The following letter was send to these Ministers in July 2019:

Heather Humphreys, TD, **Minister** for Business, Enterprise and Innovation
Regina Doherty TD, Minister for Employment and Social Protection
Finian McGrath TD, Minister of State for Disability
Pascal Donohue, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

Dear Minister

As Ireland prepares for the new digital age and the future of work, we need an effective infrastructure to ensure disabled workers can access assistive and accessible technology supports they need. At present, Ireland enjoys full employment, but the employment rate for people with disabilities is just 27%. We believe that a coherent ecosystem of technology supports could improve employment and self-employment rates, and turn this situation around.

We write from the Community Hub for Assistive Technology (CHAT), a community of practice of over 250 people who use technology, makers, developers, researchers, employers, service providers and academics. CHAT is part of FreedomTech, a collaboration between the Disability Federation of Ireland and Enable Ireland.

Future Jobs Ireland[i], the upcoming Digital Strategy, and plans to reform the public employment service[ii] present an opportunity to act now to ensure that people have access to the technology that they need to access the workplace.

Minister McGrath spoke at the UN (in June) on Ireland's commitments under the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. He acknowledged the transformative power of technology. Words must translate into action. Recommendation 3 of the Make Work Pay Report[iii] under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy promises to bring forward proposals to address technology needs of those "*whose entry, retention or return to work could be jeopardised by being unable to afford these items".* This commitment was to be completed by the end of 2018. It has not yet commenced.

In a discussion paper, published in 2017, by FreedomTech, we demonstrated the cost benefit of supporting people to work via technology and the net benefit to the State[iv]. We also recommended the introduction of an ecosystem of supports that help people transition from education to work, and across employment. The Assistive Technology Ecosystem needs to include provision for procurement and funding, information, training, service provision as well as create space for innovation in this rapidly evolving field.

This must include provision for an Assistive Technology Passport, which puts technology in the hands of users, who are the experts in their own lives.

We now ask that you and your department prioritise the following actions:

1.   Work systemically across departments, strategies and policies to prioritise the development of an ecosystem of supports.

2.   Introduce an AT Pilot programme, which we estimate will cost €1.5 million.

3.   Incorporate Recommendation 3 in Make Work Pay into the Ecosystem of supports as part of a total overhaul of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund.

4.   Remove VAT from Assistive Technology products and bring them in line with mobility scooters and hearing aids.

On behalf of all Assistive Technology users, we look forward to your response and commitment to further engagement on these issues.

Yours sincerely

Joan O'Donnell.   Siobhan Long

Disability Federation of Ireland.   Enable Ireland

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[i] https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Business-Sectoral-Initiatives/Future-Jobs
[ii] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f9cced-public-employment-services-mapping-activation/
[iii] https://m.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Make-Work-Pay-Report-2017.aspx

[iv] https://freedomtech.ie/at-paper/