



Relate

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The journal of developments in social services, policy and legislation in Ireland

Supports for getting back to work

Introduction

In this issue, we describe the new structures that are being put in place for job placement, training and further education and the main supports that are available to help unemployed people get employment or become self-employed. These supports are categorised under the following main headings:

- Work programmes, including internships
- Training and education programmes
- Supports for self-employment
- Incentives for employers

The *Action Plan for Jobs 2013* sets out a number of actions that the Government proposes to take to increase employment. The aim is to help create the right environment for businesses to create 100,000 net new jobs by 2016. See: djei.ie/publications/2013APJ.pdf. Among other things, this plan reiterates the objectives set out in *Pathways to Work* (see *Relate* April 2012) that outline how the State engages with and supports unemployed people to get back to work.

New structures

The structures for delivering supports to unemployed people and people in need of education and training are being changed. The main changes are:

- The development of the Intreo service by the Department of Social Protection
- The reorganisation of the delivery of further education and training involving the establishment of Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and SOLAS

Intreo

Intreo is the name of the Department of Social Protection (DSP) service that aims to provide an integrated system of employment and income supports. The service was launched in late 2012 and the first twelve offices have opened. It is expected that there will be 43 Intreo offices by the end of 2013 and that all social welfare offices will be providing the service by 2014.

A key aspect of the Intreo service is its case management approach. If you are unemployed, the service will deal with you as follows:

- You are profiled to establish what your needs are, for example, your need for training or for work experience; this profile then determines the approach that will be taken to provide you with supports for getting a job. Particular attention is paid to people who are likely to become long-term unemployed. Your *probability of exit* from unemployment is assessed. The supports you are offered depend significantly on this assessment.
- A personal progression plan (PPP) is agreed between you and the Department. It sets out the steps to be taken by you and the support that will be provided.
- You sign a contract with the Department, called a Record of Mutual Commitments, which sets out your rights with regard to the type and quality of services to be provided by the Department and also sets out your responsibility to engage with these services and actively seek employment.

Failure to engage with this process can result in a reduction in your social welfare payment. Just over 1,800 people were penalised in 2012 for failing to engage with the activation process and a further 800 have been penalised in the four-month period January – April 2013.

The Intreo service is also engaging with employers to try to ensure that unemployed people get opportunities to apply for and get the jobs that become available.

The Department provides employment services through its own offices and through a number of Local Employment Services that it funds. It is currently examining the possibility of using private sector employment services as well.

Reorganisation of delivery of further education and training

Changes are being made in the structures for delivering training and further education. *Further education* is mainly education beyond secondary school level but not including higher education (higher education is mainly provided by universities, colleges of technology and other third level institutions).

The main changes are as follows:

- Thirty-three VECs are being replaced by 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs)
- FÁS is being abolished
- A new organisation called SOLAS is being established

When all the new structures are in place, the intention is that SOLAS, unlike FÁS, will not directly deliver training or education programmes. Its role is to:

- Provide the strategy
- Fund the main providers of the programmes – the Education and Training Boards and private sector providers
- Monitor the outcomes

When the new Education and Training Boards and SOLAS have all been established, FÁS training centres and related staff will be gradually transferred to the appropriate ETB.

Education and Training Boards Act 2013

The Education and Training Boards Act 2013 was passed in May 2013 and is coming into effect on 1 July 2013. It provides for the replacement of the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) with Education and Training Boards. The process of reducing the number of VECs to 16 (from 33) is underway. These are being renamed Education and Training Boards (ETBs) from 1 July 2013.

The Act repeals the existing legislation governing the VECs and replaces it with modernised legal provisions including provisions on how the boards will operate with other education and training bodies, particularly SOLAS.

The VECs already carry out a range of functions. These include:

- Patronage of second-level vocational schools and community colleges – these schools educate about 24% of all second-level students
- Joint patronage with religious authorities of second-level community and comprehensive schools – these schools educate about 17% of second-level students
- Patronage of a small number of primary schools
- Provision of adult and further education including Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, the Back to Education initiative, community education, the Youthreach programme, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and adult literacy courses
- Distribution of funding to VEC schools that participate in the DEIS disadvantaged schools programme

The Act provides that the functions of the new Education and Training Boards will include the establishment and maintenance of schools, centres for education and education or training facilities. The Minister for Education and Skills

will have the power to direct the boards to establish and/or maintain schools and education centres and to establish, maintain or resource education and training facilities. The other main functions of the boards will be:

- Planning, providing, co-ordinating and reviewing the provision of education and training in schools or centres maintained by them, in education or training facilities maintained or resourced by them as well as in child detention schools, prisons and facilities maintained by other public service bodies
- Making arrangements with and providing support services to education and training providers
- Providing education and training at the request of and on behalf of any body that has public funds for such training
- Supporting the provision, co-ordination, administration and assessment of youth work services

The Act gives the Minister for Education and Skills the power to issue legally binding directions to the boards and to appoint an investigator to carry out an investigation into the performance of a board.

The boards will have 12 local authority representatives, two staff representatives, two parents' representatives and five local representatives from bodies with a special interest in education and training. Existing VEC members will continue to be members of the new boards until after the next local elections (to be held in June 2014).

Further Education and Training Bill 2013

The Further Education and Training Bill 2013 provides for the establishment of SOLAS (An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna). The Bill is currently before the Oireachtas. The Bill proposes that SOLAS will replace FÁS but with a somewhat different role. FÁS is mainly concerned with training; its functions in relation to employment services and programmes and community services have already been transferred to the Department of Social Protection. SOLAS will also be concerned with further education – currently mainly the responsibility of the VECs (see above for changes to the VEC structures). An action plan for the development of SOLAS is available on the Department of Education and Skills website: education.ie.

The main functions of SOLAS will be to:

- Develop and implement a national strategy for the delivery of further education and training
- Consult the Department of Social Protection and employers to determine the types of education and training programmes to be funded by it and delivered by public and other bodies
- Advance funding to training bodies and other bodies (including private sector providers) for the provision of

further education and training programmes

- Provide, or arrange for training for employment and to assist in and coordinate the provision of such training by others
- Assess the efficiency and effectiveness of education and training providers who are funded by it
- In consultation with the Minister for Social Protection, promote, encourage and facilitate the placement of recipients of jobseekers' payments in further education and training programmes
- Promote cooperation between training bodies and other bodies involved in the provision of further education programmes

The Bill includes provisions for the protection of employees who act as *whistleblowers*.

Work programmes, including internships

There are many different schemes whose aim is to get people back to work. Most are operated by the Department of Social Protection but some are operated by the Department of Education and Skills and supports for self-employment are mainly provided by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and Enterprise Ireland.

Here we list the schemes which are available with a summary of the main conditions attached. The Department of Social Protection (DSP) published *A Review of Department of Social Protection Employment Support Schemes in November 2012*.

See: [welfare.ie/en/downloads/Review of Employment Support Schemes.pdf](http://welfare.ie/en/downloads/Review%20of%20Employment%20Support%20Schemes.pdf).

Community Employment

Community Employment (CE) is a scheme that is designed to provide people who are long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people with an opportunity to work, get some training and then move on to employment. There are currently 25,300 places available on the scheme; 2,000 of these are new places announced in Budget 2013. Five hundred of the new places are being allocated to childcare services and another 500 to social and health-related services.

The CE scheme has two options – the Part-time Integration Option and the Part-time Job Option.

The Part-time Integration Option generally involves one year but it may be extended to two years. It is open to those aged 25 or over who are unemployed or those aged 18 or over who are disadvantaged.

The Part-time Job Option provides for placements of up to three years for unemployed people aged between 35 and 55 (four years for certain recipients of disability payments) and for disadvantaged people aged 18 and over and placements of up to six years (seven years for certain recipients of disability payments) for people aged 55 or over.

You may be eligible for one of these options if you:

- Meet the age requirement
- Are unemployed and getting Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance, One-Parent Family Payment (OFP), Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension, Deserted Wife's Benefit or Farm Assist for at least one year. If you were getting Carer's Allowance this can also count towards the one-year eligibility period, but your caring responsibilities must have ceased and you must currently be getting either a jobseeker's payment or the OFP.
- Are a qualified adult who is dependent on someone who has been getting Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance, or Farm Assist for at least one year
- Are getting an illness or disability payment
- Are disadvantaged, for example a member of the Traveller community or a refugee, and getting a social welfare payment for a period

In general, time spent on a recognised training programme may be regarded as time spent getting a social welfare payment for the purposes of qualifying for the scheme. Time spent on CE no longer counts towards continued time on CE for new participants who start on or after 8 October 2012.

In each option, you are required to work 39 hours a fortnight. You are paid the full personal rate of Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) plus €20 a week with increases for qualified adults and children where relevant. You get the full personal rate of JA even if you were previously getting a lower rate. Tax may be deducted from your pay if applicable, but you pay a special lower PRSI contribution at Class A8/9. You are not liable for the Universal Social Charge on your CE payment. You may retain your extra benefits. You are free to do any other work at times when you are not working on the scheme.

The CE scheme is voluntary in that you may apply to get a placement and are not sent by the DSP. The CE scheme is expected to cost just over €350 million in 2013.

Tús

Tús is a community work placement programme that has 7,500 places (2,500 new places in 2013) for people who have been on the Live Register for over a year. The aim is to provide short-term, quality work opportunities. It is being delivered at local level by each of the 52 local development companies and by Údarás na Gaeltachta. Participants are selected by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and referred to one of the local development companies. If you are selected, you are expected to take part unless you have good reasons not to and there may be sanctions for failure to take part or for leaving a placement without good reason.

Unlike the Community Employment scheme, Tús is only for people who are getting Jobseeker's Allowance. In order to participate in the scheme you must:

- Be currently getting Jobseeker's Allowance
- Have been continuously unemployed for at least 12 months and "signing on" on a full-time basis and
- Have been getting a jobseeker's payment from the Department of Social Protection for at least 12 months

The hours of work and the payment arrangements are the same as for the CE scheme. A placement lasts for one year. There is no training element. Tús is expected to cost €96 million in 2013.

Rural Social Scheme

The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) aims to provide income support for farmers and fishermen who qualify for specified social welfare payments. Farmers who are getting Farm Assist are eligible for the scheme. You may also be eligible if you are actively farming or fishing and you are getting Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit (if previously on CE or RSS within the last 12 months), Disability Allowance, OFP, Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension, or an Increase for a Qualified Adult under 66 years of age as part of your spouse's, civil partner's or cohabitant's State Pension (Non-Contributory).

The scheme is operated by the Department of Social Protection and delivered at local level by 35 local development companies and by Údarás na Gaeltachta in Gaeltacht areas. There are 2,600 places on the scheme. The scheme is voluntary and the work and payment arrangements are similar to Community Employment. There are no time limits for taking part in the scheme. It is expected to cost €45 million in 2013.

The RSS is currently the subject of a *focused policy assessment* by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Focused policy assessments are short evaluations of particular

aspects of public services and are being conducted as part of overall expenditure reviews. The assessment of the RSS is looking in particular at the rationale for the scheme, the continuing relevance of its objectives and, to a lesser extent, its effectiveness.

Local authority work opportunities

A new local authority social employment scheme with 3,000 places was announced in Budget 2013. The design of this scheme is now largely completed and local authorities have been identifying the nature of work and range of opportunities that can be made available. It is expected that places will become available over the next few months. Thirteen local authorities have identified 700 places to be filled by the end of September. However, the details of who will be eligible and of the conditions that will apply have not yet been announced.

Part-time Job Incentive (PTJI)

The PTJI allows long-term unemployed people to take up part-time work for less than 24 hours a week and get a weekly allowance instead of their jobseeker's payment. You must be getting Jobseeker's Allowance at a rate higher than the allowance payable under this scheme. You must be available for and be seeking full-time work while getting the payment. You may stay on the scheme for one year initially but this may be extended. The current personal rate of the allowance is €119 a week; the maximum personal rate of JA is €188. The personal rate plus qualified adult rate is €193.90 and no increases are paid for qualified children. Your income from employment is subject to tax, PRSI and the USC in the normal way. There are less than 100 participants on this scheme at present.

JobBridge

JobBridge is an internship scheme operated by the Department of Social Protection. You may qualify if you have been getting Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance, OFP or Disability Allowance for at least three months of the past six months or have been signing on for credits for at least three months of the past six months. There are 8,500 places available on the scheme. You get work experience for six or nine months. You get €50 a week on top of your existing social welfare payment and you retain any secondary benefits to which you were entitled.

About a quarter of the participants are under the age of 25 and over half of the rest are aged between 25 and 34.

There are various requirements for employers who want to avail of the scheme including limits on how many interns any employer may have. Vacancies under the scheme are advertised at: jobbridge.ie. You apply directly to the

prospective employer. If you are accepted on the scheme, you and the employer sign a standard agreement setting out the precise terms of what you are expected to do.

An evaluation of this scheme has shown that over 60% of people who complete the internship get employment within five months. See: welfare.ie/en/downloads/Indecon-Report-on-Evaluation-of-JobBridge.pdf.

The cost of JobBridge is estimated at €81 million for the year 2013.

Work Placement Programme

The Work Placement Programme (WPP) is a scheme similar to JobBridge but there is no extra payment involved. You may avail of the programme if you are unemployed whether or not you are getting a social welfare payment. If you are getting a payment, you retain it while on the programme. The numbers availing of this programme have been steadily decreasing since JobBridge became available.

Training and education programmes

Back to Education Allowance

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) scheme is run by the Department of Social Protection (DSP). It provides income maintenance for unemployed people returning to further or higher education. There are almost 26,000 people participating in this scheme in the current academic year; about a quarter are aged under 25. About 60% are pursuing third-level courses. The majority of the rest are following further education courses, generally Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. A small number (about 2% of all BTEA recipients) are doing courses at or below Leaving Certificate level (second-level).

In general you must be aged 21 (24 for a postgraduate course) but people aged 18 and over may qualify if they are getting a disability payment.

If you want to follow a second-level course you must have been getting a qualifying social welfare payment for at least three months. For a third-level course, you must have been getting the payment for at least nine months. Time spent on other employment or training schemes may count towards meeting this period.

The qualifying social welfare payments include jobseekers' payments, OFP, Farm Assist, Widow, Widower or Surviving Civil Partner payments, Carer's Allowance, Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension and long-term (for at least two years) Illness Benefit. Qualified adults may also get the BTEA.

You continue to get your normal social welfare payment while on the course and you retain any secondary benefits. Prior to 1 January 2013, your payment was increased to the maximum personal rate of your payment if you had been getting a reduced rate. This was ended for new participants from 1 January 2013. A new maximum rate of €160 a week was introduced for people aged under 25 who start getting BTEA on or after 1 January 2013. Participants used to also get a Cost of Education Allowance but this was abolished from 1 January 2013 for both existing and new participants.

You are not required to be available for work and you may take up part-time work without affecting your payment.

Part-Time Education Option (PTEO)

The PTEO allows you to attend part-time day/evening or weekend education or training courses and retain your jobseeker's payment while an entitlement exists provided that you continue to satisfy the conditions of being available for and genuinely seeking employment.

Education, Training and Development Option

The Education, Training and Development Option allows you to attend certain courses of short duration that are not covered by the BTEA scheme and retain your jobseeker's payment. You do not have to be actively seeking work while attending.

The Back to Education Allowance is estimated to cost €189 million in 2013.

Technical Employment Support Grant/ Technical Assistance and Training Scheme

These are two schemes whereby the DSP offers additional help in the form of access to training, advice, or support for the purchase of certain goods and services to unemployed people who are facing particular barriers. You must be registered with Intreo and be undertaking a guidance process leading to an agreed career plan. You must be getting a jobseeker's payment or a lone parent or disability-related payment.

The Technical Employment Support Grant may be provided for training, for example, where this cannot be provided by a State provider within a reasonable time. In general, the training must be on certified courses. The maximum payable for training is €500. It can also be provided to cover travel

costs to job interviews. The maximum payable for non-training supports is €250. Further amounts may be available in very exceptional cases.

The Technical Assistance and Training Scheme is geared more towards helping people who want to start self-employment and can help with buying training or mentoring, equipment, advertising and public liability insurance.

Activation and Family Support Programme

The DSP provides funding under this programme to help local organisations and agencies to implement projects addressing the disadvantaged personal, social and economic circumstances of recipients of social welfare payments and their families, to enhance their employability through education, training and personal development opportunities and to improve their quality of life. The funding is primarily involved in supporting training and educational programmes. It can also support information events.

You must be getting a social welfare payment or be dependent on a social welfare recipient. You may get out-of-pocket expenses.

MOMENTUM

MOMENTUM is a scheme funded by the Department of Education and Skills. It provides for free education and training for up to 6,500 jobseekers who have been unemployed for 12 months or more. 1,250 places are reserved for people under the age of 25.

The scheme uses the Labour Market Education and Training Fund that is co-financed by the European Social Fund to provide the education and training.

In order to qualify, you must be:

- Unemployed and on the Live Register for at least 12 months
- Getting Jobseeker's Allowance or Benefit or have been signing on for credits for at least 12 months
- Actively seeking work

Periods spent on various other schemes may count towards the time requirement provided you have finished the scheme in question and returned to the Live Register. You may also be considered if you have been getting JB or JA for 312 days in the previous 18 months.

You must get prior approval from the Department of Social Protection before you can participate in the programme. You continue to receive your social welfare payment for as long as you remain entitled. You do not get any extra payments.

Springboard programme

Springboard provides part-time third-level courses that are mainly geared to meeting skills needs. It is managed by the Higher Education Authority. A large number of third-level institutions, both public and private, are offering courses under the scheme. The courses vary in length and some can be undertaken by distance learning. The entry requirements depend on the particular course. In some cases, you may be able to get entry to a course without having a Leaving Certificate.

You may be eligible to take part if you:

- Have been getting Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance, OFP, Disability Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Farm Assist/Fish Assist, Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's pensions, Blind Pension or Deserted Wife Allowance or you are a qualified adult of working age or signing on for credits for at least six months before the course starts **and**
- Have been previously employed (the scheme is not available to recently qualified people who have no history of employment) **and**
- Are actively seeking and available to take up work

If you want to pursue a post-graduate course, a period of at least one year must have elapsed since completing a full time undergraduate degree course.

You retain the social welfare payment that you were getting before the course starts as long as you remain eligible for it. You do not have to pay registration fees or charges. You must remain available for work and, if you get a job, you may also be able to continue with the course.

You apply online at springboardcourses.ie. Information on the courses that are available is also on this site. There are 6,000 places available on the scheme. Evaluation reports have been published on hea.ie.

Youthreach

The Youthreach programme provides education, training and work experience for early school leavers without any qualifications or vocational training who are between 15 and 20 years of age. There are almost 6,000 places available on the scheme that is operated by the Department of Education and Skills. Almost 3,700 of these places are provided by Vocational Educational Committees in just over 100 Youthreach centres. The majority of the remainder of places are provided by FÁS in about 38 Community Training Centres.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)

VTOS provides a range of courses to meet the education and training needs of unemployed people over 21 years of age with a particular focus on early school leavers.

Redundant Apprentice Placement

Under the Redundant Apprentice Placement scheme, FÁS places redundant apprentices with employers to enable them to complete the on-the-job components of their apprenticeship. Since 2008, almost 7,000 of about 28,000 apprentices were made redundant. The Minister for Education and Skills has established a review group to examine the future of apprenticeship training. See: education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2013-Press-Releases/PR13-05-19.html#sthash.DtRiZRN8.dpuf.

Supports for self-employment

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance

The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) is an allowance that enables unemployed people to take up self-employment while retaining some of their social welfare payment for two years. Your self-employed business must be approved by the Department of Social Protection or a Local Development Company (also known as Partnership Companies).

You may qualify for the Short-Term Enterprise Allowance (STEA) if you are entitled to Jobseeker's Benefit. This allowance lasts for the duration of your entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit, either six or nine months.

You may qualify for the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance if you have been getting Jobseeker's Allowance for a year. You can also qualify if you have been getting Jobseeker's Benefit for a year with an underlying entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance (this means that that you would pass the means test and other criteria).

You may also qualify if you have been getting certain other social welfare benefits for at least a year. If you have previously participated in the BTWEA scheme and exhausted your entitlement, you may participate a second time after a period of at least five years has elapsed. If you qualify, you get your full social welfare payment for the first year and 75% of it in the second year.

Almost 12,000 people are being supported by these schemes at present.

The Citizens Information Board provides independent information, advice and advocacy on public and social services through citizensinformation.ie, the Citizens Information Phone Service and the network of Citizens Information Services. It is responsible for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and provides advocacy services for people with disabilities.

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Incentives for employers

JobsPlus

The JobsPlus incentive scheme is expected to be implemented from July 2013. It replaces the Employer Job (PRSI) Exemption Scheme and the Revenue Job Assist Scheme. The aim of the scheme is to encourage employers to recruit from among the long-term unemployed.

An employer who recruits a person who has been long-term unemployed qualifies for a direct payment of:

- €7,500, if the person was unemployed for between one year and two years
- €10,000, if the person was unemployed for more than two years

The payment is made monthly in arrears over a two-year period. The Revenue Job Assist Scheme and the Employer Job (PRSI) Exemption Scheme both cease from 30 June 2013. Existing participants on both schemes can continue to avail of them until their entitlement ceases.

Enterprise grants

The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Enterprise Ireland and the City and County Enterprise Boards provide a wide range of supports for people taking up self-employment and to employers who recruit new employees. These supports include:

Job Expansion Fund

A maximum grant of €15,000 for each new job may be paid towards the recruitment of new employees. This scheme applies to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that have been trading for at least two years with 10 or more full-time employees, in manufacturing and/or high-growth potential traded services. Companies must be looking to recruit a minimum of three new employees per application.

Pre-Investment Supports for High Potential Start-Ups

There are a number of supports including training, grants for developing business plans and exploring business opportunities, equity investment and mentoring.

City and County Enterprise Board grants

The City and County Enterprise Boards (CEBs) may provide grants for business start-ups. The typical Priming Grant payable is 50% of the investment or €80,000, whichever is the lesser, although funding of up to €150,000 may be provided in exceptional circumstances. Website: enterpriseboards.ie.

The planned reorganisation of the CEBs that involves the abolition of the 35 boards and the integration of the CEB services into the local authorities is being implemented. Enterprise Ireland and the local authorities have agreed a service level agreement that sets out the role of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) which will replace the CEBs. The legislation necessary to fully implement the changes is expected to be published soon. The LEOs will be stand-alone units within the local authority structure and will report to Enterprise Ireland.

Microfinance Ireland

This fund was established in September 2012 to improve access to credit for entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises and to facilitate the growth and expansion of viable businesses which have been refused access to credit by banks. The fund may provide loans of up to €25,000. Website: microfinanceireland.ie.

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