabilities in a physical activity setting.

Institute of Technology Tralee- Students of the honours level Health, Fitness and Leisure Studies course must complete one module of APA as a mandatory component of their course. A second module of APA is offered as an elective module at a later stage of the course. The institute has formed links with local sport clubs as well as national and international centres where students gain practical experience.

Waterford Institute of Technology- This third level educational institution provides APA modules for the students of the ordinary degree in Recreation and Leisure. They take these modules in their 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> semesters. The honours degree in Exercise and Health Studies also contains APA in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years of study.

Inchicore College of Further Education- This has a course in “Leisure and Disability Studies”. It should be noted however that this course is simply an intermediate course that links students from second level education to third level education.

New courses in physical education have been introduced in University College Cork (UCC) and in Dublin University College (DCU). However since these courses are only entering their second year, no course outline exists for the four-year duration of these courses. To date, neither of these courses provided APA modules though it is anticipated that in their third and fourth years, some APA elements will be incorporated.

Despite all these modules of APA, the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI) reported that 73% of its members received no whatsoever in APA in their training. 27% however indicated that APA was a component of their undergraduate training. Clearly

APA needs to be developed more so that professionals are equipped to cater for individuals with disabilities in their work.

### **National Coaching and Training Centre (NCTC)**

The NCTC is a national sporting institution that works in partnership with the national governing bodies (NGBs) of the various sports in Ireland. Its primary function is to develop coaching strategies for the country's elite athletes. It also however has created the national coaching development programme (NCDP), which is concerned with coaching all athletes, regardless of ability. This specifically encourages the integration of disabled persons into sport by teaching coaches how to adapt their training methodologies to accommodate participants with disabilities.

The NCTC together with disability organisations also encourages the NGBs in sport, to provide a structure within their own organisations that caters for people with disabilities. This therefore provides those with disabilities with opportunities to engage in regular sport as well as disability sport.

### **Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI)**

This association consists of physical education teachers whose primary objective is to improve standards within physical education. To achieve this, the PEA I provides its members with opportunities and material for professional growth through the exchange of information and knowledge in relating fields of physical education including APA.

A survey completed by the members of PEA I in 1990 revealed that only 27% had been

offered a module of APA at undergraduate level. This therefore indicates a lack of training among physical education teachers in regard to APA. Furthermore over half of the respondents felt unqualified to teach physical education to students with disabilities.

### **In-service training of physical education teachers**

Throughout the academic year, physical educators have the opportunity to engage in in-service training. This involves one or two day workshops whereby knowledge and skills are developed in a thematic manner. Adapted physical activity is one of many themes. In this way physical education teachers are given the opportunity to engage in professional development.

### **Local Sports Partnerships**

Local sports partnerships are evident in every county in Ireland. These organisations are specifically designed to improve the participation of sports in each county. Though each partnership is different many of them provide similar programmes and initiatives. Many for example, give presentations to local coaches regarding the inclusion of those with disabilities in their sports. This is one method that coaching personnel can develop professionally in relation to APA

## **3. Financing of Adapted Physical Activity**

Sporting organisations which represented disabled people have struggled to provide services due to lack of funding. The organisations have often been completely reliant on fundraising campaigns. Recently there have been greater advances in funding

towards voluntary bodies from the state and the Irish sports council.

In the 2004 budget a disability package was announced for 900 million euro. This package was created as a 5 year development scheme.

In the 2007 Budget further advances in financing were achieved.

- An extension of entitlement to the full rate of Disability Allowance to all persons resident in institutions from January 2007.
- An increase in the amount of capital disregarded from the means test for Disability Allowance from €20,000 to €50,000 from June 2007.
- Additional funds for Comhairle for the development of personal advocacy service for persons with disability and for the implementation of the Disability Sectoral Plan.

These measures will cost €16.48 million in 2007

- The provision of additional residential, respite and day places, as well as an expansion in home support and personal assistance.
- The appointment of extra front-line staff to enhance the level and range of multi-disciplinary support services available to adults and children with intellectual, physical and sensory disabilities and those with autism, with a priority on enhancing the assessment and support services for children with disabilities in order to underpin the commencement of Part 2 of the Disability Act 2005 from 1 June 2007.

These measures will cost an estimated €75m in 2007.

People with disabilities frequently incur greater costs for sport participation. Spons

orship of major companies has helped to give further financial support to these sporting organisations.

The Irish Paralympic Council of Ireland received 270 million euro for High performance funding in 2006. This was to help support the development of the Irish Paralympic team travelling to Beijing in 2008.

More recently the Paralympic Council of Ireland has received a significant boost as it prepares for the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Paralympic Games having agreed its first major sponsorship deal while also securing investment of €478,000 from the Irish Sports Council.

The sponsorship deal with O'Neills provides significant in-kind support to the Irish team and has taken care of what is ordinarily a big financial and logistical burden for the PCI. It is hugely significant in that it will provide athletes with specially designed competition clothing well in advance of the Games in 2008 and 2012.

Special Olympics Ireland received a once off allocation of 2 million euro in the 2007 Budget to support the organisation's running costs and to maintain the organisation's valuable work.

Special Olympics Ireland launched their fundraising campaign of Support an Athlete-Share the Feeling in January 2007. This campaign has been successful in supporting the organisation reach their goal of raising 5 million in 2007 to support the existing programme.

The Irish Sports Council allocated 9.5 million in grants to 58 Governing Bodies of

Sport in Ireland in January 2007. The following is a breakdown of that grant and the organisations which represent disabled people.

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Amount in euro:</b>
Special Olympics Ireland	917,000
Irish Blind Sports	43,133
Irish Deaf Sports Association	63,350
Cerebral Palsy Sport Ireland	63,450
Irish Wheelchair Association	281,030

#### **4. Organisation of APA**

Ireland has structured, developed and implemented its Governmental legislation and regulations for people with disabilities within the last twenty years. These regulations brought about the change in various obstacles facing those with disabilities. Through the creation of these Acts areas such as education, employment, training, housing and public building standards and public services became more accessible to people with disabilities.

##### **Disability Act, 2005**

The disability act created a greater awareness and positive attitude towards people with a disability. This act supports the provision of disability specific services, the access of public services to those with disabilities and requires public employers to take positive

steps to employ people with disabilities. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005 created this Act to establish a statutory basis for the following:

- Assessment of health and education needs of people with disabilities;
- Access to mainstream public services and actions to support access to public buildings, services and information;
- Complaints and appeals procedures
- Access to public buildings, services and public service employment
- Safeguards for the use of information obtained from genetic testing to ensure that persons affected by genetic disorders are not subjected to unreasonable requirements from an employer, insurer or mortgage provider
- Obligations on public bodies to be proactive in employing people with disabilities and the monitoring of compliance with those obligations.
- Public Bodies must ensure that at least 3% of their workforce are people with disabilities.
- The establishment of a Centre for Excellence in Universal Design in the National Disability Authority to promote best practice in the design of the environment and products so that they are accessible and usable for everyone, especially people with disabilities.

([www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie))

**Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004**

The purpose of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004 is to make detailed provision for the special educational needs of those with a disability.

The law seeks to provide the following:

- To make further provision for the education of people with special educational needs;
- Education to take place in an inclusive environment with people who do not have special educational needs;
- Children with special educational needs to have the same right to avail of and benefit from appropriate education, as do their peers who do not have special educational needs;
- To assist children with special educational needs to leave school with the skills necessary to participate in social and economic activities of society and live independent lives to the best of their capacity;
- To provide for the greater involvement of parents;
- Establish the National Council for Special Education;
- Confer certain functions on Health Boards in relation to education of people with special educational needs;
- To establish an Appeals Board.

([www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie))

### **Equal Status Act, 2000.**

The Equal Status Act, 2000 outlaws direct and indirect discrimination, discrimination by association, harassment and victimisation on the ground of disability in relation to the provision of goods and services, accommodation, disposal of property and education. It

requires the reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities.

### **National Disability Authority Act, 1999**

In 1999 the National Disability Authority Act was approved to create the framework for the provision of services to people with disabilities. The National Disability Authority was established in June 2000 under this act. The NDA is an independent statutory body operating under the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The principal functions of the NDA are to:

- Act as a central, national body, which will assist the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform in the co-ordination and development of policy relating to persons with disabilities;
- Advise the Minister on appropriate standards for programmes and services to persons with disabilities;
- Monitor the implementation of standards and codes of practice in programmes and services for people with disabilities;
- Promote equality, participation and inclusion;
- Undertake and commission research on disability in Ireland;
- Collect and disseminate information about disability;
- Liaise with other bodies (e.g. the Department of Health and Children and Comhairle) and to facilitate and support the development and implementation of appropriate standards in relation to programmes and services for people with disabilities.

[www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)

### **Employment Equality Act, 1998 sourced from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.**

The Employment Equality Act 1998 outlaws discrimination in employment on nine distinct grounds-gender, family status, marital status, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, race and membership of the traveller community.

The legislation covers discrimination in relation to access to employment, advertising conditions of employment, equal pay for work of equal value, promotion, collective agreements, training and work experience. These kinds of discrimination are outlawed whether by an employer, an employment agency, a trades union, a professional body, a vocational training body or a newspaper advertising jobs.

### **Building Control Act 1990 and Amended Building Regulations**

Since the 1990s there have been significant developments in the area of building and accessibility. The Building Control Act 1990 is recognised as a pivotal piece of legislation as it regulated standards in building construction and design through the introduction of building regulations. Section M deals with the minimum standards required to be implemented in order to facilitate access for people with disabilities.

On the 22nd June, 2000, the Minister for the Environment and Local Government signed into law, an amended Part M of the Building Regulations, 1997. This amended Part M, which came into effect as of the 1st January, 2001, includes several provisions that apply to new dwellings (houses, flats and apartments) and extensions to ensure that they are visitable by people with disabilities. In general, all new dwellings and extensions built must comply to these standards which include:

- 800mm width of entry at site boundary at least one entrance accessible to wheelchair users
- level entry or a maximum of 15mm threshold.
- minimum clear opening width of entrance door of 775mm.
- fittings (eg: doorbell, handles, switches) positioned between 900mm and 1200 above ground/floor level .
- an accessible WC at entry level, or where there is no habitable room at this level, in the storey containing the main living room.

## **6. The general impression and attitudes of Irish society towards people with disabilities**

Historically Ireland has had a poor attitude toward disability. These negative attitudes however are being slowly eroded and in its place exists an ever-growing positive attitude towards people with disabilities. This change of attitude is as a result of several

legislation and programmes that promote the equality, participation and inclusion of disabled people into society.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of September next for example, the National Disability Authority has organised a conference to be held at the Radisson SAS Hotel (Dublin airport) that intends to improve the attitudes society holds towards those with disabilities. The conference entitled “Attitude is everything: understanding and improving attitudes to disability” is one of many campaigns and strategies in place to bring about a change in attitudes towards people with disabilities.

On an international level, the European Union four years ago designated 2003, the European year of People with Disabilities. This was a major step in raising awareness of the abilities, talents, and difficulties faced by people with disabilities throughout all of Europe.

The National Disability Authority is a statutory body that assists in the coordination and development of disability policy. In 2002, it reported on the attitudes towards people with disabilities in Ireland. This was the first, and to date, only report of its kind in Ireland and it revealed some interesting issues. The findings of this report are summarized as follows:

- People with disabilities are frequently subjected to unfair treatment.
- Barriers exist regarding facilities and services available to those with disabilities
- The disability benefit provided by the government needs to improve

- Those with physical/sensory and learning disabilities often receive supportive attitudes
- Those with mental health disabilities are more likely to receive negative attitudes
- People affected directly by disabilities have a heightened awareness of issues such as rights, equality, support etc.
- Females tend to exhibit more positive views than males to those with disabilities.

The Irish government also set up a pilot scheme from 2001 to 2005 called “*Workway*” which is still in operation. This aims to raise awareness and promote the employment of those with disabilities in the private sector. This initiative incorporated employers, people with disabilities, trade union representatives, service providers and government agencies. This scheme resulted in the publication of guidelines that provide information to employers about hiring those with disabilities. Guidelines were also published for people to refer to if working with a disabled individual. The most recent publication in June 2007 “What small businesses need to know about current employment legislation” was co-devised by “*Workway*” and the Disability Policy and Development department in FÁS (a public employment agency).

In 2003, the *Special Olympics World Summer Games* were hosted by Ireland, the first time they were held outside the US. This had a substantial impact on Irish attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. Over 30,000 Irish people volunteered to help during the two-week period that it lasted. Almost everybody was affected in some way

by these games. Towns throughout the Ireland hosted a particular participating country of the games and so people with disabilities were to the forefront in all towns and villages for this duration. This increase in contact with people with disabilities resulted in a heightened awareness of disability. An individuals' ability was for the first time recognised rather than their disability. Since these games, the number of Irish athletes training for the Special Olympics had increased from 8,000 in 2003 to 11,000 in 2007.

Evidently the combination of such events and legislation has given priority to the inclusion of people with disabilities in all elements of society, ranging from working environment to sporting involvement. Societal attitudes have changed in recent years however as indicated by the report from the National Disabilities Authority, much more progress is necessary.

### **Children with Disabilities and the School Situation**

As part of the Irish constitution, every child has a right to an education regardless of abilities. This education was primarily located in special schools for children with disabilities. However in recent years provisions have been made in mainstream schools to accommodate children with disabilities. There are three models of educational provision currently employed in Ireland. These are:

1. Children with special needs are educated in mainstream schools along side their able bodied peers. They receive additional help from special needs assistants.
2. Children with special needs are educated in mainstream schools however are placed in a special class with other children with disabilities.

3. Children with special needs are educated in special schools that cater for the education of children with disabilities.

The National Disability Authority reported that 16,919 children attend primary schools. 9,384 of these children are in mainstream schools while 6,807 attend special schools. Despite the increase in the mainstreaming of children with disabilities, the Department of Education indicates that there are still 107 special schools in operation in Ireland and a further 315 mainstream schools have specific classes designated for disabled children.

The Education for Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, as mentioned previously, is an especially proactive piece of legislation regarding the education of children with disabilities. Its principal objectives are:

- To make further provisions for the education of people with special education needs
- Education should take place in an inclusive environment with people who do not have special education needs
- Every child with special education needs are entitled to an Individual Education Plan (IEP)
- Every school should assist a child to continue his/her education or training into his/her adult life.

#### The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

This is a national body that is concerned with the curricula of all individuals. One of its aims is to provide an appropriate, broad and balanced curriculum so that students can

realize their potential. As a result it has devised additional physical education guidelines and curricula for primary school teachers of students with general learning disabilities. These guidelines are divided into three areas namely; mild, moderate and severe/profound.

#### The National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

This was established in 2005, as part of the EPSEN Act 2004. It allocates additional teaching and other resources to support special educational needs of children with disabilities.

#### The Special Education Support Service (SESS)

This service facilitates the professional development of those who are involved in providing an education for children with disabilities. They co-ordinate, develop and deliver a range of initiatives that ultimately support professionals in this area.

#### Adapted Physical Activity and Individuals with Disabilities

In 1998, the “People with a Disability in Sport Taskforce” completed an extensive report on how physical education and school sport are organised in primary, post-primary and special schools. Unfortunately, no more recent data on this has been gathered and so these findings may be somewhat dated. The key findings of this report are outlined as follows:

## **Primary Schools**

### Incidence of students with disabilities:

There were 10% of students in the primary sector with disabilities. The broad categories of disabilities may be sub-divided as follows: Learning Difficulty 43%, Physical Disability 29%, Sensory Disability 14% and Multi-Disability 14%.

### School P.E./Sport Policy:

93% of respondents stated that they had a policy (oral or written) for physical education within their schools, however, only 54% indicated that their policy was written.

### **Physical Education teaching staff**

The class teacher is fully responsible for the provision of physical education in the primary school.

### Facilities:

Teachers indicated that resources were inadequate to cater for students with disabilities in physical education classes.

## **Post-Primary Schools**

### Incidence of students with disabilities:

There were 9% of students in the second level sector with disabilities. The broad categories of disabilities may be subdivided as follows: Learning Disabilities, 51%,

Physical Disabilities 24%, Sensory Disabilities 15% and Multi-Disability 10%.

#### School PE/Sport Policy:

86% of respondents stated that they had a policy (oral/written) for physical education in their schools. Only 33% of respondents indicated that their physical education policy was written.

#### Physical Education teaching staff:

62% of the respondents felt that their undergraduate training was insufficient to them in teaching students with disabilities, a further 29% were unsure, whilst only 9% felt that they had sufficient training at undergraduate level, to work with students with disabilities. Only one respondent had undertaken an in-service course in APA.

#### Facilities:

All respondents had some form of either indoor or outdoor facilities for physical education/sport.

### **Special Schools**

#### School Type:

The categories of disability type catered for by the schools may be broadly grouped as follows: Learning Difficulty 64%, Emotional Disability 22%, Sensory Disability 3%, Physical Disability 1%, Other Categories 10%.

#### Physical Education Teaching Staff:

In-service training to teach people with special needs was undertaken by 65% of the staff. A physical education specialist was employed by 49% of special schools with an average teaching time of 105 min per week.

#### School PE/Sport Policy:

43% of respondents indicated that they had a written policy on physical education/sport in their school. A total of 74% of the respondents stated that they had some form (oral or written) of policy on physical education.

#### Facilities:

78% of schools had some form of suitable indoor facilities for physical education. 10% had no form of suitable indoor facilities

### **Care Taking**

This is one group that receives very little recognition by the government. According to the People with Disabilities in Ireland (PwDI), approximately 150,000 people are providing unpaid help for a family member or friend with a disability. Caretakers receive poor pay however the 2007 Budget improved their income. The Carers Allowance increased from €180 to €200 per week for carers who help individuals under 65 years. Carers responsible for individual over 65 years also received an increase from €200 to €218 per week. Other aspects of the current budget include an increase in Respite Care Grant from €300 to €1,500. Also 2000 more home care packages will be put in place this year as well as an increase in the number of home help hours.

To raise the awareness of the plight of unpaid carers, the PwDI organized an event

called “Twenty-four-seven”. This was held on July 17<sup>th</sup> last and it was a specific day that focused on carers and their lack of recognition.

## **7. Issues regarding the development of APA in Ireland.**

It is envisaged that APA may struggle to gain status in Ireland. There are several well-established fields that are closely related to APA such as physiotherapy, rehabilitation, occupational therapy, therapeutic rehabilitation and physical therapy. Having so many inter-related areas may cause difficulties for APA to develop since people tend to depend on what they are familiar with. This competitive element is one challenge that APA must overcome in order to gain recognition in the public view.

As mentioned previously there is a large amount of ignorance in Ireland in relation to disabilities. Traditionally, people with disabilities were hospitalised permanently and were sometimes seen as a burden. However that attitude is changing and as this attitude evolves so too will the development of APA. People with disabilities are becoming more and more involved in everyday life activities and so APA will gain in momentum as a result.

As mentioned previously, funding is a major issue for APA. Since it currently holds a relatively low position in relation to similar fields of expertise, APA does not yet receive as much governmental funding as it should. This is another obstacle that must be overcome in order for the development of APA to flourish.

With the development of APA comes and increase in the employment opportunities in APA. There are three areas in Ireland that provide employment opportunities in APA.

1. Education- At third level, there will be openings for APA specialists and lecturers to teach students of physical education, sports science and health and leisure in the area of APA. At second and primary levels of education, those with APA backgrounds would be easily employed in special needs schools. These include schools for the deaf, blind and intellectually disabled as well as mainstream schools where students with disabilities are taught alongside their able-bodied peers.
2. Recreation- Employment opportunities for APA specialists may be found in leisure centres where they could design programmes and help the physically and intellectually impaired to engage in physical activity.
3. Sport- The national governing bodies of the various sports is another point where employment of APA specialists is possible. For example, the Football Association of Ireland has a programme specifically for disabled participants. Organising, devising and co-ordinating such a programme would be ideal for an APA specialist. An APA specialist could also work with disability sport organisations such as Special Olympics Ireland, Paralympics Ireland, the Irish Wheelchair Association, Cerebral Palsy Sports Ireland etc.

4. Rehabilitation- Employment opportunities may also be found in rehabilitation centres or organisations. APA specialists could for example, devise programmes to help patients to become more active, to strengthen certain motor skills, to integrate more with other patients etc. Enable Ireland is the primary rehabilitation organisation in Ireland and this has centres nationwide. The Cope Foundation in Co. Cork is another rehabilitation centre where employment may be found for APA specialists.

## **8. Issues about integration and inclusion of people with disabilities in Ireland**

Access to appropriate facilities is a significant factor to be considered when discussing the issue of inclusion and integration of people with disabilities in Ireland. As mentioned previously, all buildings in Ireland should be wheelchair accessible but as yet many public buildings such as restaurants, bars, schools, offices etc. are not wheelchair accessible. This definitely restricts the degree of integration and inclusion of people with disabilities in society. Only recently have all the public buses in Ireland become wheelchair accessible, which indicates that Ireland is improving its accessibility and in creating an inclusive environment for people with disabilities. However more work needs to be done in this area.

In relation to physical activity, at a schools level, many schools don't have the equipment to cater for students who have disabilities. The buildings may be wheelchair accessible, but the equipment necessary to adapt games for students with special needs

is rarely available. This is due to a lack of funding, which yet again, appears as a barrier to the development of APA and to the integration and inclusion of people with disabilities in Irish society.

As discussed earlier, there are a number of disability sport organisations in Ireland. These organisations are primarily located in the capital, Dublin or at a number of other cities in Ireland. Having such organisations provides people with disabilities with fantastic opportunities to integrate with others. However, only those with disabilities who live in these regions can only avail of these opportunities. Vast areas of rural Ireland exist without providing recreational opportunities to include and integrate its disabled community members. Location and demographics therefore play a role in determining the opportunities available to integrate and include people with disabilities in everyday life in Ireland.

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