



PACIFIC COAST UNIVERSITY
FOR WORKPLACE HEALTH SCIENCES

Donal McAnaney

Donal McAnaney, who holds a PhD in educational psychology, was Director of Program Development for the Rehab Group, a private not-for-profit organization, serving people with disabilities based in Ireland and the UK. He is a well-known top researcher in the field of disability management and works throughout Europe and, indeed, the world. He is Senior Research Consultant, Work Research Centre, Dublin; Lecturer and Associate Researcher, Centre for Disability Studies at the University College of Dublin (UCD); and Team Leader, Bernard Brunhes International Research and Training Consultant, European Platform for Rehabilitation. Additionally, he is Chair, Board of Professional Conduct, Psychological Society of Ireland and is Past Chair, Global Applied Disability Research and Information network on Employment and Training.



While at the Rehab Group, one of McAnaney's tasks was to design an assessment system for people with physical and mental health disabilities that would identify their best career potential, and then design an individual vocational rehabilitation program. He soon discovered that people who have acquired a disability during their working life face the prospect of being pushed to the margins of society by the very systems designed to protect them, and there is a tendency for employers to try to shift disabled workers onto the disability pension system and by doing so, often think they're doing the individual a favour.

It reached a point where for example in the Netherlands, you could retire on 80 percent of your salary, and by the mid-1990's, 16 percent of their labour force was on disability pension. It had become the most disabled workforce in the world. The government put in place some very different policies to redress the situation as it had become very clear that the inflow of people into the disability pension system had to be reduced. The Netherlands shifted the cost directly onto employers; i.e. it is the employer's responsibility to pay 80 percent of the salary of their disabled workers who are not returned to work for up to two years. A subsequent study showed that 80 percent of people got back to work, compared with 24 percent in the UK.

Donal McAnaney cited the importance of a university like PCU-WHS, which is so badly needed, with its three-pillar approach to workplace health as pioneered by NIDMAR – health and safety, wellness and return to work. First, there is the need to educate professionals to manage the flow of disabled workers in the workplace, but there is also the need to educate the customers – employers and unions – about the need for better practices, and there is the need to educate human resource managers about the services that are available. Even more critical is the need to educate the insurance companies and compensation boards who handle the money.

Not by coincidence, the International Social Security Association (ISSA), a United Nations body, which represents 340 members in 158 countries, has decided that they need return to work guidelines for their members, based on a three-pillar approach similar to the PCU-WHS model.

Dr. Donal McAnaney was appointed PCU-WHS International Research Advisory Council Chair earlier in 2012.