



## Europe 2020 Who's in charge?

### Developments

European labour market policy has a direct impact on unemployed people of which many are probably unaware. In a practical way it happens when an unemployed person is sent by their local Social Welfare Office to FÁS to discuss their employment, education and training options. When an unemployed person is referred in this way they have been put through the National Employment Action Plan process. This is an EU wide initiative and one on which the Irish Government reports to the EU Commission as part of the National Reform Programme or Lisbon Strategy.

The Lisbon Strategy is coming to an end shortly and the EU Commission initiated a short consultation process from the end of November to mid January on a document entitled 'EU2020 Strategy'. Then on 3rd March the Commission published a Communication<sup>1</sup> entitled "EUROPE 2020 a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" which put forward "three mutually reinforcing priorities:

**Smart growth:** developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.

**Sustainable growth:** promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy.

**Inclusive growth:** fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion."

### Issues

Given the extent and nature of the economic and social crisis facing Europe, how feasible is it to realise smart, sustainable and inclusive growth? It could be argued that chasing the illusion of continuous

<sup>1</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION, "EUROPE 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" Brussels, 3.3.2010 COM (2010) 2020

### Departmental re-alignment

On the 23rd March An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, TD, announced his cabinet reshuffle. In his speech he noted that the "jobs agenda" was a major influencing factor in the changes he was making. The INOU welcomed this focus which is far overdue as long-term unemployment heads over 4% and the live register continues at unprecedented levels. However, the organisation thought it was very odd that given this focus on jobs, the word 'employment' was dropped from a departmental title.

There is a certain logic to incorporating employment and community services provided by FÁS into the newly named Department of Social Protection. Bringing social welfare and employment services together should address some of the issues raised by unemployed people. In particular it should ensure that people get timely access to the good quality information on the range of options available to them as unemployed people. But will it? How is this re-alignment of Government Departments going to transfer into better services on the ground for unemployed people?

The training element of FÁS will be incorporated into the re-named Department of Education and Skills. The INOU was appalled to see this name change being interpreted in academic circles as a dumming down of education. This class laden divide between education and skills / training is not conducive to the development of either a

smart economy or an inclusive society. The Expert Working Group on Future Skills Needs highlighted the challenge facing Ireland in achieving its' hoped for economic development given the skills deficits within its workforce. On the one hand the economic downturn has exacerbated this problem but it also presents the State with a golden opportunity to re-educate and re-skill a significant segment of the labour force. The investment must be found to address this issue otherwise long-term unemployment will continue to grow and will become harder and harder to address.

FÁS has been a key delivery mechanism for the previously named Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on its active labour market programmes. As responsibility for FÁS moves from this Department to two other Departments an important question arises: who will now be responsible for the future development and implementation of active labour market policy?

The answer to this question is particularly important as the ForFás 'Review of Labour Market Programmes' raised questions about the impact of employment programmes. Access to employment programmes, like Community Employment and Jobs Initiatives, creates openings in the labour market for many unemployed people living in rural and disadvantage areas. And in many cases they are the only openings.

The INOU is keenly aware that challenges arise in people progressing from active labour market programmes into wider employment and these challenges are intensified at a time of significant job losses. However, these issues must be addressed constructively. Joined-up thinking across a range of education, training and employment providers is required to address barriers in the labour market. In particular to ensure that the learning and work experience acquired in employment programmes is transferrable to more sustainable employment opportunities.

To ensure 'smarter' outcomes for unemployed people requires greater cross departmental and interagency working and a clear answer as to who is indeed in charge of inclusive active labour market policy. ■

### Unemployment Statistics

Live Register (LR) adjusted =  
**433,000** March 2010

Redundancies year to date =  
**17,908** March 2010

LR Standardised Unemployment  
Rate = **13.4%** March 2010

Quarterly National Household  
Survey (QNHS) Unemployment  
Rate adjusted = **13.1%** Dec 09



growth has played no small part in creating the crisis now facing the

Western world. There is a real danger now that in continuing the pursuit of the holy grail of competitiveness that Europe will find it increasingly difficult to ensure that future economic development does not exacerbate social exclusion.

The positive interaction of policy development and implementation at the European, national and local levels will be crucial in delivering inclusive, sustainable and smart growth. In the Communication seven flagship initiatives were identified as integral to the roll-out of this Strategy. What is quite striking about the language used in this document is how much of it is already in use within Irish policy making and indeed within the renaming of Government Departments. For example, one initiative is called the "Innovation Union".

The other initiatives include: "Youth on the move"; "A digital agenda for Europe"; "Resource efficient Europe"; "An industrial policy for the globalisation era". Of particular interest to the INOU are the initiatives on "An agenda for new skills and jobs"; and "European platform against poverty". With regard to the initiative on 'new skills and jobs' the document notes that its aim is "to modernise labour markets and empower people by developing their skills throughout the lifecycle with a view to increase labour participation and better match labour supply and demand". Such a development is to be welcomed but presents a not insignificant challenge if the aim of the anti-poverty initiative is to be realised. That initiative aims "to ensure social and territorial cohesion such that the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society".

As Europe moves towards 2020 it is imperative that its development strives to be inclusive, sustainable and smart. In particular, that those least likely now to benefit from a smart economy are enabled to play an active part in its realisation. ■

## INOUE participates in innovative new employment initiative

We are delighted to report that 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). The overall management agency for MST-EI is the Work Research Co-operative (WRC).

The Mount Street Trust's Employment Initiative is targeted at addressing poverty related to unemployment in the Greater Dublin Area. The aim of the MST-EI is to make a meaningful contribution to intervening in poverty by supporting organisations to develop and implement specially designed measures to support the labour market integration of specific vulnerable groups. The Initiative will also seek to develop a generic model of inclusive labour market service delivery capable of being adapted for the benefit of other groups and localities.

The specific objectives of the Initiative are to:

- Generate positive and durable outcomes for vulnerable groups through an integrated approach to addressing the multiple barriers such groups experience

- Develop innovation and good practice in relation to partnership approaches and integrated working
- Contribute to ongoing knowledge and practice in relation to appropriate responses to unemployment at the local level.
- Generate meaningful learning for policy and appropriate linkage to the policy context

The Initiative will run for a three year period from 2010 to end 2012.

As part of the initiative, the INOU is delivering FETAC accredited training courses and associated workplace internships which will draw on participants own life experiences to enable them to become peer educators, trainers and mentors. The project is operating in three areas within Dublin (Finglas, Tallaght and the North Inner City) and it is intended that the training course will enhance both the employment prospects of participants and also increase the expertise available to community and voluntary organisations at local level.

Work is currently underway on recruiting the participants, from the Finglas area, for the first year of the programme. The project is being co-ordinated by INOU Trainer, Lorraine Hennessy. Please contact Lorraine if you would like further information on the project. ■

The INOU have recently produced an 'Education options for unemployed people' leaflet. The leaflet outlines ways in which unemployed people can take up education opportunities and retain their Social Welfare payment.

The leaflet is available to download from both INOU websites, [www.inou.ie](http://www.inou.ie) and [www.redundancy.ie](http://www.redundancy.ie) however if you require hard copies of the leaflet please do not hesitate to contact Joe McDonagh on 01-856-0088 or email: [development@inou.ie](mailto:development@inou.ie)



## Discussion Forum



Attendees at recent Dublin discussion forum

Regional meetings for Welfare Rights Information Providers were held recently in Cork and Dublin; both meetings were well attended with particular reference and discussion around training and education options for unemployed people.

Feedback from the meetings has been very positive and the INOU would like to thank all those who took part, for making them successful. ■

# Emerging Social Welfare Rights Issues

## Jobseekers Payments pending Illness Benefit Appeals

Persons in receipt of Illness Benefit payments may be subject to ongoing medical 'reviews' by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to ascertain their continued entitlement to Illness Benefit.

These assessments will determine if the claimant is deemed sufficiently incapacitated and can continue to be classified as medically 'unfit' for any type of work.

Where a Medical Assessor, from the Department of Social and Family Affairs, forms the opinion that the applicant 'is' in fact fit for work, payment of their Illness Benefit claim will stop – purely on medical grounds.

Understandably, given that many recipients rely on their Illness Benefit as their only source of income; this can prove a distressing and stressful time for the claimant, with genuine concerns about entitlement to any Social Welfare payment or other source of income.

In this article we attempt to clarify the process and procedures that will ensure that a claimant will retain entitlement to a basic Welfare payment pending the outcome of an appeal.

### Appealing the decision:

Where a person feels the medical assessment, resulting in the refusal of

payment, is incorrect, that it has not taken full account of their illness/disability and that they are not 'fit' for work they have the right to appeal this decision. As part of the administrative process rendering the decision the claimant should receive a letter from the Department of Social and Family Affairs explaining the payment refusal and the grounds for the refusal as well as a leaflet explaining their right to appeal the decision.

Any appeal will be based on medical grounds only, and will be heard by the Social Welfare Appeals Office – a body which functions independently of the main Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Given the detailed and complicated nature of the appeals process and work involved we can only address the key elements for consideration in making an appeal in the following paragraph - if you require further information, assistance or support in dealing with an appeal please contact the INOU directly.

Appeals must be lodged in writing with the Social Welfare Appeals Office within 21 days of receipt, not solely issuance, of the decision, extensions to this deadline can be granted under exceptional circumstances. It is strongly advised that the appellant request that their appeal be held as an oral hearing, where they will have the opportunity to attend and put forward their case. The appellant should seek, as a matter of course, a copy of their Social Welfare file which will contain all relevant documentation in relation to the medical assessment and decision reached. The appellant should also seek representation from a local support service i.e. Citizens Information, Unemployed Centre, etc. in preparing and presenting their case, with a request to the appeals office that such representatives be allowed to advocate at the oral hearing on behalf of the appellant.

It is important to note that recent studies have shown that such appeals against refusals of Illness/Disability payments on medical grounds are more successful when the appellant has the assistance and support of organisations and groups.

### Entitlement to a payment:

Where a person has lodged an appeal in such circumstances, they may apply for

and receive a Jobseekers Benefit (JB) payment while awaiting a final decision from the Social Welfare Appeals Office

Normally, under 'other' circumstances, an applicant for JB must clearly satisfy the Departments rules on 'Genuinely Seeking Work' (GSW) in that they must be fit, able and available for full-time employment. In this particular instance they do not need to satisfy this GSW conditionality

Notwithstanding any statement the claimant may have made directly to DSFA officials in pursuance of their Jobseekers Benefit (JB), where they may have stated that they do not consider themselves fit or capable of work, they would still have an underlying entitlement to claim and receive a Jobseekers Benefit payment – until a decision on their appeal is rendered by the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

It is important to note that there is no legislative basis for the payment of Jobseekers Benefit to a claimant while their Illness Benefit claim is under appeal. This is purely an administrative decision to facilitate the claimant appealing the refusal of Illness Benefit.

The practice of paying JB while IB is under appeal is that the person has been declared to be 'not incapable' by another section of the Department. Further, while appealing this decision (on grounds of being incapable of working) the Department of Social and Family Affairs deems that it would be unreasonable to expect the claimant to produce evidence to the effect that s/he is actively engaging in seeking full-time work.

### Provisos

Under these 'provisions' JB will only be paid pending an appeal for Illness Benefit if the conditionality for receipt of JB is being met by the claimant in that

- They reside in Ireland and not outside of the state
- They are not employed in a full-time capacity
- They are not a full-time student

If you require any further information, clarification or assistance on this or any other welfare rights related issue please contact the Welfare to Work Section at the INOU. Telephone 01-856 0088 or by e-mail: [welfareinfo@inou.ie](mailto:welfareinfo@inou.ie).

## Redundancy info

Redundancy figures to March 2010 show that 17,908 people have been made redundant so far this year.

These figures represent a decrease of 7.1% on the figures for first three months of 2009.

It is important however to note that the redundancy figures for 2009 were the highest ever recorded and showed that 77,000 redundancies occurred in that year, almost double the total for 2008. ■



## Fingal Centre Celebrates 25 Years

The Fingal Centre opened its doors in 1985 at a time when the country was struggling with high levels of unemployment. Again, as The Fingal Centre marks 25 years providing quality programmes and services to the community of Finglas, the stark realities and challenges of unemployment have returned.

25 years on, The Fingal Centre has grown, developed and continues to work with unemployed people and those at risk of unemployment, and to support and assist their progression back into training, education and employment. The Fingal Centre now celebrates 25 years of providing and supporting a wide range of programmes and services across the community of Finglas and surrounding areas including:

- ▼ Active Parenting Programme
- ▼ Citizen Information Outreach Service
- ▼ Two Community Employment programmes
- ▼ Employment Support Services
- ▼ Family Support
- ▼ FETAC Registered Provider
- ▼ Schools Programme
- ▼ Voyages Programme



The Fingal Centre also works at a variety of levels contributing to policy and development, both locally and nationally, through its representations and affiliations on various organisations.


The Fingal Centre will celebrate 25 years in Finglas on Thursday 15th April at 6.30pm, and invites all its friends and supporters to attend. On the night, The Fingal Centre will launch its Strategic Plan for 2010-2013, setting out its aims and objectives for the next three years, and inviting the local community to participate in the ongoing development of their work.

The Fingal Centre's Strategic Plan for 2010-2013 is available on request from The Fingal Centre on tel: 01 884 5228 or from their new website: [www.thefingalcentre.ie](http://www.thefingalcentre.ie) ■


The INOU would like to congratulate the Fingal Centre on its achievements over the last 25 years and to extend our good wishes for continued success in the years ahead.

### Social Media

The INOU is seeking to distribute its publications in as diverse a manner as possible. With social networking and media websites now reaching wider audiences than ever before possible, the INOU is embracing these new technologies. Please follow us on the following sites:

 <http://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Irish-National-Organisation-of-the-Unemployed/197274531407>

 <http://twitter.com/inouireland>

 <http://www.youtube.com/inouireland>

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**Tel: (01) 856 0088**

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### ADC Date for your diary

#### **INOU Annual Delegate Conference**

**26th May 2010, Athlone,  
Co. Westmeath**

This year's Annual Conference is scheduled for Wednesday 26th May at the Prince of Wales Hotel, Athlone. Registration will be from 10.00am – 10.30am. The overall theme of the Conference is job creation. Conference details have recently been circulated to our member organisations and we hope to see as many affiliates as possible represented on the day. Further details available from the Development Section.