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BULLETIN

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed is a federation of unemployed people and more than 195 groups throughout the country, concerned with combating unemployment.

What's happening to Services for Jobseekers?

In the Programme for Government it states "We will replace FÁS with a new National Employment and Entitlements Service so that all employment and benefit support services will be integrated in a single delivery unit managed by the Department of Social Protection. This integrated service would provide a 'one stop shop' for people seeking to establish their benefit entitlements; looking for a job; and seeking advice about their training options.

It will process citizen entitlements such as supplementary welfare allowances, higher education grants and welfare allowances. It will manage as much as possible means testing for State entitlements. It will also be responsible for employment referral and training supports provided by FÁS. This service will offer users a higher level of personalised employment counselling, with more frequent face-to-face interviews. Those on the live register who are identified as being most at risk of long-term unemployment will receive priority treatment for more intensive support. It will ensure active case management for people in need of assistance." (p8)

The service envisaged in this quote indicates a service much broader than a merger of FÁS Employment and Community Services, Community Welfare Service and the Department of Social Protection initiated by the previous Government would suggest. On 3rd August the Department of Social Protection published their Project Plan for this new service.

The INOU believes strongly that this proposed new National Employment and Entitlement Service (NEES) must strive to be as ambitious as possible and it must seek to provide a world class service to unemployed people. To develop such a service key issues must be addressed and key principles must underpin its development.

At a first glance the guiding principles for this new service are to be welcomed as they include:

- A client centred service
- Customised for the specific client needs
- A case management approach
- Service Delivery Focus
- Activation is the priority
- Providing an environment for staff to excel and develop

Also to be welcomed is the joined-up training and development referral model between NEES JobBridge and SOLAS outlined on p 19 of the report. SOLAS is the new further education and training body announced by the Department of Education and Skills on 27th July which will incorporate FÁS Training services and ultimately will be rolled out through the VEC structure.

However the INOU is concerned that the culture underpinning this new service will remain one of enforcement rather than one of enablement which is required if this new service is to be efficient, effective and equitable. The cause of concern is the following

quote from the summary description of the new service:

- a) *The creation of a social contract between the citizen claiming unemployment benefits and the State under which the citizen commits to engage with the employment advice/training referral services. Failure of the citizen to honour this commitment can lead to a reduction or withdrawal of benefit payments. (p8)*

For the development of a truly efficient, effective and equitable service the State must commit itself to deliver for the unemployed citizen and this commitment must be clearly stated. The revised model for the much criticised National Employment Action Plan is not ambitious as it envisages "that new clients signing-on on to the live register will, as a minimum, benefit from a Group Engagement after three months and a referral to job placement/training after eighteen months" (p12) The longer someone is unemployed, the harder it is for them to find a job. If activation is to be meaningful referrals to job placement/training will have to occur well before eighteen months. And the social contract between the state and the citizen must hold such a commitment. ■

Minister launches Working for Work

The INOU welcomed Joan Burton, TD, Minister for Social Protection, to Araby House on Tuesday 26th July to launch the 18th edition of Working for Work.

In welcoming the launch of the publication, the Minister highlighted the practical and positive nature of the information in the book, particularly in relation to the range of options and supports available to people when moving from welfare into work. ■



Joan Burton, TD, Minister for Social Protection with Ann Fergus, Chair, INOU at the launch of "Working for Work."

UNEMPLOYMENT & REDUNDANCY STATISTICS

Live Register (LR) adjusted
– August 2011 = 449,600

Redundancies Year to Date
– August 2011 = 33,336

LR Standardised Rate
– August 2011 = 14.4%

QNHS Rate Adjusted
– Qtr 2 = 14.2%

Employment Programmes Update

In Budget 2011 15,000 additional places on three schemes were announced by the previous Government. These schemes included: the introduction of the community based scheme TUS; the introduction of the Skills Development and Internship Programme; and the expansion of the Work Placement Programme to the public and civil service.

TUS has started to be rolled out. Little has been heard or is evident about the expansion of the Work Placement Programme and the Skills Development and Internship Programme (SDIP) never got off the ground. Instead, in May, the new Government announced the Jobs Initiative which saw the replacement of the SDIP with the National Internship Scheme (NIS) which was launched at the end of June.

It is disappointing that the terms and conditions outlined for the proposed SDIP were not maintained. On the NIS a participant will receive a top-up of €50 per week to their Jobseekers payment. On the proposed SDIP participants would have received a top-up of €100 and a payment of €50 would have been paid into a fund to provide training for the participants. Under the SDIP the top-ups were to come from the employers while under the NIS the top up is paid by the Department of Social Protection.

The INOU has a number of concerns about the Work Placement Programme including that there is no top-up and

that a number of the places on the non-graduate strand are effectively minimum wage jobs. If this is the case, then participants should be paid the proper rate for the job. The INOU has called for the Back to Work Allowance scheme which facilitated the initial maintenance of a Jobseekers payment with the payment of a wage by the employer to be re-introduced.

It is early days yet on the National Internship Scheme and it will take time for the scheme to be rolled out. However, in the first month following the launch, 1,285 internships had been listed on the website – www.job-bridge.ie with 500 being vetted for listing. A total of 473 interns had been selected by companies and 292 had already started. The evidence, to date, suggests that there is strong interest from unemployed people in taking up intern positions and a number of companies have reported being overwhelmed by the response.

Concerns of exploitation have been raised and it is incumbent on the Government to ensure that the necessary safeguards are in place to prevent this from happening. The Government must ensure that the experience on offer to interns is worthwhile and will improve the participants' prospects of securing paid employment.

TUS was discussed at the INOU's Annual Conference on 26th May. Concerns were expressed that TUS would eventually come to replace

Community Employment. Concerns were also expressed about the lack of training opportunities available on TUS and the inefficient method of selecting potential candidates that will present considerable matching challenges for the local development organisations implementing the programme on the ground. Our view is that TUS as a programme is trying to meet incompatible objectives.

On the one hand it is trying to provide an opportunity for local unemployed people with skills and experience to work with local community organisations that have a need for those skills and experience. This is the apparent rationale for there being no training element on the programme. On the other hand, the programme it is trying to address the issue of fraud and 'catch' people working in the informal economy and hence fund the programme through the savings arising. If last years savings are anything to go by there will be very little additional money in the TUS kitty (see 'Let's get to the facts').

Concerns have been raised about the increasingly complex range of criteria and payments across all of the different schemes. This has led to confusion on the ground and it is vital that inconsistencies across the schemes are addressed so as to ensure the best possible provision and outcomes for unemployed people. ■

Building Futures

As reported in Spring of last year, the INOU is participating in an innovative new three year project as part of the Mount Street Trust Employment Initiative (MST-EI) - an initiative of the Mount Street Club Trust, delivered by the INOU, Ballymun Job Centre and the One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN). This initiative is targeted at addressing poverty related to unemployment in the Greater Dublin Area.

As part of the initiative, the INOU is delivering a FETAC accredited training programme and associated workplace internships which draws on participants own life experiences to

enable them to become peer educators, trainers and mentors. The first year of the Building Futures programme has now been completed with fifteen participants from the Finglas and Ballymun areas of Dublin.

Participants have completed eight FETAC modules at levels 4, 5 and 6. They have undertaken intense workplace internships and volunteering opportunities which have provided valuable experience of and insight into community and voluntary based workplaces. Participants also had several opportunities to take part in conferences, workshops and addi-

tional training. Feedback from organisations who provided internships has been very positive with all willing to offer internships for participants in year two.

Due to huge enthusiasm and commitment both on behalf of staff and participants the first year of the programme has been hugely successful with seven participants been placed either in full or part time employment and two progressing to third level education. The programme won a STAR Award in the 'Projects in Progress' category. One of our participants attended a conference in Brussels entitled 'A Meeting of

INOU Annual Conference

The INOU's Annual Delegate Conference was held on Thursday 26th May at Wynn's Hotel, Dublin. The Conference was officially opened by Joan Burton, TD, Minister for Social Protection. In welcoming the Minister, Ann Fergus, INOU Chairperson said it was vital for the new Government to focus on creating jobs and getting people back to work. Ann also referred to the importance of maintaining the basic social welfare rate and other supports in the December budget and stressed the importance of ensuring that the proposed new National Employment and Entitlements Service delivers a holistic, person centered service to unemployed people. Ann also thanked the Standing Orders Committee members, Elaine Harvey, Frank McDonnell and Paul Taylor for their work.

Minister Burton said that it was clear that it was not unemployed people or people working on low wages that caused the banking crisis. The Minister said that both Ireland's finances and sovereignty has been severely limited by what was allowed happen. The Minister also said that it was important to ensure that the many young men who lost their jobs in construction did not drift into long-term or very long-term unemployment and highlighted the need to create opportunities and pathways for people to get back to work.

The Minister referred to the training and education places created in the Government's Job Initiative, adding that the system of national internships with 5,000 places was to be launched in July. The Minister also referred to the proposed new National Employment and Entitlements Service adding that it was important that training be focussed in areas where jobs were most likely to be created. The Minister added that society needed to support people when they were unemployed and people need to retain confidence in the fairness of the system.

John Stewart, INOU Co-ordinator thanked the Minister for opening the Conference and also for her Department's financial support to provide information and publications. John said that the scale of the current crisis was huge and that urgent action was needed to create jobs and get people



back to work. John said that the recently announced Job Initiative was a welcome first step, but much more needed to be done to support unemployed people. John said that the INOU strongly disagreed with those who argued for further cuts to social welfare payments adding that the problem was a lack of jobs and not that unemployed people do not want to work. John said that the INOU welcomed the announcement of a National Employment and Entitlements service. This service needed to be of the highest quality and should put the needs of the unemployed person at the centre of the Service. John concluded by reminding the Minister of the Government's promise to maintain the level of social welfare payments in the next budget and said that the INOU would be monitoring this as cuts to welfare never heal.

John also gave an overview of the work of the organisation and Bríd O'Brien, Head of Policy and Media gave an overview of policy developments in the organisation since the last ADC.

The following NEC members were automatically elected at the Conference; Seamus Orr, General Branch; Rotimi Adebari, SUIL; Pat

Kelleher, EDIC; Barrie McLatchie, Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre and Des Bonass, Dublin Council of Trade Unions.

Nine policy motions were discussed and debated at the Conference. The Motions included calls on the Government to: develop and implement an integrated and inclusive Jobs Strategy; deliver an effective and efficient employment and related service to unemployed people; ensure access for unemployed people not included on the Live Register to the full range of employment, training and education supports and a call on the INOU to prioritise the increased membership of individual unemployed people.

A new aspect to this year's Conference was round table discussions on a number of unemployment/employment related themes including the Government's Jobs Initiative; the National Employment and Entitlements Service; Meeting the needs of unemployed people who are not in receipt of social welfare payments and Active Labour Market and other Programmes. The feedback on this new format for our Conference has been very positive. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who attended and participated in the Conference. ■

Let's get to the facts

In the public domain a number of statistics keep popping up and are quoted as if they represent the levels of supports all unemployed people receive. Employers' bodies and other commentators have been very selective in how they have presented certain information. For example, child benefit and the maximum level of support in the Dublin area for Rent Supplement are included in sample figures. Yet child benefit is a payment all families with children up to 17 years of age receive regardless of their level of income or its source. With regard to Rent Supplement not all unemployed people receive this payment: in fact it's less than 13%.

According to the Department of Social Protection's Annual Statistical Report 2010, 97,260 people were in receipt of Rent Supplement and approximately half of these were in receipt of or waiting for a Jobseekers payment. €517m was spent on Rent Supplement last year given an average per recipient cost of €5,314. This figure is a far cry from the Dublin maximum for families with at least three children which commentators so frequently use.

Another feature of these examples is that they are usually based on families with 2+ children. Yet according to the Department's statistics, at the end of 2010 72% of people in receipt of Job-

seekers payments are claiming only for themselves. Claimants with 2+ children account for less than 14% of those in receipt of a Jobseekers payment. Given these statistics is not surprising to find that the average per recipient cost of Jobseekers payments plus Rent Supplement was only €11,298. Again this figure is a far cry from the 'sample family' that has been used which implies people are better off on welfare rather than in a job. This sample family represents less than 5% of the unemployed.

Putting things in perspective

What unemployed people need is a job. With over 300,000 jobs lost over the past number of years finding one presents major challenges. This is not only a challenge for unemployed people but one for the Government, and one it must address. When Ireland created sufficient jobs in the past unemployment fell and in particular long-term unemployment which fell to as low as 1.2%.

Much of the public debate about unemployment focuses on 'forcing' unemployed people to do things. 'Do what' is not only a query raised by unemployed people but one raised by support staff on the ground who are keenly aware that they have too few places to offer

the numbers of unemployed people looking for an education, training or employment opportunity.

Another striking feature of the public debate is the implicit presumption that the €20bn social protection budget is all spent on unemployment payments. In fact Jobseekers payments account for only 20% of this budget or €4bn.

Another presumption is that all social welfare 'fraud', a term used to describe anything from actual fraud to over-spending arising from official or claimant error, arises on unemployment payments. Again this is not the case. In 2010 the DSP realised savings of €483m in reducing fraud and error: Jobseekers payments were not the biggest category and in fact accounted for €57m or 12%.

Unemployment affects people in many different ways. It impacts on general health and well-being and it impacts negatively on confidence and self-belief. Public debate on social welfare reform must be about genuine reform. It must be about designing and delivering an integrated system that has at its heart meeting the needs of unemployed people and helping them to secure good education, training and employment outcomes. ■

Recent Publications

Two key publications that will impact on unemployed people have recently been released – the report from the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) on "Supports and Services for Unemployed Jobseekers" and as outlined on page 1 the "Project Plan for the Development and Implementation of the National Employment and Entitlements Service" from the Department of Social Protection.

The NESC report provides a detailed analysis of the services and supports available to unemployed people and sets out a vision for a new employment and entitlement service for unemployed people including conclusions and directions for further changes.

This is a key publication that is likely to inform developments in this area for the period ahead. The publication is available to download from the NESC's website: www.nesc.ie.

The publication of the Project Plan for the Development and Implementation of the National Employment and Entitlements Service by the Department of Social Protection is to be welcomed in that the Plan gives an important insight into how the proposed new service is to be configured.

The stated objective is "to integrate the provision of employment services and benefit payment services within the Department and in so doing to ensure that the payment and income supports to people who do not have a job is directly linked to the equally, if not more important, task of supporting such people in their pursuit of employment and related opportunities and improving their life chances"

Unemployed people are desperately anxious to get back to work. The proposed new Employment and Entitlements Service must deliver for

unemployed people – it cannot simply be a change of name over the door and how the service is delivered on the ground will be critical in this regard.

The Project Plan is available on the Department's website – www.welfare.ie (under Press Office). The Plan can also be downloaded from the INOU's website – www.inou.ie. ■

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Building Futures

People Experiencing Poverty', as part of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN). Recruitment for year two has now been completed with fifteen participants from the Dublin North and South Inner Cities starting their training in September.

The INOU would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved with the programme for their enthusiasm, commitment and hard work which has contributed to the success of the programme. ■