



BULLETIN

Vol. 17 No. 2

July/August 2007

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed is a federation of unemployed people and more than 170 groups throughout the country, concerned with combating unemployment.

Activation

The Latest Buzzword

In recent policy documents changes to the National Employment Action Plan were proposed. The referral process is now down from 6 months to 3 months. Government departments are exploring ways of extending its remit beyond those in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance / Benefit to people in receipt of One Family Payment and disability payments. And now the NEAP applies to people over 55 years of age.

The introduction of an Active Case Management approach by the Department of Social and Family Affairs was also proposed and is likely to commence once the key personnel are in place. This development is part of the DSFA's new 'Social & Economic Participation Programme'. The SEPP was outlined in both the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and the NDP. According to the NDP the "vision is of a single transparent system with a primary focus on the customer and a route starting at the first point of engagement with the Department" (p 253)

What is interesting about the DSFA's Active Case Management approach is that they intend to work with social welfare recipients from the minute they apply for their payment. This begs the question as to who will be expected to work with the long-term unemployed if both the DSFA and FAS through the NEAP are concentrating on the short-term unemployed and other welfare recipients. Anecdotally, the INOU understands that to address this issue FÁS are looking to the LES and Jobs Clubs.

The key players at both a national and local level with regard to policy development and implementation are: the Department of Social and Family Affairs; the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; and FÁS.

So why is there a concerted effort to activate people distant from the labour market? In many respects it is in keep-

Continued on page 2

Minister O'Cuiv launches INOU Irish language publication

The Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Mr. Eamon O'Cuiv TD launched the INOU Irish language publication, 'Bíodh do Chearta Leasa ar eolas agat' in the INOU offices in Dublin on Thursday, 5th April. The Minister said he was delighted to see the publication printed in Irish. The Minister added that he was sure that there would be a use for the publication as he said that many people in his own constituency prefer to use Irish. The Minister

thanked the INOU for producing the publication and said his Department was very glad to be supporting the very useful work of this project specifically, and the INOU more generally through the National Anti-Poverty Network funding. The INOU Chairperson Ann Fergus said this was a very significant day for the organisation as it marked the launch of the first publication that the INOU has published in Irish. The INOU Assistant General Secretary, John Stewart said

that during the course of the Project the INOU received a number of queries from a range of organisations, groups and individuals asking for this information to be provided in the Irish language. John added that the publication was part of a wider very successful

Welfare to Work Development Project. John said that the feedback from the English language version of the Resource Guide, entitled 'Know Your Welfare Rights' has been very positive.



Left to right: Ann Fergus – Chair INOU, Mr. Eamon O'Cuiv TD, Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and John Stewart–Assistant General Secretary INOU

'Bíodh do Chearta Leasa ar eolas agat' is a Resource Pack that contains a comprehensive Resource Guide, leaflet and wallchart. The Guide contains key Welfare Rights information to assist Information Providers, Shop Stewards, Trade Union Officials and Human Resource Managers in assisting people who have recently lost, or are about to lose their job. The accompanying leaflet is aimed directly at those who have recently lost their job. ■

NEC Member, Rotimi Adebare, elected Mayor of Portlaoise



We are delighted to report that NEC member, Rotimi Adebare, has been elected as Mayor of Portlaoise Town Council. Rotimi, whose nomination to the NEC is via SUIL (Supporting Unemployed in Laois), was elected to the Town Council as an independent councillor in 2004.

In wishing Rotimi every success in the coming year, Ann Fergus, INOU Chairperson, said that this was an historic development and the INOU National Executive Committee and staff are delighted for Rotimi and his family on this special occasion. ■

JULY/AUGUST 2007 LIVE REGISTER FIGURES

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Unadjusted count: 166,366

Adjusted count: 163,400

In this issue...

- Annual Delegate Conference, 2007
- NAPS – Addressing Social Exclusion?
- Changes to the Rate Supplement System

Activation – the latest Buzzword

... (cont'd from page 1)

ing with existing Government policy and arises from a concern that even with considerable growth in employment, over half a million people are in receipt of welfare payments.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment commissioned an evaluation of the NEAP a few years ago and in the FÁS Annual Report 2005 it was noted that *"having regard to the data available and taking account of constraints, our analysis suggests that the NEAP process has been a success"*. The report goes on to say, *"this finding was consistent with previous research which has shown positive outcomes for this form of active measure, i.e. that counselling and jobsearch assistance measures are effective and relatively inexpensive."*

So what will all of this mean for people on the ground? Well it will be interesting to see how it will develop over time. Much has been made of the level of resources in the National Development Plan. However, when one looks at the figures relating to this area of work it becomes apparent that very little additional expenditure is forthcoming. Given the structural issues to be addressed to ensure that long-term unemployment does indeed become a thing of the past demands a level of integrated development and provision not seen to-date. Such a concrete

development would not be cost free but may be more cost effective.

What should 'positive activation' consist of given the challenges facing many people distant from the labour-force market? These challenges range from a lack of childcare to public transport to accessible employment to low levels of marketable skills. The INOU and other organisations working on the issues of economic and social inclusion believe that positive activation requires:

- Access to decent quality jobs.
- Develop quality accessible services and supports.
- Incorporate the principle of choice.
- Access to good information to make the right decision.
- Support people to face the extra costs and risks of taking up employment.
- Address all remaining poverty traps.
- Support services must work closely with users to address the barriers they face; meet their needs; and respect their identity.
- Measures must be put in place to directly address the discrimination barriers posed by employers.
- To take account of work-life balance and other issues a variety of different and flexible types of employment are required.

- All the relevant organisations must work closely together at local and national level.
- Policy makers and practitioners must work closely with organisations representing and working with groups which are the focus of activation policies.
- Develop a system for monitoring activation policies and practices to ensure that they are addressing poverty and enhancing inclusion.

Research On Activation

One Family are currently carrying out research on the barriers facing lone parents in moving from social welfare to work. This research is funded by the Combat Poverty Agency and supported by the DSFA. The aim of the research is to inform activation policies currently being planned by the DSFA. As part of this research a number of lone parents receiving the one-parent family payment will receive a questionnaire from the DSFA which they can complete and return directly and in confidence to One Family. If you receive such a questionnaire we would encourage you to complete it and return it to the researchers. It is an opportunity for your views to be heard and for your needs to be taken into account. If you know someone who has received the questionnaire please encourage them to complete it.

If you have any concerns about the survey please do not hesitate to contact Candy Murphy, One Family at policy@onefamily.ie or phone 01-6629212 ■

NAPSI – Addressing Social Exclusion?

On the 21st February this year, the Government launched the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPSI) 2007 – 2013. This Plan replaces the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, which was an Irish Government initiative and the National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion, which was part of an EU wide programme called the National Action Plans for Inclusion.

NAPSI has one over arching goal *"to reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016, under the revised definition."* You may wonder why the proviso was added in at the end of this goal: it reflects the lively on-going debate on what definition of poverty should be used. On the one hand many non-government organisations want Ireland to use 'relative poverty' while the Government prefer to use consistent poverty. Ireland's record on this issue looks better using a consistent poverty

definition. According to the Central Statistics Office's report *'Measuring Ireland's Progress, 2006'* 6% of men and 7.5% of women were in consistent poverty, while the proportion of people at risk of poverty was 20% in 2005. The report also notes that unemployed people were most likely to be in consistent poverty then those in employment.

In the NAPSI there are 12 Goals set under the themes of children; people of working age; older people; people with disabilities; and communities. With regard to employment and income support five of the goals cover these issues. For example, on the issue of income support under Children, Goal 4 aims to *"maintain the combined value of child income support measures at 33%-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment"*. While under the theme of People of Working Age, Goal 6 seek to *"maintain the relative value of the lowest social welfare rate at least to €185.80, in 2007 terms, over the course of this Plan, subject to available resources."*

On the employment and participation front under the People of Working Age theme, Goal 5 seeks to *"introduce an active case management approach that will support those on long-term social welfare into education, training and employment. The target is to support 50,000 such people, including lone parents and the long-term unemployed, with an overall aim of reducing by 20% the number of those whose total income is derived from long-term social welfare payments by 2016"*. Under the theme of people with disabilities in Goal 9 *"the longer term target is to raise the employment rate of people with disabilities from 37% to 45% by 2016"*. By way of comparison it should be noted that according to the Quarterly National Household Survey Q1 2007 the employment rate for men and women respectively were: 77.2% and 59.8%. The NAPSI aims to at least achieve the Lisbon target of an employment rate of 70%: currently the employment rate stands at 68.6%.

... (continued on page 3)

Continued from page 2

NAPSI – Addressing Social Exclusion?

So what will all of this mean for unemployed people and others distant from the labour market? At present it is hard to say: for example how will the Department of Social and Family Affairs new 'Social and Economic Participation Programme' sit vis-à-vis the National Employment Action Plan as lead by FÁS? Though Goal 5 gives the impression that people in receipt of long-term social welfare payments will be supported to enter education, training and employment, the description of the SEPP gives the impression that DSFA will work with welfare recipients "at the initial claim stage". Given that this new initiative has only €50m to spend over a seven-year period the INOU is concerned the needs of the long-term unemployed, to ensure that they can access sustainable and decent employment, will not be met. In particular how will the skills shortage and mismatch identified through the work of the Expert Working Group on Future Skills Needs be addressed in a way that will not further distance marginalised people and communities from the labour market?

The organisation is also concerned the phrase in Goal 5 "with an overall aim of reducing by 20% the number of those whose total income is derived from long-term social welfare payments by 2016" may not be met constructively as 2016 draws nearer. To this end the argument over the most satisfactory definition of poverty may be particularly pertinent to ensure that unemployed people and other welfare recipients are truly better off economically and socially. ■

Changes to the Rent Supplement System

New and more simplified arrangements for the means testing of Rent Supplement and Mortgage Interest Supplement have been introduced since June 5th 2007. The old €317.43 ceiling for retention of the Rent Supplement will no longer apply

Under this new system the first €75 of 'additional household income' will be disregarded, and income in excess of €75 will be assessed at 75%. There is no upper limit on the amount of income that may be earned under this new system.

'Additional household income' means income which is derived from any other sources and such monies that place the individual's / familie's income excess of the basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance rate, which is equal to the basic rate of most Social Welfare payments. Additional household income will include income from employment and training schemes (i.e. Community Employment (CE), Back to Work Allowance, Back to Work Enterprise Allowance and FÁS course's).

Income obtained from the Family Income Supplement (FIS) **will be** counted as income, and will impact on

the amount of Rent Supplement received.

When calculating a person's additional household income, PRSI and reasonable travelling expenses can be disregarded. In addition any lunch, travel allowances or childcare allowances paid to participants on certain training courses may be disregarded. Income tax **may not** be disregarded.

Where a Local Authority accepts that a person is in need of accommodation under the Rental Accommodation Scheme, that person can take up full-time employment (over 30 hours a week) and retain their rent supplement under the local authorities Differential Rent Scheme.

Under the new provisions a person can choose to have 'additional household income' disregarded under either the new Rent Supplement disregards or the Rehabilitative Earnings disregard where such may apply (i.e. in the case of Disability/Invalidity payments). Any other disregards that are appropriate (e.g. carers disregard) shall continue to apply.

The following example illustrates how the test will be implemented:

Single person working part-time (under 30 hours) with €150 additional household income:

Private Rented Accommodation per week	€115
Minus personal contribution -	€13
Rent Supplement	€102
Income (Work and Social Welfare payment)	€335.80
Additional House Income above SWA (€185.80)	€150
- Disregard €75 of additional income	€75
- Disregard 25% of remaining €75	€18.75
- Total Disregard	€93.75
Amount Assessed (€150 - €93.75)	€56.25
Rent Supplement payable (€102 - €56.25)	€45.75



INOU Appoints new Trainer

We are delighted to report that we have recently appointed a new Welfare to Work Trainer, Lorraine Hennessy. Lorraine joined the organisation on 7th May. Lorraine lives in Blessington and prior to joining us worked as a Tutor with Colaiste Ide, Finglas.

The INOU is registered with the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) as a training provider offering programmes leading to FETAC awards. We also design and deliver a wide range of 'in-house' welfare to work training programmes. Lorraine is currently formulating our next Training Calendar for the period September to December which we aim to circulate to our affiliates in the coming weeks. Lorraine is looking forward to meeting as many INOU affiliates as possible in the weeks and months ahead. Should you wish to receive any further information or have any queries on any aspect of our training, please contact Lorraine on 01 856 0088 or email training@inou.ie.

Annual Delegate Conference 2007

The INOU's Annual Delegate Conference was held on Wednesday 20th June at the Royal Dublin Hotel. This year's Conference had a particularly special significance as it provided the opportunity to mark the 20th anniversary of the founding of the organisation. Ann Fergus, Chairperson, began by welcoming everyone to the Conference. Ann particularly welcomed Colin Hampton, Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centre, Tom Best from the Peoples Centre in Liverpool and Eileen Devaney from the UK Coalition Against Poverty.

Mike Allen, General Secretary of the Labour Party and ex INOU General Secretary officially opened the Conference. In his speech, Mike began by saying it was hard to grasp that it is 20 years since a group of fiercely independent unemployed centres were forged into a federation and named the INOU. Mike's central message to the organisation was that although much had changed since 1987 one thing remained the same – people said there was no need for the INOU then, and they say there is no need for the INOU today, but our history shows us that there was a need then – and that the INOU fulfilled that need – and an honest look at our country reveals that there is still a need today.

John Stewart, Assistant General Secretary, thanked Mike for agreeing to open the Conference. John also thanked all the delegates and visitors for attending and also thanked the staff and National Executive Committee for their dedication and commitment to the work of the organisation. John also referred to Eric Conroy's decision to stand down from the post of General Secretary and welcomed his retention in the organisation as Financial Con-

troller. John also thanked those NEC members who had stepped down from the Committee since the last Conference – Barrie McLatchie, Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre, Pat Murphy, the Larkin Centre for the Unemployed, Candy Murphy, One Family and Mark Harding, Fingal Centre for the Unemployed.

John referred to the financial crisis experienced by the Organisation of the Unemployed Northern Ireland, which had regrettably resulted in the remaining staff member, Cathy Kelly, being made redundant in April. John thanked Cathy for her work and said that OUNI were also deeply appreciative that Cathy had undertaken to continue to work for OUNI for 4 hours a week on a voluntary basis.

John gave a wide-ranging presentation of the work of the organisation in the year since the last Conference which included involvement in Social Partnership; campaigning and lobbying work, particularly in relation to the Budget; project work and the on-going roll out of the Welfare to Work Development Project. John also referred to the range of publications produced as part of the work of the Project, particularly the Irish language publications which marked a first for the organisation in terms of producing information in the Irish language. John also spoke about the role of the Welfare to Work Section and the range of welfare rights publications, including Working for Work and other supports and services provided by the section. John also advised that the INOU had been successful in its application for registration with FETAC and was now a recognised provider of training programmes leading to FETAC awards.



Mike Allen and John Stewart



Sharon Kane, Carol Thornton and Marie Lynch



John Farrell and Brendan Sherlock



Rotimi Adeberi, Eric Conroy and Natasha Nosenko



John ended by advising that the INOU planned to hold a social event later in the year to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the founding of the organisation.

A key aspect of the Conference was a presentation on the INOU's new Strategic Plan by Bríd O'Brien, Senior Policy Officer. Bríd outlined the context of economic exclusion facing the organisation and the seven strategic policy objectives the organisation will pursue over the next three years.

Continued on page 5

Annual Delegate Conference 2007

The presentation was followed by Workshops on different aspects of the work of the INOU and our affiliated organisations. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the delegates and visitors that participated in the workshops.

Six policy motions were submitted for discussion and debate at the Conference. The motions included calls for improved public services and information; increased provision for life-long learning and a call for the reinstatement of a Government target to eliminate long-term unemployment. There was one Constitutional motion on giving the National Executive Committee the ability to determine the level of Affiliation Fees. All motions were unanimously agreed.

There were no elections to the National Executive Committee as there were fewer nominees than places available and therefore Robert Finan, Richard McGhee, Seamus Orr and Des Bonass were automatically elected.

The afternoon of the Conference featured two presentations on 'Activation'. Colin Hampton from the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centre outlined unemployed people's experience of activation in the UK. Colin referred to the importance of people knowing their rights, as Colin gave examples from his UK experience where people were denied a social welfare payment without being told their payment was to be stopped. Colin said it was necessary that Governments focus on their responsibilities and the rights of unemployed people and others distanced from the Labour Market rather than continually focussing solely on the responsibilities on individuals.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Colin for his input on the day.

Colin's presentation was followed by a presentation by Bríd O'Brien who gave an overview of the Irish context: please see the article on 'Activation' in the Bulletin.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who attended the Conference for their input and support.



Brid O'Brien

Colin Hampton



Ann Fergus and Mike Allen



Unemployment Rate Highest it's been since September 2003

According to the CSO's first Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) for 2007 there are 96,200 unemployed: representing a rate of 4.4%. Every month when the CSO issue the latest Live Register figures they adjust the QNHS unemployment rate to give what they call the Standardised Unemployment Rate. For June 2007 this SUR now stands at 4.6% – the highest it's been since September 2003.

According to the Live Register the Seasonally Adjusted figure for June 2007 is 163,400, which is up 3,600 on last month, and up 3,300 on June 2006. The decline in activity in the construction industry with regard to house building was seen as influencing this increase. However, it is interesting to note that the increase is spread almost 50/50 between men and women with an increase of 1,700 for men and 1,900 for women.

On the 3rd July the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment issued the latest redundancy figures. There were 2,109 redundancies in the month of June, which brings the total for 2007 up to 12,813, which is 8.3% higher than June 2006. Again the two highest categories were: 'other services' and 'other manufacturing' representing between them 60% of the total figure.

While on the 12th July the FÁS and ESRI issued their latest Job Vacancies report. In it they note:

- The percentage of firms reporting vacancies in the private sector fell by one percentage point to 12%.
- A decrease in reported vacancies in the retail and services sectors lead the decrease in economy-wide vacancies.
- Reported vacancies in the construction sector increased by 2 percentage points to 8%. However, a higher proportion of employers in the sector still expect employment levels to fall rather than rise over the coming few months.

It will be interesting to see how the Live Register moves over the coming months – it is often higher over the summer. However, with one in five men employed in the construction sector and employers predicting a fall in employment in this sector, the Live Register figure is likely to remain high.

National Women's Strategy

What has the National Women's Strategy to say about women and employment?

The National Women's Strategy was launched on the 18th April and, like so many other plans launched recently by Government, will cover the period from 2007 to 2016. In this new strategy the chapter dealing with employment and related issues is called "Equalising Socio-Economic Opportunity". The following ten key objectives were identified:

- To increase the participation of women in the labour force;
- To decrease the gender pay gap;
- To promote the advancement of women in the labour market;
- To support more women as entrepreneurs;
- To seek to ensure that women and girls achieve their full potential in the education system;
- To ensure that childcare services are optimised to meet the needs of parents and children alike;
- To ensure that the care infrastructure supports women's socio-economic engagement;
- To reduce the numbers of women experiencing poverty;
- To reduce the numbers of female lone parents experiencing poverty;
- To reduce the numbers of women experiencing poverty by increasing pension cover.

Though the ten objectives outlined above are broadly in keeping with the demands raised by women at the local and national level in the forth-coming election, the level of ambition is considerably lower.

For example, taking the issue of the gender pay gap many commentators assume that the gender pay gap arises because of women's caring roles and the impact of this on their labour market participation. On page p47 on the issue of 'Women in Educational Management' the impact of caring responsibilities

arises and notes the experience of women in this sector "mirrors the experience in other employment sectors where women still find that the caring responsibilities which continue to fall on their shoulders impact on their career progression".

However, the Strategy also refers to 2005 research commissioned by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and noted an interesting finding that "graduates who had completed third level education three years previously and found that the gender pay gap had clearly emerged during this three-year period" (p33).

Earlier in the Strategy the gender segregation in the labour market is noted "with women predominating in caring roles that are often less well paid" (p33). Given the strong links presumed between educational attainment and employment prospects and outcomes it is interesting to note that "women in employment have been shown to have higher educational qualifications than their male counterparts" (p32), yet a pay gap of 14% persists.

The National Women's Strategy did not set a specific target on this issue, citing the lack of adequate research on which to base, for example "a drop of a percentage point per year".

The dynamics around the gender pay gap impact on the other key objectives as well as they highlight the structural issues of inequality that must be addressed. For example, why should employment primarily associated with women pay lower wages than employment primarily associated with men? It is important that when the first interim review in three years time takes place that a concrete target to eliminate the gender pay gap is set.

On the issue of care the Strategy notes "Childcare is considered by many to be the single biggest challenge facing working parents today. Lack of good childcare facilities is frequently cited as

a cause for low levels of labour market participation by women and for the gender pay gap" (p49). The National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 is cited as a key policy instrument to in addressing issues of:

- improving quality;
- matching supply with needs;
- facilitating disadvantaged parents to access childcare;
- filling outstanding gaps in provision; and
- targeting actions to prevent the cost and / or availability of childcare acting as obstacles to women's participation in the labour market.

With regard to women in poverty the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 is seen as the main policy instrument. Again paraphrasing the Lisbon Agenda the Strategy notes, "The acknowledged route out of poverty and dependence for women of working age and the improvement of the life chances of their dependents is through access to an independent income, work, training and education" (p55). The Government's discussion paper on 'Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents' and subsequent consultation process will feed into developments in this area for both lone parents and other low-income families.

It is crucial that the issue of access to decent and sustainable employment is kept to the forefront of any such developments: a challenge in many areas given that employment growth as been in the lower paid end of the services industry.

Building on this point and the issue of access to pensions as a key poverty issue for many women, the Pensions Board "noted that women are more likely than men to have inadequate or no pension provision, partly because women comprise a greater proportion of lower paid and part-time members of the workforce" (p58).

DUBLIN EMPLOYMENT PACT LAUNCHES THE EMPLOYER RESOURCE BUREAU FOR THE COMMUNITY SECTOR.

In April 2007 Dublin Employment Pact under the Equal at Work project launched the Employers Resource Bureau for Community Sector Employers. This is a web based resource which provides general information on Employment Law and contains some of the resources necessary to manage the people management aspects of their organisations.

The overall purpose of the ERB is to assist employers in the sector comply with all relevant pieces of Employment Legislation and to implement "Best Practice" Human Resource Management Policies and Procedures. It is hoped to develop the capacity of organisations to deal with what is becoming an ever more important aspect of their day to day work. It provides a selection of Templates such as a Staff Handbook, Contract of Employment, Job Descriptions and other sample documents.

The site is open to all community sector employers and access is free through www.erb.ie