

1. Summary

This Strategic Plan outlines the organisational, political and economic context in which the INOU will operate until 2006, and sets out how the organisation will respond to these developments.

2. Aims and Objectives of the INOU

2.1 The overall 10 aims of the INOU, as stated in Rule 2 of the INOU Constitution remain valid, but it is proposed that they be reduced to seven by way of combining two of the original aims and placing an existing aim into the proposed Mission Statement. The suggested revised aims of the organisation are:

- 2.1 To seek to represent the interests and views of all unemployed people and their dependants at a national level.
- 2.2 To campaign for an acceptable standard of living for all unemployed people and their dependants.
- 2.3 To campaign towards the achievement of full employment at an acceptable rate of pay.
- 2.4 To assist the establishment and development of local unemployed groups.
- 2.5 To develop close liaison with the Trade Union movement while ensuring the autonomy of the INOU.
- 2.6 To build on the common interest between the unemployed and employed.
- 2.7 To build links with other national & international bodies that share the same interest.

3. Background to the Strategic Plan

In the context of considerable economic growth in recent years, unemployment has been reduced from the high teens of the early 1990's. Whereas the INOU was at the forefront of public and political outrage at the unacceptably high levels of unemployment in the past, it has proven more difficult to maintain an awareness of unemployment issues as the overall unemployment levels have fallen. However, unemployment has been rising steadily since 2001 and is projected to rise in the medium term. There still remains very significant numbers of people who are unemployed and others who would work if other circumstances were right (child care, caring, effective public transport, lack of rural transport, etc). A key challenge for the organisation today is how to ensure that unemployment remains on the political and social agenda

3.1 Economic & Political Context

The period of the so called Celtic Tiger would appear to be over and the world and domestic economies are in an uncertain state. Large scale Government spending in the years 1997-2001 and tax give-aways have put severe pressure on the national finances. This has resulted in a less-specific national agreement (Sustaining Progress) than in the past. Competitiveness in the economy is under strain, inflation is more than twice the European average and the appreciation of the Euro will further exacerbate the cost base for Irish exporting firms.

In this scenario, the prospect for jobs is worrying in the short term. In terms of an INOU response to this changed context, it is imperative that job losses and job creation are put back in the political arena, where they were in the past and we will continue to challenge commentators of the notion that we are a full-employment society. We will also continue to campaign for the Government to honour its commitments to eliminate long-term unemployment by 2007.

The period of this Strategic Plan will probably not see a general election or a change of government. The present Government is likely to remain in power until 2007. There is also some compelling evidence that the Government is more ideologically driven in relation to policy on the social agenda. This will create a greater challenge for the INOU during the life of the Strategic Plan to effect change on income adequacy and welfare-to-work policies for unemployed people.

3.2 Northern Ireland & the all Ireland Context

Unemployment and long-term unemployment continue to be problems in Northern Ireland. According to the government's labour market statistics (Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment March 2003) the N.I. ILO unemployment rate was 5.5%, the sixth highest unemployment rate of all UK regions. The average UK unemployment rate for this period was 5.1%. 36.9% of unemployed people are long term unemployed. This represents 16,000 people. This figure remains higher than any other UK region. (In comparison the ROI LTU % of unemployed is 29%). Additionally, certain areas within Northern Ireland suffer from disproportionately high levels of unemployment such as West Tyrone, West and North Belfast and Foyle. High levels of economic inactivity also continue to be a problem. For instance, during March 2003 the region had an economic inactivity rate of 26.5% - well above the UK average (around 21%) and the second highest rate of all UK regions. OUNI has campaigned actively to highlight these issues on behalf of unemployed people and to influence decision-makers in the North and London to address the causes of unemployment.

The current social partnership agreement "Sustaining Progress" contains provision for a systematic consultative cross-border mechanism under the auspices of the Good Friday agreement. The Agreement proposes that a North/South Consultative Forum, with the participation of the social partners will be established. It is hoped that the Forum will ultimately contribute to job-creation throughout the island including economic and social regeneration of border areas which have experienced deprivation and social exclusion for decades. The INOU and OUNI will active lobby for inclusion in any Forum that may be established.

3.3 Europe

For a variety of reasons, the INOU has not been in a position to maintain its previously high European profile. Europe will become increasingly more important as it enlarges and takes greater interest in the social agenda (eg Charter of Fundamental Rights & NAPs incl). It is likely that advocacy in Europe will ultimately impact on social conditions in Ireland. The Convention on the Future of Europe will happen during the course of this Strategic Plan and is geared to bring about the greatest change in the EU since the Treaty of Rome. There is a significant opportunity to enhance the social dimension of the Union, alongside its current economic side. At present, the INOU operates through the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) who are members of the C&V Platform.

3.4 Social Partnership: Sustaining Progress

The timeframe for this plan will largely coincide with Sustaining Progress, with a review built in after 18 months. This agreement is quite different from previous agreements in that there is less reference to specific deliverables and more to a strategic and problem-solving approach to the issues facing the country. These issues are grouped under 10 Special Initiatives (SI), including Supporting the Long Term Unemployed, those who have become Redundant and those in Low-Skilled Employment. If the social partners can resolve blockages in Government delivery and expenditure in working on the Special Initiatives, it is hoped that any resources that may be freed up will be spent on the social agenda.

Therefore to maximise our impact in working the mechanisms the INOU will plan to put considerable staff time into preparation of policy positions on the agreed agenda and to achieve as much as possible at committee meetings and subsequent follow-up.

The C&V Pillar has been restructured during the lifetime of the Strategic Plan and the INOU will continue to play a leading and active role. Seven new slots or themes will be introduced (ranging from elderly to rural issues) alongside the existing five working members who voted yes to Sustaining Progress (including the INOU). The INOU will continue to make the most effective use of our time in social partnership by directly impacting on policy advocacy to Government.

4. Policy Objectives

The core policy objectives of the organisation over the next three years are:

- Income Adequacy for unemployed people and their families (30% G.A.I.E.)
- Elimination of barriers to employment for all sectors of the community
- The maintenance & improvement of training/employment programmes/human resource development for unemployed people, including those who are long-term unemployed.
- Elimination of long-term unemployment by 2007 (government NAPS target)
- Development issues affecting disadvantaged urban and rural communities
- Development of social, economic and cultural rights.

- Through OUNI, to work pro-actively on cross-border and other issues.
- To be progressively more active on the European stage on behalf of unemployed people.

Proposed actions to fulfil the above policy objectives are:

4.1 Policy Modules

It is planned to produce eight policy modules over the next three years on many of the above major policy areas of the INOU. These will draw on previous policy work and be updated to reflect current conditions. They will be comprehensive and standalone documents that will serve the following purposes:

- To address policy inputs to state institutions: Standing Committee on the Labour Market (SCLM), FAS etc. on specific issues
- To maximise media opportunities for research findings, new insights etc.
- To influence policy formulation and to promote greater awareness of unemployment related issues
- To inform the wider INOU membership about INOU policies

4.2. Project Work

The INOU will continue to pursue project work from relevant funders.

This will enable us to maximise our influence on issues affecting unemployed people and to help secure the financial wellbeing of the organisation. However, the INOU will ensure that project work is closely aligned to the above policy objectives.

4.3 Participation on Working Groups

The organisation will continue to prioritise its involvement on various bodies and committees, including the Standing Committee on the Labour Market and National Economic and Social Council (NESC). The new social partnership agreement, Sustaining Progress, will require significant attendance at meetings if the INOU is to maximise its output from the agreement on behalf of unemployed people. There will also be committees for each of the initiatives, which will require appropriate INOU input. In addition, it is planned to lobby for inclusion in any North/South Consultative Forum that may be established

4.4 Campaigning

Notwithstanding the INOU's involvement in Social Partnership, the organisation will continue to campaign on key issues if social partnership is not delivering on our stated policy aims. We will not wait for the interim review or the end of the agreement to activate campaigning. The INOU will also campaign collaboratively with other organisations in the community & voluntary sector, and take the lead organisational role as appropriate. In this respect, we will work with the C&V Platform (of which the INOU is a member). In accordance with existing practice, the INOU will continue to prioritise participation in events organised by other organisations.

4.5 Seminars & Conferences

The INOU will organise seminars and conferences for policy formulation, influence, dissemination etc. on the above policy issues. Where appropriate, the INOU will prioritise seminars over conferences in order to maximise the number of events under this heading over the next three years. It is planned to run at least one major policy seminar/conference per year.

4.6 Action in Europe

Over the three years of the strategic plan, the INOU will aim to progressively increase its involvement in European affairs. In the short term it will operate through EAPN. Later, as circumstances permit, we will work more directly with European bodies such as ENU (European Network of the Unemployed), Solidar (a confederation of European NGO's & trade unions) and the Social Platform. We will seek to advance the following:

- Effective bi-annual operation of the National Employment Action Plans, with particular reference to minimising unemployment.
- Successful launch and implementation of NAPSincl. across Europe.
- A charter of social, economic & cultural rights to be incorporated in a new constitution for Europe arising out of the Convention on Europe. The INOU will be particularly interested in the rights of unemployed people.
- Development of links with unemployed groups in countries who will become EU members in 2004.

4.7 Welfare Rights

The INOU will continue to allocate resources to the provision of a comprehensive welfare to work information and training service. To enhance welfare rights information provision and enable input to policy formulation, the query database will be further developed by the Welfare to Work Section.

4.8 Training

It is planned to increase the range and quantity of welfare rights/welfare to work training over the life of the strategic plan. The nature of these developments are:

- To continue to expand and develop the content and 'value' of existing training courses
- To expand and develop the training packs provided to participants.
- To utilise the full range of information, abilities and expertise within the INOU to develop and implement new training services/courses in response to the needs and requests of affiliates and other users of our training services.
- To create and develop a range of 'in-house' INOU Welfare Rights accredited training courses at various levels ranging from general introduction, beginner to intermediate, advanced and specialist level.
- To seek nationally recognised 'official' accreditation of INOU training.
- To consider the possibility of expanding our existing training services to facilitate calendar training on a regional basis.

- To promote our training services to a specific target group of statutory agencies and organisations, given the INOU's unique status, experience and national network.
- To examine the development of multimedia training tools including PowerPoint presentations, training videos, CD-ROM's and interactive distance learning programs through the INOU website.

5. Organisational Objectives

The key organisational objectives of the organisation at this time are:

- To increase the active affiliate base of the INOU (including trade unions)
- To forge stronger links with local organisations affiliated to the INOU
- To strengthen the link between unemployed people's experiences and needs and the work of the INOU
- To have an outreach capacity with newly unemployed people (redundancy)
- To raise the profile of the INOU

Proposed actions to fulfil the above organisational objectives are:

5.1 Review of Services to Affiliates

The INOU will undertake a comprehensive review of services to affiliates and to raise awareness of these services with affiliates. This will include reviewing how best to assist affiliated organisations to enhance their capacity to effectively respond to local job losses and factory closures. The INOU will prioritise the dissemination of policy updates and analysis to affiliates. This activity will include advice on unemployment entitlements and the distribution of Working for Work. This is very important at this time of major factory closures around the country. This will enable the INOU to reach out in a practical way to people facing the upheaval of imminent unemployment.

5.2 Continued Working With Affiliates

The INOU was established in 1987 as a federation of around 25 unemployed centres. Since then it has grown to 180 affiliated organisations. They represent not only unemployed centres and trade unions but also community groups with much narrower focus (education, welfare rights etc.) and those with much wider focus (community development). This represents a major resource for the INOU in outreach potential, campaigning associates and feedback concerning policy formulation around unemployment issues. The INOU will strive to build and improve on the quality of its relationship with existing and new affiliates during the period of the Strategic Plan.

5.3 Operation of NEC

The results of the recent review into the effective running of the NEC will be implemented during the early stages of the strategic plan period. These include systematic use of sub-committees, procedures for agenda preparation, action-oriented minutes and a new starting time for meetings. Increased use of email correspondence will be made, especially in supporting the work of the sub-

committees. The Development section will continue to oversee the smooth running of NEC meetings.

5.4 Strengthening the link between unemployed people's experiences and needs and the work of the INOU

The INOU is anxious to ensure that the policies being pursued by the INOU continue to reflect the needs of unemployed people and ensure that unemployed people feel that the organisation is responsive and representative to their needs. In this context, work will also be undertaken with a view to providing maximum, structured input and accountability for unemployed people in which they can participate in the development and the thinking and setting of priorities within the organisation.

Proposed Actions to achieve above objectives

- **WORKING THROUGH LOCAL AFFILIATES**

The on-going link with affiliated local organisations will remain a principal mechanism for ensuring the INOU are in touch with the lives of unemployed people.

- **INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP: LOCAL BRANCHES**

Over the lifetime of the previous Strategic Plan, a number of INOU Branches were closed and Individual Members in those Branch areas had their membership transferred to the INOU General Branch.

It is proposed that the main objectives of individual membership policy over the period of this plan will be:

- To support the structured participation of unemployed people in the INOU through the General Branch, by facilitating regular Branch meetings and engaging Branch members in seminars and other INOU activities, particularly decision-making Conferences
- To enhance and maintain a network of Individual Member contacts and activists
- Induction/Introductory sessions will continue to be held, in addition to the Individual Member/General Branch meetings.
- A database of members will be maintained. It is proposed that the INOU will review how the existing data can be used from queries, membership forms etc.
- To provide advice and support to Affiliates, Area Partnerships, etc on mechanisms to engage the participation of unemployed people. It is proposed that the INOU will review existing INOU good practice guidelines to support the involvement of unemployed people
- To review the potential development of the Solidarity Membership strand of membership
- To review and make appropriate constitutional changes, if necessary to make the transition from Individual Membership to General Branch member easier

The constitutional structure, membership lists, etc. of the Individual Membership structure will be maintained with a view to reactivating the local Branch aspect of the organisation, at an early stage, if the current unemployment situation deteriorates further and where local Individual Members believe this offers the most suitable approach.

- **FOCUS GROUPS**

It is proposed that a Focus group of unemployed people, particularly people who are long-term unemployed will be established on a pilot basis initially, with a view to establishing additional focus groups, to gain feedback on developing needs or issues.

- **QUERIES**

The primary means of ensuring the INOU is in touch with unemployed people's lives is through the query service located in the WTW section. The "welfare-to-work" query work of the organisation is situated in the welfare rights/welfare to work section. A high emphasis on the degree of interaction between query work and the work of the Policy Officer will be maintained and enhanced to ensure the policy issues arising from welfare to work queries are reflected in the INOU's work.

- **INOUEMINARS AND CONFERENCES**

In the event of INOU seminars and conferences on key issues, every effort will be made to ensure the attendance and participation of people who are currently unemployed in these events.

- **OTHER SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES**

INOUE staff will avail of opportunities to listen to unemployed people, particularly those facing particular sub-sets of problems, through attendance at conferences organised by other organisations.

5.5 Visits to Affiliates

Visits to affiliates were planned in the last strategic plan, but did not occur to the extent which had been proposed. In order to maximise the benefits for affiliates and staff, it is planned to tie in staff visits with relevant activities or events where possible.

5.6 Annual & Special Delegate Conferences

The INOU will continue to run its Delegate Conferences to carry out formal decision-making by the wider membership as required by its constitution. The INOU will undertake a review of the operation of the Annual Delegate Conference in order to ensure the maximum possible participation from delegates. The INOU will also investigate the possibility of holding one of its ADCs outside Dublin.

5.7 Media Strategy

Given the slow down of the economy, the employment prospects for unemployed people remains uncertain. It is therefore paramount that the issue of unemployment be placed firmly back on the Government agenda and in the public media. The INOU will therefore continue to pursue a media strategy in order to ensure continued recognition of INOU expertise in national and local media and to maintain a profile

for the policies of the INOU and for the issues faced by unemployed people. A copy of the INOU's Media Strategy is available from the INOU Policy Officer.

Considerable work has been done to upgrade the INOU website and this work will continue throughout the life of the Strategic Plan. It is planned to thoroughly update the links page and improve the information on affiliate organisations. Also the training page will be more interactive with all documents being downloadable. With these changes along with the ones already complete, it is hoped to make the INOU site more comprehensive, informative and readable.

5.9 Publications

The INOU will continue to produce and enhance its range of publications that have a wide circulation among affiliates, politicians, civil servants, the community & voluntary sector & the general public.

5.9.1 Working for Work

In relation to Working for Work the INOU will:

- Carry out a broad and wide ranging evaluation of the publication Working for Work
- Organise a structured feedback mechanism for ideas, suggestions and recommendations for future editions.
- Provide the book in electronic format though our website and as a downloadable PDF (printable) document.
- Undertake a disability access audit for the book.
- Assess the need to include new sections to reflect new user groups, changes in the Welfare System and in Irish Culture i.e. Refugees & Asylum Seekers, Migrant Workers, etc.

5.9.2 Bulletin

The INOU will continue to develop the Bulletin as a tool for the communication of information, strategic material, campaigning and sharing of information to affiliates. It is planned to publish 8-9 issues per year.

The INOU will also continue to:

- Develop new information products (leaflets/wall-charts etc.) in conjunction with training courses, feedback from affiliates and on other selected funding proposals.
- Produce New Welfare to Work Information products
- Produce an Annual report as required by company law

6. Administrative objectives

6.1 The financial and administrative systems in the organisation will be constantly reviewed to ensure the most cost-effective support is in place to aid the carrying out of the policy and organisational objectives above. This will include use of enhanced information technology & internet and email development, as our annual budget for

computer costs will allow. Other action to achieve our administrative objectives will include:

- Rationalisation of library
- Completion of Training room. However, issues of disability access and general outside use of the premises will need to be addressed.
- Examining the possibility of renting out office space
- Review of staff procedures, including updating of the staff support system.