

Getting It Right:

Linking Training and Education to Employment

seminar report



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1. INOUE Mission Statement

1.1

The INOU is a federation of unemployed people, unemployed centres, unemployed groups, community organisations and trade unions. The INOU represents and defends the rights and interests of those who want decent employment and cannot obtain it. We promote and campaign for policies to achieve full employment for all. We also campaign for an acceptable standard of living for unemployed people and their dependents. The INOU is an anti-sectarian, anti-racist, non-party political organisation which promotes equality of opportunity within society.

2. Introduction to the INOU

2.1

The INOU was established in 1987 and is the national federation of individuals and local centres and groups concerned with combating unemployment. The organisation has over 175 affiliated groups. These groups include:

- Local community based organisations tackling unemployment;
- Local community based organisations concerned with particular communities of interest or delivering specialist services of assistance to unemployed people;
- National Non-Government Organisations concerned with related issues;
- Trades Unions / Trades Councils;
- Area Based Partnerships / Community Groups / Local Employment Services;
- Other organisations expressing solidarity or seeking access to training and / or information.

2.2

The INOU supports its members through the provision of services such as training, information and analysis of government policies. The INOU works both at local and national level on issues affecting unemployed people. The INOU is also a social partner and participated, through its membership of the community and voluntary pillar in the negotiations of the last four partnership agreements including the current agreement – Towards 2016.

2.3

The aims of the INOU are to:

- Seek to represent the interests and views of all unemployed people and their dependants at a national level;
- Campaign for an acceptable standard of living for all unemployed people and their dependants;
- Campaign towards the achievement of full employment at an acceptable rate of pay;
- Assist the establishment and development of local unemployed groups;
- Develop close links with the trade union movement while ensuring the autonomy of the INOU;
- Build on the common interest between the unemployed and employed;
- Build links with other national and international bodies that share the same interests.

3. Background to the Seminar

3.1

This seminar was part of a wider project which focused on education and training options for unemployed people and others distant from the labour market. The development of this project was seen as timely as the Department of Social and Family Affairs started to roll out their enhanced activation / active case management approach. This approach was part of the Department's new Social and Economic Participation Programme as outlined in "Towards 2016"; National Development Plan 2007-2013; and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. The INOU is very aware that the subsequent deterioration in the public finances and the rapid rise in unemployment have implications for the roll out of this programme. However, the lessons arising remain pertinent.



4. Opening Remarks

Ann Fergus, Chairperson, INOU



4.1

Ann Fergus welcomed everyone to the seminar. Ann said she was particularly pleased to welcome Billy Kelleher, the Minister for Labour Affairs to open the seminar.

5. Official Opening

*Billy Kelleher, TD, Minister for Labour Affairs,
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment*



5.1

The Minister of State said he was delighted to formally open the seminar proceedings. The Minister acknowledged that, despite the huge numbers of people who were in employment, there had been very significant increases in the numbers of people unemployed. The Minister noted how large numbers of people, ranging from those who were very highly skilled to people with few work skills, were losing their jobs. The Minister added that the Government and other stakeholders, including the social partners, should work collectively to overcome the very serious challenges that the country faces.

5.2

The Minister advised that low educational attainment was very closely linked to unemployment and long-term unemployment. The Minister said there was a need to ensure that training and educational courses and programmes meet people's needs. He added that it was very important that training was effectively linked to employment. The Minister referred to the importance of informal contacts, noting that people could drift away from involvement with agencies etc. and that informal links that community and statutory based staff build with individuals were very important.

5.3

The Minister said that it was very important that we make the best use of our resources. The Minister added that he would encourage schools to remain open after 4:30pm to make the most of the space so that courses could be run at night and opportunities could be provided for community groups to meet.

5.4

The Minister referred to the importance of the social partnership process and noted the INOU's involvement as a social partner. The Minister added that social partnership had been and can now be, a problem solving structure. The Minister noted that the challenges become much more difficult when unemployment rises rapidly and referred to the need for the social partners to be involved in the collective decision making required to meet these huge challenges.

5.5

The Minister urged employers to work with FÁS and others to encourage the greater involvement of people with disabilities in the work force. The Minister said that given the educational standards and numbers of unemployed persons in the Travelling community, this was an area where the State needs to do more work.

5.6

The Minister said he was delighted that one of the presentations for the seminar was looking at the Mahon Point development in Cork. The Minister added that this was an excellent project and showed the value of linking training to employment well in advance of the building being completed. There had been a great change in the Mahon area where people who thought they would never work again were now working in the area.

5.7

The Minister said that organisations such as the INOU were very important in these changed circumstances. The Minister added that it would be a great day if there was no need for the INOU, but that would never happen as there was always a need for advocacy. The Minister said that the INOU's publication, Working for Work, was very beneficial for people who are unemployed.

5.8

The Minister said he was looking forward to reading the seminar report.



6.

Presentation on Project Findings

Bríd O'Brien, Head of Policy and Media, INOU

6.1

Bríd gave the background to the seminar and the wider INOU project. The project focussed on both the experiences and potential of education and training for unemployed people and others who are distant from the labour market. Bríd added that the project had been seen as timely as it coincided with the Department of Social and Family Affairs rolling out an enhanced activation strategy. However, the subsequent deterioration in the labour market and the rapid rise in unemployment presents new and growing challenges to the nature of activation as envisaged in 'Towards 2016' and other policy documents.



6.2

The key areas that the project focussed on included:

- Unemployed people's experiences of training and education;
- The range of available options, including potential links to employment, further training or education;
- The level of unemployed people's involvement in the decisions that affected them and their choices;
- The level of employer involvement.

6.3

Bríd then outlined the different project aspects. Questionnaires were submitted to all INOU individual members. Four areas were identified for in-depth discussion groups. The local social welfare managers in these areas were contacted and agreement was given to talk to unemployed people who were signing-on in the different areas. Unemployed people were invited to a meeting in each of the

four areas to discuss their experiences of training and education options, as well as to identify potential solutions to barriers they may have experienced.

6.4

Each of the workshops focussed on four questions:

- What are the beneficial aspects of training and education courses?
- Have training or education courses led to further education, training or employment opportunities?
- What problems have you experienced in your education or training courses?
- What are the possible solutions to the issues raised today?

6.5

Some of the beneficial aspects referred to in the workshops were:

- Starting times that suited participants;
- Affordable childcare provision;

- locally based courses;
- Flexible modular courses;
- Useful accreditation;
- Properly qualified (and capable) instructors.

6.6

The responses to whether training or education courses had led to further education, training or employment opportunities varied, from those for whom it had been beneficial to those who believed this was lacking. Some of the responses in relation to this included:

- There is a missing link between training and jobs;
- Difficulty in accessing information;
- People being given courses that are available and unfilled, rather than ones that are linked to clear progression routes;
- Very little follow-up after the course finishes;
- The need for professional guidance / advice to assist the unemployed person in helping to choose a career or training path was highlighted.

6.7

Some of the problems experienced included:

- Courses that were too short;
- Lack of local options;
- Gaps between grants and courses is not useful;
- Having to progress before being ready;
- Stuck at the same level and not progressing;

- Work experience is difficult to access;
- Lack of reply to job applications;
- Jobs already filled yet ads still on display (FÁS);
- Cost of participation;
- Age is an issue when people are looking for work;
- Funding cuts impacting on course completion and subsequent lack of certification.

6.8

Some of the potential solutions identified at the four workshops included:

- An individual approach is needed;
- Training and education courses should be carefully matched to the person's interests and career goals;
- Running high demand courses more often;
- In the current economic circumstances, the application of Genuinely Seeking Work should be reviewed;
- Improve the employment services capabilities to match unemployed people and potential jobs;
- Improved access to longer courses with better outcomes;
- Improved linkage between FETAC and HETAC so that unemployed people can progress;
- Improve joined-up thinking so that training and education courses are run as effectively as possible.

7.

Linking Training and Education to Employment – An International Example

Gerrit Jan Schep, Managing Director, Stimulansz Foundation



7.1 Gerrit gave some background as to the development of the Stimulansz Foundation since its inception in 2001. Gerrit also outlined the comparative unemployment statistics of the EU countries and provided a more detailed breakdown of the numbers in the labour force. Gerrit said that there were 680,000 households living in poverty in the Netherlands. One of the key aims of the Stimulansz Foundation was to improve the work of the municipalities.

7.2 Gerrit outlined how the Dutch expenditure on social transfers had reduced in the recent past. Gerrit added that savings in this area could be channelled in to retraining and reintegration opportunities. Gerrit described how the Dutch model linking jobseekers to jobs is moving towards a one stop shop type system, although there is still a lot of bureaucracy. Gerrit reported that the emphasis on decentralisation was a positive one in the Dutch experience.

7.3 Gerrit advised that work is the goal of the reintegration strategies and the best guarantee for individuals and families to move out of poverty. Gerrit also iterated the importance of activation strategies over passive ones.

7.4 Gerrit discussed the Work First concept in the Netherlands. Gerrit said that the key principles of this concept were:

- A positive approach;
- The centrality of work;
- How active policies will offer unemployed people greater opportunities;
- Mutual obligation;
- The right to receive the best possible services;
- The importance of aftercare.

Gerrit said that the change of mindset was a very significant one for staff dealing with unemployed people. It was important that any barriers should be removed and that the emphasis changed from highly regulated eligibility to what it

was that the person wanted to do. Gerrit advised that the Work First model had been adapted since it was first implemented. It was important, Gerrit added, that unemployed people need to be helped fairly quickly or they risked losing contact with the services.

7.5 Gerrit reported that there were a number of areas for improvement in the service. Gerrit said that there had not been much involvement with employers and much more contact with employers was required. Gerrit reported that a tailor made approach around the person's requirements to get back to work would be more effective with greater involvement of employers.

7.6 Gerrit gave examples of some innovative programmes that have been run in different areas of the Netherlands. One such programme involved contacting all people who were in receipt of social benefit for more than five years. People were offered over one hundred different

choices, including job coaching, community activities, work placements and a range of other activities. It was compulsory for people to choose an activity. Gerrit reported that one outcome was that a significant number of people voluntarily contacted the services after their placements, looking for further placements / activities.

7.7 Another programme involved quality coaching and training credits whereby people in receipt of benefits could access any training they liked. Gerrit said that there was no target to ensure people were brought back to the labour market, though an outcome was that over 40% of people were eager to progress. Gerrit advised that for people who were very long-term unemployed, the pull factors were much more important than the push factors. Gerrit concluded that they were eager to ensure that this more client centred approach could be exported to other municipalities.



8.

Linking Training to Employment – A National Example, Mahon Point Project

Hugh Rodgers, Senior Employment Officer, FÁS



8.1

Hugh gave the background to Mahon in Cork City and the project. Hugh said that Mahon was a new suburb of Cork with a high rate of unemployment and was a designated RAPID area. Hugh added that a land bank was sold to a private developer. Planning was granted for the biggest commercial office and retail development outside Dublin. Hugh advised that a number of factors were important including: a very active local community association, a very involved developer, local FÁS involvement and adopting a partnership approach (including employers when they were identified). The contacts that the local community groups and FÁS developed with local people through CE projects etc. were very important in providing training programmes.

8.2

The partners involved in the Mahon Point project met either monthly or bi-monthly. A survey of Mahon residents was conducted analysing their training needs, working preferences etc. Hugh said that FÁS facilitated this, but the promotion by local people was very important. An employment and training centre was established at Mahon Community Centre and an employment liaison officer was appointed. The officer encouraged the involvement of local people and was a conduit for information and referrals. All twenty seven local organisations were met individually and informed about the project.

8.3

Hugh advised that every house in the Mahon areas was contacted and advice and information given. News articles and publicity items on the project were run in the local media.

8.4

Hugh said that there was a huge interest in the project. Over 500 people contacted the training services within two weeks. Many of the courses were run locally and Hugh added that both full-time and part-time courses were offered. Hugh said that the involvement of employers in the process for both the content of the courses and work placement was very important. Hugh

added that the involvement of the developer was a big help in ensuring the employers were actively involved. Hugh said that all the courses were FETAC accredited and a significant number of people went on to further training and education courses.

8.5

The priority of the project was to focus on people from Mahon, but this was broadened. An application form was designed in conjunction with the employers and a database was developed from the application form. Open recruitment days were organised and these were well attended. Two of these were held in the Mahon Community Centre and there was a huge response including from employers.

8.6

Hugh gave further details on the project outcomes. Hugh said that it was difficult to precisely quantify the numbers of people employed as a result of the project. 456 people availed of training provided. There was a 78% placement rate from training. 615 from the 1650 people registered on the Mahon Point database (1200 registered with FÁS) were placed in jobs in Mahon Point. 310 of those placed were people from the Mahon area.

8.7

In analysing the key factors that ensured the Mahon Point project was successful, Hugh outlined the importance of the following:

- A clear focus and vision.
- Setting targets.
- A lead co-ordinator.
- Partnership approach.
- Local Involvement.

Hugh said that the project was bigger than the jobs created as it provided a positive profile for Mahon. Hugh added that the active involvement of the developer was central as he attended every meeting and attended all of the certification evenings. His involvement, Hugh added, gave the project a much higher profile than it might otherwise have had. Hugh said that FÁS provided an important co-ordinating role.

8.8

Hugh advised that the same approach was currently being used for the Patrick Street development in Cork and this may be replicated in other areas.





9.

Round Table Discussions

9.1

The round table aspect of the seminar gave those who attended an opportunity to discuss education and training and how effectively these link to work. We have taken the key points from the various round table discussions, with a particular focus on good practice.

9.2 Examples of innovative training and education programmes

- Clondalkin Employment and Education Development Services (CEEDS), run a FETAC accredited receptionist skills training course, where 18 out of 21 people have gone on into employment.

Key Factors: Involvement of people from the locality, a work experience element and the fact that some of the cost of childcare is covered. Another important factor is a follow up service where the centre keeps in touch with participants for 3 years afterwards.

- The Letterkenny Institute of Technology is assisting companies to save and create jobs.
- The Challenger programme run by the Northside Centre for the Unemployed provides assistance to school children from areas experiencing significant disadvantage including delivering free grinds to school children at secondary school.
- Aontas are involved in developing a portal system that would give learners access to details of their own learning, which would include where they are on the NQAI, where they can go and details of all certificates that they have completed. It would also alert learners to future courses that would be relevant to the individual and help them secure further qualifications in the future.

- CDVEC Guidance Service was an example of a service offering useful advice and progression options.

9.3 Identifying key aspects to successfully implementing initiatives

Among the range of different criteria that underpin implementing initiatives successfully, the following featured most often:

- Significant investment needed in human capital.
- The importance of person centred services.
- It is very important to have people taking the lead and using a problem solving approach to overcome difficulties.
- The importance of accurate information was highlighted.

9.4 Linking training and education to employment more effectively

- On the job training was seen as important.
- The involvement of employers was highlighted.
- An integrated approach involving trainers, employers, employment services and unemployed people was seen as very important.
- The importance of service providers assisting people to map out a route to further training, education and work was highlighted.

- Essential employability skills e.g. communications, problem solving and critical thinking need to be emphasised.
- Learners need to be provided with a transparent route to employment rather than going round in circles.
- Training and education should be tailored to suit the individual.
- Need to 'marry' individuals' skills and employers' needs.
- Work experience is important and provides a valuable reference for people seeking employment. Where funds are available for this purpose work experience should be a paid activity.
- Courses that are targeted to meet specific labour needs have to be extremely responsive so as to train people quickly to meet labour market shortages, but also to wind the courses down quickly when these shortages have been met. If provision of training persists long after the need for that skill has been filled we then risk wasting valuable resources and leaving the trainee in the position of having completed training for a field that is oversubscribed.

9.5 Skills gaps

- People who worked in construction, particularly where they had left school prior to Leaving or Junior Cert will require time to develop their skills. FÁS and education providers need to devote effort and time to address this.
- There is a lack of higher level maths students.

9.6 Maintaining Employment

- Retraining of staff and redeployment to other areas of a company.

- Ensuring that everything is done to prevent redundancies.
- Incentives for employers to ensure staff can be retrained, particularly in small and medium sized enterprises and the development of greater networking and mentoring was highlighted.

9.7 Educational barriers

- The late payment of maintenance grants, some were paid as late as August 2008 for 2007, was raised as a serious concern.
- Lack of places for people with little or no qualifications on some technical FÁS courses when university graduates are more successful at securing such placements.
- Mature students find it harder to find employment despite having the same or higher qualifications than younger graduates.
- Literacy needs to be integrated fundamentally in to all courses.
- The lack of affordable childcare is a substantial barrier to undertaking education.

9.8 Perspectives on presentations – key factors

- The importance of financial incentives to assist people to move from education or training to work was noted.
- Fears were expressed about workfare or compulsion.
- Individuals' skills and employers' needs should be matched more closely.
- Employers have a very important role in integrating training.
- The importance of person centred approaches were highlighted.
- Transfer learning and practice of the Mahon Point initiative.



10.

Panel Discussion and Open Forum

Chaired by John Stewart, Coordinator, INOU

10.1

John Stewart introduced the panel: Brian O'Raghallaigh, Department of Social and Family Affairs; Nessian Vaughan, FÁS; Seamus Hempenstall, Department of Education and Science; Brendan O'Leary, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Michael McDonnell, Chartered Institute of Personnel Development and Bríd O'Brien, INOU.



10.2

Patti McCann, Business in the Community, asked whether it would be possible to introduce the more decentralised Dutch system as outlined by Gerrit earlier in an Irish context. Brian O'Raghallaigh, DSFA, said that it was very unlikely. Brian acknowledged that it could be attractive at one level, in particular the delivery of services more locally. However, Brian said that workfare – where unemployed people have to work for their payment is a feature of the Dutch system. Brian added that it was more important that the reasons for why people were presenting were successfully analysed.

10.3

A seminar delegate said that he was very worried about the compulsory nature of the Dutch system. He said that this would add to the problem. Heidi Bedell, TARGET, said that work was very important, not least to keep a person sane. Heidi added that it was very important to ensure that people were encouraged and supported into work. Bríd O'Brien said that the key issue was one of choice. If it is mandatory for people to take up specific options or lose their payment, then there is a real danger that the wrong person will go on the wrong course. It is very important that access to social welfare payments are

available to people, and the challenge is ensuring that there are also a range of attractive quality education and training options available to them, Bríd concluded. Robbert Lynch, INOU, said that there were very significant delays in people receiving a Jobseeker's payment. Brian O'Raghallaigh, DSFA, said that the Department were in the process of hiring an additional 115 staff to deal with the ever increasing numbers of people signing-on. Brian informed the seminar that a new Dublin office would assist with claims and added that unfortunately it would be unrealistic given the increases in unemployment not to see delays.

10.4

Helen Ryan, NALA, said that it was important to ensure that literacy was knitted into workplace courses as much as possible. Helen said that being creative and flexible were key requisites behind many successful programmes. Seamus Hempenstall, Department of Education and Science, said that adult literacy was a priority for the Department. He said that there were 45,000 participants in literacy programmes. Seamus added that core skills like literacy and numeracy were vital for people's self esteem, confidence and participation in society.

10.5

Michael McDonnell, CIPD, said he took encouragement from the seminar as unemployed people were seen as customers with requirements and needs. Michael said there was a real need to better integrate learning and development. Michael added that it was important to shift our mindset in order to investigate the possibility of the state training agency providing training for people who are on reduced working hours. Michael called for the integration of learning and the national skills framework. Michael added that it was time to beef up the job club concept and develop a good job club structure.

10.6

Nessian Vaughan, FÁS, said that FÁS would need to ensure that people could access training from providers other than FÁS. Gerard McNamara, Limerick LES, asked where the future jobs would be created? Brendan O'Leary, DETE, said that there were 100,000 more people signing-on in the last 12 months. The projections for next year were very negative and Brendan added that the huge increase in the Live Register was putting more pressure on state agencies. Brendan said that jobs would be the key and hoped the downturn would be short lived.

10.7

Kathleen McCann, Congress Centres Network, pointed to the demographic changes in the labour force including significant numbers of people from other countries. Kathleen said that the social welfare system was complex and comprehensive information was very important. Kathleen said that there was also a need for language training. Brian O'Raghallaigh, DSFA, said that there was a changed perspective in that fewer migrants were coming to Ireland as work opportunities reduce. John Sweeney, NES, asked whether we may be missing opportunities for skills sets including languages to be learned by Irish people from Polish, Chinese and other workers.

10.8

Michael McDonnell, CIPD, said that we had not utilised the skills and abilities of the migrant labour force to the fullest extent. Michael added that there was a need to develop the export capacity of our indigenous sector. Michael said there was a need to utilise language skills to open up new markets adding that it could be really useful to recruit people with such skills on work experience initially. Dan Arnold said that it was important to learn from national and international expertise. Dan said that the Ballyhoura Development Community Group had developed a rapid response unit to provide help and assistance to people in a very short time.

11.

Concluding Remarks

John Stewart thanked the speakers, panellists and everyone who attended for their participation in the seminar. John said that the INOU would be producing a seminar report which should be available in the New Year.

We would like to thank the Department of Social and Family Affairs for financially supporting this seminar. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department.

