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Action Plan for Jobs 2017

Submission to Mary Mitchell-O'Connor
T.D. Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and
Innovation

INO Key Priorities for the Action Plan
for Jobs 2017

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CONTEXT

The INOU welcomes the formulation of a new Action Plan for Jobs 2017 and appreciates the opportunity to outline our key priorities in this regard.

According to the most recent unemployment statistics, the Monthly Unemployment figures for July 2016, there were 169,100 people unemployed, bringing the overall unemployment levels back to the autumn of 2008. In the same month, there were 319,294 people on the Live Register, bringing it back to late 2008, early 2009 figures. These movements in the official unemployment and Live Register figures are welcome, however, unemployment still stands at 7.8%. The Monthly Unemployment figures do not give a breakdown by duration, these are only available from the Quarterly National Household Survey, and in Quarter 1 2016, 56% of those officially unemployed had been unemployed for more than a year. This reality presents a particular challenge for any *Action Plan for Jobs*.

Notwithstanding the very positive increase in the number of construction related job opportunities in some areas, there are still over 100,000 people unemployed whose previous occupation is listed as craft and related and plant and machine operatives.

Overall, the figures generally reflect the on-going improvement in the labour market. However, unemployment has not been resolved. Behind these statistics are individuals and their families who rely on the state both to provide income support whilst they are unemployed and also, critically, key employment services and supports to assist them to get back to work.

In the *Programme for Government* it states “*Specifically, the new Government will:*

- *Target 200,000 extra jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside of Dublin*
- *Reduce the unemployment rate to 6%*
- *Facilitate the return of at least 70,000 emigrants*
- *Prioritise balanced regional development, which will allow us to aim for an unemployment rate in each county that is within one percent of the State average by 2020” (p35-36)*

While welcoming this ambition, it is critical that targets are also set to ensure that people living in families and communities experiencing structural unemployment, people living in jobless households because of this reality, or because they are parenting alone, or because they have a disability, feel they are being truly included in Ireland’s economic and social development. At the height of the Celtic Tiger Ireland failed to address these inequalities, as the *Programme for Government* notes “*While Ireland has been a wealthy country for a generation, the gap between rich and poor has remained far too large. Even before the economic collapse, Ireland had the highest rate of jobless households in Europe, facilitated by educational disadvantage, poor childcare, and a passive social welfare system that failed to offer people the supports and training needed for work. Scandals about historic and ongoing abuse and neglect of children, the elderly, racial minorities, people with disabilities and others,*

have long been an indictment of the motivation and capacity of our State and non-State institutions to include vulnerable groups in our economic and social progress.” (p38-39)

ACTION PLAN FOR JOBS 2017

It is imperative that the Action Plan for Jobs 2017 plays its part in addressing these inequalities. In particular, across all relevant Departments and agencies it is vital that there is a seamless flow of good information on employment and education and training opportunities, enterprise supports and welfare to work incentives in order to ensure that unemployed people and others of working age are able to access available employment opportunities. To ensure better outcomes, it is also critical that employers are supported and encouraged to employ unemployed people and other people distant from the labour market, and that a real effort is made to ensure that people get access to decent and sustainable jobs. Skills gaps must also be addressed to ensure that unemployed people and others of working age acquire the right skills to be able to access sustainable employment and improve their long-term prospects. It is welcomed that the Programme for Government states *“The new Partnership Government will develop our social protection services into an active employment service that works with, and helps jobseekers to return to work. We are determined that nobody will be left behind in the recovery and for this reason the Government needs to be more radical to end the plight of jobless households. In addition to implementing the ‘Pathways to Work’ 5 Year Strategy which aims to help 50,000 Long-Term Unemployed people into jobs, we will publish a dedicated ‘Pathways to Work for Jobless Households’ to support jobless households into employment.” (p40)*

While the INOU believes the overall unemployment target in the Programme for Government may not be ambitious enough, the regional and county employment targets may, for some regions or counties be more difficult to reach. The INOU recommends that the Regional Action Plans, particularly in the regions where unemployment is highest are sufficiently resourced, integrated and flexible to provide the best opportunities to achieve this target.

FIVE KEY ACTIONS/PRIORITIES

1. Local/Regional Job Announcements

Where large scale job creation is announced in a locality or region, the INOU calls for the development of an integrated, inter-departmental and inter-agency approach that ensures that the maximum possible number of unemployed people get these jobs. The involvement of and getting buy in from the enterprise (s) creating these employment opportunities from the outset is also critical. Elements of an integrated approach would include very early engagement with the company that announced the jobs with a view to gathering information on the nature of the positions to be filled, including clarification on the skills, experience and competencies criteria required to successfully do the jobs and also the recruitment process to be used for filling the positions. This in turn should inform the work of the local employment services (Intreo/LES/JobPath/Employability Services) and education and training providers with a view to ensuring that unemployed people are supported to access these positions. Relevant training courses should be established to ensure the necessary

accreditation is available; Job Clubs should be organised - or similar job preparation work undertaken - in order to prepare local unemployed people for interview and to provide key welfare to work information.

The INOU believes that, in order for this to be successful, local agencies and organisations need to work collaboratively and in a timely manner as there is, we believe, very significant scope to provide employers with suitable workers and unemployed people with jobs. The INOU recommends that this approach be adopted/piloted in response to the very welcome job creation arising from the Center Parcs development in Longford. Appropriate links with the Regional Action Plan for Jobs would also be critical in this regard. The development of such an approach could also usefully build on a number of other previous initiatives which were successful in placing unemployed people in jobs.

1.1 Related Aspects

Run a joint DJEI and DSP awareness campaign, involving the Chambers of Commerce, IBEC, ISME, SFA and Employer Networks, including Business in the Community, to highlight the employer incentives to recruit people who have been unemployed for more than one year, principally JobsPlus. This could also provide a useful opportunity to highlight how the employment services and new Jobs Ireland website could support employers with their recruitment needs.

The INOU welcomes the Pathways to Work commitment to 'review the possibility of adapting the JobsPlus scheme to incentivise employers to recruit people unemployed more than three years'. In addition to financial incentives, the INOU recommends employment service provide follow-up support which would be available both to the employer and the new employee.

2. Pro-active Engagement/Support

To ensure increased access to the local labour market, the welfare to work journey should be as seamless as possible. Information on available and emerging employment opportunities should be provided to unemployed people and others of working age in a pro-active and timely fashion. When job announcements are made, the State Employment Services (Intreo/LES/JobPath/Employability Services) should ascertain the person and job specification for the emerging employment to determine the extent to which their clients could access these jobs. Where it emerges that unemployed people and others of working age do not have the required skills and abilities, the employment services should ensure that people are supported to acquire the requisite skills and therefore enhance their prospects of getting a decent job.

3. Improved Job Matching /Jobs Fairs

Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of job-matching: this would build up the confidence of employers that they will be able to access the employees they need through the public employment service; and it would build up the confidence of unemployed people that the services will meet their employment needs. Building on the protocol between the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the

Enterprise Agencies which aims to maximise recruitment from the Live Register would help in this regard.

The INOU welcomes the development of a National Jobs Week. We believe that this could be further developed. We welcome the Job Fairs that are being planned and we have taken up the opportunity to contribute to the planning of one of these events. The INOU recommends that there is at least one very significant JobFair or job week event per region and that these are complemented by a number of other related events in the regions. Key to the success of JobFairs is the participation of employers that are actively seeking to fill jobs; lists of vacancies notified to the employment services; CV and Interview Preparation workshops; Workshops on the welfare to work incentives available to support unemployed people to take-up work and the involvement of relevant local and statutory organisations.

4. Enterprise and Other Supports

Ensure that unemployed people on the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance are given every opportunity to make their business a success, including the option of extending the BTWEA to three years: an imperative as so many unemployed people using this support are often addressing a lack of employment opportunities in their local labour market. To that end, it is essential that supports for small and medium sized enterprises also provide proper supports for unemployed people who wish to pursue self-employment.

The INOU would also recommend that local communities are supported to address their local socio-economic needs through the provision of resources to support the development of social enterprises. The role played by initiatives like Community Employment and Tús in the delivery of local public / community services and employment opportunities for unemployed people and others distant from the labour market should be acknowledged. It is essential that the progression outcomes from these programmes for participants to the wider labour market are improved by highlighting the very real skills and work experience acquired through participation in these programmes. Programme Participants should also be supported to find subsequent employment through enhanced job-matching facilities.

5. Education and Training

Integral to the delivering a quality adult education experience for learners should include:

- A comprehensive recruitment process that strives to match the individual to the appropriate course.
- Good programme supports including: a built-in induction period; high quality tutors; flexibility to take into account the life circumstances of the adult participants.
- Post progression supports to support the learner to find paid employment or a suitable further course of study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.