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BRÍD O'BRIEN

IRISH NATIONAL ORGANISATION OF THE UNEMPLOYED

[www.inou.ie](http://www.inou.ie)

**INOU Presentation to the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection**

**Theme: lack of availability of activation services and other supports for unemployed people who are not on the Live Register**

Introduction

**The Irish National Organisation of Unemployed (INOU) welcomes this opportunity to meet with the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection *“to discuss the lack of availability of activation services and other supports for unemployed people who are not on the live-register”*.**

*“The INOU is a federation of unemployed people, unemployed centres, unemployed groups, community organisations and Trade Unions. The INOU represents and defends the rights and interests of those who want decent employment and cannot obtain it. We promote and campaign for policies to achieve full employment for all. We also campaign for an acceptable standard of living for unemployed people and their dependents. The INOU is an anti-sectarian, anti-racist, non-party political organisation which promotes equality of opportunity within society.”* (INOU Mission Statement)

The organisation has 211 affiliated organisations and over 2,100 individual members. We work at the local and national level on issues affecting unemployed people through the provision of training and welfare rights information services; analysis of Government policies and related advocacy work; and working with a wide range of other organisations on issues of common concern.

There are a number of reasons why an unemployed person may not be included on the Live Register. This may be for reasons related to the type of payment a person may be receiving – e.g. people on Disability Payments; people on the One Parent Family Payment; people who were previously in receipt of a Job Seekers Benefit Payment who did not make the transition to the means tested Job Seekers Allowance Payment and people who may have been self -employed who do not meet the means test for a Job Seekers Allowance Payment.

The INOU has received many complaints over the last 7 years from people who are very much unemployed but who are not able to avail of key state support services to assist them to find work or to retrain / upskill.

**The INOU has been calling for some considerable time for unemployed people not included on the Live Register to have access to employment, training and education supports. At the organisation’s 2011 Annual Conference, Delegates discussed, debated and unanimously agreed a motion submitted by the organisation’s General Branch of Unemployed People calling onthe Government *“to ensure access for unemployed people not included on the Live Register to the full range of employment, training and education supports including the Training Allowances and other supports.”***

The INOU continues to call for:

* This matter is urgently addressed and certainly through *Pathways to Work 2016-2020;*
* Access to programmes be based on wider criteria than a person’s Live Register status;
* Programme participants be given the wherewithal to support their engagement;
* The Public Employment Service to develop the capacity to respond to the needs of all people of working age seeking employment.

Changing focus

Up to Budget 2010 unemployed people not in receipt of a payment could access a FAS training course: such access created opportunities for these unemployed people to participate in what are called ‘activation measures’, supports that can assist people to re-enter employment. However, in Budget 2010, under the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment Vote[[1]](#footnote-1), the following decision was taken: “*Cessation of the FÁS Training Allowance of €204.30 per week to new entrants not entitled to Jobseeker’s Benefit/Allowance;”* In subsequent budgets training allowances were cut in tandem with social welfare payments and now stand at €188 (max single rate) for those aged over 25 and for those aged 25 and under the maximum single education and training allowance is €160 per week.

Currently, unemployed people not on the Live Register can access a very limited range of supports. These supports primarily involve access to information and signposting which are available via the Department of Social Protection’s Intreo Offices where a limited ‘walk in service’ is available.

Since 2010 the activation landscape has changed considerably with FÁS employment and community services now the responsibility of the Department of Social Protection and its training services now part of the Education and Training Boards with oversight for Further Education and Training resting with SOLAS.

In 2012 the Government published *Pathways to Work*, it was re-visited in 2013 and 2015 where the five strands of this strategy were noted as:

1. Incentivising employers to provide more jobs for people who are unemployed
2. Better engagement with unemployed people
3. Greater targeting of activation places and opportunities for those who are long-term unemployed
4. Incentivising the take-up of employment opportunities by unemployed jobseekers
5. Complete the Reform Agenda

Curiously, in 2012 when *Pathways to Work* was originally published incentivising employers was the fourth strand and *“more regular and on-going engagement with people who are unemployed”* was the first. As a member of the Labour Market Council, the INOU is aware of the increased engagement with employers and the roll-out of the Employment and Youth Activation Charter to give an impetus to this work. However, we are also keenly aware that this work is focusing in on the larger employers yet in the Irish labour market smaller employers are a key employer. Feedback the organization has received from smaller employers indicates that incentives per se are not the issue but the ability of the local Social Welfare / Intreo Office to respond to their needs when they wish to employ people.

A criticism of the *Pathways to Work* strategy has been its sole focus on the Live Register rather than on people of working age, be they in receipt of a Jobseekers, a One Parent Family or Disability payment or no payment at all. Interestingly, *Pathways to Work 2015* proposed to *“Develop and evaluate options to extend employment services to people not on the Live Register and improve the promotion/communication of existing activation options.” (p29)* This is a welcome development, however it is an issue that will in effect roll into the next phase of *Pathways to Work*.

pathways to work 2016-2020

The next *Pathways to Work*strategy must be inclusive of every one of working age and spell out how it will incorporate *Positive Duty* into its implementation. Integral to the success of the next *Pathways to Work* strategy the *Intreo* service must be person centred and work with people to identify the most appropriate option for them. Critical to this will be a commitment to providing an integrated guidance service to unemployed people and others of working age to explore and identify the right steps that will ultimately ensure people gain access to a decent and sustainable job.

*Pathways to Work* must deliver services and supports that have the capacity and knowledge to match people up with the best opportunity for them. To that end it must deliver on a service that is flexible and work friendly, a service that smoothens out the pathway to work and ensures that no-one is worse off taking up employment. To realise the full potential of the changes underway and ensure that *Intreo* becomes a world class employment service, investment in frontline staff is absolutely critical. In particular to support the development of a person centred approach to this service and ensure that Intreo knows its own client base: what skills and competencies people have and what their needs are if their current skills and experiences are not a good match for available / emerging opportunities.

Such an understanding is required if *Intreo* is to be successful in ensuring employers look to the employment service they provide for potential employees. It is also required to create a service that all people of working age see as their employment service, a service that will support them to find a decent job. A person centred approach would also maximise the effective use of resources; and secure employers confidence in the employment service offered by the Department. An integral part of such an approach is choice and unemployed people must be supported to make informed choices about their own futures.

Unemployment and inequality

In August the Central Statistics Office published the latest Equality Module based on the Quarterly National Household Survey Q3, 2014. The equality grounds named in the Employment Equality Act and Equal Status Act were used and even though unemployment per se is not covered, the issue of unemployment was very much to the fore, as respondents were also classified by their employment status. The second highest rate of discrimination was reported by people who are unemployed: at 23%; after people from non-white ethnic backgrounds: at 28%.

Looking further at the types of the discrimination, a higher proportion of men highlighted discrimination when ‘looking for work’, 31%; while, a higher number of women experienced discrimination ‘in the workplace’ 31%. ‘In looking for work’ the issue of age featured very strongly with 46% of respondents noting it as an issue. This is very much in keeping with the feedback the INOU receives from older, long-term unemployed people.

Positive Duty

Recently, the United Nations published 17 Sustainable Development Goals, goals that every member country should spell out how they will achieve them and incorporate them into policy making and delivery. Of particular interest to the INOU are Goals 4, 8 and 10.

* GOAL 4 strives to *“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”*
* GOAL 8 seeks to *“Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”*
* GOAL 10 aims to *“Reduce inequality within and among countries”* and as part of this goal, Target 10.2 seeks to *“empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status”*. While, Target 10.3 strives to “*Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard”*

These developments fit in well with Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 which introduced *a positive duty on public bodies* reflecting a commitment in the *Government’s Programme for National Recovery 2011 to 2016.* Section 42 (1) states that *“A public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to —*

1. *eliminate discrimination,*
2. *promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and*
3. *protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.”*

In conclusion

Building on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and the introduction of a positive duty on public bodies, the INOU calls for this matter to addressed properly and in good time. It should certainly be a key aspect of *Pathways to Work 2016-2020.* And as part of the roll-out of *P2W* on the ground access to programmes and supports should be based on wider criteria than a person’s Live Register status; programme participants be given the wherewithal to support their engagement; and the Public Employment Service under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection must ensure that the needs of all people of working age seeking employment are appropriately met.

Thank you for your time and consideration

1. This Department is now called Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation [↑](#footnote-ref-1)