

[Sample letter to Minister for Employment]

**[Insert your own
address]**

Mr Micheal Martin
Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment
23 Kildare Street
Dublin 2

[Insert date]

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you to express my concern at the lack of progress in implementing the new national mental health policy framework, *A Vision for Change*.

A Vision for Change notes the high level of unemployment among people with mental health problems, and it also notes, the huge contribution that gainful employment makes to a person's mental health. It specifically recommends: "Evidence-based approaches to training and employment for people with mental health problems should be adopted and such programmes should be put in place by the agencies with responsibility in this area." *A Vision for Change* advises that the approaches of supported open employment and individual placement and support should be given preference.

Amongst the core values and principles in *A Vision for Change* is: "The individual is at the centre of the mental health system. The human rights of individuals with mental health problems must be respected at all times". I wish to make the point that people have a human right to work. The right to work is a specific right recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which Ireland ratified in 1989. This right includes "the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts." It also says "the full realization of this right shall include technical and vocational guidance and training programmes."

A Vision for Change notes that people denied employment opportunities lose not just income but also important social networks and access to the wider social world. It also notes that the largest proportion of the cost of mental health problems occurs outside the health sector, mainly through lost employment. Clearly then, there is huge economic and social benefit in taking the best

possible approach to employment initiatives, while the cost of inaction is enormous.

[Insert specific concerns in your own community, or use your experience as an example of your concern, related to the monthly question(s)]

In May 2007, the first progress report was published by the Independent Monitoring Group established by the Department of Health and Children to oversee implementation of *A Vision for Change*. It found that progress was slow. It also found that many actions reported by Departments to the Independent Monitoring Group were already in train before *A Vision for Change*, or were part of their existing commitments to people with disabilities and did not make clear how people with mental health problems would benefit specifically.

I would be grateful for an answer to the following question:

What new programmes in, or approaches to, training and employment for people with mental health problems have been adopted, or are planned, by your Department, to implement this recommendation in *A Vision for Change*?

I would be grateful for a comprehensive response to this question as this a matter that greatly concerns me. I also call on you to discuss this issue with your party colleagues and raise it with the Minister for Health and Children.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[Insert your name]