



16<sup>th</sup> August 2017

# Action Plan for Jobs 2018

**Submission to: The Tánaiste  
and Minister for Jobs,  
Enterprise and Innovation,  
Ms. Frances Fitzgerald T.D.**

**INOUE Key Priorities for the  
Action Plan for Jobs 2018**

**IRISH NATIONAL ORGANISATION OF THE UNEMPLOYED  
Araby House,  
8 North Richmond Street,  
Dublin DO1 WY49  
Tel: 01 856 0088**

## **ACTION PLAN FOR JOBS 2018**

The INOU welcomes the formulation of a new Action Plan for Jobs 2018 and appreciates the opportunity to outline our key priorities. The INOU welcomes the very positive decreases in the Live Register and Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) unemployment figures, as well as the increases in employment across the regions (though noting the Border region employment decrease in the most recent figures).

The INOU would be concerned to ensure that the positive reductions in the Live Register and the significant increase in the numbers of people in work should not be interpreted as meaning that the unemployment problem has been solved. There are still many thousands of people struggling every day to find work. Behind the unemployment statistics are individuals and their families who rely on the State both to provide income support whilst they are unemployed and also, critically, key employment services and supports to assist them to get back to work.

The INOU sees an on-going need for annual Action Plans for Jobs and believes that the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation should continue to play a key role in this regard. The INOU is concerned that the reference to Jobs should not be removed from the Department's title.

There is a continuing need to ensure that across all relevant Departments and agencies there is a seamless flow of good information on employment and education and training opportunities, enterprise supports and welfare to work incentives in order to ensure that unemployed people and others of working age are able to access available employment opportunities. To ensure better outcomes, it is also critical that employers continue to be supported and encouraged to employ unemployed people and other people distant from the labour market and that greater efforts are made to ensure that people get access to decent and sustainable jobs. The INOU would see an ongoing role for Jobs Plus in encouraging employers to recruit people who are long-term unemployed. It is also critical that skills gaps continue to be tackled to ensure that unemployed people and others of working age acquire the right skills to be able to access sustainable employment and improve their long-term prospects. The INOU welcomes the roll-out of the new Apprenticeship Scheme.

Given the scale of recent job creation and the related reduction in unemployment, including long-term unemployment, the INOU believes that the overall unemployment target in the Programme for Government should be further reviewed - recognising that the original regional and county employment targets may, for some regions or counties be more difficult to reach. The INOU recommends that the Regional Action Plans, particularly in the regions where unemployment is highest are sufficiently resourced, integrated and flexible to provide the best opportunities to achieve the desired employment/unemployment targets. We also recommend that there be a specific focus on the Border region given the likelihood of this area being particularly impacted by Brexit.

### **Recommendations:**

- That the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation continue to formulate Annual Action Plans For Jobs.
- That the reference to Jobs should remain in the Department's title.
- That there is a seamless flow of good information on employment and education and training opportunities, enterprise supports and welfare to work incentives across all relevant Departments.

- That the Regional Action Plans, particularly in the regions where unemployment is highest are sufficiently resourced, integrated and flexible.

## **KEY ACTIONS/PRIORITIES**

### **1. Brexit**

The impending exit of the UK from the EU poses a serious threat to the Irish economy. The impact of Brexit will likely be felt by the country as a whole – however there are certain regions (and particularly rural areas) and employment sectors that are more likely to be affected.

At the INOU's Annual Conference in May, concerns were raised about the impact of Brexit on unemployed people living in the Border region, the only region to see employment fall in the most recent Quarterly National Household Survey. Concerns were also expressed about the impact on more vulnerable employees, people working in indigenous enterprises that are reliant on the UK market and people who are more distant from the labour market who have yet to fully benefit from Ireland's on-going economic recovery and who may be further impacted if employment starts to fall and unemployment starts to rise again.

The INOU believes that it is imperative the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (and the whole of Government) continues to plan for the employment and unemployment impacts of Brexit and in particular to identify the emerging and possible job losses, the potential alternative enterprises and jobs and the education and training supports that are required to ensure unemployed people can gain access to these jobs. We recognise the work that has been undertaken, to date, in this area however we believe that there may be a need to fast-track responses/interventions including in the allocation of sufficient resources to the relevant state bodies, employment and education and training providers.

We also recommend that barriers to job creation e.g. lack of access to high speed broadband and transport and other infrastructural deficits are addressed as a matter of urgency.

#### **Recommendations:**

- That the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (and the whole of Government) continues to plan for the employment and unemployment impacts of Brexit.
- That barriers to job creation are addressed as a matter of urgency.
- That there be a specific focus on the Border region.

### **2. Pro-active Engagement/Support/Information Deficits**

To ensure increased access to the local labour market, the welfare to work journey should be as seamless as possible. Information on available and emerging employment opportunities need to be provided to unemployed people and others of working age in a pro-active and timely fashion. During the course of our work, we constantly meet unemployed people who are unaware of the range of in-work benefits and supports that are available. In order to address these information deficits, the INOU recommends that the Department of Social Protection initiates a comprehensive publicity campaign to highlight the range of Back to Work Supports and Secondary Benefits available to

unemployed people when taking up work. Where it emerges that unemployed people and others of working age do not have the required skills and abilities to undertake the work that is available and/or where unemployed people's construction related certificates/licences have expired, the employment and training services should ensure that people are supported to acquire the requisite skills/certificates etc. Whilst we recognise that these proposed actions are more relevant to other Departments/Agencies, we believe that the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation should note the need for such a campaign within the APJ.

### **Recommendations:**

- That information on available and emerging employment opportunities are provided in a pro-active and timely fashion.
- That front-line staff across all of the employment services are supported to develop an awareness and understanding of the range of back to work supports that are available to unemployed people.
- That the Department of Social Protection leads and implements a comprehensive publicity campaign to highlight the range of Back to Work Supports and Secondary Benefits available to unemployed people when taking up work.
- That the DJEI and other relevant Departments/Agencies support and link in with such a campaign.

### **3. Local/Regional Job Announcements**

In our submission to the APJ 2017 in relation to large scale job announcements, we highlighted the need for an integrated, inter-agency and inter-departmental approach that ensures that the maximum possible number of unemployed people get these jobs.

Elements of an integrated approach would include very early engagement with the company that announced the jobs with a view to gathering information on the nature of the positions to be filled, including clarification on the skills, experience and competencies criteria required to successfully do the jobs and also the recruitment process to be used for filling the positions. This in turn should inform the work of the local employment services (Intreo/LES/JobPath/Employability Services) and education and training providers with a view to ensuring that unemployed people are supported to access these positions. Relevant training courses should be established to ensure the necessary accreditation is available; Job Clubs should be organised - or similar job preparation work undertaken - in order to prepare local unemployed people for interview and to provide key welfare to work information.

The INOU believes that, in order for this to be successful, local agencies and organisations need to work collaboratively and in a timely manner as there is, we believe, very significant scope to provide employers with suitable workers and unemployed people with jobs. It is not clear if such an approach is being adopted and the INOU would recommend that the Department research the extent to which such an approach has been adopted over the last year including any learning that has emerged.

## **Recommendations:**

- That the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation conduct research on the extent to which an integrated and inter-agency approach has been adopted in relation to large scale job announcements.

### **4. Improved Job Matching /Jobs Fairs**

The availability of a sophisticated and effective public employment job matching service designed to meet the recruitment needs of employers and the employment needs of unemployed people (and job changers) is essential. The unfortunate technical difficulties and poor experience of many job seekers and employers in relation to the JobsIreland website, we believe, have not helped in this regard.

The INOU has welcomed the development of a National Jobs Week. We believe that there is an on-going need for these types of initiatives. The INOU recommends that there is at least one very significant JobFair or job week event per region and that these are complemented by a number of other related events in the regions. Key to the success of JobFairs is the participation of employers that are actively seeking to fill jobs; lists of vacancies notified to the employment services; CV and Interview Preparation workshops; Workshops on the welfare to work incentives available to support unemployed people to take-up work and the involvement of relevant local and statutory organisations. We also believe that there is an opportunity to tie in the roll out-out of a comprehensive welfare to work information campaign with the National Jobs Week.

## **Recommendations:**

- That the National Jobs week initiative be maintained.
- That a comprehensive welfare to work information campaign be rolled out in conjunction with the National Jobs Week.

### **5. Enterprise Supports/Maximising the Potential of our Natural Environment/Tourism/Sustainable and Renewable Energies**

#### **Back to Work Enterprise Supports**

During the economic crisis, a significant number of unemployed people looked to self-employment as a response to their unemployment. The availability of information, advice and guidance has been critical in enabling people to set up and maintain their own businesses. Access to the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance has been critical in this regard and we believe that this key support for unemployed people should be maintained. We also believe that there should be some flexibility in the system to allow for the continuation of the allowance for a limited period beyond the current 2 year duration for individuals who have viable businesses that have not yet got to the level where the business can be sustained within the first 2 years of operation.

#### **Eco/Green Tourism**

Tourism continues to be a key driver of the Irish economy and supports tens of thousands of permanent and seasonal jobs. Eco tourism involving visiting natural areas in order to experience local culture and or to learn/study, or to carry out environmentally friendly activities, has the potential to make a much greater contribution to the economic and

social development of local communities. Initiatives such as the development of Greenways, walking routes/tours, the development of sustainable woodland based recreational activities, kayaking, sailing and other water based pursuits have the potential to generate hundreds of new jobs. We recognise that there has been significant development of these types of initiatives in recent years. We believe, however, that there is scope for greater development, particularly in areas that are underrepresented in mainstream tourism. The INOU recommends that there is a dedicated section and related actions within the APJ2018 on maximising the potential for eco or green tourism related developments.

### **Artisan/Craft Foods and Beverages**

The emergence of the craft/artisan food and drink sectors in recent years has provided significant employment opportunities, including for people in rural areas where many of the craft producers are based. The potential for these sectors to grow and develop has been highlighted in a number of reports. Research from Mintel predicted that Ireland's artisan food sector was estimated to reach €706m in 2016, an increase of 3.7% on the previous year. Mintel also reported that they expect to see further growth of 10% between 2016 and 2021, while almost 60% of consumers want more specialist artisan producers in their local area.

There has been a very significant growth in the area of microbreweries. It is estimated that there are some 62 production microbreweries operating in the Republic of Ireland and that the numbers of micro-breweries have more than quadrupled since 2012. There is substantial potential for the further development of this industry which is seven times more labour intensive than larger macro-breweries. Employment in the micro brewing industry is widely dispersed throughout the country, including in rural areas, and the industry sources over half of its brewing ingredients by value in Ireland thus leading to significant benefits for the agricultural and other sectors in the economy. The INOU recommends that there is also a focus within the APJ2018 on maximising the potential of the artisan food and micro-brewing sectors.

### **Sustainable and Renewable Energy**

The INOU notes the inclusion in the 2017 APJ of measures designed to support Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy. The 2018 Action Plan can usefully build on these principles/actions. Ireland is uniquely placed to play a leading role in the development and delivery of renewable energy. We believe that Ireland needs to aim to become a world leader in renewable energy solutions and in doing so create and sustain many thousands of jobs. Ireland is well placed to innovate, design and manufacture renewal energy solutions based on wind, wave and solar energy. The State itself, as the major investor in Board Na Mona, owns / has access to many thousands of acres of bog land. The potential for these lands to be utilised for wind and solar energy projects should be further explored. The INOU would be concerned to ensure that any jobs that may be lost as a result of decisions made to support the country's transition to a low carbon economy should be replaced with new 'green' jobs in the localities where jobs are lost and that the workers affected receive every possible support and assistance to take up these positions.

Building on the initiatives currently in place, the INOU believes that there is significantly greater scope to up-scale the retrofitting of insulation in Irish homes and the related potential for job creation and job sustainment in this area. The INOU welcomes that people on Jobseekers Allowance for over six months and with children under 7 years; people on Family Income Supplement; people in receipt of the Fuel Allowance and people in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment can avail of a range of energy efficiency improvements

in their homes under the Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme. The INOU recommends that the provisions of this scheme are more widely publicised.

The INOU also recommends that consideration be given to further incentivising homeowners in houses with low energy efficiency to retrofit their homes.

### **Supporting Local Communities**

The INOU recommends that local communities are supported to develop social enterprises. The role played by initiatives like Community Employment and Tús in the delivery of local public / community services and employment opportunities for unemployed people and others distant from the labour market should be acknowledged. It is essential that the progression outcomes from these programmes for participants to the wider labour market are improved by highlighting the very real skills and work experience acquired through participation in these programmes. Programme Participants should also be supported to find subsequent employment through enhanced job-matching facilities.

### **Recommendations:**

- That there be some flexibility in the system to allow for the continuation of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance for a limited period beyond the current 2 year duration.
- That there be a dedicated section and related actions within the APJ2018 on maximising the potential for eco or green tourism related developments.
- That there be a focus within the APJ2018 on maximising the potential of the artisan food and micro-brewing/distilling sectors.
- That Ireland should aim to become a world leader in renewable energy solutions.
- That the potential for State owned (bog) land to be utilised for wind and solar energy projects be further explored.
- That any jobs that may be lost as a result of decisions made to support the country's transition to a low carbon economy be replaced with new 'green' jobs in the areas where jobs are lost and that the workers affected receive support and assistance to take up these positions.
- That the provisions of the Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme be more widely publicised.
- That consideration be given to further incentivising homeowners in houses with low energy efficiency to retrofit their homes.
- That local communities are supported to develop social enterprises.

## **6. Education and Training**

The provision of good quality information on the range of available education and training programmes is critical in enabling unemployed people to access learning and skills development opportunities, thereby improving their employment prospects. Greater

integration and transition between the employment services and education and training supports is critical in this regard as is the need to ensure that front line staff have the necessary expertise to ensure appropriate matching between individuals and the courses and programmes that are available. The provision of good quality guidance is required to assess peoples' existing skills, identify where there are gaps and how they should be addressed. The INOU is concerned about who is and should be assessing unemployed learners' needs and identifying the most appropriate re-skilling options for them. There is also concern that the training element in FET is losing visibility. According to the most recent CSO statistics there were 6,178 participants on full time training for unemployed people in May 2017, in comparison to 9,023 in May 2007.

The Programme for Government notes that *"There has been significant change in the Further, Adult and Community Education sector"* and commits to ensuring that the *"implementation of educational programs and skills training for those unemployed or underemployed are effective in supporting their path to quality employment. We will do this by initiating a Review of the Further, Adult and Community Education sector by the Oireachtas Committee on Education and an implementation of reforms to ensure the effectiveness of the sector."* (p94)

There is in our view a clear need to support and resource good quality alternative and community based learning; to ensure the provision of meaningful information on the options that are available, their relevance and usefulness to the learner and his or her needs and to map out clear progression links to other education and training opportunities, and ultimately to a decent job.

To this end, the INOU has called for resources to ensure the provision of good career and employment guidance to support unemployed people to make informed choices, access appropriate education and training, leading to good quality employment in terms of job security and salary levels and in particular to ensure this is available to individuals and communities most disadvantaged in the labour market.

### **Recommendations:**

- That good quality alternative and community based learning is supported and resourced.
- That resources are provided to ensure the provision of good career and employment guidance.

**Thank you for your time and consideration.**