



Community Employment

**A Report on research undertaken by the
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
with its member organisations**

August 2001

Acknowledgements

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John Stewart
John Farrell
INOUE Development Section

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INOUE
Araby House
8 North Richmond Street
Dublin 1

Telephone: 01 856 0088
Fax: 01 856 0090
Email: inou@iol.ie

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1. Introduction to the INOU

1.1 The INOU is the National Federation of individuals and local centres and groups concerned with combating unemployment. The organisation has over 200 Affiliated groups. These groups comprise of:

- 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 NGO organisations concerned with related issues
- Trades Unions/trades councils
- Area Based Partnerships/Community Groups/LESSs
- Other organisations expressing solidarity or seeking access to training and/or information

1.2 The INOU supports its members through the provision of services such as training, information and analysis of Government policies. The INOU works at local, national and European levels 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 on the Partnership 2000 agreement and its successor - the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF).

1.3 The INOU is an independent, non-sectarian and non-party political organisation.

2. Background to the Project

2.1 This section gives a brief description of Community Employment (CE) and outlines the context within which Community Employment is to be reviewed in the light of commitments within the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. The overall aim of the Project is to inform the INOU's policy position on the review of Community Employment by way of detailed research with INOU Affiliated organisations that are CE Project Sponsors, and with CE Participants themselves.

2.2 Community Employment is the principal Active Labour Market Programme (ALMP) in the Republic of Ireland. It provides unemployed people and other disadvantaged groups with an opportunity to engage in work within their communities and it assists long-term unemployed people to re-enter the labour market by offering part-time work experience and training. Community Employment is also the main mechanism for staffing and funding many Community and Voluntary organisations.

The number of Community Employment places was reduced from 40,000 to 37,500 places in 1998. A further negotiated reduction of 2,500 places was implemented in 1999. It was also agreed with the Social Partners that 5,000 places would be phased out on the basis that the resources associated with these places would be transferred to the new Social Economy Programme. This decision is noted in the PPF. The numbers on CE will be reduced to 28,000 places by 2003. Assuming that the level of economic growth continues, it is likely that pressure will mount for further reductions in CE numbers above and beyond those provided for in the PPF. These pressures are already in evidence. Both IBEC and the Small Firms Association have called on the Government to examine ways of reducing the overall number of participants on labour market programmes.

2.3 The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness commits the Government to establishing:

"A Special Working Group¹, comprising the Social Partners and representatives of Government Departments ... to:

- *Identify the key essential services currently being provided through CE; and;*
- *Assess the implications of those services for CE in terms of:*
 - *Budget*
 - *Number of places*
 - *The objectives of CE (including the provision of Community Services).*
- *The findings of the Special Working Group will inform future Government policy in this area."*

¹ As the Standing Committee on the Labour Market was already in existence it was agreed to transfer this work to that committee rather than establishing "a Special Working Group".

2.4 The Department of Enterprise Trade & Employment presented an initial report on essential services provided by Government Departments through Community Employment to the Standing Committee on the Labour Market in June 2000. The report was in relation to the numbers of posts involved, how alternative funding could be identified and how continuity of service would be maintained in the transfer. These are also key issues for Community and Voluntary organisations as large swathes of Community and Voluntary Sector activities are underpinned by Community Employment.

2.5 With regards to the reintegration of unemployed people to the open labour market, the PPF commits that:

“In broad terms, spending on Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) will shift to training in order to better reflect market and individual needs.

Complementing the above, an Overall Appraisal of ALMPs will be undertaken, in participation with the Social Partners, taking into account the recommendations and findings of all relevant reports and studies commissioned under the Partnership 2000 Agreements and those otherwise undertaken over the duration of that Agreement, as well as the experience of the Fast-track to Information Technology (FIT) Initiative.

The aims of the Overall Appraisal will be:

- *To ensure that they contribute to national competitiveness by increasing labour supply, through the integration of unemployed persons into the labour market;*
- *To eliminate any unnecessary anomalies between various interventions and to secure the fullest possible measure of overall synchronisation;*
- *To re-orient ALMPs, including the development of the training component of CE, so that the collective focus will be on the needs of disadvantaged groups (the long-term unemployed, lone parents, people with disabilities, Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers who have the right to work, and women, dependent spouses and young people who are disadvantaged) with the aim of progression onto the open labour market.”*

2.6 In addition to a reduction in numbers, it is also clear that the CE programme itself will be restructured, so as to better meet its objectives as an active labour market programme.

2.7 The INOU is a member of the Standing Committee on the Labour Market and this research Project will inform the INOU's policy position with regard to the review of Community Employment within the Committee.

3. Research Objectives

3.1 The Project addresses two distinct issues in relation to the future of Community Employment:

- The resource needs of local INOU Affiliated organisations
- The Labour Market needs of CE Participants

3.2 Specifically, the INOU:

- Researched the level of dependence of affiliated organisations on CE
- Identified CE numbers employed by individual organisations and the roles that Participants play in their respective organisations
- Researched the impact reductions in CE numbers are having on the ability of affiliated organisations to continue to provide services to unemployed people and local communities
- Explored the additional resources required by local affiliated organisations to allow them to continue to provide adequate levels of service and support in the wake of the planned reductions
- Identified key components and resources required to provide an effective and enhanced training component to CE Participants (this element of the process to feed into the overall appraisal of active labour market programmes provided for in the PPF)
- Undertook preliminary research on the development of local framework agreements.

4. Summary of Research Findings

i. Resource Requirements of INOU Affiliated Organisations

- Overall, a total of 1,017 Participants are employed in the 47 Projects that completed and returned the Research Questionnaire
- The provision of front-line services (eg. welfare rights, job search, social welfare appeals) to the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups accounts for the major part of the work of CE Participants in the Projects surveyed
- CE Participants in 25 of the Projects surveyed undertake a representational role on a variety of Boards and committees etc.
- 18 of the 47 Projects surveyed have experienced reductions in CE numbers with 9 projects having to either cease providing services or reduce the level of services being provided
- 96% of the Projects surveyed indicated that they were either very reliant or completely reliant on CE to deliver 'core' services

ii. Framework Agreements

- 10 of the Projects surveyed are involved in the development of Framework Agreements for the local delivery of Community Employment
- The timing of the research coincided with Framework Agreements being agreed locally
- Further research is necessary in order to assess how these Agreements are being implemented

iii. Labour Market Needs of CE Participants

- Focus Group Participants had a low level of awareness of Community Employment prior to joining their respective projects
- In general, the Participants surveyed have a positive view of their experience of Community Employment
- IT training is the most frequent type of Project Time training being delivered to Participants

- 71% of CE Supervisors surveyed believe that the Participant Development Plan is an effective means of identifying training needs
- 76% of CE Supervisors surveyed together with the vast majority of Focus Group Participants believe that a pre-CE Module would benefit some Participants prior to commencing CE
- 80% of respondents believe that the £300 training grant is inadequate
- Retention of secondary benefits was cited by Supervisors as the single most important factor in supporting Participants in moving from welfare to work

5. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

i. Conclusions

Community Employment is an active labour market programme aimed at unemployed people and other disadvantaged groups and has as its objective the provision of work experience and training in order to improve Participants prospects of moving from welfare to work. Community Employment has also become the principal mechanism for staffing and funding many Community and Voluntary organisations.

A criticism of CE has been that, overall, participation in the programme has shown to have had no discernible positive effect on a Participant's employment chances². In general, participation in specific skills training programmes has been shown to increase participants' employment chances.

The recommendations arising from this research project are therefore aimed at improving CE as a form of work experience; providing a more structured mechanism to identify Participant needs in terms of personal and skills development and improving the overall level of resources available to Participants in order to develop those skills.

The research has shown that the Participants involved have a positive view of CE and believe that with appropriate changes the programme can be significantly improved as a progression measure. The most important finding in terms of progression was the need for a much more integrated approach to participation in terms of career path planning and the development of clearer linkages to the open labour market.

Providing a progression option through work experience for unemployed people and supporting local groups to provide a wide range of services and facilities, can lead to tensions between service delivery and progression objectives.

Community Employment, as used by INOU affiliated organisations, is underpinning a range of services in local communities with a particular emphasis on services for the unemployed and the disadvantaged. These services include the provision of welfare rights information, job-seeking assistance of various kinds, educational services and childcare provision. Given the nature of these services, it is clear that CE has and is playing a role in combating social exclusion not just for those who participate in it but also in the wider local community. This fact needs to be recognised in any changes coming out of the review of CE. Due regard must be given to safeguarding these services in any planning decisions taken, whether at the national, regional or local level.

As the situation with regard to the future of Community Employment is a developing one, it is important that CE remains, in the medium term as a significant support to local organisations. In the longer term, sufficient resources must be made available to enable these services to continue.

² K. Denny, C.Harmon and P.J O'Connell (2000) Investing in People-The Labour Market Impact of Human Resource Interventions under the 1994-1999 Community Support Framework in Ireland

ii. Policy Recommendations

- **The planned reductions in CE should be implemented in such a way as to protect those projects delivering services to the most disadvantaged.**

The planned reductions in CE numbers can be implemented in a number of ways. We recommend that safeguarding services being delivered to the disadvantaged should be a clear priority in deciding which approach is used. This should be built into any local protocols that are developed on the use of CE in Area Based Partnerships. Another priority should be that CE Projects with good progression outcomes for Participants should be safeguarded.

- **To move to a position whereby sufficient resources are made available to fund core staff in local organisations providing services to the disadvantaged.**

The use of CE in local communities has resulted in the development of local service delivery infrastructures which should not be faced with an uncertain future as a result of reductions in CE. We recommend that, in the longer term, the provision of funding for core staff should be a goal of Government policy in order to ensure the delivery of these services. This would have an additional benefit in providing job opportunities in fields in which CE Participants have been trained and developed experience/expertise.

We further recommend that CE Participants should have an equal opportunity to access any new 'core funded' positions that may arise and that no unnecessary or unjustifiable barriers be put in place that would restrict CE Participants in accessing such positions.

- **To establish pre-CE modules for potential Participants who would benefit from such modules.**

One finding from the Participant research was that many of the Participants were unaware of what CE entailed prior to joining their Project. Many also felt that they had been 'thrown in at the deep end' in their initial experience of CE. Both CE Participants and CE Supervisors identified a need for the provision of pre-CE modules to which potential CE Participants could be referred. The main purpose of such modules would be to provide Participants with personal development opportunities and access to career path planning before commencing CE. This would serve to orientate the Participants in relation to CE and prepare them to engage in training needs identification once they were on CE.

- **Employment Services personnel should engage with potential CE Participants both prior to them joining a CE Project and during their time on the Project.**

What emerges in many respects from this research is a picture of CE operating somewhat in isolation, rather than as part of an integrated process to facilitate the transition from welfare to work. The lack both of a process for the early identification of career paths for Participants and of any consistent links with the open labour market as they near the end of their time on their Projects were seen as major deficiencies by Participants. This re-emphasises an important recommendation highlighted by the 1998 Deloitte and Touche report namely, to “provide Participants with ongoing progression assistance to help secure employment or other positive placement outcomes”. Given the strong evidence that career path planning, guidance and counselling can significantly contribute to gaining successful outcomes for the unemployed, there is a need for such services to be made available to all Community Employment Participants.

- **Short relevant work placement opportunities in the open labour market should be provided for CE Participants.**

While CE provides work experience in the Community and Voluntary Sector there is an issue as to the extent to which this experience prepares Participants for the open labour market/mainstream employment. In this respect, both CE Supervisors and CE Participants in the survey have identified a period of placement with an employer in the open labour market as being an important component of any revised Community Employment Programme.

Note: As this research project neared a conclusion, FÁS announced that they are developing a work placement module for CE which they intend to pilot later in the year. We welcome this development.

- **The CE training budget should be substantially increased and a supplementary training fund should be accessible to all CE Supervisors to respond to CE Participants’ additional needs.**

While there is evidence from the Participant survey that some flexibility exists in terms of accessing additional monies to fund certain training programmes this is not a universal situation. The fact still remains that the figure of £300 for training has not been increased for many years whereas the cost of purchasing training has increased substantially. Some 80% of CE Supervisors in the survey stated that they view the current figure of £300 as being inadequate.

Note: As this Project was nearing completion, FÁS issued new guideline on training for Community Employment. FAS plan to commence a second phase of Core Skills/Customised Training for an increased number of Participants. We welcome this development.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 This section outlines the methodology used in conducting the research with Affiliates that are CE Project Sponsors.

6.2 A major research exercise was undertaken that involved both CE Project Sponsors and CE Participants to obtain information on the numbers, spread and functions of CE Participants in Affiliated organisations. An important element of the research was also to gain information on the kind of supports Participants themselves have found most useful in relation to labour market integration.

The work comprised of:

- The formulation of a detailed Questionnaire. This involved:
 - Drawing up an initial draft Questionnaire for the purposes of consultation with INOU member organisations
 - Circulating a copy of the draft Questionnaire to member organisations that are CE Project Sponsors
 - Facilitating discussion on the Questionnaire by way of a special CE Workshop at our Annual Delegate Conference on 6th October 2000. The Workshop was well attended with over 30 Conference Delegates participating. There was a wide-ranging discussion about the Research Project and the Questionnaire. The Workshop provided a very valuable opportunity for Affiliates to have a direct input into the formulation of the Questionnaire prior to the final version being produced
 - Comments and suggestions from the Workshop were taken on board and incorporated into the final Questionnaire which was subsequently sent to all Project Sponsors. A copy of the Questionnaire is attached as Appendix 1 to the report

- The creation of a database for inputting/checking the collected data

- Follow up phone calls to increase the response rate. The detailed Research Questionnaire was sent to Affiliated Organisations that were likely to be CE Project Sponsors. In total, 125 Questionnaires were sent out. 47 were completed and returned. An additional 19 Affiliates notified that they were not, in fact, CE Project Sponsors.

- Visits to a number of Affiliated organisations to undertake specific research with CE Participants in structured focus group discussions

- An analysis of the collected data

7. Research Findings

This section presents the findings of the research carried out both with affiliated organisations and CE Participants themselves.

7.1 Resource Requirements of Local Affiliated Organisations

7.1.1 An important aspect of the research was to establish the extent to which INOU Affiliates are reliant on Community Employment to support their activities and deliver services.

7.1.2 The Resource Requirements of Local Organisations element of the Questionnaire focused on:

- i. The number of CE Participants working on Projects
- ii. The nature of the work being undertaken by Participants and the allocation of CE Participant hours to particular types of work activities.
- iii. The extent to which CE Participants are engaged in representational work on behalf of their Projects³
- iv. The impact of reductions in the number of CE places on Projects
- v. The estimated resources needed to replace CE Funding

i. Number of CE Participants Working on Projects

Overall, a total of 1,017 Participants are employed in the 47 Projects that completed and returned the Questionnaire. The actual numbers employed per project ranged from a total of 65 Participants in each of two large Projects to 1 in a Project that shares CE Participants with other Projects.

ii. Type of Work being undertaken by CE Participants

An important aspect of the research was to document the range of work activities being undertaken by CE Participants in the organisations researched. These activities are grouped as follows:

- **Front-line Services to the Unemployed:**
 - Welfare to Work/Welfare Rights Information
 - Job Searching
 - Education and Training
 - Enterprise Support and Information
 - Local Employment Service
 - Social Welfare Appeals
 - Outreach

³ This refers to CE Participants participating on various Agencies, Authorities and Groups Boards, Committees etc on behalf of their Organisation. These include Area Based Partnerships, City/County Development Boards and Community Development Projects.

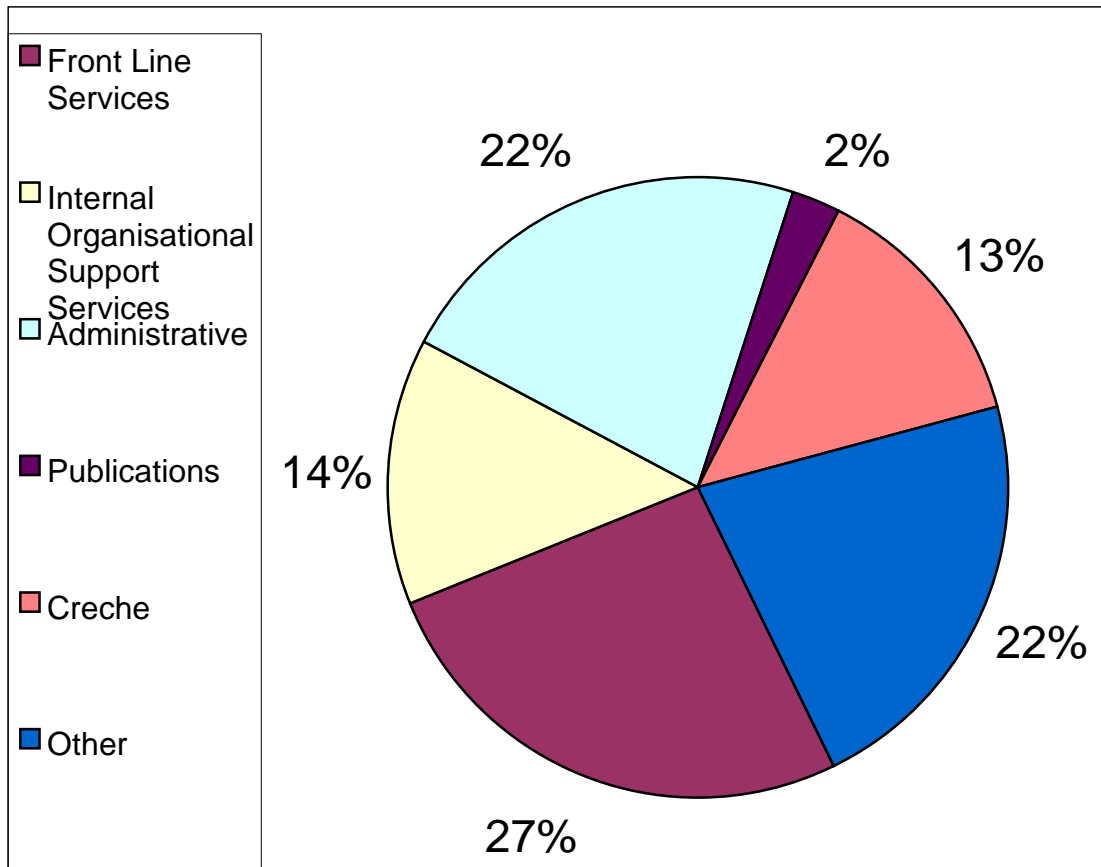
- **Publications**
 - Design/Printing/Production of Information Leaflets and other Publications
- **Childcare**
 - Crèches
- **Administrative**
 - Reception
 - Book-keeping
 - General Admin/Clerical/Secretarial
- **Internal Organisational Support Services**
 - Caretaking
 - Cleaning
- **Provision of Other Services**

This includes;

 - Retail
 - Homework Clubs
 - Youth Clubs
 - IT Training
 - Maintenance Service
 - Adult Education Service

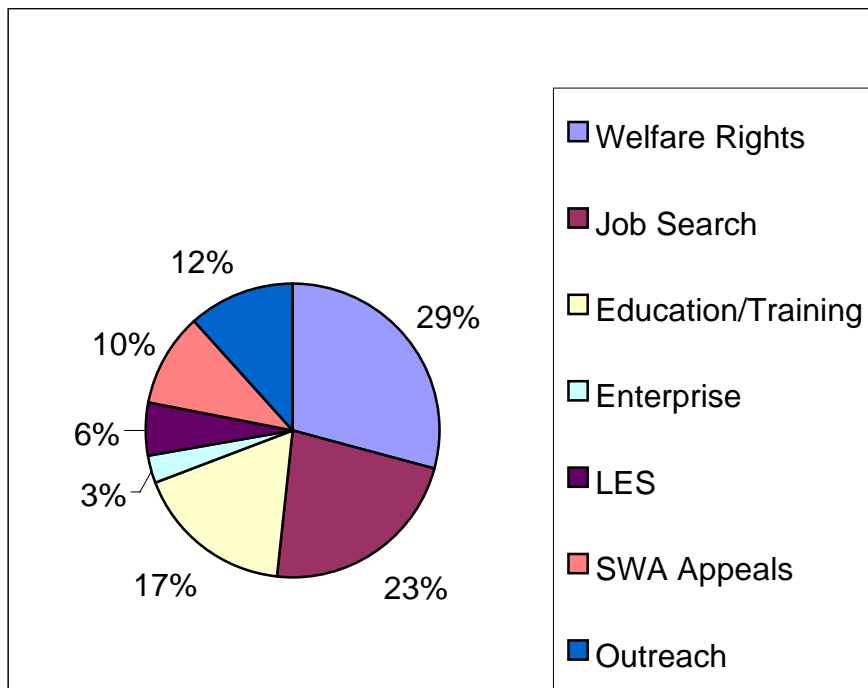
The following chart shows the breakdown of the work CE Participants do in the organisations surveyed.

Chart 1: Breakdown of Work Type undertaken by CE Participants



The following Chart gives a breakdown of the types of Frontline Services being provided by CE Participants.

Chart 2: Breakdown of Provision of Frontline Services by type



iii. Representational Work

This aspect of the research indicates the extent to which CE Participants are engaged in representational work on behalf of their Projects. 25 Projects depend on 41 CE Participants to participate on a number of Authorities, Agencies and other Groups structures on their behalf. Area Based Partnerships and Community Development Project representation by CE Participants account for 70% of all such representation from our Research sample. CE Participants also represent their Projects on City/County Development Board Committees, Regional Health Authorities and LES Management Committees.

iv. Impact of Reductions on CE Places

A reduction of 2,500 CE places was implemented in 1999 and it was agreed, with the Social Partners, that a further 5,000 places would be phased out on the basis that the resources associated with these places would be transferred to the new Social Economy Programme. The numbers on CE will be further reduced to 28,000 places by 2003.

The following Table outlines the extent to which organisations that completed the Research Questionnaire have experienced reductions in CE numbers.

Table 1: Reductions in CE Places

Reductions in CE Places					Total
Places Reduced	1-5	6-10	11-15	>16	151
No of Projects	8	4	4	2	18

Of the 18 Projects that have experienced reductions in CE Places, 9 have had to either stop providing services and/or reduce the level of the services they provide as a result of these reductions. Furthermore 10 CE Projects expressed the belief that reductions in services were likely in the coming year as a result of reductions in CE numbers.

v. Resources Needed to Replace CE

Projects were asked to identify the services that they provide that are core or essential to their work and the extent to which these 'core' services are provided exclusively by CE Participants. The vast majority of respondents (96%) indicated that they were very reliant or completely reliant on CE Participants to deliver these 'core' services. Examples of what Projects indicated as being 'core' to their work included:

- Welfare Rights Information
- CV Preparation & Typing Service
- Information re: Education and Training Courses
- Social Welfare Appeals
- Preparation and Maintenance for educational night classes
- Babyroom, Creche and Pre-School Services
- Informal Drop-in Centre
- Administrative Back-up to Counselling Service
- Support for Disadvantaged Women in the Community
- Caretaking and Cleaning
- Adult Education

Projects also indicated the level of human resources necessary to maintain 'core' services in the event of funding for these services no longer being provided through Community Employment. A number of Projects expressed no definite preference between part-time and full-time staff operating these services. Of the Projects that did express a preference, a considerable majority expressed a preference for full-time staff. If these 'core' services were no longer to be resourced through CE, the resources required to maintain the current level of services would equate to 294 full time staff and 278 part-time (i.e. 19.5 hours per week) staff.

7.2 Framework Agreements

7.2.1 This part of the Report outlines details of the Framework Agreement for the delivery of Community Employment in Partnership Areas and highlights the extent of the involvement of INOU Affiliates in the process.

7.2.2 The Framework Agreement relates to the local operation of Community Employment in disadvantaged areas designated under the Local Urban and Rural Development Programme (LURD). In these Partnership areas, Community Employment has been identified as a key resource for the achievement of the objectives of the local development plans. A Framework is in place for the operation of Community Employment in the areas concerned. The Framework, an agreed annual programme, provides for:

- i. Information
- ii. Objective setting
- iii. Implementation
- iv. Working Structures

i. Information

This includes the notification by FÁS to the Partnership of:

- All existing CE Sponsors and their Participant numbers
- Approvals of new projects (on a quarterly basis)
- Trends in participation by age, gender, activity, people with disabilities and progression
- Trends in Traveller participation
- Profiles of job vacancies/titles and types of work experience
- Placement progression rates

ii. Objective Setting

Taking account of local needs, development opportunities and available places and resources, the annual programme facilitates setting objectives to:

- Set targets for overall participation by age, gender and Travellers
- Detail a preferred geographical distribution of places
- Set a desired balance of types of work experience to be provided
- Encourage progression
- Agree on specific projects or activities which should be encouraged
- Agree necessary arrangements for sponsor development

iii. Implementation

In the implementation of Community Employment, FÁS will:

- Take account of the recruitment priorities agreed in local development plans and will link with LES activities
- Co-operate with Partnerships and the Traveller selected organisations in the identification of innovative projects which will provide enhanced work experience/development
- Provide resources to help Participants actively seek work or other training options on leaving CE
- Provide for needs assessments and training for Sponsors in respect of Participants with innovative needs prior to them starting on the Project

iv. Working Structures

- At National level, a meeting to review the operation of the Agreement will be convened by FAS with Area Development Management (ADM) and Planet initially on a bi-annual basis for the first year.
- At Local level, working groups will be established to carry out planning and objective setting. The Groups would also meet to:
 - Monitor progress against agreed objectives
 - Plan/Revise and Modify where appropriate
 - Receive comments on the Projects being submitted by FÁS to the National CE Monitoring Group.

7.2.3 Through our research, we sought to establish the extent to which Affiliated organisations based in Partnership areas are consulted with, involved in or informed of the development of Framework Agreements on the local delivery of Community Employment.

The following Table indicates the general level of involvement of the organisations researched in the operation of Local Framework Agreements.

Table 2: Level of Involvement in Local Framework Agreements

Total No. of Projects taking part in Research	Total No. of Projects in Partnership areas	Total No. of Projects in Partnership areas involved in the development of Framework Agreements
47	36	10

Of the CE projects in Partnership areas, which were not involved in the development of Local Framework Agreements, the most frequent answer as to why they were not involved (almost 2/3rds of respondents) was that Projects were not asked and/or indicated they were not aware of Framework Agreements locally. Approximately a quarter of respondents answered that there had been no Local Agreement.

Of the 10 Projects (in seven Partnership areas) that have been involved in Local Framework Agreements, four indicated a high level of satisfaction with the process, one indicated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and the remaining five did not complete the question as the process was ongoing. In the seven Partnership areas, agreement had been reached in five, one was being finalised in another and no agreement had been reached in another. However, it is important to point out that in the areas where the Local Framework Agreement was in place, Agreement had only very recently been reached and it was too early to comment on its implementation.

7.2.4 As the timing of the research coincided with the Framework Agreements being agreed locally, it is necessary to be cautious about drawing particular conclusions without further research. Notwithstanding this however, our preliminary research suggests that Projects may not be as aware of the existence of Local Framework Agreements, and the important role that they can play at local level to influence the delivery of Community Employment, as might be expected.

Overall, the research has highlighted the need for further research to be undertaken at a later stage to assess whether Agreements exist in all Partnership areas, to assess if and how the Agreement is being implemented and to monitor what processes have been established to ensure Projects are informed and consulted on developments.

Note: Information in this section of the Report, outlining how the Framework Agreements are to operate, has been sourced from Appendix 22, Framework Agreement- Partnership Areas in the FAS: Community Employment Sponsor Operation Manual

7.3 Labour Market Needs of CE Participants

7.3.1 This part of the report relates to the element of the research that covers Participant training and development and the extent to which the training component of CE meets the real labour market needs of Participants. The views and experience of CE Participants who participated in the research are incorporated into this part of the report.

7.3.2 In terms of reintegrating unemployed people into the open labour market, the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness commits that:

“In broad terms, spending on Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) will shift to training in order to better reflect market and individual needs”

Complementing the above, an Overall Appraisal of ALMPs will be undertaken, in participation with the Social Partners. A key aim of the Overall Appraisal is:

- *To re-orient ALMPs, including the development of the training component of CE, so that the collective focus will be on the needs of disadvantaged groups (the long-term unemployed, lone parents, people with disabilities, Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers who have the right to work, and women, dependent spouses and young people who are disadvantaged) with the aim of progression onto the open labour market.”*

7.3.3 The research identifies the key components and resources required to provide an effective and enhanced training component to CE Participants. Instances of best practice in relation to identification of training needs and additional/alternative approaches that would support CE Participants in re-integrating into the labour market have also been identified.

Specifically, the research Questionnaire covered:

- i. Participant Training
- ii. The Identification of Training Needs
- iii. The Training Budget
- iv. Labour Market Integration {in terms of how Participants can be best supported into decent, sustainable employment}

i. Participant Training

The key Community Employment objective is to assist long-term unemployed people to re-integrate into the open labour market. It does so by providing practical work experience and access to training and development opportunities. However, one important aspect from the research with CE Participant Focus Groups, was that the majority of Participants were not aware of what CE entailed prior to commencing their employment. "I didn't know what CE was" and "I hadn't a clue what CE involved" are typical of Participant's responses. The Participants who knew about CE did so primarily because people they knew had previously been on CE and told them about it.

A number of the Participants indicated they were surprised that CE was not explained as an option. "Fas offered me a course from 9-5. It was not suitable, but no-one told me about CE. I heard about it from someone else." "I went to FÁS a long time ago... CE was never mentioned". Another Participant added that " CE vacancies are on the [FÁS] Board but there's no explanation of what CE is".

The reasons why the Focus Group CE Participants took up the CE option varied, though certain reasons occurred more frequently. One was for the potential training and development opportunities offered by CE and the other common reason was that the "part-time hours are useful". The following are some of the quotes from the Focus Group CE Participants, "Great to experience working again in an office"; "The work situation has changed and CE is a chance to update skills", "I was ill and told I'd never work. I registered with [the then] NRB and have a new life".

It is evident that CE impacts in a positive way for CE Participants through providing flexible family friendly working arrangements which can prepare Participants for future employment and also enhances their income. However, the Focus Group CE Participants also commented on the potential negative aspects. One CE Participant who was on a Community Employment Project for the third time spoke of her frustration at CE becoming virtually "a semi-permanent way of life". This was in the context that the career the CE Participant hoped to pursue contained mostly positions funded through CE with insufficient jobs available. This lack of suitable employment opportunities locally was mentioned by CE Participants on a number of occasions. A CE Participant said that "after CE you get a job or you go back to the dole" and added that when there are no jobs locally people alternate between CE and unemployment and "often that's a cycle that goes on indefinitely". It was in the same context that another Participant said that "a lot of people are trapped going nowhere".

Community Employment as outlined earlier is an Active Labour Market Programme (ALMP) and consequently the progression of CE Participants from CE Programmes to either the Labour Market or further training or education is its key rationale. The training undertaken by CE Participants is an important aspect of CE. Currently, training is divided between Project-Time and Own-Time training. Project-Time Development "should address both personal and future job related skill needs of Participants and the job/work related skill needs required for the Project"¹.

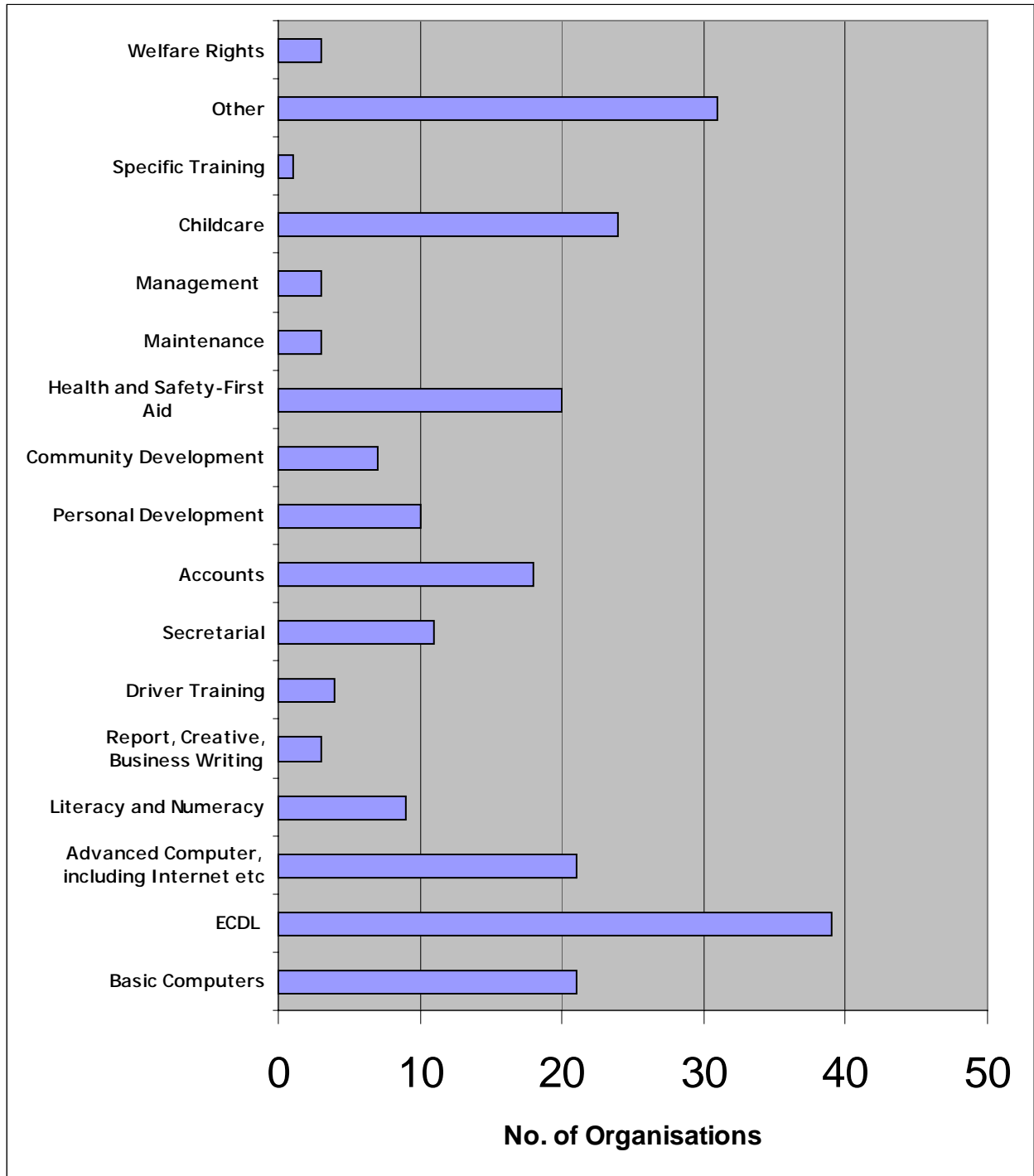
¹ FAS: Community Employment Sponsor Operation Manual (p.39)

Own-Time Development takes place outside Project time [and] should link to the possibility of work/employment after the Project. It involves the Participant, in consultation with the Supervisor, sourcing training/education and undertaking such training/education in their own time.”² It is evident from the research that CE Participants are involved in a wide range of training and development programmes.

² FAS: Community Employment Sponsor Operation Manual (p.40)

The following Chart illustrates the frequency of different types of Project-time training taking place in the organisations researched

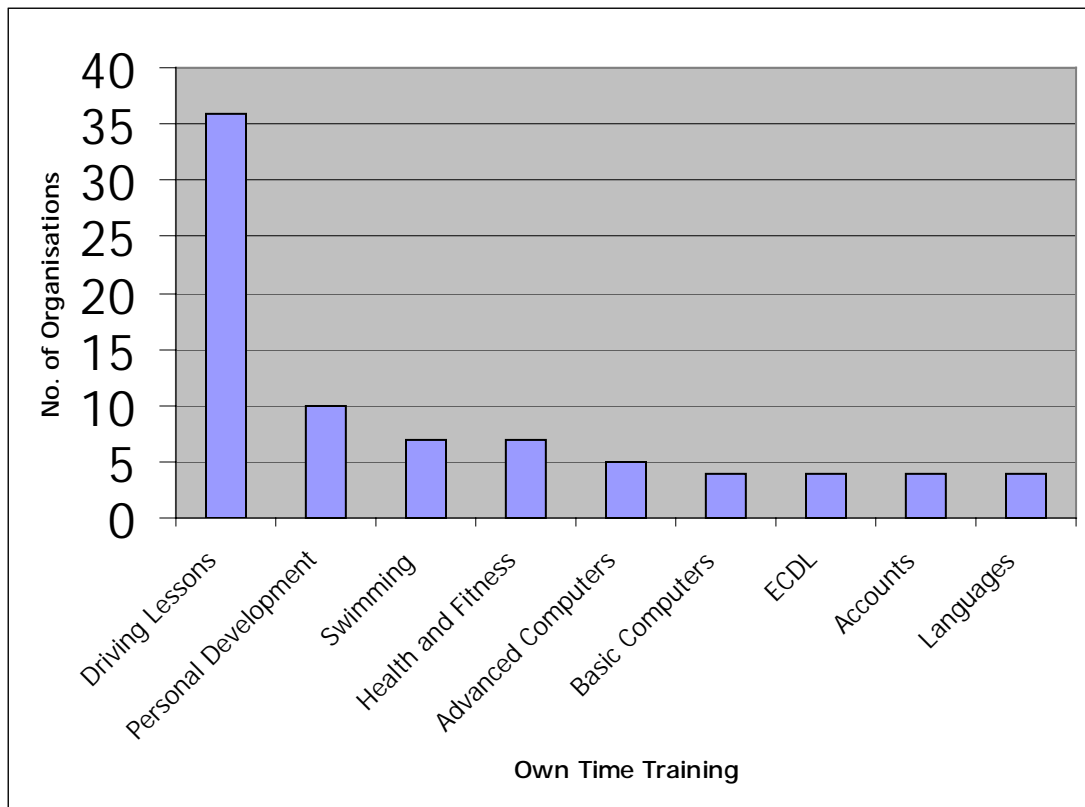
Chart 3: Comparative Study of CE Participants Project-Time Training



The prominence of IT training is a noticeable feature. The Research also indicates that the established IT standard for training is the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). Feedback from Participants indicates general satisfaction with the IT training being delivered. Childcare also features prominently and this reflects the relatively high emphasis on providing child-care services in many of the organisations surveyed. 'Other Training' accounts for the second largest block of training. Some examples of 'Other Training' include Youth Work, Interview Skills, Environmental Studies, Women's Health Issues and Customer Care.

The following chart outlines the nine most frequently undertaken Own-Time Development training modules by CE Participants.

Chart 4: Comparative Breakdown of the Own-Time Development training undertaken by CE Participants in the Organisations researched



While the above Charts represent the frequency of the different training undertaken by CE participants, the **following Table** gives an indication of the breadth of training (by no means exhaustive) being accessed by Participants both under Project-Time Development and Own-Time Development.

Table 3: List of some of the Project and Own time Training undertaken by CE Participants

Project – Time Training	Own – Time Training
ECDL	Health and Fitness
NCVA- Childcare	Driver Training
Drug Addiction Counselling Training	Driving Lessons
Literacy Tutor Course	ECDL
Interview Skills	Desktop Publishing
Montessori Teacher Course	Personal Development
Teaching Diploma in IT	Communications
Diploma in Social Studies	Leaving Certificate Subjects
Literacy – Read to Succeed	Junior Certificate Subjects
Fork Lift Driving	Editing/Proof Reading
Bus Driving	Degree in English/History
Computerised Accounts	Interior Design
Child/Adult Psychology	Stained Glass
Java Programming	Art
Woodwork	Swimming
Interpersonal Communications	Yoga
Communications in Business Diploma	Aromatherapy
Supervisory Management Course	Reflexology
NCVA-Working with people with disabilities	Stress Management

In examining the relative value of Project-Time against Own-Time Development, in general both Participants and CE Supervisors were of the view that training undertaken under the Project-Time element of the Participant Development Plan would enhance their job related skills and knowledge and thus improve their potential to secure employment. In terms of Own-Time Development, respondents were of the view that programmes undertaken under this aspect of Participant training were more orientated to personal confidence building and overall personal development. A number of CE Supervisors prefaced their remarks about the importance of training “Training is an essential part of the successful progression of the individual”. The importance of training in enabling CE Participants to take up employment opportunities was also signalled. “Training is an invaluable tool in returning Participants to full-time work”.

The value of both Project time and Own time training was borne out by a number of CE Supervisors and the following quote is an example, “Project-Time and Own-Time training provides opportunities for Participants to develop new skills, a working routine and hands-on experience in today’s working environment. It promotes self—esteem and self confidence which paves the way for Participants to seek outside employment.”

Nine CE Supervisors suggested combining both the Project-time and Own-time training. The importance of so-called “soft skills” was remarked on time and time again, particularly as being more important at the beginning of the CE Participant’s time on the CE Project. “Participants tend to focus on Core Skills training in the beginning (Personal Development, Communication skills, Health & Safety). They enjoy the informal sessions which develop their confidence to pursue hard skills training in computers etc.”

Most, but not all of the CE Participants who took part in the Focus Group discussions knew of the distinction between Project-Time and Own-time Development Training. Some of the comments on the relative benefits of Project-time and Own-time development training³ reflect what the CE Supervisors wrote. In some cases the two types of training were already being combined⁴. Four CE Participants were unable to undertake Own-time Development Training because the Project-time training course they were doing was so intensive, “With the NCVA course, it is hard to do other training as the course is difficult”.

One of the CE Participants remarked that “Own-time [Development Training] could be important to explore options”.

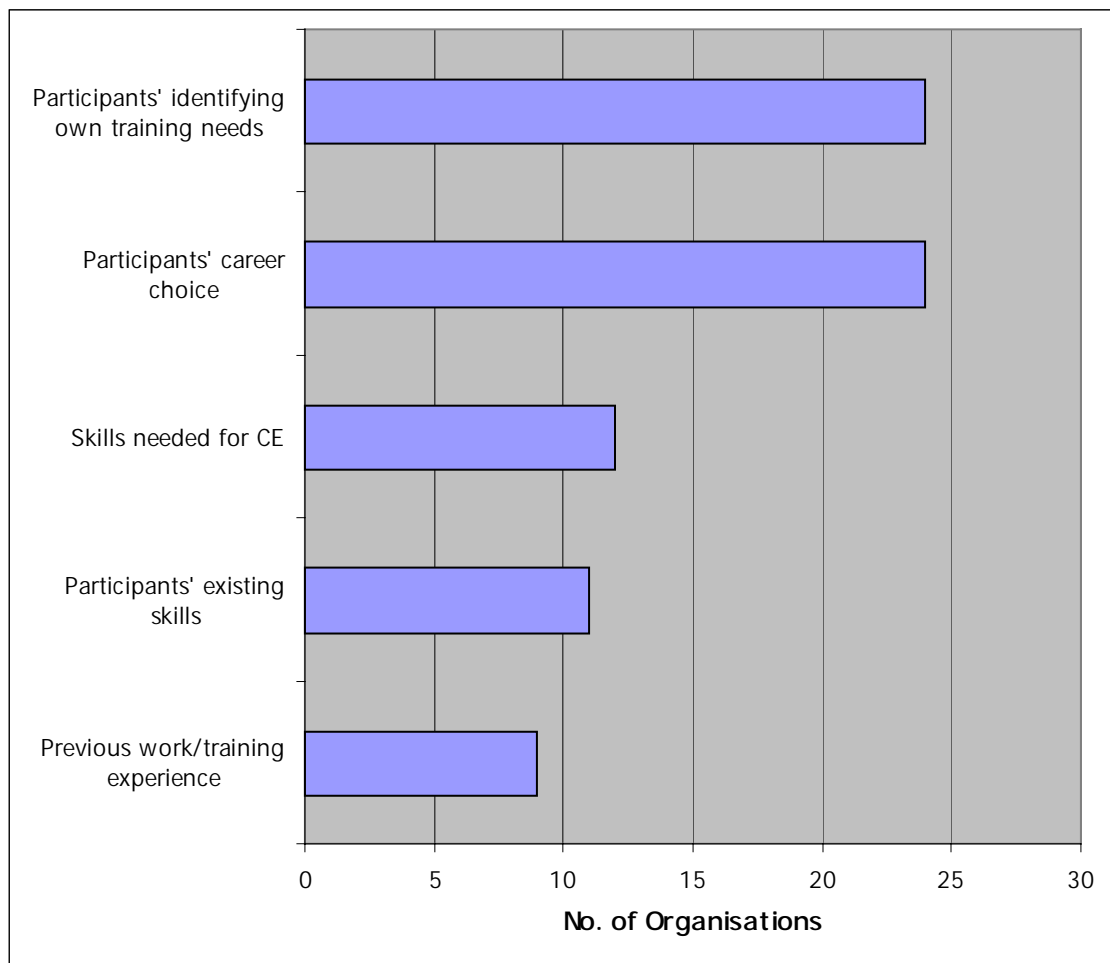
³ This was asked to two of/rather than the three Focus groups following changes identified after the first Focus group discussion.

⁴ Recently, FÁS have made changes to the Participant Development Plan so that Own-time Development training is no longer a specific component of the Plan.

ii. Identification of Training Needs

The following Chart indicates the principal factors that CE Supervisors apply in identifying the training needs of CE Participants:

Chart 5: Principal factors CE Supervisors apply to identify the training needs of CE Participants



Participants' career choice and identifying their own training needs were the two most frequently cited factors by CE Supervisors, although many cited more than one factor. In addition to the factors listed in the Chart other factors identified included motivation, literacy issues, duration from the labour market, Participants education, confidence, access to childcare, family circumstances and Participants age. Virtually all CE Supervisors indicated that CE Participants are very involved in determining their own training needs.

The method in which this was carried out was predominantly one-to-one interviews. "One to one [meetings] helped and encouraged [Participants] to undertake training that would provide employment in a chosen career". Other methods cited included ongoing dialogue and reviewing training and one of the organisations wrote that "year one is usually taster courses and years two and three are personal choice identified with a Mediator from the LES". A CE Participant from one of the Focus Groups commented that "different courses are faxed through to the Centre and the Supervisor sits down and asks us who wants to do what." While this reflected the experiences of the majority of the Participants, some concern was expressed at the tension that sometimes developed between training for the work Participants actually undertake on the Project and training/development opportunities that they themselves would like to undertake. "The training might have been relevant but not what we wanted or needed" is one example of Participants comments in this regard.

Examples of how Participants could be more involved in identifying their own training needs included:

- Careers/Employment Guidance
- Education and Training Officer to Liase with CE Participants
- Providing worthwhile work
- Personal Development courses to identify skills for career paths
- Visiting other projects
- Participants sourcing their own training

The mostly frequently cited answer, Careers/Employment guidance also featured very prominently in each of the three CE Participant Focus Groups. "I have done lots of bits and pieces, but I'm lost not knowing what to do.. A pathway would be useful". Another Participant advocated a Career Guidance Officer to discuss what qualification(s) you would need for a preferred job and who would assist in identifying a career path. A CE Participant said that continuous follow-up with an expert/mediator would be useful, "someone to see how you're doing. For support"

The majority of CE Supervisors believe that the Participant Development Plan (PDP) is a satisfactory means of identifying the real training needs of Participants. Of those that answered the question, 71% of CE Supervisors believed the PDP was either satisfactory or very satisfactory (split equally), 26% thought it unsatisfactory and the remaining 3% very unsatisfactory. The following is a flavour of some of the varying comments respondents supplied about the PDP. "It takes all training needs into consideration and Participants are involved at all stages"; "Forms are repetitive and unnecessary and it would be easy not to involve Participants and write up a good plan"; "Useful, but very time consuming"; "[Participants] Training needs are identified too early", "Satisfactory for motivated participants who know what they want, though does have it's limitations".

There were a number of suggestions outlining ways in which the PDP could be improved. The three most frequently cited suggestions were;

- Intensive Individual Assessment
- More time to draw up the plan with Participants
- Increased Training Allowance

A number of CE Supervisors advocated for the PDP to come into effect later (“the PDP takes place too early for Participants”) or to be more flexible in respect of Participants needs. One respondent identified “regular meetings between all Participants and local LES mediators” as a useful way to enhance the Plan. As has been already outlined, this (or something similar) was strongly recommended in the CE Participant Focus Groups. Other improvements suggested by CE Supervisors to the PDP included establishing a Pre-CE Module, ensuring the Plan is more concise, greater monitoring of the PDP, utilising taster courses and increased opportunities for developing communications skills for CE Supervisors.

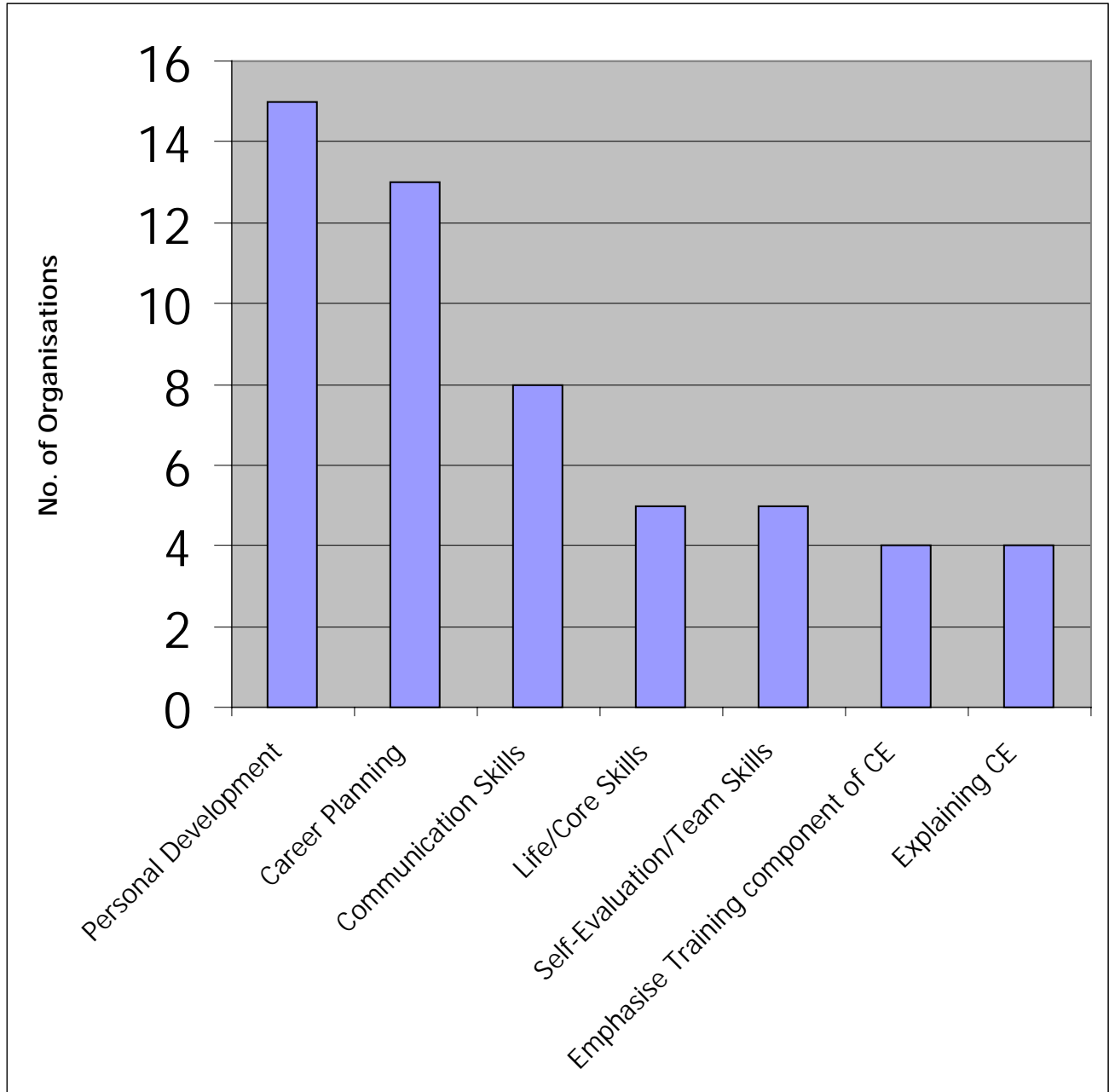
CE Supervisors cited a number of examples of good practice in the identification of training needs that emerged. These included consulting and encouraging Participants, ensuring training and trainers are accredited and ensuring programmes “help Participants identify career paths”. One Supervisor suggested that “Some Participants are not ready for training. Induction is required that forms interaction with other people”. A CE Participant in one of the Focus Groups echoed this saying that what is needed at the start of CE is, “Orientation not training”. Another Participant commented that CE needs to link with other Programmes as part of a structured process.

The most frequently cited example where the practice in drawing up the PDP could be improved (13 CE Supervisors) was lack of sufficient consultation with Participants. Another example listed was running courses in order to spend the training grant.

As outlined a Pre-CE Module was suggested as being of use to CE Participants. Of the CE Supervisors who responded, 76% of Supervisors believed that a Pre-CE Module would be of benefit to some people prior to beginning Community Employment. CE Supervisors outlined different elements they would like to see make-up the Pre-CE Module.

The following Chart lists the six most frequent elements or components that a Pre-CE Module should entail

Chart 6: Most frequent elements that should be part of a Pre-CE Module

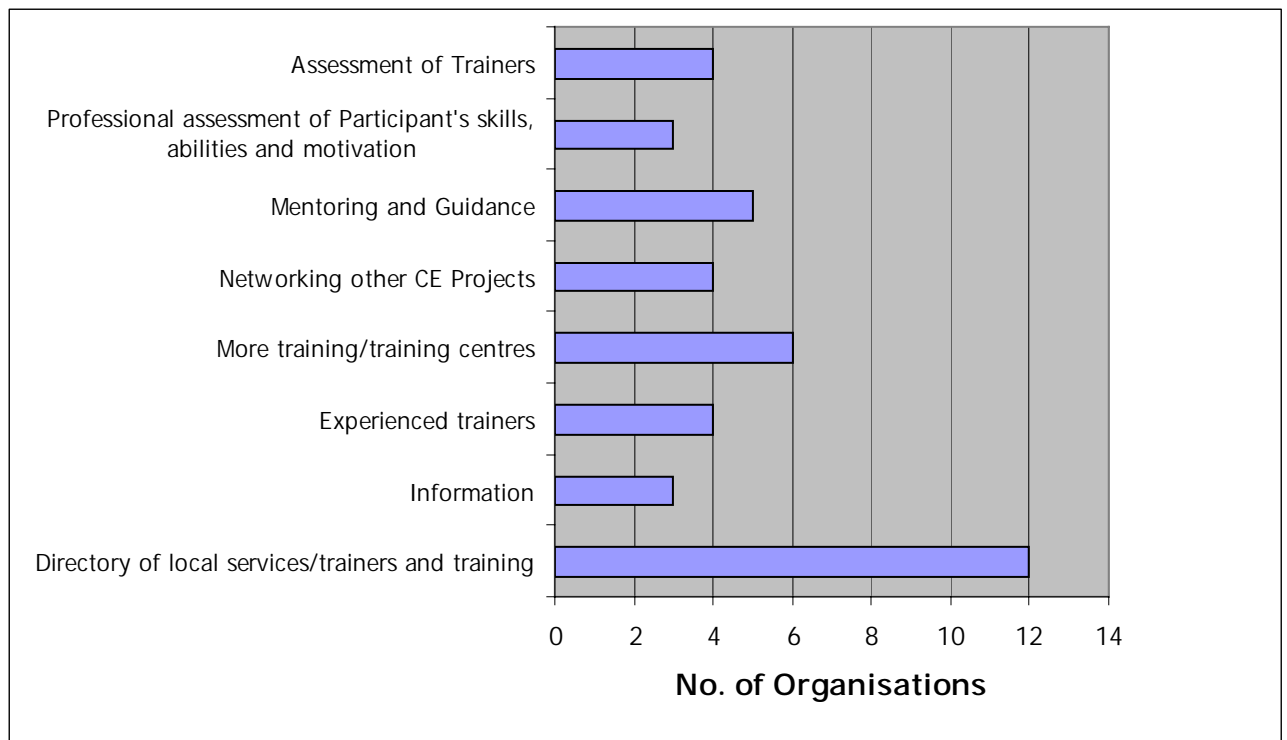


Personal Development and Career Planning were cited as the two most important aspects that the module should encompass. A range of skills such as Communications skills, Life/Core Skills, Self-evaluation and Team skills were also listed as being important. Other suggestions included identifying existing skills, literacy, explaining CE including the Training component and introductory sessions to work.

The vast majority of the CE Focus Group Participants believed a Pre-CE Module would be useful to develop an individual's capacity to benefit from CE. The components of a Pre-CE Module identified by CE Participants were similar to the CE Supervisors and included building confidence, needs assessment to identify skills, literacy and "could give people an idea of what they want to do." A CE Participant said it could be very useful for people returning to the workforce after a long absence, and another Participant said she would have benefited from it, as she felt she was "thrown in at the deep end" when she wasn't adequately prepared for the type of work she was employed to do on CE.

The following chart lists the eight most frequently cited key components, other than budget required to respond more effectively to the training needs of CE Participants.

Chart 7: Key Non-Budget Components/Resources identified by CE Supervisors which are required to respond more effectively to the training needs of CE Participants

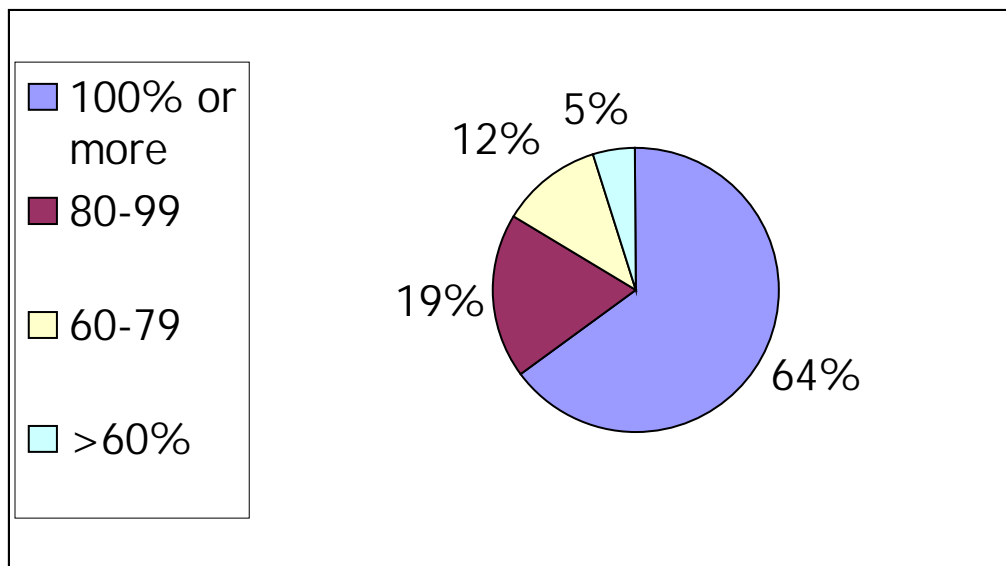


A number of areas recur more frequently. For instance, Training is identified in the context of a need for more training, additional training centres and trainers to be assessed, including that they are experienced trainers and that trainers train at an appropriate level for Participants. Similarly, Information is seen as important, particularly around the usefulness of a directory of local services including training and trainers being available. Networking with other CE Projects is also an important way to exchange information. The importance of information was also mentioned by a CE Participant in one of the Focus Groups who suggested that every Resource Centre should have a section on careers for internal CE staff replicating the way the information section is available in the Centre to the public (this could tie into a Directory of Local Services). Linking CE Participants to career opportunities is signalled in a number of ways, including Mentoring and Guidance, professional assessment of Participants skills, abilities and motivation, linking with employers willing to train people and greater linkages with other services such as the LES, FÁS, VEC's and VTOS. As outlined earlier, some of this was also indicated by CE Participants. Indeed two suggestions from CE Participants included closer liaison with employers and "doing more to set people up in jobs".

iii. Training Budget

The following chart shows the percentage of the training budget the organisations researched spent in the last year

Chart 8: Percentage of CE Participant training budget used in the last year by research sample

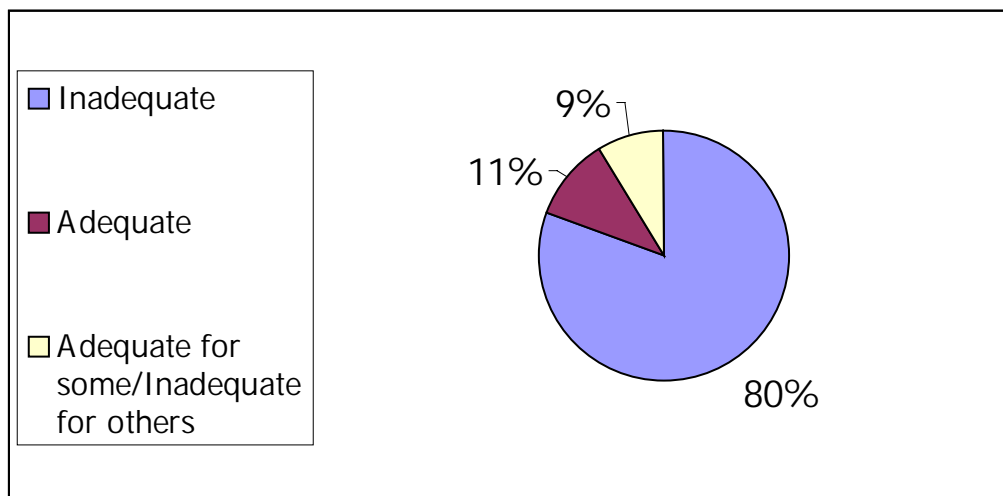


The most frequent reasons cited by questionnaire respondents for not spending the entire training budget were:

- Training too expensive
- Accessed training free or at discount
- Not being able to access type of training required (this was also borne out in one of the Focus Groups whereby four CE Participants had not been able to access the training they wanted)
- CE Participants unwilling to take-up training

The following Chart indicates the CE Supervisors response as to whether they consider the current £300 training budget is adequate to meet the training needs of Participants.

Chart 9: Is the current training budget adequate



A variety of figures which would constitute an adequate Participant training budget were suggested. Eleven CE Supervisors suggested £500. £1,000 was suggested by six Supervisors and figures in between the two were suggested by seven others. A number of the CE Supervisors did not want to place a set figure. Some of these comments included "Training should be free to the Unemployed"; there should be "sufficient funds for accredited training and trainers" and "Supervisor [should] have approved budget on a one-to-one basis. Some Participants are ready to do 3rd Level courses and funding should be available for this option."

Similarly, the CE Participants in the Focus Groups thought the budget for Participant training was inadequate. Three of the Participants said that training courses they were either participating on or hoping to participate in, cost in excess of £2,000.

In two of the three Focus Group areas, the £300 Training Budget was not an issue as CE Participants had availed of training in excess of that amount and finances had never been a reason for not being able to take-up training.

The research findings also illustrate that the vast majority of CE Projects surveyed work with other local CE Projects to pool their training resources. 27 of the 38 CE Supervisors who answered said they had such links. One frequent method involves combining with other Projects for common training needs. Such comments included “We amalgamated to deliver various training courses”, “Share costs with neighbouring projects to reduce price of training courses and share transport costs to training courses outside area.” One CE Supervisor noted that they are “part of a CE Network Support Service..[which provides a]..database of trainers, job advertising and a waiting list for CE [vacancies]”

Most CE Participants believed their work experience on CE was valuable. When asked about the comparative value of work experience and training on CE, most CE Participants believed that both were necessary.

iv. Labour Market Reintegration

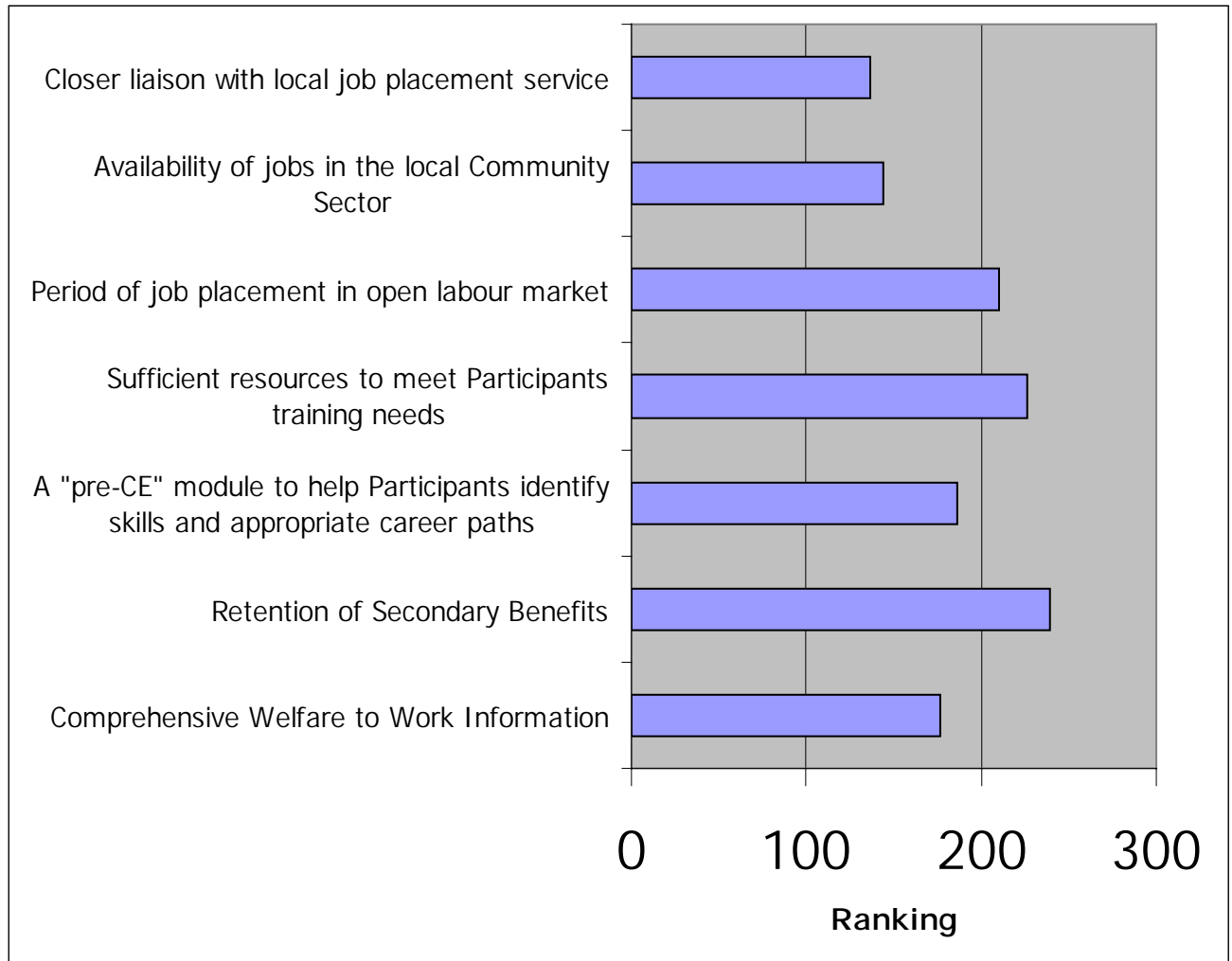
Community Employment is an Active Labour Market Programme (ALMP) and consequently the progression of CE Participants from CE Programmes to either the Labour Market or further training or education is of fundamental importance. The relative lack of progression of CE Participants into the labour market has been signalled in reports as an area of concern. A recently published ESRI report concluded that Community Employment did not discernibly improve a Participant’s employment chances. The authors wrote, “this suggests the need for reintegration paths designed to allow the long-term unemployed and socially excluded to progress through a series of programmes tailored to their needs”¹. CE is, and is likely to remain, a major labour market programme. Our research findings strongly point to the need to ensure that Community Employment itself is part of an integration path rather than a stand-alone intervention.

Both CE Supervisors and the Participant Focus groups were asked to rank factors which influence how successful CE is in reintegrating Participants into work or further training or education and these are analysed below.

¹ K. Denny, C.Harmon and P.J. O’Connell, 2000, Investing in People: The Labour Market Impact of Human Resource Interventions funded under the 1994-1999 Community Support Framework in Ireland p.90

The following Chart² illustrates the relative importance accorded to the following 7 factors by CE Supervisors

Chart 10: Most important factors identified by CE Supervisors in progressing CE Participants



Overall, the retention of secondary benefits, ensuring sufficient resources to meet Participants training needs and a period of work placement during CE were the three most important factors identified by CE Supervisors.

² In the Questionnaire, Supervisors were asked to rank a number of pre-selected factors in importance from 1 to 7 (or more if they identified other factors) with 1 indicating the most important factor. However, for ease of capturing this information in a Bar Chart, the order has been reversed to show the larger figure corresponding to the most important factor. Where Respondents did not complete the form the remaining factors not completed have been given an equivalent value. For example, where only the most important three factors were completed, the other four factors would be given a mark of 2.5 (with 7 as the most important).

The availability of jobs in the local Community Sector and closer liaison with local job placement services were identified as the least important, although the layout of the questionnaire could have resulted in both these factors being under-represented.

The **following Tables** indicate the frequency each of the factors was selected as the most important and least important factors³

Table 4: Frequency with which the Seven Pre-Selected Factors occurred as the most important factor in supporting CE Participants into the Labour Market as identified by CE Supervisors

Factor	Frequency most Important factor
Retention of Secondary Benefits	14
Sufficient Resources to meet Participants training	10
Period of Job Placement in open Labour Market	5
Availability of jobs in local Community Sector	4
Pre-CE Module	4
Comprehensive Welfare to Work Information	2
Closer liaison with Job Placement services	1

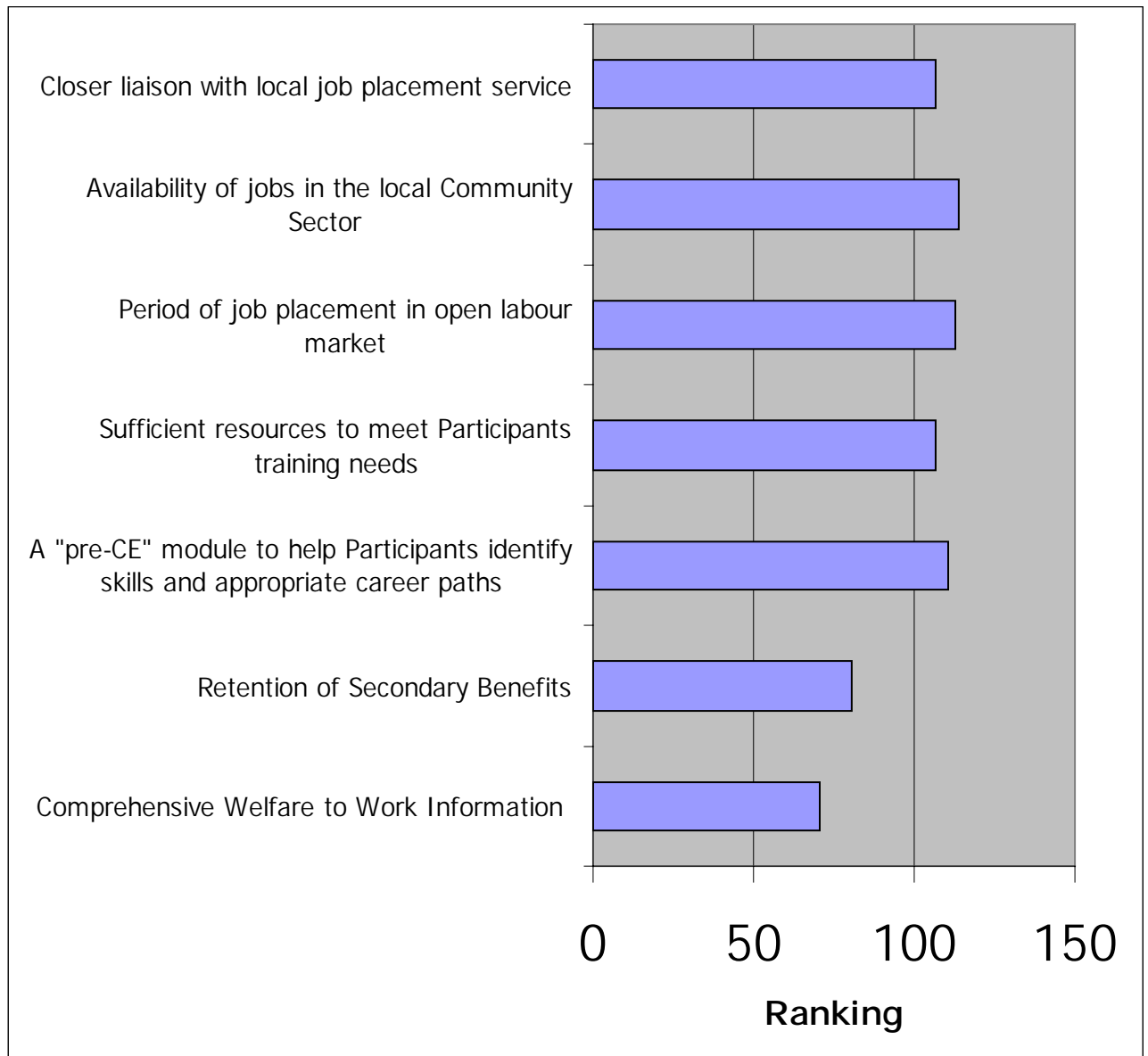
Table 5: Frequency with which the Seven Pre-selected Factors occurred as the least important factor in supporting CE Participants into the Labour Market as identified by CE Supervisors

Factor	Frequency least important factor
Retention of Secondary Benefits	1
Sufficient Resources to meet Participants training	4
Period of Job Placement in open Labour Market	3
Availability of jobs in local Community Sector	9
Pre-CE Module	4
Comprehensive Welfare to Work Information	4
Closer liaison with Job Placement services	9

³ This was accounted only if it was the highest or lowest score outright (i.e. joint highest/lowest scores were not included).

The CE Participant Focus Group respondents undertook a similar exercise and the following Chart chronicles the weighting they placed on factors to better support CE Participants into sustainable employment.

Chart 11: Most important factors identified by CE Participant Focus Groups in progressing CE Participants



The three most important factors identified by the CE Participant Focus Groups were the availability of jobs in the local Community Sector, a period of Job Placement in the open labour market and a Pre-CE Module. The only factor common to both Supervisors and CE Participants three most important factors was a period of job placement in the open labour market.

Both the “availability of jobs in the local Community Sector” and “closer liaison with local job placement services” scored much higher with Participants (though this could have been under-represented in the Supervisors responses). The importance of an integrated progression approach (particularly from the Participant focus group) is clearly borne out by the collective score for “closer liaison with local job placement service”, “period of job placement in open labour market”, “a pre CE module to help Participants identify skills and appropriate career paths” and “comprehensive welfare to work information”. Retention of Secondary Benefits which was the most important factor in CE Supervisor responses was only sixth highest among the Focus Groups.

8. Concluding Remarks

8.1 The Community Employment Programme meets two distinct needs; it acts as a resource to community and voluntary organisations and seeks to assist long-term unemployed people in making the transition from welfare to work.

8.2 Large swathes of community and voluntary sector activity have been, and continue to be, underpinned by Community Employment. The INOU has over 200 affiliated groups. The majority of these organisations in the Republic are reliant to a large extent on CE to support their activities and deliver services to the unemployed and other people experiencing social exclusion.

8.3 As a result of the improved economic situation, Community Employment is in decline as a major state intervention in the labour market. Assuming that the level of economic growth continues, it is likely that pressure will mount for further reductions in CE numbers above and beyond those provided for in the PPF. In addition to a reduction in numbers, it is also clear that the CE Programme itself will be restructured, so as to better meet its objectives as an active labour market programme.

8.4 Despite the current relatively buoyant labour market, many unemployed people are still finding it extremely difficult to find jobs. While the reason for this is multi-faceted, it is vital that programmes like Community Employment actually give Participants the right kind of supports to ensure that they can successfully reintegrate to the labour market.

8.5 There are a number of factors that can determine the ability of CE Participants to secure employment after CE. For example, there are still areas in the country where there are relatively few employment opportunities. Consequently, the opportunity to progress to the open Labour Market is restricted. Some Community Employment Participants also experience a range of barriers (literacy being one prominent example) which can hamper them in accessing employment in the Labour Market. Discussions on the future of CE clearly need to address these issues.

8.6 The production of this report marks the culmination of a major research exercise undertaken with our member organisations in order to gather information on the numbers, spread and role of Community Employment Participants in those organisations. The research has also provided important information on the kind of supports Participants have found most useful in relation to labour market integration.

8.7 On the basis of the findings, a number of policy recommendations have been developed. These policy positions will inform the INOU's position at the appropriate Partnership forum.