



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council

Activation

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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Policy Initiatives and Action	3
3.	Institutional Processes and Innovation	11
4.	Possible Further Institutional Developments	16

1. Introduction

Ireland's unemployment regime had for many years been regarded as 'passive', with recipients of benefits able to claim these almost indefinitely without a requirement to take part in education, training or work experience. This is argued to have had the effect of confirming recipients' status as 'out of the labour force', rather than unemployed (NESC, 2005, 2011b). Over time, some supports to counteract this, and to activate the unemployed, have been put in place. For example, since the 1990s, local employment services and local development companies have provided support on progression for the long-term unemployed. In 2008, the Department of Social Protection also established an Activation Unit, with the specific aim of supporting people of working age on social welfare benefits to progress towards employment, with seventy jobs facilitators providing advice on progression in local Social Welfare offices. The National Employment Action Plan had also required engagement through an activation meeting between a case officer and an individual unemployed for over three months. However it was found that those who went through this activation meeting were actually less likely to move into employment than those who did not (McGuinness *et al.*, 2011).

A much stronger focus on active unemployment support was significantly spurred on by Ireland's Memorandum of Understanding with the IMF/EU/ECB (the 'Troika agreement'). Under this, the Government committed to taking steps to tackle unemployment and poverty traps, including reducing replacement rates for those receiving more than one type of benefit; and reforming the system of activation policies to make it more effective. In relation to the latter, it was agreed that sanctions would be introduced for those not complying with job-search or participation in labour market programme requirements; instruments would be introduced to profile job seekers and to increase engagement with them; and there would be more effective monitoring of jobseekers' activities, with regular evidence-based reports.¹ These changes are very much in line with international experience, with many OECD countries moving towards greater activation of the unemployed, in particular since the 1990s (Eichhorst & Konle-Seidl, 2008). To implement these commitments, the Government has introduced legislation, set up new structures, and published an activation service model, *Pathways to Work*, to promote activation in Ireland.

This paper is structured as follows. First, section 2 provides an overview of the *Pathways to Work* policy (both the first version in 2012 and the follow-up in 2013); followed in section 3 by an outline of progress towards implementing it, and the institutional processes and innovation involved. It is important to note that the rollout of *Pathways to Work* requires the establishment of new institutions and ways of working, and this is underway rather than already in place. Finally section 4 touches on possible further institutional developments.

¹ The Memorandum is available at <http://www.finance.gov.ie/documents/publications/reports/2011/euimfrevised.pdf>

2. Policy Initiatives and Action

Policy initiatives

*Pathways to Work*² was launched in February 2012, and set out the Government's strategy to engage with and support the unemployed to get back into the labour market. It outlines how those who are unemployed will be provided with appropriate advice, support, education and training to re-enter the labour force. Therefore it focuses on the supply-side of the unemployment crisis, and so complements the *Action Plan on Jobs*, which aims to help create new employment opportunities.

The *Pathways to Work* document outlines five key strands of work, which are as follows:

1. **Engagement with people who are unemployed:** Under this Strand, all job seekers at high risk of long-term unemployment are to be provided with one-to-one supports, while those at medium-risk will be invited to participate in group advisory sessions. A Probability of Exit (PEX) profiling has been developed to identify those at risk of not leaving the live register within a short time-frame.
2. **Provision of activation places and opportunities:** Under this strand, over 85,650 job placement, work experience and back to education places are to be provided; in addition to almost 300,000 further education and training places already in existence (in 2011).
3. **Incentivising the take-up of opportunities:** This section outlines some changes to be made to social welfare payments to incentivise taking-up of employment. This includes sanctions for those who do not engage with the Pathways to Work approach, re-basing the payment week for jobseeker's benefit on a five-rather than six-day week; and working towards the introduction of the Single Working Age Assistance Payment, rather than the various payments now existing (Jobseeker's Benefit and Allowance, One Parent Family Payment, and Disability Allowance).
4. **Working with employers:** This involves incentivising employers to provide jobs for those on the Live Register. This includes extension of the Employer Job PRSI Incentive Scheme.
5. **Reforming institutions:** This section refers to the establishment of the National Employment and Entitlement Service (now known as Intreo); and the potential of the Department of Social Protection to contract the private sector

² Available at <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/pathwaystowork.pdf>.

to provide more case managers to engage with the unemployed, and others to engage with employers. More co-ordination of work between education agencies and Intreo is also outlined, to better target training and education according to the profile of the unemployed and the needs of the labour market.

In July 2013, the Government published *Pathways to Work 2013*,³ which has a greater emphasis on activating those who are not on the Live Register but are inactive, a stronger focus on employer engagement, and a more robust system for the plan's implementation.

Pathways to Work 2013 is also organised around the five strands outlined above. Under Strand 1 of the 2013 version, it is planned that PEX profiling will be rolled out to all claimants on the Live Register, not just new claimants. Lone parents and qualified adults will also be profiled. Reasons for Ireland's high level of jobless households will be assessed, and proposals developed to reconnect those in jobless households to the labour market. The high numbers living in jobless households are outlined, showing that there are 887,000 claimants of working age and 127,000 qualified adults, with 554,000 of these individuals on neither jobseeker's allowance nor jobseeker's benefit.

Under Strand 2, a new employment scheme, GateWay, will be rolled out, with 3,000 places in local authorities, while extra places will be added to existing employment schemes; and a Youth Guarantee for Ireland will be planned and developed from 2014.

Strand 3 considers the issue of working age income supports (such as those for dependents and for housing), and the extent to which they may fail to incentivise jobseekers to take up employment. A new Housing Assistance Payment will be implemented, and the proposals of the Advisory Group on Tax and Welfare in relation to working age income supports are to be considered when they become available later in 2013.

Strand 4 outlines a greater focus on employer engagement than the 2012 *Pathways to Work*. The recently launched JobsPlus scheme to encourage employers to hire from the live register will continue to be rolled out, and a new employer/job matching system will be designed and implemented. The new local authority Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) will work with Intreo, enterprise agencies and client companies to assist hiring of those on the Live Register.

Finally Strand 5 looks at capacity to case manage those on the live register. The number of case managers in Intreo is to be doubled, and contracting of additional case management capacity to work with the long-term unemployed will be

³ Available at <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/Pathways-to-Work-2013.pdf>

explored. The continuing establishment of Solas⁴ and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs)⁵ is referred to (see below). There are also commitments to review activation policy annually, to publish progress reports on targets, and to establish an industry group to advise on implementing priority actions and delivering KPIs.

The plan finishes with an Appendix outlining the new implementation process. It contains fifty specific action points, along with the responsible agency and timeline for acting on each point.

Policy action to date

Under *Pathways to Work* there have been significant changes in the substance of policy. Most importantly, in terms of work processes, clearly *Pathways to Work* outlines some new ways of providing unemployment support. First, a Probability of Exit (PEX) profiling has been developed by the ESRI in conjunction with Department of Social Protection. This identifies those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed. In 2012, 54,000 new claimants were profiled, and in Q2 of 2013, over 109,000 claimants were profiled, ahead of target.⁶ Secondly, those at high risk of long-term unemployment are now met in a one-to-one interview. In 2012, 158,000 initial one-to-one interviews were carried out, and a further 134,000 follow-up interviews. In Q2 of 2013, 83,300 initial interviews were held, and 78,700 follow-up interviews. Those at medium risk of long-term unemployment are invited to group advisory sessions, and in 2012, almost 70,000 jobseekers had participated in these, followed by 62,300 in Q2 2013. Thirdly, under the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2010, which took effect from January 2011, those receiving certain welfare payments relating to unemployment can have their payments reduced if they do not take up offers of training, employment, work experience, etc. This provision is particularly significant for activation, as it had not previously been part of the Irish unemployment benefit regime, and it motivates jobseekers to engage with the public employment service. By the end of 2012, 1,807 people had had their payments reduced, by up to 23 per cent. Attendance rates at one-to-one interviews and group advisory sessions had also increased from 60 per cent in 2011 to 90 per cent in 2012.

Other process changes have also made for those on One Parent Family Payment (OPFP). On a phased basis between July 2013 and July 2015, lone parents on this payment will be moved to a transitional jobseeker's allowance once their youngest child has reached 7 years of age. However, unlike those on Jobseeker's Allowance,

⁴ Solas is the new strategic statutory authority co-ordinating and funding the further education and training sector.

⁵ 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) have been established, which will be responsible for the delivery of publicly-funded further education and training programmes. The 16 ETBs will incorporate the existing 33 VECs, and the Fás training centres

⁶ See Department of Social Protection (Department of Social Protection, 2013a, 2013b). All figures cited in this paper on *Pathways to Work* performance for 2012 are from the first document; and all figures cited on *Pathways to Work* performance for Q2 2013 are from the second.

those on Jobseeker's Transitional Allowance are not required to be available for and seeking full-time work, and the conditions around part-time work are more flexible than for those on Jobseeker's Allowance. This takes into account the particularly acute childcare needs of lone parents.⁷ Like other jobseekers, lone parents will now have their job-readiness profiled, they will be required to engage with the public employment services, and will be subject to reductions in payment if they do not engage. These are significant changes in regard to the treatment of lone parents in the social welfare code, as previously they had not been required to be available for work in order to receive such a payment.

Changes in how employers are engaged are also being rolled out. Prior to the publication of *Pathways to Work*, the Job Bridge internship programme was introduced in May 2011. It allowed employers to recruit a person who had been claiming unemployment benefit,⁸ for at least three months, as an intern. The intern continues to be paid his/her unemployment payment, with a top-up of €50. Take-up of this scheme has been high, with over 12,000 placements in the first 18 months (Indecon, 2013). In 2013, the Government also introduced Jobs Plus, which provides a payment to employers who recruit a person who has been on the Live Register. A payment of €7,500 is received for those unemployed for between 1 and 2 years, and €10,000 for those unemployed for over two years. This scheme simplifies more complicated schemes which reduced employer costs where an unemployed person was hired, which had had low take-up in the past. By October 2013, 1,200 employers and 2,400 jobseekers had registered for Jobs Plus, which is three times higher than the numbers applying for the earlier PRSI Jobs Exemption Scheme.⁹

Pathways to Work 2013 also outlines how the new LEOs will work, and for the first time links up the various state organisations working on employment, such as Enterprise Ireland, the IDA, and the LEOs. This aims to provide more streamlined links between employers and job-seekers.

Parts of the activation agenda which will be rolled out in future

A number of other substantive policy initiatives and actions are beginning to be designed for future implementation, and it is likely that in these areas there will be some institutional and process innovations, although, as they are in an early stage, the extent of such innovations is not yet clear. Some key areas which are beginning to be designed are outlined below.

⁷ Under *Pathways to Work 2013*, an after-school childcare pilot scheme is being implemented, providing 6000 places for children of low income parents taking up work. However this is small-scale and unlikely to meet the childcare needs of the increased number of lone parents seeking work.

⁸ Those in receipt of One Parent Family Payment or Disability Allowance are also eligible.

⁹ 'Over 1,200 employers and 2,400 jobseekers register for JobsPlus scheme', *Journal.ie*, 10/10/2013—accessed at <http://www.thejournal.ie/jobplus-scheme-figures-employers-jobseekers-1122371-Oct2013/>, on 24 October 2013

First, as discussed further below, adequate further education and training is a crucial support for effective activation, and the establishment of the ETBs, and of Solas, will help to move this forward. However, setting up the structures is a first crucial part of ensuring a more effective further education and training sector. The type of courses to be delivered is also important. A strategic review of FET provision has recently been completed,¹⁰ to guide the strategic work of Solas and the FET provision of the ETBs. The review aimed to evaluate how relevant FET provision is for labour market activation purposes, assess current provision and make recommendations to enhance its relevance for activation (European Commission, 2013). Aligning activation and FET will be crucial for long-term success of activation policies.

Other issues which will be important to consider in relation to FET are the actual delivery of courses, and the number of places provided. On course delivery, providers will need to innovate to deliver courses in new ways for mature students who have significant work and home responsibilities (NESC, 2011b). On the number of course places, in April 2013, almost 38,000 people were on training courses linked to labour market activation. However in this month 186,000 people had been on the Live Register for at least one year.¹¹ The Government committed in Budget 2013 to expanding targeted skills provision, including Springboard, ICT Skills conversion courses, and the Momentum training project.¹² The latter provides 6,500 long-term unemployed job seekers with accredited quality education and training, work placement and support, and links to identified job vacancies and employers. This is positive, although more such projects could be developed.

Another area of the activation agenda which is being examined, particularly under *Pathways to Work 2013*, is secondary benefits and their link with unemployment. Several authors have noted the interaction of Irish unemployment supports with poverty traps. There are a small number of cases where the replacement rates¹³ are high,¹⁴ and 'the design of unemployment benefits implies stronger disincentive effects for low-skill workers and the long-term unemployed' with 'secondary benefits further worsen[ing] disincentive effects' (Pina, 2011: 9 & 11). Rent Supplement is an example. As outlined in *Pathways to Work 2013*, this will be

¹⁰ Although it has not yet been published.

¹¹ 9,376 people were on full-time Fás training courses for the unemployed, approximately 5,000 were on VTOS courses; and 27,830 were on back to education allowance and/or Momentum courses. From CSO (CSO, 2013). April was chosen over more recent data, to ensure that summer holidays would not affect the numbers in training.

¹² Momentum is funded under the Labour Market Education and Training Fund.

¹³ i.e. the proportion of household disposable income which is 'replaced' by social welfare when a person is out of work.

¹⁴ The vast majority of those on the Live Register are single or have spouses/partners whose earnings are taken into account in the household means test and so reduce the amounts of unemployment compensation paid. Therefore these unemployed people would be much better off at work. Secondary payments, such as housing supplement and payments in recognition of a family which a claimant is supporting, can boost replacement rates but this applies to only small proportions on the Live Register, approximately 20 per cent at most (NESC, 2011b, 2012). This is linked to the fact that unemployment benefits pay more for a family, whereas the labour market does not.

replaced with a new Housing Assistance Payment, which will be based on a differential rent, allowing employment take-up among those who may previously have been caught in a poverty trap if they entered the workforce (European Commission, 2013). The Citizen's Information Board (2012) has also shown ways in which medical card, working hours, and family income supplement eligibility can have an adverse impact on the incentive of jobseekers to take up employment. NESC noted that 'a new strategy for secondary benefits is needed' (NESC, 2012: 74). A cross-departmental report on the adverse unemployment incentives arising from the structure of social welfare payments was promised in June 2012 (European Commission, 2012). This is being worked on by the Advisory Group on Tax and Welfare and is expected to be delivered to the Minister for Social Protection by the end of 2013. *Pathways to Work 2013* commits to considering proposals to address the findings of this group's report. How the welfare and work system align for those earning low wages and/or in part-time jobs is a challenge in a number of countries. In Ireland it is estimated that one fifth of those on unemployment benefits are now working part-time (OECD, 2013: 185), and there is a high number of underemployed part-time workers (almost 150,000 in Q4 2012 (NESC, 2013). In Australia, 22 per cent of those receiving unemployment benefits report earnings other than their benefits; and since 2000, the underemployment rate there has been higher than the unemployment rate (Fowkes, 2011). A number of researchers have pointed to the development of 'jobs polarisation', or the 'hourglass economy', with significant growth, skills shortages and high wages in specialised skilled work (e.g. IT); moderate growth in low-skilled, low paid jobs (often part-time); and a decline in intermediate skilled jobs. Many of the lower skilled and low paid jobs are in sectors such as retailing, catering and care work, where many jobs are part-time.¹⁵ And as the unemployed are more likely to have lower skills, these may be the jobs which they are most likely to be able to move in to. In Ireland, recent job growth has been faster in part-time than full-time work (and retailing and social work activities are two of the sectors which have shown most employment growth between 2006 and 2011 (CSO, 2012). Clearly part-time employment provides a greater link to the work force than unemployment, but how this type of work will mesh with the welfare system, and with adequate income for individuals and their families, is important to consider.¹⁶

Pathways to Work 2012 also refers to the introduction of a Single Working Age Assistance Payment (SWAAP), which would provide one payment for those of working age, instead of the range of payments currently available, such as Jobseeker's Benefit and Allowance, One Parent Family Payment, Disability Allowance etc. This is likely to reduce the administrative complexity of the various

¹⁵ See e.g. (Fowkes, 2011); (Schlotter, 2008). Census 2011 for Ireland (CSO, 2012) also shows that an above-average proportion of those working in the wholesale and retail trades, and accommodation and food services activities, have lower and upper secondary levels of education, while the proportion with a third level degree is well below average.

¹⁶ During this research, some stakeholders suggested that it would be useful to assess to what extent some jobs are subsidised by the social welfare system; and to consider the type of jobs which the Irish economy and society wants to create.

payments now available, and to prevent 'migration' from one payment to another. It would also facilitate employment for those of working age who are on one of these benefits, but not on Jobseeker's Benefit or Allowance. The Deputy Secretary of the Department of Social Protection, in her presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Social Protection and Education on 18 January 2012, also stated that:

In order to support the activation of recipients of a single payment, the provision of the necessary supports and services to enable them to take up employment is essential. This will involve providing individuals with access to education and training supports and other secondary services such as childcare and disability supports (Joint Committee on Jobs, 2012: 10).

Introduction of a single payment is likely to mean greater activation of working age adults who are not currently employed, which would require greater focus on supports which they need to enter employment (as well as on secondary benefits). This has also been found internationally (van Berkel, 2008); (Eichhorst & Konle-Seidl, 2008). To facilitate provision of these supports, data would need to be gathered on the current position of these groups and their needs, in order to assess their distance from the labour market and what supports might be needed to address that. This will indicate whether the activation service model proposed for all unemployed will help reduce the number of jobless households, or if more targeted support is needed. *Pathways to Work 2013* commits to reviewing the capacity for work of long-term recipients of illness and disability payments; and to developing recommendations to allow those in jobless households to return to work.

At the same time, while welcoming the fact that the employability of those on disability payments is being considered, the Disability Federation of Ireland has expressed some concerns that using the Jobseeker's Allowance template to build a single payment for people of working age may not result in the best possible outcomes for people with disabilities. Disability payments and the secondary benefits associated with them have evolved over time to meet the specific needs of people with a disability. They form a package of measures that address the costs of disability, as well as poverty and unemployment traps particular to disability. It is not clear how the new SWAAP would address these factors.¹⁷ The OECD has also noted that 'the design of activation measures for disability benefit recipients is relatively complex' (OECD, 2013). In a similar vein, concern has been expressed about changes to means-tested OPFP leading to a reduction in income for lone parents who were employed while receiving OPFP. Earnings disregards for those on OPFP who are in employment are being reduced (INOUE, 2013) (to bring them to the

¹⁷ For more information, see <http://www.disability-federation.ie/userfiles/file/DFI%20Position%20Paper%20on%20Single%20Social%20Assistance%20Payment%20Report.pdf>, accessed 20 August 2013.

level of earnings disregards for those on jobseeker payments), and changes made to other benefits to address this do not make up for the reductions in income.¹⁸ Concerns have also been raised by lone parent organisations about the lack of affordable childcare for those moving from welfare to work.¹⁹ There will also continue to be other groups of vulnerable people who need to be supported into the labour force—particularly if activation is extended further beyond those on the Live Register. Vulnerable people in particular will need on-going support from the public employment service, right through from appropriate education/training or work experience programmes to the labour market, to ensure that there are positive job outcomes for those participating in such programmes.

Employers may also need support to develop pathways into work for groups who are far from the labour force, and to handle their transition into the workplace. This could help share the risks of this transition between employers, employees and the State (Fowkes, 2011).

¹⁸ Changes are being made to Family Income Supplement (FIS) to allow it to be reviewed and re-rated when OFPF ceases (previously it could only be reviewed after 52 weeks). This will help to compensate for the reductions in earnings of those who received OFPF, were employed, and received FIS. However even with these changes there will still be a reduction in income for these parents. For more information on this issue, see the answers to parliamentary questions 201 and 203, here: <http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/takes/dail2013061800068> (accessed 20 August 2013).

¹⁹ See e.g. One Family's Ten Solutions, which look for specific supports to help lone parents move from welfare to work, at <http://www.onefamily.ie/professionals/policy-research/ten-solutions-for-smarter-futures/what-are-the-10-solutions/>, accessed 23 August 2013

3. Institutional Processes and Innovation

Implementing *Pathways to Work* and the activation agenda has seen a range of new institutional processes and innovation, which will be outlined below.

Monitoring delivery

In terms of delivery and monitoring progress, a somewhat similar system to that operating for *Action Plan for Jobs* has been established. A Cabinet subcommittee on Economic Recovery and Jobs has been established, with the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste, the Ministers for Social Protection, Education and Skills, and Public Expenditure and Reform, and the junior Minister for Training and Skills. It has met monthly to date in 2013. The Senior Officials Group on Labour Market Issues supports it. An inter-departmental programme board, chaired by the Department of Social Protection, has also been set up. It comprises representatives from Forfás (in relation to the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs), FÁS/Solas, and the Departments of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Social Protection, Education and Skills, and Public Expenditure and Reform. However, the advisory group on working age policy and activation, with international and domestic policy experts—mentioned in the original *Pathways to Work*—has not been set up as yet.

In relation to targets and reporting, the Cabinet subcommittee on *Pathways to Work* receives monthly reports on progress. Quarterly targets for 2013 have also been set and these are now published on a quarterly basis. These targets are in relation to both outcomes (e.g. reducing long-term unemployment by 75,000 by the end of 2015); and outputs (e.g. completing personal profiles of those on the Live Register, providing one-to-one meetings and group advisory sessions). Previously there was no agreement to publish progress under *Pathways to Work*. Therefore the visibility of the work carried out under the *Pathways to Work* rubric may have been somewhat lower than that carried out under the *Action Plan for Jobs*, which contains many more targets, and has published progress on these since it began to be implemented. However, *Pathways to Work 2013* pushes this monitoring further ahead, with its 50 point action plan, which outlines the responsible agency and timeline. It also commits to publishing progress reports on meeting these targets. A stronger emphasis on performance targets and monitoring is a feature of the management of activation in other countries also (van Berkel, 2008, Eichhorst & Konle-Seidl, 2008).

Reforming institutions—setting up Intreo

Driven by these actions, there has also been significant reform of institutions. The organisations which had previously provided welfare payments, training and other unemployment supports are all now part of Intreo (the National Employment and Entitlements Service), under the Department of Social Protection. These functions had previously been provided separately by the Department of Social Protection, the HSE and FÁS. Bringing all these services together provides a much stronger foundation than previously for developing activation which aims to facilitate and encourage those on unemployment benefit to seek and/or prepare for employment (NES, 2011b). While *Pathways to Work* provides the activation service model,

Intreo provides the organisational structure for activation of the unemployed. The merger of the agencies responsible for employment supports and welfare payments is a feature of activation policies in other countries also (van Berkel, 2008);(Eichhorst & Konle-Seidl, 2008).

Altogether, 2000 Fás and HSE community welfare service staff have been transferred into the Department of Social Protection (Department of Social Protection, 2012), which now has 7,000 staff. The Intreo offices are also being established on an on-going basis. For each office to be established, a location must be found, HR and IR issues must be dealt with, staff need to be supported to feel part of the creation of one new organisation, and they also need to be trained into their new work. By the end of 2012, 10 Intreo offices had been established, one more in Q1 of 2013, and a further two in Q2 of 2013. This is behind target, as five were to be established in Q1 of 2013, and ten in Q2.²⁰ Nonetheless, the Department of Social Protection reports that progress is under way to roll out 43 Intreo offices by the end of 2013. Other countries which carried out such reforms also took time to merge the various offices, e.g. Germany (Jacobi & Kluve, 2006). In Ireland, the first Intreo offices to be established had both DSP and Fás functions within the same building. As it is taking time to physically amalgamate the DSP and Fás offices, for now all new Intreo offices are being asked to set up a reception area which integrates both unemployment benefit (traditionally a Department of Social Welfare function) and job search (traditionally a Fás function). Clients have an initial meeting at this reception area, and arrangements are made for them to access both services, with some of these in different locations.

The Department of Social Protection has put various processes in place to establish the Intreo offices. It commissioned a service model template to be used in the offices. This was then developed by a change management team within the Department,²¹ which now works with each new Intreo office as it is established. The change management team meets all staff who will work in the new office, to outline the processes which will take place to set up and then run it. The team trains all staff for this, and continues working with them for some time after the new office opens, in order to support the changes. This change management team is now training thirteen new change management teams, one for each of the Department of Social Protection's 13 regional areas, so that the roll-out of Intreo offices can be speeded up, and the target of establishing 43 Intreo offices in 2013 can be met.

Until early 2011, the focus of work in the Department of Social Protection was primarily on ensuring that income support payments were made on time, but now this role is being increasingly combined with that of providing support for jobseekers to prepare for and find employment. Large changes need to be made to

²⁰ See (Department of Social Protection, 2013a, 2013b), and also (Department of Social Protection, 2013c). All figures cited in this paper on *Pathways to Work* performance for Q1 2013 are from this document.

²¹ It is included in the Appendix of *Pathways to Work 2012*.

deal with this. Therefore, a variety of new functions were also set up in the Department of Social Protection to develop different aspects of Intreo. These functions work on client interaction, case management, centralisation of claims administration, employer engagement, establishing Intreo offices, developing external partnerships, building links with Solas, activation supports, and culture change/communications. They all work under the programme management and change management office. Pre-existing Department of Social Protection functions such as HR development, IT, and physical infrastructure, also work with the programme management and change management office to develop Intreo and related activation services.

Within the Intreo offices, the processes whereby clients engage with the unemployment and social welfare services have changed (drawing on the service model template), in order to speed up the process. At an initial meeting, details are taken and clients are informed which documents they need to bring to a subsequent meeting, in order to make their claim for unemployment benefits. Decisions on the claim can be made rapidly after the second meeting, at which clients are profiled. Group engagement takes place two or three weeks later for those who need less support to leave unemployment, while for those who are rated under the PEX system as needing higher levels of support, arrangements are made for them to meet with a case officer.

Reforming institutions—work programmes

The Department of Social Protection now also has all relevant work programmes under its aegis. Previously Community Employment was managed by Fás; and Tús and the Rural Social Scheme by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, for example. There have been changes to the work programmes provided also; with new programmes such as Job Bridge. Ireland's largest single work placement programme for the unemployed has long been Community Employment (CE), which in April 2013 had over 21,000 participants. However the progression of those who take part in CE to the open labour market is low, despite the length of time of the programme (three years) and the high related costs (NESC, 2011b). This may be linked to CE's dual role—as well as providing work experience to the unemployed, it also channelled the latter into local community and voluntary organisations, to support the services they provide. It has been argued that the latter role has overshadowed the activation purpose of CE, thereby weakening its activation role (European Commission, 2013). The eligibility criteria for CE also facilitated those who had completed CE moving to another CE placement, although changes to this were made in 2012. Meanwhile, an evaluation of Job Bridge has shown it to have much better progression rates than CE (Indecon, 2013). This may be related to its shorter duration (nine months vs three years), thereby reducing the amount of time an individual is in supported employment; the lower benefits paid

to those on Job Bridge compared to those previously paid to CE participants,²² and also to the greater labour market experience and higher qualifications of those participating on Job Bridge compared to CE (e.g. almost two thirds of Job Bridge interns hold a degree or higher, while 60 per cent of new CE participants in 2011 had lower than Leaving Certificate education (Department of Social Protection, 2012);(Indecon, 2013). However, the new Momentum training course provides training on level 3 to level 6 of the National Qualifications Framework, as well as work experience. It is more focused on long-term unemployed, as it requires participants to have been unemployed for a year, while those unemployed for three months are eligible for Job Bridge. The Momentum programme also contracts a range of providers to provide training in specific areas which are strongly linked to labour market growth, such as IT, logistics, and health care. This is a new targeted model of providing work experience and training.

Reforming institutions—FET

Other changes have also begun, in the further education and training (FET) area. Adequate FET is a crucial support for effective activation, particularly in the Irish context. For example, the European Commission's Spring 2012 review of how Ireland is meeting the conditions of the EU/IMF/ECB programme noted that long-term unemployment was growing, with construction and manufacturing workers making up 40 per cent of those seeking work at the end of 2011, while managers, professionals, and technicians made up only 12 per cent. It notes a mismatch between vacancies and the skills of the unemployed (which is referred to in *Pathways to Work 2013*). It says that 'this requires effective and efficient systems to ensure that unemployed workers can receive appropriate and timely education and training opportunities' (European Commission, 2012). Recognising the importance of FET for activation, the Government has recently passed legislation to re-organise the FET sector. First, Solas is the new strategic authority co-ordinating and funding the further education and training sector, and secondly, 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) will be responsible for the delivery of publicly-funded further education and training programmes. The 16 ETBs will incorporate the existing 33 VECs, and the Fás training centres. Solas will incorporate some parts of Fás, but has quite different functions, acting as a strategic funding and co-ordinating body and not providing training itself. In terms of Departmental responsibility, the ETBs and Solas will be under the Department of Education and Skills. This is a change for training that connects particularly to the labour market, as until 2010 this was governed by Fás, under the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Some of the same challenges faced by the Department of Social Protection in establishing the Intreo offices are therefore likely to arise in the re-organisation of the FET sector.

²² Prior to January 2012, it was possible to receive another primary social welfare payment while being paid Jobseeker's Allowance for participating in CE (e.g. One Parent Family Payment and Disability Allowance), which could reduce incentives to move into low-paid employment. See <http://sijtucommunity.blogspot.ie/2012/02/dsp-note-payment-changes-for-ce.html> for more detail (accessed 24 October 2013).

International studies of activation have noted a trend towards either ‘work first’ or ‘human capital development’ in the activation policies adopted in different countries. For example, the US is characterised particularly by a ‘work first’ approach, while Scandinavian countries have placed more emphasis on re-training. By and large however countries reflect a mix of both approaches, and are also changing. Scandinavian countries are now argued to have less emphasis on training, while in the UK, there is more focus on skills formation. The UK has found that the integration of those far from the labour force is not as successful without training, as instead they are inclined to find short-term unskilled jobs and return to the Live Register (Eichhorst & Konle-Seidl, 2008). This is an issue to bear in mind as the Irish FET system is re-organised and linked to activation policy.

Reforming institutions—new legislation

Many of the changes which have been made in the area of activation are underpinned by new legislation. For example the Social Welfare [Miscellaneous Provisions] Act 2010 allows jobseekers’ payments to be cut where they do not co-operate with the public employment services; the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2010 merges Fás and HSE community welfare staff into the Department of Social Protection; the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 sets up the ETBs; and the Further Education and Training Act 2013 established Solas. Preparing such a large amount of legislation and moving it through the Dáil stages required for it to be passed, is, in itself, another time-consuming work process.

Reforming institutions—governance

There are also innovations in other aspects of institutional process. For example, as training and education are a key support for activation, the Departments of Social Protection and of Education and Skills now need to link much more than previously. The Department of Social Protection now has a representative on the MAC²³ of the Department of Education and Skills, to ensure a link at a high level. In addition, the person responsible for FET in the Department of Education and Skills part-reports to the Deputy Secretary responsible for *Pathways to Work* in the Department of Social Protection. The Secretaries General of each Department also meet regularly, in conjunction with the person responsible for FET in the Department of Education and Skills, and the Deputy Secretary responsible for *Pathways to Work* in the Department of Social Protection. This provides a mechanism for both Departments to co-operate on activation and FET. New forms of governance to manage co-ordination of services are a feature of activation policies internationally also (van Berkel, 2008).

²³ Management Advisory Committee. Each Government department has a MAC, whose members are the department’s Secretary General and Assistant Secretaries (the senior managers).

4. Possible Further Institutional Developments

The possible further institutional developments which are outlined in this section are divided into two groups—developments to manage capacity to fully implement the activation process, and developments related to capacity to continuously improve activation. The focus on continuous improvement draws on the work of the NESC standards project, which argued that continuous improvement of human services is progressed through the identification and fixing of problems, and the identification and development of opportunities (NESC, 2011a).

Managing capacity to fully implement activation

An immediate challenge in implementing Ireland's activation agenda is capacity to carry out activation. The European Commission Winter 2012 report on Ireland's progress under the EU/IMF/ECB agreement noted that 'reforms to activation policy have reached a point where the capacity of institutions to deliver services to the long-term unemployed is becoming the critical bottleneck' (European Commission, 2013: 4). There is a strong need for more activation case workers, with 300 Department of Social Protection staff reported to be working in these roles at the end of 2012, and the numbers due to double in 2013. However, this is not enough to deal with all those becoming newly employed, let alone all those already unemployed. This is not a new problem, with Grubb *et al* finding the proportion of public employment service staff directly engaged in guidance and placement in Ireland to be low even before the recession and the significant rise in unemployment (Grubb *et al.*, 2009). NESC (2011b) also notes that the Irish public employment service had 50 per cent more staff working on administering benefits than on placement, referral and counselling, whereas the reverse was true in most OECD countries. Clearly the number of activation case work staff needs to increase, in line with the changes to the Department's roles.

Contracting of additional case management capacity from the private and voluntary sector is suggested as a means to tackle this, in both *Pathways to Work*, and by the EU/IMF/ECB. The Department of Social Protection has been looking at options on this, and is aiming to release a request for tender for such work to be carried out, by the end of November 2013. The Government has decided that the structure and scope of this model of work, now called JobPath, should be finalised by the Department of Social Protection, subject to agreement with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (although no further information on this was available at the time of writing).²⁴

The issue of how to manage organisations providing additional activation case management is important. Overview studies find mixed results for contracting

²⁴ See *JobPath Questions and Answers*, accessed at [http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/Questions%20\(and%20Answers\)%20from%20JobPath%20Information%20Sessions_23102013.pdf](http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/Questions%20(and%20Answers)%20from%20JobPath%20Information%20Sessions_23102013.pdf), 24 October 2013.

employment services, with it being more successful in some countries and for some groups. For example, in Germany, reforms allowed those who had not found a job through the public employment service after six weeks to be given a voucher to use in private employment services. However comprehensive evaluations showed that many people did not use the voucher, and that use of private employment services had no significant effect on the likelihood that a person found a job (Jacobi & Kluge, 2006). A study of four Dutch public employment offices also found that the services provided by private companies had disappointing results. The offices found that they lost involvement in and control over activation by using private companies. Services are still being contracted there, but private providers are now required to provide less standardised and more individualised services, and there is stricter control over their activities (van Berkel, 2008). Australia on the other hand has been successful in contracting employment support services, which it began in 1998. It has an active national management framework which uses rich data on jobseekers to assess the success of different providers and their offices in placing jobseekers with different characteristics. This outcomes data, known as Star Ratings,²⁵ is published quarterly, and has allowed identification of average, below-average and above-average providers, with the contracts of poorly performing contractors not renewed. This is just one of several elements in the Australian activation system which contributes to its high aggregate employment rate. Other elements which work include dividing disadvantaged jobseekers into four groups, with the most disadvantaged group receiving the highest level of support (OECD, 2013). Overall, Finn has recommended that public authorities design the contracting process in ways which allow lessons to be learned rapidly and adjustments made. It takes time, he notes, for authorities to learn how to steer the complex system to minimise perverse incentives and to capture efficiencies and innovations that can be offered by contracting services (Finn, 2011a: 32). Building capacity within government to design, maintain and monitor on-going service provider contracts and performance—‘contract management capacity’—is key to successful contract performance (Brown & Potoski, 2003: 153-64). Thus, across all service delivery models (public sector, private and voluntary), much depends on mechanisms for monitoring quality and performance, and on the skills and capacity to design and manage contracts with service providers. Collection of good data to identify outcomes, what works and what does not, and why, is key in this. This issue will be returned to below.

The Department of Social Protection has spent some time considering how additional unemployment support services could be contracted. It commissioned a report from the UK Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, to provide advice on the best commercial model to contract employment services; and has also looked at international experience on this. It has also consulted with interested stakeholders in Ireland,. At an information session in July 2013 on the possibility of contracting additional capacity, the Department proposed flexibility for service providers, along

²⁵ The outcomes data is weighted for several factors in order to calculate the Star Rating.

with specification of minimum standards; while it had plans to use a price review mechanism to account for changes in the operating environment.²⁶

The importance of carefully designing and managing contracted service provision is an issue also likely to arise in relation to the ETBs, which will be able to contract education and training provision.

Capacity to continuously improve

The above section leads on to the importance of engaging with all stakeholders involved in activation, in order to continuously improve it. First, NESC (2011a) pointed out the increasing move internationally towards ‘co-production’ of services between service-users and providers, which helps ensure high quality services that meet service-user needs. This is particularly important for effective activation which has two dimensions: one is improving people’s skills and employability; and, the other is ensuring people remain interested in, and committed to, finding a job. Here the issue of which work and training people are interested in and motivated by is key. If those being activated are progressed towards work experience or training courses in which they have little interest, it is unlikely to be particularly effective. Some concerns were raised by stakeholders during the course of this research that there is not enough emphasis on progressing clients towards work and training which they are interested in, and an over-emphasis on control and rules. This was also found by a study of young unemployed people in 2012. Young third level graduates in particular found that the training and employment advice they were given was inappropriate.²⁷ In this regard, institutional arrangements and procedures to give ‘voice’ to clients’ experiences would be useful. In the Netherlands a National Client Council provides such a channel (*ibid.*). Australia uses a number of methods—first, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations conducts client satisfaction surveys three months after a person finishes contact with a contracted employment service provider, and complaints identified are sent to the Department’s complaints hotline²⁸ for attention. The numbers and types of service-user complaints, and their management, is also a main element of the key performance indicator for quality among these service providers (Lam, 2007). Meanwhile, the Dutch system uses Individual Reintegration Accounts which are personalised budgets to purchase tailored services, which are jointly controlled by a jobseeker and his/her appointed employment services officer (NESC, 2011b: xiii).

Secondly, as the relevant departments are aware, engagement with employers is important, and necessary to reach several goals of *Pathways to Work*. For example,

²⁶ For further information, see <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/JobPath-Info-Session-260713.pdf>, accessed 20 August 2013.

²⁷ They also noted that they would like to meet the same adviser each time they visited the public employment service; to have more time with them; and for the PES to have a better data collection and recording system, to reduce the amount of times they had to provide personal information. See (O’Connor, 2011).

²⁸ This has a free national complaints line, which received 14,800 complaints in 2009-10 (see (Finn, 2011b).

the target for the number of vacancies to be filled by the Department of Social Protection's Employment Services is 15 per cent by the end of 2015 (Department of Social Protection, 2013b). This is down from an initial target set in *Pathways to Work 2012*, of 40 per cent of vacancies to be filled from the Live Register by the Department's employment services. This revision may be due to the fact that employers have not used public employment services extensively. For example, surveys in the late 2000s showed that half of employers had never been contacted by Fás (who delivered the service at the time) in relation to a notified job vacancy (Grubb *et al.*, 2009: 47-8). Overall, this indicates further work with employers is needed to increase use of the public employment services. *Pathways to Work 2013* contains several new commitments to link employers to those on the Live Register, particularly through the work of the LEOs. It will be important to ensure that adequately trained and experienced personnel in LEOs carry out this work, so that it yields the best possible results. The issue of ensuring that jobseekers are moved towards work and education which motivates them is also important here, as otherwise employers may be referred jobseekers who are not enthusiastic about the job being offered. This is one of the biggest employer complaints about the public employment service in Australia (Fowkes, 2011: 18).

It will also be important to comprehensively involve employers in the development of labour market-related further education and training. As noted by NESC (NESC, 2012: 70), strengthening the relationship between skill supply and labour-market demand requires the development of a more intensive, constant and sophisticated dialogue between education and training providers and the world of work. The Education and Training Boards Act requires that a body representing business, industry and employers nominates one member of each 21 person ETB. ETBs must also consult with business interests when drawing up their strategies. This is positive, and focus will need to be kept on this as the ETBs and Solas are rolled out, and develop their work programmes. In the UK, Sectoral Skills Councils exist, which are state-sponsored, employer-led organisations aiming to reduce skills gaps and boost the skills of workforces in 25 different sectors. They contribute to the design and approval of apprenticeship frameworks; and create sectoral qualification Strategies.

Involving employers in the design and roll-out of training can help to ensure that the skills mismatch in the labour force can begin to be addressed. In addition, it might help to ensure a greater focus on generic and soft skills, such as problem-solving, communication, adaptability and team-working. These are increasingly sought by employers, and are key for employment in services industries, whether these require a high level or a low level of technical skills (Schlotter, 2008).

Overall, as noted by the Council in 2011, 'the best-practice examples from other countries of lifelong learning, welfare-to-work, activation and other measures, suggest major roles for local government, education/training providers, the social partners, NGOs and for individual responsibility alongside the intelligent engagement of the State' (NESC, 2011a: xiii). One of the benefits of working in this way is that 'what works' can be more effectively tested, and so provide more effective outcomes for the unemployed and for State resources. The most effective public employment services dialogue with and learn from other services providers

and clients to identify missing services and to help design and stimulate initiatives that fill these gaps. Consultation with stakeholders on contracting extra unemployment supports is underway, which is positive. Attention will also need to be paid to ways of ensuring client feedback on the activation processes.

As with other policy areas examined in the NESC Council report, *Ireland's Five-Part Crisis, Five Years On*, the issue of collecting, collating, analysing and sharing relevant data also arises. This is important for continuous improvement of activation. The IT systems of the Department of Social Protection were set up to manage unemployment claims, rather than to produce information to manage activation (Harmon *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, work is on-going to ensure that there is a greater focus on collecting, collating and using data to manage activation. The IT systems of the three organisations merged into Intreo are being co-ordinated, and there are also plans to put in place new IT systems, which will facilitate this. Using this information, and linking it back to 'what works' is also key. In Germany, a comprehensive data collection system was put in place to track the Hartz reforms of the public employment service, which has allowed evaluation of which aspects of the reforms have worked, where, and for which groups (Jacobi & Kluve, 2006). The Australian Star Ratings system also draws on relatively rich data which allows successful job placement providers to be identified. The data system is designed and managed by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, and the organisations providing unemployment services populate it (Lam, 2007). Within Ireland, comprehensive data systems are being developed in, for example, the HSE, in relation to eldercare. The HSE has piloted use of a single assessment tool (InterRai), which is used extensively in the EU and US, and collects a variety of standardised data on the care needs of older people. This data allows decisions to be made on the most appropriate care setting for the older person, and follow-up data collection can be used to assess the outcomes of the care received. As the pilot found InterRai to be useful in the Irish context, it is being rolled out to assess the care needs of all older people accessing services throughout Ireland, between 2013 and 2017.²⁹ It would be useful to look at how a similar data collection tool, which links needs, outputs and outcomes, could be used for activation in Ireland.

In this regard, it would also be useful to share the information collected with organisations beyond Intreo, such as the ETBs, Solas, and those providing work experience programmes. To this can be added the importance of independent evaluation and monitoring of the outputs and outcomes of activation services. The views of the unemployed would also need to feed into such evaluation, to assess how the new activation processes work for jobseekers, and to see if they are supported to access training, education and employment opportunities which motivate them.

²⁹ See *Single Assessment Tool (SAT) for Services for Older People: HSE information— for intranet/wide circulation*, accessed at <http://www.iasw.ie/attachments/1d2210cd-89c2-4b62-b95d-1ac3392234e8.PDF>, 28 August 2013

In Australia, an innovation fund run by Job Services Australia resources organisations to trial innovative ways to help disadvantaged job seekers. The findings of these trials are written up into 'better practice' guides available for employment service providers, to share key learning and early results. A thematic review of all the projects also identifies key principles and themes, which are used by the Government in the design and funding of Demonstration Pilots. These Demonstration Pilots trial the findings of the innovation fund projects within Job Services Australia offices.³⁰

Intreo case managers providing career advice to jobseekers will need to have extensive knowledge of the social welfare system, employment opportunities, further education and training, work programmes and how to provide career guidance to people with a very varied range of skills and qualifications. This is tricky to put in place. In the Netherlands, one study has found that it is difficult for one staff member to provide both activation and welfare payment information, with the result that the time given to activation was not sufficient. This has led in some offices to activation staff being differentiated from welfare payment staff (van Berkel, 2008). Staff in Intreo offices meanwhile will need a good knowledge management and transfer system to store and access this information internally, and so provide good progression advice to jobseekers.

Continuous improvement could also be promoted from the experience of establishing Intreo, for the institutions still being established to promote the activation agenda, and indeed for institutions outside this sector. The implementation arena for *Pathways to Work* differs from that for the *Action Plan for Jobs*, as most of the organisations implementing actions under the *Action Plan for Jobs* were already in existence. In contrast, actions in *Pathways to Work* includes the establishment of new large organisations. Indeed, this is probably the largest reconfiguration in the history of the state and constitutes a landmark in public sector reform. The new organisations are in various stages of establishment. Intreo has progressed the furthest, while the ETBs and Solas are only beginning to be established. Many of these new institutions are made up of staff from a variety of pre-existing organisations. The Department of Social Protection has surveyed the culture and values of the three organisations being merged under its aegis, to monitor the extent to which these cultures and values merge over time, and to focus support on staff groups which are less engaged than others in the new organisation. Merging different organisations in these ways can be complex. Ensuring that objectives, interests and incentives are all aligned is important. With this alignment, some parts of the organisations and practices may be integrated, but not others (OECD, 2013). The experience of merging these organisations could yield significant learning on the best ways to merge pre-existing organisations, to develop a shared culture, and to train staff in new ways of working. The learning from the Intreo establishment could be useful for the ETBs, and indeed for various

³⁰ See <http://deewr.gov.au/innovation-fund-and-job-services-australia-demonstration-pilots#job-services-australia-demonstration>, accessed 23 September 2013

organisations beyond the activation sphere, such as the re-organisation of local authority and development structures, and possibly the establishment of the new Child and Family Agency.

It can also be argued that, as activation is such a recent addition to Irish policy and process, the exact actions to be taken are less clear from the outset than some of the actions listed in the *Action Plan for Jobs*. This could be one reason why there are less actions listed in *Pathways to Work* (in particular the 2012 version) compared to the *Action Plan for Jobs*. Therefore, identifying what works best in terms of activation, understanding why this is the case, and using this information is key to ensuring that good practice is built on. The Department of Social Protection has noted that the macro-policies on activation will only succeed when they translate into work on the ground at local level, and that local work will have to be connected (Department of Social Protection, 2013d). So, as with the *Action Plan for Jobs* arena, it is important to ensure that information flows from groups who are working successfully on the ground back to central policy makers.

In this regard, it may be useful to consider the available models of policy monitoring and learning. One such is triple loop learning, as outlined in the NESC standards project (2011a). Triple loop learning is an advanced system of structured reporting and shared learning. The first loop of learning occurs when practitioners monitor their achievement and make adjustments to gain improved outcomes. The second loop occurs when this kind of practical learning is noted by managers who subsequently adjust their systems and routines to take note of this. And the third loop occurs when oversight authorities and regulators learn from monitoring the organisation's improved goals and revise their strategy for the entire field.³¹ Such a system can be seen in the link between the innovation fund for activation in Australia, and the trialling of the findings of these innovative projects in the mainstream Jobs Services Australia offices. Such learning could also be assisted in Ireland by a forum or clearing house where actors who are in positions to identify, manage and deliver valuable projects and ensure people on the Live Register are employed on them in a satisfactory way, can share experience. In the case of activation policy, this model was outlined by NESC in 2011 (2011b), when it was argued that such a forum would help to connect national schemes and local success. It would also be helpful to have comprehensive data on the position and progress of jobseekers, such as the type of data collected in Australia to provide star ratings for different employment service providers. This would help identify practices which work, to support those on the live register back into employment.

Summary

This paper outlines the significant changes which have taken place in relation to activation, with the introduction of *Pathways to Work* (2012 and 2013); the on-

³¹ The model has been developed by Ayers and Braithwaite in *Responsive Regulation: Transcending the Deregulation Debate* (1992). The definition also draws on an interpretation by Koornneef (2010: 6).

going setting up of Intreo offices; new case management, profiling and sanctions (in cases of non-cooperation) for jobseekers; new governance and monitoring arrangements; and a new treatment of lone parents under the social welfare code. Work is also commencing to re-organise the further education and training sector, while a report on secondary benefits and their interaction with unemployment benefits is due later this year. It is also argued that if capacity to implement case management activities needs to be contracted from outside the public sector, then it will be important to develop effective central management systems to oversee this challenging area of work. Secondly, to allow continuous improvement of activation, good data and analysis, feedback from service-users and employers, and sharing of information from all these sources on what is effective will be key. Disseminating learning from the establishment of Intreo could also be helpful for the roll-out of Solas and the ETBs.

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