



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta  
National Economic & Social Council

# Low Work Intensity Households and the Quality of Supportive Services: Detailed Research Report

Research Series

Paper No. 12

June 2018

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Dr Helen Johnston  
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## Abbreviations

<b>ACS</b> Affordable Childcare Scheme	<b>CSP</b> Community Services Programme	<b>ESRI</b> Economic and Social Research Institute
<b>AGTSW</b> Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare	<b>CSR</b> Corporate Social Responsibility	<b>ETB</b> Education and Training Boards
<b>AHB</b> Approved Housing Body	<b>CTES</b> Childcare Education and Training Support	<b>FET</b> Further Education and Training
<b>BTEA</b> Back to Education Allowance	<b>CWO</b> Community Welfare Officer	<b>FETEC</b> Further Education and Training Awards Council
<b>BTWEA</b> Back to Work Enterprise Allowance scheme	<b>CYPSC</b> Children and Young People's Services Committee	<b>FIS</b> Family Income Supplement (now Working Family Payment)
<b>CCC</b> County Childcare Committee	<b>DA</b> Disability Allowance	<b>FT</b> Full time
<b>CCS</b> Community Childcare Subvention	<b>DEASP</b> Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection	<b>GNP</b> Gross National Product
<b>CE</b> Community Employment	<b>DES</b> Department of Education and Skills	<b>HACPP</b> Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points
<b>CEC</b> Community Employment Childcare	<b>DSP</b> Department of Social Protection	<b>HAP</b> Housing Assistance Payment
<b>CEDRA</b> Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas	<b>DWS</b> Developmental Welfare State	<b>IR</b> Industrial Relations
<b>CIB</b> Citizens Information Board	<b>ECDL</b> European Computer Driving Licence	<b>IT</b> Information Technology
<b>CSO</b> Central Statistics Office	<b>ED</b> Electoral Districts	<b>JA</b> Jobseeker's Allowance
	<b>ESG</b> Enterprise Support Grant	<b>JB</b> Jobseeker's Benefit

<b>JI</b> Jobs Initiative	<b>NMW</b> National Minimum Wage	<b>RGI</b> Registered Gas Installer
<b>JST</b> Jobseeker's Transition	<b>OPFP</b> One Parent Family Payment	<b>RS</b> Rent Supplement
<b>LCDC</b> Local Community Development Committee	<b>PALF</b> Potential Additional Labour Force	<b>RSS</b> Rural Social Scheme
<b>LEB</b> Local Enterprise Board	<b>PCB</b> Partial Capacity Benefit	<b>SICAP</b> Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
<b>LEOs</b> Local Enterprise Offices	<b>PLC</b> Post Leaving Certificate [course]	<b>SILC</b> Survey of Income and Living Conditions
<b>LECP</b> Local Economic and Community Plan	<b>PPP</b> Personal Progression Plan	<b>SNA</b> Special Needs Assistant
<b>LES</b> Local Employment Services	<b>PT</b> Part time	<b>STEA</b> Short Term Enterprise Allowance
<b>LFS</b> Labour Force Survey	<b>PSV</b> Public Service Vehicle [Licence]	<b>SYOB</b> Setting up your Own Business [Courses]
<b>LLL</b> Lifelong Learning	<b>QA</b> Qualified Adult	<b>VLWI</b> Very Low Work Intensity
<b>LTI</b> Local Training Initiative	<b>QAA</b> Qualified Adult Allowance	<b>VTOS</b> Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
<b>MABS</b> Money Advice and Budgeting Service	<b>QNHS</b> Quarterly National Household Survey	
<b>NEETs</b> [people] Not in Employment, Education or Training	<b>QQI</b> Quality and Qualifications Ireland	
<b>NFQ</b> National Framework Qualifications	<b>RAS</b> Rental Accommodation Scheme	
<b>NIRSA</b> National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis		

# Acknowledgements and Executive Summary

## Acknowledgements

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We thank NESC members and colleagues for their comments and ideas, which have improved development of the policy implications. In particular, we acknowledge the insights and direction of the Working Group, chaired by Professor Tony Fahey, brought together to work through the conclusions from the study.

## Executive Summary

In Ireland, the percentage of people living in households where no-one is working or where there is only marginal attachment to the labour force is higher than in most other European countries. These 'low work intensity' households experience much higher poverty rates and there is a long-lasting negative impact on the children growing up in these homes. There are also significant costs to the State from the income transfers necessary to support the households.

This report examines the experiences of low work intensity households and the services they interact with, through 92 interviews with households, service provider organisations, employers, senior officials in government departments and agencies, and national stakeholder organisations.

The research was carried out in a disadvantaged suburb in Dublin in 2016-2017. The area exhibits the characteristics of low work intensity households: higher levels of unemployment, lower education levels, higher rates of disability, households more likely to contain children and more likely to be headed by a lone parent, more likely to be in the manual social class, and more likely to be in rented social housing.

The study found that there is a diversity of low work intensity households: unemployed people, lone parents, people with an illness or disability and ethnic minorities. The households interviewed avail of a range of income support payment schemes. Most had labour market experience and low levels of education but many also have ambition to improve their lives and the lives of their children. The main reasons why people were not working at the time of the interviews were because they lost their job due to the economic crash; they left work to care for children; they or a family member developed an illness or disability; or other reasons, including being a Traveller or African migrant who found it difficult to get work.

The research also found that the social welfare and employment support system, i.e. Intreo, the Local Employment Service and JobPath, is generally supportive, and more benign than in some other countries. However, there can be a lack of trust between service users and Intreo, and at times, people feel they have no choice in relation to the activation/training options offered. Some also felt there was not enough places on sought-after courses with good labour market potential. In addition, service users reported that it can be difficult to get information on the options open to them.

**These findings suggest three overarching conclusions:**

- First, there is a need to develop a stronger focus on the household, by continuing work to expand activation supports to adult dependents, people with a disability, and carers who wish to enter employment.
- Second, coordination needs to improve and this requires stronger links between the employment support services and employers, and between the wide range of services to support jobless households. Resources for co-ordination need to be provided; and
- Third, the intensity of support available to ensure effective outcomes should increase, particularly for those most distant from the labour market, such as lone parents, people with illness/disability; and those with literacy difficulties, poor English, no work experience or contacts, a history of addiction or time in prison.

**The study's findings also provide more specific guidance on key issues arising from the research, which have implications for a range of government departments and agencies.**

**For employment support services it points to the need for:**

- Tailored supports for those most distant from the labour market;
- Adequate time for case officers to engage with clients, and pairing of the most disadvantaged clients with the most experienced and qualified case officers; and
- Ensuring that those who have completed employment support schemes, such as CE, are linked effectively to employment; along with recognition that this also supports social inclusion and community services.

**For particular services it points to the need for:**

- More affordable childcare, particularly after-school care;
- More public housing, and additional affordable private sector housing;
- Greater promotion of the fact that those leaving welfare to take up employment can keep their medical card for three years;
- Considering the possibility that those with an on-going illness could retain their medical card for the duration of their illness; and
- Greater support for those on low incomes to enable access to transport and IT that facilitates moves into training and employment.

**For further education and training it points to the need for:**

- Financial support to cover the full costs of those in jobless households attending education and training, including childcare and transport;
- Improving career guidance provision and ensuring it is consistently available;
- Upskilling the low skilled in employment, making greater use of the National Training Fund and Skillnets;
- Stronger links between training and the labour market, by linking training resources to skills needs, and involving employers more in curriculum development, work placement and recruitment;
- Reducing early school leaving further by providing more alternatives to school-based education;
- Supporting disadvantaged groups with higher education qualifications to access appropriate employment; and
- Further research on why people who undertake multiple training courses do not progress to employment.

**For supports to help people move from welfare to work it points to the need for:**

- Measures that provide more certainty for people with children, and/or in precarious employment, to reduce the risk of moving into paid work;
- Better tapering of payment withdrawals for people with children, to incentivise opportunities to take a job;
- More timely assessment and payment of income supports and secondary benefits; and
- Awarding the Working Family Payment automatically to eligible households moving from welfare to work.

**In relation to employers it points to the need for:**

- Employment support and training services that engage more comprehensively and consistently with employers;
- Employers to be encouraged to engage more with applicants with atypical CVs, e.g. through recognising the value of volunteering; and
- Actions to be continued that address negative issues arising from precarious working practices.

**For institutions and service provision it points to the need for:**

- Greater trust between service users and service providers to ensure effective engagement;
- Additional flexibility to allow local service delivery to be better tailored to meet people's needs;
- More funding to address the needs of disadvantaged groups;
- Poor neighbourhoods to have adequate resources to self-finance community services; and
- Evaluation to continue to be built in to all programmes, and data to be collected that adequately captures service outcomes, including 'distance travelled', as well as acting on the evidence gathered from data and evaluations.



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This NESC report is concerned with understanding household joblessness and finding ways in which the lives of people in such households can be improved. Since 2013 NESC has been working on this topic, publishing an overview report in 2014, *Jobless Households: An Exploration of the Issues* (NESC, 2014). To gain a deeper understanding of the factors underlying household joblessness and low work intensity, NESC has undertaken this qualitative research study, in the form of 92 interviews. These were undertaken with 33 jobless households, 16 local service organisations, and 11 local employers in a disadvantaged suburb of Dublin in 2016, and subsequently with 11 service managers at county or regional level, 12 government department and public agency officials and 9 other national stakeholders in 2017.

The *Programme for a Partnership Government* (Government of Ireland, 2016) acknowledged the high rate of jobless households in Ireland and identifies a range of actions to address the problem. These actions include a more integrated framework to promote social inclusion, supports for low income families, and a commitment to publish a dedicated 'Pathways to Work for Jobless Households' to support jobless households into employment.

The Country Specific Recommendations from the European Council on Ireland's 2017 National Reform Programme also raised concerns about the low work intensity of many households in Ireland despite significant falls in unemployment, contending that barriers to inclusive growth still exist. The European Council recommended that Ireland implements an integrated package of policies to address the needs of low work intensity households (European Commission, 2017).

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, along with other government departments and agencies, plus the Labour Market Council, are concerned to address the issue of low work intensity households and have been proposing and undertaking a number of initiatives to alleviate the problem. On a related theme the *National Risk Assessment 2017* has identified skills shortages and weakening trust in public institutions as national risks (Department of An Taoiseach, 2017). NESC's qualitative research study can help to inform this work.

The report is structured as follows. This introductory chapter provides a general understanding of what is meant by household joblessness, the characteristics of jobless households, explanations for household joblessness, and the impact of households being jobless. Theoretical debates from the literature are briefly discussed, plus the case for an in-depth qualitative study.

Chapter 2 portrays the socio-economic characteristics of the study area and the nature of its labour market. Although it is a disadvantaged area, there are a range of

public services available, and job opportunities nearby. The second part of the chapter presents the study methodology and the limitations of the research. The third chapter describes the main policies and services which are available to job seekers and their families. This includes unemployment and secondary benefits, job-seeking and in-work supports, as well as support services.

From Chapter 4 on the interview data collected during this study is presented and discussed. Chapter 4 provides a description of the household interviewees, presenting their socio-demographic details, their employment, unemployment and education, along with their use of services, kinship networks, resilience and ambitions. The fifth chapter explores interviewees' interaction with public employment services, including Intreo, the Local Employment Service, and JobPath, and depth of engagement with these services. Eligibility for services is examined, including the position of qualified adults (i.e. partners of those on a social welfare payment). The use of sanctions as well as the importance of trust are also outlined.

Chapter 6 documents employment opportunities in terms of the jobs available and employers' recruitment policies. The chapter includes discussion of precarious work where people combine work with welfare or ricochet from welfare to work and back again. It also includes consideration of self-employment and the value of volunteering.

Chapter 7 explores the issues arising when interviewees aim to transition from welfare to work. The capacity of individuals to make that transition is considered, along with information and myths, confidence and motivation. A key issue is the extent to which income from employment replaces that from social welfare and secondary benefits. Also relevant is the availability and affordability of supportive services such as childcare, other caring services, housing, health, transport and information technology. The chapter explores the role of employment support programmes and social enterprise in supporting people into employment.

Chapter 8 deals with the role of education and training in supporting people to move from welfare to work. Literacy concerns as well as early school leaving and the need for alternative forms of second-level education are discussed. Other issues arising are choice and appropriateness of courses, career guidance, barriers to taking up courses, and progression from courses. The role of the further education and training system, and lifelong learning, as well as apprenticeships are also considered.

Chapter 9 discusses the role of institutions in the provision of services for low work intensity households, in particular how services can be tailored to meet needs. Services which link and bridge, as well as co-ordinating mechanisms are presented. The chapter explores the role of organisational ethos, as well as funding and the delivery of services. The political dimension is considered, along with measurement issues and the use of evidence.

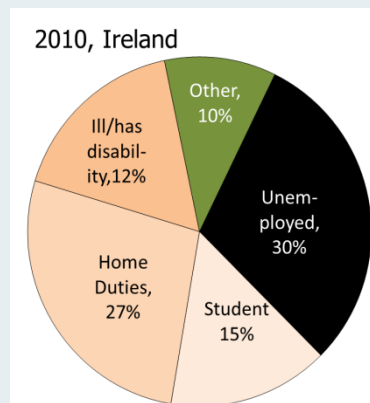
A final tenth chapter draws overall conclusions from the study.

## 1.1 Understanding Household Joblessness

Household joblessness is distinct from unemployment, which is usually defined as individuals who are not working but are actively seeking employment. While the focus of unemployment tends to be on individuals, jobless households are households where no-one is working or has very limited access to work. There are two commonly used but different measures of household joblessness: one where no-one in the household is in employment (the definition used by the Labour Force Survey, LFS) and one which measures very low work intensity where the adults spent less than 20 per cent of their time over the last year in paid work (the definition used by the Survey of Income and Living Conditions, SILC).<sup>1</sup> The CSO uses the first definition but this report will look at research using both measures, as similar issues often lead to absence of work and low work intensity.

An analysis by the ESRI, using SILC data from 2010<sup>2</sup> showed that in Ireland 30 per cent of adults (aged 18-59) in jobless households were unemployed, while 27 per cent were on 'home duties', 15 per cent were students, 12 per cent had an illness or disability and 10 per cent had other reasons, see Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1: Principal Economic Status of Very Low Work Intensity Households in Ireland, 2010**



Source: (Watson *et al.*, 2013)

<sup>1</sup> The LFS definition is based on working age adults (aged 18-59) living in a household where no-one is at work. The LFS definition of being at work is used, i.e. in the last week if a person performed work, even just for one hour, or were temporarily absent from their usual work, they are considered to be working. In Ireland, until recently these data have been published in the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). Since quarter 3, 2017, the data are published in the new Labour Force Survey. The SILC definition is also based on anyone aged 18-59 living in a jobless household, but here the definition of joblessness is related to work intensity over the last year. A household is considered jobless if the total time in work over the year reported by all the working-age adults (excluding students) falls below a threshold of 20 per cent of their working time (very low work intensity).

<sup>2</sup> SILC 2010 data is the most up to date data available at this level of analysis.

While the figures are now somewhat dated it does demonstrate that household joblessness is broader than unemployment and includes caring for the home and family, people with disability, carers and lone parents. People who are officially unemployed make up about one third of those in jobless households.

Household joblessness has been comparatively high in Ireland. Eurostat data shows that in 2016, in Ireland, 11.6 per cent of adults aged 18-59 lived in households where no-one was working. The EU27/28 average then was 10.1 per cent, with Ireland's rate being 7<sup>th</sup> highest.<sup>3,4</sup> For children, in 2016, 13.4 per cent of 0-17 year olds in Ireland were living in households where no-one was working, compared to an average of 10.5 per cent in EU27/28. Ireland's rate is the third highest in the EU, with only Bulgaria and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia higher.<sup>5</sup> While still high, these proportions have fallen from a peak of 20 and 16 per cent respectively at the height of the recession in mid-2012. Within Ireland, in Q2 2016, the highest proportion of adults under 60 in households with no one working was in the Border region (14.1 per cent) and the lowest was in the Mid-East (10.2 per cent).<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2 Characteristics of Jobless Households

A quantitative study by the ESRI showed that nearly half (42 per cent) of Irish jobless households comprise several adults and children while just over a quarter (26 per cent) are lone parent households.<sup>7</sup> One fifth (21 per cent) are living in households with several adults and no children, with 10 per cent living in single adult households, see Figure 1.2.<sup>8</sup> The profile of household joblessness changed during the economic recession with a larger proportion of multi-adults with children now in jobless households. Persistent joblessness is higher for households with children, as well as being more common for women, older adults, those with lower levels of education, adults with a disability and one-adult households (Watson *et al.*, 2015).

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the EU Labour Force Survey.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do> Accessed on 20 March 2018.

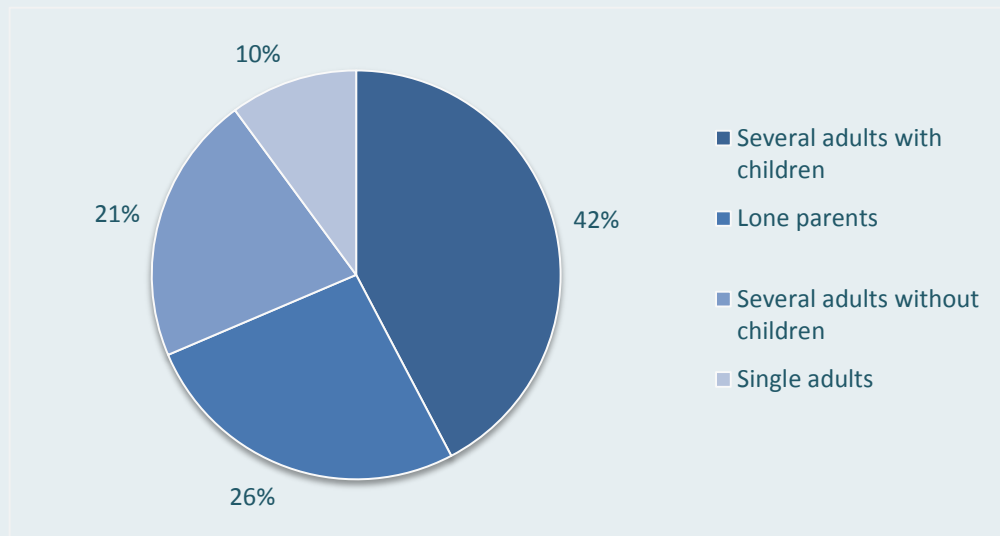
<sup>5</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00181&plugin=1> Accessed on 20 March 2018.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/qnhs-fu/qnhs-households-and-family-units-q2-2016/> Accessed on 20 March 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Based on Quarterly National Household Survey, which uses the Labour Force Survey definition of joblessness.

<sup>8</sup> These figures are based on an analysis by the ESRI examining how the profile of persons aged 0 to 59 in jobless households changed over the period from 2004 to 2014 by household type. For example, since the start of the recession, the proportion of people in jobless households who were in lone-parent households declined from about 31 per cent between 2004 and 2007 to about 24 per cent thereafter. In the same timeframe the proportion of people living in multi-adult jobless households with children rose from about 37 per cent to 46 per cent (Watson *et al.*, 2015: 17-18).

**Figure 1.2: The Profile of Persons in Jobless Households by Household Type, 2004-2014**



Source: (Watson *et al.*, 2015).

People do move in and out of jobless households. As might be expected, the entry rate into joblessness increased faster than the exit rate during the recession. Before the recession (2004 to 2006) the rate of people exiting from joblessness was just over 10 per cent (as a percentage of those living in jobless households). During the early recession years (2008/09) this fell to 7.5 per cent, but by mid-2013 the rate of joblessness exits had increased to 10 per cent again (*ibid.*).

Attachment to the world of work is a relevant factor in exiting unemployment. Thus, the chance of someone in a jobless household getting a paid job is little more than half that of someone in a household where there are others in employment. The presence of children is also linked with a lower chance of getting a paid job and a higher chance of exiting employment, mainly linked to the employment pattern for women. This highlights the vulnerability of children to living in a jobless household both because of a lower probability of getting a paid job and a higher probability of leaving employment among the adults with whom they live (*ibid.*). A distinguishing feature of Ireland's jobless households, compared to other European countries, is the likelihood that they contain children, as well as being less likely to have at least one other working adult (Watson *et al.*, 2012).<sup>9</sup> This finding is based on research

<sup>9</sup> Irish families tend to contain more children than most other European families, with the exception of France. In 2015, Ireland had a fertility rate of 1.92, compared to an EU28 fertility rate of 1.58. The rate for France was 1.96, see Eurostat at [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility\\_Statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Fertility_Statistics)

where the definition of joblessness is related to job intensity over the last year (using the SILC definition).

Particular risk factors of being in a very low work intensity household relate to the employability of those in the household and the household structure, see Box 1.1. Those who live in low work intensity households are more likely than others to have no educational qualifications, to have never worked or to be in the unskilled social class. They are also more likely to be renting their accommodation, to be single or parenting alone, and to either have a disability or to live with someone with a disability. The characteristics of those who live in households with others who are not in employment tend to be different to those who live with someone who is in employment (*ibid.*).

### **Box 1.1: Risk Factors for Household Joblessness**

#### ***The Householder***

- Has never worked
- Is in the unskilled manual/service social class
- Has no educational qualifications
- Is living in rented accommodation
- Has a disability

#### ***The Household Type***

- One-person household
- Lone-parent household

**Source:** (Watson *et al.*, 2012).

## **1.3 Explanations for Household Joblessness**

Various explanations, internationally and in Ireland, have been put forward to explain the causes of household joblessness, which can be summarised as:

- The operation of the tax and welfare system;
- The state of the labour market; and
- The characteristics of jobless households (age, level of education, age and number of children, health status of adults and children) (NESCC, 2014).

The interactions between the social welfare system, the taxation system, and access to services and employment can be complex and, depending on people's circumstances can facilitate, or in some cases, hinder, the transition from social welfare into employment. These relate to the level and certainty of in-work income compared to the level of social welfare benefits, especially when secondary benefits such as medical cards and housing supports are taken into account. For instance, the household context requires consideration of the impact that one person in the household getting a paid job would have on the benefits received by other household members. The availability and cost of childcare may also be a factor on a household's ability to enter employment where there are children in the household.

The state of the labour market also impacts on a household's ability to exit joblessness. If there are few jobs available in the area in which the household is living or if there is a mismatch between the education and skills of the individuals in the jobless households and the skills required for the jobs which do become available, it may be difficult for these individuals to compete for the jobs. Other factors have also been identified such as the importance of networks and informal contacts in finding out about potential jobs and being able to access them. As stated earlier, an unemployed person in a household where someone is working tends to have a better chance of getting a paid job than someone in a household where no-one is working.

The characteristics of the household can also impact on their ability to exit joblessness. In a household where someone has a disability or a health issue it can be more difficult to access the labour market. Likewise, those with caring responsibilities may not be in a position to access the labour market without specific supports. In these situations tackling joblessness requires a broader focus than those on the Live Register (i.e. in receipt of a Jobseeker payment). It will need to take into account people with a disability and those with caring responsibilities. For example, Watson *et al.*, (2015) found that an employment entry by a woman who had been engaged in home duties was almost as likely to move the household out of joblessness as employment entries among those describing themselves as unemployed. The *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities* (Government of Ireland, 2015) notes that people with disabilities are only half as likely to be in employment as others of working age. The reasons given include level of education and skills, fears around loss of benefits, the knowledge of employers about disability, low expectations of the person with a disability, limited re-entry to work following the onset of a disability and a higher incidence of ill-health. The strategy does, however, commit to ensuring that people with disabilities, who are able to, and want to, work are supported and enabled to do so.



## 1.4 The Impact of Household Joblessness

There are a number of impacts of household joblessness. These include:

- Risk of poverty;
- Cost to the social welfare system; and
- Cost to society.

One consequence of living in a jobless household over a period of time is the risk of poverty. For example, there was a much higher at-risk-of-poverty rate in 2016 for those in households where no-one was working, at 42.1 per cent, than among the population in general (16.5 per cent) (CSO, 2017b).<sup>10</sup> Jobless households comprise 73 per cent of households in consistent poverty and experience high levels of deprivation along with economic stress and vulnerability (CSO, 2017b, 2014). Lone parent households, in particular, experience high levels of deprivation with 50 per cent of lone parents experiencing two or more types of enforced deprivation in 2016 (CSO, 2017b), see Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1: Poverty and Deprivation Among Different Household Types, 2016<sup>11</sup>**

	At Risk of Poverty (%)	Consistent Poverty (%)	Deprivation (%)
State average	16.5	8.3	21.0
0–17 year olds	19.3	11.1	25.2
Unemployed	41.9	25.2	42.6
Illness or Disability	39.1	26.3	46.7
Lone Parent	40.2	24.6	50.1
No-one at work in the household	42.1	24.4	37.7

Source: (CSO, 2017b)

<sup>10</sup> It is noted that this information is taken from the Survey of Income and Living Conditions and encompasses all households, including those over the age of 60.

<sup>11</sup> At risk of poverty rate is the share of the population with an equivalised income below 60 per cent of the national medium income. Consistent poverty is being at risk of poverty and experiencing enforced deprivation, i.e. experiencing two or more types of deprivation of the 11 basic deprivation items. The 11 basic deprivation items are: (i) two pairs of strong shoes; (ii) a warm waterproof overcoat; (iii) buy new (not second hand) clothes; (iv) eat meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day; (v) have a roast joint or its equivalent once a week; (vi) had to go without heating during the last year through lack of money; (vii) keep the home adequately warm; (viii) buy presents for family or friends at least once a year; (ix) replace any worn out furniture; (x) have family and friends for a drink or meal once a month; (xi) have a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight for entertainment.

In general, the Irish social welfare system has been reasonably successful in ameliorating income poverty, even in the face of a severe recession. For example, in 2011 social transfers lifted almost 40 per cent of the population out of income poverty. Social transfers were effective in reducing income poverty for all social welfare groups, ranging from 84 per cent effectiveness for working age adults to 95 per cent for retired people. It was 87 per cent effective for both children and people in jobless households (Watson & Maître, 2013).<sup>12</sup>

However, there are a number of areas of concern. Firstly, despite the success of social transfers in ameliorating income poverty, levels of basic deprivation remain high in jobless households. For example, as outlined above, some 38 per cent of households where no one is working experienced two or more types of enforced deprivation in 2016 (CSO, 2017b). Secondly, even as economic, and subsequently employment, growth resumes as Ireland recovers from the recession, people in jobless households may not find employment. There are a number of reasons for this including the issues outlined above, such as evidence that people in households where someone already has a job are more likely to get a job than those in households where no one is in a paid job, plus a myriad of other factors such as level of education and skills, work history, accessibility, caring and other responsibilities, and health and wellbeing.

Thirdly, Ireland's reliance on income transfers leads to questions about the long-term financial sustainability of Ireland's social welfare system. In 2016 total social welfare expenditure was €19,867m which was 29.2 per cent of gross current government expenditure and equivalent to 8.8 per cent of GNP. This was down from €20,970m in 2011 at the nadir of the recession, when social welfare expenditure was 15.1 per cent of GNP. In 2016, working age income supports made up 20 per cent of social welfare expenditure, down from 31 per cent in 2010 (DEASP, 2017b).

As well as the risk of poverty and the cost to the social welfare system, household joblessness has an impact on society. Research on wellbeing shows the importance of having a sense of purpose, of nurturing capability, of agency, and of having an adequate income which paid employment can provide and which contributes to an individual's and household's sense of wellbeing. The lack of these fundamentals, especially over time, can lead to a sense of hopelessness and detachment from mainstream society (NESC, 2009). There is also a net economic cost to society.

Perhaps the greatest cost of household joblessness, however, is the impact on the children living in these households. Poor children have lower returns on educational investments, and lower skills and productivity in the longer term. This comes with a higher likelihood that they themselves too will be unemployed and place greater demands on public services such as health, welfare and social protection. At societal

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<sup>12</sup> Poverty reduction effectiveness refers to the extent to which social transfers contribute to a reduction in the market income poverty gap. The market income poverty gap is the gap between the household's market income and the poverty line.

level, there is the risk of anti-social behaviour and increased crime with a loss of social cohesion.

There is also the risk of the transmission of joblessness and poverty across generations. Research from the Combat Poverty Agency indicates that where neither adult was in work, 80 per cent of children experienced recurrent or persistent low income. In addition, people from less advantaged education backgrounds, from lower socio-economic groups and with less favourable economic circumstances in childhood were all found to have considerably higher poverty rates in adulthood than others (Nolan *et al.*, 2006: xxviii).

## 1.5 Theoretical Debates

There are many theoretical debates as to why households are jobless. The economic, sociological and social policy literature presents a range of theories for household joblessness relating to market and societal explanations of unemployment and the risk of poverty as a result. A dimension of these debates is the extent to which people are actively encouraged to seek employment. A related factor is influence of the household or family in decision-making about employment and the role that gender plays in this. Also of crucial importance is the role of state institutions and their staff, in interacting with households which are not working on a regular basis, and the nature of that interaction. This section briefly rehearses some of the main theoretical debates which contribute to our understanding of household joblessness and help to inform the research questions to be addressed in this study.

### 1.5.1 Contested Views: Market Oriented View Versus Societal Oriented View

The theory of household joblessness is a contested space between, in broad terms, those who hold a market oriented view of unemployment, joblessness and poverty, and those who hold a societal oriented view.

In the market oriented view of neoclassical microeconomics, individuals are seen to make rational choices. They seek to maximise utility by making choices according to a consistent set of preferences. In relation to making labour market decisions these preferences concern choices between certain quantities of work, generating an income from earnings, and leisure time for consumption and relaxation (Jordan *et al.*, 1992: 23). Some market oriented theorists portray unemployed people as opportunistic rational egoists who favour leisure and will try to 'play the system'. This view was proposed by Lawrence Mead, an American political scientist who has studied poverty and welfare in the United States. He advocated 'workfare' schemes on the basis that welfare recipients should have to do work of some type to receive a welfare payment. He supports the requirement to have conditionality attached to the receipt of benefits, on the basis that if such conditions were not imposed some people in receipt of welfare benefits would have no incentive or motivation to get a

job (Mead, 1986). In a more controversial vein, Charles Murray, another American political scientist, proposes reducing welfare benefits for able-bodied people of working age, based on the argument that welfare benefits are too generous and therefore people are reluctant to take low paid jobs (Murray, 1984).<sup>13</sup> Both Murray and Mead argue for making people take ‘jobs first’ and that education and training have little impact and can, in fact, be counter-productive in getting people off benefits and into work, at least in the short-term, as education raises expectations about the type of job the person might be willing to accept.

More recently, Andrew Dunn, a UK social policy analyst, has written about unemployment and the work ethic, challenging in particular the structural explanations for unemployment (discussed in the following paragraphs) (Dunn, 2014). While he accepts that the vast majority of unemployed people want employment and actively seek it, he argues that unemployed people are often very ‘choosy’ in the jobs they are willing to apply for, even if these jobs would increase their net incomes. These were jobs described as inadequately paid, uninteresting, inconvenient in terms of distance from home, unsuitable or unfamiliar. He also suggested that the more educated are the most ‘choosy’ as they have higher expectations of the type of job they are willing to do.

This selective presentation of issues put forward by proponents of a market oriented view of unemployment and poverty raises a number of concerns with regard to the employment-welfare relationship. For example, it may be considered a ‘rational choice’ not to take up poorly paid, uncertain, short-term work; how is working outside the home weighed against work requirements in the home, such as caring for children or other less able-bodied relatives; and what is the composition of the household in terms of tax and benefit conditions? Some of these issues are addressed by proponents of a more societal oriented view of unemployment, joblessness and poverty.

In the societal oriented view there are seen to be structural factors which limit people’s choices. In this body of literature it is contended that most unemployed people want and actively seek work but are often denied the opportunity of having a job because of various societal barriers, e.g. lack of skills, lack of suitable jobs, child care. Being unemployed is seen to be associated with having to live on a low income and thus at risk of poverty, of boredom, stigma and shame which can impact on physical and psychological health (Jordan *et al.*, 1992; Daly & Kelly, 2015). For example, the UK sociologist Peter Townsend produced the widely used relative definition of poverty as having inadequate material resources and being excluded from the norms in society (Townsend, 1979). In a similar vein, Bradshaw and Holmes’ work in the north-east of England using a budget standards approach,<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Although research by Hills (2015) shows that in the UK middle class households benefit as much, if not more, than working class families from the welfare state, e.g. through supports for education, health and mortgages.

<sup>14</sup> A budget standards approach establishes the budget necessary for different types of households to maintain a minimum standard of living. It does this by determining what it costs on a weekly basis to meet minimum

concluded that the level of benefits was not enough for families dependent on them to share in conventional living standards (Bradshaw & Holmes, 1989). This body of research makes the case for adequate levels of benefit to prevent poverty, but also that for most people having a job provides a better standard of living. Savage *et al.* (2015) found that the latter was the case in Ireland also. Gallie and Paugnam's study of welfare regimes and the experience of unemployment in Europe found that overall a more generous welfare system did not erode commitment to employment or have any impact on job search flexibility (Gallie & Paugam, 1992).

Much of this literature paints poor people as victims of society because of their inability to get work or earn adequate wages and so they are excluded from mainstream society, materially and socially. The operation of the tax and welfare system is often seen to compound this notion of 'victimhood' by trapping them in a cycle of poverty. Other qualitative researchers, however, such as Jordan *et al.*, and Daly and Kelly, whose research is based on the accounts of poor people themselves, have found people who are living on low incomes to be active, resilient and fully involved in the mainstream of their own community.

### 1.5.2 Activation

Following the economic crisis, Ireland introduced a more active social welfare system, see Chapter 3, where recipients of unemployment payments were expected to actively seek work. This approach was based on the 'workfare' type programmes operating in the USA, and subsequently in many European countries, including the UK. Described by Lodemel and Trickey (2001) as 'an offer you can't refuse' (and subsequently by Wiseman, (2001) as 'an appointment you can't refuse'), activation programmes evolved from the 1990s to the present day. Some policies and programmes focused on education and training to improve the capabilities of participants in seeking work, while others emphasised early transitions into work, or a 'work first' approach. The choice of strategy reflects different understandings of the causes of worklessness, and in most countries activation models reflect a blend of both strategies (Lodemel & Moreira, 2014).

In his study of the effectiveness of European active labour market policy, Kluge (2006) found that it is the programme type that matters for programme effectiveness, rather than what he terms contextual factors such as labour market institutions or the business cycle. His research identifies wage subsidies, services and sanctions as being effective in increasing the probability of participants getting employment, while direct employment programmes in the public sector were less successful.

Advocates of activation programmes claim that people should contribute something in order to receive benefits and that work experience helps people to get work and

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socially acceptable standards on food, goods, services and other activities based on actual market prices. Focus groups are generally used to determine which items should be included in the basket of goods and services.

references. Critics, however, believe that activation programmes exploit people, forcing them into low skilled, poorly paid jobs. They also argue that activation programmes can support poor employers, giving them an unfair competitive advantage. Along with activation, associated reforms are the strengthening of the role of the market in the governance of activation, including through payment by results, and individualising service delivery, for example, by the use of personal action plans (Lodemel & Moreira, 2014).

The extent to which activation policies and programmes have been successful in getting people into work, alleviating poverty and reducing the social welfare bill has been analysed by Cantillon and Vandebrouke (2014). They conclude that the Nordic countries have been able to combine low poverty, high employment and good economic performance, showing that effective social protection and work-oriented policies can be complementary, but mostly there are trade-offs. The link between household employment rates and the poverty record of welfare states tends to be an indirect one, influenced by the quality of jobs and by the level and efficiency of social spending.

### 1.5.3 Gender Dimension

A particular aspect of unemployment and household joblessness is a gender dimension, which is often not addressed, especially at household or family level. Much of the feminist literature emphasises women's dependence and power disadvantage, and that analysis needs to take account of care responsibilities and the dynamics of interpersonal obligations in the family (Jordan *et al.*, 1992: 33; Lister, 1992; Glendinning & Millar, 1992). Historically, certain occupations and roles have been designated as female, resulting in a form of labour market segmentation and consequences in terms of pay and career progression, e.g. in terms of women's over-representation in secondary labour markets, in part-time work, and in home working. The gender pay gap continues to exist in Ireland, with figures from the EU Commission showing that the gender pay gap in Ireland is 14 per cent, i.e. that gross hourly pay for women in Ireland is 14 per cent less than that for men. In addition, the gender pay gap is greater for women with children (European Union, 2014).

For low income households with low education and skills, however, there may be more jobs available for women than men. Such scenarios may require some negotiation within households and families in relation to job opportunities, caring responsibilities, the impact of the tax and welfare system and allocation of housework. For example, Jordan *et al.*, (1992) found that women doing temporary casual or informal work often withdrew from it when their husbands became unemployed. This was adjudged to be because of the persistence of a 'breadwinner-family carer' model rather than as a result of labour market conditions.

### 1.5.4 Kinship Obligations

In her work in the late 1980s Janet Finch (1989) studied kinship obligations which showed a system of obligations and mutual support located in a network with a

shared understanding of men's and women's roles, reflecting traditional gender identities and divisions. Women's access to employment depended heavily on social networks for information and support. In their study of families living on a low income in Northern Ireland, Daly and Kelly (2015) also recognised the importance of social networks and local engagement. A notable finding was the 'highly local character of people's lives' (*ibid.*: 147) in that their respondents did not leave their areas much and the services and resources that they most used tended to be locally based. Like in Jordan *et al.*'s (1992) study of low income families living in Exeter, Daly and Kelly found evidence of a 'small society' where people get support from family and friends in the local community.

One of Daly and Kelly's (*ibid.*) main findings was the importance given to the role of the family in low income households, which was the central thrust of their study from the outset. It is notable that they chose to use the 'family', rather than the 'household' as the unit of study. The household unit is commonly used in studies of low income, but Daly and Kelly argue that 'people live in families rather than households' (*ibid.*: 2). Though this may seem obvious, it has implications for how people in low income situations act and the support mechanisms available. Households are seen as a functional arrangement while families are arrangements of personal life, 'governed by relationships, bonds and preferences rather than utility' (*ibid.*: 2). Such relationships, bonds and preferences influence decision-making within the family in relation to engagement in the labour market, caring arrangements, and other household work and family commitments. For example, Jordan *et al.*, (1992) reported on 'household income strategies' where low income households sought to maximise their income, rather than their employment necessarily, through various combinations of regular paid work, occasional work, undeclared cash work and benefits. Interestingly, Jordan *et al.*, (*ibid.*) found that female lone parents' willingness to take some form of paid or unpaid work outside the home was greater than among women with partners. There are various reasons given for this including the need 'to get out of the house' and less complicated rules governing tax and welfare implications than when a partner is also involved. However, lone parents are constrained in their employment by the need to work around childcare arrangements and the operation of income disregards.

A theme which emerges in qualitative research with low income families is that of reciprocity, and the complex relationship between paid and unpaid work. One of the earliest proponents of this concept was the American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins who referred to 'generalised reciprocity' in his system of 'stone-age economics' which he described as 'sharing without reckoning' (Sahlins, 1974). So, as well as seeking, and engagement in, paid work, low income families may support each other through unpaid work such as home maintenance or child-caring, or through income support by way of loans or buying presents or necessities if people need them. In their study, Daly and Kelly (2015: 128) note, however, that 'such support was not costless'. They highlight the psychological cost of being beholden to someone, especially if it is difficult to reciprocate that support either financially or in kind. Rather than using the term 'reciprocity' they refer to the 'interdependence' of low income families and friends on each other for regular support. As referred to earlier, some low income families also undertake voluntary

work outside the home, in the absence of paid work. This can provide an opportunity to ‘get out of the house’, as well as make connections in the local community and also maintain or develop skills which may be relevant for future paid work (Jordan *et al.*, 1992; Daly & Kelly, 2015). For example, about one fifth of those interviewed in Daly and Kelly’s study of 51 low income families were active as volunteers or involved in their local community centres or women’s groups. This involvement was valued both for skills learned and for personal development.

### 1.5.5 The Informal Economy

Another dimension often discussed in relation to low income households is their involvement in an informal economy. This is where work is undertaken for cash, without declaring it to the tax authorities, or where paid work is undertaken while people are in receipt of benefits which debar them from such work. There is a wide market and societal literature on the moral rights and wrongs of such activity. While illegal and fraudulent, a perspective provided by Jordan *et al.*’s low income households in Exeter is that cash work is construed as legitimate, given the unreliability and short-term nature of much employment, and the delays in processing benefit applications. But undeclared cash work was only seen as acceptable up to a point within the local community, and when people started to earn on a regular basis or earn larger amounts they were expected to declare these earnings to the relevant authorities (Jordan *et al.*, 1992).

A related point was explored by British sociologist Ray Pahl (1984) in his seminal study on the divisions of labour on the Isle of Sheppey where he focused on ‘informal work’. Contrary to his expectations he found that there was little informal work among low income people, but much more among people who were relatively well off, because they had the resources and tools to undertake such work, which poor people did not have.

### 1.5.6 Public Service Provision

Also of interest is the impact of services and institutions on these households, especially in supporting them into employment. Few studies seem to have examined this particular dimension of supporting low income families in any great detail. Dunn (2014) points to two such studies, his own, and that of British sociologist Tracy Shildrick and her colleagues (2012). Dunn undertook 40 telephone interviews with ‘activation workers’, who worked in organisations contracted by the British Department of Work and Pensions to help long-term benefit claimants into employment. In line with his thesis that some unemployed people were too ‘choosy’ in the type of jobs they would accept, he reported that the activation workers were ‘united in the belief that a group existed at the bottom of society which possessed distinctly negative attitudes towards employment’ (Dunn, 2014: 188).

Shildrick *et al.*, (2012) for their part interviewed ten employers and thirteen agency workers, as well as sixty residents engaged in ‘low pay or no pay’ cycles. Shildrick



and her colleagues drew different conclusions, challenging the assumption that work is necessarily the best route out of poverty. They talk about the ‘precariat’ as people who exist without predictability or security in their lives, but rather find themselves in a cycle of recurrent poverty, and of long-term churning between low skilled poor work and unemployment.

Hills (2015), in his book on transitions in and out of the welfare state in the UK, challenges the myth of a ‘them and us’, asserting that the welfare state is a support for the vast majority of people over a life time. He does say, however, that the rise of a precariat makes the organisation of the welfare system more complicated. He also provides evidence that very few people have never worked, but it is more about a turnover of jobs, and that the long-term unemployed are generally a relatively small proportion of the workforce. Using longitudinal studies of households, he challenges the myth of ‘triple generations’ of people never working, although there are cases where at any one point in time two generations of a family may be unemployed.

Rice (2015), in her book on how unemployed clients are activated by case workers in the different welfare settings of Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK, highlights the influence of the type of welfare system and its culture in shaping how case workers engage with clients in ‘activating’ them back to work. In the Netherlands, where case workers have agency to problem-solve for their clients at the local level, a holistic view is taken. The importance of the first meeting is emphasised, as is the case officer making a connection with the client, and the building of trust. In the Danish welfare system, which is more centrally driven, there is more emphasis on addressing the structural causes of unemployment. Therefore there is a greater focus on re-skilling or upskilling, and referral to other services, where necessary, e.g. in relation to health, housing or other needs. In the Danish system, managers had a greater role and organised training and other services which were required.

In its work on the *Developmental Welfare State* (2005a), NESCS argued for a ‘tailored universalism’ approach to the delivery of social services (such as employment services, education, health, childcare, eldercare, housing, transport), where mainstream providers would ‘adjust their services to accommodate a more diverse public, including people who are socially disadvantaged’ (NESCS, 2005a: xix). In a similar vein, the Carnegie UK Trust (Wallace, 2013) through their work on ‘an enabling state’ suggests turning the traditional welfare state models of service delivery upside down, from a ‘top down’ model of service delivery to a ‘bottom up’ approach. Such a change would involve a greater role for empowered citizens and communities to use their own capacity to improve their community wellbeing and realise their own aspirations. Co-production models are suggested involving citizens, community organisations and the state institutions, with a more holistic approach to public service delivery and a great sharing of responsibility (Wallace, 2013). In their work with ‘Troubled Families’ in Britain, the Department for Communities and Local Government has also observed that ‘the traditional approach of services reaching individual family members, at crisis point or after, and trying to fix single issues ... in these families is most often destined to fail’ (Casey, 2012: 64). Casey contends that what is required is to look at the full family and the

full life cycle, as behaviours and problems experienced in childhood often only become apparent in later life.

A key challenge of much of this work on the delivery of public services is the need for service providers to take a holistic view and to work together to support the needs of low income families. This can be a challenge given the way public service agencies are currently structured (Colgan *et al.*, 2014). NESC's work on quality and standards in human services (NESC, 2011b, 2012) suggested that a fruitful approach to quality service provision and continuous improvement is to set a small number of guiding principles 'at the centre' and devolve their application to the local context. The overriding priority should be to achieve and improve outcomes for service users. Ideally, the focus of quality service provision should take place at a number of levels: the level at which the service is delivered; at regional or sectoral level; and at national level. The OECD (2016c) examined the role of institutions in Ireland, such as social protection and employment services, vocational education and training services, local government, community and children's services, for their impact on supporting people and families living in disadvantaged communities. The findings from the study suggest: the need to improve brokerage and connections at the systematic and individual level; the need to build local capacities; and the need to consider the impact of national policies at the local level, including the unintended consequences.

## 1.6 The Case for an In-Depth Qualitative Study

The presentation of key issues from quantitative analyses and a brief overview of some of the theoretical debates and international literature on unemployment, poverty, activation, gender, families and public service provision raises pertinent issues to be explored in relation to low work intensity households in Ireland, to understand better the dynamic of their lives and decision making processes and how they interact with service providers and *vice versa*.

In order to explore these issues in more depth, NESC has undertaken a qualitative study in a disadvantaged suburb of Dublin to:

- Understand better the circumstances of households where no-one is working regularly and their decision-making processes;
- The interaction between jobless households and front-line service providers;
- The decision-making structures and delivery mechanisms within service providers;
- The decision-making and implementation processes of national policy; and
- The extent of integrated service provision.

How the study was carried out, and the results from it, are presented in the remainder of this report.

# Chapter 2

## The Study—Area Chosen, and Study Methodology

## 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the reasons for choosing the study area will be summarised, and a brief socio-demographic profile of the area will be given. Local employment opportunities will be outlined, as well as the services which are available for the unemployed and disadvantaged communities. Following that, the methodology used to carry out the study will be described.

## 2.2 Choice of Study Area

Given the resources available, it was decided to undertake a qualitative study in one specific urban area, in which there are:

- A concentration of jobless households which contain children;
- A range of public services and community interventions to tackle household joblessness and disadvantage;
- Employment opportunities available; and
- The Local Community Development Committee sees household joblessness as an issue to be addressed.

On the basis of these criteria, the study was situated in a disadvantaged area of Dublin which covers three electoral districts. This area is not named, to protect the confidentiality of those who were interviewed as part of the research.

## 2.3 Profile of Study Area

In the following sections, a picture is outlined of the socio-economic characteristics of the population in the area in 2016 (the year in which the households and local service providers were interviewed). First, the general level of advantage and disadvantage in the three electoral districts (EDs) which make up the study area is described. This is followed by a focus on the characteristics which are often found in jobless households, as outlined in the previous chapter. They include economic

issues such as education level, occupation, and employment; and household issues such as family composition, the presence of children, whether or not there is a person with a disability, and household tenure. The ethnicity of households in the area is presented, as well as the extent to which households have their own transport, and access to IT, as these support job search and retention.

## 2.4 Level of Disadvantage in the Study Area

One of the characteristics of jobless households is the level of poverty and deprivation in them, and households in the study area are more likely to be disadvantaged. The Pobal HP Relative Deprivation index, which measures deprivation in Ireland through a range of indicators covering population growth, social class and labour market situation, shows that in 2016 the three EDs all scored as below average, or disadvantaged. The national Pobal HP deprivation index scores range from +40 (extremely affluent) to -40 (extremely disadvantaged) with most areas clustering around the national score, which was 0.6 in 2016.<sup>15</sup> The score for the first ED (ED A) in the study was -6.9, for the second (ED B) it was -12.6, and for the third (ED C) it was -19.5. There was also variation within EDs, with some Small Areas<sup>16</sup> showing extreme levels of disadvantage, while others were affluent, see Figure 2.1.

Although the study area is disadvantaged, nevertheless there are many positive aspects to the area, including public and community services, community spirit, and job opportunities nearby. These will be outlined in this and later chapters.

## 2.5 Economic Characteristics of Households in the Study Area

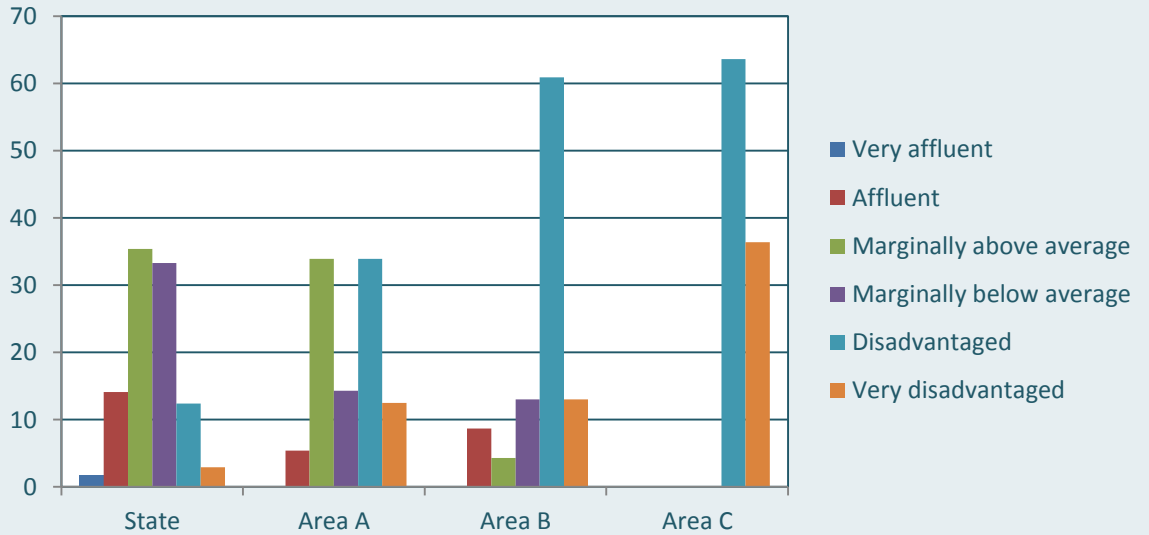
As presented in Chapter 1, those who live in jobless households are more likely than others to have never worked, to be in the unskilled social class, and to have no educational qualifications. What is the situation of those living in the study area on these factors?

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<sup>15</sup> The scores are as follows—over 30: extremely affluent, 20 to 30: very affluent, 10 to 20: affluent, 0 to 10: marginally above average, 0 to -10: marginally below average, -10 to -20: disadvantaged, -20 to -30: very disadvantaged, below -30: extremely disadvantaged, see (Haase & Pratschke, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Small Areas are areas of population with between 50 and 200 dwellings. They were developed by NIRSA and the OSI for the CSO, see <http://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2011boundaryfiles/> for further detail (accessed 14 September 2017).

**Figure 2.1: Distribution of Relative HP Index across small areas nationally and in the study area, 2016**

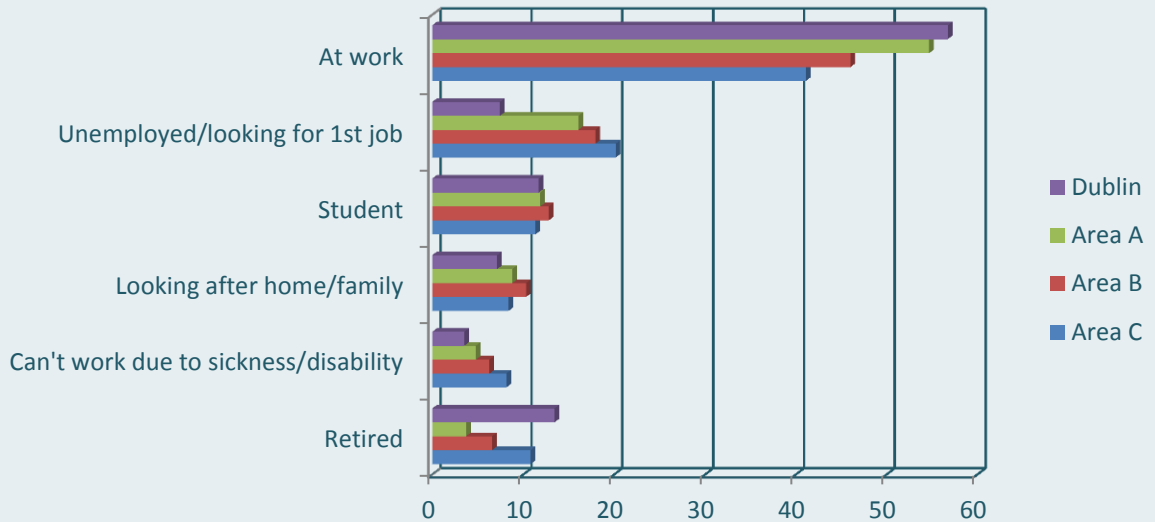


**Source:** National data calculated from Haase & Pratschke, (2017); ED data calculated from Pobal small area data, abstracted from <https://maps.pobal.ie/WebApps/GeoprofilingReports/index.html>

### 2.5.1 Labour Force Participation and Unemployment

Data on whether or not those in the study area have ever worked is not available, but it is clear that levels of unemployment are higher in the area than is typical of Dublin. A higher proportion of the population in the three EDs are looking for their first job, on home duties, and unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability, see Figure 2.2.

In EDs A and B, Census 2016 showed that the unemployment rates were approximately twice the Dublin and national averages, while in ED C, the most disadvantaged, they were almost three times the Dublin average.

**Figure 2.2: Labour force participation in the study areas and Dublin overall, 2016**

Source: Calculated from Census 2016 electoral district statistics.

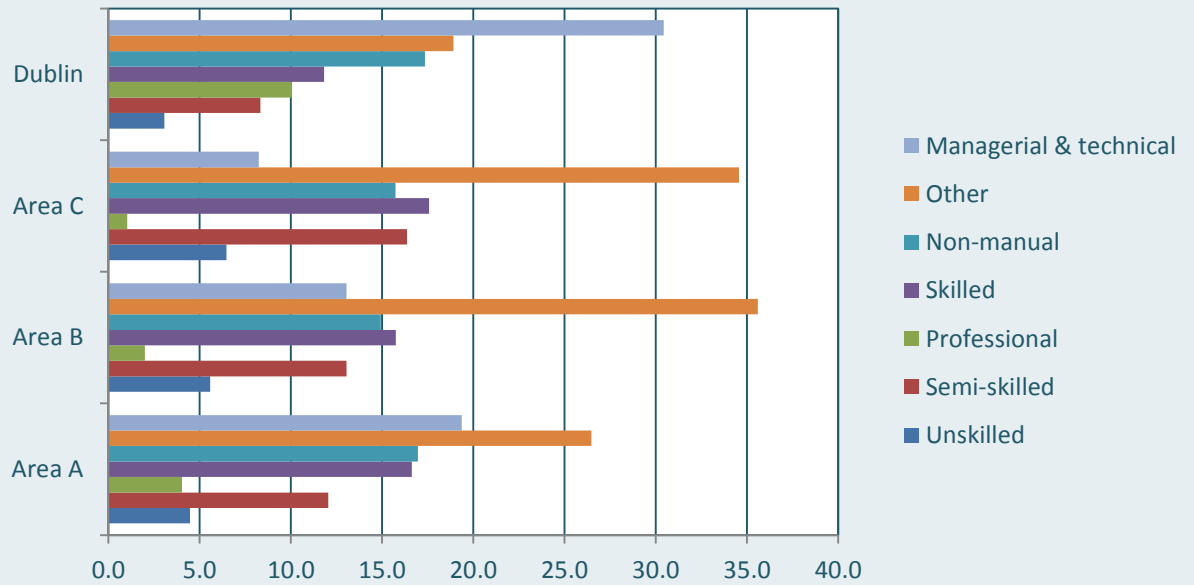
### 2.5.2 Social Class and Occupation

The social class mix<sup>17</sup> in the three EDs is not typical of Dublin. Overall in Dublin, 30 per cent of households are in the managerial and technical class, while 8 per cent are semi-skilled, and 3 per cent unskilled. In ED C, only 8 per cent of households are in the managerial and technical class, while 16 per cent are semi-skilled, and 7 per cent unskilled. Only in ED A does the proportion of non-manual workers exceed the proportion of manual workers. Being unskilled is a characteristic of jobless households. The high proportion of those in the 'Other' social class is also evident in the EDs,<sup>18</sup> see Figure 2.3 and Table 2.1.

<sup>17</sup> The definition of social class used here is that used by the CSO. It is outlined in Appendix 6 of this document—[http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/vol10\\_appendix.pdf](http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/vol10_appendix.pdf), accessed 14 September 2017.

<sup>18</sup> The CSO states that 'A residual category "All others gainfully occupied and unknown" is used where no precise allocation is possible', see CSO (2017c).

**Figure 2.3: Social class of residents in the study area and Dublin, 2016**



Source: Calculated from CSO 2016 electoral district statistics.

**Table 2.1: Proportion of households in manual and non-manual social classes (excluding ‘other’), 2016**

Area	Proportion of households in a non-manual social class	Proportion of households in a manual social class
Dublin	58	23
Area A	40	33
Area B	30	34
Area C	25	40

Source: Calculated from Census 2016 electoral district statistics.

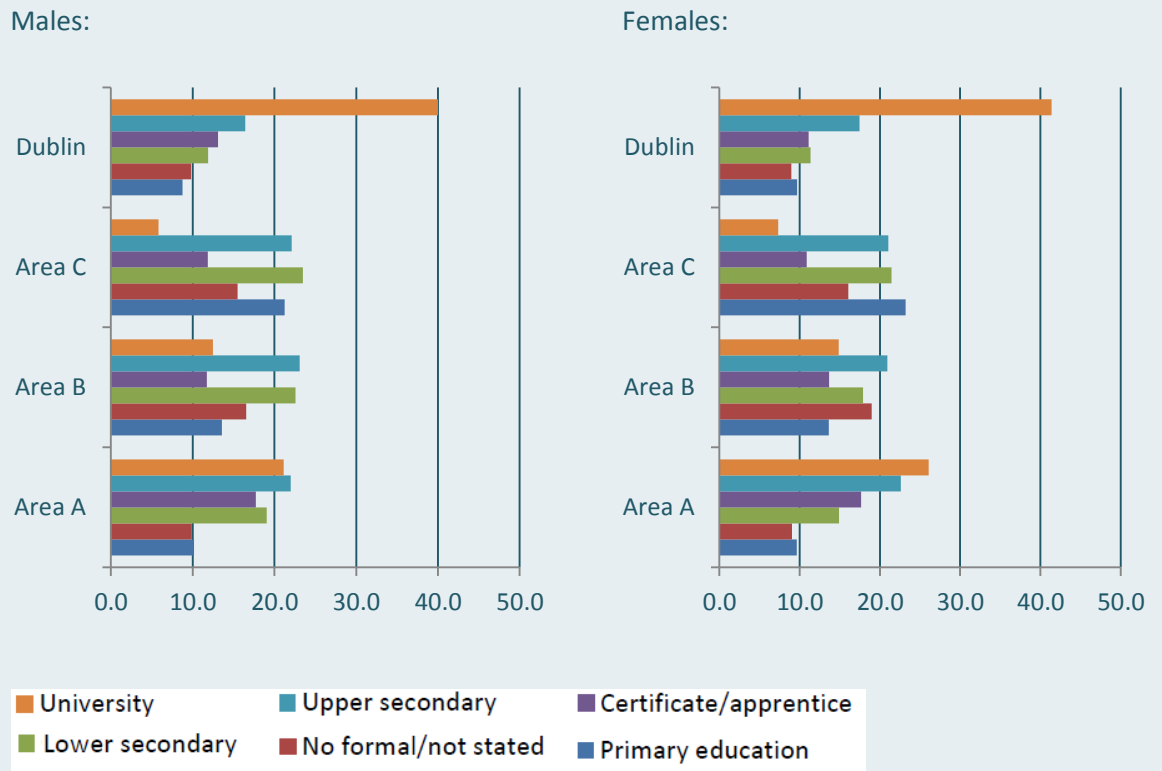


### 2.5.3 Educational Levels

Those with lower levels of education are far more likely to be unemployed, and the education level of those living in the three EDs is much lower than both the Dublin average and national average, particularly in ED C. ED A is the only ED of the three where the proportion with third level education exceeds the proportion with only primary education, and this can be linked to the higher employment levels there compared to EDs B and C.

Only for women in ED A is the most common completed level of education university level, as it is for women and men in Dublin overall. For the other EDs, and for men, the comparison with Dublin overall is poor, see Figure 2.4.

**Figure 2.4: Highest completed level of education of residents in the study area and Dublin, 2016**



Source: Calculated using Census 2016 electoral district data.

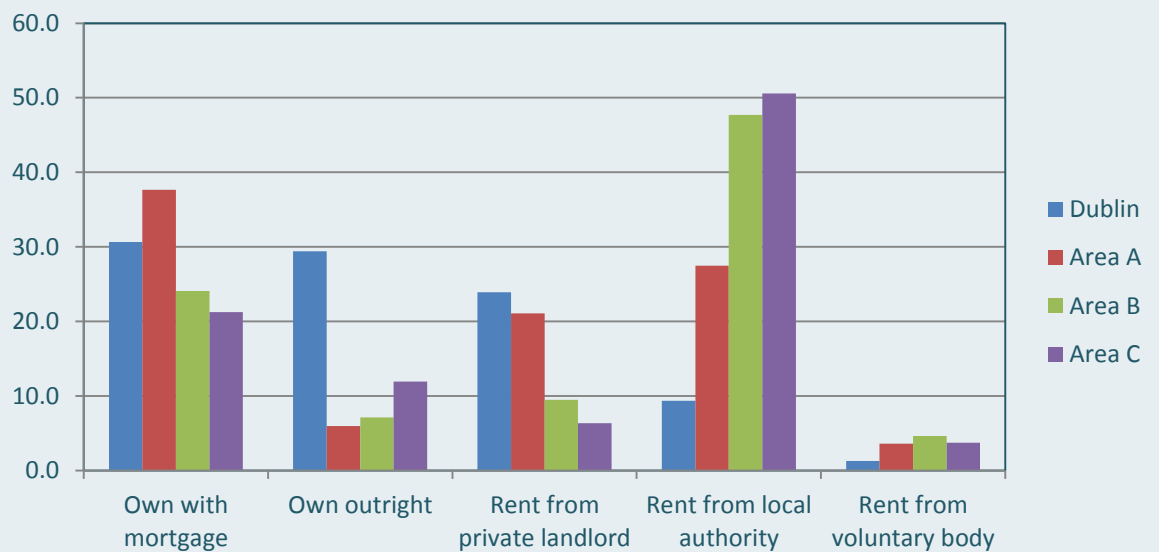
## 2.6 Characteristics of Households in the Study Area

As described in Chapter 1, those who live in jobless households are more likely than others to be renting their accommodation; to be single, parenting alone or living in a household with several adults and children; and to either have a disability or to live with someone with a disability. What is the situation of those living in the study area on these factors?

### 2.6.1 Tenure

Occupancy types vary between the three EDs, but it is clear that there is a high reliance on rented social housing. In EDs B and C this is by far the predominant tenure, with over 50 per cent in each ED renting from the local authority or a voluntary body, see Figure 2.5.

**Figure 2.5: Household occupancy in the study areas, compared with Dublin overall, 2016**



**Source:** Calculated from Census 2016 electoral district statistics.

These figures underestimate the full extent of socially supported rental housing, with data for the end of September 2013 showing that 130 of 1,000 private rented properties in ED A were paid for through rent supplement, 61 in ED B, and 52 in ED C (compared to 70 per 1,000 in Dublin overall).<sup>19</sup> In these EDs, between 42 and 47 per cent of those on rent supplement had been in receipt of it for over 18 months.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, many households in the study area are reliant on rental accommodation, which is characteristic of jobless households.

## 2.6.2 Household Composition

The composition of households in the three EDs is outlined in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2: Household types as a percentage of all households, Dublin and the study area, 2016**

	1 person household	Couple, no children	Couple & children	Lone parent	Family & others	Non-related households
Dublin	22.6	18.6	31.1	10.5	7.3	9.9
Area A	14.0	9.5	39.7	22.2	9.0	5.7
Area B	10.9	9.0	37.7	26.4	11.4	4.5
Area C	12.1	12.9	30.6	25.2	15.1	4.1

**Source:** Calculated from Census 2016 electoral district statistics.

The largest groups of jobless households in Ireland contain children (42 per cent), and are lone parent households (26 per cent). Compared to Dublin overall, the study area contains proportionally more households with children, and many more lone parent households. In fact, the proportion of lone parent households is very high in the three EDs. The Pobal HP Deprivation Index shows that the lone parent rate<sup>21</sup> ranges from 36 in ED A, to 40 in ED B and 50 in ED C, compared to a Dublin median of 20 (Haase & Pratschke, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> See <http://airo.maynoothuniversity.ie/external-content/dcc-housing-monitoring-tool>, accessed 28 September 2015. This webpage has not been updated since.

<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.dublindashboard.ie/pages/MappedDublinRegionHousing>, accessed 20 October 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Percentage of single parent households with at least one dependent child (aged under 15) as a proportion of all households with at least one dependent child (aged under 15)—see Haase & Pratschke, (2012: 10).

Considering the number of families where all children are aged under 15, in the three EDs families are more likely than in Dublin overall to have 3 or more children aged under 15, see Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3: Percentage of families with children, where all are aged under 15, with 1, 2 or 3+ children, Dublin and the study area, in 2016**

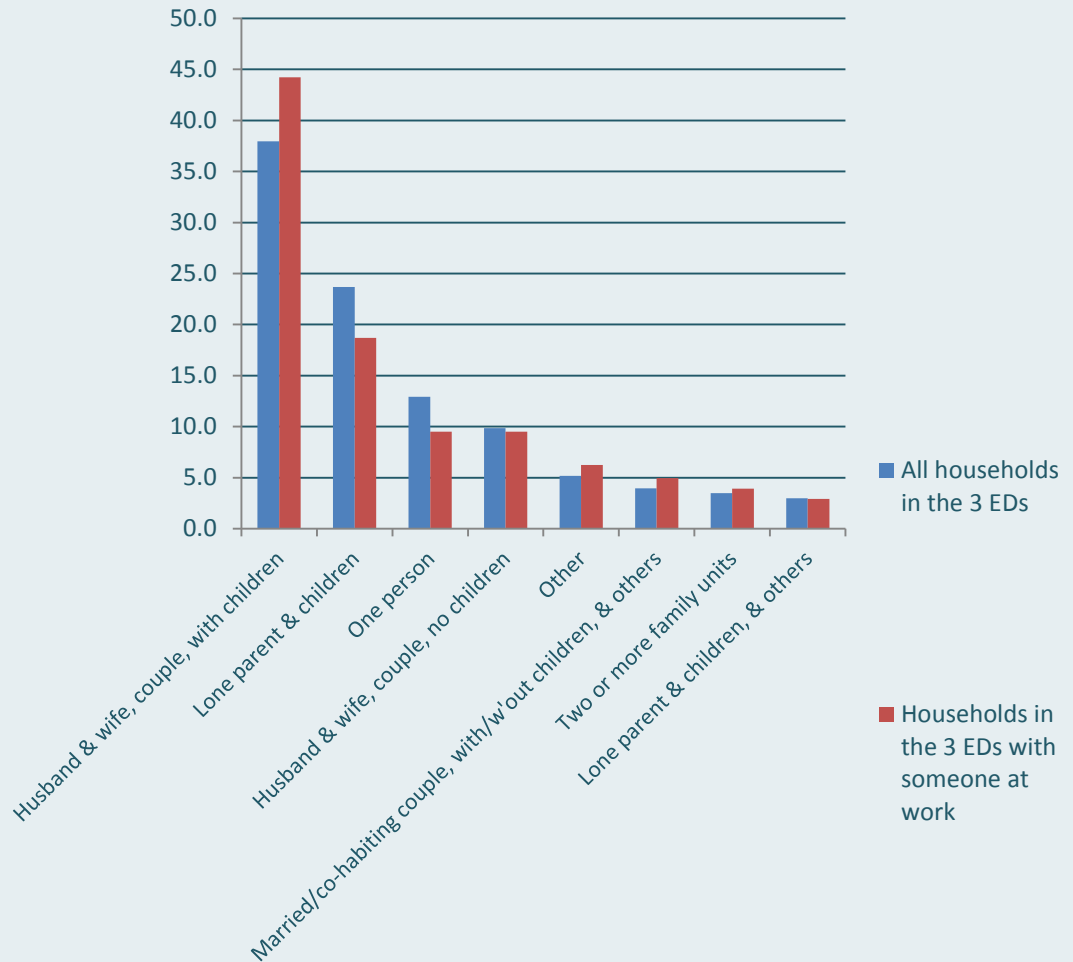
	Families with 1 child	Families with 2 children	Families with 3 or more children
Dublin	44	40	20
ED A	37	40	23
ED B	37	35	28
ED C	43	32	25

**Source:** Calculated from Census 2016 electoral district statistics.

However, the study area has a lower proportion of households with several adults and no children, and single adult households, which are the two smaller groups of jobless households (representing 21 per cent and 10 per cent of jobless households, respectively). Nevertheless, the single adult households in the area do have a lower likelihood of being in employment, see Figure 2.6, which compares the composition of all households in the three EDs with the composition of households in the three EDs where at least one member is at work.

This figure shows that households made up of couples with children are most likely to be in employment, while lone parent households are the least likely to have someone at work, followed by single person households.

**Figure 2.6: Composition of all households, and of those with at least one member at work, study area, 2016**



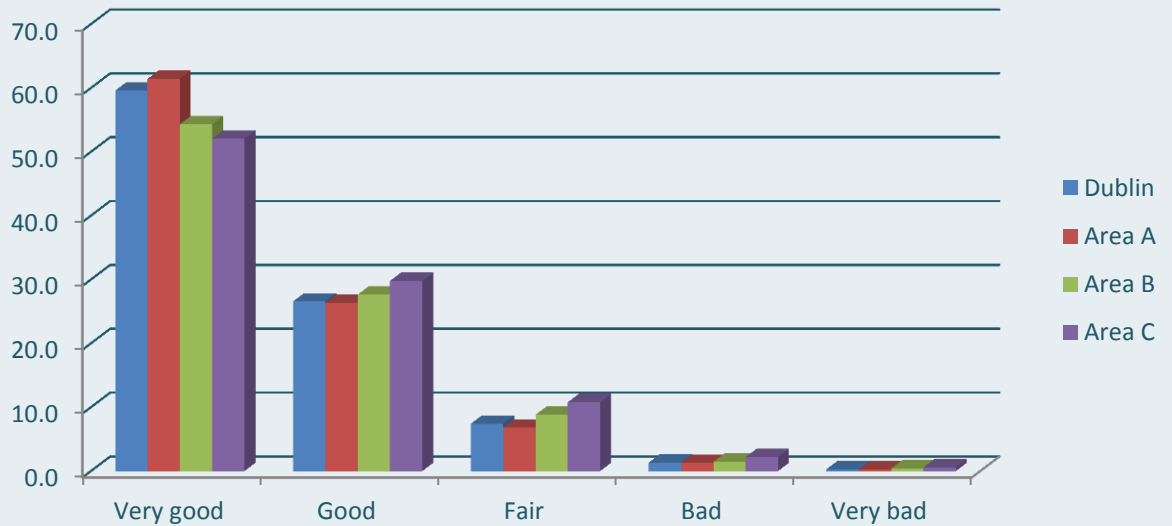
Source: Calculated from a special run of Census 2016 provided by the CSO to NESCC.

### 2.6.3 Disability, Health Status and Caring

Jobless households are proportionally more likely to contain a person with a disability, and disability rates are higher than the Dublin average in EDs B and C. In Dublin overall the percentage of the population with a disability is 13 per cent; while in ED B it is 17 per cent, and in ED C it is 18 per cent. As outlined in Figure 2.2, the proportion of those in the three EDs who are not working due to a disability or illness is above the national and Dublin averages.

The self-reported health status of the population is, however, not that dissimilar to that of the national population and the population in Dublin. Residents of ED A are more likely than Dublin residents to report being in very good health, while those in EDs B and C are slightly less likely to, see Figure 2.7.

**Figure 2.7: General health of the population, self-reported, various locations, 2016**



**Source:** Calculated from Census 2016 electoral district statistics.

The proportion of the population in the three EDs who are informal carers is a bit lower than the Dublin average (34 per 1,000, compared to 37 per 1,000). This may be related to the low proportion of older people in the population in the three EDs compared to that in Dublin overall, as it is older people who are particularly likely to need care.<sup>22</sup>

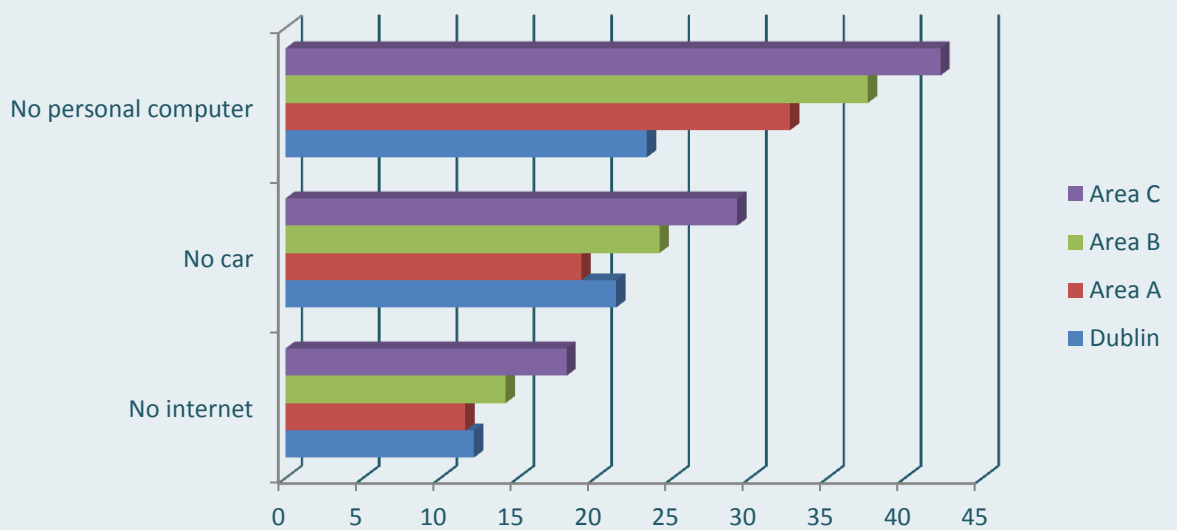
#### 2.6.4 Transport and Information Technology (IT) Access

Access to transport, and to IT, is helpful in accessing and maintaining a job. Households in ED A are more likely to have a car than in Dublin overall, but in EDs B and C, they are more likely to have no car than the average household in Dublin. Households in ED C, the most disadvantaged of the three EDs, are the least likely to have a car.

<sup>22</sup> Census 2016 shows that the proportion of the population aged over 65 in Dublin was 12 per cent, but it was 3 per cent in Area A, 5 per cent in Area B and 10 per cent in Area C (data abstracted from 2016 Census data for electoral districts).

Households in the three EDs are much less likely than those in Dublin to have a personal computer. These figures are the lowest in ED C, where households are almost twice as likely not to have a personal computer as an average household in Dublin.<sup>23</sup> However, a high proportion of households have an internet connection, with figures similar to Dublin overall in EDs A and B. But in ED C, households are a third more likely than a typical Dublin household to have no internet connection, see Figure 2.8.

**Figure 2.8: Percentage of households without a car, personal computer and internet connection, 2016, study areas and Dublin overall**



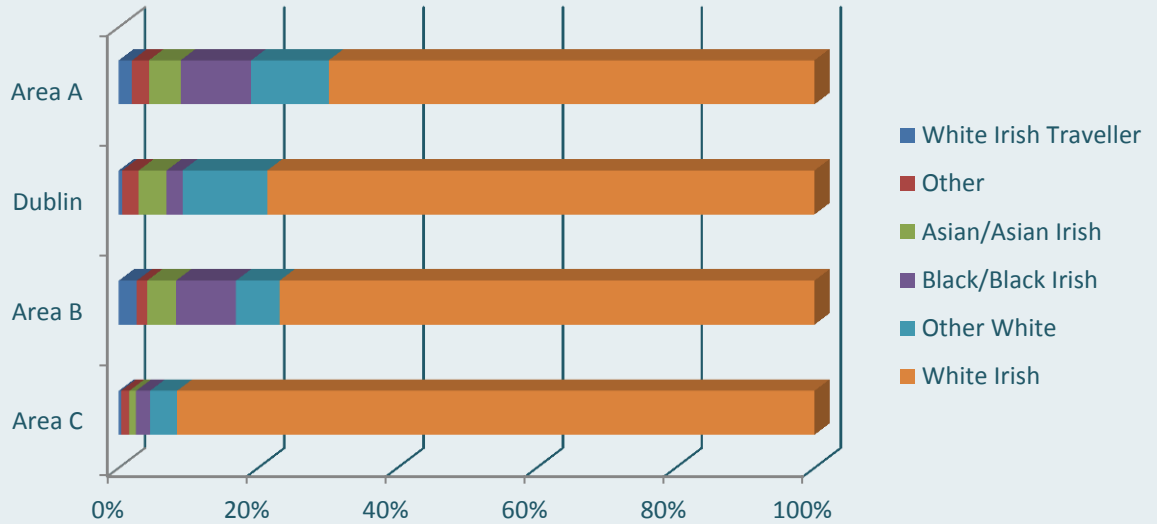
Source: Calculated from Census 2016 electoral district statistics.

### 2.6.5 Ethnic Background

An issue which arose in this study is the representation of ethnic minorities among those who are jobless. In terms of ethnic background, the three EDs demonstrate different patterns, with ED C having a lower proportion of ethnic minorities, and ED A and B a higher proportion, than Dublin overall. EDs A and B both have a much higher Black and Traveller population than the average in Dublin, see Figure 2.9.

<sup>23</sup> There is no data on whether or not the household had for example, a tablet.

**Figure 2.9: Ethnic background of population in the study area EDs, and in Dublin, 2016**



Source: Calculated using Census 2016 ED data.

However, there is a lot of variation by small area in the proportion of ethnic minorities in each ED, and in the characteristics of those areas. Closer examination of the small areas shows that Travellers and black/black Irish are more likely to live in disadvantaged or very disadvantaged areas, and those living in these areas are more likely to be unemployed and to have low education levels. In the small areas where Travellers are most concentrated,<sup>24</sup> the proportion of males who are unemployed or unable to work due to a disability is 31 per cent, compared to the study area average of 25 per cent. In this small area, educational levels are low, with 17 per cent on average having primary education only, while 11 per cent have 3rd level education.<sup>25</sup> In Dublin overall, approximately 10 per cent have primary education only, and over 40 per cent have a third level education. There is likely to be some link between the high number not at work in this small area and qualification levels there.

<sup>24</sup> In these small areas, Travellers constitute 20 per cent and 13 per cent of the population, while the average in the study area overall is 2 per cent.

<sup>25</sup> Defined as higher certificate, degree and post-graduate qualification.



In the two small areas where black/black Irish are particularly concentrated,<sup>26</sup> both men and women are again very likely to be out of the work force, with 41 per cent of men unemployed or unable to work due to a disability. For females, this figure is 28 per cent. In these small areas, 10 per cent have primary education only, while 14 per cent have third level education. Approximately 28 per cent of residents are native speakers of a foreign language.<sup>27</sup> Some 63 per cent consider they speak English very well, and 10 per cent rate their ability to speak it as poor or none. The high proportion of residents not at work in these small areas may be related to relatively low educational levels, and English language ability.

In the small areas where Travellers and black/black Irish are particularly concentrated, between 63 and 93 per cent of accommodation is rented from the local authority or from an AHB (Approved Housing Body). This indicates low levels of income—another characteristic of jobless households.

Meanwhile, the white non-Irish group<sup>28</sup> are most likely to live in more affluent small areas. There are 18 small areas where the population of white non-Irish residents is above 15 per cent of the total, and all but two of these are affluent or marginally above average. All of these areas are in ED A or B, and have been built since 2000. Looking at the six small areas in which white non-Irish residents are most over-represented,<sup>29</sup> the employment levels in these areas show an average of 84 per cent of men at work, and 72 per cent of women—well above the study area means of 54 and 47 per cent, respectively. Education levels in these small areas are also well above the Dublin average, with 55 per cent of residents having third level qualifications. Interestingly, the self-rated ability of non-native English speakers to speak English is lower in these small areas than in those where black/black Irish residents are over-represented. In the six small areas with a particularly high proportion of white non-Irish, 52 per cent of non-native speakers consider they speak English very well, and 13 per cent not well or at all. So even though self-rated spoken English is lower, the employment levels in these small areas are the highest. The residents' high standard of education and their ethnic similarity to the Irish population may be factors explaining the large proportion at work in these small areas. However, the residents do appear to be underemployed considering their educational qualifications. Compared to the average in Dublin, those working in these small areas are somewhat over-represented in elementary occupations, sales and customer services, skilled trades, and process, plant and machinery occupations.

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<sup>26</sup> In these two small areas, black/black Irish residents constitute 40 per cent of the population. The average in the study area overall is 8 per cent.

<sup>27</sup> They speak Polish, French or Lithuanian—it is not possible to see how many are native speakers of other languages.

<sup>28</sup> Of the non-Irish born, 17 per cent were born in the UK, 15 per cent in Poland, 6 per cent in Lithuania, 14 per cent in the rest of the EU, 48 per cent in the rest of the world.

<sup>29</sup> In these six small areas, the white non-Irish population makes up between 25 and 40 per cent of the population. The average in the three EDs is 8 per cent.

In these small areas, there is a very low proportion of accommodation rented from a local authority. Instead, 43 per cent of homes are owned, and 46 per cent rented from a private landlord.

## 2.7 Relevance of the Study Area for Research into Jobless Households

This description of the three EDs shows a high level of both joblessness and factors identified by previous studies as contributing to, or associated with, joblessness. More detailed analysis of small areas in the three EDs shows that those which have a high rate of unemployment and inactivity also have a very high ratio of lone parent families, and a greater proportion of families with a large number of children. Low educational attainment is also common among the population, and the occupations in which the majority are skilled are frequently low skill occupations. In the most disadvantaged areas of the three EDs, there is a higher proportion of people who are unable to work due to disability or illness. All of these factors are commonly associated with jobless households.

In terms of ethnicity, small areas in which Travellers and black/black Irish are particularly concentrated have lower than average levels of employment and education, while those in which white non-Irish are particularly concentrated have average or well above average levels of employment and education. Areas in which black/black Irish are concentrated have a high proportion of non-native English speakers. While the extent to which these issues may apply to the Travellers or black/black Irish in these small areas is not known, it is likely that the issues of low levels of education and English speaking ability do have an influence on their ability to access employment.

In the EDs, and the most disadvantaged small areas within them, there are both low levels of employment and a high proportion of households living in accommodation rented from the local authority, or from a private landlord but supported by rent supplement. This may reflect the proportion which are unemployed and inactive. It is interesting that in these areas, as much of the accommodation is local authority owned, occupants would pay differential rent, and be able to work while maintaining their social housing, unlike those who receive rent supplement (although the moves to HAP, the Housing Assistance Payment, will change this, see Chapter 3). However, given the high proportion of people who are poorly qualified, they may have fewer connections with the labour market, or those with access to jobs, or job networks.

### 2.7.1 What Jobs Are Available in the Study Area, and Where do the Inhabitants Work?

What jobs are available in the study area? A special run of Census 2016 data shows that there were 34,458 people at work in the 13 EDs which make up the wider neighbourhood,<sup>30</sup> so there clearly are job opportunities there. Most of the employment is concentrated in shopping centres and industrial estates, as well as in several public sector organisations including schools. There are several thousand jobs situated in EDs A and B, but very few in ED C.

Where do the residents of the study area work? Census 2016 data shows that 10,495 people who live in the three EDs are at work, with 27 per cent of them employed in the 13 EDs which make up the wider neighbourhood. What types of job are those resident in the three EDs working in? It is very apparent that while there are employer, manager and professional jobs available in the wider neighbourhood (of 13 EDs), those who live in the three EDs and work in the wider neighbourhood are not proportionally represented in this level of employment. Some 49 per cent of those at work in the wider neighbourhood are employers, managers and professionals, but only 24 per cent of those living in the three EDs and at work in the wider neighbourhood are in this level of employment. Those living in the three EDs are, instead, most likely to be working in non-manual, semi-skilled, unskilled and other employment locally (see Figure 2.10). Not only does this have impacts on household incomes, but it also means that the local community is less represented in employment which can shape the development of the community.

## 2.8 Study Methodology

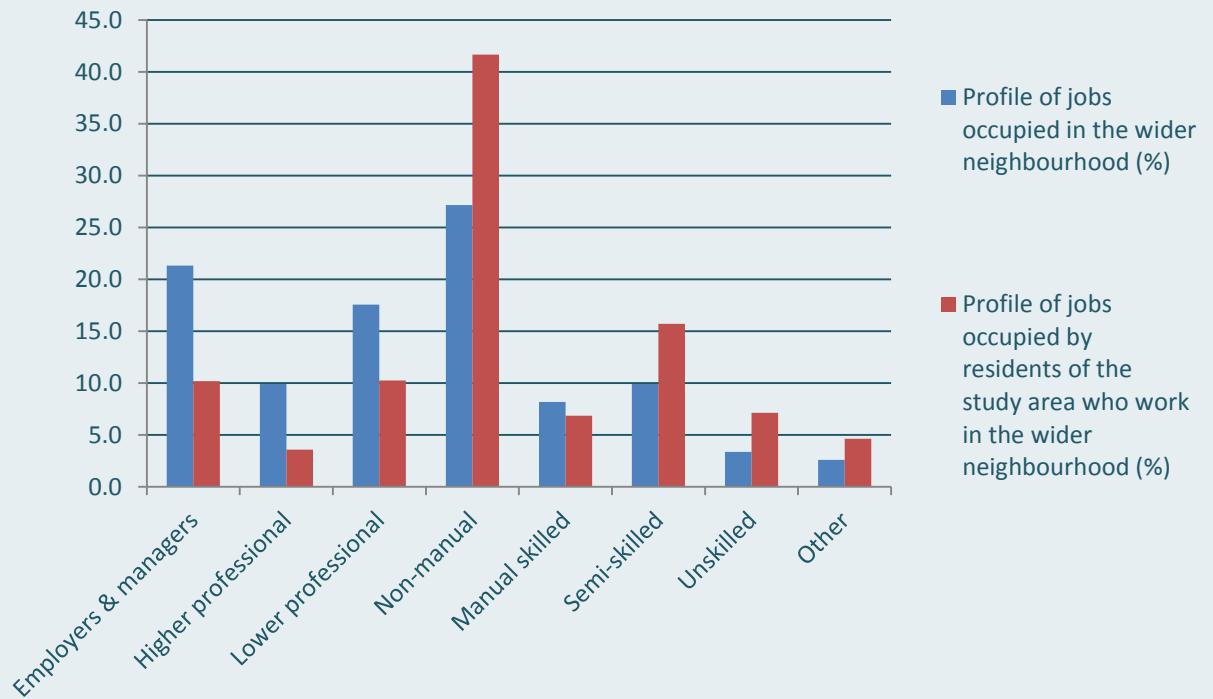
As outlined in the previous chapter, this study aims to:

- Understand better the circumstances of households where no-one is working regularly and their decision-making processes;
- The interaction between jobless households and front-line service providers;
- The decision-making structures and delivery mechanisms within service providers;
- The decision-making and implementation processes of national policy; and
- The extent of integrated service provision.

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<sup>30</sup> Altogether, the wider neighbourhood had a population of over 76,000 in 2016.

**Figure 2.10: Comparison of type of employment in the wider neighbourhood, and the employment which residents of the study are engaged in, in the wider neighbourhood, 2016**



**Source:** Calculated from a special run of Census 2016 provided by the CSO to NESG.

Semi-structured interviews were judged to be the most effective way to probe the various issues to be covered by the study, and so this research approach was adopted. It was also decided that the experiences and views of four different groups would be researched, to provide a 360 degree view of the issues underlying household joblessness, and the possible solutions to problems identified. These four groups are:

- Local households;
- Local service providers—both front-line and managers;
- Local employers;
- Regional and national decision-makers, and national level stakeholders.

In 2016, 33 households were interviewed, followed by 16 local service provider organisations and 11 local employers. In 2017, 11 service managers at regional or county level were interviewed as well as 12 senior officials in government departments and agencies, and nine other national stakeholders. The number and type of organisations where individuals were interviewed are listed in Figure 2.11. More detail on how the organisations were chosen, how interviewees were contacted, and the topics covered in the interviews are outlined in the following sections.

### 2.8.1 Households

To access household interviewees, the researchers began by visiting 48 different locations in the study area to let staff and clients there know about the study, and to leave information on it and on how potential interviewees could contact the researchers. These locations included the following:

10 community centres	10 training centres	8 churches
6 job search advice centres	3 medical centres	2 childcare centres
2 drug rehab centres	2 advice centres	5 other centres*

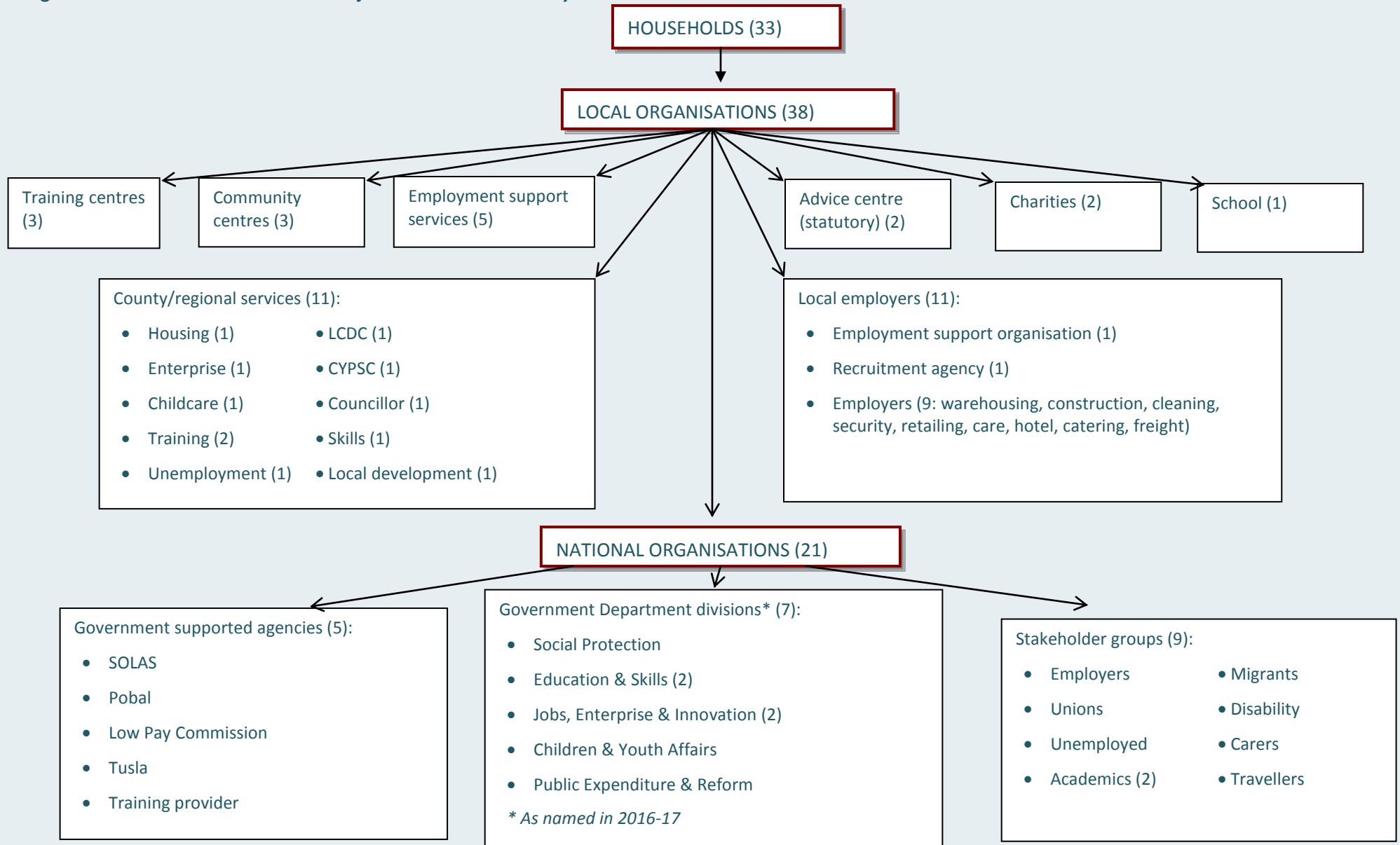
**Note:** \* These were a library, a credit union, a CE scheme, a charity, and a leisure centre

A copy of the flyer and poster distributed is included in Appendix 1. These outlined that the researchers were seeking to talk to local households where the adults were not working (including those on employment schemes and Jobseeker’s Transition),<sup>31</sup> or working less than 10 hours a week or less than three months a year—the ‘low work intensity’ definition of a jobless household. The researchers decided to use this definition for two reasons. First, it would increase the number of households who could potentially take part in the study. Secondly, many of those in jobless households find themselves churning between low skilled poor work and unemployment, and so including low work intensity households would throw more light on the experience and potential for moving from joblessness into employment. Prospective interviewees were assured the information gathered would be confidential, and were also offered a €25 voucher for a large store, to incentivise them to take part, and to compensate them for their time. This decision was based on the practice used in similar studies conducted by Shildrick *et al.*, (2012), and Daly & Kelly (2015).

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<sup>31</sup> Jobseeker’s Transition is a jobseeker’s payment for lone parents whose youngest child is aged between 7 and 13. For further information see Section 5.3.3.

Figure 2.11: Those interviewed for the jobless households study



The researchers aimed to interview 30 households; and as they wished to capture the views of the key groups who are particularly likely to be in low work intensity households, they deliberately sought particular types of household. These include two parent families with children, lone parents, disabled people and carers, non-Irish nationals, Travellers, and single people. On a suggestion from one community centre, the researchers also sought to interview people from homeless households, as homelessness is likely to lead to extreme difficulties holding down and/or finding employment.

It took some time to access the required number of interviewees, and eventually many were identified through people working in local community and training centres. Some 22 interviewees were put in contact with the researchers via one of these centres, 5 contacted the researchers after seeing the flyer, 4 were put in contact through another organisation, and 3 got in touch after a friend or relative had been interviewed. A total of 33 households were interviewed between February and May 2016. It was decided to interview a representative adult from each household, as it would be too difficult to try and meet a number of adults at the same time in each household. In one household, two people were interviewed separately, however, bringing the total number of household interviewees to 34.

Some 15 of the 33 households comprised two adults with children under 18. There were also five lone parent families, with children of all ages. Two of the sample lived on their own, and one household was a couple with an adult child living away from home. There were also 10 multi-generational families. Four Traveller families were interviewed, and seven families with non-Irish nationals (five from Africa, and two from the UK). Three families were living in emergency homeless accommodation. Disability and illness were mentioned as issues by over half the households, with seven interviewees having a disability or illness which had affected their ability to work at some stage, with three currently affected. In nine households, one member of the family had a quite severe disability, with Carer's Allowance paid to a household member in four households, and a disability payment in three households (see Chapter 4 for further information on the households).

The interviews were held in a variety of places—most in a community or training centre, some in a local café, and three in the interviewee's home. Interviewees were offered a choice of interview location, based on what suited them. At the start of each interview they were given a signed statement from the researchers confirming that the material collected was confidential, and that they would be given feedback on what was found. They also signed a form stating that they were happy to have the interview recorded. All but one of the interviews were recorded (although on one day a recorder broke down, leaving 29 interviews fully recorded), and transcribed.

The interviews covered the following topics relevant to the aims of the study—information on the household, the interviewee's experience of employment (if any) and unemployment, their qualifications and experience, their job search, their engagement with services, their future plans and expectations, and their hopes for their children. More detailed information is included in Appendix 2.

All interviewees were given pseudonyms, and the interviews were then transcribed. Following that, the transcriptions were analysed line-by-line, with the findings grouped under various themes, which will be explored in further detail throughout this report.

To ensure that the analysis reflected the experiences of the household interviewees, and to feedback the findings to those who had taken part, in October 2016 the interviewers held four workshops in the local area, to outline the findings from the interviews. The findings were portrayed in a booklet of 34 infographics. The feedback sessions were held in local community or training centres, and all interviewees were informed of them in advance. Some were not able to attend, but were sent copies of the booklet. The interviewees felt that the analysis reflected well the issues which they were experiencing, and provided further examples of these in some cases.

### **2.8.2 Service Providers**

Once the household interviews had been analysed, the themes to discuss with service providers were clear, and the type of service provider organisations to interview became evident. They were chosen based on the fact that they were key services associated with job-seeking and disadvantage, and that a number of household interviewees had interacted with them. The service provider organisations provided a variety of services, which can be roughly grouped into advice, advocacy, training, employment supports, and miscellaneous social support services. Some organisations provide short-term or one-off services/advice, while others provide long-term more intensive support. Some provide both.

Managers in these organisations were emailed with an outline of the study, a request to be interviewed, and a commitment that the conversation in the interview would be treated as confidential and anonymous. Altogether, 16 local service provider organisations were interviewed between July and October 2016, with 28 interviewees in total. The interviewees comprised 1 director/area manager, 11 office managers, 4 deputy managers, and 12 staff in client-facing roles (e.g. information officer, case officer). The organisations were five employment support organisations, three community centres, three training centres, two advisory centres, two charities, and 1 school (home school community liaison officer).

The questions which were asked in the different organisations varied depending on the type of service offered. However, the key issues covered were related to the study aims, and to the themes identified in the household interviews. These included the services provided by the organisation, funding sources, the clients, interaction with jobless households, interaction with other organisations and employers, the supports the organisation could and could not provide, and solutions to the issue of low work intensity households. With specific services, issues related to activation, training, employment schemes, eligibility criteria, literacy, health, and debt were discussed. The job-seeking support organisations were also presented with four 'vignettes' describing four different jobseekers with different needs, to see what services would be provided to them.



The interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours on average, with almost all recorded and later transcribed, and analysed. The analysis again was line-by-line, checking the issues that arose in relation to themes identified in the household interviews, with some new themes also arising. As with the household interviewees, all service provider interviewees were given pseudonyms.

The service providers will all be sent a copy of the final results from the study.

### **2.8.3 Employers**

A number of local employers and employer organisations were also interviewed between July and October 2016. As the household interviewees had worked mainly in lower-skilled sectors, or were looking for jobs in these sectors, it was decided to interview employers from a range of those sectors, specifically retailing, catering, cleaning, hotels, care, construction, security, warehousing and freight.

Companies were contacted through cold calling (two companies), letters or emails (three companies), and existing contacts, some suggested by other interviewees in the project (four companies). All were provided with an outline of the study, a request to be interviewed, and a commitment that the conversation in the interview would be treated as confidential and anonymous. Altogether staff from nine companies were interviewed, one from each sector. The companies varied considerably in size, from a sole trader-run business to one with 15,000 employees. Some businesses were locally owned and operated, while others were branches of multi-nationals.

The roles of those interviewed in the nine companies were: CEO (three), owner (one), HR manager (three), financial controller (one), and area manager (one). In addition, the MD of a recruitment company which sources staff mainly for warehousing and distribution roles in the study area, and the wider locality, was interviewed. The deputy CEO of an organisation representing employers in that region was also interviewed.

The questions which were asked of the companies again linked to the study aims, and to the themes identified in the household interviews. They covered the following topics—a description of the business and the staff member's role there, the company's recruitment policy, their interaction with the long-term unemployed, their use of unemployment schemes such as community employment, their interaction with local services (including the public employment service, training organisations and community centres), the barriers for them in taking on unemployed people, and their views on solutions to the issue of jobless households. Slightly different issues were discussed with the staff of the recruitment company and the employer representative organisation.

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 90 minutes, with almost all recorded and later transcribed, with all interviewees given pseudonyms. The interview analysis again was line-by-line, checking the issues that arose in relation to themes

identified in the household and service provider interviews, with some new themes also arising.

The service providers will all be sent a copy of the final results from the study.

#### **2.8.4 Decision Makers**

When all other interviews had been completed, a range of decision makers at county/regional and national level were interviewed, to find out more about the policy decisions taken in relation to jobless households. The decision makers were chosen for interview for a number of reasons. First, interviews were held with two senior staff in the local authority, and with senior staff in four local agencies. The latter interviewees were managers at county or regional level in service provider organisations where more junior staff had been interviewed in the earlier phase of the study. Interviews were also held with managers in four statutory organisations set up to co-ordinate a particular policy or service of relevance in the county or regional area—the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), Children and Young People’s Services Committee (CYPSC), County Childcare Committee, and Regional Skills Forum. One local authority councillor was also interviewed, to gain more perspective on the role of politics in relation to tackling household joblessness.

Secondly, interviews were held with senior managers in national agencies and government departments overseeing the policy areas in which the service providers were operating. Seven interviews were with senior decision makers in government departments, and five with senior staff in government agencies or government-supported organisations operating at national level. Finally, we wished to ascertain the views of stakeholder organisations working in the policy areas identified in the study. Interviews were conducted with senior staff in seven national representative organisations, as well as two interviews with academic experts. Altogether the decision makers worked in the policy areas of activation, education and training, employment conditions and regulation, enterprise development, social inclusion, community development, housing, care, disability, and the position of migrants and Travellers.<sup>32</sup> The interviews took place between March and August 2017.

The questions which were asked in the different organisations varied depending on the type of service or policy dealt with in that organisation. However, common themes which were discussed related to the study aims, and to the issues brought up in the earlier rounds of interviews. They included policy/practice in that organisation relating to jobless households; the situation of various groups which are unemployed; the role of supportive services; the issues of stigma and trust; funding of the organisation; how it works with other bodies (e.g. State, employer);

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<sup>32</sup> Further detail is not given as the interviewees were assured that the interviews would be confidential and anonymous.

co-ordination, flexibility and challenges in policy-making and implementation; and solutions to the issue of household joblessness.

The interviews lasted between one and two hours on average, with almost all recorded and later transcribed, and pseudonyms given to all interviewees. The analysis again was line-by-line, checking the issues that arose in relation to themes identified in the household interviews, with some new themes also arising.

These managers and stakeholders will all be sent a copy of the final results from the study.

## 2.9 Limitations of the Research

There are a number of limitations to the research. First, many of the household interviewees were identified through people working in local community, training and other centres—26 of the 34 interviewees. As these households are engaged in a service, they may be more engaged members of society, and so they may not be fully representative of all jobless households.

However, care was taken to ensure that the proportion of different households interviewed was representative of the overall grouping of households in jobless household figures. In addition, the demographic data of those interviewed is typical of that of jobless households (several with no educational qualifications, working in unskilled jobs, renting their accommodation, parenting alone, and having a disability or living with someone with a disability—see Chapter 4 for further detail). As is the case with all qualitative research, this research does not aim to be fully representative, but instead serves to illuminate the reasons why particular patterns are evident in larger-scale quantitative surveys and to document the experience of low work intensity households, service providers, employers, decision makers and national stakeholders.

Secondly, when interviewing the decision makers, and other senior staff, they were assured that their words would be confidential and anonymous, and attributed as the views of a senior official, without naming their organisation. However, as there are a small number of people in some of these positions, there is a possibility that some readers might be able to guess who has said what, and so it is possible that some more senior staff may have decided it would be prudent for them not to disclose all information they were aware of.

# Chapter 3

## Policy and Services

In this chapter, the policy on the approach to jobseekers in Ireland is presented, followed by a brief description of key supports available to those who are job-seeking.<sup>33</sup> This description includes income supports, secondary benefits, job-seeking and training supports, and in-work payments to incentivise those who have been unemployed, and/or are offered low-income jobs, to enter the labour market. Finally, the chapter will outline the provision of job-seeking supports and other supportive services in the study area.

## 3.1 Welfare and Unemployment Policy and Practice

### 3.1.1 From 'Passive' to 'Active' Unemployment Supports

For many years the Irish government had been criticised for its 'passive' approach to supporting the unemployed, with little conditionality<sup>34</sup> attached to receiving unemployment payments. As a result, it was possible to remain on unemployment benefits over an extended period of time (Grubb *et al.*, 2009; NESC, 2011a; O'Connell, P., 2016). The institutional structure of unemployment services reflected this situation, with the organisation which paid unemployment benefits (the Department of Social Welfare, now Employment Affairs and Social Protection) separate from the main organisation which provided training and job-search support to unemployed (and employed) people (FÁS). With rising numbers unemployed, and the intervention of the Troika<sup>35</sup>, in 2011, the Irish Government addressed this situation through the adoption of a new 'active' approach to unemployment payments.

The new approach included the establishment of Intreo, a one-stop-shop where those registered as unemployed could claim benefits, and at the same time receive

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<sup>33</sup> For further information on the supports available, see [http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/jobseekers\\_home.aspx](http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/jobseekers_home.aspx), and [http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social\\_welfare/irish\\_social\\_welfare\\_system/](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/irish_social_welfare_system/)

<sup>34</sup> Conditionality links the right to welfare payments to expected behaviours from the welfare recipient. If the welfare recipient does not comply with the expected behaviours (e.g. take part in activation, continue to job seek), their welfare payment may be cut. Stakeholder interviewees explained that in Ireland before 2011, it was possible to completely cut a person's jobseeker payment if they did not comply with expected behaviours, but this was such a drastic sanction that it was very rarely imposed.

<sup>35</sup> The term Troika refers to the presence of the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund in Ireland between 2010 and 2013, as part of the financial rescue plan necessitated by the recession of 2008.

job-seeking support services. Intreo was formed from the merger of Department of Social Welfare offices, the employment service provision of FÁS offices, and community welfare officers who had previously been employed by the Health Service Executive. Greater conditionality was introduced as part of Intreo's processes. Those in receipt of unemployment payments are now required to commit to engaging with Intreo's employment, advice and training referral services. If they fail to do so, it will lead to reduction or withdrawal of their jobseeker's payment.<sup>36</sup>

The new activation process was initially applied to all newly registered unemployed people, who were appointed an Intreo case officer, completed a personal progression plan with the case officer, and were required to take part in training, work experience, etc., as directed. Over time, the long term unemployed were also moved into this process. More detail on the process is provided in Figure 3.1.

## 3.2 Activation Process

### 3.2.1 The Pathways to Work Policy

These new activation processes were outlined in *Pathways to Work*, a key policy document developed by Government to tackle unemployment, and first introduced in 2012<sup>37</sup>. It contained five key strands of work, outlined in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: Key strands in Pathways to Work, 2012-2015<sup>38</sup>**

- More regular and ongoing engagement with the unemployed
- Greater targeting of activation (through profiling of clients)
- Incentivising take-up of opportunities (through changes to tax, welfare, health and housing policies)
- Incentivising employers to provide more jobs for unemployed people (through JobsPlus and other job creation measures)
- Reforming institutions (with increased activation and training capacity)

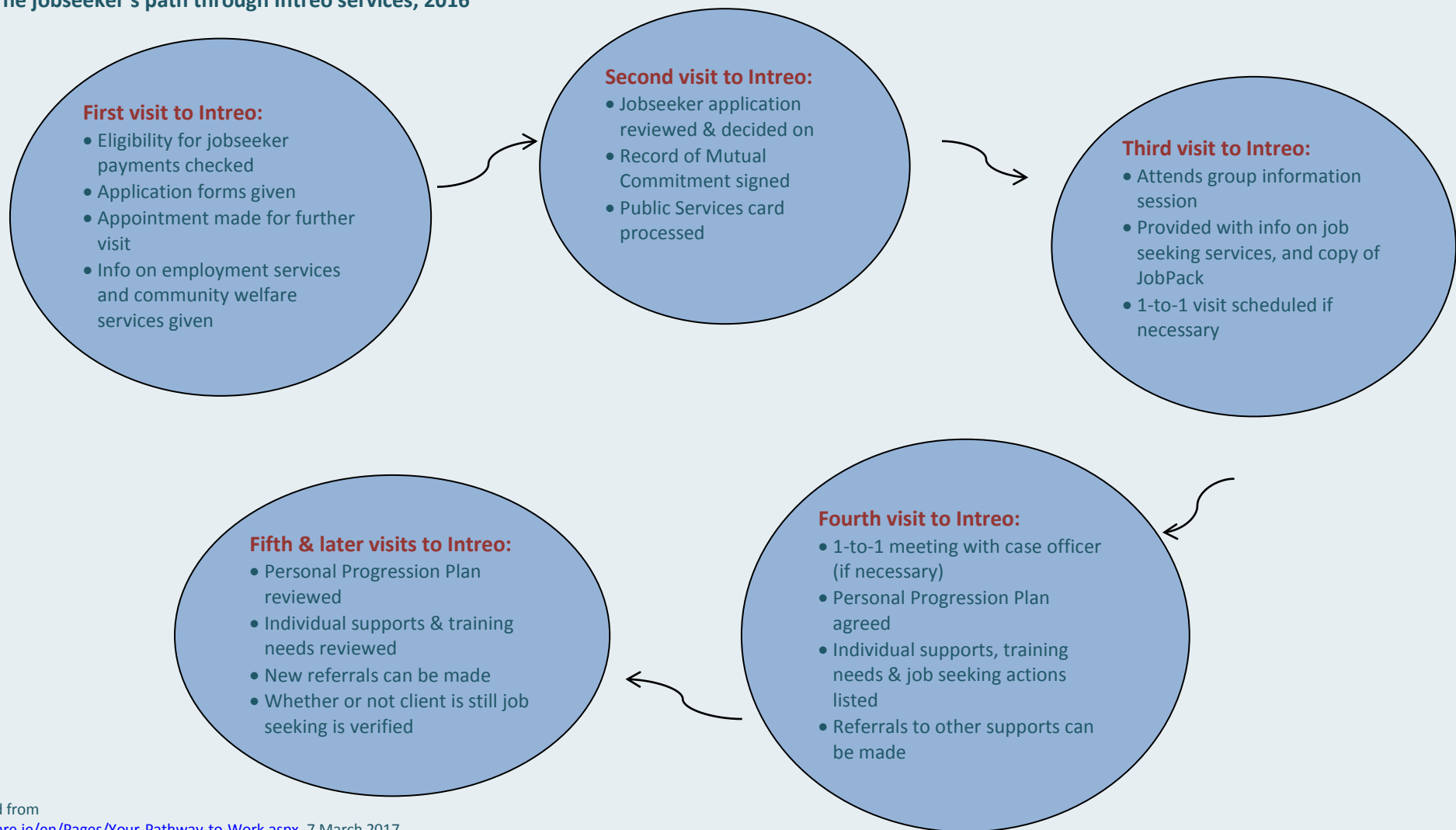
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<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Intreo---Frequently-Asked-Questions.aspx#q5>, question 11 (accessed on 29 June 2017).

<sup>37</sup> See <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Pathways-to-Work-2016.aspx>, accessed 16 April 2018.

<sup>38</sup> See <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/pathwaystowork.pdf>, accessed 30 June 2017

Figure 3.1: The jobseeker's path through Intreo services, 2016



Source: Abstracted from

<https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Your-Pathway-to-Work.aspx>, 7 March 2017

*Pathways to Work 2012* was followed up by *Pathways to Work 2013*, and *Pathways to Work 2014-15*, both of which contained actions to promote the five key strands outlined in the 2012 policy document.

In 2016, *Pathways to Work 2016-2020* was published, and this contained six new strands of work, building on what had been implemented from the 2012 policy document. Two new foci were commitments to extend Intreo activation processes beyond those on the Live Register,<sup>39</sup> and to upskill the public employment service workforce. These six strands of work are outlined in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Key Strands in Pathways to Work, 2016-2020**

- Enhanced engagement with unemployed people of working age (through e.g. increased engagement with those on the Live Register, and expansion to those who are not);
- Increase the employment focus of activation programmes and opportunities;
- Making work pay—incentivise the take-up of opportunities (through e.g. childcare supports, less precarious employment);
- Incentivise employers to offer jobs and opportunities to unemployed people (through increased engagement with employers and their needs);
- Build organisation capability to deliver high quality services to unemployed people (through increased activation capacity, and evaluation of existing systems);
- Building the work force (through quality FET provision).

From 2013 on, the *Pathways to Work* policy documents included specific numeric targets which were regularly reported on, and identified the organisation responsible for attaining these targets, and a timeline. They were also overseen by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Economic Recovery and Jobs. During this time period, unemployment declined strongly, and the number receiving jobseekers' payments declined from 370,000 in 2012 to 256,000 in 2016 (DEASP, 2017b: 21).

*Pathways to Work* complements the *Action Plan for Jobs* policy, also introduced in 2012. It is the Government's key policy to support job creation, and focuses action on a number of areas, including enterprise growth, regional growth, skills, innovation, competitiveness and addressing labour market challenges.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> I.e. beyond those on Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Transition, and Jobseeker's Benefit.

<sup>40</sup> See <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Business-Sectoral-Initiatives/Action-Plan-for-Jobs/> for further information. Downloaded on 22 March 2018.



The Government has also introduced a policy to support people with disabilities into the labour force—the *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, 2015-2024* (Government of Ireland, 2015). The background is the high poverty and low employment rates of people with a disability. The Strategy sets out a ten-year approach to ensuring that people with disabilities, who are able and want to work, are supported and enabled to do so. The Strategy has six key priorities, listed below, many of which are similar to the strands in *Pathways to Work*.

- Build skills, capacity and independence
- Provide bridges and supports into work
- Make work pay
- Promote job retention and re-entry to work
- Provide co-ordinated and seamless support, and
- Engage employers.

Since then, a working group was set up to progress priority three, ‘Make Work Pay’. This group looked at the complex interaction of the benefit system, including the medical card, with the additional costs of work associated with disability, and the net income gains in employment, with a view to devising workable solutions to difficulties identified. The resulting report made a number of recommendations, grouped into four types—reconfiguring the system of payments and supports to ensure that work pays, promoting early intervention, communicating effectively that work pays, and future-proofing new and existing policies to ensure that work pays for people with a disability (DEASP, 2017c).

### 3.2.2 Key Organisations Providing Supports to Jobless Households

Intreo operates alongside the pre-existing **Local Employment Services (LES)**, which were set up at local level in the unemployment crisis of the 1990s, and are now operated under contract from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, mainly by local development companies. There are 22 organisations contracted to deliver LES services nationwide by the Department,<sup>41</sup> and they deliver them in a variety of locations within each contracted area. Traditionally the LES worked with more marginalised long-term unemployed people, who came to the LES voluntarily. However, during the recession of 2008-2013, the LES began to be referred short-term unemployed people by Intreo, which was facing capacity problems dealing with the high volume of unemployed people. Since 2016, with the decline in the number of people who are unemployed, the LES is once more being

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<sup>41</sup> See <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Local-Employment-Service.aspx>, accessed on 24 August 2017.

referred mostly the long-term unemployed, with Intreo working more with the short-term unemployed. The LES is also being referred less unemployed people than previously, partly in line with the reduction in unemployment, but also because of the introduction of JobPath providers, see below. This reduction in numbers allows them to spend more time with each individual. In 2016, there were 19,867 referrals to the LES.<sup>42</sup> The LES also often runs Jobs Clubs, which provide training in drawing up CVs, doing interviews, etc.<sup>43</sup>

Several **local development companies**, and **Leader companies**, also operate **SICAP, the Social Inclusion and Community Action Programme**, which directs funding streams to the most marginalised, to support them to enter training and employment. It is funded by both the Irish Government and EU's European Social Fund. In 2016, SICAP provided assistance to approximately 47,500 people and 3,000 local community groups. It is delivered by 45 programme implementers in 51 contract areas across the country.<sup>44</sup>

Pathways to Work also introduced the proposal for a new job-seeking support service, **JobPath**, under which successful tenderers would be paid a fee for placing unemployed individuals referred to it in a job for at least 13 weeks. Requests for tender were put out in 2013, and the first operators began work in July 2015. Two companies were successful in gaining JobPath tenders, one operating in the north and west of the Republic of Ireland (Turas Nua) and the other operating in Dublin and the south and east of Ireland (Seetec). JobPath is now provided in 90 locations across Ireland. Long-term unemployed people are randomly referred from Intreo to JobPath offices for a year's intervention, with a focus on moving them into the labour market. If after one year they have not moved into employment, they are referred back to Intreo and may then be referred to an LES office, or remain with Intreo case officers. They may also be referred back to JobPath. If they enter employment, they continue to receive JobPath supports for up to 12 months from the employment start date. A performance report on the first year of JobPath operation shows that its clients were more likely to move into employment than Intreo clients, ranging from 42 per cent more likely for those referred in Q3 2015, to 17 per cent more likely in Q2 2016. However, the authors of the report note the small numbers involved and the importance of treating this data with caution until larger numbers and more rigorous analysis is available (DEASP, 2017d).

Finally, for people with a disability who are looking for a job, the **EmployAbility** service can provide specific supports to help them access employment, such as job coaches. There are 24 EmployAbility offices nationwide,<sup>45</sup> and in 2014, 3,151 people

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<sup>42</sup> See <https://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2017-01-24a.251>, accessed on 19 December 2017.

<sup>43</sup> See <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Jobs-Clubs.aspx>, accessed on 25 August 2017.

<sup>44</sup> See [https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/Social%20Inclusion%20and%20Community%20Activation%20Programme%20\(SICAP\)/Pages/More-SICAP-Information.aspx](https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/Social%20Inclusion%20and%20Community%20Activation%20Programme%20(SICAP)/Pages/More-SICAP-Information.aspx), accessed on 24 August 2017.

<sup>45</sup> See <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/List-of-Employability-Organisations.aspx>, accessed 24 August 2017.

were referred to the service (Indecon, 2016). A new programme, Ability, was commenced in 2017, to support young people with a disability to enter employment. It will have funding of €10m over three years.<sup>46</sup>

For more on organisations delivering services used by jobseekers, see Section 3.2.8.

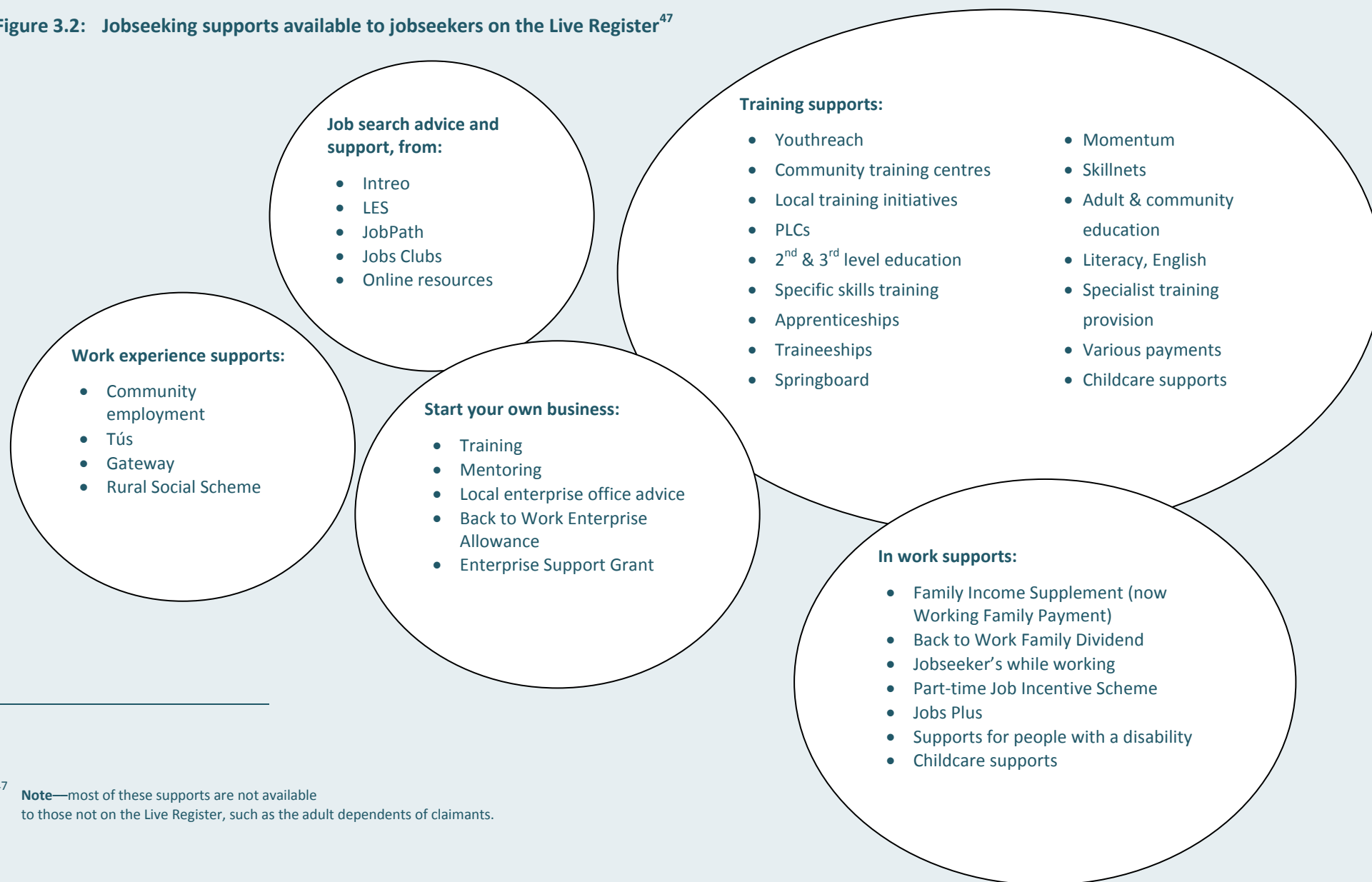
### **3.2.3 What Type of Supports are Available to Jobseekers?**

A wide range of supports are available to job-seekers (and others who are eligible), from income supports administered by Intreo, to secondary benefits provided by a range of Government departments, and job search support provided through the Intreo, LES, SICAP and JobPath processes. There are also a number of schemes to assist previously unemployed, or low income employees, in work. These various supports will be outlined briefly in the following sections. A summary of all of these is depicted in Figure 3.2, as they were in 2016, at the time when the households and local service providers were interviewed for this study.

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<sup>46</sup> See <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-11-29a.1161>, accessed 19 December 2017.

Figure 3.2: Jobseeking supports available to jobseekers on the Live Register<sup>47</sup>



<sup>47</sup> **Note**—most of these supports are not available to those not on the Live Register, such as the adult dependents of claimants.

### 3.2.4 Income Supports

The key income supports which are available to those of working age are outlined in Figure 3.3. They are grouped by whether or not the recipient is required or allowed to be in employment while receiving the benefit, or not allowed to be employed at all.

The key payments where the recipient is required to be looking for work are **Jobseeker's Benefit** (JB—paid based on PRSI contributions) and **Jobseeker's Allowance** (JA—paid based on a means test). Those in receipt of these payments must take part in activation processes required by Intreo. In 2016, over 255,000 people were in receipt of these payments, at a cost of €2.8bn (DEASP, 2017b)<sup>48</sup>. This figure includes almost 15,000 people who were on **Jobseeker's Transition** (JST), which is a means-tested payment to eligible lone parents whose youngest child is aged between 7 and 13. Those on JST are not required to seek full-time work, although they are allowed to work, and also must take part in Intreo's activation processes. This payment was introduced in 2013 for those previously in receipt of One Parent Family Payment (OPFP). Eligible lone parents whose youngest child is 14 or older now move onto JA. Previously, eligible parents could receive OPFP until their youngest child was 18.

Then there are a range of payments under which the recipient is allowed but not required to work, although the amount of work permitted varies by payment. These include the means-tested **One Parent Family Payment**, which had just over 40,000 recipients in 2016, at a cost of €500m. Recipients are allowed to earn up to €110 per week without the payment being affected, and a further €325 per week under which the payment is gradually reduced. Those in receipt of **Carer's Benefit** (paid based on PRSI contributions) and **Carer's Allowance** (paid based on a means test), are also allowed to be in employment, or to take part in training, of up to 15 hours a week. They cannot earn more than €332.50 net per week. In 2016, 73,000 people were in receipt of one of these carer's payments, at a cost of €685m.

Finally, there are the payments for people with a disability or long-term illness where the recipients are not allowed to work. These are **Illness Benefit** and **Invalidity Pension**, both PRSI based payments. The vast majority of Illness Benefit is usually paid for a short time, but it can be paid for up to two years. Invalidation Pension is a longer-term payment for eligible people who are not able to work. In 2016, 110,000 people claimed these two payments, at a cost of €1.2bn.

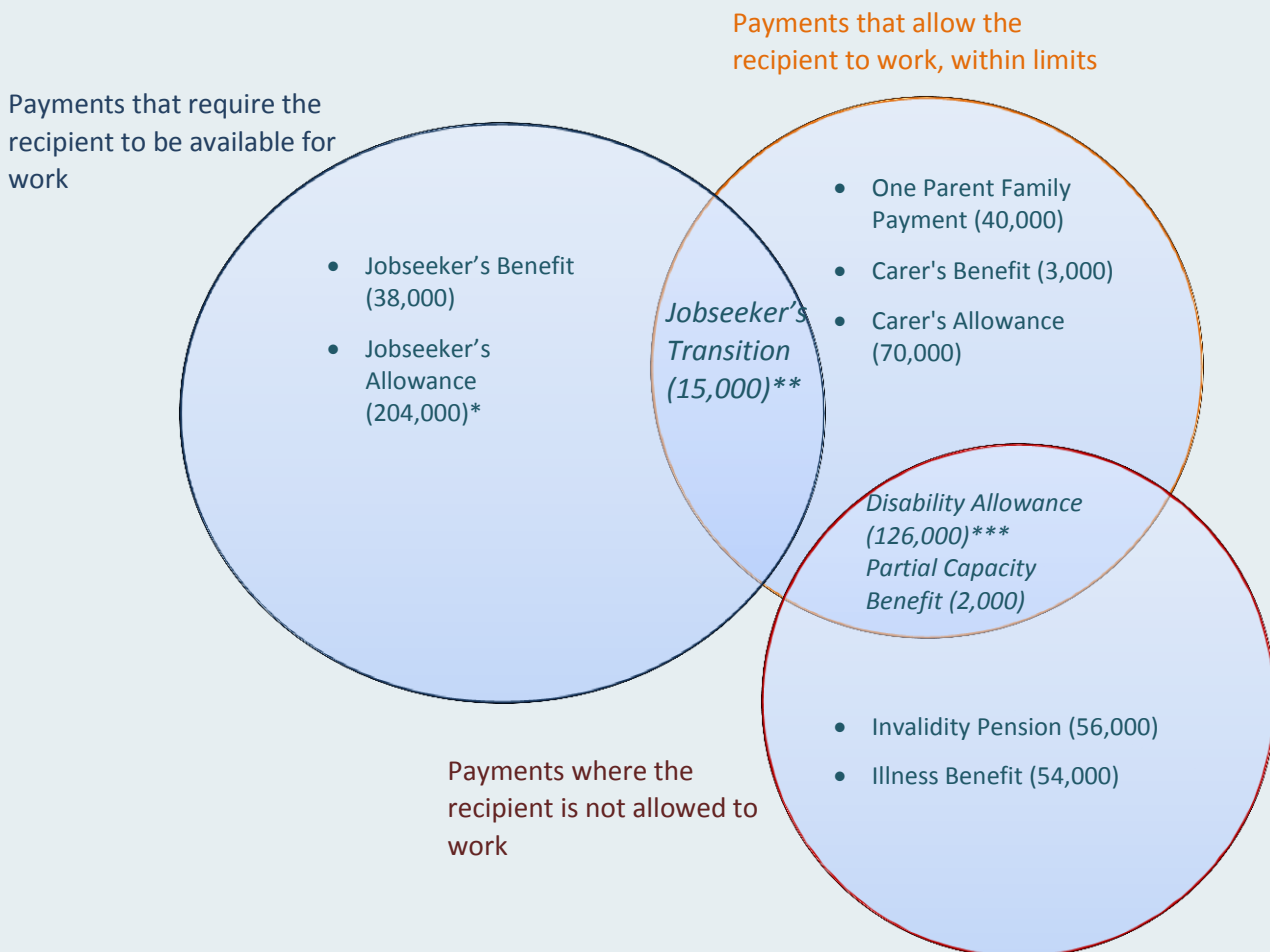
There are also two payments for people with a long-term illness or disability, which do allow employment, although under quite strong restrictions. These are **Disability Allowance** and **Partial Capacity Benefit**. The latter payment is one which recipients of Invalidation Pension or Illness Benefit can transfer on to if they wish to work. They

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<sup>48</sup> All figures in this section are from DEASP (2017b), unless otherwise specified.

must be assessed by a doctor as being moderately, severely or profoundly restricted in their capacity to work, and also get a letter of approval from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection before taking up work. There were 1,800 people on this payment in 2016, at a cost of €13m. Those on **Disability Allowance**, a means-tested payment, are also allowed to work, but the work must be rehabilitative. A recipient can earn up to €120 per week<sup>49</sup> without their payment being affected. They must also notify the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection before beginning work. In 2016, 126,000 people received this payment, at a cost of €1.4bn.

**Figure 3.3: Key income supports for those of working age, with number of recipients (to nearest 1,000) in 2016**



<sup>49</sup> After deduction of PRSI, any pension contributions and union dues.

### Qualified Adults

A number of recipients of the above payments also claim for 'dependent adults', who are their spouse, civil partner or cohabitant, and for dependent children. Dependent adults, or qualified adults as they are often called, do not have to be solely reliant on the main claimant of a social welfare payment. However, any income they earn must be below a certain amount if the payment is still to be claimed.<sup>50</sup> The number of qualified adults supported under such claims is listed below, in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3: Number of various social welfare claims which include a qualified adult, 2015<sup>51</sup>**

Payment	Number of claims which include a qualified adult only	Number of claims which include a qualified adult, & dependent children
Jobseeker's Allowance	16,963	41,288
Jobseeker's Benefit	1,720	2,109
Disability Allowance	7,669	4,771
Invalidity Pension	5,387	2,017
Illness Benefit	2,501	2,491
Other income supports <sup>52</sup>	1,254	4,872
Employment schemes <sup>53</sup>	3,584	6,694
<b>Total</b>	<b>39,078</b>	<b>64,242</b>

### 3.2.5 Secondary Benefits

There are a number of secondary benefits which those on social welfare payments may be able to avail of. These are summarised in Figure 3.4.

<sup>50</sup> See [http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social\\_welfare/irish\\_social\\_welfare\\_system/claiming\\_a\\_social\\_welfare\\_payment/claiming\\_an\\_increase\\_in\\_your\\_social\\_welfare\\_payment\\_for\\_an\\_adult\\_dependant.html](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/irish_social_welfare_system/claiming_a_social_welfare_payment/claiming_an_increase_in_your_social_welfare_payment_for_an_adult_dependant.html), accessed 25 August 2017.

<sup>51</sup> This data was not published in *Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services, 2016*.

<sup>52</sup> Back To Work Enterprise Allowance, Back to Education Allowance, Partial Capacity Benefit.

<sup>53</sup> Community Employment, Rural Social Scheme, Tús, Gateway.

First, all those whose household's only source of income is social welfare are entitled to **medical cards**. Where income is higher than this, a means test applies.<sup>54</sup> The means test is based on net income, which takes into account costs such as rent and travel, as well as the size and age of the household. In 2016, 1.25m people in Ireland aged under 65 held a medical card (HSE, 2017).<sup>55</sup> Medical card holders receive free medical care, and pay a small charge for prescription medicine. Holders also do not have to pay school transport or State examination charges, and can get help with the cost of school books. Those with a higher income may be eligible for a GP-only medical card, which covers GP costs, but not other medical or medicine costs. People who have been on a jobseeker's payment for over a year may keep their medical card for three years after taking up employment.

There are a range of supports available to those on social welfare payments, and/or on low incomes, for housing costs. **Rent supplement** is a means-tested payment for eligible people living in private rented accommodation. Those working over 30 hours a week are not eligible for it. In 2016, there were 45,000 recipients.<sup>56</sup> Until recently<sup>57</sup> a person could apply for rent supplement if they qualified for social housing support and were on the local authority's housing list. However, those in this position are no longer eligible for rent supplement, and instead need to apply for HAP. HAP, or **Housing Assistance Payment**, is also a means-tested payment for private rented accommodation to those with a long-term housing need, but it can be paid to eligible households in full-time employment. Recipients pay a differential rent, which is a proportion of their income, towards the rent, with the remainder paid by the local authority. In December 2016, there were almost 16,500 HAP recipients.<sup>58</sup> Those in receipt of HAP are deemed to have their housing needs met and so are no longer on the local authority's housing waiting list. However, they can apply to the local authority for a transfer if they wish to have access to local authority or housing association housing. Recipients must apply for this transfer of being awarded the payment if they want any previous time on the housing list to be taken into account.

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<sup>54</sup> Medical cards are not generally awarded on the basis of a health condition or illness.

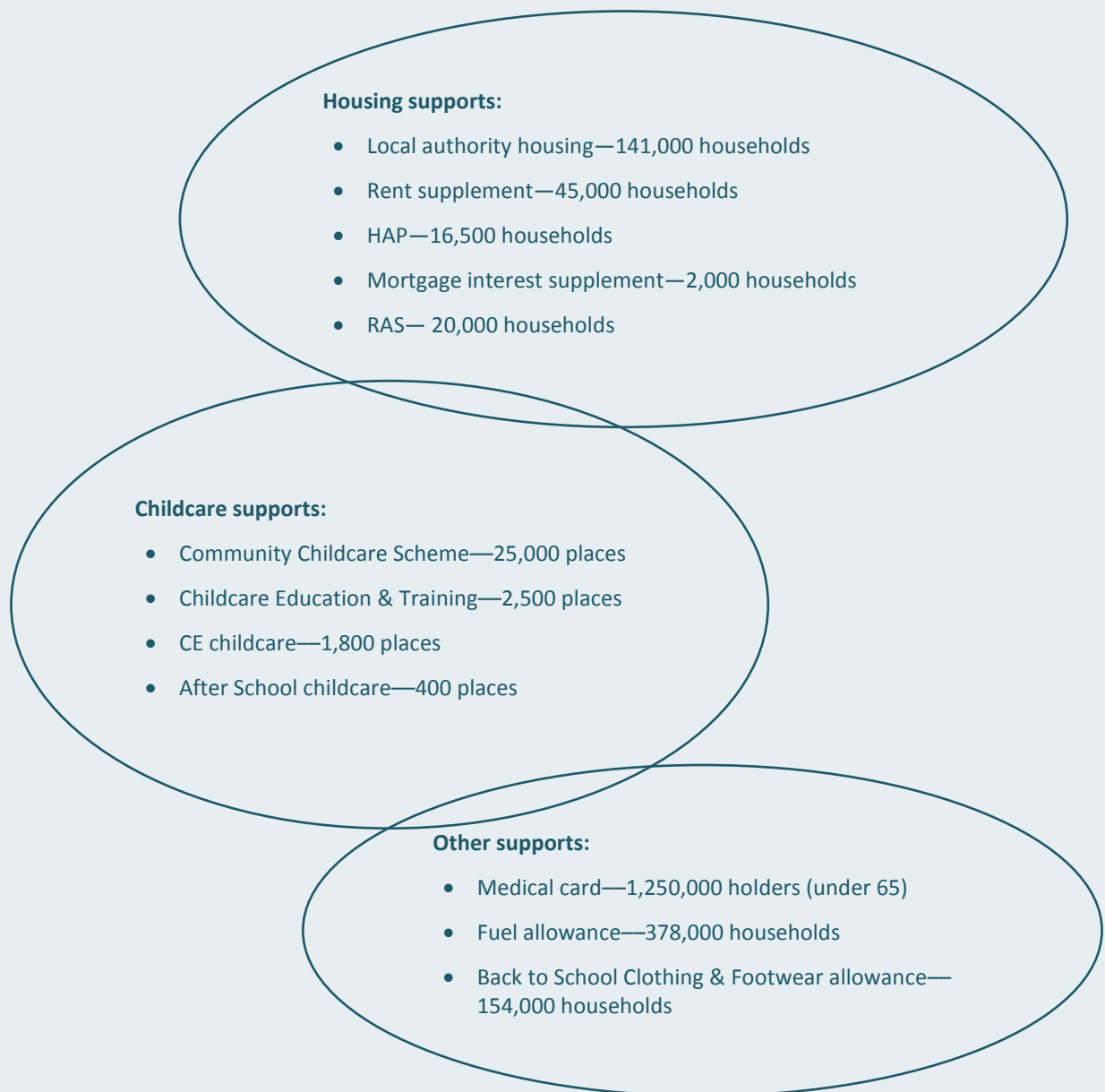
<sup>55</sup> This figure does not include those entitled to GP cards only.

<sup>56</sup> *Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services, 2016*. The information on mortgage interest supplement figures is also taken from this publication (DSP, 2017b).

<sup>57</sup> HAP was signed into law in 2014, but has been gradually introduced into different local authority areas between 2014 and 2017.

<sup>58</sup> The figures on HAP, RAS and local authority housing was accessed on 24 August 2017 from <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.



**Figure 3.4: Secondary benefits which eligible jobseekers may claim, 2016<sup>59</sup>**

<sup>59</sup> Figures are given for 2016 as this is the year in which the households were interviewed.

**Local authority housing** is another option for people on social welfare, and those on low incomes who satisfy a means test. Like HAP recipients, those living in local authority housing pay a differential rent, and are able to work full-time. However, local authority housing is much more secure than HAP. Under HAP, tenant's leases are based on private residential tenancy laws, and so tenants can be evicted if the landlord or his/her family wish to move in, or if s/he wishes to renovate the accommodation or sell it. Leases also only last for a maximum of six years, while local authority housing leases are long-term and in some cases can be inherited. In December 2016, 141,000 local authority houses and flats were rented. Local authorities also lease some private-sector rental accommodation through **RAS** (the Rental Accommodation Scheme), with the conditions similar to those under HAP, although the leases are generally longer and more secure. In December 2016, there were just over 20,000 households accommodated through RAS<sup>60</sup>.

Some people in arrears with their mortgage payments are also entitled to the means-tested **mortgage interest supplement** payment. A household where the applicant or their spouse/partner works over 30 hours a week is not eligible. This scheme was closed to new applicants in 2014 and is being wound down for all existing recipients over a four year period to 2018. In 2016, there were almost 2,000 recipients.

**Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance** is a means tested payment that many households relying on social welfare qualify for. The payment is annual, and is €125 for children aged 4-11 and €250 for children aged 12-22. At the end of 2016, 154,000 families had received this payment, for 283,000 children.<sup>61</sup>

**Fuel Allowance** is a payment of €22.50 per week to people who are dependent on long-term social welfare payments, to help with the cost of heating their home during the winter. Those who have received Jobseeker's Allowance for over 15 months are one of the groups which qualify. Some 378,000 households received the payment in 2016.<sup>62</sup>

Some targeted childcare supports are also available. The **Community Childcare Subvention Scheme** supports eligible disadvantaged parents and parents in training, education or low paid employment by providing reduced childcare costs to them. Until recently the CCS could only operate in a facility run by a community and voluntary organisation, but this has now been extended to privately run facilities. Up to 2016 the scheme could cater for approximately 25,000 children annually.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-09-28a.772>, downloaded 8 May 2018.

<sup>61</sup> See the following, accessed on 24 August 2017—<https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-05-17a.369&s=%22back+to+school%22+footwear>

<sup>62</sup> See <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-03-28a.636>, accessed 24 August 2017.

<sup>63</sup> For this and the other figures cited in this section, see <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-01-31a.1951&s=%22community+childcare+subvention%22#g1953.r>, accessed 25 August 2017.

The **After-School Childcare** programme supports unemployed and low-income people to take up a job, increase their working days, or take part in an employment support programme. It provides 300-500 places per year.

The **Community Employment Childcare (CEC)** programme is targeted specifically at participants in community employment, and provides both pre- and after-school places. It can provide approximately 1,800 places per year.

Over the latter part of 2017, and into 2018, the new **Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS)** will be rolled out. This scheme, unlike some others, will not require the recipient to be in receipt of a social welfare payment, and so will help those who found they could not access affordable childcare when trying to move into employment. There will be two key parts to the ACS—a universal, non-means tested subsidy of up to €1,040 per year for children up to the start of the ECCE (free pre-school) programme, and supports of up to €7,500 per year for children up to 15 years of age in families on lower incomes, where parents are at work or training.<sup>64</sup>

### 3.2.6 Job-Seeking Supports

The job-seeking supports provided by the State were outlined in Figure 3.2, and are described in the following sections. They consist of job search advice, work experience, start-your-own-business supports, in-work supports, and training courses. Such supports are available to recipients of certain social welfare payments, including all of those who receive a jobseeker's payment, and so are on the Live Register. In some circumstances the supports are available to those who are not on the Live Register but are seeking work, such as some qualified adults (QA). QAs are able to access LES services, but not services in Intreo. Their eligibility varies by scheme and institution.

#### *Job Search and Advice Supports*

The job search advice and support services described earlier in this chapter (see Figure 3.1) are available to jobseekers in-person, on-line and through training, and are delivered mainly by the organisations outlined earlier—Intreo, the JobPath contractors Seetec and Turas Nua, the LES, and local development company staff or contractors delivering SICAP services.

#### *Employment support schemes*

As well as job-search and advice supports, there are a number of employment support schemes which provide work experience, and training in some cases. On all of these schemes, the participants continue to receive their social welfare payment, as well as a small top-up payment, while taking part. The schemes include **CE (Community Employment)**, which provides part-time work experience for up to

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<sup>64</sup> See <http://affordablechildcare.ie/>, accessed 4 January 2018.

three years in a community or voluntary organisation<sup>65</sup>; **Tús**, which provides part-time work experience for a year, again in a community or voluntary organisation; **Gateway**, which provides part-time work experience in local authorities for 22 months; and the **Rural Social Scheme**, under which low-income fishermen/women and farmers provide part-time services that benefit the local rural community, for an indefinite time period.

Two further programmes are now closed to new applicants, but still had a number of participants while the research was being carried out. The first is **JobBridge**, which provided work experience of 30-40 hours per week, for between 6 and 9 months, in a private, public or charity sector organisation. It closed to new applicants in 2016.<sup>66</sup> The second is **Jobs Initiative (JI)**, which provides full-time employment, training and development, to prepare the participant for the open labour market. It closed to new applicants in 2004.

The number who took part in these schemes in 2016 is outlined in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4: Number of participants on various employment support schemes, 2016**

Community Employment	22,356
Tús	7,140
JobBridge	1,765
Rural Social Scheme	2,527
Gateway	683
Jobs Initiative	886
<b>Total</b>	<b>35,357</b>

Source: Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, (2017b).

It is worth noting that there are a lot of variations in the eligibility criteria for the schemes, e.g., age, social welfare payment, and length of time unemployed. For example, there are two CE options. To qualify for the Part-Time Integration Option

<sup>65</sup> In general, since 3 July 2017, for those aged between 21 and 55 years, the CE placement is for one year. However, for those working towards a major award (level 6 -10 on NFQ), the CE placement can be extended by up to 2 years to complete this award. Those aged over 55 can remain on CE for 3 consecutive years.

<sup>66</sup> Since there, a new internship programme for the under 25s, the YESS programme (Youth Employment Support Scheme) has been announced. It is due to commence in Q2 2018. For further information, see <https://careersportal.ie/careerplanning/story.php?ID=2501202897#.WvmV1suWzX4>, accessed 14 May 2018.

of CE, a recipient must be one year on social welfare and aged over 21. To qualify for the Part-Time Job Option of CE, which lasts longer than the other CE option, a recipient must be on social welfare for three years, and aged over 35. There are other eligibility criteria for younger people who want to take part in either option. For JobBridge, a person only needed to be on social welfare for three months, and there was no age criteria. For Tús and Gateway, unemployed people are selected by Intreo, and there are no eligibility criteria listed.<sup>67</sup>

### ***Start Your Own Business Supports***

There are a range of start-your-own business supports for those in receipt of certain social welfare payments. These supports include income replacements, which are the **Back to Work Enterprise Allowance scheme (BTWEA)**, and the **Short Term Enterprise Allowance (STEA) Scheme**. Both allow recipients to set up their own business while keeping a percentage of their social welfare payment for up to 2 years.<sup>68</sup> Recipients can also get financial support of up to €2,500 with the costs of setting up their business through the **Enterprise Support Grant (ESG)**. Recipients must supply at least 20 per cent of the cost to access the grant. In 2016 there were almost 11,000 people in receipt of BTWEA, and nearly 400 receiving STEA, and just under €4.5m was spent on the ESG (DEASP, 2017b). People unemployed for over 12 months may also benefit from the **Start Your Own Business Relief** scheme, which provides an exemption from income tax up to a maximum of €40,000 per annum for a period of 2 years. In 2014, almost 2,300 people made a claim under this scheme<sup>69</sup>. It is also possible to continue to receive **Jobseeker's Allowance** while establishing self-employment, based on means-testing. In 2016, there were approximately 9,000 people per month in this position (DEASP, 2017b, Table H6).

Other financial supports which can be accessed are for funding, although these are not available specifically for those who have been unemployed. Through the **Microenterprise Loan Fund Scheme**, Microfinance Ireland provides loans of between €2,000 and €25,000 to small businesses, including start-ups.

In terms of support on how to set up a business, **Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)** and **local development companies** provide supports including training and mentoring to local businesses that are starting up or in development. Local development company supports for self-employment are usually delivered through SICAP. In 2016, there were over 6,800 LEO clients,<sup>70</sup> and in 2016 over 5,700 SICAP clients progressed into self-employment (Pobal, 2017b). LEO supports are open to

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<sup>67</sup> For a detailed outline of the eligibility criteria for these schemes, see [http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/unemployment\\_and\\_redundancy/employment\\_support\\_schemes/](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/unemployment_and_redundancy/employment_support_schemes/)

<sup>68</sup> STEA is for those on Jobseeker's Benefit, while BTWEA applies to those on other payments.

<sup>69</sup> This figure applies to 2014. See <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-10-25a.398&s=%22start+your+own+business+relief%22#g399.g>, downloaded 24 August 2017.

<sup>70</sup> See Local Enterprise Office Annual Employment Survey Results 2016 at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/News-And-Events/Department-News/2017/March/21032017.html> accessed 20 March 2018.

everyone looking to start or develop a business, while SICAP focuses on the disadvantaged, such as the long-term unemployed.

Support of €43m was provided nation-wide to **social enterprises** through the **Community Services Programme (CSP)** in 2016, with 404 services supported (DSP & Pobal, 2017). The European Commission defines a social enterprise as an operation whose main objective is to have a social impact, rather than make a profit for its owners or shareholders. It operates by providing goods and services for the market in an entrepreneurial and innovative fashion, and uses its profits primarily to achieve social objectives. It is also managed in an open and responsible manner, involving employees, consumers and other stakeholders in its management.<sup>71</sup>

The most commonly supported services under the CSP are community halls/resource centres, tourism and heritage services, and services for older people. A key requirement of the CSP is that service providers generate traded income (usually 30 per cent of income) by adopting a social enterprise model of delivery. Many of these services also aim to employ those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The CSP grants, which fund the employment of service managers, are awarded through SICAP contractors. From 2008 to 2016 there were no calls for new applications, although an extra €1m was provided in 2017 to facilitate new entrants. The new funding was focused on services which employed long-term unemployed people, including those on disability allowance and OPFP, as well as recovering drug misusers and homeless people, etc (Pobal, 2017c). Such supports can help disadvantaged people to move from welfare to work.

Funding, and other supports such as training for social enterprises, are available through LEADER, SICAP, local development companies and LEOs. Schemes such as Community Employment, Tús and the Rural Social Scheme (RSS) are also often used to help cover the cost of short-term staffing in social enterprises (Hynes, 2016), although Pobal stress that there is a difference between the social enterprise ethos of the CSP which aims to create paid employment opportunities, and active labour market programmes such as CE which aim to provide work experience (Pobal, 2017a).

### ***Training courses***

There is a very wide range of training courses and support which can be accessed by those in jobless households<sup>72</sup>, which are diverse both in terms of the training provided and who delivers it. Most of these training supports are funded and managed (albeit sometimes at arm's length/indirectly) by the 16 local Education and Training Boards (ETBs), which were set up in 2013, through the merger of

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<sup>71</sup> See <http://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/social-economy/enterprises/>, accessed 5 March 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Some of the training provision is also available to those who are not in jobless households, on the basis of a range of eligibility criteria.

VECs<sup>73</sup> and the training function of FÁS. One of the ETBs' functions is to manage and operate further education colleges and a range of adult and further education centres delivering education and training programmes. SOLAS, the further education and training (FET) authority, was established in the same year, to provide strategic direction to the FET sector. As a result of these structural changes, the entire sector is undergoing a lot of re-organisation.

The range of courses available for jobs-seekers (and others) can be grouped into a number of categories. First of all, **for early school leavers, Youthreach** is a full-time education programme, run directly by ETBs, for 15-20 year olds. It provides Level 3 and 4 qualifications on the NFQ (National Framework Qualifications).<sup>74</sup> On 1 January 2016, 3,225 people were enrolled in it.<sup>75</sup> **Community training centres**, which are independent community-based organisations, also provide full-time training and education courses, usually for one year, to early school leavers aged between 16 and 21. On 1 January 2016, 1,540 students were enrolled in these. They also provide qualifications at levels 3 and 4. For unemployed people aged 18-35, the **Local Training Initiative** (LTI) provides full-time project-based training and work experience, run by local community groups. Qualifications are at levels 3 to 5.<sup>76</sup> On 1 January 2016, 1,878 people were enrolled in LTIs.

There is also the **Back to Education Initiative**, which funds part-time courses for over 16s, aimed principally at those who have not completed a Leaving Certificate (or equivalent) qualification. Many of the courses are at QQI levels 3 and 4. In 2016, 33,675 learners undertook BTEI courses (YEI, 2016: 18).

Secondly, for **those who have completed the Leaving Certificate** (or have equivalent experience), full-time **PLC** courses are available for one to two years, usually run in colleges or institutes of further education. These provide level 5 and 6 qualifications.<sup>77</sup> On 1 January 2016, 30,501 students were enrolled in a PLC.

There is also the **VTOS** programme, the **Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme**. This is a funding mechanism to provide free second chance education and training courses, up to 30 hours per week, of up to two years duration for registered unemployed people over the age of 21. VTOS courses are generally at Level 5 on the QQI<sup>78</sup> scale. On 1 January 2016, 4,168 people were enrolled in a VTOS course.

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<sup>73</sup> The statutory local education bodies that administered some secondary education and most adult education until 2013.

<sup>74</sup> Junior and Leaving certificate levels.

<sup>75</sup> All figures on FET provision in this section are from *2016 Further Education and Training Services Plan*, (SOLAS, 2016), unless otherwise stated, downloaded 25 August 2017 from <http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/FET%20Services%20Plan%202016.pdf>.

<sup>76</sup> Junior and Leaving certificate levels.

<sup>77</sup> Level 6 is a higher certificate level.

<sup>78</sup> Quality and Qualifications Ireland – a State agency which has responsibility to develop, promote and maintain the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. See [www.qqi.ie](http://www.qqi.ie).

Thirdly, there are a range of courses targeted at gaining **sector specific skills for the workplace**. These include **Specific Skills Training**, which usually comprise six months of full-time training leading to accreditation, either from the Irish QQI, or an industry or UK accrediting body. Courses available include computer applications, book keeping, IT, payroll, health and beauty etc. These training courses are often run in ETB-owned training centres. 3,420 students were enrolled in these on 1 January 2016. **Apprenticeships** also provide specific skills for the workplace, but last up to four years, and involve alternate workplace and training centre<sup>79</sup> components. In 2016 there were over 3,800 new apprenticeship registrations, and there were a total of 10,316 apprentices with 3,919 participating employers in December 2016.<sup>80</sup> **Traineeships** provide a much shorter combined workplace and training programme, of e.g. up to one year. Some 1,818 people were enrolled in a traineeship on 1 January 2016. A new strategy for apprenticeships and traineeships in Ireland was rolled out in 2016, and will provide this type of work-related training in a greater range of sectors over the next five years.

The Government has also funded private and community providers to provide work-related training under the Springboard, Momentum and Skillnets programmes. **Springboard** has been opened up to unemployed people,<sup>81</sup> and offers part-time courses in higher education from certificate to post-graduate level, in enterprise sectors which are growing and have skills shortages, including ICT; the medical devices sector; bio-pharma; green energy; etc. **Momentum** is targeted at long-term unemployed people and includes on-the job training in expanding employment areas such as ICT, transport, distribution and logistics, and financial services. Some 351 people were enrolled in it on 1 January 2016, but it is not currently recruiting participants. **Skillnets** networks provide industry-specific training mainly to employees, but some unemployed people are also eligible to undertake this training. In 2016, 5,915 job-seekers undertook Skillnets training (Skillnets, 2016).

Fourthly, there are **part-time adult education** courses provided at community level which are more developmental, and not necessarily directly linked to the workplace, but may provide benefits in the workplace to those who undertake them. They are delivered by a wide range of groups, from statutory to community.<sup>82</sup> In the statutory sector, community education is co-ordinated through Community Education Facilitators based in the ETBs. Community education courses include **literacy** courses (which almost 9,000 people were enrolled in on 1 January 2016) and **English language** courses (which over 3,400 people were enrolled in on 1 January 2016). These courses would have direct benefit in the work place, as well as in day-to-day living outside the workplace. Part-time adult education also includes a

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<sup>79</sup> Usually in ETB-owned centres.

<sup>80</sup> See <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR2017-05-08.html>, accessed 5 January 2018.

<sup>81</sup> And now to others, including 'home makers'.

<sup>82</sup> Aontas has a network of community education providers with 130 members, see <http://www.aontas.com/commmed/networkcen.html>, accessed 30 June 2017.



diverse range of courses which are both formal and informal, accredited<sup>83</sup> and non-accredited. Many of those who take part in community education courses are people who experience disadvantage or have been out of education for some time. Many of these groups may be unemployed.

There are also **specialist training courses**, offered to people with a disability. There were 1,735 people enrolled with specialist training providers on 1 January 2016.

### ***Income Supports While Training***

Those who are registered as unemployed can usually undertake many of the further education and training courses listed above, free of charge, while continuing to receive income supports. However, while on this training, their payment changes from a jobseeker's payment to a training allowance. The amount of the allowance is usually at least the same as that of the jobseeker payment, and for those aged under 26 the training allowance may be higher. Those on OPFP and Disability Allowance can also take part in most of these courses free of charge and without it affecting their social welfare payment.

Meanwhile **Back to Education Allowance** can be paid to an eligible person who is taking part in second or third level education. In 2016, just under 14,000 people received this (DEASP, 2017b). There are also the **Part-time Education Option**, and the **Education, Training and Development Option**, both of which allow a job-seeker to keep their Jobseeker's Allowance or Benefit while attending a part-time course and continuing to job-seek. Those taking part in VTOS training and education are also paid a training allowance instead of (but equivalent to) their JA/JB while taking part in this training.

However those who are not registered as unemployed are not always entitled to do the courses listed above, or to the **travel or accommodation allowances** which are paid for some courses. The travel allowance amount is small, ranging from €4.60 per week for a person living up to 8km from the training centre, to €32.00 for someone living up to 80km away.<sup>84</sup> These are issues which will be returned to later in this report.

As well as travel and accommodation allowances, a **Childcare Education and Training Support (CETS)** payment is available for eligible ETB students. This scheme contracts childcare services to provide places to qualifying ETB students for the duration of their courses. Approximately 2,500 FTE places can be provided annually.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Between levels 3 and 8, so from Junior certificate level up to honours' bachelor degree level.

<sup>84</sup> See e.g. <http://kerryetbtrainingcentre.ie/support/travel-allowances-full-time-and-part-time-courses/>, accessed 5 January 2018

<sup>85</sup> See the following, accessed 25 August 2017—<https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-01-31a.1951&s=%22community+childcare+subvention%22#g1953.r>

### 3.2.7 In Work Supports

Finally, for those who find employment, there are a range of in-work supports available from Intreo, aimed at those who were long-term unemployed and/or who are on low incomes.

First of all, those working casually or part-time may be able to keep all or part of their **jobseeker's payment** depending on the number of days worked (usually three are allowed) and level of pay. In 2016 there was an average of 635 short-time workers on the Live Register each month (down from over 15,000 in 2010) (DEASP, 2017b, Table H6).

The **Part-time Job Incentive scheme** allows some long-term unemployed people to take up work for 24 hours a week and receive a weekly allowance instead of their jobseeker's payment. The part-time work must be likely to last for at least two months. In 2016, over 450 people were in receipt of this payment (DEASP, 2017b).

It is also possible for a person taking up a new job to receive a social welfare payment to support them while waiting for wages paid in arrears—the **Pending Wages Payment**.

There are also a number of in-work payments for families on low incomes. These include **Family Income Supplement (FIS)**, (now renamed Working Family Payment), which is a weekly payment available to low paid workers with at least one dependent child. The amount paid depends on household income and number of children. Recipients must work at least 38 hours per fortnight, and the job should last over 13 weeks. In 2016, just over 57,500 households received this payment (DEASP, 2017b).<sup>86</sup>

The **Back to Work Family Dividend**, introduced in 2015, provides a weekly payment for two years to Jobseeker and One-Parent Family Payment (OPFP) recipients with children, who end their claim and take up employment or self-employment. It can be combined with FIS. The payment is €29.80 per child with a ceiling of €119.20 per week (maximum of four children). It is halved during the second year. There were just under 13,000 households receiving it in early 2017.<sup>87</sup>

There are also some supports for employers to encourage them to take on people who are finding it difficult to get a job. First, the **JobsPlus** scheme provides financial incentives for employers to take on long-term unemployed people. Employers can receive a payment of €7,500 for each person recruited who has been unemployed for between 1 and 2 years, and a payment of €10,000 for each person recruited who has been unemployed for more than 2 years. The job must be for over 30

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<sup>86</sup> The information on other Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection supports in this section is also taken from this publication.

<sup>87</sup> See <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-01-24a.650&s=%22back+to+work+family+dividend%22#g651.g>, accessed on 24 August 2017.

hours per week. In 2016, just under 3,800 new jobs were created through this scheme (JobsPlus, 2017: 18).

To encourage employers to take on people with disabilities, a similar financial scheme operates, the **Wage Subsidy Scheme**. This offers financial support for employers who employ certain people with disabilities between 21 hours and 39 hours per week. In August 2016 there were over 2,200 employees employed through this scheme<sup>88</sup>. Other supports for people with a disability and their employers include the **Reasonable Accommodation Fund**, which includes the Job Interview Interpreter Grant, the Personal Reader Grant, the Employee Retention Grant Scheme, the Workplace Equipment/Adaptation Grant and the Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme. However, take-up does not seem to be high—in 2015, just under €74,000 was spent under the Reasonable Accommodation Fund.<sup>89</sup>

### 3.2.8 Delivery Organisations

As can be seen from the discussion above, supports for those in jobless households are delivered by a range of organisations, with public sector bodies playing a key role. The main organisations involved are summarised in Figure 3.5. This figure does not contain an exhaustive list of all organisations which deliver supports to the those in jobless households, just the main State organisations which will be referred to again in this report.

As outlined above, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), as well as funding all social welfare payments, also funds a number of organisations to provide job-seeking supports directly. These include Intreo, which is part of the Department; and the two contracted services, the LES and Jobpath. DEASP also funds the Citizen's Information Centres, which provide confidential advice on a wide range of state services, including those for the unemployed. They also fund MABS, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service. In terms of secondary benefits, DEASP funds rent supplement, mortgage interest supplement, fuel allowance and the back to school clothing and footwear allowance.

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) funds the ETBs, which finance and deliver training around the country, and pass funding on to other organisations providing training on their behalf. DES also funds SOLAS, the agency developing the further education strategy.

The Departments of Housing, Planning and Local Government fund local authority housing, HAP, RAS, and some community centres. Local authorities also host individuals on Gateway work placements. The Department of Rural and Community

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<sup>88</sup> See <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-09-16a.2107&s=%22wage+subsidy+scheme%22+number#g2108.q>, downloaded on 13 April 2018

<sup>89</sup> See <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-05-24a.755>, accessed on 24 August 2017.

Development funds SICAP, and the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), which manage SICAP; as well as RAPID, and the Community Services Programme which funds social enterprise.

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, through Enterprise Ireland, funds the Local Enterprise Offices, while the Department of Children and Youth Affairs funds childcare supports and some supports and schemes in community centres.

Pobal is a not-for-profit organisation which manages programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU. Through it, funding is channelled to SICAP programmes, and also for the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme, the National Childcare Investment Programme, the Rural Social Scheme and the Gateway work experience schemes. It is also designing, and will manage, the new Affordable Childcare Scheme.

As well as the state bodies delivering such supports, community and voluntary organisations and private sector organisations are commissioned to provide supports, such as training and job-seeking advice. Some community and voluntary organisations which receive state funding to provide particular services also provide their own supports, funded through donations and philanthropy. Examples include training centres and social enterprise units set up by social entrepreneurs.

There have been a number of institutional re-organisations of various sectors in the past number of years. Earlier sections of this chapter outlined the changes to employment support services, and to the FET sector. There have also been changes to the local government sector, and to the childcare sector.

Regional and local government structures were restructured under the Local Government Reform Act 2014, with roles at the city/county level being strengthened. The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is responsible for local authorities, who now have responsibility for the community and voluntary sector.<sup>90</sup> Of particular note is the establishment of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in each local authority, comprising local councillors, local authority staff, representatives of public bodies that provide services in the area, local community representatives, and representatives of publicly funded or supported local development bodies. The aim of the LCDCs is to develop, co-ordinate and implement a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development, including the community elements of the six year Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) which each local authority has to provide. LCDCs have also been tasked with overseeing the implementation of SICAP. They are responsible for co-ordinating, generally, local and community development activity within the operational area of the LCDC so as to minimise overlap and duplication and improve the targeting of resources.

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<sup>90</sup> Some of these responsibilities have been taken on by the Department of Rural and Community Development, which was established in July 2017.

In the area of children, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs was established in 2011 to consolidate a range of functions previously discharged by a number of government departments, including early childhood care and education, child welfare and protection, children and young people’s participation, youth work and cross cutting initiatives for children. The Department has responsibility for the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) which brings together a number of agencies with a remit in the area of child welfare. Of particular interest for this study is the development and roll out of the Affordable Childcare Scheme, plus the role of the County Childcare Committees and the Children and Young People’s Services Committees (CYPSCs). The CYPSCs are county level committees that bring together the main statutory, community and voluntary providers of services to children and young people. They are intended to provide a forum for joint planning and co-ordination of activity and oversight of local policy and provision, to ensure that children, young people and their families receive optimum services.

Overall, this chapter has shown the range of supports and organisations involved in delivering services to the unemployed, and the related complexity of funding and management arrangements. While the range of supports available can be hard to grasp, for the unemployed and indeed even for those working in the sector, an advantage of the complex range of services available is that there are supports for many different needs. This is another issue which will be returned to later in the report.

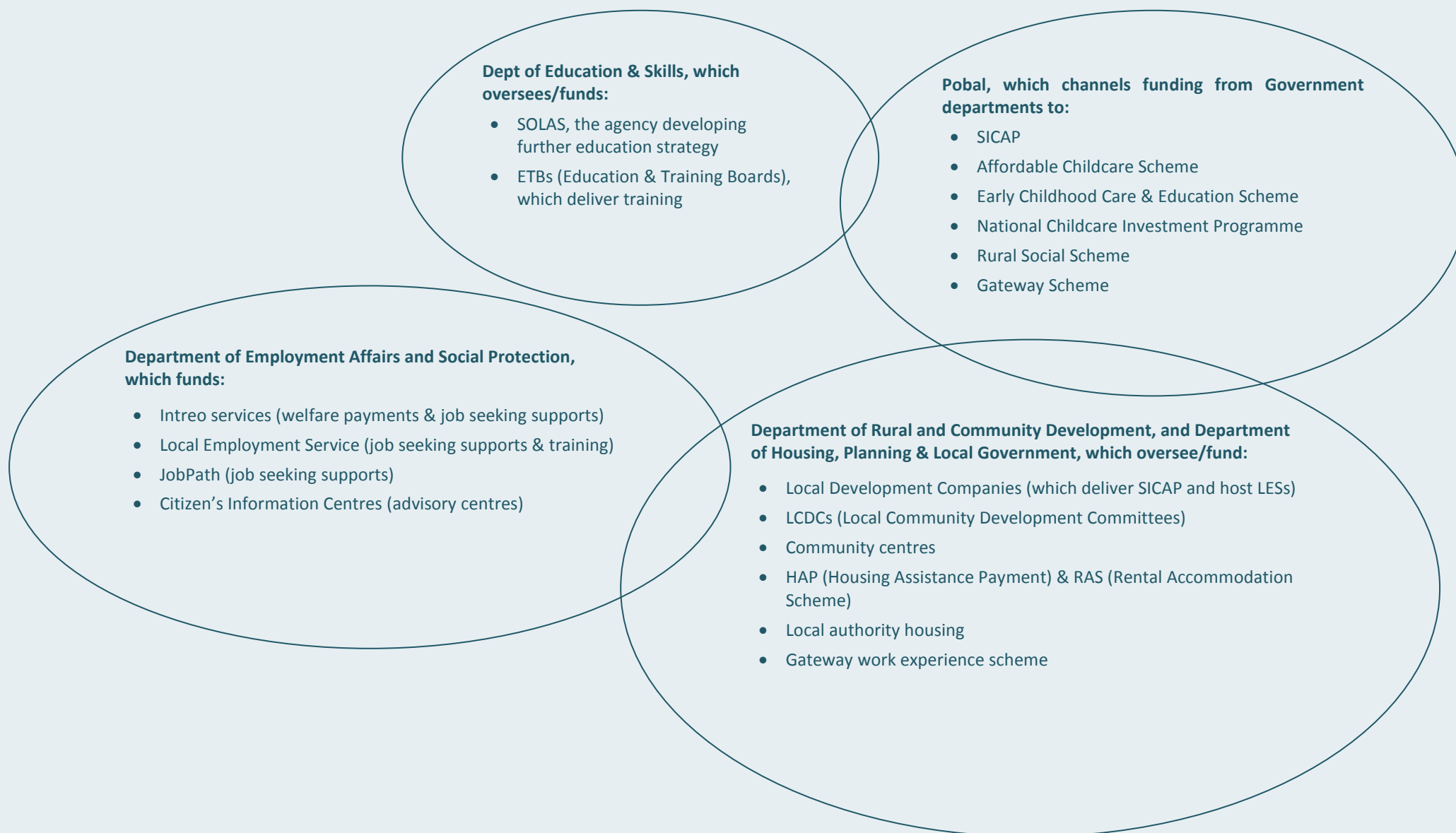
### 3.3 Supportive Services in the Study Area

The section outlines the range of supportive services which are provided in the study area. As well as specific job search support services, there are also education, housing, childcare, health, infrastructure and community services in the area.

#### 3.3.1 Job Seeking Support

The study area contains a number of services providing job-seeking supports. These include an Intreo office, a LEO, and a local development company. The latter has a contract to deliver LES and SICAP. There are a number of LES offices, and they deliver JobClub services, among others. The SICAP programme provides job search, education and self-employment supports. There is also a JobPath office in the study area.

**Figure 3.5: Key State organisations funding or overseeing supports accessed by jobless households**



### 3.3.2 Education

In terms of education, the study area contains 14 primary schools and 4 post-primary schools, with most receiving funding from DEIS, the programme set up to provide extra school supports in areas of educational disadvantage. There is a broad range of 'post-school' education services in the study area, including training colleges providing both full-time and part-time courses with QQI certification. There are training centres providing Youthreach, BTEI, community and adult education, and Traveller education. There are also some privately run training centres.

There are, however, no Post Leaving Certificate courses provided in the area, although there are two colleges providing them which can be reached in 40-60 minutes by bus, and much more quickly by car.

### 3.3.3 Childcare Facilities

Twenty-two childcare services exist in the area, some private and some community and voluntary. Nine of the 22 services provide full-time care, and the remainder are sessional. Some of these provide care in a training or community centre while a child's parents are taking part in training or other events. This is helpful for parents, as is the emphasis on early education for children's development. However, the focus on sessional care in children's services in the study area suggests that it may be difficult to find subsidised care for babies whose parents would like to be in employment. Thirteen of the 22 childcare services are in the Community Childcare Subvention scheme (CCS).

### 3.3.4 Housing

The housing infrastructure in the study area was outlined in Chapter 2, highlighting the high reliance on social housing there. In addition, there are a number of emergency homeless accommodation centres.

### 3.3.5 Health

There are three health centres in the study area, and five pharmacies, as well as a range of mental health supports, and several centres providing supports for individuals and families affected by drug addiction. The wider neighbourhood in which the study area is located has a Drug and Alcohol Task Force. The most common drugs used in the area are opiates and cannabis, with polydrug use and alcohol misuse increasing. There are strong impacts on the families of those abusing drugs. For example, one national study found that one in 11 young people have reported that parental alcohol use affected them in a negative way (Alcohol Action Ireland, 2016). Drug abuse also clearly has a negative impact on a person's ability to sustain education or employment, and if it leads to a criminal conviction, this compounds difficulties finding employment.

### 3.3.6 Transport

The study area contains rail transport connections, and is served by seven bus routes, although in common with many other suburbs of Dublin, residential areas tend to be separated from areas with employment opportunities, and so commutes could be quite long. As outlined in Chapter 2, car ownership in the study area is fairly typical of Dublin overall, but with variations by area. In the most disadvantaged ED in the study area, 29 per cent of households had no car in 2016. In that area, 11 per cent of people walk to their job, and 15 per cent get the bus, compared to 7 per cent and 9 per cent for the three EDs overall. Only 44 per cent drive a car to work, compared to 59 per cent nationally.

### 3.3.7 Community Services

A range of community supports are available, with four community and youth centres in the study area. Key services provided in these centres and others in the area include youth services, after-school care, childcare and child development, inter-cultural supports, health supports, healthy eating programmes, drug rehabilitation supports, gardening through community gardens, a number of Men's Sheds facilities, and rooms for hire for classes and meetings.

There is also a large library located near the study area, which provides services such as a literacy programme, English (and other) language classes, book clubs for various age groups, support sessions for secondary school students carrying out projects, and space for other classes and meetings. It also provides access to the internet and IT facilities.

The area has a number of sports facilities. Several of the community centres referred to above house sports facilities and clubs. Within the study area there are a number of football and boxing clubs, a GAA club, a dedicated sports hall, several pitches and a swimming pool.

There is a local MABS (money, advice and budgeting service), a Citizens' Information Centre, a family mediation service run by the HSE, and a local Policing Fora.

A 2014 survey on use of community services in the wider locality (broader than just the study area) indicated that:

- Over 10 per cent of respondents made use of training and employment services.
- Almost one in 10 households had used adult education services.
- A third reported using community services such as the Citizen's Information Centre.
- Fifty per cent of respondents had used local community centres weekly over the previous year, while a further fifth used the same services monthly.



- Three per cent of households reported use of addiction services in the previous year, with all using local services; and 10 per cent utilised mental health services in that time, with three quarters using local services.
- Just over 10 per cent reported that someone in the household used senior citizen services or youth services in the previous 12 months.
- There was also good use of leisure and sports facilities. Over the previous 12 months, one third of households had used leisure services such as a theatre; one third had used play spaces; and over forty per cent had used sports facilities, with the majority using local sports clubs or facilities.

These findings indicate a considerable amount of community infrastructure and services available which are used by the local population.

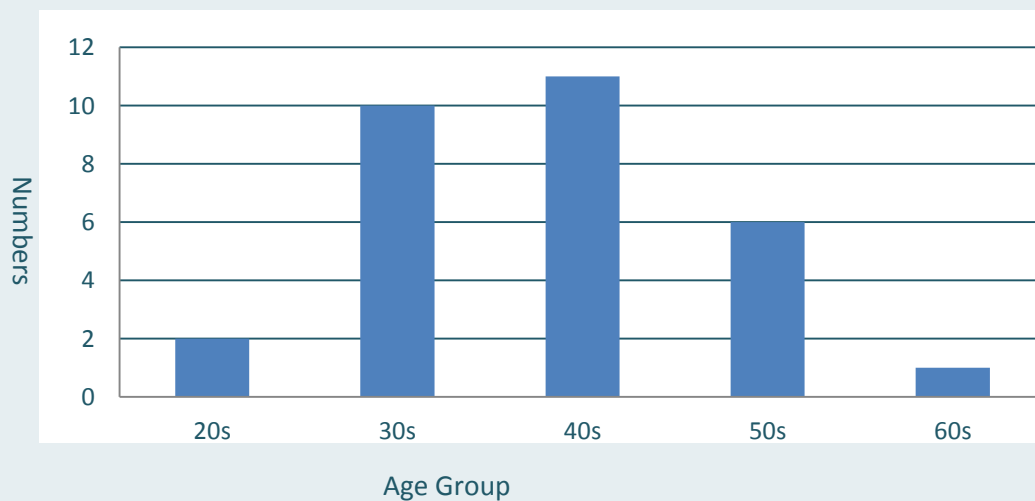
# Chapter 4

## A Description of the Household Interviewees

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, some of the key findings from the interviews with 33 households are presented. First, the interviewees' socio-demographic details are summarised, followed by why they are unemployed, their experiences of employment (if any), and their education levels. Secondly, their interaction with State services is described, including income support services, their experiences on courses and employment schemes (where relevant), and use of other supportive services (e.g. health, housing). The final section looks at household and individual resources and well-being, including household assets and networks, and individual well-being, resilience and ambitions. Some details are summarised in Figure 4.2.

**Figure 4.1: The age of household interviewees in the study**

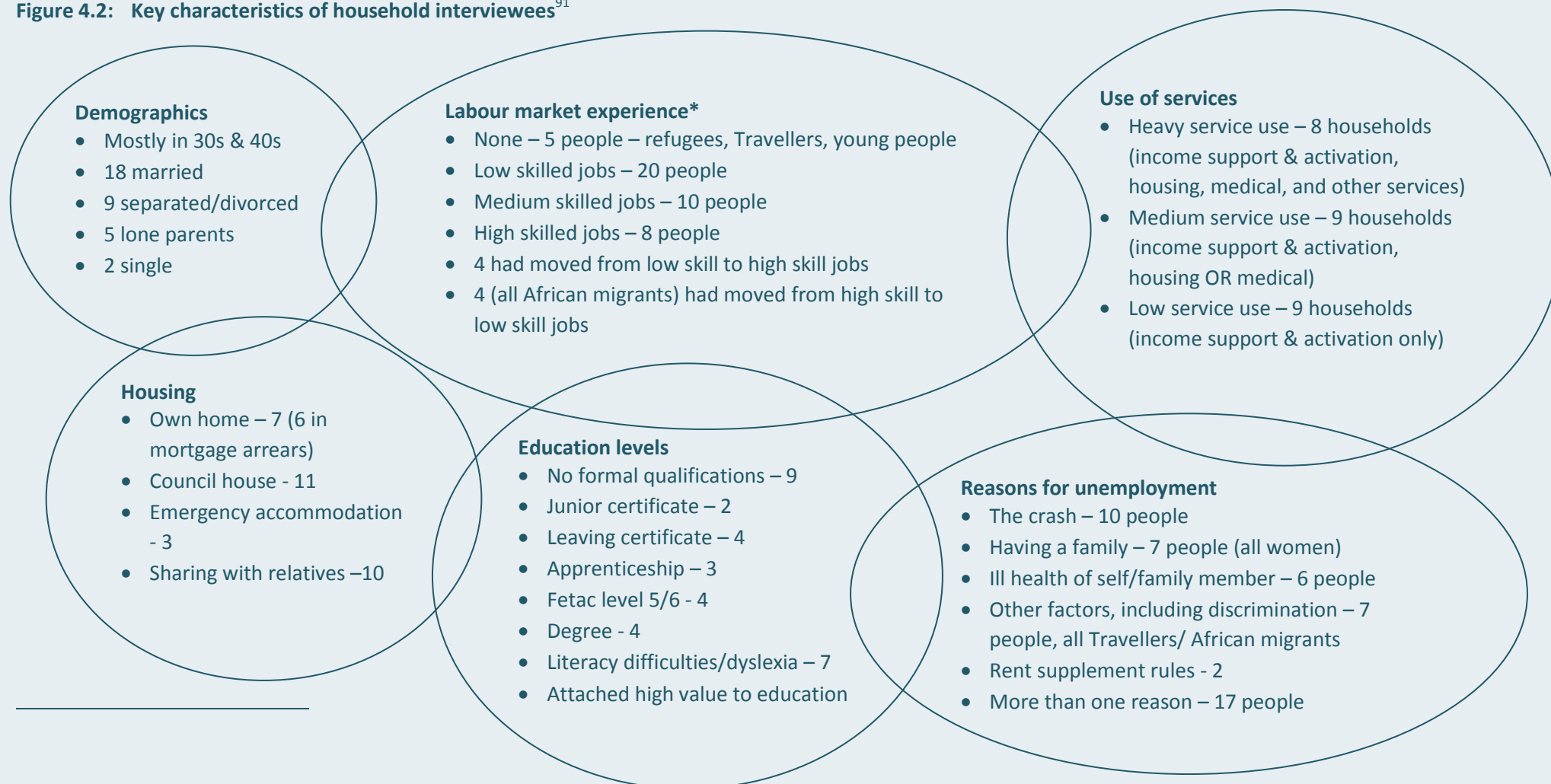


## 4.2 Socio-Demographic Details

### 4.2.1 Age

Interviews were held with 34 individuals, from 33 households. Some 14 interviewees were male and 20 female. They ranged in age from their early 20s to early 60s, with most interviewees in their 30s and 40s, see Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.2: Key characteristics of household interviewees<sup>91</sup>



<sup>91</sup> There were 34 interviewees. Information is not available on all characteristics for all interviewees, as the qualitative interviews did not rigidly follow set questions.

\* Several people had worked in more than one type of job.

#### 4.2.2 Household Composition and Ethnicity

Some 18 interviewees, over half, were married or co-habiting. This is not surprising as we were targeting low work intensity households with children for interview. The next biggest category was people who were separated or divorced—nine people. Before the survey we under-estimated the number of low work intensity households who would be separated, but Census figures show that their unemployment rate is higher than average.<sup>92</sup> Often their family arrangements are complex and sometimes traumatic. Marital separation can, in some cases, lead to joblessness and almost always to a drop in household income. Many of the separated men we interviewed were not doing very well and had been affected materially and psychologically by the experience.

Split up last July you know, twenty three years together, gone (Danny, separated from his wife and children, now living with his mother and niece) (see Appendix 3 for an outline of the key circumstances of each interviewee).

The separated women we met, even though some of them suffered from depression, tended to be more resilient and had got on with their lives—rearing children, taking courses and in some cases working, often part-time or in employment schemes, and in some cases volunteering. Of the separated people with children we met, in all cases the children were living with their mother.

Five other interviewees were parenting alone. We did not ask how they entered lone parenthood—in some cases this information was offered but often it was not. One was widowed.

Just under half of the sample, 16 people, lived with their partner and children, and five lived with their children only. Some of the families were quite large with three, four and in one case seven children. A number of the families had adult children, either living at home or away from home. One family also mentioned step children who stay some weekends. Inter-generational households were common, with four interviewees living with three generations of their family, and six other interviewees living in a household made up of adult children and parents. Many of the families had complex family arrangements associated with family circumstances, low income and lack of housing and work options. Quite often family breakdown or illness and disability have led to joblessness and the current household composition. Caring elements play a role—both child care and disability or elder care. Finally, one person lived with their partner only; and two people were single. Both lived alone.

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<sup>92</sup> StatBank tables EZ005 for Census 2016 show that the unemployment rate for those aged 15-64 was 12.9 per cent on average, but it was 19.2 per cent for those who were separated, and 17.8 per cent for those who were divorced.

In terms of ethnicity, six of the interviewees were Black/Black Irish, one was mixed-race, and four were Travellers. Two were from the UK. The remainder were white Irish. There were no white non-Irish. This representation fits well with the outline of those most likely to be unemployed in the study area, as the groups with the highest unemployment rates included Black/Black Irish and Travellers, while white non-Irish people were very likely to be in employment (see Section 2.6.5).

### 4.2.3 Housing Tenure

The turbulent state of the housing market over the past 15 years was evident in the households interviewed. A number of housing difficulties were reported, from mortgage arrears to unaffordable private sector rents, and homelessness to overcrowding. Council housing seeming to offer the greatest security and most affordable rent, but it is increasingly out of reach, particularly for separated men. In some cases these housing pressures (particularly rent supplement conditions and homelessness) had a negative impact on interviewees' ability to find and take up work. Although HAP aims to address some of these problems, it has only recently been introduced in parts of Dublin, and households seeking accommodation under it reported a lack of available supply. In contrast, being in mortgage arrears provided a motivation to find work, as households tried to pay down their debt.

#### *Ownership*

Only one interviewee mentioned that they owned their own home outright. Six interviewees were in mortgage arrears following loss of employment, often after trying various different ways to pay their mortgage repayments.

The mortgage now, we had to go interest only like, we had to, we'd no choice, we had to. We did, we paid it for three years, four years ... you get redundancy but that then becomes your mortgage money ... [our] children's allowance [was] paying actually our mortgage. (Hannah, self and husband both unemployed)

Several couples had restructured their mortgage, while one has entered a Personal Insolvency Agreement.

Two interviewees with mortgage arrears mentioned the difficulty they had paying for necessities associated with owning a home, such as repairs, and management fees. These costs would not have to be paid if they were in social housing.

Owning your own house—you have to pay for everything in your own house. Your toilet breaks, ... you get a leak—you've to get it fixed ... It might seem something simple to somebody but when you've to go to B&Q and spend €20 on this or €20 on that and then say if something blows and you've to get an electrician and its €50, €60 and all, and that's out of your money every week. And you haven't budgeted for that, because you're living week to week ... when you're in a council house or something the landlord looks after that. (Hannah, self and husband both unemployed)

For two interviewees, a key motivation in finding a job was to reduce their housing debt.

In an ideal world I'd like part-time [work] but... to keep the mortgage and all going I think I'll have to look for fulltime work. (Elsa, unemployed woman living with disabled husband on Invalidity Benefit)

Three other interviewees planned to buy a house over the next 5–10 years—two had been homeless.

### ***Private Rented Accommodation***

A number of interviewees had previously lived in private rental accommodation, but there did not seem to be any currently living in it. Three who were now homeless had been living in the private rented sector, but had lost their accommodation there. Some of the separated men now living with their parents spoke of the fact that they could not afford to rent their own accommodation. Two interviewees specifically told of leaving a job or not taking a job offered, due to the fact that they would not get rent supplement if they were working, and that their pay was too low to allow them to pay for the private rental sector. This was before HAP was introduced—but two people who were currently in emergency homeless accommodation told of their attempts to find accommodation in the private rented sector under HAP, which they were finding extremely difficult due to the shortage of supply. There were reports of people under great pressure to pay private sector rents. One person who was not interviewed<sup>93</sup> rang the researchers' phone line in great distress as he and his wife were trying to pay rent of €1,200 a month based on his wife's 30 hours work per week, and FIS. Another interviewee told us of friends, a couple with young children, where one worked by day and one by night so that they could pay their rent and incur no childcare costs.

### ***Homelessness***

The researchers decided to interview three homeless families to see how this affected their ability to find a job. All three had become homeless from the private rental sector, in one case because the landlord wanted to sell the house, in the second case the owner of the apartment they were renting returned from Spain and wanted to live in it. The third family became homeless because the landlord would not repair the house and so it became uninhabitable.

These families had then lived with relatives, and in hotels, before finding more suitable emergency accommodation.

We moved into Vicky's mother's then ... when we were in her mother's we were living in a box room—bunk beds, the three of us. Her sister

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<sup>93</sup> He was not interviewed as he did not live in the study area. He had seen the poster looking for interviewees in a library located in a central area nearby.

and her fella and their baby were in the front room. Her ma and da were in the back room. Her brother was sleeping downstairs on the couch. There was like 10 of us in the house with one bathroom. So just a nightmare. (Vinny, unemployed, now living in emergency homeless accommodation with his partner and daughter)

Being homeless, particularly in hotels far from their children's schools, meant that organising daily life was very difficult, and also costly. Interviewees reported travelling long distances to their child's school, having nowhere to stay inside during the day, and the high cost of not being able to cook and so having to eat out.

Two of these households were headed by a person on OPFP so they were not required to look for a job, although one was studying to get a job. In the third household one person was seeking work and the other was studying. They were not able to seek work effectively while living in a hotel due to the time taken to travel to their child's school 20km away, which involved getting up at 6.30am and travelling there by train and bus.

### ***Council Housing***

Council housing offers affordable rent, and great security of tenure. Eleven interviewees lived in a Council house. A number had previously lived in the private rented sector and find being in a Council house much better, because the rent is pegged to their income and so they can take up employment without losing their housing supports, as Mercy explained.

Then they made this rule that once you begin to earn about, I think €320 or thereabouts, you know they don't pay your house rent again. And to be honest if you ask me that was the beginning of my woes ... because I wasn't earning something huge, that I could afford to pay for a rent of €1,000 for 2 bedrooms ... when all of my salary in a month is probably like €1,300 ... So the only thing was a council house. That would be the solution...you only pay 10 per cent of your income. (Mercy, lone parent of Nigerian origin with twin 15 year old boys)

Five interviewees wanted to live in a Council house but were having difficulty getting one due to the shortage of supply. Two separated men thought that they would never get a Council house as they were living alone. One interviewee was waiting for a bigger house, as she had seven children, but noted that they had been waiting a long time.

## **4.3 Employment, Unemployment and Education**

### **4.3.1 Employment History**

Altogether, only five interviewees of the 34 had no experience in the formal labour market. One was a school leaver, one a refugee, and the remainder were Travellers.



Some of this group had worked on an employment scheme, but had not yet found employment in the wider labour market.

The vast majority of the interviewees did, however, have labour market experience, often of many years. The jobs in which they worked were mainly low skill ones, such as builder's labourer, security, shop work, bars, cleaning and factory work. Some 20 interviewees had worked in such jobs.

I have done cleaning, retail ... a few odd-jobs here and there—like I worked in a playground ... but nothing kind of majorly concrete or anything that's kind of been substantial in terms of being able to bring in a decent income, and also be able to live comfortably. (Krystal, lone parent with two children aged 10 and 16. Was on OPFP but now on JST)

Ten had worked in medium skill jobs, such as supervisors, dental nurses, and trades, and four had worked in high skill jobs, as managers and accountants (two of these were migrants who had worked in the high skill jobs in their country of origin). Several people talked about the good jobs they had had, contrasting them to their current situation.

When we worked ... in our hand we would actually get 600 plus, each, that's what we was getting. And now when we're getting 248 each. (Julia, on invalidity pension, married with three children)

Four people had been able to move from low skill jobs to higher skilled jobs. Three were male, and young, and the fourth was an older woman. They were all Irish.

I started out in the fitness industry in 2005, went back to college. I'd been in dead-end jobs previous to that, you know, warehousing jobs and all that kind of crap you know ... [so I] went back to a college ... for fitness instructors and managers. So done the course for two years, came out with a diploma, leisure manager diploma, and then qualified as a personal trainer and fitness instructor ... [and] I took on [a] managerial position. (Danny, unemployed separated man)

Migrants tended to have the opposite experience, with four African migrants having worked in a higher skilled job in their country of origin, but only able to find lower skilled work in Ireland.

Yea, I was doing work with the Inland Revenue ... yea, tax and stuff like that... [but here] they're not accepting my certification, you know. (Nathaniel, unemployed Nigerian man)

Ten people had worked abroad. The four Irish people who did so were all men and all worked in building. Two others were from the UK and had worked there, and the other four were Africans who had worked in their home countries.

### 4.3.2 Reasons for Unemployment

There were a variety of reasons for the interviewee's unemployment, with the economic crash a key one. Ten of the 34 had lost their jobs due to the crash, with nearly all working in building at the time.

Early 2000 I came back [from England]. Working [was] no problem. Plenty of money, plenty of work there was, and in 2008 it just died...I came back after Christmas and there was about twenty of us let go...We were to start a site in town and it just—bump. It never got off the ground and that was it. (Xavier, unemployed plumber in his early 60s).

A second common reason was having a family/childcare, with seven interviewees who had left work for this reason, all women.

Then his wages went up...he was on a good wage. So I said—right, we've two kids, they're starting school, you can't start passing them from pillar to post, so I left the job. (Barbara, unemployed separated mother of 6)

One lone mother had given up work because she found combining work, a long commute, and domestic life in poor accommodation just too stressful.

I was [commuting 70 kms] every day, I was like a robot. Every minute counted, children weren't seeing my face ... it was still very stressful ... Every day I get to work I'm like—I can't continue like this ... [I] looked at how much I earn[ed], look[ed] at my daily expenses ... I pay a minder ... my rent... I just typed a letter, I said that's it, I'm resigning ... so the whole motivation was already dying, the whole 'you have to work' ... the stress was just too much [so] that the other part of me that's like—you're a human being, you should go out to work—was just dying. (Mercy, single parent of twin boys)

Six interviewees were unemployed, due to the illness of themselves or another person.

I got sick myself with a blood clot in my leg [which] settled in my lung, and so I was out for a while. But just as I was over that my mother had a massive stroke so I left the family home and moved in with her, I looked after her twenty four hours [a day] for two years. (Elsa)

One interviewee had been addicted to drugs when younger, which had resulted in poor education qualifications and gaps in her CV, and this had a negative impact on her ability to gain employment now.

Seven interviewees were migrants or Travellers and they felt that this status prevented their employment, as Ulysses, a Nigerian immigrant, and Greta, an Irish Traveller, outlined.

Is the government making the law for all employers that they must, if they have any vacancies, they must give privilege for the Irish indigenous first before any other person? And after that Europeans before any other? ... so I don't know because I didn't read it in the paper or I didn't hear it from the news or whatever, but some people are saying that ... I've went for a lot of interviews and I see it—even those ... who don't have experience like me, they employ them because they are Irish. So when I go to interview then I'm meeting an Irish, a very nice boy, we talked to each other, we make friends there, but he told me he never worked before. That was his first job, you understand what I mean. And they see us together, we called for interview together—[and] they employ him and they left me. (Ulysses, unemployed Nigerian)

It is very, very hard for a Traveller to get a job. Once they know—I think once they know that you're a Traveller at all ... [My eldest son] has put out loads of CVs but he didn't get a job, I think it's over being a Traveller I think. Because he had the interview—he had an interview up there [large retailer], and they didn't give it to him ... the girl that was sitting beside him had the same experience, and she got it (Greta, Traveller, on Carer's allowance for a young child with a disability)

There were a variety of other reasons for being unemployed. Some people had taken voluntary redundancy, and the contracts of others had come to an end. Some had literacy difficulties, and some had no work experience. One person had left a job and another turned down a job offered, because of rent supplement rules.

Having more than one reason for being unemployed was very common—this was the case for more than half of those interviewed. The people who are most likely to be facing multiple reasons for unemployment are migrants and Travellers, who cited their ethnic minority status, literacy/English proficiency issues, and lack of Irish work experience as barriers. Traveller women had the most barriers, adding childcare responsibilities and sometimes family disability to these. For some people, the amount of time a person was unemployed led to one issue compounding another (e.g. years in the asylum process, combined with no work experience and poor English; or parenthood leading to a long break from the labour market and no recent work experience; or absence from the labour market while caring leading to a decline in English language proficiency). This shows the complexity of issues to address in order to reduce joblessness—although of course not all adults in jobless households were encumbered by more than one reason for being unemployed. Many of those who had lost their job during the crash, particularly men, had no other major reasons for being unemployed, and some of the reasons (e.g. ineligibility for courses that provided safepasses, a PSV licence, or a security licence) seem to be relatively simple to address.

### 4.3.3 Education

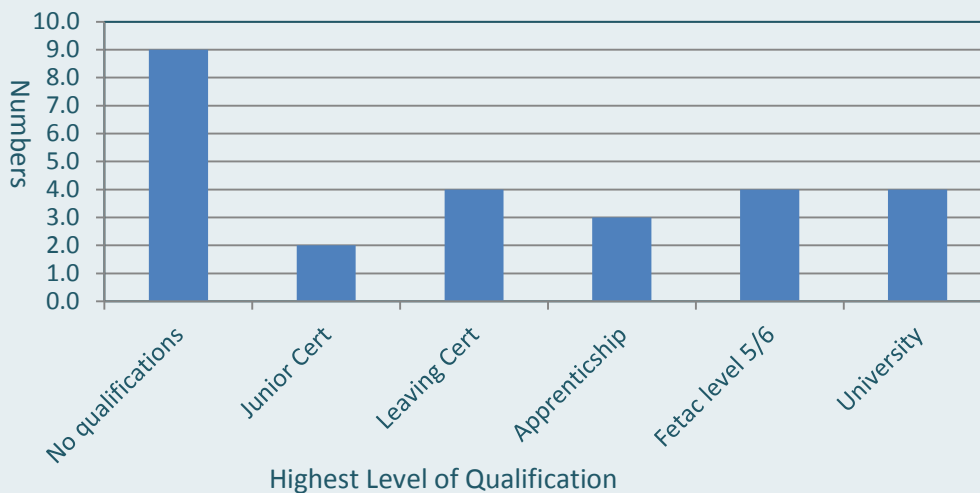
The interviewees had below average levels of completed education when compared to Dublin overall, as Figures 4.3 and 2.4 show.

All interviewees were asked about their education, including when they finished studying, their experience of school, and their views about the value of education for their children.

#### *Levels of Education*

Of the 26 interviewees whose completed education level was known, nine had left school with no formal qualifications, at some stage before taking the Junior Certificate. Nearly all of these were older, or Travellers. Two interviewees had Junior Certificate qualifications only, and four had a Leaving Certificate as their highest qualification. Three had completed apprenticeships (all men). Four had undertaken Fetac Level 5/6 studies, usually after completing school. Four had degrees, see Figure 4.3.

**Figure 4.3: Interviewees' highest level of completed education**



For the household interviewees with degrees, why were these not leading to employment? This is a particularly pertinent question for the two migrants who had degrees in areas where there are skills shortages. Three of the graduate interviewees were migrants, two of whom cited difficulties having their qualifications from Africa recognised (see below). The third had poor English. She also had an ill son and so was on Carer's Allowance, and could not find work for less than 15 hours a week (the permitted amount for those in receipt of this allowance). The fourth person with a degree was Irish, but got her degree in community development as the recession hit and funding for employment in this area was cut.

She also had been out of the labour market for several years as she was a lone parent, and said her lack of work experience held her back. Some similar findings were recorded in a recent qualitative evaluation of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) (BMG Research, 2017), which found that lack of links to employers, lack of follow-up with those who completed courses, under-qualification for available jobs, and a limited number of jobs in some fields, were reasons why BTEA participants did not move into employment.

### ***Literacy/Dyslexia***

Seven of those we interviewed had literacy difficulties, or dyslexia. All but one of the Travellers interviewed had very poor literacy, and the Traveller with good literacy was from the UK. Often Travellers had left education early, and one woman reported not going to school at all. Several Travellers noted the poor education they received when in school as children, as described by Catherine, below:

See, when we were kind of growing up—we found this a lot—the school I was in, all the Travellers would be put in one class ... there could be twenty Travellers in one class...all different ages...that's why no one was kind of learning because you were all left there...with a colouring page and a marker...[that's why] in our generation there's a very rare Traveller that knows how to read and write. (Catherine, Traveller, on carer's allowance with two children with a disability)

At that time there were few educational supports available. Many Travellers had also moved often as children which provided more difficulties in gaining an education. They contrasted this to the situation of their children, who are more likely to be living in the same location, are in mainstream classes and receive effective learning support.

Now it is brilliant in the schools, and they have the SNAs and helper teachers and all that and things to help...whereas when we were growing up there was nothing. (Catherine)

All the Travellers interviewed reported children or younger relatives who could read very well, and those with teenage children or relatives reported that they had done their Leaving Certificate, or were studying for it, so that they would be able to get jobs which their older relatives are unable to compete for. However, as outlined above, some of these Travellers were concerned that their younger relatives were not getting jobs despite having the Leaving Certificate qualification.

### ***Feelings About School***

Most of those interviewed did not express any particular feelings about school, but of those that did, the predominant feeling was dislike, as outlined below:

I hated school, and school hated me... (Irene, a lone parent and ex-addict, left school before Junior Certificate)

They used to beat you with a cue if you didn't know it... We used to be put standing in the corner, and I was in the corner the whole time. (Alan, has dyslexia and serious literacy difficulties, left school at 12)

Those who disliked school had left education early, and a number had literacy difficulties.

### ***Education and Their Children***

The interviewees were almost unanimous on the value of education, and nearly all very much wanted their children to get a good level of education. They wanted them to stay in school as long as possible, and in many cases to go to college, so that they would have a good qualification which would help them get a job. Many felt that without a good level of education, their children would not be able to compete for good jobs.

I'd like them to go to college. I hate to see them leave school, 'cos there's nothing out there for them. Like it's now for us the way it's going, it'll probably be ten times worse for them in the future. (Will, separated man with 3 children)

Only one interviewee voiced concerns about the quality of education which her children were getting, but a number voiced concerns about the cost of further and higher education.

Sadly, several interviewees said they wanted their children to have a high level of education so that they would not end up like them.

I want them to finish college, they would finish education, then find a good job, don't become desperate like I am. (Casper, refugee, spent nine years in the asylum system and didn't complete his education, married with two children)

A small number said they would only want their children to study something that they enjoyed, and how important it is to work in something you like doing.

### ***Attractions of Working Over School***

Although interviewees wanted their children to stay in school and finish the Leaving Certificate, a number noted that their children (usually boys) were more attracted by working and having a wage than staying in school. As Barbara, whose 16 year old son had the prospect of a summer job, said:

It's money in his pocket then—then it's off from my back...But then I'm afraid if he gets a taste, that he won't go back [to school]—it's a catch twenty two. (Barbara, separated mother of 6 on CE)

A number of interviewees also spoke about how they themselves had preferred to work than stay in school.

Yea I finished the inter cert and I got a full time job. So I didn't bother doing the leaving...sixteen years of age, going around with me own money in me pocket. All the friends going mad, they were in still asking mammy and daddy. I was going to discos! (Will, separated unemployed builder's labourer)

One Traveller parent noted that young Travellers had been paid to attend courses in specialised training centres but this was no longer the case and so reduced their motivation to attend. On the other hand, another Traveller felt that these specialised centres were no longer needed as Travellers could attend mainstream schools as equals.

Three interviewees talked about sons or brothers who had dropped out of school or college but later went back to education, at night or full-time, showing the importance of alternative means of accessing education.

He took the early redundancy, right, and put himself back in education ... He's doing a logistics [course], right, and he found that like they were telling him that he'd need some form of an educational thing. He never thought down the road that he'd have to, you know, have a degree in something. So that's what he's doing at night school. (Frances, unemployed and separated, speaking of her brother)

### ***Migrants and Education***

Two of those with degrees were migrants who had completed their degrees in their country of origin. All migrants felt that degrees from their country of origin were not accepted. One interviewee described it in this way:

Some [foreigners] have their certificate already in their country. They're professionals and even if you are a dentist, or...teacher, or...engineer, they still have to tear [up] their certificate when you come in here, and start again, 'cos there's no recognition of those certificates. Especially from the third world countries. So that is one barrier for somebody that is well-to-do and is leaving and suddenly find himself, or herself, in Ireland. His certificate is tissue paper. (Tammy, unemployed Nigerian woman who is studying and actively volunteering, with unemployed husband and three daughters under 17)

Another migrant, and the husband of a migrant, had gained degrees while in Ireland. These degrees were in areas with skills shortages, but these migrants had been unable to gain employment in these areas. A number of migrants (and also some other interviewees) thought that having a good level of education was not enough, that you needed contacts and work experience to get a job.

[A degree] is not enough at all. In Ireland you need experience. Some people they don't even have a degree, they got a job easily, more than

you have a degree ... that's what I notice. (Ruth, refugee, on carer's allowance with one sick child, holder of a degree)

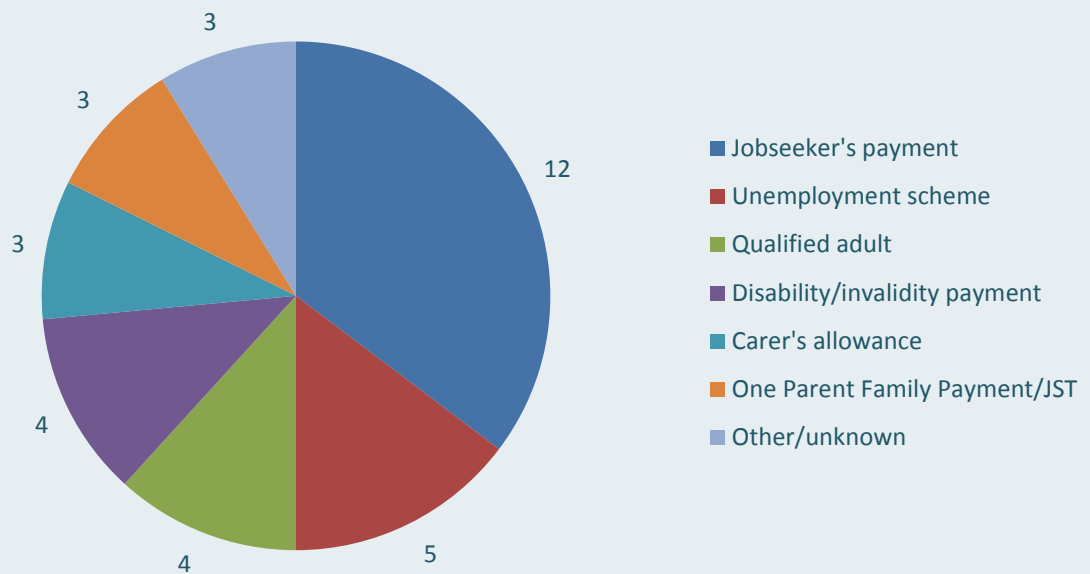
It doesn't matter how much education you have, that's what I think. Because one of my friends, he never go to college, he just got some friends and got connections and he is working. (Casper, a refugee with no qualifications from school)

## 4.4 Use of Services

### 4.4.1 Income Support Services

Interviewees were on a variety of different social welfare payments, as outlined in the Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4: Social welfare payments of interviewees



As expected, almost half of the interviewees are on a Jobseeker's benefit or allowance payment or the qualified adult payment attached to it. Others are in receipt of payments related to employment schemes, lone parenthood, disability and caring. Individuals also report movement between payments depending on changing contingencies and household circumstances, with some examples given



below. For example, Elsa moved back to a jobseekers' payment when her mother went into a nursing home, and Mercy had moved from One Parent Family Payment to a jobseekers' payment.

A number of issues were raised in relation to payments: eligibility issues; the ability to live on the amounts received; having to ask for extra through exceptional needs payments; issues relating to Qualified Adult payments; issues relating to changes in the One Parent Family Payment; whether you can work or not while receiving benefits and the days/hours you are allowed to work; issues relating to self-employment; and the desire to leave welfare. These are presented in more detail in chapters five and seven.

#### 4.4.2 Courses and Employment Schemes

Intreo seems in almost all cases to have offered courses to interviewees on jobseeker's allowance. It also advises those seeking employment to go on courses to expand their skills. The courses undertaken usually provide entry-level qualifications, for example, ECDL certification, Safe Pass, literacy training. A number had attended return-to-work courses, or a Jobs Club. The courses were run by a number of organisations, some public, some private and some voluntary. The courses were usually short, and usually provided certification of some sort. This is usually a low level of qualification—but qualification levels useful for the type of jobs which the interviewees had done or were seeking. Some people had done many courses, while a few had done one or none. The amount of courses an interviewee had done seemed to be related to their time on a welfare payment, with those more likely to not be employed for a long period (lone parents, those on disability, migrants) often doing many courses, as Casper and Frances outlined.

The way I start ... introduction to electronics, second was delivery driver... and first aid... [and] security. (Casper, a refugee who did not get to finish his education due to war)

I've been doing different types of courses here, I started off doing like a cookery course ... then I went into basic computers ... I did parent plus class as well. (Frances, who left the labour market on the birth of her children over 20 years earlier)

#### ***What do Interviewees Think of the Courses?***

Some interviewees find the courses too basic, some too complex. From our small sample, it seemed that younger, more educated interviewees were more likely to find the courses too basic, while older interviewees and Travellers were more likely to find them too complex.

I told them ... I've done computers in school ... I know the basics of computers ... I went to it and the whole class literally was just, for the whole class was logging on to the computer. I didn't go back (Brian, young school leaver with no work experience, on Tús)

They said 'well there is a course you can go on' ...and I had previously explained to her 'so you know I'm not the best at spelling, and I'm not the best at writing, I left school like without any qualifications' and 'not a problem, not a problem', go along to this, to an Open Day for the course ... and the guy sort of giving his presentation, yea, he said 'you have to have sort of' and I'm not quite sure of the Irish qualifications, 'but the Leaving Cert would have to be the best, to be able to cope with the course'...and people did actually stand up and walk out. (Fred, unemployed Traveller)

Not surprisingly, enjoyment of a course seemed more likely to happen when the course was something which the interviewee was interested in learning about.

I'm doing a sports recreation course ... I've played sports all my life like so that's what I know I wanted to do ... I love it down there ... it's great. (Anna, single parent on OPFP, doing a Fetac Level 5 course in sports)

Intreo, they sent me for that [the computer course]. But I wanted to do a computer course... I loved [it]. (Elsa, older unemployed woman on Tús)

### ***Further Issues Relating to Courses***

Further issues which were raised by interviewees in relation to training include difficulties getting on courses, a lack of career guidance, eligibility criteria, funding, literacy/English language proficiency, childcare and transport. The outcomes of courses was an issue which several interviewees discussed. These issues are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

### ***Employment Schemes***

As outlined above, five interviewees are currently on an employment scheme, but altogether almost half the sample has been on one of these schemes, mainly Tús and CE, with one on JI and the husband of an interviewee on JobBridge.

Tús and CE were generally popular schemes. They pay an extra amount per week on top of the jobseeker's payment, provide work experience, and participants generally feel they are making a contribution through their work. They also get paid directly into their bank account rather than having to go to the post office to collect their dole, which they preferred. In addition, a number of participants reported not getting 'hassle' from Intreo when they are on an employment scheme. Job Bridge also offers many of these benefits.

Tús...one of the best things I ever done ... I was delighted when this came up. Just to get [the LES] off me back ... I'd go down to them once a week and they'd say—are you genuinely seeking work? And I'd to prove to them that, you know, I sent a CV here, didn't hear anything back ... I'll be finishing in two or three weeks, so I'll be back signing on, back down there, back to the post office collecting money. See [Tús] is

great; you get paid through the bank ... [And] you get an extra twenty a week doing this as well. (Will, separated man on Tús)

However, others felt that CE does not lead anywhere, but is just a conveyor belt of people going on and off the scheme, where in some cases you even have to train in your replacement.

[There was] ten or twelve of us [on CE in this centre]. And then we were all going one by one when our time finish. And then they would bring in another set. And then they would go. There's no continuity. And it doesn't prepare you for a job, it's just the system. Like a battery egg, just go, off you go, next...It's just something to tick the box. (Tammy, unemployed woman who was on CE)

This was similar to views on JobBridge. One respondent's partner had been on JobBridge but found it disillusioning and thought that it exploited people. She felt that people are taken on by companies with little or no intention of giving them a job at the end of the JobBridge term.

He [Hannah's husband] got an internship the following year, which was a joke like because you got an extra €50, and the bus fare alone was that, and then you'd lunches and, you know it was just—it was the worst thing ever like....then the internship was up and there was 4 of them in the job and [they told] the 4 of them—ok grand, you did your internship, see you—and they took on 4 more...it's just pure and utter like using people...exploiting people. (Hannah)

#### 4.4.3 Other Supportive Services

##### *Medical Card*

All of those interviewed are dependent on a social welfare income and so are likely to all have a medical card. Fourteen interviewees did not mention its importance, possibly as they and their families are in good health. Five other interviewees, all of whom have ill health either themselves or in the family, but who are far from the labour market, did not mention it either, presumably as its loss is not an issue which they are weighing up. However, seven interviewees who are actively seeking work and who have an illness, or an illness in the family, are concerned about the possibility of losing it if they take up employment (although most would be able to keep it for three years, and depending on their overall financial circumstances, may be able to keep it for longer). Three others are aware that they might lose it but do not mind, either because all the family are healthy, or because they are more aware of the eligibility requirements (which are quite broad) and think that they will still qualify for a medical card when working. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 7.

### *Intensity of Service Use*

There were variations in the intensity of services used. Eight families were heavy users of services. These are defined as families availing of both housing and medical services, and sometimes special education services. Often there is a person with a disability or chronic illness in the household, and typically the household has other vulnerabilities. For example, there were Traveller families among the intensive service users, availing of educational supports and medical supports for children with disabilities, as well as housing and unemployment supports. As the adults in these families have poor literacy, they also often used services to help them deal with this, with the Citizen's Information Centres and Traveller-specific centres helpful for this. Lone parents also figure among the intensive service-user families, due to their low income meaning housing support is required, and there is a need for care services for younger children when the parent is training.

Nine families are 'medium' users of services—tending to avail of either housing or medical services. Finally, nine other interviewees are 'light' service users, typically only availing of training and Intreo services. Many of these light service users are single or separated males living with other family members. These family members may be living in Council housing but it is not known. Also, the ex-partners and children of the separated men may be living in Council housing and/or availing of medical care, but this is also not known. Intensity of service use seems to depend on the stage in the life cycle, family size, health and 'assets' [in the widest sense]. Those with children, poor health in the family, and few 'assets' use most services. Single and separated men use (or get) least.

Other popular services which interviewees reported using include the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) (five households, four of which are in mortgage arrears); the local community centre (five households), Citizen's Information Centres (four households); Men's Sheds (four); and the St Vincent de Paul. The latter was used by four households, although there seems to be a hesitation to use their services extensively, with people saying they are for the worst off, as Hannah explained.

I know there's people that have gone to Vincent de Paul and they would get vouchers...but like I just never gone down that road ...I think they're abused a lot....I do always say—ah there's always somebody worse off than me. (Hannah)

Three people reported using the local library, one had used Threshold, and one had used the local Centre for the Unemployed. One person noted that he was not aware of all the facilities available until he became unemployed.

Views of services were very mixed. Some interviewees were very happy with the services they received, and some commented on how they had improved over time, and some were not happy at all with the services.

A number of people reported long waits for services. For example, one family in mortgage arrears reported that they had to wait a while to get support from MABS.

Many people reported waiting lists for housing, and single/separated men did not expect to get housing at all, which Will evocatively outlined.

Can't even get a place off the Corporation. I applied and then you're put on the waiting list. Ah jaysus, I'd say I'm probably about four hundred thousand...on the list and I'm on it about six years ... I'd knew I'd never get a house, single fella you know. They don't have any single ... I'll be living with me ma for the rest of me life. (Will, separated man living with his parents and brothers)

Some expressed concerns about the quality of services their children received (housing and education). Ethnic minority households would like to see more supports specifically for them (e.g. an integration programme, literacy courses, etc), but they also welcomed and appreciated the services that are available to them.

#### 4.4.4 Volunteering and Service Provision

A number of interviewees provide services themselves. Five are on an employment programme in a community centre or organisation; and two others were previously on such a programme. The husbands of two interviewees have also provided community services through JobBridge or another mechanism.

When it comes to volunteering, even more people are involved, with 12 interviewees currently volunteering, two more planning volunteer work (as sports coaches), and four volunteering in the past. One person who had been addicted to drugs when younger did a lot of volunteer work in centres to support people with addiction issues, and in schools. Some of those who are currently volunteering could be called 'super volunteers' as they do so much volunteering. Two do a significant amount of sports coaching as volunteers, two more are doing community work in a centre, and another is on the board of two community organisations while also helping to provide some services in a community centre. An issue to bear in mind is that some of those we spoke to were 'sourced' through a community centre and so we may have interviewed more community-spirited individuals than average. However, when compared to CSO figures on the proportion of the population who volunteer, the proportion of the interviewees who volunteer (35 per cent) is not much higher than that recorded in a module on volunteering in the Q3 2013 Quarterly National Household Survey. That survey showed that on average 28 per cent of the population volunteered, with between 30 and 38 per cent of those aged 35-55 volunteering (the age of most of the household interviewees) (CSO, 2015b). Daly and Kelly (2015) also found that many members of the low income families which they studied volunteered.

Altogether three interviewees had been or were still on the board of a community organisation. An issue which arises is why this extensive volunteer experience has not led to employment. Four of the interviewees with significant volunteer experience were lone parents, so their caring responsibilities and the conditions of their payment (OPFP) may have led them to decide not to take up employment at that time. Irene, one of those who had been on OPFP, also thought that her lack of

education held her back from employment as an outreach or community worker. She had left school before the Junior Certificate and was very nervous of returning to education, feeling that it would be intimidating and frightening. She had not enjoyed school when she was there. She also had a history of addiction when younger. The impacts of that were not outlined in the interview, but are likely to lead to a poor or patchy work history, which is unlikely to be attractive to employers.

## 4.5 Kinship Networks

Kinship networks are an important element in people's lives—only four respondents did not mention kinship networks. As might be expected, family networks are the greatest support for households who are not working, though some also get support from friends. Many of the low work intensity households had other family members living outside the household who were working—these were important networks on whom the families relied, though in many cases these family members had their own issues to deal with. There were a few families lacking family networks and support, and as might be expected this was especially evident for migrant families. On the other side of the coin, many of the respondents provided support for other family members and friends.

### 4.5.1 Family Support

People receive all kinds of support from their families—in relation to potential jobs, employment schemes and courses; children and young people; and financially.

I remember our laptop broke then and he [husband] really needed it for college, it was actually when he was in college and I was like we can't afford €300 for a laptop but his mam got him one. Thank God for our parents. ... My family have been great like you know, my sister bought [my daughter's communion] dress like, she's her godmother; and my mam bought my other daughter's [communion] dress.  
(Hannah)

Family support is also important with regard to childcare.

Me ma was very good, like she'd take [my son] on weekends and all for me. (Irene, previously a lone parent)

[My son's] dad lives down in [name of area] and ... he [and his dad] are really helpful like if I need him collected or anything like that, they are great like. (Anna, lone parent)

As well as help with young children, family members have also helped out with teenagers and young people in their twenties who have become disruptive in the family home, some of whom are using drugs. Barbara outlined the support she gained from family for her son when he dropped out of school at 16:

Your choice, I said it—either to go over to me sister’s in England, I said, or go over to your aunty, I said, in Spain. So I got, I paid for his flight, sent him over to Spain, over to his aunty. He was there for a year. He was working, she is manager of a family pub, through her partner. And he was working in there doing lounge staff and they were training him in behind the bar. (Barbara, in relation to one of her sons who had dropped out of school)

When people have split up from their partners their family of origin has provided an important support, with a number of men, in particular, living with their parents and siblings.

#### 4.5.2 Support from Friends

Some people said that they received support from friends in relation to telling them about potential jobs and courses, or with regard to looking after children, or in some cases providing finance.

I found out about it, my friend's boyfriend actually works in [name of leisure centre] and he heard that there was a course running there like and he just told me about it and I applied for it through FÁS and got it. (Anna)

I had to get my friend to come down, I'd dress the kids and she came fair play to her, she used to come down every morning and collect the kids, because I wouldn't let them miss school. And bring them to school and collect them and bring them back down to me then...because I wasn't allowed drive. (Diana, speaking of a friend's support after she had an operation)

#### 4.5.3 Providing Support

A number of respondents provide support to other family members, giving care to elderly grandparents, parents, disabled siblings and grandchildren.

But then my mother is, be ninety one this year...So I do a lot with her...Well my sister lives with her but she has a disability...And she's out in the Rehab all day...So I go down to her and do her hair, do the gardens, the house or whatever and bring her out if she wants to go out anywhere...you know she is still walking around but she has vertigo so it's she gets a bit unsteady, so long as she is linking you know she's fine. ... I have the grandkids then on a Saturday and they all come over, and as I said I am down most days with my mother ... So it does take up a good bit of my time. (Queenie, unemployed mother and grandmother)

One respondent talked about helping out a friend by collecting her children from school.

#### 4.5.4 Lack of Networks

Some people have very few networks, especially those whose families of origin are in other countries, as one refugee outlined.

The agents, they took some groups and [say]— you go in the US, you go in Holland, you go in the UK, you go in America ... Families go in different ways... so it's very hard, you know, to separate family. (Casper)

One respondent wondered how people are supposed to manage childcare when they have no family around (assuming that family should mind them if they are close by).

A friend of mine, she's on her own, she's no support from him, she hasn't got family around her, she's on her own, so how do you cope with that? ... Then the kids are off for three weeks, it's a nightmare, it's a nightmare for them, do you know if they don't have their parents. Not everyone has their parents on their doorstep like. (Hannah)

## 4.6 Resilience and Ambitions

### 4.6.1 Resilience

A number of respondents displayed remarkable resilience in difficult circumstances. As well as being unemployed, several respondents and their families have experienced some of the following difficulties in their lives—poor education, literacy difficulties, illness, disability, war, death, demanding caring responsibilities, financial problems and overwhelming bureaucracy—yet have gone back to education, are re-training and/or are remaining positive and engaged with services.

The only good thing that came out of [being unemployed] was to me, you learned to actually appreciate what you do have... my dad was unemployed for years so in one way I think that helped me... so I kind of learned to try and live on what we did have. ... We see it that it's not always going to be like this. ... It is tough, I'm not sugar coating it...But you have to think positive...I tell you, you'd get into a very dark place if you don't. (Hannah, both her and her husband were made redundant and both are unemployed. They have 3 children under 12, and mortgage debt)

### 4.6.2 Ambitions

Interviewees' desire to work was evident when asked where they would like to be in five years' time. Nearly all wanted to be working in five years' time, with nine wanting to be in 'a job', while 10 others wanted to be in a specific job. A small number (five) would like to see themselves more educated in five years' time—



these were either older people (late 50s, 60s) or young people (20s). Four also said they wanted to be financially secure in five years, and three said that they wanted to own their own home then. Two wanted to be caring for older or younger relatives, and three wanted to be volunteering or working in politics. Four (nearly all of whom were older, or had ill health) wanted to still be active in five years. Finally, four people had no particular ambitions. Some had been through traumatic experiences, and one suffered from depression.

Chapter 5  
Engagement with Employment  
Support Services

## 5.1 Introduction

All households interact with Intreo through the payment they receive. As presented in the previous chapter, people in jobless households who engage with Intreo are in receipt of a range of payments, ranging from jobseeker's payments, one parent family payment, disability payments or carer's payments. The one group who do not necessarily engage directly with Intreo are 'qualified adults' (the partners of those on jobseeker payments), as the direct interaction is through the main claimant. The individuals who engage with Intreo have a range of experiences depending on their circumstances but also how they are received by the Intreo service and staff. Intreo staff and surrounding support services also have views on the purpose and nature of this engagement, as do employers. Service managers, policymakers and other stakeholders with an interest in labour market activation hold views on how the service should be delivered and how effective it is currently.

This chapter presents findings, from a range of perspectives, on the nature of engagement with income and employment services, particularly with Intreo, but also with the Local Employment Service and the relatively recent private provider JobPath. Issues discussed include the range of rules applied in relation to eligibility for supports, decision-making in making the transition from welfare to work, the particular case of qualified adults, along with the use of sanctions and the importance of trust.

## 5.2 Engagement with Employment Support Services

This section deals with engagement with the main income and support services, specifically Intreo, the Local Employment Service and JobPath.

### 5.2.1 The establishment of Intreo

As outlined in Chapter 3, Intreo was established in 2012 with the merger of the social welfare offices, the FÁS employment services and the community welfare officers. While the Intreo offices were well established at the time of the survey, 2016/17, some people—welfare recipients, service providers and employers—still referred to them as the welfare offices or 'the labour', the dole office, FÁS, the 'relieving officer'. For example, one household who became unemployed through redundancy was unsure of what Intreo was:

I remember we got a letter and we were like—where is Intreo? you know and then we copped it was the actual social welfare. (Hannah, and her husband were made redundant and both are unemployed. They have 3 children under 12)

However, the extent of the changes which had taken place were acknowledged, with one interviewee outlining the change from a passive income support approach to a more proactive activation process:

When you compare it to when I worked with FÁS and, you know, we were working with, obviously with the clients that would have been referred in to us, you know, for job seeking or whatever - but the fact that it didn't really have an implication against their payment as to whether they engaged or didn't, that was the big problem that, you know, we would have incurred in FÁS at the time. And now that there is an actual, there could be an implication against their payment, you know, it's, it's - you'll find that, you know, some of the clients are more willing to engage. (Darina, senior case officer in an income and employment support service)

Others noted the extent of the change which had taken place, with an overall view that the service had been improved and was generally working well:

It's been a journey for everybody, you know, like I mean there's been a significant amount of change occurred within DSP as a body corporate. ...from 2011 on, like we're really only five or six years now at this point, you know ... when you think of, you know, the introduction of the community welfare service, the introduction of the employment services. (Daithi, manager in an income and employment support service)

There were some concerns about the extent to which the culture of Intreo has changed from one of control to one of activation, although it was argued that there is now a presumption of honesty. It was, however, considered by some to still be patriarchal in nature:

I mean a starting point I suppose would be just the patriarchal nature of the state in terms of the backdrop of it being a male breadwinner, welfare and tax regime and a traditional construct of the, you know, of the female as the carer and the male as the worker and that that's, you know, quite embedded in a lot of our culture and institutions. (Fidelma, labour market and activation expert)

The organisational change required and implemented was recognised as a major achievement but not without its difficulties, with some acknowledgement that there may be variability in the quality of service people received depending on the office attended and the case officer they engaged with.

You know the merger of organisations was not easy. People had to change culture, change jobs, change approaches, get used to new IT systems, it was a huge challenge you know. (Jarlath, senior official in a Government department)

The next subsections deal in more detail with the nature and quality of engagements with employment support services.

### 5.2.2 Engagement with Intreo

The nature of interaction with Intreo depends on a person's welfare payment status, i.e. if they are unemployed and job seeking there is regular interaction, but less or none at all if the person is a lone parent, a qualified adult, has a disability or a caring responsibility or is on an employment scheme. The engagement process is outlined in Chapter 3, Figure 3.1., but as might be expected there is a range of experiences in people's interaction with the Intreo office and their personnel, as highlighted by the following quotes:

Yea, they (Intreo) said they would get in touch with me. And I haven't heard from them anything...since I went back to unemployment benefit. (Tammy, a Nigerian woman who is unemployed)

They [Intreo] do bring him in. My husband has everywhere searched for jobs for his skills and they do tell him they'll give him a note to tell them that he is not up to the jobs. They do bring him [in], he brings all the notes in and things there,...and they just told us to keep trying. (Catherine, a settled Traveller whose husband is on Jobseekers Allowance)

There are a range of views on the usefulness of engagement with Intreo, some finding it very helpful with others finding it not useful at all.

Once every blue moon I go in. ... [Intreo's] improved...you've everything in the one place now. ... It's more one-to-one now. (Xavier, Irish married unemployed plumber).

Any time like I had to go down I thought they were very helpful down there. ... I didn't have a bad experience the way some people do. But then I don't go in with the attitude that some people do. (Barbara, Irish lone parent)

Qualified adults, i.e. the spouses and partners of persons claiming a social welfare payment, who are mainly women, are not required to engage with Intreo, which some qualified adults found disconcerting.

They haven't come near me... I think the way it works is like when you're a married couple, it's the husband [that is called in to Intreo] and the wife is at home to look after the kids and I think that's the way

the system is working. (Hannah and her husband were both made redundant and both are unemployed)

Being classified as a qualified adult or 'adult dependent' has led to feelings of degradation and not being treated as someone in their own right. Many people who had been holding down full time jobs, with their own bank accounts, etc., were shocked when they lost their job and went to Intreo and were treated as a 'dependent' of their husband/partner.

You kind of get that feeling as well when you do go to like you know the labour, like...the wife doesn't exist ... he gets paid for you, you don't get your own payment...there are times when I felt like a second class citizen because you feel like no payment, no nothing, no, yeah the control is just gone, it's like you're a spouse, that's all you are. ... I went down [to the CWO] for beds, the girls needed new beds, we'd no money...and he said to me it's not your claim, it's your husband's...I really felt like—oh my god, like how can you, how can you treat people like that because you're a spouse, you're a wife? ... It was a shock to me because I went from like earning, with my own money, my name, my cheque, my payslip to you know, ... The thing that really affected me was depending on him always. (Hannah)

The manager of a job seeking support service explains how the service deals with qualified adults:

[Qualified adults] wouldn't be sent to us, they'd come in themselves...like walk in, they wouldn't be sent through the DSP....It's only the claimants that's focused on. ... But as well as that the services that have been set up to deal with the unemployed don't have the facility to be able to cater for those individuals who come through the door because they're not counted as a statistic, so they don't get the supports...They're not unemployed, their husband is unemployed. (Gail, case officer with a job-seeking support service)

Some other service providers took a dim view of this situation.

We would have people here who are not in the labour force ... you know, homemakers ... I hate that term, it's like housewife, you didn't marry a house ... you would have people [who] get a label based on you know their partner or whatever, so irritating. (Bertie, manager of a training centre)

Organisations talked about their own interaction with Intreo. Some organisations find it difficult to make contact with Intreo staff, although they did note variations depending on which section of Intreo they were contacting.

You can't get through to them on the phone! That's one of the major difficulties, is, there is no phone service available in Intreo anymore.

You could be on the phone waiting for somebody to answer for hours on end. (Anita, manager of a community centre)

Intreo staff reported that they were required to prioritise clients in the office rather than phone calls, which corroborates the views of those who had difficulty contacting them by phone, as outlined by Esther, a case officer:

[Interviewer: Okay so some people have said that they found it difficult to contact the office by telephone. Is there a policy on that?] ... It would be difficult to get through definitely, the priority is the customer in front of you more so than the phone ... [I'd] rather deal with them over the phone [but] you have to prioritise, ... if you've told someone at a hatch that they are going to have their payment in three days' time and if you don't award it today—that's going to be your priority over taking a phone call, every time.

Four of the employers interviewed have had contact with Intreo with a range of experiences, but mainly negative. They found Intreo to be slow to respond to queries, to ask for too much paperwork and to fail to identify what they felt were suitable potential employees for them, as reflected in these comments:

I've lots of problems with the system as it stands and with the pace at which it operates. I think it's way too slow. (Isabel, Employer, Care Agency)

The will would appear to be there, but they just couldn't enter the pace of what our business is. ... We've kind of given up the ghost with Intreo because ... they just don't deliver. (Karen, Employer, Catering Company)

Decision makers and national stakeholders also had a range of views on the Intreo service, with a number making suggestions as to how it might be improved. Many of these suggestions relate to greater tailoring within the service to meet the range of service users' needs. For example, one stakeholder thought more attention needs to be paid to caring commitments:

I've always felt that one of the problems with our activation strategy is that we assume that the optimal outcome is full time work....And I think it's one of the biggest gendered obstacles to making activation work—it's perfectly reasonable in my opinion if you're a full time carer not to aspire to full time work, I personally don't know how people do it....So I do think that we need to get our heads around that when we're looking at low work intensity households, that actually they have the right to optimize their care and work balance in whatever way they think they can make it work. (Fidelma, labour market and activation expert)

The case was made that there is one model of intervention but tailored supports may be provided within that depending on the person's needs:

There is one model of intervention, you know, now what happens within that, within that intervention on a one to one basis... varies. (Daithi, manager in an income and employment support service)

Sansa, however, thought there was a need for further targeted programmes.

I think targeted programmes are important so that people have a sense that something real is on offer and that they can participate and engage. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

Targeted schemes were acknowledged as needed by government decision makers.

I think that is a big issue ... there is a fair point ... in relation to what degree should the service be, clients be segmented, and the service be differentiated ... Certainly, as a department we need to offer a standard service for all, which says—this is something that everybody can reasonably expect. And then recognise that different people have different needs. (Jason, senior official in a Government department)

But it is recognised that there are challenges in how to define people for additional tailored supports and how they should be delivered:

Then what should be that intervention, what should be the nature of the service, and who is best placed to provide that? Is it DSP, is it referral out? And they're complex—there's agreement around the fundamentals but there are difficulties, practical issues and difficulties, when you try to implement those solutions. (Jarlath, senior official in a government department)

This issue is discussed in more depth in Chapter 9.

### 5.2.3 Engagement with the Local Employment Service (LES)

As with Intreo, there are a range of different experiences in people's interactions with the Local Employment Service (LES). As stated in Chapter 3 the LES was set up at local level in the 1990s to help address the unemployment crisis, and the service is now operated under contract by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, mainly by local development companies, formerly referred to as the partnership companies.

As with Intreo, there was a range of experiences in people's engagement with the LES.

They [LES] were brilliant, absolutely, because they got you back into employment. (Alan, who is on an employment support scheme)

I went to [the LES] ... I explained to them my situation, they told me 'afraid not, you can't get that kind of work, fifteen hours, no'. (Ruth, a Rwandan refugee who is a lone parent and on a carer's allowance)



In general, people felt that the Local Employment Service is now stricter about activation and job search than they had been previously. In Chapter 4, for example, Will outlined how the LES had been 'hassling' him to look for work, and that he had to report to them on his efforts every week.

Some people felt they were being sent on irrelevant courses by the LES.

I have used the services in [the LES] in the past, and they've been quite successful in terms of getting me on various courses. At the time I didn't realise—they'd mention a course that was coming up and you'd think 'ah yea that sounds great' you know—they sell it to you quite well, put it that way! But really nine times out of ten, from my experience, none of them ever went anywhere for me. (Krystal, lone parent now on JST)

A number of interviewees reported being sent a lot of letters from the Local Employment Service. Some respondents were not impressed by the LES, stating that they thought that they were not really interested in helping people to find a job, and didn't follow through on meeting people's needs.

Last year I came in here looking for a Safe Pass, I had work ... you know a guy said to me—look, sure get a Safe Pass and I'll get you a couple of months work on a site...but these guys were to get me a Safe Pass, nothing...that was her job, that's her job to do that, and she didn't do it...the [LES] thing is just totally unsuccessful....there's an element of not caring so to speak, you know. (Danny, an unemployed man who had worked until 2.5 years ago)

In terms of links to employment most of the employers had not heard of the Local Employment Service, though Walter in the security and cleaning company lauded the role of the local partnerships in the 1990s because they connected with employers, but he feels this is no longer the case.

Intreo say that they connect their more marginalised groups and long term unemployed with the Local Employment Service and have a contract with them for this purpose, and others agree that the LES is the appropriate service for vulnerable jobseekers, as Darina, a senior case officer in an income and employment support service, explained:

If I recall this correctly, the LES would have within their contract, you know, a requirement to engage with certain, marginalised groupings ... people who will need more intensive supports; ... We try to send the long term unemployed, ... to the LES...because they will need more support.

Some decision makers, however, wonder how effective the LES is at this, and report inadequate hard data on their outcomes, which seem to be mixed. Some argued that the changes made to it during the recession have diluted its core work.

In relation to the LES ... certainly in some areas we need to be evidentially based and need to see ... if the service is designed to facilitate progression of people, how well or otherwise is it doing? ... my own kind of previous experience was that it was a mixed bag ... some of them are really good in terms of progression, some of them not so good. (Jarleth, senior official in a government department)

The LES does have the benefit of being trusted by local communities.

But certainly what they do seem to have going for them is that people do trust them, no more than with the Citizen's Information [Centres]. (Jason, senior official in a government department)

Plus, the LES has the potential to work with people who are quite distant from the labour market, albeit with some updating of their methodologies.

I think there probably are strong capabilities in the LES still, in terms of a really strong ethos and value set around what you need to do to bring people who are quite far distant, into job readiness and then into employment. I think possibly some of the methodologies that they use might be dated. ... I would think that it would require some re-orientation of the way the LES works...just even in terms of the nature of the labour market that their model was set up to service, if you like. ...It itself has changed an awful lot in the twenty years since the LES [was set up] and it's not clear their model has massively adapted...like even the degree to which a lot of jobs now might be advertised online and that you're engaging with online exchange mechanisms for work. (Fidelma, labour market and activation expert)

#### 5.2.4 Engagement with JobPath

As outlined in Chapter 3, JobPath is an employment support service introduced in 2015 when the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection contracted two private operators to provide the service. The objective is to get long-term unemployed people into sustainable jobs, and the companies are paid on the basis of results.

Two of the household respondents had experience of JobPath, with neither reporting that this was positive.

They're like tormenting the heart and soul out of him [Irene's partner]...He got the letter last night [that] he has to be there today at two o'clock or something, but he had arrangements made today to go into town to try and find work... Like you don't give someone one day's notice that you have to be in a place at a certain time. ... They told him like that they'll try and help him find work...He's been at 4 or 5 meetings, they showed him to do a CV, they showed him how to do a cover letter—he knows all these things, so he doesn't feel as if he needs to be there. (Irene, she and her partner are unemployed)

Linda, in particular, had very strong views about her engagement with JobPath. She felt threatened by them, and thought that her benefit would be cut if she did not attend the sessions.

So then in January then I got a letter from the Department of Social Protection that was on the letter and then underneath was this company JobPath ... so it's the new Job Pack (JobPath) thing ...yes, because I was like what is long term unemployed, I am googling what is long term unemployed because I feel I am not unemployed that long you know. ... So the letter said you know you must attend otherwise your payment, you know, so there is a little threat at the end (Linda, unemployed and sent to JobPath)

She said she felt like a product being sold to potential employers.

I am landed in this JobPath thing ... I feel me rights as a person is kind of being taken away, I don't want to be there, I feel that they are not doing anything new for me. ... I feel a bit like their product and they are trying to sell me, that's the best way I can put it. ... So they basically look for a job for you, so they want to give my CV to employers, you know ... and sell me as a product, that is how I feel about it. (Linda)

She felt that people were expected to have to take any job, anywhere, regardless of their particular circumstances, but her perspective does raise the issue of how much flexibility jobseekers should have in taking up job offers.

And I was only about a week into it and they were ringing me saying oh we have this fantastic job you know really would suit you. It's out the [other] side [of the city]. And I am going—no way am I travelling to the [other] side [of the city] but you would kind of go into a bit of a panic, I can't explain it. Because you kind of feel—if I don't do this they might stop my money, you know. (Linda)

A case officer in a JobPath employment support service acknowledged that its service may not be the best place for everyone who is referred to it, especially as people are selected and sent on a random basis.

If I could change a thing, I'd probably change the autonomy towards the client. Because you get to know the client [and] you realise maybe JobPath isn't what they should be on. I'd change some of the rules, that maybe I could put this lady on a CE scheme—not that I think oh CE schemes are the best thing—but sometimes they're the best thing for that person. So that's what I would change. (Alice, manager of a job-seeking support service)

Only a few (four) of the employers knew about JobPath (these were in the care, catering, freight, security and cleaning sectors). Their views on JobPath were not very positive, both in relation to the actual providers and in relation to private

providers in general. The catering company is 'trailing' with a JobPath provider but at the time of interview they had not been able to fill any positions.

So we've been out to their [JobPath] offices...and I spent time with them, they explained to me how the service works. ... I just got an update...no success yet. Not a single person. And we've got three positions. So we don't have to do it, we can put those up on our website and we can fill them. (Karen, catering company)

Niall in the freight company has reservations about a private company delivering this service as he thinks their main concern will be about turnover and the bottom line rather than being motivated to find people suitable work, and he thinks people placed through JobPath will eventually return to the Live Register.

Private companies—I mean they are profit orientated—I don't care, no matter how good your intention ... They will see themselves turning over as many people as they can to get paid, so they get paid per person I think it is, they get a fee ... it's either that or they are going to get cut off the dole ... They are not going to consider whether somebody is suitable for the job, if somebody has needs, maybe a little bit of guidance, a bit of an education, ... without consideration to the individual, and the long term job placement or satisfaction of the individual. And those people are going to end up on the Live Register again at some stage. (Niall Employer, freight company)

As noted in Chapter 3, a performance report on the first year of JobPath's operation shows that its clients were more likely to move into employment than Intreo clients, but the authors note that the results should be treated with caution due to the small numbers involved (DEASP, 2017d). The national decision makers alluded to this study as well as raising a number of other issues on cost, the types of jobs people were getting and the extent to which some people were returning to the live register after a year with a JobPath provider.

The degree to which this was going to be offering value ... My straight answer is 'I don't know'. ... Like there is only so many jobs in the country, they now have every unemployed person basically, you know those jobs are all going to be filled, and they are going to be paid for everybody that fills them, no matter who ... really did the work, they are going to be paid. And I do just wonder about—how, how does that work? (Isaac, national level decision-maker)

There was a view that JobPath could be a 'conveyor belt to poorly paid jobs':

I don't know with JobPath, but my sense is maybe that some of the pay by results models that work in the UK are very linked in to local labour markets, even in a bad way sometimes in that they are conveyor belts to poorly paid jobs, ... They're part of a systemic local labour market model where people are made to take poor low paid jobs and the

whole system becomes a self-sustaining one. I don't know what will emerge in Ireland. (Fidelma, labour market and activation expert)

Some people are now returning to Intreo after a year with JobPath and they still have not got a job.

So our first Job Path returnees started I think December, ... we are starting to meet them now, you know. What we did was we sent a letter out to those ... that we got the information on and we just said look, you're eligible for, you may be eligible for community employment or for the Tús programme, would you be interested in meeting with a case officer, are you interested in education and training requirements. (Daithi, manager in an income and employment support service)

So, essentially there are three models of activation: Intreo, the LES and Jobpath and they all have different approaches and can cater for different groups of unemployed people. However, there is some concern that none of them will deal with some people, e.g. those who want to work part-time or those with health issues:

So between the three models like there is a chance that each of the models is different but that none of them will actually cater for people with very different skill sets. Like the degree to which any of those models are well equipped to cater for people who want to restrict to part-time work by choice, and have fairly significant health obstacles, for example - the degree to which they can manage that. I would sense the LESN is probably the nearest to it culturally. ... But whether or not it is able to do it. (Fidelma, labour market and activation expert)

### 5.3 The Complexity of Rules and Eligibility Criteria

There are numerous rules around eligibility for income and employment supports depending on an individuals' payment and their household circumstances. While these rules have been put in place to deal with various contingencies, as outlined in Chapter 3, they can be bewildering for people in receipt of payments who are trying to transition to employment, and also in some cases confusing for staff in income and employment support offices and other support services. Community centre staff and the Citizen's Information Centres play an important role in providing people with information about their entitlements, though income and employment support staff note that each person's entitlements can vary depending on their own unique circumstances.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> For further information see <http://www.welfare.ie> or [http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social\\_welfare/](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/) or <https://www.inou.ie/workingforwork21/>.

This section discusses some of the issues raised by interviewees in relation to eligibility criteria, with sub-sections dealing with specific issues relating to qualified adults, lone parents, and the implications of ‘breaking the rules’.

### 5.3.1 Eligibility

There is a wide range of issues raised in relation to eligibility. These issues relate to the amounts a person is allowed to earn while they are on benefits, and when; changes to payments for lone parents in relation to earning disregards and the age of children; whether or not a person can access a disability payment; the reluctance of people who are on a disability or carers’ payment to move off it for fear of not being able to re-access it if their circumstances change; a greater focus on activation for some of those on disability and lone parent payments; and the limitations on voluntary work while on a jobseekers’ payment.

A number of front line services highlighted issues relating to eligibility with some organisations reporting that it was difficult for clients to meet Intreo eligibility criteria. Several very poignant examples of this were outlined. For example, one motivated young man who was excelling at youth work was not able to access social welfare supports to either train in this area or get work experience in it, as he did not meet the eligibility criteria. He is now in jail.

I had a young man here who came up from Probation Services, and as part of his Probation Services piece of work he was doing an Education Programme ... and on a Back to Work Education Payment ... he did a twelve week Programme here with the young men as a Junior Youth Leader, a young man from the area, knew all the kids well. If ever there was somebody that shone throughout his twelve weeks, he did, he was absolutely amazing. His whole thinking had changed, you know, and he said ‘I’ve been that person’ you know, and he said ‘and I’m standing here today’ he said ‘and I want to give something back to my community’ you know. And I said ‘right, this is our plan’. I said ‘there is a Youth Work Placement coming up here, we’ll get you on the Tús Programme, I’ll get you a bursary fund, you can do a two year part time programme in the Liberties College in your Youth Skills and get your Degree, whilst you are getting your experience here’. [But] he couldn’t get on the Tús Programme because he was on the Educational Allowance Scheme, so therefore he didn’t qualify!... And where is that young man now? [Interviewer—Probably back inside?] Yea, yea—a shame! A shame! A shame! An absolutely crying shame! And why? Because somebody in an office, somewhere, can decide that this person is not worth the effort. I rang—oh yes, then I rang—then I wrote him a letter to Intreo explaining the circumstances, explaining the opportunities, asking could we appeal. And the person wrote back and said ‘yes you can appeal, but I’m the person who is making the decision, and I’m not going to reverse that decision’. (Anita, manager of a community centre)

Interviewees from community, training and advice services all noted the lack of flexibility in Intreo rules, and how it leads to some individuals falling through the cracks.

One of the children ... a baby ... had a disability that was actually life limiting ... and the father of the family, was being hunted around his Jobseekers ... yet he was refused Carer's Allowance for his child, because the Carer's Allowance is designed to [assess] 'Does the person walk normally?' 'Does the person sit normally?' 'Does the person eat normally?' You are talking about a three-month old baby! (Anita, manager of a community centre)

### 5.3.2 Qualified Adults

There were a number of issues related to the payment for qualified adults. For example, the issue arose of whether or not someone could get a split payment, which is paid directly to them rather than to their partner for a 'dependent'.

When he moved in with me, the welfare put us a cohabiting couple, so my money is in with his money now... When I went to get me own payment back they say—'oh you're better off getting the payment with him'. But I wanted me own money, paid in me name like. But they won't do it because we're a cohabiting couple. They won't split it, they won't. We went down and asked them to split it and they won't... they were saying—well, you're actually on more. (Irene, and her partner, are unemployed)

Qualified adults are not entitled to certain things in their own right e.g. applying for exceptional needs payments, being contacted by Intreo for 'activation' or being eligible for all courses. Many found being dependent on someone else's circumstances demeaning and outdated in the 21st century.

I just can't understand why when two people get together why the man should have ... the main, you know, money because it would have been hard for me because you know he would have control over the card, over the money...you know where I think somehow it should be changed because I think most women pay the bills ... I just can't understand it you know ...why a woman when she lives with a man has to give up everything, you would think that was years ago. (Queenie, unemployed woman living with, but separated from, an alcoholic husband)

Although qualified adults can ask for some of their partner's payment to be paid to them (which is subject to the partner's agreement), this arrangement does not give the QA an entitlement to activation, as it is the partner who is considered the claimant. Qualified adults can make their own claim, which allows QAs be entitled to activation supports and training, after a waiting period. However, in this situation the QA must be available for full-time work and activation.

They can easily go onto a separate payment. They get exactly the same amount of money and they can still get it ... If they want to make their own claim they come in, they come to us at fresh claims we give them the appointment and basically if it's a jobseeker's allowance the payment just gets split 50/50 ... [But if] you are setting up the claim on your own so therefore you have everything else that goes with that, you know, you have your entitlement to do the course but you also must be available for work, because you are setting up a claim. ... The main claimer has to be available for work but the spouse or whatever the partner doesn't have to be. (Emily, case officer in a job-seeking support service)

In that case, it is up to the couple to decide who is the main claimant, which can be tricky.

The householders themselves decide who gets the payment...And that can be a massive difficulty, especially if the man has always worked...Huge, absolutely huge. ... who's more likely to get employed? (Gillian, case officer with a job-seeking support service)

The rules around qualified adults claiming, and spousal swops<sup>95</sup>, are complicated, and some couples go to Citizen's Information Centres for advice on the best way to claim.

Intreo do not contact qualified adults at all, so there is not a mechanism to inform qualified adults that payments can be split, or that they are entitled to some supports. Some interviewees were of the view that Intreo does not tell Qualified Adults that they are entitled to a share in their partner's claim, as this reduces the number on the Live Register and the amount of job-seeking supports provided, which cuts costs (in the short-term at least).

They (DEASP) don't like to do it [let QAs know about splitting payments] because again it's two people in one household that needs two supports, so it's about one, saving money, and two, trying to force one individual back out so they come off the live register because once they're in full time employment usually it brings them over the threshold so that the other individual isn't entitled. (Gillian, case officer in a job-seeking support service)

A number of national stakeholders commented on the rules around engagement with qualified adults, and more specifically how the commitment in *Pathways to Work* that activation would be extended to qualified adults (among others) would be dealt with.

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<sup>95</sup> This is when the dependent spouse/civil partner/cohabitant of a main claimant applies in their place for the activation supports.



There's some talk about whether we expand the cohort to non-job seekers. This is a kind of a question in *Pathways to Work* around a lot of these services—so do we move beyond just the live register cohort and people who are subject to, you know, conditionality on their payments and so on, and move to a wider cohort? ... And is that a useful kind of vehicle for those people? ... Some of it's quite complex as well. (Clive, senior official in a government department)

Since this research began, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection published the *Action Plan for Jobless Households*, in September 2017 (DEASP, 2017a). This Action Plan focuses on broadening active engagement to qualified adults who have a capacity to work, by extending the JST mode of activation. It also proposes piloting a family-focused case management approach where there are two or more jobless people in a household. This would involve them attending together, voluntarily, for interview with a case officer, to look jointly at their employment prospects and address any barriers to employment that may be shared. Progress on each of the actions identified in the Action Plan will be monitored and reported on quarterly to the Cabinet Committee on the Economy, Trade and Jobs.

### 5.3.3 Lone Parents

There have been a number of changes to the payments for lone parents recently and this was reflected in the interviewee's responses. The amount they can earn before their OPFP is reduced (earning disregard) has decreased, and also lone parents now have to move to Jobseekers Transition payment, where they must engage in Intreo activation processes, but are not required to seek full-time work, when their youngest child turns 7.

When I started work it was €140 you were allowed to earn, then that went down to a €110 with my one parent and then I think it went to €90. (Linda, was on One Parent Family Payment until her youngest child reached 18)

Many lone parents, and others, feel strongly that there are care issues pertaining to lone parents whose youngest child is 7 which would make it difficult for them to hold down a job, or even attend education or training courses.

Yeah, because they are stopping now aren't they, they are stopping your payment aren't they when your youngest is seven is it ... yeah, you have to be doing something then ...yeah, because he's like, he's in senior infants now and he's only in till half one you know what I mean, and he's just seven now like. Even still like it would be hard to get a job from that time, nine till half one, you know. (Anna, Irish lone parent with 2 young children)

Some people thought that the changes to payments to lone parents were forcing them back to work when their youngest child was 7, but Intreo clarified that this is

not the case—instead those on JST are engaged with, for training, employment schemes, and work experience, and may seek work, while their child is aged 7-13.

[Interviewer: we heard a lot of people saying ... that they are going to have to go back to work now when the younger child is 7]. They don't have to ... there was a time where they possibly did have to but there was an awful lot of changes ... Like the job seeker, you know, they are referred into us but the difference is there's no obligation to look for work at the moment ... but we would try and encourage them to do some training, so as when that child becomes 14 and they lose the JST payment and if they are still unemployed go onto the jobseeker's payment, [and] then they are required to look for work, so at least you know they may be ready. (Esther, job-seeking support service)

Some supports which those on JST get are better than those available to qualified adults, e.g. affordable childcare during training courses. Several interviewees thought that JST is positive, an opportunity for women who want to engage and progress, while acknowledging that it can be a big change for older lone parents.

*Bronagh*: The Job Seeker's Transition is good ... the girls that look for it, some of them are quite excited going back in to work, you know, or retraining, so really it's good to see the positives coming out of it ... [But] you get the other level saying—how can I work, I have a child and it's a fourteen year old child, you know. [Interviewer: Yeah, I suppose it's a shock for them ... after fourteen years.] *Brenda*: Some people are never going to move on, but for the ones that will, it's good to see that someone is thinking outside the box, you know. (Bronagh and Brenda, advisory organisation)

### 5.3.4 Breaking the Rules

Interviewees were not asked directly about breaking any social welfare rules, and while the majority said nothing on this issue, some spoke about the non-payment of PRSI contributions, and over-payments.

#### *PRSI contributions*

Some interviewees had previously been in employment where their employer had not paid full PRSI contributions. They were then unable to access welfare payments and redundancy payments (although some were able to once the issue had been sorted out).

I went down to get my allowance... this one said to me - you've some cheek coming in to look for money. I said, I've no cheek ... I paid my stamps and all that. She said - you paid nothing... The moral of the story was that [employer] had me down as a contractor. (Alan, previously worked in construction)

### ***Over-payments***

Some interviewees had received a social welfare payment to which they were not entitled. In all cases the interviewee said they were not aware that they were receiving this over-payment. Some were repaying the amount owed; one was not and was receiving court letters about it, and one interviewee's husband had ended up in court over this payment and subsequently had become depressed.

He went to...FÁS and [LES]. He talks between the both of them, because they were trying to get him work experience. So he ends up working like a Christmas job...and I think [LES] sends him there. And then FÁS...and [LES] wasn't communicating. And then he was done for fraud. ... You are trying to get work experience, it doesn't really matter, you know. We sent you there, we just trying to work with you know. But ... [LES] didn't tell FÁS, or FÁS didn't get in touch with [LES]. And I think something was filed against him that he was working while he was pulling in benefit, so. And he only work for a few weeks...So, he got a record for that. He was taken to court and everything. He was charged with taking a lot of money ... he was devastated ... he's in bed now sleeping day in, day out ... he's actually cracking up ... I claim for the whole family now. So he's my dependant. Because he just doesn't want to have anything to do with [Intreo]. (Tammy, speaking of her husband)

### **5.3.5 Case Study Examples**

As part of the interviews with the three job seeking support services, case officers in each were asked how they would support four different job seeking clients. The clients displayed an amalgam of issues that had come up in the household interviews, with the answers revealing different approaches, as shown in Box 5.1.

The next section deals in more detail with the extent to which employment support services engage with clients.

## **5.4 Depth of Engagement**

The literature reviewed at the outset of this report suggested that the nature of engagement with those using income and employment support services is fundamental to a person's ability and capacity to progress and to avail of opportunities to gain paid employment. A number of commentators allude to the need to tap into people's motivations and desires to help them overcome any barriers which are preventing them from achieving their potential.

As before, there were a range of views from household respondents on the nature of engagement by service providers, with service providers and others offering their own perspectives.

### Box 5.1: Case study examples of different approaches to supporting job-seekers

The first client is Samuel, an African migrant married with three children. He qualified as a dental assistant in his own country and worked there for several years. Since he moved to Ireland in 2014 he has not been able to get work. He has no contacts at all in the dentistry field in Ireland. He has a good grasp of English but quite a strong accent.

In general, the services would first check if Samuel was legally able to work in Ireland, and secondly, if his qualifications could be recognised here. Service A and Service B also suggested training for him, if he was interested and/or if his qualifications were not recognised. When asked about work experience for him, Service B outlined difficulties in finding work experience for clients. Service C proposed empowering Samuel to contact local dentists to find out what he needed to do to get work in Ireland, as well as work experience for him, and giving support to get his CV into the format usually used in Ireland.

The second client is Joanna, who has 2 children aged 12 and 8, and has been on One Parent Family payment until recently. She is now on a Job Seeker's Transition payment. She worked in retailing before her eldest child was born, but has not been employed since. While on OPFP, she did a number of courses, including ECDL, first aid and positive parenting. However, her qualifications are low as she left school early.

Support service A would offer Joanna training, and CE. They also note that she is eligible for JobsPlus. Support service B again would offer training, and they note the difficulties Joanna is likely to have getting after-school childcare. Support service C consider a wide range of factors, including building Joanna's confidence in employment after so long away from it, looking at the transferable skills which she has and building them into her CV, linking her up with employers who would be interested in her transferable skills, and helping her decide what areas she is interested in working at, and helping her take ownership of this. They are quite sanguine about the possibilities of finding childcare. However, they do note that they may not be referred anyone on JST.

The third client is Eithne. She worked in office administration for several years but was made redundant during the recession, as was her husband Joe, who had worked in construction. They are now both unemployed and looking for jobs. Joe is the main claimant on Jobseeker's Allowance and Eithne is a Qualified Adult. She feels her computer skills are getting out of date and holding her back from getting a job.

Support service C does not get referred any clients in Eithne's position. Meanwhile services A and B note that Eithne would not necessarily get any supports. She can avail of some training but no training allowance is paid for this. If she swops her claim with her husband, she would have to wait 12 months to be eligible for CE—a recent change, as previously she would have been able to swop the claim and immediately be eligible based on the length of his claim. She would also need to come to the services herself to see what supports are available, as she would not be referred to them.

The final hypothetical client is Patrick, who is 35. He was made redundant after working in building for several years and he now wants to retrain as a sports coach. Then he would be interested in getting work experience in sports coaching to help him get a job in the sector.

Both Service A and B think of training courses that Patrick could do to gain qualifications in this area. Service A notes that the end of JobBridge means that it can be harder to get work experience in an area. Service B also outlines the difficulty getting jobs in sport, as so much sports coaching is done voluntarily. To get a secure job in the sector a person could look at getting personal training qualifications, which are very expensive, or getting a degree in sports. This would take several years and be expensive, and committing to this would only be possible in some households. Service C are also aware that it will take some commitment to get work in this sector. They talk about assessing the extent to which a person is genuinely motivated to do this, which they would check by seeing how much work the person currently does in sports, and by setting them tasks to find out about e.g. existing training. Through this the person's motivation to work in the area would be assessed.

Overall, the approach to hypothetical clients shows that services A and B are very likely to recommend training, and CE or work experience, and to provide most of the advice to clients. Service C is more likely to require clients to find advice themselves. This they feel can empower the client who feels disengaged and lacks confidence, and also helps provide the service with information on how motivated the client is to work or train in a particular area. Case officers in service C also speak most about connecting the client to an employer, either directly or through reformatting their CV.

Some respondents suggested that Intreo officers are going through the motions, ticking boxes to say they have dealt with a client, rather than trying to genuinely help people to find suitable work.

They're not really helping people out, they're just ticking a box. ... I mean the whole system in general, in my opinion, they're not really looking at the individual and the individual's needs themselves, you know, they're more concerned about ticking boxes and saying 'well look this is what we're doing'. (Krystal, lone parent on JST)

Others felt that the services are good and that they are doing their job and that people have to take some responsibility to use their own initiative.

They are good ... you have to interact, you know ... you have to open your ears to information and stuff like that ... they probably do their best, but they cannot employ [you]. (Nathaniel, Nigerian, married with 4 children. His wife is working part-time in care and he is training in caring and taxi-driving)

### 5.4.1 Are Case Officers Speed Dating?

Case officers play a critical role in engaging with people seeking income and employment supports. Some people seem to have case officers and others do not.

They say you have someone over you or something? [Interviewer: Yes, a case officer]. I never had that case officer, I never had that. [Interviewer: So you meet a different person each time you go in?] Yeah. (Elsa, an unemployed woman living with her disabled husband on Invalidity Benefit)

For those who have case officers, some have found them helpful and have a positive relationship with their case officer.

I go every week, every Monday sometimes every Tuesday, depending how busy they are; I think more than a year now ... One lady, she help me find a job... she checks on line and she send on my CV. (Casper, an unemployed African refugee who has never worked, and was 9 years in the asylum system)

However, others have reported that their case officers do not seem to understand their circumstances, have failed to contact them or have sent them on inappropriate courses or seeking unsuitable jobs.

But two years ago anyway I went to services, and I had explained I was looking for a job, they set up this thing where they do, I think every second week or something like that, a whole load of people come in and they do a whole little presentation thing to them, and then you're assigned a little worker that works with you and then tries to help you out. So I went to that, was assigned somebody, told them what the situation was, what I was looking to do,...was told 'I'll get a phone call' never received a phone call. Rang them back, they said 'oh such and such will be back in contact with you', again never received a phone call. I had a contact in [LES] ... so I decided to give her a call, and she basically said, 'look because of the way things are now, it's changed completely, you've been assigned to this person, I can't really work with you, I'd advise you just to give another call again'. So I did that. Done that on three separate occasions after the first two initial occasions, and still received no phone call back. So...I just gave up! ... And somebody had said to me basically...'if you're not on Jobseekers they're not interested.' (Krystal, lone parent on JST)

JobPath has regular appointments with people but there seems to be an expectation that people should attend at very short notice.

So you are assigned a one-to-one person ... and the guy was lovely ... your personal something officer ... so you are assigned this person and he sits with you and kind of tries to gauge what skills you may have, what you may need, what they can help you with ... and of course I am sitting there going I know how to do that, I know how to do that, you

are grand...they do like a mini survey with you, you know, well on a scale of one to ten how do you feel you are at meeting people for the first time, I am just using that as an example ...I am like probably a nine, you know, how are you on this, fine, how are you with conflict, you know, that kind of maybe a five you know. So based on that like five second survey you know to gauge your personality. (Linda, a woman in her 50s)

From the front line service providers' perspective, a range of organisations (some training, some community and some jobseeking support) reported that, due to their high case load, Intreo case workers are only able to spend a short amount of time with claimants, and so are providing referrals rather than long-term trajectories for career development. In line with household interviewees, some service providers said that Intreo were seen as 'ticking boxes' rather than doing in-depth future planning, with one service provider referring to the process as 'speed dating'.

It is speed dating you know. You go in [to Intreo] for fifteen minutes... I think it's got more to do with the referrals than a placement process. (Bertie, manager of a training centre)

The manager of one training centre thought that this was a factor leading to claimants being sent on courses they were not interested in. The co-ordinator of another training centre felt that Intreo case officers underestimated the level of supports some clients needed.

We have some people coming [where] English is not their first language, and they are sent to do a course. We find...we have to give so much extra help there ... So a Department will send somebody and think "that's great, I've sent them off to do that course". But that's a whole bigger issue for us because we've got to do extra support ... so it's not just a simple 'tick the box, somebody has gone off to a course.' (Colette, co-ordinator of an education centre)

Some national stakeholders thought that the quality of service was related to the case officer, but there was acknowledgement that the service reflected the merger of a number of organisations with different staff competences.

To say the quality of service varies, is a bit of an understatement ... Anecdotally we hear comments back that, you know, the service I will get on activation almost depends on the case officer. (Jason, senior official in a Government department)

When Intreo was established at the height of the recession, there was not a lot of time to train staff to deal with the large numbers accessing the service at that time.

I mean we were in dire straits. So it was almost a luxury to set up, you know a formal training at that time. (Jason, senior official in a government department)

Over time, however, some divisional officers have provided training, as required.

There would be a focus on, on training...within this division anyway,...we found as the, the Intreo model was rolled out that there was pockets of training, you know, that people required. (Daithi, manager in an income and employment support service)

There is an acknowledgement of the need for further training of case officers to help people with their progression.

The department has partnered with National College of Ireland. ... There's this accreditation programme now, a level 8, and we have 70 case officers have already attended this. Now it's step in the right direction—there's still another 400 to go there. But it's a move in the right direction in upskilling people so that they will have the necessary skills, you know. (Jason)

#### 5.4.2 The Elusive Personal Progression Plans

No-one said they had a personal progression plan (PPP), despite some respondents being asked specifically about this. Yet, the main income and employment support service emphasised that the PPP is the key instrument for how a person is referred to services and for their progression towards paid employment, and steps are being put in place to train case officers to be better able to do this.

*Jason:* So the intention certainly is that a personal progression plan would be agreed between the case officer and the job seeker. And that ... there'll be an agreed pathway to employment. *Jarleth:* That's what the personal progression plan [is]. So clearly something is going wrong if there isn't, if people don't first of all understand the nature of the process that we're engaged in, the case officer and client. (Jason and Jarleth, senior officials in a Government department)

In relation to case officer work, it was acknowledged that it could be difficult to complete a Personal Progression Plan in the time allotted.

*Judy:* The question is, is [it] a realistic expectation for a case officer who is operating at HEO level<sup>96</sup>, within a 45 minute timeframe, to make that assessment? *Jason:* And whether we have the tools available to us in the first instance to be able to identify where is this person at. (Judy and Jason, senior officials in a Government department)

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<sup>96</sup> A HEO is Higher Executive Officer, at low to mid-management level.



### 5.4.3 Importance of a Good CV and Cover Letter

In relation to CVs, Krystal complained that she had to go on a six week course to get one done up, and mentioned the importance of a cover letter.

I was saying 'I need to get a CV done up' and I know like you used to be able to go to different services and they'd bring you in and they'd help you—I suppose they'd ask you whatever, and they'd type up a CV—that was the experience I'd had in the past. But supposedly now you've to do a six week course...to get a friggin CV, you know! ... so that's another stumbling block I suppose that you have to sit and do a six week course just to get a CV! ... But it's the cover letter, ... I wouldn't really have a clue what is even meant to go into a cover letter, or what way to do one up. I'm assuming obviously for each job you're applying for you'd have to do a different cover letter up that would kind of suit that position that you're applying for, but the layout of it or what would go into it I wouldn't have a clue. (Krystal, lone parent on JST)

Employment support services place a lot of emphasis on the preparation of CVs and a tailored cover letter, yet employers' views were mixed in terms of how they recruited staff and the value they placed in CVs. While this issue will be dealt with further in Chapter 6 on employment opportunities, suffice to say here that companies view CVs which are dropped in to them speculatively in different ways—some discourage this and do not generally use them (hotel) while others (security firm) look to see if people have the required qualifications and experience to do the job and, if so, interview them.

We do have people that come in and just randomly hand in their CVs [at] the front desk ... but then you don't know what role they are interested in. [They] are better off when they apply, I think that, specifically for a role. (Denise Employer, Hotel)

Like people will go to our sites and just send in cold CVs. ... And typically if they have the qualifications that we're looking for, anybody who applied today for a job with a security licence we would have in for an interview in a week. That's the reality. (Walter, Employer, Security and Cleaning firm)

Having discussed the depth of engagement jobseekers have with employment support services the next section looks at the extent to which sanctions are applied for lack of engagement.

## 5.5 Sanctions

### 5.5.1 Why are Sanctions Applied?

Sanctions can be imposed where a person does not engage with the activation process. When a person applies for a Jobseekers' payment they are required to sign a Record of Mutual Commitments, which sets out the rights and responsibilities of getting a Jobseekers' payment from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. If the person does not keep to the steps agreed in the Record of Mutual Commitments their payment can be reduced, e.g. if they fail to attend meetings requested by DEASP, or fail to participate in appropriate employment support schemes, work experience or training. All groups of interviewees reported the existence of sanctions, and thought that they are to encourage engagement with the activation process—or at least attendance at activation events.

And why [were sanctions] introduced? [They're] introduced to get people to engage. Ok, that's the whole purpose ... You intend to encourage people. (Jason, senior official in a Government department)

### 5.5.2 How Effective are Sanctions?

Some household interviewees commented that a sanction was leading to a young adult in their household engaging with Intreo. Some service providers who were not generally in favour of sanctions as a method of encouraging engagement also reported that they could have positive impacts.

I wouldn't have always been a great kind of activation fan, and probably still amn't, but when it's done well, it has forced an engagement that otherwise might not have happened. I mean I am still absolutely amazed about Tús. You know, that it was as forced an engagement as you might ever get—but once you got through the first kind of 'what the hell am I doing here?' stuff, it was surprisingly successful. I just thought it was incredible that all my instinct was—this is never gonna work and we're gonna have a permanent kind of, 'can't come in, I'm not feeling great', you know—and the incidence was very low. (Gloria, local service co-ordinator)

One stakeholder reported that sanctions could allow someone to engage with Intreo, when they were under pressure from friends or family not to.

Now I would always be conscious that for some people maybe where maybe in, within their own family or maybe within the wider community, where if you sort of try and engage at all you're seen maybe as—what would you be doing that for, you know—that sometimes yes people need to say—well actually God if I don't do [it] I'll be sanctioned. ... So some people have, you know, on occasion,

said—actually I was glad of the threat, it meant I could justify ... going off to do something. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

Some decision-makers thought that even if sanctions forced someone into a job that they disliked, that this could have positive longer-term benefits.

There is some stats to show people who participate in employment support enter a job, and then enter a different job so ... people might have progressed, or [if] that job doesn't suit them they find it easier to move to another job rather than back to welfare. So I think is it's a stepping stone to something else. (Caitlin, senior official in a Government department)

So, sanctions are often seen as an incentive to engage with the activation process. However, for those subject to sanctions, or the threat of them, they are a pressure, as some interviewees outlined.

I recently got a letter ... from the social protection or [LES] saying that if I didn't show proof that I was looking for work my money would be stopped... I have all the emails of all the jobs I've applied for in the last three years—I have everything there. And I only said it to the case officer that I'm working with in [LES], I says—listen if these guys pressurise me when I'm trying my best and I've been through a hell of a lot you know in my private life, I says, if these guys keep pressurising me and threatening to say that they'll cut the lousy few pound I get, I says, I'll just go on disability and nobody will touch me. (Danny, unemployed man who was working until 2.5 years ago)

One person's sanction can also affect the whole family's income.

He said—I'm not going to it [JobPath]. But ... they can stop his money if he misses three sessions. ... What I'm saying is—you're risking losing our money, I said, we can't afford to be down money. So that's—they're threatening you. (Irene, she and her partner are unemployed)

The threat of sanctions can risk complete disengagement from the activation process, as Danny's statement above shows. Sansa, a national stakeholder, felt that engagement with unemployed people 'all needs to be done with care and caution', and that sanctions can be an indication that claimants were not engaged with well.

### 5.5.3 How are Sanctions Applied?

Service providers and decision-makers both outlined how sanctions are not applied the first time that someone fails to attend an activation meeting, or without investigating the reasons why.

So is a penalty rate always applied? No it isn't...There is the good cause clause, so that if the person can show they didn't attend a meeting and

they had good cause for doing so. (Jason, senior official in a Government department)

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection will apply sanctions when job seekers do not attend activation appointments or courses either with themselves, or with other public employment services, such as the LES, JobPath or training providers. In the study area, the initial approach of the local Intreo office is not to apply sanctions, but instead to change the post office in which a person is paid their social welfare payment, as this means a person comes into the social welfare office to find out where their payment is.

A lot of people don't turn up for the [activation] interviews ... And then if that happens [we] usually change the post office to bring them in and explain to them that they must turn up ... and advise them that they have to engage and that they will receive a further appointment then to come back in. And then they are told where their money is. It's not that they are doing without money—they'll get the money ... but it's just a mechanism to get people to come in. (Intreo group, local service providers)

Only when a person does not attend after having their payment made to a different post office are sanctions applied.

When you get the next [invitation] you have to attend because the knock-on effect of not attending is that, you know, your payment can be reduced. ... The majority of people will then, you know what I mean. And those who are persistent offenders - the next time, for them it is a penalty rate. (Darina, senior case officer in an income and employment support service)

The initial cut in a payment is €44 a week for three weeks. However, once a person begins engaging in the activation process, this is restored.

The vast majority of people will see the light and will attend at the next meeting ... as soon as you do your money is restored, happy days. ... As soon as they engage the penalty rate is lifted ... to the full rate. (Jason and Jarleth, senior officials in a government department)

#### **5.5.4 How Often are Sanctions Applied?**

Both decision-makers and national stakeholders felt that not many sanctions were applied.

In terms of the overall numbers that have engaged, both within our own internal activation at Intreo and JobPath, which are vast numbers, like we're talking hundreds of thousands, possibly up to nearly half a million. The number of penalty rates applied is very small. (Jason, senior official in a Government department)

Well I know the media every so often jump up and down like cats on a hot tin roof, going—oh sanctions are up, da, da, da, da...but when you look on the scale of payments...it's a fraction. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

Intreo offices say they do not want to apply penalty rates, and are not incentivised to do so.

The purpose of sanctions [is]—it's kind of a last resort, in the sense that nobody wants to be imposing sanctions. I mean purely from the administrative hassle alone, never mind the financial loss for the individual. It's a pain in the butt. (Jason, senior official in a Government department)

In 2016, 10,864 people on Jobseeker's Allowance were sanctioned - a considerable increase from the 1,519 sanctions applied in 2012,<sup>97</sup> the year that *Pathways to Work*, outlining the Government's new approach to activation, was adopted. However, in 2016, there were over 203,000 Jobseeker's Allowance recipients (excluding those on JST), so the number sanctioned in that year accounted for just over 5 per cent of all those on this payment.

In summary, sanctions do not seem to be heavily used, and their existence, while pressurising for claimants, can be effective in getting people to attend activation events, and actively job seek. Wider questions do arise as to the most effective ways to engage claimants, whether claimants are in a position to compete for the jobs available, and the suitability and appropriateness of these jobs.

## 5.6 Trust and Engagement

While household interviewees did not talk about their trust in services or service providers, several talked about how they disliked engaging with activation services.

And them hassling you, down every second day—are you genuinely seeking work? You just feel like going mad at them. You go out and have a look; you try and do what I'm doing. Your woman sitting there—I don't need to, I work. But they just, they hound you, want you to come down, you know, talk the same stuff to them every week. Oh, I used to hate it. (Will, household interviewee, on attending meetings at the LES)

A number of service providers talked about how people dislike engaging with state services, and fear them, and how this can lead to lack of trust in services.

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<sup>97</sup> See <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-09-11a.5187>, accessed on 14 March 2018.

When the families first meet you, you have to build up a relationship of trust. That can take time because they're afraid to impart information. They think somehow it's going to get them into trouble, you know. (Luke, service provider working with homeless families)

Several decision makers and stakeholders noted that there was not adequate trust in Intreo. This is for a number of reasons. One key issue is that people fear engaging with Intreo could endanger their payments.

Do people consider that if you want help and support to get a job, the place to go is your local Intreo centre? I think if people felt that it was the place to go to get help [they'd] go in ... [But] people's primary concern is going to be in relation to the payment. And you're not going to do anything that might jeopardise your payment. So I think there's a very genuine fear on the one hand of losing it, trust on the other. (Jason, senior official in a Government department)

People with disabilities, in particular, seem hesitant to trust Intreo.

The Department of Social Protection is saying "please trust us, we are opening our doors to people with disabilities". And the experience is...that people have really lost faith in you, they are terrified, and everybody wants to hold on to what they have. And that is a natural human response to trying to survive, you know ... There is a lack of trust in the service, or in the Department, that they will get their, ahm, needs met if they go back to them, or if a job doesn't work out. So that is not somewhere somebody is going to put themselves on a line to go out to work. (Ivy, national stakeholder)

A number of interviewees spoke about claimants of carer's allowance doing courses and being threatened with, or having, their payment cut because social welfare officials did not feel that they were complying with the payment rules about taking up training opportunities.

We had somebody come in here who needed to do a course for themselves, just you know around confidence building, and had somebody stepping in to mind the partner or whoever it was they were caring for. And then were told they'd be cut off their Carer's Payment because they were doing this course here, one morning a week, for two hours! And that was just devastating ... causes terrible stress. (Colette, local training provider)

Not surprisingly, such actions can put people off trusting and engaging with Intreo, and seeking opportunities to move them nearer to employment.

Another reason for lack of trust in Intreo is that people do not trust it to provide them with a good service. Sometimes this was built on previous poor experiences of job-seeking or educational services, or the experiences of family or friends. While

services are seen by some to have improved, they still face the challenge of re-engaging those who do not have much faith in them.

I do think that the employment services now compared to where they were five years ago are very, very different, they are much more professional ... [but] people's experience five years ago [was different] and they may have been burnt by that...and I suppose that's the challenge for, for government services, is to get them to reengage and to have a better experience (Ronan, senior official in a government department).

The complexity of the system, which makes it hard to understand and engage with as discussed earlier, is also likely to lead to disengagement and lack of trust.

The other issue is I think the complexity ... I thought tax was complicated, but if you really want to do a PhD it's social welfare (laughs). And every government department seems to think up its own scheme ... There's no coherence at all, there were all sorts of gaps and traps in the thing. Which I think erodes people public confidence as well. (Hugh, national stakeholder)

## 5.7 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has presented interview findings on the nature of engagement with employment support services by people in low work intensity households. The income and employment support system underwent huge change in the period following the economic crash and many of the experiences reflect a system adjusting to changes in the employment support services, especially the move from a passive system to a service focussed on the activation of those on jobseekers payments. For others, there was less engagement.

The chapter documents a range of experiences with the employment support services. While it is encouraging to hear positive experiences the focus is on how to address and improve shortcomings.

As unemployment falls and skill shortages re-emerge in the labour market, it will become even more important to ensure people who are able and want to take up paid employment are supported to do so. This will require engagement with people in receipt of income supports who are not currently being activated, such as the unemployed partners of those on jobseekers' payments, and people with disabilities. The extension of activation is stated in recent policy documents, but how this is done will require careful consideration, as discussed in this chapter. Pre-requisites seem to be the simplification and clarification of rules, good depth of engagement with people, the building of relationships and establishment of trust, as well as the availability of supportive services.

We will return to these issues in the concluding chapter. The next chapter looks at the employment opportunities available in the study area and its surrounds.

# Chapter 6

## Employment Opportunities



## 6.1 Introduction

Labour markets at local level are changing as the national and global nature of work becomes more competitive. Skills are an important driver of economic growth but local economies vary in their ability to develop, attract and retain skilled workforces (OECD, 2016a: 22). There can be considerable variation in local demand for labour as local employers differ in the level of skills they require and how they use these skills. Some local areas have a mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the jobs which are available in that area, so that jobs may remain unfilled or the skills of the workforce may be under-utilised. In some areas, a low level of unemployment can mask issues of low skilled and poorly productive jobs which can undermine growth and job creation (OECD, 2016a: 40).

Added to these local labour issues is the precarious nature of some jobs. Much has been written about this, and the 'gig' economy recently, giving various explanations for an increase in non-standard employment that is poorly paid, insecure and unprotected. These explanations include globalisation, the shift from manufacturing to service sector employment, the spread of information technology and automation, and the demand for flexibility in the work place. Many precarious jobs tend to be low skilled and primarily, but not exclusively, filled by women, young people and migrants.

As we saw in Chapter 2 (Section 2.7.1) there are job opportunities in the study area, with most of the employment concentrated in shopping centres and industrial estates, as well as in public sector organisations. However, while there are employer, manager and professional jobs in the area, these tend to be taken by people who do not live in the study area. Those living in the study area who are in paid employment locally are most likely to be working in non-manual, semi-skilled, unskilled and other types of employment.

This chapter firstly discusses households' engagement with the labour market before going on to look at recruitment processes. The chapter then examines the types of jobs on offer, including the issue of precarious work, followed by a section on self-employment, with a final short section on volunteering before drawing conclusions. As before, the chapter draws on the views of interviewees living in low work intensity households, service providers, employers, service managers in the area, policymakers, and national stakeholders.

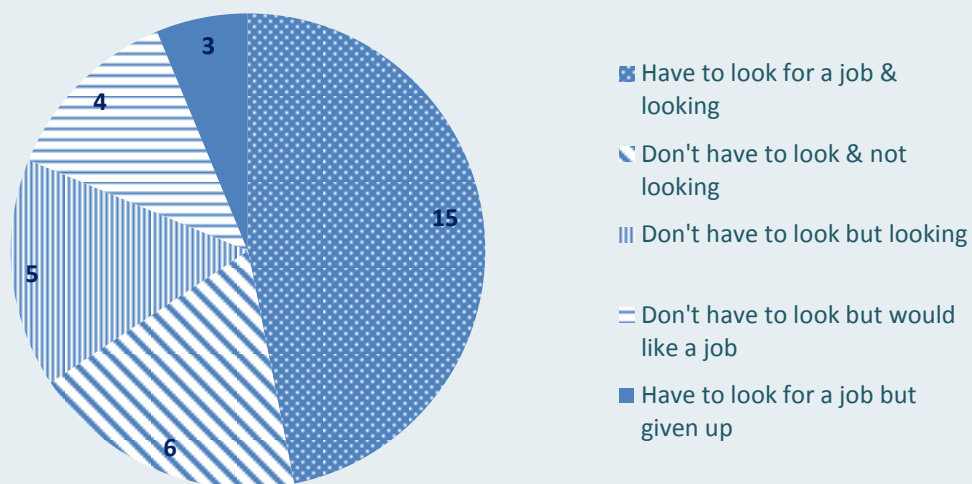
## 6.2 Engagement with the Labour Market

As outlined in Chapter 4, only five of the thirty four people interviewed in the low work intensity households had no experience in the formal labour market—a school leaver, a refugee and three Travellers, some of whom had worked on an employment scheme but had not yet found work in the wider labour market. Twenty nine of the interviewees had labour market experience, often of many years. There were a variety of reasons as to why people had become unemployed as detailed in Chapter 4.

### 6.2.1 Who is Required to Actively Seek Work?

The social welfare payments which people receive have different requirements for job search. As discussed in Chapter 5, people who are unemployed and on a jobseeker's payment are required to actively seek work. Others, such as qualified adults, those receiving One Parent Family Payments, and those on Disability Allowance are not required to search for a job. However, in practice, interviewees whose payment does not require them to seek work are sometimes seeking it. Requirements and practice in relation to the interviewees' job search activities are outlined in Figure 6.1.

**Figure 6.1: Interviewee Job Search Requirements and Actual Job Search**



The figure shows that fifteen interviewees were required to job seek and that they were doing so. Their experiences are discussed in the next sub-section. Six interviewees did not have to seek a job, are not, and seem to have no wish to do so

at the time of the interview. These interviewees were on an employment support scheme, or on a Carer's or Disability Allowance. Four others were not required to look for a job, are not actively seeking one, but would not mind having one. This group were either qualified adults, lone parents or on Partial Capacity Benefit.

If somebody said to me - here's a job, quarter past 9 till quarter past 1, 5 days a week - thanks a million, I'd take it. (Hannah, unemployed qualified adult with 3 children under 12)

Five others who are not required to look for a job are actively seeking one. These were either qualified adults, lone parents, people on an employment support scheme or in receipt of a Carer's Allowance.

I'm after being looking, applied to [name of store], even to [have some work at] weekends. 'Cos I'm still entitled to do the bits. To have something in my pocket, do you know what I mean, if I got it. (Barbara, on CE, prior to that on OPFP)

Of the interviewees who were on payments that did require job seeking, three seem to have given up looking, one of whom was older, and one of whom had tried self-employment which had not worked out. The husband of one interviewee had become so depressed at not finding a job and at his interactions with Intreo, where he had been accused of fraud, that he had swopped with her to become the qualified adult.

### 6.2.2 Issues Which Impact on Job Search

There were a number of issues which people felt impacted on their ability to find a job, either personal factors or issues external to the individual. In relation to personal factors, some lacked work experience, or job experience in Ireland, although others had done work experience in Ireland but found it did not lead to jobs (one did not have very good English and the other had suffered from addiction issues in the past, so these issues may have 'over-ridden' the value of their work experience).

Most places you need a minimum of a year experience as well, so that limits you out straight away. (Brian, school leaver)

Secondly, some interviewees noted that contacts could play a key role in helping them get a job, and that they lacked these, or had contacts who could no longer offer work (e.g. in building), as outlined in Chapter 4.

Others cited difficulties with literacy, computer literacy, and English language proficiency, which made it difficult to apply for jobs.

When you speak like in broken English like me, I don't know! ... I think maybe the job I'm looking [for], and ... the English I speak [don't] match. (Ruth, refugee from Rwanda)

The first thing they'll say is—fill out that form, did you do your Leaving Cert, did you do this and that? And I just say—well I can't manage to fill that out. So what good [am I]? (Alan, has severe literacy difficulties and left school early)

Some did not have an entry level requirement, such as a SafePass, a PSV licence, or a security badge, and/or had difficulties meeting eligibility requirements for Intreo to pay for them.

Childcare was another reason for not being able to apply for jobs, or only being able to apply for jobs available locally, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. However, none of those who cited childcare as a limitation on job search were required to look for a job, as all were 'qualified adults' or on OPFP.

Several had no transport, which again limited the jobs which they could apply for.

I've been looking in [nearby area] as well ... but you can only go so far, because I have no transport, so you've to rely on public transport. (Irene)

One person on Invalidity Benefit wanted to find work and thought he could work 15 hours a week but felt his health did not allow it at the moment. One person who was homeless cited this, not surprisingly, as restricting his ability to search for jobs.

Interviewees also referred to a number of external factors which affected their job search. First, a number of people referred to strong competition for available jobs, less job openings now, and a decline in jobs in their particular sector, all of which led to extended job search.

I went to an interview for a similar role [to the one I'd worked in for ten years] over in [name of car dealer] ... I was sitting there, and there was, there must've been twelve, fourteen people there. I'm thinking, Jaysus, there's a good few people going for this, you know, fourteen people, whatever else. So I went in, got on well with your woman and then she was saying, oh right, she goes, I'll let you know in a couple of days. We have another four or five sets of interviews. I was like—is that not all the people that are going for it? And she goes—no, that's after been the third lot in today. And I've another three days, for one job. (Vinny)

In some cases, the requirements of the social welfare payment which people were on restricted the type of jobs they could go for, usually by hours. For example:

I am allowed to take 15 hours [but] it is very hard to get 15 hours... when you are on Carer's Allowance there is so many limitations. (Ruth, on Carer's Allowance)

Three interviewees also said they could not earn enough money to justify keeping a job they had been offered or had been in.

I was working two years ago ... it was only in a nightclub, I was only doing like Friday and Saturday night from half nine till three in the morning. But it was very hard because I had to get them [children] minded at night time like and then travel. I wasn't driving at the time so I was travelling into town and travelling back—was nearly my whole wages, you know...so it wasn't worth it. (Anna, single parent of two small children)

Several household interviewees also referred to discrimination against certain groups which they felt was holding them back, as outlined by Travellers and migrants in Section 4.3.2.

The service providers interviewed concurred with the barriers to employment which were outlined by households in Chapter 4 and added some others. These included gaps in a person's CV, being out of the workforce a long time, employers' fears of taking on people who had been long-term unemployed, and unrealistic job expectations (usually on the part of the jobseekers, but sometimes on the part of the employer).

Our big problem here—people who have been unemployed for a long time have this big gap in their CV....People who are have a gap in their CV are always going to be at the end of the queue for a job. (Harry, manager of a training centre)

Other barriers such as a history of addiction or prison spells, lack of confidence or motivation are dealt with in the next chapter.

### 6.2.3 Methods Used for Job Search

Household interviewees used a variety of methods to search for jobs—online, cold-calling, through contacts, through Intreo/LES/JobPath, and a small number had also been to a job agency. Many get no response to their applications, which they find very demoralising.

You do send so many application forms, you never get a reply from them, you know. That's what saddens me...that's really bad I think—you just say no or yes, that's it....that's all you want to know. (Xavier, unemployed plumber)

A few have had interviews (usually those with a trade or higher qualification) but have been unsuccessful. Some had been searching for several years, with job search interspersed with courses.

Some of the service providers interviewed offer a range of supports to job seekers, ranging from 'light' supports such as CV printing and computer use (typically available in community centres) to 'medium' supports such as identification of job websites, help doing a CV, some help identifying career paths (available in some training and job-seeking support services). Intensive supports are provided by job-seeking support organisations with trained career guidance counsellors,

psychological job profiling tools, job banks, direct links between employers and potential employees, interview coaching, etc. Not all the job-seeking support services had these tools available to them.

On the employment side, we provide a range of employment training—whether it's safe pass, manhandling, first aid....And some career guidance supports and some help with interview preparation, CV writing. We also have the job club service...it consists of eight modules that are run over the three weeks...personal development...get[ting] motivated, interested in getting out there and back into work...practical help around...CV preparation, job search, online application form filling...support with interviews. (Orna, manager of a job-seeking support service)

A few of the employers mentioned people coming to their company to get a form signed to say they are looking for a job, but none of them are open to doing this. Denise in the hotel said she would not do this and that people have to go through their recruitment process.

I wouldn't just sign ... fair enough if we bring them for an interview and regret them, then fine, then they can bring that in. (Denise, Hotel)

The supermarket and security and cleaning businesses also take this approach. Rosanna in the recruitment company said that sometimes 'young lads' come in asking for them to sign a letter to say they are looking for a job. She asks them if they are really looking for a job and asks to see their CV. She says she would not sign a letter for anyone who is not genuinely looking for a job.

We sometimes have young lads that come in, particularly young Irish lads, that might say “can you give me a letter to say I was here looking for a job?” ...“Are you here looking for a job?” You know. Or “are you here to get the letter?” ... “You haven't applied for any of the jobs we have”. (Rosanna, Recruitment Company)

#### **6.2.4 Type of Jobs People are Looking For**

Several household interviewees said they would take 'any job', although actually they all had a preference for a particular type of work.

Preferably outdoor work, I've always been sort of an outdoor guy. I hate being stuck in ... That's the sort of work I prefer but trying to get anything out there as I said. (Will, ex printer and builder on Tús)

Their preferences could be for a particular location (usually local), particular hours (usually part-time or day-time), or in a particular sector (often one which they had studied or otherwise invested a lot of time in).

I want a job in my local area, any area [round here], anywhere I can walk to. I don't drive. (Linda)

Yeah, part-time for the moment I think, fulltime would be too hard like.  
(Anna, single parent of two small children)

However, there seemed to be a lot of variation in how flexible people were, with some very flexible and others not. Many women with caring responsibilities who were interested in working felt they could only take local part-time jobs. Often the conditions of their welfare payment only allowed part-time jobs, such as those on Carer's Allowance.

It was men without caring responsibilities who were happiest to travel for work, and women whose children were older, i.e. all in secondary school, (and who had cars), were also happier to travel for work.

*[Interviewer: Would you look outside this area for work, like in town, or?]* *Interviewee:* Ah yea, I'd go travelling. I've always travelled...some of the jobs I was out the [other] side [of the city], just had to get up early, two buses. ... But you have to do these things, if you want full time employment. (Will, separated man, ex-wife has care of children)

In relation to the particular sector in which people were seeking work, some were only interested in working in this sector. For example, Hannah's husband, who had retrained in sports coaching following redundancy from a building firm during the crash, was not impressed when Intreo suggested he look at jobs in another sector with more opportunities.

And then he was basically told when he did go to, I think it was Intreo, you know the way they send for you, ... and he was like—yeah I'm doing this, blah-di-blah; and then they turned around and they said to him, well maybe you need to retrain in a different area. After him going to college! (Hannah, speaking of her husband)

However, some who had been fruitlessly seeking jobs in a particular sector were now considering employment in a different sector, often in a lower skilled occupation, which they felt they had more chance of getting work in. For example, Nathaniel, an unemployed migrant had taken IT courses but had no links to jobs in this sector.

I did a Web and Cloud Technology [course], and then I did Networking and Cloud Technology ... [but] no jobs now, you know ... and I am doing Care Course just to expand my, my skill, and possibility of getting a job, you know. I'm not choosy ... I'm trying to do Taxi too, you know, so I'm not leaving my eggs in one basket. (Nathaniel, unemployed migrant)

Quite a number of people had a definite 'plan' as to how they would find work in their chosen sector. For example, Hannah's husband and Pamela's partner both had studied sports coaching and worked as volunteer sports coaches, and were trying hard to get jobs in the area (although Pamela's partner was deciding to move back to work in building as it provided a better living). Irene was 'putting the pieces together' to get a job in community supports, as she had all her passes, time

volunteering, and was looking into how to get a qualification for the sector. Nathaniel and Vinny were both organising getting a PSV licence, investigating funding and welfare payments in relation to this. Nathaniel, and Vinny's partner Vicky, were also both currently studying Fetac Level 5 qualifications so that they could get work in caring. Krystal was studying biology so that she could get on a course for beauty therapy, which she wanted to work in, in future. Brian had organised to go on Tús to address his lack of work experience, as a relative had found it very useful.

## 6.3 Recruitment Processes

### 6.3.1 Job Vacancies

There is a mixed picture in relation to job vacancies, with some companies having vacancies and finding it hard to fill positions and others not. In general, employers, especially SMEs, in 2016 (at the time of the interviews) were only starting to employ people after the recession. Some companies, e.g. in the construction sector, were re-employing people they had to lay off in the recession, while others were hiring people on a contract basis rather than on a permanent basis. Vacancies existed in areas with a high turnover of staff e.g. unskilled hotel work, security and cleaning areas, and also for more skilled positions, such as chefs, IT workers, skilled trades, and licensed drivers.

Accommodation assistant, food and beverage assistant or reception usually you get tons of applicants. But then say like we were looking for a night porter and commis chef but they weren't really, we weren't getting as many applicants for them as we were for other roles. So it really depends ... on the role. (Denise, Hotel)

### 6.3.2 How Staff are Recruited

A range of methods are used to recruit staff with the most popular being through on-line websites such as irishjobs.ie, using recruitment agencies and through word-of-mouth/referrals from existing employees.

Even where on-line recruitment systems are used, current employees and others associated with companies are encouraged to get their friends and families to apply, making it more difficult for unemployed people who do not have such connections.

There would be a lot of kind of family relationships and that ... we have a huge amount of long serving staff ... very, very low turnover ... so very often what we do when we're looking for staff as well is we, you know, we go on kind of, you know, employee referrals and things like that. (Jennifer, Warehousing Firm)



Some of the service providers interviewed were critical of employers' recruitment methods, saying that a lot of posts were being filled informally on the one hand, while on the other hand the high tech processes of large companies can be off-putting. There is much more online recruitment now than in the past, which leaves some people at a loss, such as those who do not have IT skills or access.

How the labour market operates has changed. You know—even the quality of basic job search skills, CV, ability to engage with IT, ability to do an on line application. (Adam, manager of a job-seeking support service)

For relatively unskilled positions most employers emphasised the importance of personality and attitude over specific skills as they said they would provide training. Most employers required basic literacy and a good grasp of English as well as specific licences such as a safety pass, but the main focus was on drive, presentation, good communication skills and ability to work with others.

When we recruit people ... we don't require any qualifications ...It's all about the personality ... because we train for what we need then. (Karen, Catering company)

So meet the core skill sets, licence, English language skills, written skills, communication skills. (Walter, Security and Cleaning Firm)

In some instances, employers were wary of gaps in CVs, wanting to know what the person had been doing during these periods.

And obviously an employer looks at gaps in CVs, and you know I suppose they want to confirm that somebody hasn't maybe been in prison or something like that ... But obviously we all know that we've lived through a very recent recession and there hasn't been jobs there for people, you know. ... We always need an explanation for gaps ... If somebody came in here today and they haven't worked since 2010, you kind of have to be saying "why?" (Rosanna, Recruitment company)

The care agency was unusual in that it recruited people through the LES and from employment support programmes such as CE and Tús, although the security employer would like better links with the LES, but felt they should be more proactive in this regard.

I will go and talk to the LES and explain to them that I want a very particular type of person and there's no point in sending me somebody who isn't genuinely interested in working in this area—it's a waste of time. (Isabel, Care agency)

I think if [the LES's] goal is get people back into jobs, then they have to reach out, it's a business....The fact that it's not happening says everything for me. (Walter, Security and Cleaning firm)

Several employers also used local free newspapers and local college websites to advertise positions.

Some employers liked to interview people locally and employ them locally so that they would get a feel for where they would be working and it would be accessible for them.

We'd certainly interview locally, you know, ...geography becomes really important, so if we're hiring for [name of area] Hospital somebody living in the area is kind of important to us. (Walter, Security and Cleaning Firm)

### 6.3.3 The Recruitment Process

Two companies provided information on their recruitment process in detail, with striking similarity. Both start with applying on-line. For one, applicants then have to take a psychometric test which is focused on giving the customer a good experience. For the other, applicants submit their CV on-line and answer some filter questions as a screening exercise. In both cases applicants who come through the on-line filters are interviewed for vacancies, with managers interviewing 6 to 10 people for any vacancy. Then, in both cases, there is 'on-the-job evaluation' to give both the applicant and the company an opportunity to assess their suitability for the job. If they are taken on they are given training and then have a trial or probationary period. In both cases, selection focuses on giving the customer a good service and being loyal to the company, which they said improves retention rates. As a manager in one of these companies explained,

We have our customer service psychometric test because our entire business is all about the customer. ... So our only screening criteria is if you are customer oriented. We will train you for everything else...So you could interview anything up to six people for one job. And then probably three would get through to the second round and then the second round includes an on-the-job evaluation. ... And it's all observed and assessed. And then it's straight through then to start the job. ... We do have probation periods, absolutely.

In the hotel, applicants are also filtered on-line through their CV and cover letter for relevant experience, and if deemed suitable, they are then screened through a telephone call before being called for interview. Denise said a lot of people say they have experience when they actually do not.

We'd go onto jobs.ie and we ask a number of questions, so it's part of the process in jobs.ie, but we try to ask things ... about their experience level. So that's how we filter through them ... and then I read their cover letter and then into their CV. [Then] usually I'd ring and I'd do like a screening, telephone screening. Like a mini-interview. And then I'd invite them in for an interview....A lot of people, like, say on the cover questions they might be like—I've loads of experience—[but when]

they come in they've no experience. It's really frustrating ... if they had have said, 'No, I don't have experience but I'm a quick learner, I'll just get stuck in', you'd go—well we'll give them a go, where when they are lying on their thing ... So we do get a lot of applications for roles but they are not always very suitable. (Denise, Hotel)

The recruitment company asks applicants to complete an application form, submit their CV and any certificates and licences they might have as well as answering a medical questionnaire because they need to be physically fit for the type of work they will be doing.

An application form and a medical questionnaire, and then people like give us their CV as well, and any certificates they have, if they have a Forklift Licence, ... if they have previous experience and they have certificates or licences to do it. And some people have written references but we would always verify, because we have learned over the years that 'paper doesn't refuse ink' (Rosanna, Recruitment Company).

#### **6.3.4 Difficulty in Recruiting**

The catering company and supermarket both said they had difficulty recruiting. The supermarket had difficulties getting people to turn up for interviews—about one third of those invited do not turn up (he thinks they send off multiple applications and have got something in the meantime).

For example, in recent weeks you know I'd say if I had thirty percent that didn't turn up [for interviews] just for different reasons, I'm not too sure why. We would give them an absolute minimum of four days' notice, minimum, ... and we give an opportunity to reschedule as well...yea, it can be frustrating. (Tom, Supermarket)

The catering company said they had difficulty orienting people into the world of work and the discipline of holding down a regular job. Things like being on time, being well presented, being hygienic and doing the job that needs to be done were sometimes difficult. There were also difficulties in getting potential employees to appreciate the breadth of the job and the range of tasks involved.

People sometimes don't have an alarm clock. ... The other difficulty that we have is that people come in and they don't appreciate the breadth of the job. So they will be doing everything from being on the tills to directly interacting with the customer, right through to putting the bins out. (Karen, Catering company).

#### **6.3.5 Retention**

The catering company and the supermarket both mention retention difficulties. The catering company said that other companies try to recruit their staff and staff leave

to get higher pay elsewhere. For the supermarket retention is a priority and as a result they have a low staff turnover rate. Tom said they set a high selection standard and recruit good quality people that will stay with them.

And to be honest [name of supermarket] has quite a good turnover rate, and the retention is pretty important to us, it is one of our priorities... that is the reality that people do come and go, often, you know maybe in the first year or two, which is the worst time for us from a cost point of view, but if we get people to stay then generally they do very well, they can be people that will move through the management, there is lots of opportunities. (Tom, Supermarket)

### 6.3.6 Who is Employed?

In general, the companies interviewed employ a range of people from different backgrounds. For example, the hotel employs what they term a 'peripheral labour force' with a lot of students, i.e. 'a lot of the staff are in college', and a few people with families who are on FIS. A number of employees are on social welfare payments such as OPFP and part-time jobseeker's payments, which limits the number of hours they can work.

The care agency looks for people who are interested in the work, are available at any time and have good English.

I want a very particular type of person and there's no point in sending me somebody who isn't genuinely interested in working in this area, it's a waste of time. There's no point in sending me somebody who doesn't have good English, because again it's critical that the clients can understand what the carer is saying to them. And there's no point in sending me somebody that's only interested in working a short window between half nine and two o'clock in the day. (Isabel, Care Agency)

The catering company employs a high percentage of students and people who are caring for others, whether that is children or elderly parents. They like to employ working mums as they know the clientele and provide a level of 'security' in their restaurants.

Working mums are fabulous. Absolutely fabulous....We're really interested to hear from and to recruit working mums. Because they are like a security on their own. They will know the young ones coming in and if there's any messing around they'll be like I'll be telling your mother. So it works, it really works. (Karen, Catering company)

There is a view that people should be honest about their availability at recruitment stage, especially if they have caring responsibilities.

It is only after they get the job then you find "well really I need to be off Tuesdays" or "I was late in this morning because"...Now you can

facilitate things, you know. But if you are not aware of them...You need to know in advance. (Niall, Freight Company)

Many employers like to employ local staff as it makes transport arrangements easier, especially for late shifts and customers often like to see staff from the local area.

There is a range of views about employing people who have been long-term unemployed. The employer organisation interviewed said there are two types of people who are long-term unemployed—those who have never worked and she thinks do not want to work, and those who have worked and have been laid off and now lack the confidence to get back into the workforce. A lot of older men would be in this latter category.

Which is really awful because, realistically, the government have probably ten years to do something about this before that whole generation is lost, and into retirement. And feeling incredibly unconfident and let down....and not valued anymore, having made such a significant contribution to the country. That's the biggest barrier, I think – it's confidence. (Florence, Employer Organisation).

Some companies, like the supermarket, said they do not distinguish who they employ if the person has a good attitude and is motivated.

We are focused probably on those kind of competencies—if they can demonstrate them to us, we'll give them a crack. And I think also, I wouldn't under-estimate the level of motivation that somebody who is unemployed would have as well, you know there is that kind of appetite to succeed. (Tom, Supermarket)

The hotel has recruited long-term unemployed people through JobBridge and JobsPlus and if they are good they try to find them jobs in the wider hotel group.

The security company says that if they take on long-term unemployed people they would expect them to have a good reason for being out of the workforce and would expect them to have been upskilling themselves while they were out of the workforce.

It's not a barrier if somebody has legitimately been out of the workplace. ... people ... might have up-skilled themselves during that period, demonstrated I suppose some reasons why, it's not that I've opted out, if they've won the Lotto and they haven't worked for ten years, well good luck to them...but if I've sat on my ass and the only reason I'm here is because Social have said they're gonna cut me off if I don't get an interview, well I'm sorry. (Walter, Security and Cleaning Firm)

The construction company says that it is difficult to take on long-term unemployed people due to the nature of site work and contract work—they need people who are skilled and well trained.

We like to employ people that we know who have worked with us before, who know our way of working, who understand you know the systems and programs that we have to follow. (Sasha, Construction Company)

Some companies said that they had lone parents working for them, but several others said they did not know if they had lone parents working for them as they employed people based on attitude and competence, regardless of their marital or family status.

We don't really get involved in it ... from our point of view we are dealing with them in a professional context...If someone wants to bring it up, to look for support or a change of rota, we'll deal with that...To be honest you know these days that's not kind of the stuff that you bring up with people, you know, it is up to them I suppose...from our point of view, if the person can deliver, that's fine, and we are very happy with that. (Tom, Supermarket)

A number of the companies said they were not aware if they employed Travellers or not (construction, catering company, supermarket). The security and cleaning company said they employed Travellers in country areas but not in Dublin.

We have [employed Travellers] in some country regions, with success I would say ... we don't think of them as Travellers or non-Travellers, we just think of them as employees that do a ... good job....and the client thinks of them the same, which is critically important. (Walter, Security and Cleaning Firm)

The care agency had Travellers working for them through a CE scheme. Isabel said they were good employees but she felt it was hard to keep them in work as family issues often take a higher priority.

More than half of the companies interviewed said they employed non-Irish nationals, and these nationalities varied by employment sector.

Quite a number of Vietnamese and Chinese ... it was probably a local thing ...you know, lassie A got in and, you know, she got her sister or her cousin or whomever...and it has kind of built up like that so huge loyalty and as I say very, very low turnover....which is a good thing. (Jennifer, Warehousing Firm)

A few of the companies explicitly stated that they do not employ people with a disability, for example, the construction company saying that their work is manual so that it may be difficult for some people with a disability. The catering company do employ people with disability, but Karen says it is expensive to employ people with an intellectual disability, as other staff also need to be there as employees with this disability are not as able to work independently as others.

The security and cleaning company employ some people with disability and say they would like to employ more but they have to meet their clients' needs and expectations.

People with disabilities are difficult to place because again we're not placing them in our business here, we're placing them in clients' premises and it really becomes quite difficult depending on what the disability is....So that's a real challenge area. (Walter, Security and Cleaning Firm)

Only the supermarket specifically mentions employing young people who have just left school, or early school leavers, saying that they would employ them if they come through their on-line filter system and show good motivation and initiative. Tom says work experience through Transition Year or a part-time job would help.

## 6.4 Types of Jobs on Offer

Decent work has been described as a job that delivers a fair income, provides a sense of security, recognises and rewards effort, uses people's skills and allows them to develop, lets people have a say, takes into account work-life balance and treats people fairly (ILO, 2012; Eurofound, 2015; Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2017).

This section presents findings from the interviews on the types of jobs on offer in the study area focusing on pay rates and hours of work. First, some of the policymakers talked about Ireland's employment model.

### 6.4.1 Employment Model

A number of interviewees commented on Ireland's employment model, giving a range of perspectives. Hartley, a labour market commentator, was of the view that Ireland has an employment model at the low productivity end of the economy where there is an emphasis on keeping costs low, not so much wages, but keeping the tax wedge small and supporting lower wages with Family Income Supplement (now Working Family Payment). He thinks this is a collective concern rather than an issue for individual employers.

There is this thing where we are kind of locked into a particular model of, ahm, business at the, you know, lower productivity end of the economy. So, ahm, you know, it is basically "keep costs low". Wages aren't that low, but I mean some wages are low, but certainly the tax wedge is small, you know, FIS and so on are helping you to keep your wages down, you know, to some extent. ... This is the model, and it is quite a leap for an employer to move out of that. (Hartley, national stakeholder)

Ronan and Roisin, who are officials in a government department, said that Irish industrial policy since 1995 has had the theme of up-skilling, higher productivity, higher paid jobs and this has been a successful policy over the last 20 years. At a national level Ireland's productivity growth is impressive internationally, but this is driven by a few firms.

If you look at our industrial policy papers back until 1995, *Shaping our Future*, the first major one, they've all had the same theme of up-skilling, higher productivity jobs, higher paid jobs, and that's been the underlying theme in every single one of them and it's been consistent and they've done quite well on them. ... the IDA and the EI firms, they're actually the highly productive ones and they're paying really good wages, ... there is a large bunch who are not in that space but if you're picking them up through [income] transfers, ... I'm quite happy with that. (Roisin, senior government official)

The manager of a local service in the area said that it can be difficult to offer sustainable jobs to low skilled people as few sectors are protected from economic downturns, and it can be difficult for low skilled people to compete for jobs in such a situation. A growing economy provides more opportunities for people.

The reality on the ground is no, [low skilled workers] are not going to [get good sustainable jobs]...All of the hospitals went to contract so their cleaning is contracted, their catering is contracted....so there's been a downsizing ... on the salaries. (Arthur, local manager)

#### 6.4.2 Type of Jobs

The type of companies which took part in the study varied, from local branches of multinationals to local companies, a sole trader, a recruitment company recruiting manual warehouse workers, and an employer organisation providing representation, support and networking opportunities for its members. In relation to the number of people employed by the companies in the vicinity of the study area, numbers ranged from six to several hundred.

The types of jobs in the companies interviewed varied widely. Many are relatively unskilled and manual jobs but some are more specialised and there are management positions available. Some of the companies employ people on a full-time permanent basis, while others employ people part-time, or on a temporary contract basis. There were fixed hour and non-fixed hour contracts. For example,

Everybody who is working on a site for us wouldn't be employed directly...by us...We would bring in you know sub-contractors for ground works, you know for concrete, for steel, you know the electrics, the mechanical elements of our projects. So that's kind of largely how we work. (Sasha, Construction Company)



### 6.4.3 Pay Rates

In a recent study to explore the degree to which the likelihood of minimum wage employment is driven by factors such as personal characteristics, job conditions with particular occupations, or factors related to household composition and caring responsibilities, the researchers found that just under 5 per cent of workers were in receipt of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) in 2014. They were more likely to be women, young people aged 18-29, non-Irish nationals, less educated, and in low-paid occupations (Maître *et al.*, 2017).

In our study, in general, the pay rates paid by the companies interviewed varied from the minimum wage of €9.25 per hour to the Living Wage of €11.50 (2016) per hour, though there are many variations of this. In the hotel most of the casual staff were on the minimum wage.

The construction company is now noticing more pressure on wages. They also said that they support staff financially for education progression.

There's more activity in the construction industry so obviously that's kind of putting a lot of pressure on wages and salaries, which you know is a challenge for us to, you know, to manage ... I would be very aware you know that our colleagues who work on site, you know they work very hard you know for the money. (Sasha, construction company)

The not-for-profit care agency said they paid more than private providers but did not give a rate. Isabel said they cut their pay rates during the economic crash. Some of their staff are on CE so they do not get paid by the company.

The catering company said they pay above the minimum wage with a starting rate (in 2016) of €9.25 per hour with people moving to a higher rate once they gain a certain level of competence. The average hourly rate is €10.50. There is a premium for working nights and Sundays, plus people get paid more if they take on more responsibility.

Yeah so you come in at 9.25 but very quickly once you pass all your [competence requirements], ... literally within six months you are up higher. (Karen, catering company)

In the recruitment company it is the client who sets the pay rate under the Temporary Agency Workers Directive (2012). The recruitment company says that some people, young men in particular, do not want to work for the minimum wage as 'they think they above this', even though those under 25 now only get €100 per week on Jobseekers Allowance.

The recruitment company were of the view that some employers pay the living wage, but these companies give people less hours.

And then you know there is this Living Wage that companies talk about,...But they don't give anybody full time hours, they are all on—they give them the higher rate, but they only give them about twenty-

four hours a week. And they don't really advertise that part of it, do you know what I mean. (Rosanna, Recruitment Company)

One company interviewed pays the living wage (€11.50 per week in 2016) and says that in return for being well paid they expect high standards, and they are focussed on getting good quality people. However, they do not offer 40 hour a week contracts.

In the security and cleaning firm, staff get paid €10.75 an hour (going up to €11/hr from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017) for security jobs.<sup>98</sup> The firm says there are opportunities for people to move up in the business, and get paid more, but people often do not avail of these opportunities because they lack the confidence to take on more responsibility.

So, you know, what's perceived as a low paid industry is not necessarily one in my opinion and there are opportunities within for that 5 per cent of people in those sectors who say - I want to do more and I want to earn more - that opportunity is there for them in spades....I don't think a lot of people put themselves forward for those type of opportunities. (Walter, Security and Cleaning Firm)

#### **6.4.4 Supplementing Pay with Family Income Supplement (FIS) (now Working Family Payment)**

Most of the employers interviewed have employees on FIS.<sup>99</sup> While it provides an income supplement for people on low wages, employers say it can also prevent people from wanting to go for promotion, or mean they ask for reduced hours if they get a pay rise. This can be a poverty trap for employees and reduces flexibility for employers. None of the employers interviewed had heard of the Back to Work Family Dividend.

In relation to individual employers and their awareness of FIS, the hotel employer said she thought there were a few people on FIS. In the construction firm one woman in the administration section was in receipt of FIS, but Sasha said the others were paid too much to claim FIS. In the care agency, Isabel said a few of her staff were in receipt of FIS. In the warehouse firm, the head of HR said she did not know if employees were on FIS, but that some employees do not want to do overtime or to increase their income in case it affects their benefits.

Last year there was overtime available and there was a few people that didn't want it....And I think it was because of their, you know, there's certain kind of, to go over a certain income level might have disturbed other benefits. (Jennifer, Warehousing Firm)

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<sup>98</sup> The contract cleaning and security industries are covered by an Employment Regulation Order (ERO).

<sup>99</sup> See also Section 7.4 where income supports for those moving from welfare into work, such as FIS, are covered.

In the catering company a lot of employees are in receipt of FIS and a lot of time is spent filling out forms for this.

Oh God yes, yes, I mean the majority of our [managers] would spend every Monday afternoon sending off forms, filling out forms [for FIS]. It can be difficult at busy times, when the flexibility is not there and people are not prepared to do extra hours....So we have to have more people on our books.... getting less hours. (Karen, Catering company)

Likewise, Walter in the security and cleaning company said that his employees, especially the part-time workers, were reluctant to increase their hours if it means they will lose their FIS if their income goes up. He suggested that there needs to be a transitional arrangement:

People need to be transitioned is my view, ... That would give people time to adjust, to see the other side and typically then they're going to push on again to say—actually I'm gonna make that €300–€500 and actually I don't want this FIS. I never wanted it in the first place. I just needed it but now I can work so I can have my own independence. ... And then you've got this whole self-worth piece then kicks in after that, which is, I think it's an important society element. (Walter, Security and Cleaning Firm)

#### 6.4.5 Hours Offered

The hours offered by employers were variable, from a casual minimum of 8 hours or one day's work per week, to full time permanent positions for management or office staff. Predictability and consistency, with some flexibility, is important for many workers, especially those with childcare or family responsibilities; while flexibility is a key requirement from an employer's perspective though some recognise the importance of worker's needs as well. The employers' organisation acknowledged that variable hours are contentious but said that they mostly deal with socially responsible organisations, and that most businesses, if they do not offer full-time work, will provide a consistent level of work even if it is part-time.

Examples of what the various companies interviewed told us about the hours they offered are provided in the box overleaf.<sup>100</sup>

And then, you know, in that sector [hospital] the hours are really determined by the individual because there's that much flexibility in it, we can have part time people in the wards or fulltime people during the day or evening time people and I think there's great opportunity for people to get this home commitment piece right and be able to

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<sup>100</sup> As noted earlier, the contract cleaning and security industries are covered by Employment Regulation Orders (EROs).

support it with a job and typically that falls into the part time category....That model has worked great for this company for thirty years (Walter, Security and Cleaning Sector).

#### Hotel

Management staff are full-time but the rest of the staff are casual. They are offered a minimum of 8 hours work per week, and can work one day one week and be offered five days the next week—the focus is on business needs.

A lot of our management team would be fulltime. But everyone else would be quite casual depending on the business needs ... they'd get a minimum of 8 hours a week. ... They might only get one shift this week, but we might need them to work five the following week ... in line with what the business needs are (Denise, Hotel).

#### Construction Company

Management and office staff are permanent and mostly full-time but site staff are on fixed-term contracts. The company nearly closed down during the economic crash, so covering costs is now key.

The cyclical nature of the work makes it very difficult for us to manage the business. Because on the one hand you want to have like a skilled team of site managers and project managers, ... surveyors, ... the site managers or any site staff that we employ directly, we mightn't necessarily have work for them all year round. [And] obviously there's a significant cost to us employing somebody ... who isn't productive ... [So] rather than let somebody go, you know we'll make sure that they take all of their holidays or they have their paid holidays and then what we might do is we might put them on kind of ... short term working on a 3 day week (Sasha, Construction Company).

#### Care Company

Staff work flexible hours depending on the company's needs. The company competes for contracts from the HSE and then offers people 11 or 12 month contracts.

We have pretty much enough hours for everybody. There's only one or maybe half a dozen of them now who are constantly looking for hours. But there are these rigid people who won't budge out of these hours (Isabel, Care Agency).

#### Warehousing Firm

Head office have office hours, most warehouse workers work 8 to 6 but finish early on a Friday. Where there is manufacturing, shift work is available of 3x12 hour shifts plus the extra hours another day or night to make up a 39 hour week. The hours are predictable so that it suits childminding and family/community arrangements. Some people opt for night shifts to accommodate child and family arrangements.

#### Catering Company

Some, but not all, of their restaurants are 24/7. There is a 50/50 split between full-time and part-time positions. People's hours are scheduled 2 weeks in advance so that people know their shifts, and people generally work the same pattern of shifts.

#### Cleaning Company

People have variable hours to suit childcare and picking children up from school.

### Recruitment Agency

Part-time jobs are offered of 4 or 5 hour shifts, which are attractive for women with children in school, and lone parents who can work these hours and still get the One Parent Family Payment, but the company's priority is to find people to meet their clients' requirements. One person who was offered a payroll position in the office for 2 days per week said it was not worth her while to work less than 3 days.

### Supermarket

The supermarket offers a signed contract which is agreed and signed for a minimum number of hours. If fewer hours are available, people may be sent to another store or are paid for their contracted hours anyway. They may also be asked to work extra hours. If the contract no longer reflects the hours they are working then the contract can be changed.

So, for example, if you sign somebody up for a 25 hour contract we guarantee those hours once they are employed with us. ... So, as we say, if the store went out of, was burnt down, or something happened, we'd give them their hours in another store ... or if, ahm, we can't get them in another store we will pay them. That's the deal, that's our contract...so it is pretty good for the sector (Tom, Supermarket).

### Security and Cleaning Company

People are employed for 48 hours per week in security and a mix of full-time and part-time hours in cleaning. For security or cleaning staff working in some industries, the hours can be flexible in a way that allows people to combine work and home duties.

## 6.5 Precarious Employment

### 6.5.1 An Increasing Concern about Precarious Employment

As seen in the previous section hours are variable. Precarious employment is an increasing concern. While there is no official definition of precarious work it is recognised as being poorly paid, insecure, and unprotected. It is associated with part-time, temporary, 'zero-hours' and 'if and when' contracts. The OECD and trade unions have raised concerns about what they see as an increase in these working arrangements, with the OECD setting out a 'Job Quality Framework' which encompasses earnings quality, labour market security and quality of working environment, to help assess job quality (OECD, 2016b). The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation commissioned the University of Limerick to undertake a study of the prevalence of zero hours contracts (University of Limerick, 2015). The study examined four sectors—retail, hospitality, education and health—finding precarious work of varying degrees in all of these sectors and making a number of legal, policy and operational recommendations involving employers, trade unions, government and NGOs.

In our survey, precarious employment was raised by some of the unemployed household interviewees, a few of the service providers, but mainly by the policymakers. As might be expected, employers did not specifically comment on precarious employment, but did often reference the need for flexibility, as discussed in the previous section. However, they did also mention the need to treat employees well to improve productivity and retention, with some reference to corporate social responsibility and links to local communities. Some of the issues presented in the following sections will be more fully discussed in Chapter 7.

### **6.5.2 What the Households and Service Providers Said About Precarious Employment**

Household interviewees were most likely to mention precarious employment in relation to irregular work, but some also mentioned the uncertainty of transitioning from welfare to work, aspiring to a better job than short-term, part-time positions, as well as supplementing their income with ‘nixers’.

You get bits and pieces to do. But it’s not; it’s not a job you know what I mean. Nixers, you know—but it’s not permanent. (Xavier, Irish unemployed plumber)

While a few people thought that being in precarious employment was better than nothing, others with irregular work said they found it difficult to plan their lives.

After...like four or five months they close the site. So...since then...they just call me now and again, so I've been talking to them. I'm a family man, you know, sometimes I was thinking maybe I don't know that I'm going to work today, maybe at weekend, I see my kids only to take them out or whatever. Sometimes I bring them out and they will call me for a job. I have to beg the kids, please I have to go to work. So I've been complaining to them, I write a letter to them, talk to them, if it is 24 hours in the week it is ok with me but let it be regular so that I can have time for my family. But they don't listen...they have to comment that they don't have work for me anymore. (Ulysses, unemployed Nigerian)

Precarious work was not an issue particularly highlighted by the service providers, though a number of interviewees did note that uncertain hours of work, or a job with low hours, can put people off moving from welfare to work, particularly parents of young children.

Zero hour contracts can be quite difficult...for somebody transitioning [and] potentially losing the benefits they have as well. And very little, I suppose security, you know, from one week the next ... if they're the primary income earner, then there's a huge risk there when zero hour contracts are offered ... if they lose their benefits...the fear around it. (Orna, manager of a job-seeking support service)

Job-seeking support service interviewees noted that there is low awareness of the benefits which those moving from welfare to work can access, such as the payment available while waiting for wages to be paid, FIS, keeping the medical card for three years, etc. These issues are discussed more fully in Chapter 7.

### 6.5.3 Trends in Precarious Work

The remainder of this section presents issues raised by the policymakers interviewed about precarious work, many of whom raised it as a concern and held a range of views on whether and how it should be addressed.

Policymakers noted that precarious work is very evident in some sectors, and seems to be becoming more prevalent, e.g. in construction, childcare, retailing, hospitality. It is now evident in sectors where it was not so evident before, e.g. care and security contracted out by the State; and in high-skill sectors such as the media and higher education.

There's a lot of that sort of "if and when" going on in the personal health care that is being outsourced by the HSE—literally people driving around Dublin for private health care organizations that are doing this under contract from the HSE, visiting people in their homes, getting an hour here, an hour there, getting nothing this week, getting a whole load of hours next week. (Ultan, national stakeholder)

Policymakers said that the growth of precarious work was related to both consumer demand and employer choices, and sometimes to court rulings and changes in labour law.<sup>101</sup> There were very mixed views in relation to how widespread precarious work was in reality, with some interviewees noting that it depends which measures you use. In the recession, Hartley (a labour market expert) thought that a lot of those in precarious jobs lost them, so it looked like there was a decline. A number of people thought that 'hollowing out' of jobs, people having a range of part-time jobs, more 'uberisation' and more automation, all mean there will be more flexible and/or precarious jobs in future.

Flexible working is here to stay and, you know, that's as much driven by consumer demand, technology, globalization, all these other factors. Now you've got to—you can't just say—oh well, get over it—you've got to kind of address it. (Wesley, national stakeholder)

Hartley pointed out that as Ireland has a relatively flexible labour market it has more precarious work compared to, for example, the Nordic countries. But if Ireland

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<sup>101</sup> For example, a constitutional case to the High Court by an employer against the Catering Joint Labour Committee (JLC) resulted in the JLC being found unconstitutional, thereby rendering the regulations set by all JLCs as illegitimate. The JLCs are tripartite bodies which were established in sectors where collective bargaining was weak and pay was relatively low, and they set minimum pay and conditions of employment for workers in particular sectors, including hotels and catering (University of Limerick, 2015).

is compared to the UK and USA, then Ireland has less loss of good medium skilled jobs.

#### **6.5.4 Who is Most Affected by Precarious Work, and what forms does it take?**

Various research studies have found that young people, women, migrants, and those in disadvantaged areas are most likely to be affected by precarious employment (ILO, 2012; Eurofound, 2015; University of Limerick, 2015; OECD, 2016b; TASC, 2016; Nugent, 2017; ICTU, 2017).

There are specific issues for migrants. They often cannot get their qualifications recognised, so they end up working in poorer quality employment. The work permit system can leave them stuck in the same poor job for many years. Spouses of migrants do not have a visa to work under the work permit system.

Precarity takes different forms, and has varying impacts, with a wide range of views being expressed by the interviewees. Different types of precariousness were mentioned, e.g. bogus self-employment, shorter hours, less certainty, etc. There was a view that this is fine if it suits people, and this can be the case if they are young, students, on probation, and it is a stepping stone to a better job. But often the income can be uncertain, and the ability to cover the costs of working low, so that it can lead to some people turning down such jobs. This is particularly the case for the main income earner in a household.

Like if it's the primary income in a household...You can't do it....Like if it's the second or third income in the household or say, you know, older children or young adults living [at home], then people might be able to manage collectively....But if it's the primary income that kind of out of which a roof is kept over people's heads, food is put on the table, the lights are kept on - that isn't feasible. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

#### **6.5.5 What is the Role of Employers, and of DEASP, in Relation to Precarious Work?**

Policy maker interviewees made the point that employers do have a choice over how much they use precarious work. Some choose not to. There are seen as good employers. Those who provide precarious work choose different options.

My view of most employers—they're human like the rest of us, right, they've kids, they've families, they want to do well, and if they see somebody, you know, wanting to contribute, if they see potential in somebody—they'll support that. Yes, there's still unscrupulous [ones], you know, who will exploit people and, you know, low wages, low incomes and all the rest, you know. But I don't want to place anybody in to one of those jobs. (Padraig, manager of a training agency)



The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection wants to see full-time and part-time jobs available for those who want them. Some interviewees queried how much DEASP know about the quality of jobs they activate people into, but this viewpoint was countered by others.

People are not expected to take it. ... If an employer was offering an hour or 2 hours a day, you know for 5 days, that means you don't get a payment. So would we force somebody to take that? Clearly you wouldn't. (Jason, senior government official)

Through their supports, DEASP tries to incentivise employers to offer better conditions. For example, JobsPlus only applies if the work is 30 hours a week for a year or two; FIS only applies to those working 19 hours a week for at least 13 weeks, and DEASP point out to employers that this type of contract generates more staff loyalty and reduces turnover. However, their payments do allow some precarious forms of work to be combined with welfare.

A number of interviewees stated that it is important to ensure that precarious work does not become too widespread, both because of negative personal impacts, but also because it will be a challenge for the State to ensure people have adequate resources to live on, now and in retirement. The DEASP has little control over how employers choose to employ people, but state interventions to improve the quality of employment include the minimum wage, the Joint Labour Committees (JLCs), and now the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017 which strengthens rights for workers on insecure contracts.<sup>102</sup> There was a mixed reaction to the proposed introduction of this legislation, with a number of interviewees welcoming it, but others were of the view that it would add to employers' administrative burdens. A number of interviewees commented that it is difficult for trade unions to combat poor work practices as they often have very low membership in these sectors.

### **6.5.6 The Role of Social Clauses and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**

Social clauses can be used when awarding contracts to encourage employers to take on people who are unemployed. In relation to corporate social responsibility (CSR), some interviewees thought that businesses should engage with societal issues where there is a shared interest between the business and society to do so - for example, not discriminating, to ensure that good employees are not passed over; providing training to develop staff, etc. CSR should not be about businesses preserving or promoting their reputation.

I think CSR is fine, but as long as it's not just an extension of marketing or it's not just to preserve reputation. (Wesley, national stakeholder)

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<sup>102</sup> The Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017, accessed from <https://beta.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2017/147/> on 14 March 2018.

The ethos of the employers interviewed for this jobless households study varied from a very competitive and business oriented approach, to a customer focused approach, to one where there was an emphasis on staff as an asset, with investment in training and some flexibility in terms and conditions. One company specifically mentioned corporate social responsibility and their ambition to get involved in this to help young people in the area at risk of leaving school early.

We're now kind of entering the phase of kind of a little more stable sort of business,...it's now that we're looking at things like our corporate social responsibility, refreshing all of that and what we're thinking of is something that will be a little bit more community based, you know, in terms of giving back something....where there will be opportunities both on the kind of social side as well as, you know, maybe reaching out to schools and things like that. (Jennifer, Warehousing Firm)

## 6.6 Self-Employment

The policymakers interviewed provided a range of views about self-employment. The self-employed were described as a very diverse group, from solicitors to architects to farmers to the 'bogus self-employed' in construction, the gig economy and the media. The rate of self-employment is lower in Ireland than in other EU countries, possibly as some of the other countries, e.g. France, have a stronger culture of small artisans. Income for the self-employed can be quite low, and some of the work can be low skilled, although there was a view that there are also some 'under the counter' payments which can be hidden.

The average income for self-employed in Ireland is very low as well. It's like €15,000 or something ... But then again of course there's an overlap with the informal economy and, you know, the plumbers kind of, like its €70 if it's in cash, it's a €100 if it's by cheque, you know, it's very common here (Ultan and Uri, national stakeholders).

Several interviewees referred to examples of people who lost their jobs in the economic crash and who invested their redundancy money in setting up a business. Nevertheless, some household interviewees considered it risky to set up as self-employed.

All the job-seeking support services interviewed reported interest from some clients in setting up as self-employed, in many different sectors. However, many unemployed people feel they do not have the wherewithal to set up as self-employed. An organisation that supports people to move into self-employment agreed that it is not suitable for everyone.

Not everybody is suited to self-employment, so if there's other options for people quite a few people will take those options, they're easier...there's more security for them I suppose...So typically our cycle

would be in times of high employment ... our numbers would reduce...Because there are jobs yeah....[But when unemployment is high]...we would have a lot of forced entrepreneurs...people who are kind of forced in to it because they've [no] other options. (Georgia and Gisele, in an organisation supporting people to move to self-employment)

### 6.6.1 Barriers to Self-Employment

Household interviewees were asked if they were interested in self-employment, but most did not see themselves moving in this direction in future. Various reasons were cited by households for not wanting to set up their own business, including that they had no interest in it, not wanting the stress of self-employment, self-employment not being possible in their area of expertise, lack of money, literacy difficulties, and not having the ancillary skills required such as bookkeeping, doing tax returns and marketing. Lack of funding was a key reason, and a number of interviewees said that they would be interested in self-employment if they had the money to set up.

Yeah, I thought about that [setting up my own business], but unless you have money you can't start any business you know. I would do my own business because my father used to do [that] as well, I remember some of that (Casper, refugee).

### 6.6.2 Consideration of Self-Employment

Four household interviewees were actively planning to be self-employed, and five had tried to set themselves up as self-employed.

Of the four who were actively planning to be self-employed, one had already organised work giving fitness classes part-time, two were either studying or organising the money to study for a PSV (taxi) licence, and another had done training in starting your own business. Three more had done extensive research to set up their own business but in the end found that they could not afford it. One was a plumber who had considered registering for RGI (Registered Gas Installer) but considered it too expensive for what it offered. Two others were affected by the fact that they had no savings left after a number of years not working, which also meant that it was very difficult to get a loan.

He looked into [self-employment] and he got all the paper work and he was going to get a van...but it was working out that we actually just didn't have the money to get the van...we weren't in a position to actually borrow even to get the van...we probably should have done [that when we got made] redundant at the start. (Hannah, speaking of her husband)

The remaining two had set up a business, but neither was able to make a living from it. One had set up a clothing business but it had failed as she was not able to sell her

goods, and they were later stolen. A second person, the partner of another interviewee, had set up a boxing club, but found that the fees paid only covered his costs and did not pay him a wage. He ended up running the club in the evenings and weekends as a volunteer while still job-seeking. His partner said that he had found being unemployed very stressful and that running the boxing training club had greatly helped him as it provided him with a meaningful activity.

A number of the job-seeking support service providers noted that many people underestimate the amount of sales and marketing work, and/or financial work, needed to run a business successfully. One job-seeking support organisation provides support in-house, but most refer clients with a plausible idea on to specialised set-up-your-own-business centres. Many people are not aware of the supports available to set up as self-employed, or if their business fails.

I suppose if we surveyed all of our clients who came in last year, you know, there would still be quite a large majority I'm sure that will say there are no supports for people starting off....But in fact there are so many supports they're sent all over the place! (Georgia and Gisele, in an organisation supporting people to move to self-employment)

### 6.6.3 Supports for Setting Up Your Own Business

Many policy maker interviewees noted that setting up a business is much harder than many people think and people may need help with this. Various supports for this exist, including the Back To Work Enterprise Allowance; mentoring; advice from Intreo, the local development company and the LEO; Start your Own Business courses; and other local organisations which support enterprise and the social economy.

Household interviewees who had looked into being self-employed had usually availed of supports offered, or had looked into them. They were aware of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, and some planned to take this up. A number had been on a start your own business course. One had found the course she attended 'brilliant', while another had found the course he attended far too complex for what he wanted to do. One interviewee (Krystal) who had wanted to set up as a baker accessed a range of state services, some of which she found very useful. However, regulations meant that she was not able to bake in her own home, which was an important factor in preventing her starting the business, as she could not afford to hire a kitchen to bake in.

I started making cakes, and I think I just kind of was like 'I'd like to work for meself ' ... I did use [a] service which was tremendously helpful...[Names community organisation]...now I have to say they were amazing...they put me straight on to a Start Your Own Business course, which was brilliant....I was going to do it from the house...I contacted [the] County Council and it was like 'no you cannot work from your home, no way, shape or form ... the house is for living in and

that's that'. So that kind of put a big stop on that...it was just a whole load of blockages were put in me way.

Mercy, the interviewee whose clothing business failed, had availed of services from the Local Enterprise Board (LEB, now LEO) but felt they did not meet her needs, although as it turns out the advice might have been helpful, as the LEB mentor felt that the business did not have a large enough market in Ireland to succeed.

The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) can provide seed funding to businesses starting up, and will also assist with research to help a person access finance. Some clients arrive at the door of the LEO with an idea, but unemployed people who want to setup a business usually come through the local development company, which is a stepping stone to the LEO.

Creating awareness of the supports provided by the LEO is one of its biggest challenges. They run a local enterprise week with different events across the county to increase awareness of the supports available, as well as running local radio and media campaigns. In addition, the LEO goes to regular Chamber of Commerce meetings to network with business people.

Financial supports available include the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) and registering as self-employed while on a jobseeker's payment. There are also supports for those on BTWEA with doing their accounts, although a community centre manager thought that other useful supports could be developed and available to more people, such as assistance with filing tax returns.

A number of interviewees commented on the bureaucracy attached to accessing supports to set up a business. For example, it takes approximately 3 months to process the BTWEA grant.

To apply for the Back to Work Enterprise they have to do the Start Your Own Business course, then they have to put their business plan in place, then they're waiting for an appointment off Social Welfare and the whole thing can take months...at least three months, yeah. (Gillian and Gail, service providers)

Some grants also may not give the business flexibility to spend the funds on the items they feel are most important.

The funding that's available...for small start-up businesses—you have all of the construction men that are coming back, that are being forced into self-employment...when things went wallop they had to sell machines, tools, all of that kind of stuff...For an individual to apply for the Back to Enterprise the most they can apply for is up to €2,500, right, but that's very specific, it can't be for machines, it can only be for the likes of tools or insurance or all of those bits and pieces...but you can't go out and spend €2,500 on tools....You might be allowed spend 500 on tools, maybe 200 on marketing and...promotion and stuff like that...But the other side of it is as well is [that] they will pay eighty [per

cent], you have to pay twenty. On the insurance, they don't pay up front, you have to pay your twenty per cent up front—you're unemployed, how are you supposed to afford that? (Gillian and Gail, local service providers)

The long-term survival rate of self-employment businesses set up through the BTWEA scheme is not known, though it was reported that most of those which are set up survive throughout the term of their BTWEA support.

Last year I think we maybe supported about 600 people ... and of that about 250, maybe slightly more, moved in to self-employment, so came off the Live Register on to the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance scheme ... Now from year two and when [the] support from DSP ends, we don't really know that, we wouldn't know that unless we carried out a kind of a study of it because they've no obligation to come back to tell us. (Georgia and Gisele)

In relation to funding, a number of people were of the view that it is a good discipline for businesses to have to put up matching funding to demonstrate their capability and commitment.

If they just get everything on a plate I don't think it would be of any benefit because they'd be, they mightn't work as hard at it. (Eamon, local enterprise officer)

Accessing matching finance, however, can be a challenge. People with a good business idea who can get a grant from the LEO but have no matching funding can apply for a loan from Micro Finance Ireland, which has more competitive rates than the banks.

## 6.7 The Value of Volunteering

Working voluntarily can keep people engaged and connected when they are unemployed, and in some cases develop their skills. However, not everyone has the time, capacity or interest to undertake voluntary work. There are also various rules about the nature and extent of volunteering allowed under some of the social welfare payments. Section 4.4.4 describes the extent and nature of volunteering among the household interviewees. The current section adds some additional information about the role of volunteering in supporting, or otherwise, attempts to get paid employment.

Some of those who were volunteers for years noted that the work which they did as volunteers now requires qualifications which they do not have.

I done voluntary work now in a school, for years, in order to keep the, it going like. Instead of sitting at home, looking at the four walls. (Laughs) But all that had to change because you had to be vetted and—do you know what I mean—there's SNAs and there's rules and

regulations that were brought in over the years. That I had to take a back seat of it, yea. So I was kind of left then, the parents were helping out and sorting courses. (Barbara, was a volunteer SNA, now on CE in a community centre)

A question which arises is why extensive volunteering experience does not lead to paid employment. In some cases it is the conditions attached to their payment, or lack of education, as outlined earlier.

Volunteering is seen by community centre and job-seeking support staff as boosting a person's confidence and enhancing their skills. These skills can be useful to employers.

Definitely the youth work placements and volunteering are huge for going on to a CV, because a lot of [the] time it's experience, and even us interviewing we will always look if somebody has worked for a year somewhere. (Evelyn, manager of a community centre)

However, the rules on volunteering for jobseekers are quite complex. Their volunteering has to be approved by an Intreo deciding officer, and must be in an approved community and/or charity organisation. Only a few hours a week of volunteering is allowed, so that job seeking activity can continue.

Volunteering—there's a VW1 form that they have to complete and it basically has to be approved by a deciding officer to say they have our okay to do it as such. But if they were [volunteering] for six hours three or four days a week, you'd obviously have to say no, because they have to satisfy the main condition, which is being available for looking for fulltime employment. But if it was only two or three hours possibly two mornings a week, generally there wouldn't be an issue with that... there is a register kept of [all volunteers]. (Emily, case officer with a job-seeking support service)

In the study area, some of the community centres provide valuable sources of volunteering opportunities, as most have volunteer staff, as do a number of training centres, a charity and a statutory service. In the latter, the volunteers are providing specialised services.

There was little reference to volunteering by the employers interviewed but Karen in the catering company did say that she was interested in recruiting people who have done voluntary work. She finds that it demonstrates that a person is dedicated to supporting a customer. She adds that employers need to recognise this more, and that people looking for work need to promote this to a greater extent.

## 6.8 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has situated the findings of the low work intensity households' study in the domain of local labour markets and the employment opportunities available.

Local labour markets are affected by changing patterns nationally and internationally, and some of these trends are evident in the study area, e.g. increasing job opportunities after a severe recession, and the insecure nature of many jobs.

Most of the people interviewed for the study who were living in low work intensity households had previously worked but were currently not working because they had lost their job in the economic crash, had given up employment for family reasons, or they or a relative had an illness or disability. Many were trying to find employment but were experiencing difficulties for a range of reasons.

Job vacancies tend to be advertised on-line or employees are sought by word of mouth, with some advertised in the press and local venues. Digital and word of mouth approaches can put some long-term unemployed people at a disadvantage as they lack contacts to the labour market and may not always have the wherewithal to make on-line applications. Employers, for their part, use a range of methods to engage staff, from exhaustive application and interview procedures to recommendations from existing employees. Few respond well to speculative CVs. In general, employers look for people who are well motivated and willing to be trained. Depending on the nature of the job, some employers require various qualifications and certificates to demonstrate competence in certain areas.

The number of hours offered tended to be a bigger issue for both employers and potential employees than pay rates. Most of the employers interviewed for this study offered at least the minimum wage and often more, but many people struggled with low or variable hours, meaning that it could be difficult for a household's primary income earner to take jobs of a precarious nature. Many employers wanted a certain level of flexibility depending on the business. Family Income Supplement provided an income boost for many low paid employees but employers felt that it limited people's ability to work additional hours or take promotion. The policymakers interviewed expressed a range of concerns about what they saw as precarious working arrangements.

A number of the household interviewees had tried or were interested in self-employment, and had availed of the range of supports available. However, many lacked the wherewithal to pursue this option, mainly because of a lack of finance. Service providers highlighted the supports available, including access to loans, but both they and some policymakers interviewed highlighted the risks involved in self-employment. Attention was also drawn to the increasing incidence of 'bogus self-employment', particularly in the construction sector.

The chapter also explored the potential of social clauses and corporate social responsibility in encouraging employers to engage with people who are unemployed or at risk of becoming long-term unemployed. The value of volunteering was also highlighted, with issues preventing progression to paid employment noted.



# Chapter 7

## Moving from Welfare to Work

## 7.1 Introduction

A number of issues were raised by household interviewees when they are either considering moving from welfare to work, sometimes when they are offered jobs, and sometimes when they take them up. The key issues are described below, along with the views of service providers, employers, decision-makers and national stakeholders. These issues are whether rules around welfare payments facilitate leaving the payment for work, and the relative value of the income which a person receives in work versus social welfare, including secondary benefits such as the medical card and housing benefits. The extent to which employment support schemes and self-employment supports can help unemployed people move into work is also considered. Caring costs, as well as transport and IT access, are focused on as well. How work can be combined with a welfare payment is another issue, as is precarious work, discussed in the previous chapter. Other problems which can hamper the movement from welfare to work are confidence and motivation, discrimination and stereotyping, and the capacity of individuals.

The extent to which these issues affect all jobseekers and unemployed people is not clear, as nearly all the household interviewees had been out of the labour market for at least one year and so fall in to the long-term unemployed category. However, the experiences and views of the different groups interviewed do illuminate some issues which can hamper the transition from welfare to work for those who have been out of the labour market for a longer period of time.

## 7.2 Do the Rules Around Welfare Facilitate a Move to Work?

First of all, there is the issue of whether or not rules on welfare payments facilitate a move to work. A number of household interviewees felt that certain payment schemes could not easily be combined with employment. One household interviewee outlined how she felt she had to leave her part-time job after 16 years, when the rules around combining welfare and work changed when she moved from One Parent Family Payment to Jobseeker's Allowance.

I was in part time employment up to around two and a half years ago. And I had to—I had no choice, I had to give up work, I was forced into it ... I was on One Parent Family as well and then when my youngest child turned eighteen I was taken off the One Parent. And because I worked

one hour every day and I worked five hours on a Thursday night, so ten hours in total a week, I didn't qualify for job seekers because I was unavailable for work because of that one hour every day ... So I tried living on fifty euros a week ... I went from being able to earn a few bob on top of my Social Welfare to just living on fifty euros a week you know ... So I gave up then the one hour every day and I held onto my Thursday night ... Because I was classed as a casual worker so I was having to get slips signed and stamped every week in work [and] bring them down to the Social Welfare ... If they could have just stopped my money without me having to be doing that because my work never ever changed - it was always only Thursday night you know ... Then I just said—you know, this is just too much hassle. Because basically I felt I was doing five hours work for thirty euros you know because the welfare was taking twenty out of it ... So I had to give up after sixteen years, which was devastating to me. (Linda, household interviewee)

A number of service providers also reported similar issues arising for some people moving off One Parent Family Payment. Meanwhile, those on Carer's and Disability Allowances who wish to combine training or employment with receipt of their payment encountered some problems with the hours they could work, as outlined previously.

Some of those on various carer's and disability payments wondered could they risk coming off their payments to take up (more) work (or work experience) when they or their relatives are in a period of better health. However, they considered that the payment could not be regained if it was needed, and this puts them off leaving welfare. Julia, a household interviewee on Invalidity Pension, outlined her experience.

There's a new Scheme out now, right, that people that are on Invalidity to work for a certain amount of hours. So I went to the Citizen's Advice Bureau to find out about it, and they said "I wouldn't even touch it because you're on Invalidity because you're not supposed to be able to work", right. And they said that "if you're suddenly going out to work because they're got this new Scheme in, obviously you can work". (Julia, household interviewee on Invalidity Pension)

Decision makers and national stakeholders agreed that people on the various disability and carer's payments have a fear that the payment may not be regained, as outlined in section 5.6. The result is that people on Disability Allowance tend to stay on it rather than move to another payment which would facilitate them to look for some work, as Disability Allowance is seen as a 'safe' payment, one which will endure.

As outlined in Chapter 3, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is aware of these issues, and is aiming to tackle them through the policy *Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities*.<sup>103</sup> However, the policy is very new, and stakeholders interviewed suggested that there is quite a way to go, in terms of building trust with people with disabilities and the stakeholder organisations who work with them.

## 7.3 Income from Paid Work

### 7.3.1 Pay Can Be Less Than on Social Welfare

A second important issue that arises for those who are contemplating moving from welfare to work is that some household interviewees found that income from employment is less than income from social welfare payments. Those who described this were couples or lone parents with children. This fits with earlier studies showing that in Ireland, the replacement rates<sup>104</sup> for couples with a number of children are high, while they are typically low for single people (NESC, 2011a). Hannah outlined how this had happened when her unemployed husband got a temporary job.

He took a job [as] Christmas work ... which was €400 a week ... we were getting €420 on the labour because we were getting fuel allowance ... [So] we actually lost, we lost out on €60 because of the €20, three weeks [of] €20. I think it was €30 petrol every week [as well, so] just taking a job for three weeks set us completely back. (Hannah, unemployed qualified adult)

The fact that income from social welfare might be higher than that from a job, particularly for a family, was also mentioned as an issue by employers, service providers and decision-makers.

Sorcha, who is a single parent and came back to work, you know last year, ... she lost you know a big part of the benefits [she was getting from the State] when she came back to work [so] at the time we employed her you know she had to sit down and think about it very carefully ... We were offering her you know a salary of X level [and] by the time you know she paid tax ... I understand that she's not that much, you know, better off than had she remained you know unemployed. And I think that's a real disincentive you know for people

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<sup>103</sup> See <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Make-Work-Pay.aspx>, accessed 19 September 2017.

<sup>104</sup> Replacement rates try to capture the proportion of household disposable income from employment that is 'replaced' by social welfare when a person is out of work.

who are long term unemployed. (Sasha Employer, Construction Company)

### 7.3.2 Secondary Benefits

As outlined in Chapter 4, several households mentioned how costs such as medical care, housing and childcare can end up being borne in full by an individual when employment is taken up, and that this can be difficult on the low wages which long-term jobless households often command.

#### *Medical Card*

All of those interviewed are dependent on a social welfare income and so are likely to all have a medical card. Seven interviewees who are actively seeking work and who have an illness, or an illness in the family, are concerned about the possibility of losing it if they take up employment. One person was considering part-time rather than full-time work as a means to keep it, or to allow her to be eligible for the GP-only medical card.

See this [the medical card] is what I have to watch. 'Cos I'm on medication and I'll be on it for the rest of me life ... the tablets alone are nearly seventy euro...every month...I can't afford then to lose the medical card...Yea this is what you come up ... against, like. Probably would eventually go part time, in order to stay under that, stupid—having to stay under the bracket. But I wouldn't be able to afford the tablets, and your doctor visit then is sixty euro ... You could fight that—I could probably get the doctor card, do you know what I mean. But then paying for the meds every month. (Barbara, household interviewee, on CE)

Decision makers and employers also noted that loss of a medical card can put people off taking up employment.

This has happened me more than once, where I'd send the [person] off, more or less to get the job, and they come back and say—I can't take that—why—well like, eventually I'll lose me medical card. (Johan, local politician)

#### *Housing supports*

As noted in Chapter 4, some interviewees specifically told of leaving a job or not taking a job offered, due to the fact that they would lose their rent supplement if they were working, and that their pay was too low to allow them to pay for rents in the private rental sector.

When I finished with FÁS I was supposed to get a job and work in [local area] here, that's where I did my work experience. So the management liked me, they wanted to take me but the problem is that the social made me lose the job there. Because I haven't got council house. You

see, so I pay rent and what they wanted to pay me by then was something like €350 a week, I'm going to pay like €1,200 for rent. So once I'm doing fulltime job, there's no supplement they can give me anymore. So I can't live, do shopping, do everything, I can't do it. So that's how I can't take the job there. (Ulysses, household interviewee)

Again, this experience was corroborated by a number of service providers and employers.

### **Childcare**

A key issue raised in relation to moving from welfare to work was the cost of childcare, as Tammy explained.

Crèches are very expensive... so much a month for the first child, the second child and, if it should work like that, just take your wages and give it to the childcare organisation at the end of the week or month. That's it. Don't even worry about your rent or anything. (Tammy, household interviewee with 3 daughters under 18)

A number of respondents said they could not afford to go back to work because of the cost of childcare. This was also noted by service providers and employers. Several interviewees acknowledged the particular difficulties for lone parents.

The cost of childcare is just kind of prohibitive, and that's got to be a real disincentive. I mean particularly if somebody is a lone parent and they're trying to get back to work. You know and again if its somebody who is long term unemployed, you know typically would be you know less skilled, you know so wouldn't, you know demand kind of a higher salary. So how you could expect people, you know to go back to work? (Sasha Employer, Construction Company)

### **7.3.3 What Supports are Available for Moving into Work?**

Some employers and service providers felt that a family's secondary benefits should only gradually be withdrawn when they leave welfare to take up work, and that this should be linked to income earned.

Somebody with four or five children ... needs [to earn] €1,100 or €1,200 [if they] get a job. Otherwise it's not worth [their] while. My argument is that, yes, there should be a support from the State around families who are disadvantaged and require some assistance but ... the unemployment part shouldn't be included in that. It should be separate. [If that was the case and I'm on jobseeker's, and] I get an offer of a job of €400—€400 is better than €210.50 or €188, [and] my household support is not touched; that just travels with me and reduces incrementally as my salary rises, until there's no further necessity for it...[This would help] getting people out of the trap, take

[away] the fear of taking a job, even if it's only a short time job, take the fear away. (Isabel, employer in the care sector)

As outlined in Chapter 3, there are several supports which do in fact follow a person from welfare into work. First of all, the eligibility requirements for a medical card, and particularly a GP-only medical card, are quite broad and so can be combined with work, as a small number of households recognised. The medical card can be kept for three years when a person moves into work from long-term unemployment, or for five years if they are a person with a disability.

In relation to housing, there are also supports which can follow a person into employment, which some households are aware of, such as differential rent, which is based on household income, for those in local authority-owned accommodation, or in receipt of RAS or HAP, as Vinny outlined.

No matter what I'm earning a week I only have to pay 10 per cent towards me rent. Like now we pay 50 here a week, because we get 350 as a family payment, for the three of us. So let's say even if I was to earn 600 a week, I'd only be paying 60. (Vinny, household interviewee living in emergency accommodation)

A number of service providers and decision-makers spoke about the difference the new HAP scheme could make to those taking up employment, compared to rent supplement.

HAP is making a difference ... for the persons, you know, who qualify and who gain agreement with their landlord in terms of the HAP arrangement ... their contribution is at 14 per cent, it's the same as if it was, you know, a kind of, a regular, if you like, local authority dwelling... so it's a differential rent ... The rent supplement issue, which was generally speaking a poverty trap... has been addressed. (Daithi, local service provider manager)

For childcare, the new Affordable Childcare Scheme will help with costs for those earning low incomes, and in training, as Chris, a senior government official, outlined.

The CCS which is the largest of the [existing childcare] schemes—you need to be in receipt of a social welfare payment to be getting the highest subsidy rates ... but the eligibility criteria aren't well, I suppose, aligned with the labour market activation agenda ... There [are] many families who would get the maximum support when they are out of work ... and when they go in to work may lose some or all of that childcare support. So one of the changes that the Affordable Childcare Scheme is making, is it is shifting the eligibility solely, or almost entirely, on to income. So that you can be—if you are in work, but in low income employment, you can get potentially quite a significant childcare subsidy. (Chris, senior official in a government department)

### *Issues with these supports*

However, there are some problems with the supports which can be accessed by those in work and on low incomes, which may continue to hamper those who wish to move into employment. For housing, local authority-owned accommodation is in short supply, so that demand for it is much higher than the supply available. These problems also affect HAP, although it is based on accommodation owned by private landlords. The general shortage of rental accommodation, and some landlords' reluctance to take HAP payments<sup>105</sup>, are reducing the potential supply of HAP accommodation available, as noted by a number of interviewees and also the recent report by (Walsh & Harvey, 2017).

It's just a nasty trap you're in because there's no houses ... It's not the fact of money, there's nothing out there...we went to a viewing up in [local area], a two bedroom apartment. And it was like, first of all we came in, we seen all these—we thought there was a party going on or something. We got off the [bus], there was all these cars everywhere ... It was all the people coming for the viewing. They couldn't even get parking, the road had blocked up with people coming...you could barely even get into the place ... That's the way it is, there's just no houses out there. (Vinny, household interviewee in emergency homeless accommodation)

It's not every landlord is going to sign up to HAP ... it's not a perfect a solution is what I'm hearing. (Daithi, local service provider manager)

The Affordable Childcare Scheme is also very new, and it remains to be seen how many providers will offer it, and the budget available.

Another barrier is around availability of places ... the Department could only subsidise childcare places where private childcare providers decided to provide them. (Chris, senior official in a Government department)

Huge, huge funding challenges ... obviously there's an upper limit, but it runs into seven figures, not six, for that [Affordable Childcare] scheme. It could become a very expensive scheme. (Clive and Caitlin, senior officials in a Government department)

New schemes such as HAP and the ACS are a departure from the traditional support provided to those on social welfare but not to those in work who are on low incomes. HAP and the ACS both aim to provide support to those on low incomes, no matter what the source of this income is. This is positive in terms of supporting jobless households to move into employment. However, access to health care is not

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<sup>105</sup> Even though it is illegal for landlords to refuse to accept HAP. See <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2017/0821/898813-housing-assistance-payment-case/>, accessed 18 May 2018.



as far advanced in being structured in this way, as it is still primarily provided to those on a social welfare payment. It is not awarded primarily on the basis of health needs. There are some moves towards this with the provision of free GP care to children under six, and the planned move to free GP care for children under twelve. However, these moves have been subject to delays. Providers, employers and decision-makers thought that the medical card should be awarded on the basis of health issues, as well as income.

Certainly there may need to be some recognition for sort of underlying chronic kind of illnesses. (Gloria, senior manager at local level)

Despite some of these problems, nonetheless there are several schemes available to those who move from welfare to work, which raises the question of why some are not being taken up. First, some households are not aware that they are able to keep a range of secondary benefits after leaving social welfare, as Alice, who manages a job-seeking support service, outlined.

A lot of the longer term unemployed clients—because a lot of ... changes have happened in recent years around those wrap-around supports—there can be a low awareness of that. So there can be a low awareness of—“oh I do keep my medical card for 3 years”. “No, I’ve never heard of Family Income Supplement”, “oh I’ve never heard of Back to Work [Family Dividend]”. (Alice, manager of a job-seeking support service)

Some people reported that it was hard to find information on what supports are available.

There also seems to be quite a lot of misinformation about what secondary benefits people can keep. Many people seem to rely on what neighbours or friends say, rather than asking Intreo what supports apply to them.

People will come in the door and they’ll say to you ‘well I heard’, you know... and we say—look, it’s a case by case basis, you know—the next door neighbour—what could be going in to their house and the knock-on effect on them could be totally different to the knock-on effect for you...So it’s not till they actually come in the door to sit down to find out about the knock-on effect [on them]... People may not seek out the information, you know, because anecdotally, as we all know, like I mean if you, you might hear something and believe it then. (Daithi, local service provider manager)

Some decision-makers found it frustrating that so many sources of information are funded, but that people still lack information.

It is hard to know that you have an [information] network with a lot of people getting some kind of income from [it] on the C&V<sup>106</sup> side, and an [information] network on the state side through social protection offices and all the rest of it—and somehow that the information is lacking! You know, it's kind of hard to know [why]. (Darina, manager in a local service provider)

It does seem, however, that people rely more on local and community-based organisations that they trust for information, rather than DEASP, as a number of interviewees outlined.

If I want advice about social welfare, it's interesting, I won't go into the social welfare office. Well some people do, clearly! But some will not go in there, [they]'ll go to the citizen's information. (Jason, senior official in a Government department)

This can be related to the lack of trust in Intreo, as outlined in Chapter 5. A number of decision-makers felt that lack of trust in Intreo means that people are less inclined to go to one of their offices to check what entitlements they might have when moving into work.

I think that there has been very significant improvements in terms of information ... There's been efforts to make it much [better], both its availability and ... its presentation, you know. ... But of course the difficulty really is if people are coming from a stage of not [being] confident about holding [their] payments, the last thing you want to be doing is talking about this to the officials (laughs). (Gloria, regional manager)

Such fears seem to be particularly pronounced among those on disability payments, as outlined earlier.

It is also the case that information given by Intreo can be incorrect, as reported here.

It depends on the individual [in Intreo] you're talking to. ...It's not necessarily the correct information they're getting all the time....When you go in to our local Intreo office you go to a reception, [and] in recent years because of the merger and the change, staff have been moved, so [you] could have somebody who was dealing with rents and they've been put on the information desk in reception, they don't necessarily have all of the information...so sometimes it's the question that's asked, sometimes it's the fact that the individual behind the counter doesn't know the answers. (Gillian and Gail, job-seeking support service)

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<sup>106</sup> Community and voluntary.

As outlined in Section 5.4.1, Intreo is aware of this variation in service in different offices, and is rolling out a programme of training for staff, but it is taking time to provide this training to all Intreo offices nation-wide.

In addition, the schemes that make most difference in tackling these poverty traps (HAP and ACS) are either quite new (HAP), or completely new (ACS). They are not that well known yet, and also the concerns outlined above, that they face/will face capacity constraints, are important.

Meanwhile, there are a number of cash supports which have been available for some time for those moving into work and on a low income. How these facilitate moves from welfare into work will be considered in the next sections.

## 7.4 Income Supports for Those Moving into Work, or in Work

### 7.4.1 Pending Wage Payments

A number of household interviewees mentioned the delay in getting paid when starting a job and how difficult it can be to cope with this after a period of unemployment.

People on benefit, and when they get a job, even before they get their first payment their benefit will be withdrawn from them. It's a frightening thing because when you're on benefit, you are in debt...you're living from hand to mouth. It's not like you have a great savings or anything ... You have no support and you haven't even got your first payment. So that system is not encouraging anybody to step out there and go for a job. (Tammy, household interviewee)

However, one service provider mentioned the pending wage payment which can help with this.

A lot of them wouldn't come in and tell you before they've started [a new job], because if they are doing a back week or a back month a lot of them wouldn't be aware that they can go to a community welfare officer for a pending wages payment. (Emily, case officer in a job-seeking support service)

But one national stakeholder thought that this payment is not well advertised by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

There is the mechanism of payment pending wages. It's one of those things we keep plugging (laughs)—we keep encouraging them to plug. At one stage it disappeared off welfare.ie ... That is one of those things—like the Department really don't want people to know because God forbid they might use it. But when you think about it, it's like

literally maybe four weeks money, so €800 if it's a single person.  
(Sansa, national stakeholder)

Three interviewees suggested that welfare payments should not end immediately a person starts work, due to the extra costs taking up work entails, but instead continue for a time to help cushion the fear people feel about leaving welfare.

And when you get a job, definitely you need clothing, or a car ... or leap card, or something. You need something up front, so it will get you through first month. ...If some people find the courage in themselves to work, I think that...[the] system should support [them] before you then let go. ... it makes people stuck, do you know, if it's not carefully weaned off. (Tammy, household interviewee)

Some policymakers and national stakeholders also spoke about the importance of advisory supports to help long-term unemployed people sustain employment. Under the JobPath contract, support is provided for a year following the take up of a job, to help the previously unemployed person deal with difficulties this might entail. This might include fitting in with the team at work, keeping concentration up, feeling more tired than usual, and managing the changes at home. However, not all employment support services provide this.

#### **7.4.2 Family Income Supplement (now Working Family Payment)**

As outlined in Chapter 3, Family Income Supplement (FIS) (now Working Family Payment) assists people with children on low incomes who have moved from welfare to work. Two households among those interviewed received it. Several employers also told the interviewers that they had staff on FIS, as outlined in Section 6.4.4 earlier.

Some service providers, decision-makers and national stakeholders talked about delays in accessing FIS—although no household interviewees did.

*Interviewee 1:* When they do the review [of FIS], the review seems to take forever ... what they do is they stop the Family Income Supplement until the review is complete so [the client] could have no money. *Interviewee 3:* But it does happen a lot. *Interviewee 2:* It happens an awful lot, I used to see that in community welfare an awful lot. *Interviewee 3:* And the Family Income Supplement [section] don't seem to understand the sense of urgency, they are taking this money from people. It's a big problem and it can undermine... *Interviewee 2:* I think FIS do write out to them well in advance and they are supposed to supply the information, I think it's only when the money stops that's when they realise. (Emily, Esther and Eric, staff in a job seeking support service)

There is work underway to see if the application process for FIS can be speeded up.

We've had a pilot where we had case officers involved in two locations around assessing people for Family Income Supplement. Not to short-circuit the whole thing, you know what I mean, [but] where somebody has someone who is looking for a job and believe is eligible, the case officer was involved in the FIS application, other than [the application] going to Longford ... Surprisingly the numbers were very low, do you know what I mean, of actual people in that situation who were eligible. (Jason, national policy maker)

Those undertaking temporary work (less than 13 weeks) are not entitled to FIS. The case of Hannah's husband, who ended up earning less in a temporary job than he had gotten from Jobseeker's Allowance and fuel allowance (see Section 7.3.1), would have been different if he had been eligible for FIS in that job. It would probably have resulted in his earned income being higher than his social welfare payments. However, for a temporary job, he was not entitled to it.

One national stakeholder thought that it should not be that difficult to assess eligibility for FIS through Revenue records, which would remove the requirement for a separate application, and help ensure that more of those who are eligible for FIS receive it.

[In response to a question about whether it should be possible to be automatically assessed for FIS]...I think to be honest with you, between the fact that Welfare and Revenue now talk to each other, all of this should be feasible, you know, so it should. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

### 7.4.3 Combining Welfare and Work

There are also a range of ways in which people can combine jobseeker's payments and employment, as outlined in Chapter 3. One way in which people can do this is by taking up casual work and suspending their claim, and then quickly re-activating it later when the work has finished. A service provider working in this area felt that moving from casual work and back to a claim should be quite simple.

If they have been working casually, they would be just—that would happen very easily, so it would. There shouldn't be any delay as long as they have their P45 or a letter from the employer stating the last day of employment. That should be fairly straight forward. (Into Work, service providers)

However, a household interviewee who got temporary work experienced delays in being able to access their payment once the work had finished, which put them off taking up such work again.

He took a job [as] Christmas work [and so]...they suspended his labour ... [When he finished he went back] to the labour [and said] I need to reopen my account, it was suspended... They opened his account. And they said yeah your next payment is the 29th of December. And he

said—what about this week... I've 3 kids, its Christmas week... we've no money... She goes—oh the way it works because of the dates that you finished or you worked...[Okay,] we'll pay you tomorrow but next week you'll only get €200 [instead of €400]....We had to live on €200 that week with no other money from nowhere else...what incentive is out there? (Hannah, household interviewee, speaking of her husband)

As outlined above, in this temporary job he was not eligible for FIS.

A much more common way in which work and welfare is combined is through those who are working low hours also claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, part-time.<sup>107</sup> As noted above, FIS can also support those on low pay in certain jobs, where they have children. Some employers found that staff combining welfare and work worked well.

Some of them would only, can only work maybe you know, 15 or 20 hours a week to hold on to their [social welfare] ... I am aware that they are on social welfare. And to be honest, we never give more than 20 hours a week, anyway. (Miriam employer, cleaning company)

There can be positive spin offs from being able to combine welfare and work.

At least if you work you might be able to get either extra hours or move on into a better job, so at least you maybe have some chance of finding a better job, increasing your income. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

But, as outlined in Section 6.4.4, some employers also reported that staff do not want to do overtime or increase their income in case it affects their welfare payments and benefits.

So we would have some people that come [in], and they would be like, 'well I'll only work three days a week', but we are like, 'no, that's not the way it works. You have to work in line with what the business needs are'. They might only get one shift this week but we might need them to work five the following week. But what tends to happen then is they'll call in sick. And that's really frustrating... That would turn you off taking on someone that you know is on social welfare because we've so much difficulty. (Denise, Employer, Hotel).

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<sup>107</sup> Sometimes household interviewees had to do this as they could not get work with higher hours. In some sectors there are many jobs which are of low hours and in some cases are precarious too. This issue has been discussed in the previous chapter.

Some also argue that it costs the State money to subsidise employers who can afford to pay more.<sup>108</sup>

Of course the cynical view is that it's a subsidy to employers and that there is evidence that it does effectively do that, you know. (Ultan, national stakeholder)

#### 7.4.4 Certainty of Income, and Precarious Work

The issue of precarious work is relevant also, as outlined in Section 6.5.4 earlier. Clearly it is off-putting to leave welfare for a lower income—and even more off-putting to leave it for an uncertain income.

If the only income you have is welfare, and the only work that you can access is precarious, [then] you don't know what your hours are [and] that's bugging all use to you...You might be struggling to manage on welfare but at least you know, well, I've got X amount per week and I can manage. If you don't know what you're going to get when you transfer to the world of work, you might get double X one week, you might get half X the next week. So, unless there's another income in the household, that's not feasible. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

As highlighted in the previous chapter, Government officials do not expect those on welfare to move into such insecure jobs, and JobsPlus and FIS are only awarded for more secure jobs.

Certainty of income and support is something which jobseekers (and others) value.

The people moving from welfare to work, they need definite ... Definite is, you know, I need X to, you know, to be able to pay the rent, feed the kids, pay for the extras. (Daithi, local service provider manager).

As discussed earlier, this issue can also be seen in relation to medical cards. Some decision makers thought that the prospect of losing the medical card after three years employment seems to be more about the insurance value it provides a jobseeker, than its actual value.

At [one] time [the medical card] was worth on average €600 a year. But the perceived value of it is much more ... It's the insurance aspect of it. (Harvey, academic expert)

Some stakeholders felt that making it easier to combine precarious work and social welfare, providing more certainty about this, and Intreo being open to

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<sup>108</sup> It is also argued by some stakeholders that Family Income Supplement (now Working Family Payment) does this.

conversations without this triggering an investigation of payments, could ultimately help to move more people from welfare to work.

It is in the Department [of Social Protection's] own interest to build that relationship with people,...so that people feel, yes I can go down and talk to them....And you build up that relationship of trust, make sure there's good communication, people are properly informed ... Even the hours based stuff, if they did it as an activation measure...to facilitate people to get back in ... The most effective activation tool is facilitating people to get paid work, build up their links in the labour market,...skill them a bit more, they're more likely to hear about work because they'll be in the loop and then a very good chance they will progress on, you know. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

Such an approach may facilitate more take-up of employment. But it does seem that at the moment, household interviewees who are offered casual employment feel it is better to turn it down rather than risk losing welfare payments or secondary benefits.

There's actually a couple of people come to him and said "look, well cash in hands" right. But even bouncer on a door, or taxi or whatever, but Jim was like "you don't know who you'll see and then they end up grassing you up". People are so spiteful. But if he knew for a fact that his money wouldn't be touched if he went for things, our medical cards wouldn't be touched, certain things then, like sure he'd be [interested]. (Julia, speaking of her husband who is on Carer's Allowance)

## 7.5 Other Supports to Help People Move from Welfare to Work

### 7.5.1 Self-employment

There are income and other supports available for those who wish to move to self-employment, such as the BTWEA and STEA, and start-your-own-business courses, as outlined in Chapter 3 and discussed in Chapter 6. However, those who are looking to set up as self-employed, and service providers, noted that it can take some time for the supports available to be put into place, and that some of the supports can be difficult for those trying to move from welfare to self-employment to make use of, as outlined in Section 6.6 earlier.

Overall though, it seems that there is a wide range of supports available for those setting up a business—even though awareness of them may not be high, and people might prefer different types of supports.

Some household interviewees also thought that taking up self-employment runs the risk of no welfare supports in future. However, as with secondary benefits, the



picture is not that clear. Although previously self-employed people are not eligible for non-means tested Jobseeker's Benefit, they may be eligible for means-tested Jobseeker's Allowance. As with other supports, awareness of this is not high.

A lot of self-employed don't know that they can apply for Jobseeker's Allowance and all that and be means tested. They—they're just told you can't apply for anything. (Brenda, service-provider)

Lack of awareness of this could deter people from moving from welfare to working as self-employed. The Government has recently made provision for more social welfare supports to be available to self-employed people who are paying PRSI contributions. In the past year, a number of PRSI benefits have been extended to the self-employed, including the Treatment Benefit scheme (for optical and dental treatment) and Invalidity Pension. This could help increase the incentive for unemployed people to move into self-employment.

### 7.5.2 The Role of Employment Support Programmes

Employment support programmes are another measure put in place to help people to move from welfare to work, with over 35,000 participants on the main schemes in 2016, as outlined in Chapter 3.

#### *Beneficial outcomes from Employment Support Programmes*

About half the households interviewed had a member who had been on an employment support scheme, mainly Tús and CE, with one on JobBridge and one on Jobs Initiative (JI). Five people were currently on a scheme. As outlined in Chapter 4, most participants liked the fact that they were making a contribution to their local community, they could get training (on CE) and an extra payment on top of their welfare payment per week. They also liked getting paid directly into their bank account rather than having to go to the post office, and the fact that do not get contacted by Intreo when they are on an employment support programme.

Some service providers saw employment support schemes as a good next step for some clients—young people with no work experience, and people very removed from the labour market, e.g. those on Jobseeker's Transition, or someone who had been in prison.

[He] had a ... thirteen year old conviction ... and it stopped him going anywhere ... I just couldn't find him work ... [Then] I saw a CE scheme job that came up ... in a drug rehab project ... looking after a small little coffee dock [I gave him a] reference ... and he got the job ... The job [there] was the ideal thing—start small, show you are dependable, show you're able ... He rang me about just over a year in the job ... and says—I have an opportunity of getting an assistant manager job in the refuge in [name of place]—will you give me a reference. ... So he got the job—he walked into it ... It's great ... but they are few and far between ... people need to take a leap of faith as well. (Harry, manager of a training centre)

Some of the policymakers commented that employment support programmes were not necessarily a solution to long-term unemployment issues of skills and employability, but that they could provide important social benefits from working. Positive broader outcomes can also arise for the children of people on employment support programmes compared to those who remain unemployed, as this experience can provide social capital from a household perspective. Policymakers also noted other social benefits, such as the possibility for CE places to be targeted at particular groups. For example, at one stage there were 1,000 CE places reserved for recovering drug addicts (on methadone) and they were very successful.

### ***Criticisms of employment support programmes***

However, there were some criticisms of employment support programmes.

#### Choice

First, there is a perception that people are sent on employment schemes. This can have negative impacts for the employer, as Denise in the hotel outlined.

I did have now one or two bad experiences with Job Bridge where just the people that came just weren't interested ... We've had really good people come, and they are the people who have stayed with us and gone on to do JobsPlus and been employed, but I have had a few bad experiences with Job Bridge. ... I think they didn't want it, but they had to do it. (Denise, Hotel)

Nevertheless, the requirement to go on an employment scheme is not always negative, as Gloria outlined in Section 5.5.2, where she spoke about people being compelled to go on Tús—but to her surprise, they engaged with it and absenteeism was very low.

#### The costs of taking part in an employment scheme

Although employment schemes have a 'top-up' payment which is to cover the costs of taking part in them, for some household interviewees this top-up payment did not cover the costs of taking part in the scheme, as Hannah outlined in Chapter 4, in relation to her husband's participation in JobBridge. One employer reported not engaging with JobBridge due to negative publicity around the view that some employers who could afford to pay staff were engaging with JobBridge to cut wage costs. A number of community centre managers also felt it was demeaning to pay someone only a small top-up to their social welfare for taking part in an employment support programme, when those around them doing similar work are getting paid much more. These issues also came up in the evaluation of JobBridge (Indecon, 2013). Hugh and Harvey, two national stakeholders, felt that while there is a value in work experience schemes, there needs to be an increased rate of payment for participants, and the host organisation should make a contribution towards this as they get the benefits. A recommendation to this effect was included in the outcomes of the JobBridge evaluation.

### Changes impacting on people with a disability

Some changes to employment support schemes have a negative impact on particular groups. For example, CE has shortened the amount of time which participants can stay in their roles, which has had a negative impact for some people with disability who would have stayed in roles where progression was not possible, but the social element of the role was beneficial. During the crisis, the eligibility of people with disability for schemes such as CE was reduced so that now the only one they are eligible for is Gateway (see Section 3.2.6).

During the crisis, ahm, people with disabilities were elbowed, literally elbowed out, the Department said “no, no, no, no”. And then the eligibility, and the training, and the allowance for that got curtailed, and you know it didn’t operate anymore ... The only iteration of the CE Scheme now that people [with disability] would be eligible for is that, ahm, the Gateway Project, the Local Authority one. (Ivy, officer in a disability organisation)

### Training

Another problem which arises in some employment programmes is lack of upskilling training, which can delay less skilled participants from subsequently moving into paid employment. For example, Tús does not incorporate a training element. This was because it initially was focused on unemployed people with skills. During the recession, some highly skilled people who had lost their jobs moved on to Tús, where they mixed with participants who had low levels of qualifications, and the mix was beneficial as those with low levels of skills learnt a lot from the more highly skilled participants. However, with the changes in unemployment, the programme is dominated by younger unskilled participants, who would benefit from training.

CE does allow the participant to get training and certification. However, some household interviewees reported that the training they got was not FETAC-accredited, and so had limited validity in terms of getting a job.

The [CE] scheme that I’m on at the moment, I’d love to stay in it. ... look at the training that [we’re] getting. All the certs I’m after doing. ... But the likes of the certs that we have ... they’re all in-house training. That’s no good ... I know meself from watching girls finishing up and back down the labour to sign on. It’s heart breaking. (Barbara, lone parent on CE)

A number of trade union interviewees were very critical of JobBridge, arguing that the return on internships is very low and that the resources could be put to better use. They compared unpaid internships without a training component to apprenticeships, as two ends of a training spectrum for young people. They also felt that internships can push down wages for new entrants, and can result in people getting poor contracts afterwards, e.g. short-term temporary contracts. However, the JobBridge evaluation did show that the scheme was successful in helping participants move into employment.

### Accessing Employment Support Schemes

Some people have found it difficult to get on an employment support scheme, even though they want to, citing administrative delays and eligibility criteria.

I applied for the CE scheme for the security over in [name of school] ... and I was told you'll be waiting twelve to thirteen weeks for that. I says—I'll wait, you know. Thirteen weeks has come and gone I haven't heard anything. (Danny, unemployed sports centre manager)

Isabel complained that people who are interested in working on a CE scheme in the care agency have to apply through Intreo and many do not come back to them, either because they do not bother or if they do enquire with Intreo, they get sent to another CE scheme.

People come into us all the time, well they used to come in and leave CVs in and stuff like that, and then we had to say—look, really sorry, but you have to go through the Intreo process. And either they don't bother ... or they go through the Intreo process and get sent somewhere else and they don't get to us. And what we are trying to say to them in the Department is—look, if somebody comes in and says they have an interest in care, there's no point in sending them for an admin post. If their interest is in care that's where they should be sent. (Isabel, Care Agency)

Others are not eligible to go on CE, e.g. those on Carer's Allowance.

I saw a CE Scheme [with] four hours [work], I applied for them, they said to me "make sure you go to Social Welfare to ask them if you are qualified". I went and they say "you are not qualified—you have to quit Carer's Allowance to go to Jobseeker Allowance". (Ruth, a Rwandan refugee with a disabled adult child)

However, one of the biggest criticisms of employment support schemes, particularly CE, is that they do not connect people well enough to the labour market. The following section outlines the views of interviewees on this issue.

### ***Progression from employment support schemes***

As outlined in Chapter 4, some household interviewees felt that their employment support scheme did not lead anywhere, but was just a conveyor belt of people going on and off the scheme, where in some cases the participant even has to train in their replacement. Both Tammy and Hannah spoke of their disillusionment with this, (see Section 4.4.2) and noted that there was no progress from the scheme into a job. Several service provider interviewees were also concerned about where the participants go once the employment support scheme ends. Some feel that the host organisation does not have the best interests of the participant at heart, and that they focus more on employment support schemes to reduce labour costs.

CE ... is designed here to keep these doors open. [The] Council ... are saying that it is cheap labour ... our job is to keep the doors open [and] we can use CE to do it. ... The Department of Social Protection are saying 'brilliant, you are using CE as an activation measure'—which is not what [the] Council are using it for. (Evelyn, manager of a community centre)

Two interviewees felt that more comprehensive monitoring of the sponsor organisations would ensure better progression for those on schemes. Hilda also spoke about her annoyance when organisations let someone on CE go and then employ someone else to do the job the CE participant was doing. Niall in the freight company, speaking of his experience of CE in a voluntary organisation, also holds this view.

CE Schemes are fine, they help charitable organisations such as day care centres and community centres ... But the problem is ... there is no progression.... The idea and the concept is the progression of those workers into full time employment. The reality is we have them for three years, right, [and] who is going to give a job, a full time job, to somebody that they are going to pay nothing to for three years? (Niall, Freight Company)

Some participants end up on the 'carousel', moving from scheme to scheme. One organisation felt that this was sometimes because a family was better off financially on CE than in work, due to the secondary benefits received.

Other interviewees argued that the lack of follow-up with programme participants does not help them link into the labour market.

The Community Employment or the Tús workers—they spend a year here, and they walk back out the door at the end of the year and there is no follow up ... it just dies the minute they walk out that door. (Damian, manager of a community centre)

CE participants working in organisations where there is no paid employment role to move into, and where there may be no direct links to the mainstream labour market, are likely to find it more difficult to progress. These participants, who would have been long-term unemployed, are less likely to have good qualifications and contacts to help them get a job in another organisation when they finish their CE placement. It might be useful to link them to a service such as JobPath when their placement finishes, as JobPath seems to have strong links to employers.

However, a number of people do progress on from an employment support scheme. Seven of the eleven employers have employed people who have been on CE, and had positive experiences. For example, Isabel in the care agency has 50 CE staff out of a total of 150. Many of them are training in Fetac Level 5 and hoping to progress on to jobs in the organisation. CE seems to be a cost effective way for her to train and try out staff, and plenty do progress to jobs in the labour market, as she has a CE progression rate of 60—75 per cent. Three of the employers also said they

had taken someone on through JobBridge. Walter in the security and cleaning business thought it was a very good kick-start to someone's career and that JobBridge was a very good scheme.

This is the interns...really successful actually....I'd say probably six would come to mind and all of them were offered jobs....And all took the jobs and were excellent....And most of them have moved on to better things now, which is absolutely fine ... And I think they would look on the experience as being, that was really a kick start to my career. (Walter, Security and Cleaning Firm)

Evaluations of employment support programmes over the years have shown varying degrees of effectiveness in returning people to the labour market. Programmes which are directly linked to skills demands, and include job search assistance and training, are the most effective. Internships, such as JobBridge, can be effective if they do not subsidise jobs which would have been created anyway. However, some public employment programmes such as CE have been found to have limited effectiveness in supporting people to get jobs in the open labour market (Kelly *et al.*, 2011; O'Connell, P.J., 1999; McGuinness *et al.*, 2014). On the other hand, the social inclusion component of CE does provide opportunities for those most distant from the labour market and supports the provision of community services in local communities (Department of Social Protection, 2015). However, several service provider interviewees were annoyed that non-labour market progression through a scheme is not always recognised. They felt that the social progress that can be made through participation in a scheme can be very valuable.

That's a huge issue with all of these CE schemes, the progression is not marked as progression because they are not after getting a job...I've seen some people come in and their children are nearly going into care...and after.. three years—the difference...[At the beginning] that person was going to [local drugs rehab centre]...and [they got] a placement here. And by the end of it they might be running the shop for me. You know, that's huge progression. But in that file of FÁS it's not noted as progression. And you are kind of saying—their family are benefiting from them being fulfilled and happy. But that's not [seen as progression.] (Evelyn, manager of a community centre)

Isabel says she would like to see CE places kept for people who are unlikely to get mainstream employment but who are great assets locally.

I did a piece around the value of people who are unlikely to get work in mainstream employment but who are invaluable assets to their local community and their local voluntary groups, because either of their experience, or their skills, or their particular interest in a field that's only relevant in that community and not necessarily in the business area. And that there needs now to be a recognition of this on the Department's part and that perhaps 25 per cent of the places on CE projects would be retained for social engagement which would mean the people wouldn't have to come off and go back onto the live

register. They would be able to stay doing meaningful work and making a meaningful contribution. (Isabel, Care Agency)

Recent changes to CE, with one strand focused on social inclusion, will help this aspect of the programme to be better recognised. As outlined in Chapter 3, CE is now limited to one year for most participants, while a duration of two to three years will be reserved for the very disadvantaged. This aims to allow a better chance of progression, and less incentive for people to become locked into the scheme.

Meanwhile, JobBridge was closed to new applicants in 2016, but some service provider interviewees regret its demise, as they felt that in the right organisation, it provided good opportunities for learning, development and progression. It was thought to be useful for some people, particularly younger people with no work experience. However, the new YESS programme (Youth Employment Support Scheme) is due to begin in Quarter 2, 2018. It is targeted at young jobseekers who are long-term unemployed or who face barriers to employment. The programme aims to provide them with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement. The host organisation is encouraged to offer the young person employment once their scheme term ends.<sup>109</sup>

## 7.6 Social Enterprise

As outlined in Section 3.2.6, there are a number of supports available nationally for social enterprise. At local level, there are a number of social enterprises in the study area. The role of social enterprise was mentioned by some policy maker and service provider interviewees, but not in explicit terms by the households themselves, nor by the employers. The policymakers who mentioned it thought that there was a role for social enterprise in terms of helping people move from welfare to work, but that it would only ever account for about 5 per cent of economic activity. They felt that during a downturn there was a tendency to cut social enterprise supports and instead focus spending on employment support schemes. However, it is useful to continue to support social enterprise, as it does have a role in moving people from welfare to work, even if that role is limited.

## 7.7 Caring and Work

Nearly three quarters of respondents referred to caring responsibilities as being a factor in relation to their ability to work. Childcare was the main issue raised though some others had other caring responsibilities or multiple care issues. Apart from its cost, as outlined in Section 7.3.2, a key factor relating to childcare which prevented

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<sup>109</sup> For further information, see <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/youth-development-internship.aspx>, accessed 14 May 2018.

people taking up employment, particularly mothers, was hours of work and how this fitted in with school hours.

My children are so small, who would make the school run?...Can I leave my office and come and make a school run? And collect one at half one, and collect the other one at half two? (Tammy, household interviewee with three children)

After-school provision is both rare and expensive in Ireland.

Afterschool provision is completely inadequate in Ireland. There's no other way to call it ... I'd say a handful of schools maybe in the country that are providing that kind of care. So it's a real issue...For people on low income or with very little money this is a real challenge. (Bradley, senior public official)

As a result, some said that parents, particularly mothers, couldn't go back to work until their youngest was in secondary school.

I have to drop Gavin to school... so like the job I was looking for, it would have to, like it would be you know after nine o'clock... Next year now when he goes into secondary school ... he'll be able to go over himself and that, the school would be nearer so he can walk to school... and then I can go in to start looking for a job for any time. (Grainne, household interviewee with three children)

Difficulties combining work and care can be compounded if/when children are sick, and also when the hours of work which are offered are very variable.

The zero hour contracts are out there ... The message was very clear [in large clothing retailer]. They want complete flexibility ... from people coming in, for weekend work ... late evenings—and if somebody has other commitments that can sometimes be a barrier. (Orna, manager of a job-seeking support service)

Some people also spoke of caring for other relatives which limits their availability for work e.g. caring for elderly grandparents or parents, disabled siblings, spouses/partners and children.

My mother had a massive stroke so I left the family home and moved in with her, I looked after her twenty four hours for two years. ... I got to the stage I couldn't [look after her any more] so she's in the nursing home now ... I go up to him [father] every day. Try and sort him out with his dinner for the following day, and do his bit of cleaning and washing. He's 76 now, he's had a heart attack, he's had pneumonia, he's not in great health ... It was hard, because down there [in previous job] you work Christmas days and everything and I need that time to be with my dad. (Elsa, household interviewee)



## 7.8 Access to Transport and IT

Access to transport was also raised as an issue which can throw up difficulties for those wanting to move from welfare to work. Transport is expensive for the unemployed and those on low incomes.

Some service providers and employers spoke of people who had given up work due to the time and cost of travelling.

I had two Croatian guys leave yesterday because they...have to get a bus...and then walk. And they said like sometimes it is an hour and a half to get to work. So that is a three hour round trip on top of your eight hour working day, which is a little bit much for a job that pays €9.69 an hour. (Rosanna, recruitment agency)

For those without a car, taking the bus from one suburb to another can be very time-consuming. In a car, the journey these two men undertook would take less than half an hour.

Some service providers also mentioned that those in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are reluctant to travel to other areas which they do not know. This is a pattern also noted by Daly & Kelly (2015) in their study of low income households in Northern Ireland.

Computer literacy and access to IT were other issues raised, as both assist in job search. As Sansa, a national stakeholder pointed out, 'sometimes there's a presumption everybody has a smart phone'—but not all do, and not all are computer literate. A number of staff in job-seeking support services spoke of clients who do not have email addresses. Several household interviewees did not have a computer. As with cars, ownership of a computer was usually linked to previous employment, which provided the person with enough income to buy the computer or car. Some community centres and job seeking support services provide computers and printers which people can use to apply for jobs. One JobPath company was reported to provide job seekers with iPads to allow them to apply for jobs online.

Even when people do have a computer, internet connectivity in the area is poor, as another community centre manager pointed out.

We don't have fibre optic—I rang up Eircom and said, 'eh is this the best you can give me in relation to broadband?' 'Yes that's it'. I said, 'Do we not have fibre optic?' 'No'. I said, 'You have a—here is a national plan—is it on the national plan?' 'No, it's not even on the national plan to be installed into an area like this'. (Damian, manager of a community centre)

## 7.9 Discrimination/stereotyping

As outlined in Chapter 4, several interviewees referred to discrimination against certain groups which they felt was holding them back. Nearly all Travellers referred to this, either implicitly or explicitly. A number of migrants also wondered if there might be discrimination against them. One national stakeholder wondered was an English language requirement a covert way of discriminating. Some decision-makers agreed that there was discrimination against certain groups, with stereotypical views of them. This applied to Travellers and to those from the 'wrong area'.

*Uri:* We think we're a very non-racist country here and maybe we were until people started arriving in the 1990s, but the level of prejudice against Travellers going right back to centuries ago ... *Ultan:* It's incredible really ... Most Irish people will make comments about Australians and how racist they are or whatever in terms of how they treat their own indigenous communities, and then they turn around and make the most obnoxious comments about the Travelling community. (Ultan and Uri, national stakeholders)

We began to sort of realise that the fundamental issue was, that a [name of disadvantaged area] address was, you know, discriminated against, it was a huge disadvantage. (Padraig, training manager at national level)

A number of interviewees also felt that people with disabilities could be discriminated against.

### 7.9.1 Some Particular Issues for Migrants

Migrants can end up working in jobs which are below their skills and qualification level. This can be related to their work permit, to lack of English, and to lack of recognition of their qualifications, as outlined in Chapter 4. When migrants are in work, these issues are less problematic. However, as a number of service providers point out, if they lose their jobs, then their lack of English, and their unrecognised qualifications, mean that they are in a poor position to compete for other jobs. More services which improve their vocational English, while in work, and which provide recognition of their qualifications, may help to prevent them becoming jobless households in future.

One national stakeholder also highlighted that the spouse of a person with an employer visa has no entitlement to work. He noted the high unemployment of African migrants, and attributed this to the fact that many were unable to work for a number of years in the early 2000s while the situation of the families of Irish-born

children was decided upon,<sup>110</sup> and so they lost contact with the labour market. A tailored service addressing the reasons for particularly high unemployment among Africans may therefore be helpful.

Many refugees also lose contact with the labour market while waiting for their asylum application to be heard, leading to high unemployment later (although there are other factors affecting the employment of refugees—see below).

## 7.10 Confidence and Motivation

There are less tangible issues which can hinder the move from welfare to work. Several service providers working directly with jobseekers stressed the importance of ensuring that jobseekers' confidence was boosted so that they could effectively compete for jobs.

We would always try and work around ... building the person's confidence up ... A lot of people who are unemployed, maybe unemployed a long time... they just lose their confidence ... [Hard skills and soft skills] they go hand in hand—you get your certificate, whatever, but you also have built up your confidence, you have also developed yourself ... the person can go off, and feel more confident to go off for a job. (Colette, co-ordinator of a training centre)

Employers and household interviewees also saw how unemployment can knock confidence and affect mental health.

(Social interaction)—yes I missed that so much ... me work colleagues, me little you know that feeling that you were you had a worth, you had a value you know so. ... People really liked me in work and people depended on the good job I done and I was always very friendly and I missed all that. ... So I slipped into a bit of depression for a while when I had to give it up. (Linda, household interviewee)

Several service providers reported encountering clients with health problems, with mental health problems mentioned most, followed by addiction issues. These people are not in a position to seek work straight away, so service providers refer

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<sup>110</sup> Quentin, a national stakeholder, explained that until a Supreme Court decision in 2003, all babies born in Ireland were automatically Irish citizens, and so their parents were given leave to remain in Ireland. However, this practice was stopped by the 2003 Supreme Court ruling. After a 2004 referendum, children born in Ireland of non-Irish citizens only got Irish citizenship if their parents had been here for five or more years. So the families whose children were born between the 2003 ruling and the referendum ended up in limbo, until the Irish Born Child Scheme of 2005 gave them leave to remain for two years—with extensions since then. The 2005 ruling regularised about 17,000 parents of the Irish born children. They had arrived in a variety of ways—as refugees, students, tourists—and many were African. While they were waiting to be regularised however, many were not working and so lost contact with the labour market.

them on to health supports—but note that the services they need are not always available.

We do have a volume of clients who have substance abuse issues...alcoholism or whatever. We will endeavour to provide some structure for them...it may be sign posting them into other services...addiction services...mental health services...where the resources probably aren't there...That availability is...it's more of a national question. (Adam, regional manager in a job-seeking service)

While mental health difficulties or lack of confidence can limit a person's ability to job seek, some people also questioned whether or not all jobseekers wanted to get a job. Several household interviewees felt that they were seen as not wanting to work, and 'screwing the system'. They thought that some unemployed people did not want to work (and one interviewee may have been in this category, claiming that she could not work due to injury to her left arm which prevented her lifting it up, while at the same time talking about playing snooker regularly). However, the common view was that most unemployed people did want to work.

It's the overall perception that a big chunk of people on jobseekers are screwing the system, it's just not true. Like most people are genuinely looking for work, you know.(Linda, household interviewee)

One interviewee noticed the irony of some unemployed people being seen as wanting everything for free, after she had spent years working and paying all her own and her family's medical and housing costs.

Some employers thought that some unemployed people did not want a job.

What I know is that people that have been unemployed for a while are very reluctant to eh, to get into employment. Some of them, I think the social welfare is pushing them, to, to get work. (Miriam, employer, cleaning sector)

Some service providers also said they had met people who weren't interested in getting a job.

And there's habitual jobseekers, you know what I mean, families that have never—they call it their 'wages', that don't even know the name of the payment ...it can be so frustrating sometimes—it's not helping them neither. (Brenda, local service provider)

However there were several household interviewees who very much wanted to work, and had put a lot of effort into it, as shown by Krystal's efforts to set up a cake baking business, see Section 6.6.3.

Anna had also made efforts to undertake a course in a field she wanted to work in.

[I did a course and] it was only two hours a week like, one morning a week. It was just too slow like. It was just, I need to have something

every morning, I do be up and out every morning like. I hate—when I'm off, I come home and sit down and I'm like—what will I do now? (Laughing) ... I actually really want to work for myself like. So I'd hope to have my own place like where I run my own classes. (Anna, household interviewee, lone parent finishing a training course in sports)

## 7.11 Capacity

Some groups also have much less capacity to enter the labour market than others. A number of jobseeking support services described three groups of people whom they see, with the third group having least capacity to access employment.

The first type of client, which tends to be more in the minority, would be the person who is pretty much job-ready. There's not an awful lot we can do for this person, maybe hook them up with the right opportunity and the right interview chances, get them together with an employer ... The second type would tend to be the ... largest majority of who we meet, [and] would be the 'almost job-ready' person. There's something notable in their way and it may be the renewal of an expired licence that they couldn't afford to do because they were unemployed ... And then the third type is the person who is a long way from the job market because there are bigger issues—whether that would be to do with dependencies or more serious health issues. (Alice, manager of a job-seeking support service)

Particularly severe barriers are a history of addiction or prison spells, and homelessness, as discussed previously. Some of these groups need very intensive support, as do some lone parents and migrants, as service providers explained.

They may not have worked—that child, the youngest child is 12 but they could have an older child of 30—so they may have not worked in 30 years. It can be quite difficult and quite daunting for somebody like that to try and go back out in the workforce. (Emily, case officer in a job-seeking support service)

As outlined earlier, difficulties with English language and literacy also hold people back.

A few of the non-Irish nationals had experienced severe trauma in war situations in their country of origin which had affected their mental wellbeing. In some cases their experiences had interrupted their education, leaving them poorly qualified as well.

Because I saw so many things, so it comes up sometimes, like haunting me ... [And] I couldn't get chance to finish school, the leaving certificate ... from secondary—I couldn't get chance because of the war. (Casper,

household interviewee from Somalia who was in the asylum system for 9 years, and has never worked)

My life was comfortable, but in Rwanda they rip up everything—this is why they follow us, me and my husband, because I had a good job, he had a good job ... So I still dreaming to get that kind of life, you know. (Ruth, household interviewee, a Rwandan refugee)

Interestingly, many of the interviewees far from the labour market, such as Travellers, or people with disabilities, did not mention many of the welfare to work problems cited by others, such as fears about income and loss of secondary benefits. This is presumably as they are not in a position to move easily to work. Instead they contend with a range of problems which keep them further from the work force. However, most of the household interviewees we interviewed did not have to contend with issues that would keep them so far removed from the labour market.

## 7.12 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the challenges cited by household interviewees trying to move from welfare to work. Some of the interviewees are very far from the labour market, and contend with problems that are difficult to address, such as serious literacy difficulties, trauma, discrimination, a history of addiction or a criminal record. While there are some services to address these issues, they are not available in all areas, and sometimes the service provision is not intensive enough to adequately address the problem.

Others are closer to the labour market and contend with different problems. One issue is the confidence and motivation needed to seek a job, which is often diminished over a long period of confidence-sapping unemployment. Another key issue is the extent to which income from employment replaces income from social welfare and secondary benefits. For a number of those with children, employment on minimum wage rates does not replace the income and secondary benefits received while on welfare. Particular issues arise with the costs of housing, childcare and medical treatment, while transport and IT can also be difficult to access while on a low income. However, there are quite a number of long-term, and also relatively new, schemes which aim to address the loss of secondary benefits, and the costs of raising a family on a low income, when moving into work. These include the retention of the medical card for three years, Family Income Supplement (now Working Family Payment), the Back to Work Family Dividend, HAP, and the Affordable Childcare Scheme. But awareness of these supports is low among many groups, and there seems to be a reluctance to seek information from Intreo on what supports might be available. Some people do not trust Intreo, and are afraid to ask Intreo questions about moving to work, as they fear jeopardising their payment. Trust in the Citizen's Information Centres, and in community organisations, is higher than trust in Intreo. In addition, some of the schemes to support people into work

are new and so they are not so widely known, nor are their likely impacts clear. Some, such as HAP, face supply challenges.

Another issue which arises is the importance of certainty. Those moving from welfare to work seek definite income; and precarious jobs, or supports which may or may not be awarded to them are very off-putting, particularly if they have dependent children. A number of groups also cite delays in accessing supports which aim to ease the transition from welfare to work. Such delays are very problematic for long-term unemployed people, who have no financial cushion to fall back on.

Views on the role of employment support schemes in helping people move back to work were mixed. Some such as JobBridge were very successful in helping people move from welfare to work, but faced criticism around pay levels and the financial costs of participating. Community Employment and Tús are less successful in helping people move from welfare to work, but can provide work experience for groups far from the labour market, as well as important social outcomes. Better links between participants and the labour market would be useful to develop for participants on these two schemes in particular.

# Chapter 8

## Education and Training



## 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter the key findings in relation to education, training and skills are summarised. First of all, the level of education of the households interviewed, and in the study area generally, are outlined, including literacy issues and early school leaving.

Secondly, most of the household interviewees had been on a course which was accessed through the Intreo service. A number of issues were raised about these courses, including the choice of whether or not to attend a course, eligibility requirements, the availability of courses, and the supports available to attend them. The importance of career guidance, and its patchy provision, also came up. Finally, the outcomes from these courses, and follow up from them to further training or employment, is discussed.

This led to the third theme—the issue of the skills employers are looking for, and the links that exist (or not) between them and the State training and further education system.

Finally, the overall vocational education sector, including lifelong learning and apprenticeships, are discussed.

## 8.2 Level of Education

### 8.2.1 Low Levels of Education

A number of stakeholders noted the class-based nature of education in Ireland, with children in middle class families gaining higher levels of education than those in working class families. This pattern was evident among the 34 household interviewees, who had below average levels of education compared to the population in Dublin as a whole, as outlined in Section 4.3.3 earlier.

Local service provider interviewees were aware of the low levels of education in the study area, and the implications for employment, noting for example that many people who access their service do not have Leaving Certificate qualifications, and that such low educational levels can be coupled with intergenerational unemployment.

### 8.2.2 Literacy Issues

As outlined in Section 4.3.3 earlier, seven of the household interviewees had literacy difficulties, or dyslexia, which clearly cause difficulty in accessing employment, and further education. This was a barrier also identified in a recent report on barriers to accessing the FET sector (Mooney & O'Rourke, 2017).

All of the training and job-seeking support organisations interviewed see people with literacy difficulties, as do those in the community centres and the Citizen's Information centres.

Some service providers noted that while it was usually older people who had poor literacy, they also encountered some young people in this situation. In addition, the literacy level of Roma adults was reported to be very low by some service providers, a fact corroborated by a number of studies.<sup>111</sup>

Literacy difficulties can be very varied, ranging from very poor ability to ability that stops progress on a Fetac Level 4 or 5 course. However, any type of literacy difficulties can have a serious impact on a person's progress, as Bertie, manager of a training centre, outlined.

People tend to think in terms of literacy as being illiteracy, but in actual fact you know it's more sophisticated than that. If you can't cope with the written requirements for a course at level five in order to get your beauty qualification—well then, technically, in that context you have got a literacy difficulty...we don't have huge numbers of people that literally are illiterate. But we have a huge number of people that have literacy difficulties that prevent from them engaging in whatever they want to do. (Bertie, manager of a training centre)

Other types of literacy problems include lack of digital literacy, and poor word range.

Some community centres and community-based training centres provide supports for people with literacy difficulties, while other organisations refer people on to specialised literacy services run by the adult education services. However, some decision-makers raised concern over the adequacy of these literacy supports. While provision of literacy training has been increased to ten hours in a week in many cases, for many the training is still two hours per week, which is not seen as adequate to progress well<sup>112</sup>.

Some service providers felt that it can be hard for someone to admit to needing literacy support in a course which does not specifically focus on this issue.

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<sup>111</sup> See for example, Lesovitch, 2005; Pohjolainen, 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Data supplied to NESC by the Department of Education and Skills showed that in 2017, there were 39,951 beneficiaries of the adult literacy programme, and 2,329 beneficiaries of the intensive adult literacy programme.

Vocational literacy classes, which provide support for the type of literacy needed in a specific training course, do not seem to be widely available in ETB training. Victor reported that this was issue was being reviewed by SOLAS.

There is another piece of research being commissioned currently by...SOLAS, on integration [of] literacy more broadly ... There's a whole dedicated adult literacy service there...but the question around how literacy issues are addressed in the context of other programmes is really the focus...of [the review]. (Victor, senior government official)

The experience of some training providers which have developed literacy and numeracy supports within vocational education programmes shows that this support can be very effective in improving pass rates and reducing dropout.<sup>113</sup> It would be useful to have such supports available more widely.

### 8.2.3 Attitudes to Education

As outlined in Section 4.3.3 earlier, most of the household interviewees did not express any particular feelings about school, but of those that did, the predominant feeling was dislike. Some local service providers and national decision-makers noted too,

In [disadvantaged] areas...parents didn't necessarily have a good experience in school themselves, they probably left school early without qualifications...so they've a fairly jaundiced view of the education system. (Norma, senior government official)

This issue was also reported by Mooney & O'Rourke (2017) in their report on barriers to accessing FET.

### 8.2.4 Early School Leaving

Compared to international figures, Ireland's early school leaving rate is quite low. In Ireland in 2015, 8.4 per cent of boys and 5.4 per cent of girls aged 18-24 had left school with at most lower secondary education, compared to 12.4 per cent and 9.5 per cent respectively in the EU28 (CSO, 2015a). But some service provider interviewees noted the higher than average rates of early school leaving in the study area. This was particularly the case with Traveller children, who as well as leaving school early (Lally, 2012),<sup>114</sup> could also be poor school attenders. Roma children were also reported to have very poor engagement with school—as Bradley,

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<sup>113</sup> For example, the programme developed by Galway & Roscommon ETB to incorporate literacy and numeracy supports into their apprenticeship programmes, see <http://www.aloa.ie/context-collaboration-and-key-skills-integrating-literacy-and-numeracy-support-into-gretb-training-centre/>, accessed on 12 March 2018.

<sup>114</sup> This report shows that in 2008, just 50 per cent of Travellers completed their Junior Certificate, with only 13 per cent continuing on into the senior cycle.

a senior government official in education, put it, ‘really, attending school is not on their radar at all’.<sup>115</sup> In general, he thought that non-Roma migrant children fit well into school, being motivated and often having highly qualified parents.

There were a range of views on why early school leaving was higher in the study area. First, while very aware of the returns to education, some parents noted the attraction for their children (and earlier, for themselves) of earning a wage over being in school, as outlined in Section 4.3.3 earlier. Service providers also noted this.

Some young people jump ship earlier when there's employment opportunities, poor though they might be. (Victor, senior government official)

This suggests that more work is needed to demonstrate the benefits of staying in education to young people at risk of leaving school early.

Some service providers reported children being encouraged or compelled by older criminals to become involved in the sale or delivery of drugs. For some children, the accompanying money, status and social capital by association could be more attractive than school, particularly if they were not doing well at school in the first place. Such patterns have been noted in other disadvantaged areas in Ireland, as well as the difficulties which children face exiting such criminal networks (DCYA, 2016).

A local home-school-community liaison teacher outlined a range of other reasons for early school leaving. These include a lack of parental support, dysfunctional families, poor school policies, and drugs and mental health issues. While dysfunctional parents lack capacity to engage, he found that where parents were able to engage fully, their children are likely to stay in school. Although interviewees referred to Travellers who very much support their children’s education, some Traveller parents were reported not to, which led to school dropout, as Bradley, a senior government official, outlined.

[Travellers] want their sons to leave and pursue Traveller men activities, pursuits. They want their daughters to be married young. They don’t want their daughters to be educated with boys, particularly non-Traveller boys. (Bradley, senior government official)

The poor experiences which Traveller parents often had in school, and other parents as well, do not help their engagement with education.

But then I suppose the wider issue for Travellers is—and they have all the issues that other parents will have who haven’t completed school themselves—they’ll [be] struggling to help with the homework, they’ll feel [that] they're not welcome in some schools. So that’s not

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<sup>115</sup> This is corroborated by Pohjolainen, 2014.

encouraging. Are they going to participate in the school? Are they going to look to be on the board of management? No. (Norma, senior government official)

Work is done by home-school-community liaison officers to combat this experience, to support parents who did not enjoy school to feel welcome in it now.

What home school liaison does is it creates a parents' room in the building [and] after-school activities, and [so] those parents are now back in the school building... It's kind of reintroducing them to the school and once they're in, they realise this is probably a different space to what it was in back in the day [when they were there]. (Norma, senior government official)

One interviewee felt that many teachers are middle class and so do not provide role models for the students. This can lead to disengagement from school.

Who are the teachers at the head of the classroom? They're white, middle-class men and women, mostly women, who've been to college, have a different world experience to a lot of what's sitting in front of them. And actually whether it's Traveller or migrants, kids from unemployed households, lone parents—teachers teaching those kids have had no experience of that, that's not their life experience...It's a particular issue for...Travellers, where what you want is a role model standing at the top of the classroom, ultimately as a principal, that they can recognise as being from their own community, if for no other reason than to say—well I can be that person. (Norma, senior government official)

In recognition of this, the Government recently allocated €2.7m to projects to increase the number of teachers from underrepresented groups, with a key goal being to provide teacher role models for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>116</sup>

In relation to school policies, some schools were reported to be too strong on discipline, which can lead to lower school attendance.

I see it...every day during the school year. I could see a child walking up at nine o'clock to school, in a school uniform, and see them walking back down the road twenty minutes later. Sent home! "Why were you sent home?" "Wrong coloured socks" And that is not a lie! "No tie", "no school jumper", "no school coat", "runners—not proper school shoes"...you're talking about children who can't thrive in an environment where rules and regulations that are so conforming, and

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<sup>116</sup> See <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR17-04-17.html>, accessed 12 March 2018

haven't been brought up in an environment like that. (Anita, manager of a community centre)

This view was corroborated by senior government officials working in education, one of whom noted that while most schools are open, friendly, and very welcoming places, there continues to be a small number where rules are very rigorous, and there is an overly strong focus on discipline. The result is that:

[Some] schools nationally seem to be suspending and excluding kids at a phenomenal rate, which is completely at odds with the national, with the general population. (Bradley, senior government official)

National education bodies work with these schools, but it can be difficult to change their practices as schools are independently managed. However, there is now a requirement for each school to have policies on specific issues, e.g. school attendance, which may help with some of these issues.

Some decision-makers also reported high levels of stress and of mental illness among some children, which mean they do not attend school.

We have a lot of children with anxiety and stress related conditions, [and so] we now have a phenomena called school refusal where children are just refusing to go to school. (Bradley, senior government official)

There can be delays in assessing children for mental health issues, and the ability to access services to deal with mental health issues unfortunately varies by area.

If you have a child in crisis, they need to see someone that day—they won't get an appointment with a counselling service for three months! (Phillip, home school community liaison officer)

### **8.2.5 The Need for More Alternative Forms of Second-Level Education**

Another issue which a number of interviewees brought up was that children disengaged at second level as the secondary school curriculum is very regulated and still rote-driven. A number of interviewees thought there was a need for more alternative forms of second level education. Some service providers felt that the school system is unable to deal with some children, and once they drop out there are few other options available.

There needs to be a whole rethink around the education system, that not all children are suited towards. We have early school leavers as young as twelve and thirteen here. The formal school system, for whatever reason, just isn't the right type of education for them. (Anita, manager of a community centre)

Youthreach is great for kids who are engaged, kids who do well in the mainstream school do well in Youthreach, but kids who leave

mainstream school because they can't behave, they can't behave in Youthreach either...it is not the answer to somebody who is really struggling in school a lot of the time. (Philip, home school community liaison officer)

Youthreach is focused on those aged 15 and over, but there is less available for those under 15 who drop out of school. Interviewees referred to alternative education which does focus on those under 15, such as the Life Centre in Cherry Orchard,<sup>117</sup> and the ALPs (Alternative Learning Programmes)<sup>118</sup> but these programmes are not widely available. Bradley would like to see a programme of alternative education which is available nationwide, and for example, the ability to study for a range of QQI qualifications in school.

I would like to see...a national programme of alternative education for children between the ages of 12 and 16 ... And it shouldn't depend on where you are located ... Every school in the country should have, should be offering QQI ...Certainly for some kids the idea of examinations are alien and doing work through project work and focused on things that you are really interested in makes a lot more sense...And the beauty of the QQI is that there are progression routes. If you do your FETAC level 4 you can automatically go into PLC. (Bradley, senior government official)

However, care would need to be taken to ensure that those undertaking alternative forms of education would be treated equally in school, and by prospective employers. There were reports that the Applied Leaving Certificate is not so well viewed by employers.

Young people have come to me and told me that [fast food restaurants] are even refusing them when they mention Applied Leaving Certificate...for whatever reason the tag of Applied Leaving Cert has damaged it in employer's eyes. (Damian, manager of a community centre)

Norma reports that the Department of Education is looking at the area of alternative school-age education.

We support a [very small] number of private NGOs and other organizations that provide second chance and that kind of provision for school drop-outs...and part of our policy remit is to look at all of that and we're planning a review of that. (Norma, senior government official)

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<sup>117</sup> See <https://www.idealists.org/en/nonprofit/1fe4e01861e44f72b654aa7ca4997c15-the-life-centre-cherry-orchard-cherry-orchardballyfermot?>, accessed 13 March 2018.

<sup>118</sup> See <http://www.ddletb.ie/Footer/Youth-and-Sport-Development-Services/Alternative-Learning-Programme.aspx>, accessed 13 March 2018.

Consultation on this has recently begun<sup>119</sup>.

## 8.3 Courses Accessed via Intreo

### 8.3.1 Introduction

In the following sections, the courses which household interviewees were sent on by Intreo, and the issues which arose with those, are outlined.

### 8.3.2 Choice and Sanctions

Intreo seems, in almost all cases, to have offered courses to household interviewees who have become unemployed or wish to re-enter the workforce. Staff in job-seeking support services believe that jobseekers without good skills would benefit from taking a course.

[Some] people come in, and they are job seeking, but they are not getting any response. And then when you sit down and chat to them and you find what kind of skills they have—and they mightn't have the skills, you know, enough skills, relative to the jobs they are looking for. So you talk to them about training...And then you'd have some people who might, particularly I suppose the under twenty-fives, who you know they have a certain level of education and might have no further skills than that. So you really would be encouraging them to look at training. (Emily, job-seeking support service)

It was also suggested that training may be the strongest support that Intreo is able to offer jobseekers to find employment (with, for example, relatively limited time to allocate to each job-seeker) and this may be why they send so many on courses. As one interviewee from another job-seeking support service put it,

[Intreo] have to be seen to be doing something...[like] moving somebody on to a course...I'm not slating them, I'm not saying that they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing...it's the way they do things...I suppose in a sense they have to, that's their way of motivating an individual. (Gillian, case worker in a job-seeking support service)

Household interviewees report both being sent on courses by Intreo, and also finding out about courses themselves and requesting to go on them. A number commented that they should not be sent on a course they have no interest in.

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<sup>119</sup> See <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2018-press-releases/PR18-03-14-1.html>, downloaded 18 May 2018.



If they don't appeal to you, I don't think you should be put in a course that you've no interest in; you'd go crazy like. I don't think just because you're unemployed that you should have to do [a course that's not] mentally fulfilling to you. (Hannah, household interviewee)

When asked about the choice given to the job seeker about going on courses, Intreo staff stated that:

It's a joint [decision], we give them the choices, we give them the list of courses available. So it is a joint decision, you know, we'd never put somebody on a course just because, it would be a joint decision. And they would be in agreement to it.

However, now that Intreo clients can have their payment cut if they do not engage with activation, including training, it may not feel like a joint decision to the client. As outlined in Section 5.2.2, some household interviewees reported feeling threatened by the fear of sanctions, if they did not comply with Intreo's requests. Some service providers felt that Intreo did not realise the power balance between the job seeker and Intreo was not even.

You feel completely powerless, and the person behind the desk that you are talking to has the right to say "yes" or "no" to you, and has the right to impact financially on your life and on your family life, and has the right to say whether you can feed or not feed your children this week. (Anita, manager of a community centre)

Having people 'sent' on courses is difficult for trainers also, as Orna outlined.

Very often [it's] the case—half the class are there because they're forced to be there...that's a big challenge for our facilitator team... (Orna, manager of a job-seeking support service)

However, a benefit of being 'sent' on courses is that it could help provide routine and promote some engagement, particularly for some younger people, as Barbara outlined in relation to her son.

[I've] a nineteen year old that's in me ma's and he hasn't a clue, God love him, what to do with his life...I asked—'what work do you see yourself [doing]?' 'I don't know, ma'...I [told him]—'[Intreo] are going to haunt you. Once you go in there', I said, 'sign on, you're going to be haunted'. 'No I won't, no I won't, f\*\*k them'. 'You can say that all you want', I said, 'when you go to collect your money', I said, 'and there's nothing there'...Now it has been cut on him...he kind of got the fright of his life when he went over to the post office. 'What do you mean, nothing there?' I says, 'I told you...you'll listen', I said, 'at some stage'...Now he's after being sent out on some course like that through FÁS...So just to get him back into a routine...I'm hoping now, with this course. (Barbara)

### 8.3.3 Eligibility Issues

Eligibility to do courses which can be accessed via Intreo is complex, as it varies according to the payment or scheme a person is on, and also how long they are on it, etc. As Pádraig outlined, it is difficult for an unemployed person to know all courses available to them, and their eligibility for them.

If we were to do a list of programmes that are currently available to somebody, below third level, okay—so you have PLC, BTEI, BTEA, CTC, Youthreach, VTOS, contracted training, [and] there's probably one or two others. Pádraig and Mary are at home. How do they get their head around that?...They'll go to a course and somebody will say—oh, you're VTOS, oh, you have to be over twenty-one and six months unemployed; oh Youthreach, you have to be under twenty-one; oh PLC, yeah, you've to pay to do that, and there's no training allowance and you'd lose your welfare; contracted training, yeah, you'll get a training allowance, yeah, if you're eligible...It's a basket case, an absolute—how does anybody—I'd hate to be unemployed—how do you find your way through the system? (Pádraig, training manager)

In general, while those on jobseekers' payments can be required to do courses, those who were self-employed and are not in receipt of jobseeker's allowance, and qualified adults, are not eligible to do all courses which those on jobseeker's payments can do. Some people who had already done a course at a certain FETAC level were also not allowed to do another course at that or a lower level. People on Tús could only do courses required for their work (e.g. manual handling) while those on CE could do a wide range of courses. This led to one household interviewee currently on Tús planning to do CE to get training for an entry level qualification to allow him to take up jobs in the sector he used to be employed in, as he could not get funding to do the training while on Tús.

Meanwhile, some service providers felt that the talents and abilities of migrants are being wasted due to eligibility criteria which they reported prevent those working from taking up free English classes.

You are minimising the contribution that people could make...We have had people that we have had to refuse an English language service to, because they are working—but they are working in, you know, stacking shelves. And they used to be whatever in some country outside the EU. And you are sitting here thinking—you know that's crazy...it's just the whole thing about the lack of recognition of the resource that's sitting there. For what is a relatively small investment, [it] could be released. (Bertie, manager of a training centre)

A household interviewee reported not being able to do a three day course costing €500 to qualify him for taxi-driving as he had done a 3 day course in a different sector in the last 18 months.<sup>120</sup>

Now I can't get funding off social welfare because I already done a security course. I done a course in regard to becoming a security guard. A three day, four day course. But it cost something like €385 and you get one funding like that, and I think you've to wait eighteen months or something for another one. (Vinny)

However, other jobseekers reported going on multiple courses, as outlined in Section 4.4.2 earlier. This was referred to as the 'course carousel' by one training centre manager.

Meanwhile, some household interviewees who are not required to go on courses (e.g. those on disability payments, on OPFP and qualified adults) have sought to go, and have gone, on courses—even though qualified adults are not eligible for all courses, and do not get any training allowance for doing so.

[A qualified adult] can do a day course with the likes of say the training centre in [local area], but they wouldn't get any training allowance...but whoever is claiming for them would still be claiming for them obviously. They can't do evening courses, free of charge, because evening courses are [only] free to any person that's receiving a payment with the Department at the moment. (Emily, job-seeking support service)

Even decision makers in the area found it confusing to know who is eligible for what course—and why.

There are also some anomalies effectively in some of what you get on what programme...I have to say, I mean I struggle to understand it myself sometimes, particularly when you, as you say, when you bring in all the types of payments that people may be on from an income support perspective and then the rules that are associated with various programmes. (Victor, senior government official)

### ***Availability of Courses***

A number of household interviewees reported difficulty finding information about courses, which is not surprising given the complexity of the offering. Informational barriers were also identified in Mooney & O'Rourke's (2017) study of barriers to accessing FET.

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<sup>120</sup> It is likely this interviewee is referring to the Training Support Grant, which allows a maximum of €500 to be spent on courses for a jobseeker in a twelve month period, see <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Training-Support-Grant.aspx> accessed 5 December 2017.

Several household interviewees also reported that the choice of courses was not what they wanted, or that they had to wait a long time to do a course which they felt would be useful in finding a job.

I wanted to do the warehouse operations course and...the warehouse operations runs every—like I think there's only two a year. And that's a great course, that should be run more. (Brian)

Similarly, several job-seeking support services reported that ETBs do not always provide enough of the training sought by clients; and that there can be long waiting lists for sought-after courses.

We got an email last November to say that they were going to run short three week forklift courses—we were saying brilliant, because there's a high demand for forklift. The first one they ran was June, so people waiting from November to June...Only twelve people got a place. They started one this morning (August) and I think the next one is not until October. So they're only running three this year and they've about—what would you say, two hundred and something on the list...Two hundred and forty-two, yeah...I don't see why they can't run them back to back. (Gail, manager in a job-seeking support service)

However, the key local training providers did not agree.

*Interviewer:* One of the other things we heard about—some courses are very popular and people are finding it difficult to get on to them. *Tanya:* That's not true. *Oonagh:* No, not on our courses....*Tina:* Very few people are turned away, yeah. *Tanya:* If they're eligible. (Tina, Tanya and Oonagh, training managers)

They clarified that waiting lists could be long, but reported that those on the lists often do not turn up to start the course, and so courses run below capacity.

*Oonagh:* Well the waiting lists look long but they're not really. *Tina:* We could have a waiting list of a hundred people but that could be people who just, in front of their case officer, said yeah, I'd love to do hairdressing, but we call them in for discussion and they don't turn up. *Oonagh:* 50 per cent don't turn up. (Tina, Tanya and Oonagh, training managers)

This may be related to activation requirements to sign up for training courses, as well as the timing of courses, the range of training options available, and life events. The cost of running some sought-after courses also seems to play a role, as do rules on the type of training which funds can be spent on.

*Oonagh:* Yes, I mean we had to postpone a warehousing [course]...they don't want to do it. *Tanya:* We don't run as much warehousing anymore because it's a very expensive course. It costs a fortune, and it was one of these ones that a lot of people were being sent on but

there were very few outcomes...*Oonagh*: So you need outcomes. (Tina, Tanya and Oonagh, training managers)

€500 is the amount that we can apply for an individual [for training] per year, but you can only spend €250 of that on anything to do with driving. (Gillian, case officer in a job-seeking support service)<sup>121</sup>

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs has identified a need for more trained staff in warehousing and logistics, and HGV drivers,<sup>122</sup> so it is unfortunate that costs and spending rules seem to reduce the amount of training which can be done in these sectors. The issue of how courses are linked to employer requirements will be looked at more in Section 8.4.

There were particular issues for migrants seeking English-language courses. As well as issues regarding eligibility, as outlined earlier, the community training centres report high demand for these courses, and not enough places on them—or any dedicated funding.

We will still be out the door, I mean, the English language provision, for instance, we don't have a budget for to provide English language ...You must have heard this one that, you know, government don't provide a specific budget strand to provide English language for migrants. (Bertie, manager of a training centre)<sup>123</sup>

Of course, not all courses have long waiting lists, and for some courses the waiting time seemed to be short, and the courses were run often, for example, in computer skills.

### 8.3.4 Supports to Attend Courses

Household interviewees often needed supports to attend courses. As outlined earlier, some have problems with literacy, and with English language ability. Childcare and transport were other issues commonly raised (see also Mooney & O'Rourke, 2017).

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<sup>121</sup> Again this may be a reference to the Training Support Grant, which only allows €250 to be spent on driving courses for an individual in a 12 month period, see <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Training-Support-Grant.aspx>, accessed 5 December 2017.

<sup>122</sup> See Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2016.

<sup>123</sup> The Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration notes that 'The Department of Education and Skills provide annual funding to Education and Training Boards (ETBs) from which English Language tuition *may* be provided to adult migrants' (author emphasis), see <http://www.integration.ie/website/omi/omiwebv6.nsf/page/infoformigrants-learningenglish-en>, accessed 5 December 2017.

### **Childcare**

Several household interviewees undertaking training reported problems with organising affordable childcare, with some overcoming these and some not. In the past a number of training centres had crèches attached to them, but these are no longer provided. New arrangements for community childcare for the children of trainees and those taking up employment are also much more cumbersome than they used to be, involving referral and contact with multiple organisations, and making it more difficult for people to take up training opportunities. One case officer outlined these:

There's an after school placement, €3 per day per child...But again...nothing in this country is simple...They have to get contact details for the community child care development sector within the county council, they then have to make links with that individual, so they have to ring them physically and find out which child care providers in the local area provide this service. Then they have to ring those services to see if there's places available and...go on waiting lists... If you're left for eight weeks waiting on a placement...you know, the course [could have] already started...We used to [have it so that] they had to provide places for training courses. So we would have gotten a list of the local providers that would have, say, five places that are available for training courses that are manned through the ETB. But now everything has gone central, we don't have that information anymore... (Gillian, case officer in a job-seeking support service)

Some trainees are also unable to access childcare support due to eligibility criteria.

People can actually get some supports, but that's linked to their eligibility for that... There was an issue there...I had a young girl on a, she was a lone parent, on a CTC, and they were progressing her to, I think it was VTOS...but the VTOS didn't qualify for a CET scheme<sup>124</sup>...she was actually hindered from progression...because of childcare. (Oonagh, training managers)

Victor, a senior government official, noted that there is hardly any childcare support for higher education or PLCs,<sup>125</sup> and attributed this to the likely cost of providing it.

The assumption is not really that people don't, wouldn't necessarily have childcare [needs]...I think the assumption is probably far more that these [PLCs, higher education] are massive programmes, which

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<sup>124</sup> The Citizen's Information Board outlines that not all ETB courses qualify for CET funding. Those on VTOS courses 'may be approved as qualifying', see [http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/vocational\\_education\\_and\\_training/child\\_care\\_support\\_during\\_fas\\_training\\_courses.html](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/vocational_education_and_training/child_care_support_during_fas_training_courses.html), accessed 5 December 2017.

<sup>125</sup> There are some supports for childcare at university, but they are not universal and are usually college-specific, see e.g. O'Brien, (2017).

[are expensive]...I think that's a fair bit to do with it. (Victor, senior government official)

People organise informal childcare instead, but the arrangements are not always satisfactory, as Krystal, a lone parent, outlined.

[The course is] from quarter to two till a quarter to five, Tuesday and Thursday, and...in May I'm going to struggle in terms of getting the youngest one minded, because even the after-school care that's in the school finishes at twenty-to-four, my eldest doesn't finish school till four so that's going to be a bit of a problem you know...I have me Mam and me sister...I will try and see between the two of them, so I've basically said to me youngest—if my sister isn't at the school collecting her boys...that she's to go straight down to me Mam's, and then when the eldest gets back from school she can go home. (Krystal, lone parent with two daughters aged 10 and 16)

But for those with no-one to offer informal childcare, the barriers are even greater.

Lack of affordable after-school care is also problematic for the training centres. Organising timetables around school hours means that training infrastructure is poorly used, as Bertie, manager of a training centre, outlined.

Now we have started a new programme on the basis of [the lone parent] profile for people...and they have to be part time, and we have to have them in the morning and we can't start before half nine. And they have got to be finished by two o'clock and we had to rearrange the lunch timetables for the staff and the whole thing—which is grand because that is what we do. But the flip side of it then we end up with an empty building in the afternoon for those programmes and you are scratching your head. (Bertie, manager of a training centre)

The new Affordable Childcare Scheme, which will be available to all those in employment and training, should make a difference to the situation of trainees with children under 16. However, those designing the new scheme feel that after-school care provision is likely to lag behind that of other types of care, as it is starting from a low level of provision.

### **Transport**

For those without private transport, access to courses could be difficult, particularly those doing evening courses.

I did the Security Course, yea, ...it was actually in [name of suburb]...I found the transport was a bit of a nightmare ...because the course was an evening course, three nights a week, and it was the middle of winter...and I was in [suburb] with no transport at sort of half past nine...I ended up getting a bus to the town centre of Dublin, and then getting [another] back...about eleven o'clock, yea. (Fred, unemployed Traveller)

Some household interviewees doing ETB courses reported that they got a transport allowance when doing courses. However, it does not come near to covering the costs of transport to a course, and has not been increased in years.

*Tina:* If they come on a course with us they get a contribution towards their travel. *Tanya:* They will get a small, small...*Oonagh:* It never equates, it's actually horrendous, it wouldn't cover, like it wouldn't cover the bus fare...for one day. Up to five miles is €4.60—sure your fare is three something. *Tina:* Yeah, like people think that's per day. *Interviewer:* Is it not per day? *Tina:* No, per week. *Tanya:* Per week, it was never increased, I don't think, in all the years that I can remember. (Tina and Tanya, training managers)

The problem with the lack of supports for the transport costs to get to a course is that some of the people who would most benefit from the training would end up at a financial loss if they undertake it.

*Tanya:* [It] is part of the disincentive, if you're maintaining the same jobseeker's allowance and if you happen to be someone who's trying to support a family, actually you're taking away from your income to do [a course]. They're barriers. There's a cost—even your lunches and clothes. *Tina:* You should not be disadvantaged to come on a training programme and technically they are. (Tina, Tanya and Oonagh, training managers)

A number of people also thought that eligibility criteria for course supports need to be simplified. Whether or not someone can keep their allowance varies depending on the type of course and the institution it is provided in, and the rules can be difficult to grasp.

SOLAS has recently published a report on the barriers to people from disadvantaged backgrounds accessing FET. This contains a number of recommendations to address some of these barriers, focusing on information and organisation (Mooney & O'Rourke, 2017).

### 8.3.5 Guidance Issues

In relation to the Intreo courses they undertook, although many households interviewees enjoyed the courses they did, the experience of several suggested that there was not always good matching between the course and the interviewee's interests and abilities. For example, as outlined in Chapter 4, Brian, who already had computer skills, was sent on a course where the entire first class was spent showing students how to log on to a computer. Fred, who had literacy difficulties, was told that this was not a problem for the course he was sent on, only to arrive and be told that a Leaving Certificate level of education was necessary for it.

One interviewee mentioned that she had done a literacy test before starting a course, to check if she was literate enough to do it, but there was no mention of other grading processes before a course started. More grading might have been



useful, however, given the issues raised in the quotes above. Some household interviewees also mentioned that more guidance as to what the course involved would be useful too in terms of helping them to make a good choice on the course to do,<sup>126</sup> as Krystal explained.

Then I was given information [but] then when we were going in to the second part of [the course], it was to be some kind of computer, I don't even know what it was! But I left it, I was like—I'm not into this at all—and I ended up leaving it. (Krystal)

All of these issues point to a lack of good career guidance for those taking up courses.

Guidance about future direction can take many different shapes, as Victor, a national decision maker in education, pointed out.

There's the kind of full guidance, one-to-one guidance experience; and then there's...group work and there's also...where guidance stops and information provision begins...Sometimes what people need is information, it's not always guidance. (Victor, senior government official)

Several service providers noted the importance of career guidance, particularly in relation to long-term outcomes.

We will see people change, you know, after a few sessions with a guidance counsellor. They go—of course, I was looking for the wrong thing. So I think guidance is crucial. (Bertie, manager of a training centre)

We have to make sure that our clients are choosing the correct path ... because ... with a career path plan, ultimately they will move in to something that will be sustainable long term. Whereas if an individual is coming in and they're just being put on a course just to keep them busy or to motivate them in to doing something on a daily basis, it doesn't necessarily get the results that we need here. (Gillian, case officer in a job-seeking support service)

Good guidance is of particular importance to those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may not have a good idea of what careers are out there, or what their aptitude is for them.

I was [in] the Job Centre one day, and a fella was being registered...and they said to him—'Listen Paul, what do you want to work at?' And Paul said—'If I effing knew that I wouldn't be here'. And the whole point

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<sup>126</sup> Mooney & O'Rourke, (2017), had similar findings.

was—we didn't appreciate, you know—when you have first, second, third generation unemployment, you know, apart from the job in the shop or maybe a plumber, people don't know what roles are out there... And that was a real eye opener. And we actually, by hook and by crook, stole, borrowed, money to employ an occupational psychologist. And for the first time we had somebody on the team who was telling people what they were good at, what they weren't good at, and that began transforming them. (Padraig, training manager)

A recent review of PLC courses also noted that dissatisfaction with career guidance at second level was high for all school leavers (McGuinness *et al.*, 2018).

### ***What Career Guidance Can Intreo Provide?***

The consensus of many service providers and decision-makers is that the Intreo activation process makes it difficult to dedicate enough time to career guidance, and often Intreo engagement with clients is more about referrals than in-depth guidance—like 'speed dating', as Bertie called it in Section 5.4.1.

All due respect to the DSP, the engagement with the case officers for fifteen minutes to work out what course they want to go on—you know, you can call it whatever you like, but it's not guidance. (Bertie, manager of a training centre)

The career guidance skills of Intreo case officers also vary.

About half, I think, of case officers are former—they would have received training in adult guidance...New case officers didn't—they received...a limited training, in relation essentially, to the nature of the service. (Jarleth, senior government officials)

### ***Recent Cutbacks, Re-deployments, and Patchy Provision***

A number of interviewees reported that there were cutbacks to career guidance during the recession, in both the further training area and in schools. Staff with career guidance skills were also re-deployed, and use these skills less in their new jobs in Intreo.

I think the DSP would be great if they went back to doing counselling you know or career advice. Because [the] staff that went over, they were all trained on that and it's just a pity to let that skill go. They stopped [doing that]—well they probably had no choice they were so busy. (Oonagh, training manager)

So overall, career guidance is not absent from the public employment and education services. There are career guidance counsellors working within Intreo,

and there is an adult education guidance service in each of the 16 the ETBs throughout the country. However the interviews show that access to career guidance, and its provision within the public employment and education services, is patchy.<sup>127</sup>

Those who are most distant from the labour market, and so might need most career guidance, are not necessarily allocated the case officers trained in guidance in Intreo.

*Interviewer:* Obviously your case officers have different backgrounds and, you know, more experience in some areas than others, so is there, like would people who've done the career guidance course be more likely to be allocated to those with low PEX scores<sup>128</sup> or is it just whoever is available next? *Daithi:* No, it's whoever is available. (Daithi, manager in an employment support organisation)

In addition, those who are not clients of Intreo have no clear place to go to seek career guidance. Before FÁS and the Department of Social Welfare were merged, career guidance advice was available from FÁS. This had the disadvantage that not all those registered as unemployed had to engage with FÁS' job seeking support services—but now that this issue has been addressed by merging welfare payments and career advice in Intreo, another problem emerges.

If you're not in receipt of a welfare payment and you're of working age and you wish to progress on in life, where do you go?...so that's one of the challenges that needs to be addressed. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

### ***Costs for Individual and State***

Lack of career guidance is not just a problem for an individual who ends up in a course or job which they do not want to be in. It also has an economic cost for the State and course providers. One decision maker noted how a place on a course can cost up to €5,000, and if the person taking the place does not want to be there, this funding is being wasted. Both lack of career guidance, and the interaction of this with the activation requirements of Intreo, could contribute to this.

Suggestions to deal with it include paying a small fee for a course (to work effectively obviously this would need to dovetail with Intreo activation requirements).

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<sup>127</sup> OECD data from 2006 shows that just over 50 per cent of Irish post-primary students had career guidance scheduled into their time at school, which was below the OECD average (Ireland had the 11<sup>th</sup> lowest score out of 29 countries) (Kis, 2010: 72).

<sup>128</sup> A person in need of a significant level of supports to access education or training or employment.

Training that we deliver...some of it is funded through SICAP, [so] we don't charge for that training because it's fully subsidised...But people might just not turn up then, if they don't turn up it's not paid for [and] they've very little kind of commitment to it. Whereas courses that we deliver through the Local Employment Office, the LEO—we have to charge a nominal amount, but ... that works much better, people value it more...I think everybody should pay something...even a small amount...I remember what they used to do years ago...they used to pay a nominal fee but it would be refunded at the end of it if they turned up for it...When people get something for free it isn't for free, we're being paid for that so there is a cost [and] the premises cost money to run. (Georgia and Gisele, in an organisation supporting self-employment).

One training centre which is funded through a mix of private and public funding does charge trainees a small fee per day.

Engagement which takes a person's interests into account from the beginning could provide better long-term outcomes, both for them and for confidence in the public employment service.

Trying to get the system to see it's actually in its own interest to get that initial engagement piece right...it takes time to do that...but it's worth it, it's an investment in the person, so that resources will be used more effectively and that you [can] create more win/wins and people feel, God, you know...and then they tell other people. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

Better career guidance, and emphasis on the links to employment could also help to reduce the number on the 'course carousel' (although it is likely that other supports are also necessary, e.g. for childcare, work experience).

People just get onto the carousel of courses and just switch subject...and follow it around. That's really difficult [and] when we talk about subjects that would lead to employment...it's the real weak spot. (Bertie, manager of a training centre)

A review of career guidance was launched by Minister Bruton in January 2018, to be completed by the end of Q2 2018.<sup>129</sup> This is very welcome. A number of issues need to be grappled with, as Victor, a senior government official, outlined.

[Guidance] needs to be restructured at ETB level in a way that reflects the fact that the VECs have come together into the ETBs, that the former FÁS training centres have moved into the ETBs and there's bits

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<sup>129</sup> See <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2018-press-releases/PR18-01-22.html>, accessed 20 February 2018.

of guidance there too...There might well be a resource issue about the extent to which we—and even who, you know—does the guidance. (Victor, senior government official)

### 8.3.6 Course Outcomes and Follow Through to Employment

What are the outcomes of the courses for the household interviewees? They were often on a course which provided a ‘licence’ to work in a sector, for example, FETAC level 5 in social care, HACPP, Safe Pass, PSA licence (for security), or PSV licence (for taxi-ing). A number had also gained ECDL qualifications. With the exception of Fetac Level 5, these are low levels of qualification. On the one hand, they are useful, and sometimes necessary, for the type of jobs which the interviewees had done or were seeking. But one trainer thought that such low levels of qualification limited options for unemployed people with low skills, and that it was much better to provide them with more intensive and long-term training that equipped them to compete effectively for jobs with good prospects.

Why can't [the long-term unemployed] have a decent job, you know, why have [they] to be the waiter or the waitress or the lounge boy?...I'm not interested in low level employment, I'm interested in people getting the skills for quality jobs that have career progression paths and good career prospects for them...I'm not interested in ECDL...ECDL gets nobody the job. I'm interested in courses that...take people from very foundational and no knowledge of IT, but bring [them] to a level where they're a competitive asset in the labour market. (Padraig, training manager)

What were the longer term outcomes for household interviewees who had completed courses they were sent on? Did the courses lead them to employment? It is useful to remember here that the interviewees are not working, so they may not be representative of all people who have done courses. Some of the courses they previously undertook had led to employment before their current period of unemployment (e.g. tradespeople who had come through an apprenticeship, Tammy who had worked in childcare in the past). There are also some interviewees who did not do the courses to find a job, but instead to, for example, ‘get out of the house’. However, several interviewees who wanted a job said that the courses did not lead anywhere, as Krystal outlined in Section 5.2.3. Brian also noted this.

Retail sales... I done that course and I had that on my CV and I was going looking, do you know, for retail jobs; nowhere was taking me. So I done a different [course]—I done the gardening skills then... to try and get a different job—nothing. (Brian)

Some people have become disillusioned. Several felt that they were sent on courses so that they were no longer on the Live Register, improving unemployment figures (a finding which also came up in Mooney & O'Rourke, 2017).

[The case officer] she just puts you down for courses and all; it's just to get you off the dole as quick as possible like, it's not benefitting you...They were like—this course is free, will we put you down for this; yeah, they're only putting you down for courses now that's free. (Brian)

A number of interviewees said that there was no follow-up with them after the courses.

I says—put me down for the next course coming up. No follow-up, no nothing...so you know, you get knocked back...you say to yourself how am I ever going to get out of this, you know. (Danny)

In many cases there seems to be no work experience element to courses, which interviewees felt held them back. One interviewee, Nathaniel, was very positive about a Fetac social care course he was doing which did include work experience:

The course modules also include work experience, so you are schooling, you are getting work experience, you know. And then once that is finished, I'm going into the job straight—the work experience you already have it. So it will not be like the other courses, you know. (Nathaniel)

How do the training centres progress students into employment opportunities? Tina, Tanya and Oonagh spoke about progression into the workplace—but also placed a lot of emphasis on progression from a course at one level to a course at another level.

Our role is either to progress people from three to four or whatever or the higher level five and six straight into jobs, like childcare, healthcare, office admin, whatever ...*Tanya*: As much as we can we would certainly promote progression. And every teacher, every tutor, every instructor would also be encouraging people to progress after the course and I suppose making people aware of the options to them. *Tina*: The recruitment officers go in and talk to them near the end of the course and...say—right, you're finishing whatever, maybe a level 3 course, and they'd say well look, these are the options. [*Interviewer*: And who are the recruitment officers?] *Tanya*: They recruit in the training centres, and then it would be guidance counsellors would do some work with people in the other areas as well. (Tina, Tanya and Oonagh, training managers)

Their organisation provided links to employment through their Facebook page, but in general seemed to have few proactive links with employers. This is also an issue raised in relation to PLC courses, in McGuinness *et al*, (2018).

We have a very good Facebook page that employers would ring us, and we would put up local ads. Now we are not becoming a recruitment agency so we have to be careful there, and we advertise that. And we have a jobs notice board downstairs that we put jobs up on as well for

them...[and] the instructors have contacts with employers. (Oonagh, training manager)

Tina, Tanya and Oonagh think that, over time, engagement between their organisation and employers has become weaker, which some employers corroborated. The weaker engagement was attributed to organisational changes, including more contracting out of training, and less staff to focus on employer engagement.

*Tina:* We used to have a lot of contacts when...we were all instructors...you would have built them up, so you could ring [employers] and, you know, they'd take [trainees] and you knew the type of person that they might take, you know...*Tina:* [We] had all that expertise. *Oonagh:* That's all lost now unfortunately...[And] because we've had no replacements of instructors and...we have a lot of contracted training...so those people are changed all the time. So you could have one company doing it this time, because it's a tendering process, and [another] one another time, so you are losing that continuity [with employers]. (Tina, Tanya and Oonagh, training managers)

Staff in this, and several other training centres, reported few staff to follow up with ex-trainees<sup>130</sup>.

[Interviewer: What kind of follow up if any is done with people particularly unemployed people after the courses or is there any?]  
*Bertie:* Not enough and that is one of the things we are not resourced for at all. When they finish here generally the guidance service will follow them up but when they follow them up its probably within three months...but beyond the three months we wouldn't have the resources obviously. (Bertie, manager of a training centre)

However, not all training centres had this pattern in place. One which focused strongly on engaging with employers, and in following up with ex-trainees, was very successful in placing trainees in jobs, and had a specific placement and follow-up service.

We stay with people for the three years after completing a course. So we're not just interested in people doing a course...so, for example, if somebody who has done a level six course goes off and goes to

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<sup>130</sup> This will change as the new PLSS (Programme Learner Support System) is brought into use. This will allow learner progression to be tracked for a year after a course has ended. See [https://www.google.ie/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwJkmJvfxY\\_bAhWHDsAKHd8\\_AdoQFgg3MAM&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gqi.ie%2FDownloads%2FProgramme%2520Learner%2520Support%2520System%2520EQU%2520VET%2520-%2520Fiona%2520Maloney%2520ETBI.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3ryD9\\_xPV7LL7eeYQmou7](https://www.google.ie/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwJkmJvfxY_bAhWHDsAKHd8_AdoQFgg3MAM&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gqi.ie%2FDownloads%2FProgramme%2520Learner%2520Support%2520System%2520EQU%2520VET%2520-%2520Fiona%2520Maloney%2520ETBI.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3ryD9_xPV7LL7eeYQmou7) for further information, downloaded 18 May 2018.

university afterwards we'll touch base with them the following year and the year after and then we'll offer our placement service to them on completion of that course. If somebody gets a job and loses it they can come back to us...We have an overall placement progression rate of 74.6 per cent in to jobs. (Padraig, training manager)

This organisation also selected trainees for courses through aptitude tests, to ensure a good match between their skills and aptitudes, and the training. These steps led to good matching between trainees and employment, but was resource intensive. What employers are looking for, and how they are engaged with by the FET sector, is outlined in the next section.

## 8.4 Employer Requirements, and Links with State Training and Education Services

### 8.4.1 What Type of Skills are Employers Looking For, and What Type of Training is Used?

As outlined in Chapter 6, employers are looking for staff with experience and a good attitude. In relation to specific skills, naturally there are variations in the types sought by employers, depending on the role. Employers rely on a mix of externally provided, and internally provided, training.

#### *Internal and External Training*

About half of the employers interviewed carry out internal training, often for induction or specific work requirements. A number of employers also mentioned using external companies, e.g. for health and safety training. Some companies contract the provision of training which is also provided in ETBs. For example, in the security and cleaning firm, Walter says that in the absence of adequate external training, they now have their own in-house approved trainer to carry out PSA training. Rosanna outlined another model used in her recruitment agency.

If somebody has a licence and it has expired, and he reference checks as a good forklift driver—what we are currently doing is, we are paying for the training, we are deducting the money out of their salary over an agreed term...Then the licence is theirs because they have paid for it...But it enables them to start in the job...Now why are we doing that? Because there is a shortage of forklift drivers. (Rosanna, recruitment company)

Rosanna adds that they do not avail of training provided by the ETB because it is only available to people who have been unemployed for a period of time, and this would not apply to all those they recruit.

However, some companies do work with State training providers. For example, Karen, in the catering sector, is working with a JobPath provider to train up long-



term unemployed people to work with them, specifically for manual handling and HACCP qualifications. And Sasha, in the construction company, noted how they had staff who were apprentices, and so were doing ETB training.

### **Soft Skills**

With staff attitude an important attribute, the need for good soft skills was brought up by a number of employers.

What [employers] want to see is that [prospective employees] can be polite to a customer, that they can answer a phone correctly, that they can make eye contact with people. (Florence, employer organisation).

Is it easy to train someone in these skills? Or are they learnt at home? There are mixed views. Some employers felt that attitudes and practices, such as never missing a day's work, are inculcated at home from very early on; while others noted that even those with high levels of education did not have the right type of soft skills. However, most trainers were of the opinion that these type of skills can be taught. Pdraig, manager of one training programme, outlined how these skills were incorporated into his courses.

There's three components in every course. We've a basic introduction to computers and IT, there's a technical discipline section, and there's a huge focus on the personal professional work ethic. They're the pillars within the FIT programme ... One of the challenges that we had to deal with early on ... [was that] a small number of them lost their jobs early on and the reason was ... they had [said], like, 'I'll take a day off', and [we'd] say, "well, you know, you can't do that, you might lose your job" – "well, I've lived on the dole before" ... which is a healthy mentality in another way, like, if the worst comes to the worst I'll survive - but a misinterpretation of that. So we had to work with some of the people saying – "actually no, look to what the future can hold for you, look what an income can do for you, you know", and to break down some of the old norms, you know. And that was a real lesson that we imported in to our future programme development. (Pdraig, training manager)

In Oonagh's training centres, some of these attributes were also taught on courses.

Soft skills, yeah—[on] every course we do a week of, well career planning...[and] there's communications on a lot of courses, team working. Customer service is on some courses, not on every course. And some of the high IT courses, they would do presentation management. (Oonagh, training manager)

Tanya felt that her centre could do more training on soft skills, but that it was difficult to fit this into the certification requirements of their training programmes.

There's probably a lot more work needed on that because I actually think that is the area that people are lacking in in all sorts of ways...I mean I was interviewing for temporary clerical and some people came

in, we were shocked like, the way they were dressed and how, they didn't even wash their hair like, you know...they're good on paper, you know, and you feel like giving them a little bit of advice...We may have to rethink about where we're going is, we're driven by the certification [but] actually we can probably make our programme bigger than the certification. (Tanya, training manager)

The quote from Padraig above suggests that it is possible to include teaching such skills in the certification of a course.

#### 8.4.2 How do Employers Link with Training Providers?

The contacts between employers and training providers vary. One training organisation described how they made a lot of effort to make sure their courses were relevant to the unemployed people and helped them to find sustainable employment. However, they did not have as much contact with employers as they would like.

So there'd be a huge effort...making sure that our courses are very relevant and are responsive to the needs of local unemployed people...so that [they] can engage with us and hopefully move to, you know, get a qualification at a level that helps them access some kind of sustainable employment in the labour market...We'd like to get more contact with employers, just from the perspective of—what opportunities, planning, yeah. But actually, you know, that's very difficult in Dublin because it's huge, so, so, you know, that is a challenge for us to think about, how we do that. We're constantly looking at trying to improve that, but we're tight on resources as well. (Tanya, training manager)

They had found it difficult to engage employers at times, and noted that for engagement to happen, it had to meet an employer need.

*Tina:* The DSP ran an employers' week and the last two years it was a disaster... It was cancelled. They were having breakfast meetings and...employers just didn't turn up. *Tanya:* But employers, in fairness to them, will only come when they want something. *Tina:* Or there's a grant. *Tanya:* Yeah, there has to be something in it for them, you know. (Tina and Tanya, training managers)

Regional Skills Fora have now been set up to provide more strategic links between employers and training providers, in order for trainers to better meet the skills needs of employers. Wesley, a national stakeholder, outlined how these are at an early stage of development, but 'tick the right boxes' in terms of bringing all state actors in training and education, and employer representatives, together for regular meetings.

Padraig, one of the national training providers, has put a lot of work into engaging with employers, finding out exactly what type of skills they need, and putting in

place training to provide these skills. As outlined earlier, his programme only takes people on its training courses who have shown in aptitude tests that they have ability in this area. They have a 74 per cent placement rate in jobs.

We took the tech sector, and in this incidence we broke it in to a number of key disciplines, and then [we] go out to companies and have a conversation on this basis ...We entertain a continuous dialogue with our companies as to where, where the ball is going to, not where the ball is at...So we're able to identify then what skill requirements are needed by what company, in what areas, at entry, competent, expert, and then we calibrate courses for that level. [*Interviewer*: All right, so you're actually delivering courses to meet their needs.] *Padraig*: Exactly. (Padraig, training manager)

Like Oonagh and her colleagues, Padraig also found it hard to engage employers—until he is meeting a need for them. Once he can meet their need for skilled employees, their relationship is more like that of business partners.

Most times when I go in to companies they're looking at their watches to get me out the door because they've got their day jobs to do. The one time I can't get out of a company is doing the skills audit. They say—you're the first person to come and have a conversation with us about skills... That relationship and dialogue has changed, we're now a business partner. They need workers, but, but they see us as providing a credible stream [of workers]. (Padraig, training manager)

A number of Regional Skills Fora were engaging with Padraig's organisation to get skills audits done for a variety of industries, including manufacturing and agrifood.

More evaluation of course outcomes should also help to give an indication of how well different courses are meeting employer needs. Many more courses are now evaluated than previously, but in some areas this is still at an early stage, and some interviewees felt that more data gathering and evaluation was needed. For example, Wesley, a national stakeholder, felt that some courses were not being evaluated, but continued to be funded; while some others were evaluated but there was little action taken based on the evaluation findings.

## 8.5 The Further Education and Training (FET) Sector

### 8.5.1 The Education System, FET and Life Long Learning in Ireland

#### *The Education System*

Linking to the earlier discussion on early school leaving and the need for alternative forms of education, a number of decision-makers and stakeholders do not believe the school system prepares people adequately for work, and so needs more reform, as Wesley, a national stakeholder outlined.

There should be more...life skills...But they're not the sort of skills that [the] particular model of education which we have, which is all around valuing CAO points attainments, etc, etc, inculcates. And that's why...we [are] so passionate...about things like Junior Cycle reform...Our secondary level curriculum doesn't develop these behaviours. It's all so one particular model of learning, which is middle class and academic and disconnects kids who don't necessarily learn that way or flourish in that kind of environment. (Wesley, national stakeholder)

This means that the role of vocational education and lifelong learning (LLL) is important, particularly for those who left school early. However, vocational education does not have a high status in Ireland, and levels of LLL are low.

### ***Vocational Education***

First, Ireland does not have as much vocational education provision as other European countries, which often have a dual provision system through much of secondary school. With a smaller industrial sector, Ireland's economy traditionally may have had less need for this, some interviewees suggested.

Additionally, in Ireland, FET can often be seen as a second best option by students, parents, teachers and employers. This leads to less people in vocational education—even where they may be more suited to it than higher education.

Does the world need another 4,000 business graduates every year, with 2,500 of them getting a 2-2, and we are still wondering why the hell they went to college when they could be doing something else with a business component in it...There is a massive like push into, you know, certain disciplines, you know, areas, that I'm not sure it really makes a whole heck of a lot of sense. (Hartley, academic expert)

However, FET can play an important role in supporting disadvantaged people into good jobs.

I suppose the thing with jobless households is...what is the labour market you are close to?...so further education is to get you into that job market really at the end of the day. (Hartley, academic expert)

But does it link well enough to the labour market? As outlined above, on a job placement level, training colleges and employers are often not well linked. Several interviewees felt that in terms of strategic planning, the training system and the labour market could be better linked. There has been quite a bit of reform to address this in the FET and skills area, with the establishment of SOLAS, the ETBs, and the Regional Skills Fora. However, a number of interviewees think this change is rolling out too slowly.

If we look at *Pathways to Work*...Social Protection eventually got engaged and recreated their job activation services around *Pathways to Work*. There simply isn't the same on the education and training

side...very little has happened...SOLAS kind of got off to a bright start but ... but certainly some of the energy and dynamism went out of it very quick. You're up to five years now...and you could easily understand why even after five years such a radical change wouldn't be fully bedded in—but it's hard to understand, after five years, why you aren't seeing evidence of change here, there and everywhere. You should be, you should be seeing that a lot. (Clive and Caitlin, senior government officials)

Sansa feels that establishing Intreo before establishing SOLAS and the associated changes to FET was unfortunate.

It was most unfortunate that Intreo *et al* all rolled out in one time period, and then the emergence of ETBs and the emergence of SOLAS was kind of coming up behind. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

As a result, Clive and Caitlin feel that Intreo do not always have good FET options to direct clients into.

### ***Life Long Learning***

Lifelong learning is another important area for those with low skills, whether employed or unemployed, as it offers them a means of improving their skills to combat future downturns, and other changes such as automation of low-skill jobs, which a number of decision-makers identified as a challenge in future.

We were looking at robotic process automation, which is actually service-based work [and] any routine process that can automate using software. And [the] impact of this is going to be massive on low skilled people...you don't just need to be literate and you don't just need your Leaving Cert, you need something else, now whether that's an apprenticeship, a traineeship or going to, you know, a certificate, a diploma or a degree or master's, whatever like. The way that technology is going is just going to blast a hole through loads of these low skill jobs. (Roisin, senior government official)

Unfortunately, Ireland's level of lifelong learning is low compared to the EU average—particularly for those with low levels of education,<sup>131</sup> which a number of decision-makers and national stakeholders commented on. How can this be combatted? Victor, a senior government official, thinks there is a responsibility at State level to support those with low education to take it up again later, as they have not benefitted from the full State investment in their education at an earlier age.

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<sup>131</sup> See Solas, (2017). It confirms Ireland's lifelong learning participation rate at 7 per cent in 2016, compared to 11 per cent on average across the EU. Those who had secondary education or less had a participation rate of between 2 and 6 per cent on average in Ireland, compared to 11 per cent for those with a post-graduate degree.

However, Sansa thinks that the education system is so secondary school focused that it really struggles to provide a good experience for adult learners who had a bad experience in school.

The whole system is very geared around a particular way of operating, a particular mindset that doesn't lend itself to engaging with adults of a working age who may be, were never that fond of the formal ed system...didn't have a great time in it. And so we really, we really I think, struggle around trying to ensure we have alternative provision that adults feel they can opt into and that they will get an outcome from that will assist them in getting a decent job. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

Some training centres do aim to combat this, as Colette outlined.

Where somebody might be afraid to come...we might bring them in, give them a tour, and encourage them, and say "look this is the room, it's not like a school classroom, it's a lovely environment here" and so they'd feel welcome. (Colette, co-ordinator of a training centre)

Work is under way, meanwhile, through the *Action Plan for Education*, partly to meet EU requirements, to raise the proportion of people in lifelong learning to 10 per cent (DES, 2017: 61).

SOLAS are producing a framework for how Education and Training Boards can support people who are in employment...And we have to do that anyway because we also at European level have the up-skilling pathways piece coming out, which basically says that member states need to have a plan to, you know, assess and offer people who are below a certain level of the European qualifications framework...We may need to invent new processes by which we reach out, identify and get people into programmes. (Victor, senior government official)

One senior government interviewee suggested that employers could be incentivised to provide training to low-skilled employees through the National Training Fund and Skillnets. Ireland has the third highest level of employer provided training in the EU, but for almost two-thirds of employees, the training lasted less than five days (Eurofound, 2017: 83-84). As rates of life-long learning are low in Ireland, there may be a need for longer and more externally-accredited training for the low skilled.

Another factor which would help working migrants, in particular, would be better recognition of their qualifications. As outlined in Section 4.3.3 earlier, migrants reported that degrees from their country of origin were not accepted. This problem was also reported by service providers. The result is that many migrants are working in jobs which are far below their qualification level. One national stakeholder explained that there is no system in Ireland which allows formal recognition of foreign qualifications, in terms of equivalency. There is a QQI database which allows a person to find their qualification and the country it is from, and tells them what QQI level it is similar to. However, this provides a parameter, rather than a precise

match. In Canada a different system provides like-for-like recognition of qualifications. An agency which specialises in this work will look at a person's years of study—for example three years studying agricultural economics in Libya, and see what it is equivalent to in the Canadian system, and if any extra study might be necessary to have the Canadian equivalent of this qualification. Such a scheme could be useful to help better utilise the skills of migrants in Ireland.

### 8.5.2 Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships were popular with household interviewees, who see them as a good career move, particularly for their sons—some of whom showed less interest in them, however.

[X company is] taking on 250 apprentices...to be a qualified electrician, never be out of work... And I says—Tony, would you not even go try it? [And he says]—oh I don't know, I don't know. (Barbara, speaking of her 19 year old son)

Ireland traditionally has had most apprenticeships in the construction area (Kis, 2010). As with vocational education, the structure of the Irish economy has not traditionally demanded (or perhaps been offered) a wide range of apprenticeships, unlike some other EU countries.<sup>132</sup>

The whole apprenticeship system ...it was always for construction, plumbers, carpenters...[Central Europe would] have more technical schools and ... apprenticeship programmes...This is tied in with manufacturing as well, [which] we don't have much of. (Ultan, national expert)

A new apprenticeship model has been developed recently for Ireland, with apprenticeships at higher level and in a much broader range of areas, more linked to growth areas in the current Irish economy. Twenty seven new apprenticeships have been approved, and a further call has been made for more new apprenticeships in different sectors<sup>133</sup>. However, the new apprenticeships are often looking for more highly qualified students, and some are almost at third level, which could mean they are less accessible to the working class, which concerned some interviewees.

People have this notion that apprenticeships are around panel beating and whatever, and they're not, like the world has moved on

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<sup>132</sup> In Germany, manufacturing accounts for 22 per cent of employment, compared to 11 per cent in Ireland. This may have led to the emphasis on higher over vocational education in Ireland. Germany had 340 apprenticeship programmes in 2014, compared to 26 in Ireland, see O'Mahony, (2014).

<sup>133</sup> See <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR2017-05-08.html>, downloaded 18 May 2018.

completely...Now you probably need a Leaving Cert to take up most apprenticeships. (Norma, senior government official)

In the building sector, the provision of apprentice opportunities has dropped a lot,<sup>134</sup> with some employers reluctant to commit to the cost of training an apprentice over four years (although the construction company which we interviewed does have some apprentices). This pattern is likely to have a negative effect on opportunities for young working class men.

If you were to go back, you know, thirty years and you were to say well in certain disadvantaged parts what did the men do?...A lot of them were in areas like, you know, whether it was bricklaying, plastering, etc, etc, etc, and they...largely came out through the apprentice system. These days it's not that people have stopped putting bricks on top of bricks or plastering walls or whatever else...[But] basically the construction industry has voted with its feet not to invest the time and energy in training those people through a formal system. (Victor, senior government official)

However, the experience of Pádraig's training programme, which does recruit long-term unemployed people, and trains them into high level jobs, shows that there are possibilities for them within the new apprenticeship system. He has recently developed a new apprenticeship for the tech sector, working with employers to develop a programme which provides a mixture of training and work experience over two years. This has been very successful with over 200 candidates sponsored by over 100 companies, and was expected to rise to 500 candidates by the end of 2017.

However, despite some good progress in developing the new apprenticeship system, a number of interviewees felt that its rollout has been somewhat slow.

*Clive:* You keep on hearing the further education and training system call out that as an issue, that we've traditionally been...very focused on third level...and we have no apprenticeship system. [But] I mean the apprenticeship policy is—is that three years old now? *Caitlin:* They're very slow...*Clive:* They haven't even managed to roll out the apprenticeship, which you'd have thought would be their core business. (Clive and Caitlin, senior government officials)

One problem is that the FET system cannot generate apprenticeships on its own—it relies on employers taking them on, a factor which is not always understood, as Victor, a senior government official, outlined.

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<sup>134</sup> There was a decline of 93 per cent in construction apprentice registrations between 2007 (over 3000 registrations) to 2012 (222 registrations) (see Ó Murchadha & Murphy, 2016). By 2016 it had increased to 947 (see <https://beta.oireachtas.ie/ga/debates/question/2017-01-17/382/>, accessed 5 December 2017).



I think people don't always understand the dynamics of the apprenticeship system, that sometimes there are assumptions around well, you know, the State decides this year there's going to be 2,000 apprenticeships...and next year there's going to be 3,000 [and that] the State says, [or] has a role in deciding who should get them...and that isn't the case ... It's an employer decision. (Victor, senior government official)

However, this was not always so. In the 1970s, under AnCo, young people interested in apprenticeships did not always have to find an employer—instead AnCo sponsored 25 per cent of apprentices, and found them an employer to work with. AnCo had a division that engaged with employers, in relation to apprenticeships and other issues. In 1994 the new standard-based apprenticeship system came in, part of which included the apprentice finding the employer to train with. This left the sector more dependent on employers to generate apprenticeships. The interviewees considered that employers will engage with apprenticeships when it solves a problem for them. This means possibilities for more apprenticeships in future, as many interviewees could see that they provide a good mix of practical and theoretical skills, and labour market experience. A number of employers in, for example, the engineering sector were finding it hard to find graduate engineers who were work ready. An apprenticeship at level 8 or 9 could therefore be more useful than a degree to employers.

Wesley outlines the factors that need to be in place to ensure employer engagement with apprenticeships.

Now three things have to be in place. First of all they've got to have a genuine skills requirement...[Secondly] they've got to have some influence on the programme in terms of...defin[ing] the occupations and the occupational standards, in other words what somebody needs to be able to do, to do that job. It's up to the education and training providers to define the pedagogy and the learning outcomes to enable that, but employers need to be at that table...And finally that the State would provide some of the training and education element. If those three boxes can be ticked, employers will engage with this. (Wesley, national stakeholder)

These three factors appear to have been in place when Padraig was designing an apprenticeship for the tech sector, and in the new call for apprenticeships. However, apprenticeships are expensive to run for the State as well as employers, and it is not clear who is going to pay for the numbers to expand. Ultan, a national expert, noted that Germany was spending up to 1 per cent of GDP on vocational education and training, and wondered did Ireland have the same appetite for this level of spending.

In addition, more work needs to be done to make apprenticeships more attractive—at least to the middle class.

*Ronan:* Obviously the students [are] one thing, but you have to get the parents on board ... *Roisin:* One of the big challenges, particularly for some of the, the newer apprenticeships like the...bio-engineering one and those, is that parents are reluctant to encourage their children in to or down the apprenticeship road...Snob value. (Ronan and Roisin, senior government officials)

It is likely that apprenticeships would still be attractive to more disadvantaged groups, as they provide skills and stable work for them. There is now a new website to link potential apprentices to employers offering training (see [apprentices.ie](http://apprentices.ie)), but the following quote suggests that lack of contacts and low qualification levels could still make it difficult to access apprenticeships.

I met one young man and...his only desire was to be a mechanic...he was probably going to be the best mechanic you have ever met because he was taking his father's car apart every second day. [But] he couldn't make that breakthrough, because everywhere he walked into with his Applied Leaving Certificate...no one would entertain him, no one would let him look inside the door...he can't even get to that stage where you get your apprenticeship. (Damian, manager of a community centre)

Ensuring that the qualification levels of the more disadvantaged are high enough, and that they can access employers providing apprenticeships, will be important in the future, as will the number of apprenticeships available.

## 8.6 Summary of Key Issues

Several key issues were brought up in this chapter. First, the low education levels of the household interviewees, and of those who live in the study area overall, compared to average education levels in Dublin. This puts the household interviewees and their peers at a disadvantage in competing for jobs in the Dublin area.

Interviewees also noted low literacy levels among some people, particularly those who are older, Travellers, and Roma. While there has been improvement in overall literacy levels, a number of interviewees suggested a need for both more intensive literacy supports, and more vocational literacy supports, to allow those who do have literacy difficulties to better access employment and training.

Early school leaving, while generally low, is higher than average in disadvantaged areas such as the study area, and among Travellers. Given the links to poor employment outcomes, it is important to continue addressing the issues which lead to early school leaving, such as parental engagement and capacity, school disciplinary policies, teachers who are role models for disadvantaged groups, supports for mental health difficulties, and an engaging school curriculum. A

number of interviewees suggested a need for more alternative education at second level, e.g. the ability to take QQI modules at school.

In relation to courses which household interviewees accessed via Intreo, some felt that they had little choice on whether or not to do a particular course, due to the threat of sanctions to their welfare payment where they do not engage with Intreo-directed training. There are pros and cons to this, as sanctions can lead some disengaged people towards better engagement, but can also risk further disengagement by pushing an unemployed person into training in which they have no interest at all. There is also a need for less complex eligibility criteria to access courses through Intreo, and for greater supports for participants to undertake training, such as childcare (which is beginning to be addressed) and transport.

Discussion of the availability of places on courses which had strong links to the labour market showed varying opinions, with training providers sure that there were adequate places on these, while other interviewees felt there were not. Some particular issues arose in relation to English language courses, for which it was reported there is no dedicated funding stream.

Career guidance was another concern. It can promote a better match between the aspirations and aptitudes of unemployed people, and the courses/career direction which they are referred to by Intreo. Good career guidance is also particularly useful for disadvantaged groups, who do not always have a good grasp of career opportunities available. Career guidance availability is, however, patchy, and the time which Intreo staff have to dedicate to this is seen as too low. It may also be useful to match those who most need career guidance with the Intreo staff which have the best career guidance qualifications and experience. The recent announcement of a review of career guidance in second and third level education is welcome.

The importance of links between the labour market and training strategy was stressed. It seems that improved links are being put in place, with the establishment of the Regional Skills Fora, and greater monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes from ETB courses. There were reports, however, of poor links between employers and some training bodies. Only one training organisation interviewed had a job placement service. It combined this with intensive engagement with employers on skills needs, and the ability to choose motivated trainees and provide them with a high level of training. It had a high job placement rate—74 per cent. Supports which allow jobless households and their peers to improve their education level, particularly in areas with skill shortages, and then link them effectively to jobs, are likely to be an important factor in reducing joblessness and in-work poverty.

There was discussion of the further education and training sector overall. It has often been the poor relative of higher education, but can play an important role in equipping many, including the more disadvantaged, for the labour market.<sup>135</sup> The

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<sup>135</sup> In rural area, not only ETBs but also Teagasc can provide this type of education and training.

new apprenticeship system being slowly rolled out may provide a way to demonstrate the value of better linking sectors of the modern Irish economy with the further education and training system. However, for disadvantaged young people, it is important to ensure that they have the qualifications and contacts to access these opportunities.

The interviewees stressed the importance of lifelong learning, in particular, for those working in low skill sectors, who appear more likely to lose their jobs due to a downturn or automation. Skillnets, and use of the National Training Fund, may provide a way to do this. The *Action Plan on Education* (DES, undated) also contains steps to increase rates of lifelong learning. It is important that the FET sector also works to provide an educational experience which engages better with adults, particularly those who had a poor experience in school when they were younger. For migrants, better recognition of their qualifications could help them access more skilled jobs, as would more accessible and/or affordable English language training.

# Chapter 9

## The Role of Institutions in Service Provision

## 9.1 Introduction

To improve economic and social well-being in Ireland, the Developmental Welfare State (DWS) advocated by NESC, proposed three overlapping areas of welfare state activity—income supports, services and activist/innovative measures (NESC, 2005). First, the DWS acknowledged that the heart of social protection in Ireland is frequently considered to be the social welfare payments provided to ensure people have adequate incomes. Secondly, NESC argued that access to services is equally important to social protection, stating that ‘the radical development of services [is] the single most important route to improving social protection’ (*ibid.*: xix). For services to be most effective, the DWS argued that they should be more universally accessible, with redesigned targeting. Services which are used by everyone reduce stigma and strengthen social cohesion. However, such services also need to be ‘capable of gradation and adjustment to help diverse groups attain similar outcomes’. This can be done by mainstream service providers adjusting their services to accommodate a more diverse public, including those who are socially disadvantaged. This process is called ‘tailored universalism’. On the third area of welfare activity, activist or innovative measures, these should respond to unmet social needs, initially in a particular and once-off manner. While all providers can carry out activist or innovative measures, greater recognition needs to be given to community and voluntary groups who pioneer ways of addressing the marginalised position of some groups.

Throughout this report on low work intensity households reference has been made to the role of various institutions—public, community and voluntary, and private; national and local—how citizens interact with them, how connected or disconnected they are to each other, as well as commentary on the institutional changes which have taken place in the aftermath of the economic crisis. NESC’s DWS report emphasised the importance of effective institutions to deliver a progressive welfare state. In particular, NESC stressed the need for coalitions of institutions to ensure comprehensive responses to social deficits, and ‘joined-up’ government to ensure effective coordination across the public sector and the exercise of governance to integrate the contributions of non-public bodies. Furthermore, NESC asserted that strong institutions are required to ensure adherence to appropriate and adequate standards (NESC, 2005b: xxi-ii).

This chapter recaps on the main issues which have been raised in the preceding chapters of this report on services and institutions. The substantive issues of service provision, co-ordination, ethos, funding and delivery are presented, followed by sections on the political dimension of service delivery, and measurements of

success. A final section summarises the main elements of the chapter and draws some conclusions.

## 9.2 Summary of Institutional and Service Provision Issues Raised

The main issues raised in relation to the role of institutions in service provision to low work intensity households can be summarised as follows:

- The need to tailor service provision to meet the needs of people distant from the labour market;
- The complexity of the institutional landscape and the levels of co-ordination or connections between organisations;
- Low awareness of some institutional service providers, with a need for better information provision and communication of the services available;
- How people are influenced by their previous experience of institutions, and the process and pace of change;
- The culture, values and the ethos of institutions and how that relates to levels of trust in organisations;
- The role of design and implementation of policy and practice, including consultation and the nature of service delivery by public agencies, the community and voluntary sector or private providers;
- The resources available, and the cost to individuals, the community and the State of the poor use of resources;
- The influence of a political dimension; and
- The need for a greater focus on outcomes, measurement and learning.

A number of these themes are dealt with in more detail in the remainder of this chapter. First, there is a discussion on the provision of supportive services using a tailored universalism approach.

## 9.3 Tailored Universalism

As outlined in Section 4.4.3, a key finding from this study of low work intensity households is that some households need a wide range of services. This points to the continued need for ‘tailored universalism’—for services for the most disadvantaged groups, which are accessed through mainstream services. This was raised by a number of interviewees, who pointed to several groups who need extra

levels of service—those with literacy and/or English language difficulties; those from ethnic minorities which may be discriminated against, such as Travellers and Africans; those with health difficulties and/or a disability; those with a history of addiction; those who are homeless. Lone parents and NEETs are other groups that can need extra supports. Early intervention with these groups is also particularly effective, as outlined in the DWS.

There were also calls for more services focused on disadvantaged areas, as they have a particularly high concentration of unemployment and lower than average education.

The reality of where joblessness is...the geographic element of this is still something that we think is enormous...it is more important to get people into employment in those areas than others...We really do think that the return to communities and the State is multiplied when you actually manage to get people from a very disadvantaged community into employment, rather than an unemployed person in a, you know, in an ordinary commuter town...[So] the ability to target mainstream services is hugely important. (Isaac, manager in a government agency)

There are already some services within mainstream provision which do focus particularly on disadvantaged groups, and with some success. For example, the educational level of Travellers has improved strongly since Traveller children have been educated in mainstream schools, where extra support is available through SNAs, as Catherine outlined in Section 4.3.3. However, the mainstreaming of Traveller education has not solved all problems.

I think there's a little bit of a myth that in the Department of Education they thought the Traveller problem was solved by integration, and I mean clearly the evidence is that it's not. ... There's no doubt that the Traveller children are subjected to some abuse from others. (Bradley, senior government official)

There are also factors which suggest that the culture of Travellers does not always mesh well with mainstream service provision.

[Travellers] are very welcome...there's certainly opportunities there for them to do training...[But] you know there's huge issues there around attendance on courses...[And] we would have had a couple of Travellers in here doing hairdressing but then [the young girls] are not allowed do barbering because they are not allowed cut men's hair, so we can't take them because they won't get their full award...That's a huge problem for us. If somebody comes in and they can't do modules of the course, well I have to take somebody who can do all modules. (Oonagh, training manager)

So, a key issue is whether mainstream or separate provision is better? The consensus appears to be that mainstream education is better, as outlined in Section 4.3.3—but it does not address all problems, and extra supports remain necessary



within the mainstream system, for disadvantaged groups. For Travellers, some of these extra supports were cut during the recession, which was judged to be counter-productive.

The removal of the Visiting Teacher for Travellers was a disaster, a disaster, because you know what? There are Traveller kids not on the system, that's the problem. ... I go in to the halting sites all the time and I see other kids and I'm going "who are they? where are they from?" ...[And] the level of intelligence worked up over thirty years—gone! (Philip, home-school-community liaison teacher)

Talking to other mainstream service providers, it became clear that although they are aware of issues arising for Travellers, they do not often have any actions targeted at them within their strategic plans. Travellers remain a very disadvantaged group in Irish society. So the importance of ensuring that mainstream services continue to have extra supports to meet the needs of Travellers (and other such groups) remains important.

### 9.3.1 How to Provide Tailored Services?

While the need for tailored services to support the most disadvantaged is clear, some questions were raised about what was the best way to do this. For example, Personal Progression Plans in Intreo are already tailored to the needs of an individual.

There's a set approach...that you presenting to me, I as a case officer and you as a job seeker...will agree a Personal Progression Plan. And that that plan is tailored to meet the needs of the individuals—and clearly would be a very different plan for Jason who left school at 15 without any qualifications and has been fully unemployed for the last 3 years, and Judy who is just graduated from college, and Julian who has just left his job, or Jessica who is working part time. (Jarleth, senior government official)

Intreo has introduced the PEX profiling system, which profiles jobseeker claimants to assess how likely they are to exit unemployment within a given period of time. Those who gain a low score are considered far from the labour market, and so have more supports targeted at them.

The whole model is prefixed on a recognition that there isn't a 'one size fits all', that some people require a lot of help and are very far removed from the labour market. And [so] we need to see you quickly and we need to see you often. And other people are in a position to be able to look after themselves. And that's what the profiling model was all about, the PEX. (Jason, senior government official)

But even though different needs are recognised, how can these be quantified, and addressed? Some senior officials thought it was difficult to address the varying needs, as Jarleth outlines:

To what degree can you quantify [the different needs], you know? And it's when you get down to that issue of segmentation—and it's only for the purposes of determining, giving an increase, beyond the standard—that you come into difficulties. Because it's actually very difficult to define those cohorts...Is it sufficient to say a person with a disability, should people with a disability get a different kind of service?...Then what should be that intervention, what should be the nature of the service, and who is best placed to provide that? Is it DSP, is it referral out? And they're complex—there's agreement around the fundamentals but there are difficulties, practical issues and difficulties, when you try to implement those solutions. (Jarleth, senior government official)

However, the experience with Traveller education suggests that progress can be made, although it takes time and resources.

### 9.3.2 Problems with Specialised Support Services

Some service providers and stakeholders noted problems than can arise with specialised services. One community centre manager was worried that providing specialist services targeted at particular groups would segregate people.

We would see funding is aimed at you know target groups and na-na-na. And again I get annoyed because I say—that is our community [-] so we should be given the grant not to segregate people. (Evelyn, manager of a community centre)

It is also important that tailored supports would not be stigmatising, as then people are reluctant to use them. As outlined in Chapter 8, some people are reluctant to look for literacy supports for that reason. The Applied Leaving Certificate also does not seem to be well regarded by some employers, and there were reports of teachers trying to deter students from taking it. And some household interviewees also seemed to hesitate to use charity services even though they needed them, saying they are for the worst off, and not wanting to be considered among this group, as outlined in Section 4.4.3.

Some interviewees suggested that specialist supports may not be as helpful as intended, as Ivy outlined when talking about services in place to support people with a disability into work.

People [with a disability] would arrive at the door and unless they are deemed to be job ready, with a lot of these employability services, ahm, they didn't get a service, they were referred back to DSP or back in to Rehab or a course. (Ivy, national stakeholder)

She attributed this to the fact that these services are not funded to support people with a disability once they are in work. Funding is an issue which will be returned to later in this chapter.

## 9.4 Services Which Link and Bridge

As well as the need for ‘tailored universalism’, another key issue brought up in relation to supportive services was services which link and/or bridge. Such linking or bridging services are needed at several different levels. They are needed to link jobless households with relevant services, to link service providers with each other and with employers, and to ensure that strategy is effective.

### 9.4.1 Linking Households with Relevant Services—The Role of Information and Communication

Good communication of accurate information is the first part of linking households—and employers—with relevant services. Section 7.3.3 outlined how unemployed people often have low awareness of services which are available to them, such as the ability to keep the medical card when working, or the availability of FIS (now Working Family Payment), or the Back to Work Family Dividend. Interviewees also reported finding it hard to get information on services which are available.

Likewise, employers were reported to have low awareness of supports available to them.

We’re constantly trying to, you know, engage and, and spread the word...We had one call from a fella who, he saw the ad in the paper and he said, ‘I never knew about this’...there’s a huge untapped market for it but it’s really challenging ...That’s the one thing I’ve seen as the biggest challenge in my twenty months or so in the role—it’s creating the awareness, and it’s not out there at all. (Eamon, manager of an enterprise support organisation).

Good information is key in allowing people to efficiently and effectively access the services that they need. Why do they find it difficult to find information on the services? One problem is that the system of available services is complex, as outlined in relation to education and training by Pádraig in Section 8.3.3. This can happen for a variety of reasons, including the fact that services are designed and implemented incrementally, and so new services can be ‘patched onto’ existing ones, and so not seem very coherent.

How Intreo communicates with clients is important. There were some incidences reported of Intreo staff giving clients incorrect information. There were also reports that Intreo had sent letters calling people approved to start CE schemes to report to JobPath, which indicates that internal communication may not always be optimal. The use of letters to impart information about Intreo may not be suitable for everyone either.

It was even suggested that maybe the [letter about activation] was wrong, that it was too unwieldy, it was too long and they just saw the long letter and they discarded it. (Jarleth, senior government official).

However, some work has been done on this, with Intreo trying out different types of letters to assess which one is most effective. In addition, one job-seeking support service has a help line which people can contact after receiving an activation letter, which can answer some queries.

With more services being provided on-line, one interviewee, the manager of a community centre, pointed out how the assumption that everyone has IT access impacted on people in her local area, and her centre.

A lot of them don't have Wi-Fi, ... and people forget you know. You know the basis of everything now is a bank account, a bill in your name, this and that and a lot of people in our community don't have it...We have a credit card, so people that haven't got a credit card can come in here and pay bills, book a holiday, pay their car tax, so we would do about between €7 and €10,000 a month using that facility. They pay me directly. But then that now impacts on us as well, in that the banks have charged so much now in lodging cash, you know, and here I am, Oh my God—so we had to put a charge on that. (Evelyn, manager of a community centre)

Some interviewees argued that lack of access to IT has a range of implications other than being able to access information.

That's a much broader issue...I mean that's civic participation, you know...it's a whole issue in respect of your ability to participate in society...I'm not sure what the sort of the solution is—it's, you know, you're almost in the space of, you know, treating broadband or mobile phones or whatever as in the same space as electricity. (Victor, senior government official)

The lack of access to IT is also an issue raised by the Citizens Information Board (CIB) (CIB, 2018) as it means not everyone is able to access on-line services. This is not just an issue for older people who may lack IT skills, but also for those who cannot afford IT costs.

#### **9.4.2 Links Between Employers and Public Services**

As outlined earlier in this chapter, employer awareness of supports was reported to be low. Section 8.4.2 showed that links between employers and training bodies were variable. Some training bodies had set up strategic links and had become almost business partners with employers, by providing well trained staff to meet skills gaps in their companies. Meanwhile, other training organisations facilitated employers to advertise jobs with them, without having many strategic links.

From the point of view of employers, there are a wide range of state organisations which could interact with them. Greater links between these state organisations, before they contact employers, are likely to be helpful.

My concern is that connectedness at a local level between these services [JobPath, LES, Intreo]. First of all from an employer perspective...everybody from the LEOs to Intreo to the ETBs to the universities to Uncle Tom Cobley, are trying to engage with them, right...These are just different arms of the state knocking on their door or not knocking on their door, you know, so there is a confusion there which I don't think has been hammered out. (Wesley, national stakeholder)

The Regional Skills Fora are set up in a way that will facilitate greater co-ordination between training bodies and employers, but there does not seem to be a similar body for the activation organisations. Instead co-ordination seems more *ad hoc* at this stage.

You should have a situation where...if one of our employer engagement staff can go out to an employer and they are looking for X, Y and Z, [that] there is liaison with JobPath...And ditto if the JobPath provider or employer engagement person went out...What we don't want is [both] of them going out simultaneously. And that's what we're endeavouring to achieve. (Jason, senior government official)

Several employers who had engaged with Intreo and Jobpath reported that they did not send them the type of staff they required.

You'd have companies that are looking for fluency in a language...[it] could be Polish, but [Intreo] wouldn't know whether somebody had just done a bit of Polish [or] native fluency. (Kevin, senior government official)

However, it can also be difficult for some jobseeking support agencies to link potential employees with employers, as Emily explained.

[I would go] in and [look] at the database and [match]...that job vacancy against what we have on the database. Then that would usually mean me either doing a mail merge or an email. Some of the job seekers have email addresses which makes it easy. A lot of them haven't, [and] those that haven't then we are looking at sending letters out and contacting them that way, and advising them about the vacancy. But because of data protection I can't link the employer up with the job seeker. So the job seekers are being asked, you know—I'm supplying them with all the information and then I'm advising them then to contact the employer. But it doesn't always happen unfortunately. (Emily, job seeking support service)

A number of job-seeking and training organisations said they would like to have staff to link directly with employers, as they used to have. One employer also noted that previously there had been much better engagement between FÁS, local partnerships, and employers. Intreo are, however, now working on greater engagement with employers, which was acknowledged by employer organisations.

## 9.5 Co-ordination

Following on from the theme of services which link and bridge, co-ordination was one of the strongest themes to emerge in relation to the role of institutions in supporting people into work. Co-ordination was mentioned in many guises—at national level, at county level, at local level, between national and local levels - as well as the role of various co-ordination bodies.

This section first of all sets out the reasons given for co-ordination and then goes on to discuss national co-ordination, local co-ordination, and national-local co-ordination. The role of co-ordination bodies is discussed with examples of good co-ordination and co-ordination difficulties then highlighted.

### 9.5.1 Reasons for Co-ordination

Various interviewees identified reasons for co-ordination and linkages. These included having a shared purpose or the need for shared solutions, especially in tackling ‘wicked problems’. It was suggested that these issues are best addressed through dialogue, as to address ‘wicked problems’ often requires solutions offered by a variety of bodies.

In the most extreme cases where people are facing multiple barriers that we certainly need to work collaboratively with the other agencies that are there in order to be able to meet what are multi-faceted problems. (Jason, senior government official)

However, a number of people mentioned the challenges of co-ordinating a myriad of organisations. Some people referred to overlapping organisations in some sectors, which were not always seen to be well co-ordinated. For example, as outlined above, in the activation area there is Intreo, JobPath, the LES and SICAP. Working collaboratively was seen as the way forward to deliver quality services.

### 9.5.2 Co-ordination at National Level

One of the levels where co-ordination is seen to be required is at a national strategic level. A number of reasons were given to support this view: to develop policy, to implement policy, to monitor its implementation, and to devise and agree funding allocations. To some extent policy to address unemployment seems to be reasonably well co-ordinated at national level. For example,

[We] would have been very involved in the development of the new Pathways [to Work] last year and again we would have fed in from the different sides, [of the organisation] ... and looking at where, you know, the issues that were coming up and how they can be addressed,...There would be formal structures and then at other times it will be more informal and there would be discussions between [us] ... and DSP on different issues and maybe just teasing through...what

might work and what, you know. We would let them know what comes through in our consultations. (Ronan, senior government official)

One of the key roles of co-ordination at national level is the development of policy. This often requires senior civil servants, practitioners and experts working together to devise policy, but crucially is also seen to require consultation with potential policy beneficiaries and those tasked with delivering the policy. Examples of this policy approach are the *Action Plan for Jobs*, the *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities*; and groups such as National Skills Council and the Labour Market Council.

However, some interviewees were of the view that there can be a lack of coherence between policies when they are designed. Ultan, a policy expert, argued that ‘every government department seems to think up its own scheme [with] no coherence’.<sup>136</sup>

There can also be gaps in implementation, even where strategy is clear. For example, in Section 8.3.3, it was reported that few warehousing and HGV driving courses were run in the training centre in the study area, due to their expense and poor outcomes, even though the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs has shown that there are skills shortages in these areas. Section 8.5.1 also argued that difficulties can arise where the redesign of one sector (such as the ETBs) lags that of another key linking service (Intreo).

### 9.5.3 Co-ordination at Local Level

The delivery of employment support and related services takes place at local level so co-ordination between these local delivery and support organisations is critical. That co-ordination can take the form of links between local bodies doing similar work, or collaboration for specific projects. In some cases, formal local co-ordination bodies are specifically set up for the purpose of co-operation and they are discussed later in this section.

Co-ordination between local bodies doing similar work is common and can be seen among education and training organisations, among the activation bodies, and among organisations dealing with enterprises. Local services focusing on children’s issues, such as early school leaving and after-school care also collaborate.

Co-ordination takes place to aid the delivery of specific projects, and these linkages tend to be one-off rather than on-going. They can be set up to design a new project, or to get a one-off project implemented. Examples given by interviewees included links for dispersal of dormant accounts funds, for employment projects, for programmes for children with a disability, for work with schools, work on the carer’s

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<sup>136</sup> For example, a 2017 review by the IGEES and the Department of Social Protection, *An assessment of the financial incentive to work for recipients of illness and disability schemes*, shows that there were 10 different income limits for 15 means-tested supports which can be accessed by a single adult on disability allowance. What is treated as income under the different means tests also varies (see p.15, Figure, 2.8.1).

strategy, work to set up social enterprise, and for recruitment for a large company moving to an area.

The lack of co-ordination between services impacts the experience of jobless households, as Gisela, a manager in an enterprise support service, pointed out.

So DSP or INTREO may have a meeting with a client [and collect] a huge amount of information and then they come down here and then they've got to fill in a huge amount of information as well. [And] that can be just frustrating...because the information we collect, somebody had collected already...[And] it takes up a lot of our time...and with all of this extra paperwork. (Gisela, manager in an enterprise support service)

Gisela thought it would be useful to be able to share data where the informant did not mind doing so, as it would leave more time to focus on the service they were providing to the client.

Some organisations had set up protocols between them, on referral of clients, for example. However, such arrangements were not in place across the board, with some organisations interacting with Intreo having protocols and named contacts, while others who interacted regularly with Intreo did not have these, and reported difficulties in contacting staff there.

#### **9.5.4 Vertical links to Support National/Local Co-ordination**

Vertical links between national and local organisations (and vice versa) are important as well as horizontal co-ordination at national and local levels. These can be links between government departments and regional/local co-ordination bodies, or with local implementing bodies. These co-ordination channels can deal with allocating funding, monitoring spending, setting eligibility criteria for programmes and schemes, and/or linking national policy with local policy and vice versa. Sometimes this work is undertaken by a link body, such as Pobal, or through a network of institutional representatives, e.g. in the CYPSCs.

Fiachra, a manager in a local authority, stresses the importance of links between the local and the national levels.

For that to work at a local level, what you do need is that commitment on a national level as well, and particularly for the LCDCs, what you need is you know the cross-departmental committee to work strongly and to feed back down. (Fiachra, manager in a local authority)

There are a number of linkages related to funding and annual planning: between departments, between departments and implementing bodies, and between implementing bodies and local actors. Tanya, in an education and training organisation, describes the planning process, in preparing their annual service plan to be submitted to SOLAS for funding. In doing this, they work closely with the



Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to identify trends and anticipated numbers to use their services.

However, a number of interviewees commented on a lack of connection between national departments and local implementation.

One of the big issues that when you try and see what the integration issues are for Ireland is that, ...there isn't a local government as such....like there's local authorities that have very technical kind of functions but there isn't that many, apart from the community and voluntary sector, which fill gaps. When you look at state services that need to be integrated there's not as many as you might like to think....So then it becomes a problem as to well how do you do this....they're not planning their services together. (Fidelma, national stakeholder)

A particular aspect of national-local links is the role of local government. Some interviewees were of the view that weak local government is a problem especially in relation to co-ordinating groups. While the natural home for local co-ordination is local authorities, some interviewees thought that it would require huge change to make this work as some local authorities were reported to lack dynamism (the 'lethargy of the local authority'), plus there is a need to change the political dimension of local authorities to address more strategic issues. There are also funding issues, with local authorities being limited in the services they provide.

### 9.5.5 Co-ordination Bodies

There are a number of co-ordination bodies at national, regional and local level.

At a national level there are cabinet committees on issues of national concern. These committees monitor the implementation of actions under various action plans. They are generally seen as effective, as they are seen to allow a broad ranging discussion of a policy proposal, and any potentially negative impacts can be dealt with by the relevant minister and departments.

So you've different cabinet committees but they're a very effective structure on bringing the departments together because the Taoiseach sits there and he says, okay, this is your part and this is your part and this is your part, now this bit won't work unless you've got this piece in place, ... and that's what kept everything happening, you'd so much reform and you'd so much change over a short period of time. It did have a huge political drive behind it. (Kevin, senior government official)

At regional/county level there are co-ordination committees relevant to supporting job seekers into employment including the LCDCs, the Regional Skills Fora, the CYPSCs and the county childcare committees. The LCDCs are one of several co-ordinating groups at local authority level, with mixed views on their effectiveness. Some thought the LCDC had potential to co-ordinate local activities and was generally working well. Others thought it was peripheral to the main activities of the

local authority and local agencies, was operating slowly, and was pre-occupied with overseeing the delivery of SICAP.

Local Community Development Committees, potentially they are where your integration is going to happen....in practice they're not, ... I think the experience of the first round of the SICAP was that they were so, the LCDCs were so new that they, the area based partnerships who were tendering to them nearly had to be the ones who managed the tendering. (Fidelma, national stakeholder)

The Regional Skills Fora are a local co-ordinating structure set up to link employers and publicly funded education and training providers in a strategic way. Few of the interviewees specifically commented on the Regional Skills Fora, but those that did viewed them favourably.

The Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) are a local structure to co-ordinate services for children and young people in a local authority area. Few of the interviewees commented on the co-ordinating role of the CYPSC, though there was a recognition that it had taken time for the Committee in the study area to be established and become operational. The potential to co-ordinate children and young people's services, however, was acknowledged. The lack of a budget was mentioned, and is discussed in more detail in Section 9.7.

The weakness of CYPSCs is that they don't have any budget. So they still need providers to come to the table and bring their resources with them ... So there's going to have to be some degree of mandating. And I mean I think it's going to have to be government departments are going to have to mandate and authorise or direct a percentage of budget, even a small percentage of budget, to be made available for CYPSC-driven activities locally. And definitely when an organisation has to commit some money they invest more in it. And so I mean unless that happens, CYPSCs could peter out very quickly. (Bradley, senior official in a public sector organisation)

### 9.5.6 Co-ordination that Works

A number of interviewees made observations on co-ordinating mechanisms and processes which they thought worked well. These suggestions were varied and included examples such as:

- Policy areas which are both vertically and horizontally integrated;
- Having regional rather than local bodies, as then more people can meet;
- Using committee sub-groups, so people are only in meetings which are relevant to them;
- Having good communication;

- Talking to relevant parties before the implementation of a policy or programme;
- Focusing on common areas of interest;
- Having good relationships among those working on the ground;
- Paying attention to the pace of change; and
- The motivation provided by a crisis.

It was suggested that while funding for co-ordination may help, it would not necessarily ensure good co-ordination. It was noted that good examples of co-ordination are not usually permanent or mainstreamed. The most consistently successful co-ordinating institution was considered to be the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

### 9.5.7 Co-ordination Difficulties

A number of interviewees commented on a range of co-ordination difficulties. These included:

- A lack of dedicated staff to co-ordinate policies and services;
- A lack of funds for co-ordination (though as noted above, some thought funding did not necessarily lead to good co-ordination);
- A lack of time for co-ordination;
- Not having the right people on the co-ordinating body—either having people who were too junior, or people who did not have the relevant experience;
- Lack of ‘buy-in’ from key organisations—either the lead department, or other departments;
- Staff not moving past their agency of origin, with people on the co-ordinating body often protecting their patch.

In general, however, interviewees emphasised the importance of co-ordination and felt it was critical to good service delivery.

## 9.6 Ethos

The ethos, values and culture of an institution are important in terms of how it operates and how it is perceived by its staff, service users, other institutions it engages with, and the general public.

A number of people commented on the ethos or culture of the state institutions, especially Intreo, particularly its change from a passive income support organisation

to an active income and employment support organisation. However, there was a view that the current approach was too 'work-first' and part of this reflected the overall ideology.

I do think it's too work first orientated, both at a policy level and a practice level. (Fidelma, national stakeholder)

Despite the re-structuring of the income support and employment support service, there was a view that the culture of the offices had not yet changed.

You wouldn't be convinced that the behavioural culture within the Intreo offices was as radically changed as in the office policy context. (Wesley, national stakeholder)

Others working in the income and employment support service did think that there had been cultural changes within the system, but that it would take time for these changes to bed in.

[There has been a] change in ethos really, ... a presumption of honesty, ... a focus towards, you know expediting the application to get a payment ... there would be a focus on training. (Daithi, manager in an income and employment support service)

Some of the service providers, mainly community-based services, referred to the ethos of the organisation they worked in or they engaged with, which was important to them. In general, the community centres and training organisations had an egalitarian and/or community-based ethos. They often emphasised treating clients equally and with respect, the community base of their centres, their trustworthiness, and confidentiality.

Some of the community-based training centres specifically aimed for their services not to be like school, while other community organisations stressed that their services are not like statutory services. This was important for engaging local clients, some of whom had had poor experiences with statutory services in the past, and so did not trust them.

The whole idea of people having difficulty engaging with the services, because we come across that....People, you know, they approach the literacy service because they feel it's safe and you will find that. Despite the fact that they think that the literacy skills are holding them back, it's not—it's they have a fear of engaging with people in the offices. (Bertie, manager of a training centre)

Community-based organisations generally tried to offer potential clients something rather than turning them away or telling them to come back later, as they did not wish to lose the chance of engaging a client by putting them off.

These centres wanted to empower individuals and/or the local community, e.g. by helping local people find what kind of careers they would like to study and work in,

by helping people reach their potential, and by helping engagement in the local community.

In relation to the employers, a range of different ethos were evident - from a very competitive and business oriented approach, to a customer focused approach, to one where there was a focus on staff as an asset, with investment in training and some flexibility in terms and conditions. Some employers do want to give something back to the local community and one company specifically mentioned corporate social responsibility and their ambition to get involved in this to help young people in the area at risk of leaving school early.

## 9.7 Funding

Funding was raised by a number of interviewees as having an important role for institutions in the provision of services. Issues mentioned included sources of funding, how funding relates to outcomes, the adequacy of funding especially in relation to the impact of the recession, and how coordinating structures are funded.

### 9.7.1 Sources of Funding

As outlined in Chapter 3, most of the funding at local level comes from Government departments, who control the allocation of national funding streams, although the funding can go through a range of intermediaries on its way to the ultimate user. Organisations also receive funding from the EU, from rates, from trade unions, from membership fees, and from philanthropy. Some organisations pool budgets to fund initiatives (e.g. training organisations). Several organisations have been successful in procuring private finance, and do not necessarily see a lack of funding as an obstacle. However, reporting requirements can be onerous, as Arthur outlined.

I mean private funding is very hard work....People don't understand, like there's nine emails from one funder this morning, right, and he has requirements...the money is £18,000 sterling....I could nearly write a book on this one. (Arthur, manager in a local organisation)

There are grant schemes available, e.g. in childcare, but strict eligibility criteria in some cases can limit applications.

### 9.7.2 Adequacy of Funding

Not too surprisingly, a number of interviewees noted that they did not have enough funding in their organisations to provide services to meet needs (e.g. in childcare, community development, domestic violence, training).

We never have enough money or enough time or enough people. (Norma, senior government official)

In the case of CYPSCs the lack of funding was said to seriously slow down the work of the Committees.

During the recession, although social welfare income support levels remained more or less similar (with the exception of young people), a number of services were cut back, such as career guidance, Traveller education supports, and community supports, among others. These cutbacks tend to have disproportionate impacts on disadvantaged groups, who are more in need of them than other groups.

Lack of funding can mean less staff, and several service providers talked about reductions in staff numbers, both in core staff, and in those doing work such as outreach, employer engagement, etc. One community centre manager noted that the type of contracts which staff were offered were poor.

I am only employed year to year and it's very precarious employment—like I never know from year to year whether I have a job or not...Would [I] encourage a young person to come into [the] community sector? You couldn't honestly put your hand on heart and say you should. Because there is no jobs going for anything more than a year contract...I wouldn't like to be starting off now as a young man trying to get a mortgage or buy a car because I wouldn't have a chance in hell. (Damian, manager of a community centre)

Such contracts may lead to less people wanting to take up roles in this sector in future.

Some services talked about the difficulties they faced to be self-financing. This was viewed as self-defeating by managers of centres in disadvantaged areas. Local people can only afford to engage if fees are kept very low. One centre manager viewed this approach as focusing more on the bottom line than on the services needed by local people.

I was told recently, 'you are going to have to increase your prices', and I said, 'ok, I increase my prices in an area like this for people who want to use it, and I have a great price list on the wall—but I will have nobody in here'. [So] it will defeat the purpose of trying to engage the community you know what I mean. It's just madness. (Damian, manager of a community centre)

For community crèches, this approach has led to a lot of problems. A recent report showed that many were in grave financial difficulties due to a reliance on self-funding, as local service users were not able to afford to pay the full fees (Brocklesby, 2016). Some crèches in the study area had closed recently for this reason.

A limited supply of funding can mean that a service is only provided to the most disadvantaged. There were mixed views among interviewees on the effectiveness of this. Services which are directed at those on low incomes can be stigmatised, but

some interviewees felt that it was more effective to focus spending on the more disadvantaged.

A shortage of funding can mean waiting lists too, with these common in relation to housing, health and specialised advice centres.

In some cases there is inconsistent funding, as is the case for funding for the cost of a disability in the training sector.

We had a few people, deaf people here [who] wanted a course but they wanted us to pay something like twenty grand [for a] reader...You asked me what might be improved, the training centres don't get grants to pay for reasonable accommodation...whereas I think in schools they can apply to the Department of Education for a grant. Whereas if I take, say I run a night course and I have deaf people on two courses - that could be twenty grand for a signer. And sometimes you have to have two signers because they get tired which is fair enough. So that can be quite expensive. (Oonagh, training manager)

A lack of funding can also mean that there are withdrawal 'cliffs', rather than more tapered withdrawal. Including more 'tapers' than 'cliffs' in service provision, while more expensive, could lead to better outcomes, as a policy maker outlined in relation to the proposed Affordable Childcare Scheme.

The maximum subsidies will be available for families, up to €22,700 net income, and the amount of subsidy will then taper down evenly to €47,500 net income, at which there will be no subsidy. It is a significant improvement over the current schemes in which as soon as you lose the relevant social welfare payment you lose all your subsidy...In theory like some of the, some of the really concrete barriers at the moment...should go. So somebody that is not in work, and is you know receiving a welfare benefit, and also getting one of the targeted subsidy schemes that we manage, now faces a cliff in terms of, you know, [taking up some types of employment]—that should be gone. (Chris, senior government official)

Providing more funding for one type of service could also lead to better use of another service. For example, in Section 8.3.4, Bertie described how lack of funding for childcare means that his training centre is little used outside school hours.

Some charities provide services in the study area, often in the form of short-term cash supports. However, one charity was rethinking its approach on this, and moving to supporting more long-term change for individuals, as Charles outlined.

We would have a good few this time, people going in to some third level colleges...and they'd need €150 towards the deposit and we would give that. I suppose our thinking is evolving a little bit, like ... [if] you're just helping people all the time, you're not solving any

problem—but if you help them to get out of the situation that’s a better way of doing it. (Charles, volunteer with a charity)

Interviewees noted that some of the funding reductions which took place during the recession are being now being restored, e.g. in childcare. This was not the case in all areas, such as in community development supports, and staffing in ETBs.

When you are talking about community services, some of the types of projects that were funded simply aren’t validly funded under some of the structures that are now there ... far less of the money is around the community development type activities than would have been in the original structures ... so there is a lot of gaps there now. (Isaac, manager in a public sector organisation)

A number of people expressed the view that funding *per se* does not necessarily make a difference unless it is well targeted and well used.

[Funding] is not the only answer and to be honest, I mean, certainly we would see with [name of programme] it’s about using the resources that we have better. So more money isn’t going to make [name of programme] better—reform will make it better. The clamour from the sites is—give us more money, we need more money, but if the practice is poor, more money isn’t going to fix that. (Bradley, senior official in a public agency)

It was also noted that some very effective programmes are not that expensive.

## 9.8 Delivery

In this section on delivery, there are sub-sections on how identified needs should be met in relation to eligibility and flexibility, meeting people where they are at and the responsiveness of services. Also considered are various aspects of policy implementation, provision by private providers, and the impact of competitive tendering, followed by a discussion on consultation.

### 9.8.1 Eligibility and Flexibility

As outlined in section 5.3.1, there are a range of rules on the eligibility of people to access welfare payments and job-seeking support services, including training, work experience and self-employment supports. Due to these a number of people find it difficult to access supports, in particular qualified adults and the self-employed (although work is on-going on these). Another group which would have difficulties accessing job-seeking supports is young people who are not eligible for a jobseeker’s payment. Several interviewees said would like to see greater flexibility in use of State funding, and/or in eligibility criteria, so that they could more effectively meet the needs of clients.



I'd like to move some of their guidelines a little bit...now [it's] one rule for all and there is no wriggle room...Not every case is the same...but they're all judged on the same merits, they're all judged on the same boxes that have to be ticked, and I don't think that's fair because every person who sits in that chair is completely different with completely different needs, completely different financial supports that are available to them, family supports, children, all of that kind of stuff...I would like the ability to be able to go in to someone and say—I need something for this individual, how can we do it? And just to be able to move the goalposts a little bit for specific cases...but they have to be genuine cases. (Gail, case officer in a job-seeking support service)

One solution was suggested.

For sure there is a need for a certain amount of discretion [but] I think any discretion, whether it is local or national, you know has to be, there have to be sort of parameters set around it, so that it is clear, you know, who has the power, who has the discretion, and for what purpose?...One of the things we are trying to build in to the [new scheme] is that there will be clearly defined roles for certain agencies to apply discretion in relation to certain groups...there will be you know clear procedures as to who has the discretion to make decisions, what exactly they have powers to decide, and so on...But it will be within clearly defined national rules around the discretion. (Chris, senior government official)

A need for greater flexibility in eligibility criteria was mentioned by several community-based service providers. Activist and innovative measures, as suggested by the Developmental Welfare State, may therefore be appropriate to promote change in this.

While several interviewees noted less choice in e.g. courses which Intreo referred a jobseeker to (as outlined in Section 8.3.2), in other areas more choice was being introduced, for example, in relation to the allocation of local authority housing. Choice-based letting is an on-line system which provides those on the housing list with a unique PIN number, and at regular intervals they are encouraged to go to the local authority's housing website to see if there is accommodation available which will meet their needs. They have a number of days to decide and to put any accommodation they might want in their 'shopping basket'. The accommodation is then allocated within a few days. Not only has this reduced the allocation time for accommodation, as well as the time during which they are vacant, but it has also reduced refusals and requests for transfer.

### **9.8.2 Meeting People Where They Are At**

As outlined in Section 5.4.1, several interviewees noted how important it is to work with clients' interests, and to take time over this, to have the best outcomes in the longer term.

I think what's critical is the time being taken in the initial engagement to really assess the person, you know, so in terms of their life experience, their work experience, their level of knowledge, their formal education, you know, and to really assess kind of where the person is at and where their opportunities are and how realizable are those opportunities. I think too often the system doesn't take the time to do that so people are then sent off to do things that may not be the best option for them. (Sansa, national stakeholder)

A number of household interviewees did not feel that the public employment service was engaging with what they wanted to do. For example, as described in Section 7.2, Linda had been on One Parent Family Payment, but when she moved on to Jobseeker's Allowance, she was not able to continue working 10 hours over 5 days and felt she had no choice but to give up her job, which she missed a lot. She was then called to JobPath, and asked to apply for jobs she was not interested in, on the other side of the city. She did not like engaging with JobPath at all, feeling that they had no interest in her, and angry that she had been sent to them in the first place, as she had had a job which she liked in a location which suited her until changes in her payment status.

In other ways, the design of some programmes may not meet people where they are at. As described earlier, qualified adults are not automatically eligible for activation supports, and can only access some when they seek them out. At one stage, there were few partnered women at work, but this is not the case today, with both partners in work in at least half of all couples in Ireland in 2010.<sup>137</sup> The DEASP is beginning to address this with the *Action Plan on Jobless Households*,<sup>138</sup> which is planning to extend the JST model to qualified adults with children aged between 7 and 14, and to require qualified adults with no children under 14 to register as jobseekers themselves, albeit jobseekers who do not have to seek full-time work. This approach could be useful to continue to develop, as it might better meet the ways in which many Irish households organise work and care.

Jobseekers' Transition I think was an accident, like it was a policy accident...And it may be a good policy accident...[because it could mean] the part-time work option being a valid option, and the right to work part-time, which a lot of countries have in the mainstream labour market—so why wouldn't it be a valid choice in the activation labour market? But I think that's actually really important...if you did open up activation policy to a wider group...that you're not trying to activate them into full-time work as the automatic assumption. (Fidelma, labour market expert)

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<sup>137</sup> See Watson *et al.*, (2012).

<sup>138</sup> See DEASP, (2017a).

### 9.8.3 Responsiveness of Services

How responsive are services? One point here is how well the payment system, and secondary benefits, fit with the labour market. This was described in Section 7.4.3, which showed some difficulties in combining welfare payments with short-term term, or with irregular, work.

Another matter is that those referred to JobPath, and most of those on Tús, are randomly allocated to these schemes. This can have positive benefits, as it ensures that organisations do not only choose candidates with the most potential, and it can also help promote engagement, as Gloria outlined in relation to Tús in Section 5.5.2. However, it is not always the best option for an individual. As Alice noted in Section 5.2.4, sometimes a person sent on JobPath would be more suitable for CE, for example.

An additional factor is how jobseekers are allocated to courses. As outlined in Section 4.4.2, some people with literacy difficulties were sent on courses which required a high level of literacy. Some trainees find courses too basic, and others too complex. While some training centres test potential trainees to better place them according to ability, more of this could help ensure better matching of trainees and courses.

The problem of delays in accessing financial supports was brought up as well. Average processing time for a number of social welfare payments has declined since the early 2010s, when the number unemployed was much higher. In 2016, claims for JA took two weeks to process—down from five in 2011. However, FIS still takes 4 weeks to process for an initial application, and 5 weeks to renew (DEASP, 2017b). For someone with children moving from unemployment to a minimum wage job, this is a long time. As outlined in Section 7.4.2, some interviewees wondered why FIS is not automatically awarded, as it could help counter this problem.

Some people raised the issue of delays in getting a response from a job-seeking support service, as Krystal did in Section 5.4.1. In the end she gave up contacting this service, and so the delay led to disengagement. Some training centres spoke of how they always tried not to turn people away, but it could be difficult not to. This could lead to disengagement.

Every time we open the doors for enrolments we have to be very careful because we could have a queue here. And you know eighty per cent of them wouldn't be eligible based on our criteria and the guidance service have a blue fit because there is nowhere to actually send them to. So they are having a real philosophical difficulty with the notion of opening the door and sending away eighty per cent of people that you have raised an expectation in. (Bertie, manager of a training organisation which is publicly funded)

Delays in accessing services can also mean ineffective service provision. This could happen under the process now in place to access childcare whilst training, combined with the shortage of places available, as outlined in Section 8.3.4. As Gillian, a case officer in a job seeking support service outlined, 'If you're left for

eight weeks waiting on a [childcare] placement—you know, the job is gone, the course has already started’.

Delays in accessing services are very evident in health and housing. One household interviewee reported waiting six years for a back operation, while several single men on the housing waiting list did not expect to ever get a local authority home, as outlined in Section 4.4.3.

#### 9.8.4 Policy Implementation

A range of issues were raised in relation to policy implementation. These included the use of action plans and working groups, provision difficulties, learning from the implementation of previous policies and programmes, efforts to simplify the delivery of services and achieve coherence, and the use of IT in the delivery of services. Reflecting the views of interviewees, these issues are discussed in this subsection.

A number of interviewees spoke of the use of action plans and working groups as useful mechanisms in the implementation of policy, with references made to the *Action Plan for Jobs, Pathways to Work*, the *National Skills Strategy*, and the DEIS plan. Not everyone, however, thinks that this model of policy implementation works well, with one interviewee suggesting that there were shortcomings in the *Pathways to Work* Action Plan in relation to how the different elements ran in parallel, rather than being integrated.

However, looking at the design of some services to increase employment uncovers a range of issues that need to be addressed in order to effect change. For example, as outlined in Chapter 3, the *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities* identified six key areas of action to be addressed (Government of Ireland, 2015). To progress one of these six areas, Make Work Pay, a steering group was established which agreed six areas of commitments. Under each of these six areas of commitment, there are specific actions to be done, with the organisations responsible and the timelines by which the actions are to be completed identified. The chair of the steering group considers that it could take a generation to effect a shift in practices and attitudes. It is possible that similar detailed, long-term actions could be necessary to further reduce the number of jobless households.

Other interviewees talked about the challenge of securing adequate resources to implement these action plans and strategies. Some interviewees spoke of the difficulties in implementing policies such as the Affordable Childcare Scheme if there is a shortage of resources.

The biggest issue is the interaction now between the new [ACS] scheme, and the demand the new scheme will create, and the physical availability. And that is an unknown from our side. (Isaac, manager in a public sector agency, talking about the ACS)

It can be difficult for large schemes which lack local flexibility to deal with atypical cases or meet local circumstances, with some interviewees citing DEIS and SICAP in this regard.

However, the implementation of some current programmes addresses problems that were evident in previous programmes, with examples such as the ACS, the new round of SICAP, and HAP being relevant here, as outlined in Section 7.3.3.

To improve implementation a number of things have been done to try and simplify the provision of services. For example, in relation to schemes, the ACS will replace a variety of schemes with one scheme, which should make it easier for staff to advise clients. However, sometimes a scheme introduced for one thing can end up morphing into something else, e.g. rent supplement, which was intended for short-term use, ended up becoming a long-term social housing payment, and dealing with this has led to more schemes rather than less, i.e. not only rent supplement, but also RAS and HAP.

[There are] trade-offs between different policy documents and the unintended consequences. And I think that part of that complication is actually because we're responding to issues that are happening in other social policy domains that will create another need for us to fill without us having the policy levers to actually solve the original problems. (Jason, senior government official)

Restructuring of organisational services can provide a more coherent service for service-users, with the example of how Intreo's regions are now aligning with those of the ETBs being cited. New decision-making structures can help too, e.g. in Intreo offices the person who first handles a file now must decide whether or not to award the payment, which speeds up processing. As discussed earlier in this report, mergers of organisations can provide a more streamlined service for users, but, as noted, mergers can be challenging, requiring culture changes, staff deployment, and attention to IR issues.

A number of organisations reported on the introduction of a range of new IT systems to assist in implementation. These new systems can be challenging to bed down, but are generally considered to be good when they are fully up and running. They are seen as a more professional way to deliver services, and allow better management and oversight.

The PLSS [Programme Learner Support System]—there's a few issues but we're getting there. I can see the potential of it, we think it's going to be great when it works, but ... it's going through an embedding system and like it's ... very challenging for some areas of our service. (Tanya, manager of an education and training organisation)

Another important issue to consider when designing and implementing services, is who will provide them. A very wide range of groups and organisations provide supportive services to low work intensity households, as outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, with household interviewees themselves providing a number of services. There

were some charities providing supports also, as well as a wide range of public providers, community and voluntary groups, and private providers.

### 9.8.5 Provision by Private Providers

The DWS outlines how services can effectively be provided by a wide range of groups, but the State needs to assure quality and consistency in services. Several interviewees referred to implementation issues in programmes, such as ACS and HAP, which are delivered mainly through private providers, as well as the privately provided JobPath. For example, one key issue which came up was the extent to which private providers are able to provide the quantum of services needed. This was particularly the case for HAP, as outlined in Chapter 7. HAP rent limits have fallen behind market rents, which may be a reason for lack of engagement with HAP by landlords.

Those designing the Affordable Childcare Scheme are also concerned about lack of private provision in some aspects of childcare.

Childcare is run on a market model, and it is going to remain run on the market model with this scheme. And because it is run on a market model you know the Department could only subsidise childcare places where private childcare providers decided to provide them. So one particular area where the capacity is relatively low at the moment is school-aged childcare provision...Another possible issue or risk—or a barrier in terms of capacity is the, I suppose, the flexibility that providers offer to match parents working hours. So I think a particular issue there would be something like say shift workers, where childcare providers tend not to cater for shift work. (Chris, senior government official)

As outlined in section 5.2.4, there were reservations about the privately provided JobPath with interviewees raising concerns about the extent to which there is a focus on profit margins rather than the quality of the service provided. As the economy improves there were also apprehensions about the cost of delivering this service privately and whether it is providing good value for money. Advocates of the service, however, point to improved outcomes in terms of placing jobseekers into jobs.

Another issue which comes up is the lack of links between private or charity providers and the range of supportive services available. Private and charity providers are reported to be less aware of the range of supportive services, and so are less likely to link those who need these services to them.

### 9.8.6 The Impact of Competitive Tendering

The issue of providing services through competitive tendering has been raised by a number of interviewees in relation to the delivery of employment support and related services, specifically with regard to the provision of JobPath and SICAP. A

number of reasons have been given as to why this approach was taken—to provide a more focused, outcomes-led service—but others have expressed reservations about the cost and quality of the service provided. The views of interviewees about JobPath, both positive and negative, have been documented throughout this report.

Views on SICAP have also been referred to with interviewees holding a range of views. While most welcome the existence of the programme, reservations have been expressed about the tendering aspects (as well as elements of its implementation).

There is a view that tendering can result in applicants over-promising and then finding it hard to deliver on what they have subsequently been contracted to do.

Because [SICAP] was a publically procured process, ehm, there was a sense in which people felt pushed to heighten the numbers ... in general, people did ramp up, because they were afraid that the competitor would ramp up if they didn't. And so they made offers to deliver on significantly increased levels, and once they have done that, like it is a public procurement process, a contract is signed, ... the public purse has to be protected like, and once they have made the commitment they have to do it. (Isaac, manager in a public organisation)

It was acknowledged that while tendering reduces the ability of funders to be flexible, it can increase access to a wider range of providers and improve the overall transparency of programme delivery.

### 9.8.7 Consultation

The importance and relevance of consultation has been emphasised throughout this report. Here, consultation on the design and/or implementation of policies is reported on. Government departments and public agencies, as policy designers and implementers, consult with other government departments and agencies, and organisations who implement services and programmes.

The design and implementation of new services was mentioned by several interviewees. Some service providers noted the need for more collaboration at local level when designing services, to avoid unintended negative consequences. For example, one interviewee who supported clients with debt problems wondered why a new housing development for disadvantaged people had not consulted with her organisation at the planning stage. Pre-paid gas meters had been installed when the housing development was being constructed, but not pre-paid electricity meters. She and the housing management organisations were now dealing with what she thought was avoidable electricity bill arrears.

However, many services are designed with consultation from various groups. For example, the new apprenticeship programme was designed with input from a stakeholder group; and the Regional Skills Fora contain a wide membership, to ensure that all stakeholders are engaged in improving links between employment

and training. A range of co-ordinating bodies have also been set up to help develop better policy design and implementation, such as CYPSCs, LCDCs, county childcare committees, etc., as discussed earlier in this chapter.

One stakeholder interviewee felt, however, that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection could develop a greater focus on relationship building with stakeholder groups.

And I said [to DSP], “well if you are going to do that then you need to get all the stakeholders in the area together, and all the service providers and everybody, and actually create a dialogue around this”. We had to give them a list of the service providers in the area, the Department of Social Protection had no contact with them...And then they brought us all together in a meeting [and] they stood at the top of the room and told us what they were going to do, and what a great idea it was...And everybody who was there going “really, this is our first engagement, and now that is it!” There was no concept that you have to build a relationship with the service providers so that you have trust with them, so that that is actually being conveyed to people, that “look I know a really good person inside in Intreo, we can go and talk to them”. (Ivy, national stakeholder)

Referring to the same programme, Fidelma thought that Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection were building on the learning from this.

The Department of Social Protection [had] been rolling it out as a tester [-] it's kind of an outreach strategy to bring people in to their activation, and they have been very surprised and very disappointed at the level of take-up...They're obviously trying to learn what, you know, what did they do wrong in terms of the outreach or what are the barriers, you know, like, but they're at that starting point. (Fidelma, national stakeholder)

Some organisations use customer surveys to gain feedback, although Sansa wonders how valid such surveys are, with Irish people likely to say formally that they are happy while complaining under their breath.

## 9.9 Political Dimension

The role of politicians is important in the design and delivery of job-seeking and related services. While at national level, politicians are the ultimate decision makers, at local level politicians also have an important role to play as local councillors and in relation to addressing the needs of constituents. This section reflects the views of those who spoke about the political dimension of decision making and service provision for jobless households.



### 9.9.1 Influence of Politicians in Policy-Making

A number of interviewees had observations on the influence of politicians in policy-making, informed by their own political viewpoints. Some interviewees noted that welfare reform is challenging as politicians find it difficult to leave anyone worse off.

We have a very complex tax and welfare system. And build on that education and health payments or related payments—like it is very, very tricky, you know, to navigate that. And politically difficult to reform it because you can't readily make anyone worse off. (Utan, national stakeholder)

There was reference to the roles of representative and participative democracy and how that was considered to have influenced decision making in relation to community programmes.

A view was expressed that politicians can make issues visible by highlighting them and ensuring a focus on particular policies.

### 9.9.2 Household Interviewees' Recourse to Politicians

About one third of household respondents mentioned a political dimension. This was mainly in relation to contacting politicians to get things done, though some did express political views about their situation and issues in the local community.

Several respondents said they had contacted a local politician to get something done when they had not been successful through standard routes e.g. when homeless to get moved to suitable emergency accommodation, which was successfully achieved in two cases.

They put me on the bottom of the list then, when I was homeless like, because I refused [accommodation, 25 kms away]. But I went to [name of local politician] and I was saying to him, look, I was like what do you expect me to do like. ... So he pushed and he put me forward for this like and I got it then. So I was delighted like. (Anna, Irish lone parent with 2 young children on OPFP living in emergency accommodation. She was homeless and being allocated hotel accommodation in another suburb 25 kms away which she did not want to take because of the disruption to her children's schooling. At the time she was using public transport)

In another case, a respondent had gone to her local politician about a welfare payment but that intervention did not change the outcome. A number of respondents expressed political viewpoints, covering a range of issues, e.g. dislike of the government in general, views about welfare recipients, homelessness and water charges, the need for more working class views to be represented nationally, and comments on the withdrawal of funding and closure of centres.

## 9.10 Measurement

A number of interviewees commented on the importance of measurement to see which policies and programmes were being effective and to contribute to informed decision making. The availability, collection and use of data was specifically mentioned, as was the use of evidence and evaluation of policies and programmes. These issues are discussed in the following sub-sections.

### 9.10.1 Data

A range of views were put forward by interviewees on the collection and use of data. Some interviewees thought that better quality data was required, especially longer-term follow up.

We aren't linking people enough and we're not following their pathways through the social protection system, further education system, at work. ... okay if only 8 per cent of people move on from CE—well maybe over twenty years a person who had experience of CE has a different experience than somebody who never had experience of CE. You'd have to look then whether it was better or worse. So, you know, we need to link data better, and we need to link evaluation and outcomes better. (Clive, senior government official)

A number of others felt that quantitative data was not the only way to judge whether something was successful or not.

It is the State's money, yeah. Even though we don't want everything to be judged by numbers, but there has to be something. (Tanya, manager in an education and training organisation)

Sometimes what a project sees as a valid outcome, such as engagement, is not accepted by their funders, who may require that a person who engages in a programme they have funded achieve a certain level of qualification or be in a job. A number of interviewees made this point. For example, sometimes the metric the funder wants to use does not apply well to the service users, e.g. employment being used to indicate progression for literacy students, when quite a number are already in employment. There is also reference to the adage 'what gets measured gets done', which can lead to an over-focus on throughput, with a subsequent decline in the quality of the intervention.

Some interviewees complained about 'data collection fatigue', though acknowledging the importance of having good information.

There is a consistent feedback from, particularly from the management tier of the [implementing] companies, that far too much information is being collected, it is far too [much]. Anyway we held an event for them all on Monday ... with representatives from all of the companies about how we could change data collection for the next time around ... The

result of it was major demands for more information collection ... from the programme implementers. (Isaac, manager in a public sector organisation)

In some cases, reporting requirements can be very onerous, and take a lot of time, especially for some organisations who may have to report to several funders.

The demand for information back is huge, returns and oversight down to every financial transaction has to be sent in every quarter, it's, it's nonsense like, it becomes a huge administrative burden for us. (Eamon, local manager in a public organisation)

It can also be difficult to collect data on some population groups, e.g. Travellers, where this requires self-declaration.

When you look at the figures ... there are real issues in terms of defining engagement with Travellers. Like our system is looking for people to self-define as a Traveller. [So] if you come in and you simply call yourself "unemployed" then obviously you are not [recorded] there [as a Traveller]. (Isaac, manager in a public sector organisation)

### 9.10.2 Use of Evidence and Evaluation

Several interviewees referred to the need to have an evidence base to underpin decisions and to make the case for funding.

Now it's evidence based, what we're saying is—why do you need that? ... I suppose what we're trying to do is better match the resources to needs, to make sure the right people are getting them, and that they get those supports right the way up through the system. (Norma, senior civil servant)

It is noted that a wide range of monitoring and evaluations are undertaken on the programmes being delivered, and there are requirements on local service providers to collect more data, which are often part of contractual agreements, as discussed above.

A lot more work is being done in some areas on looking at outcomes. For example, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection evaluates its programmes. Recently it completed an evaluation of JobBridge, and an evaluation of the Intreo processes is underway which will allow comparison of outcomes for those who received Intreo activation supports and those who did not.

Monitoring and evaluation studies indicate to policymakers, programme designers and implementers the extent to which interventions are effective, whether there is adequate provision, and whether there are gaps in different areas. They can include the views of participants and other stakeholders. In some cases, they can be used as a basis for funding decisions. Clive, a senior official in a government department, thinks that evaluations could be more widely used.

There isn't enough of it. I think we're having a whole conversation about how we structure the labour market that's different than if we didn't use evaluation and analysis. (Clive, senior government official)

However, others say it can be hard to act on the findings of an evaluation, for example, to close an intervention. In other cases, there may be a range of contradictory views on the same programme.

And it's right and proper that we should evaluate schemes and say that's the purpose for which it was intended, [and] is it [still] relevant? ... We engaged in a stakeholder process. And with employers,... trade unions, people representing people on welfare, ... people representing people with a disability to get their views. And as should be no surprise the views are very disparate. And sometimes the views or the desires of one run totally counter to the views of another. (Jarleth, senior government official)

## 9.11 Summary and conclusions

The role of effective institutions has been integral to much of NESC's recent work. Some key changes have been made in services relevant to low work intensity households since the mid-2000s, in particular the introduction of a more active public employment service, HAP, and the new Affordable Childcare Scheme. These changes aim to provide more support for those who are not employed to move into the labour market. Greater evaluation and measurement of service outcomes is also evident.

However, interviewees felt that some changes could improve the supportiveness of services for jobless households. An important issue raised is the continuing need for tailored supports within mainstream services, which is particularly critical for the groups furthest from the labour market, such as Travellers, some migrants, those with literacy difficulties, those with health or caring issues, and lone parents. A focus on disadvantaged areas was also argued to be necessary, to combat the entrenched disadvantage within them. Tailored supports need to be non-stigmatising, and need to be well connected to ensure that they deliver optimum outcomes. To some extent there are already tailored services, but there may be a need to improve the quantum of service in some areas, as intensive supports are necessary to tackle some issues, such as long-standing literacy difficulties and low education levels among Travellers.

A key issue raised is the importance of services which bridge and link. Information and communication are central here, as service users, employers, and other service providers all need to be able to access information to link them to the relevant services. For service users, citizen's information centres and community centres are trusted sources of information, and need to continue to be supported to do such work. Government departments and agencies also need to continue work to ensure that information on services is provided in accessible and user-friendly ways. At

delivery level, data-sharing protocols might be useful, so that similar information is not collected multiple times by different organisations. There also seems to be a need for more named contacts in Intreo, for all organisations interacting regularly with them. Currently it seems that only some organisations have such contact details.

Work has begun to ensure better engagement with meeting employers' needs, which seems necessary in some areas. Some training organisations do not appear to have many strategic links with employers, and in the activation area, there are a wide range of State-funded organisations and it seems that more co-ordinated interaction between them and employers could be useful. Intreo also needs to be able to provide more employment relevant information to employers, such as the skill level of prospective employees on the Live Register. It would also be useful for Intreo to be able to more easily share relevant details on jobs between employers and those on the Live Register.

Co-ordination of services was one of the strongest themes to emerge in relation to the role of institutions in supporting people into work. Co-ordination is needed at national level, at regional/county level, at local level, between national and local levels. Resourcing and supporting the role of various co-ordination bodies is also important. The study identified areas where co-ordination was working well. This requires policy areas which are well integrated, both vertically and horizontally. Regional bodies were suggested, as well as the use of sub-groups and good communication, with a focus on common areas of interest. Building good relationships was seen as key. Co-ordination difficulties were also identified and related to a lack of dedicated staff, funds and time to co-ordinate policies and services, as well as a lack of 'buy-in' from key organisations or not having the relevant people involved.

The ethos, values and culture of institutions were seen as important in relation to how they are perceived by staff, service users, other institutions and the general public. There was a particular focus on the changing culture of Intreo offices as they move from a mainly passive income support organisation to having an activation and employment support role. The building of trust was seen as particularly important in delivering a quality service.

Funding is viewed as an important element in the provision of quality services and a number of interviewees highlighted the cutbacks which took place during the recession, and that many of these services are only being gradually restored now. Reduced funding can lead to poor employment contracts for service providers, or services which are not properly used due to lack of investment in other areas. However, funding which is provided needs to be well targeted and well used.

In relation to the implementation of policy and delivery of services, a critical area is the extent to which services are able to meet jobseekers 'where they are at'. Adequate time is needed, particularly to assess the interests, abilities and motivation of those who are most distant from the labour market. The services which are provided need to be responsive, in terms of being timely and matching jobseekers' interests, abilities and motivation. Many interviewees stressed how

eligibility criteria need to be more flexible in order to meet these needs. In some services, more choice is being offered (e.g. choice-based letting), but in others people cannot access sought-after training or work experience schemes as they have not been on the Live Register for long enough, or are not eligible to be on it at all. All of this can lead to disengagement with public employment services, and with the labour market. More discretion around eligibility criteria could help to combat these problems, and there are models being developed in some services to facilitate this, which could be developed and expanded.

A range of issues was raised in relation to policy implementation including the use of action plans and working groups, provision difficulties, and the use of private providers, with a range of views on the use of this approach. The impact of competitive tendering was discussed, where there was a range of views. The importance of consultation with service users was also considered.

The chapter briefly discussed the role of politicians in the design and delivery of job-seeking and related services. A number of interviewees had contacted their local politicians to try to gain access to a service.

Finally, there was consideration of the role of data, evaluation and use of evidence to inform decision-making. While most felt that there was a need for good measurement on the performance of programmes, there was some critical comment about how onerous the provision of data was, and questions about how useful some of the information was in assessing the quality of services provided.

# Chapter 10

## Conclusions

## 10.1 Introduction

**This qualitative study was motivated by the comparatively high level of low work intensity households in Ireland,<sup>139</sup> particularly those households containing children.** Many of these households are at risk of poverty and deprivation. Low work intensity households are diverse, comprising households where no-one is working or where there is marginal attachment to the labour market, including lone parent households, households containing people with disability and carers, and households with low levels of education and skills.

**To explore the experience of low work intensity households and their engagement with services and employers, a qualitative study was undertaken in a disadvantaged suburb of Dublin in 2016 and 2017.** The research aimed to understand the circumstances of, and decision-making in, low work intensity households; their interaction with front-line service providers; how service providers work and how national-level policy design and implementation operate; and the extent of integrated service provision.

**The study undertook 92 semi-structured interviews: 33 with low work intensity households; 16 with local service provider organisations, 11 with local employers; 11 with service managers at regional or county level; 12 with government departments and agency officials; and 9 with other national stakeholders.** Interviews were recorded, transcribed, anonymised and analysed thematically. The interviews provided in-depth insights into the situation of low work intensity households, and their interaction with employment support and other supportive services, plus the experience and views of service providers, employers, decision makers and national stakeholders. As is the case with all qualitative research, this research does not aim to be fully representative, but instead serves to illuminate the reasons why particular patterns are evident in larger-scale quantitative surveys and to document the experience of low work intensity households, service providers, employers, decision makers and national stakeholders.

The chapters in this report have presented the findings thematically. Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter on low work intensity households which summarises the

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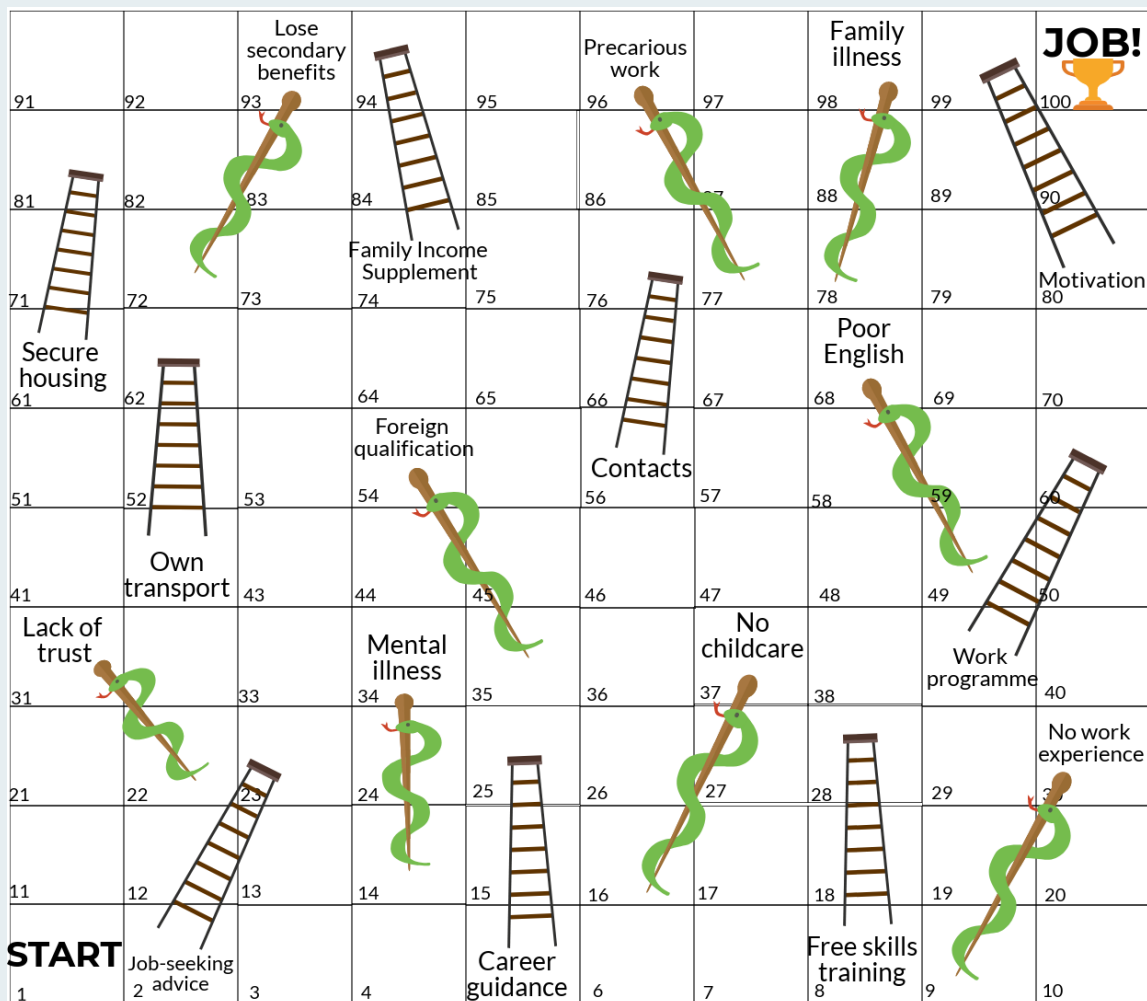
<sup>139</sup> As outlined in Chapter 1, in 2016, 11.6 per cent of adults and 13.4 per cent of children lived in a jobless household in Ireland. The EU averages were 10.1 and 10.5 per cent respectively.



quantitative research and discusses theoretical debates. Chapter 2 portrays the socioeconomic characteristics of the study area and the qualitative research study methodology. Chapter 3 describes the main policies and services which are available to job seekers and their families. Chapter 4 provides a description of the household interviewees. Chapter 5 explores interviewees' engagement with the public employment services. Chapter 6 documents employment opportunities in terms of the jobs available and employers' recruitment policies. Chapter 7 presents information on making the transition from welfare to work. Chapter 8 examines the interviewees' experience of education and training. Chapter 9 reflects on the institutional arrangements for supporting households that are marginally attached to the labour market.

**This chapter draws out the main themes identified in the research and considers these in relation to the points raised in the introductory chapter and in the context of current policy initiatives, setting out issues to be considered and possible future actions.** Figure 10.1 illustrates some of the main barriers and enablers.

**Figure 10.1 Key barriers and enablers in transitioning from welfare to work**



## 10.2 Key Messages

The key messages from the research study are that **the social welfare and employment support system is generally supportive but that it: (a) lacks a household dimension; (b) needs to be better co-ordinated, and (c), in places, does not provide the intensity of support needed. These key messages are summarised in Figure 10.2.**

Other themes to emerge from the research are:

- ***Model of activation:*** in helping vulnerable groups to overcome barriers they face, and the critical role of case officers.
- ***Tailored supports:*** by providing care supports, ensuring access to affordable and secure accommodation, meeting health needs, and ensuring access to transport and information technology.
- ***Transitioning from welfare to work:*** through tapering payment withdrawal, expanding the availability and quality of career guidance, experience of the education system, training pathways and progression, the expansion of apprenticeships, and the value of employment programmes and social enterprise.
- ***The role of employers:*** requiring greater engagement with employers, paying attention to the quality of work, and supports for self-employment.
- ***Institutional features:*** recognising the importance of institutional ethos among service providers in how they engage with service users, the significance of resources, mechanisms of policy delivery, and the need to assess and act on outcomes.

These key messages are based on the findings from the interviews. They have implications for a range of government departments and agencies.

Figure 10.2: Key messages from the research

**The social welfare & employment support system is generally supportive**

- It keeps people out of income poverty
- It tries to understand the needs of jobseekers
- It is more benign than in some other countries

**However,**

- There is a lack of trust in Intreo
- People find it difficult to get information on the options open to them
- At times, people feel they have no choice on activation/training options offered
- It can be hard for vulnerable jobseekers to engage
- Better feedback measures are needed

**There is a need to:****Develop a stronger household focus**

- Continue work to expand activation supports to qualified adults, people with a disability & carers who wish to work, etc

**Co-ordinate better**

- Create better links to employers
- Provide better links between services
- Ensure all the supports necessary to move from welfare to work are available
- Provide resources for co-ordination

**Increase the intensity of support**

- Provide more intensive support (e.g. in literacy education) to ensure effective outcomes, particularly for those most distant from the labour market

### 10.2.1 Supportive Social Welfare and Employment Support System

**Following the economic crash in 2008 Ireland moved from a passive to a more active social welfare system, in line with many other countries.** The Irish active case management system, delivered through Intreo, was formally established in 2012. It was a time of high unemployment and substantial institutional change. Since then many people have been supported into employment.

**This study, focussed on people in low work intensity households, found that Intreo, JobPath providers and the Local Employment Service (LES), by and large, have engaged proactively with people on the Live Register.** The interaction of household interviewees with the income and employment support services was variable, but as reflected in the interviews with service providers, decision makers and national stakeholders, in the main, there is an understanding of the challenges people face in seeking work. While Intreo tries to get people into paid employment, jobseekers are often referred to education and training, as well as being encouraged to apply for jobs. A number of employment support staff also spoke of their work to improve jobseekers' confidence, so that they are in the right frame of mind to search for employment. In general, sanctions seem to be used prudently, as discussed in Chapter 5. People are entitled to a range of income supports while unemployed and can apply for in-work benefits if they have children and are on a low wage, and other supports may be available to help them transition from welfare to work.

**However, a number of shortcomings were also identified.** People often felt intimidated or threatened by the initial correspondence they received from Intreo, found it difficult to contact the office by telephone, and often sourced information about income supports, training options or employment opportunities from other organisations. Their experience of Intreo very much depended on their interaction with their case officers and whether they felt their needs and motivations were being taken into account. Vulnerable job seekers often found it difficult to engage with the system. There could also be stronger links with employers.

**So, overall, while Ireland has now adopted a more active case management approach than heretofore, it appears to be a more benign system than some of the models adopted in other countries, particularly those in other liberal regimes.** The social welfare system has been relatively successful at keeping people out of income poverty and, in general, displays a level of humanity in seeking to understand people's needs and encouraging them into suitable jobs or courses to upgrade their skills. The system is still becoming embedded, so that more ongoing dialogue between Intreo officials and representatives of service users, through a

formalised schedule of meetings or focus groups to review operational concerns and to quantify outcomes, would seem to be warranted.<sup>140</sup>

### 10.2.2 Incorporate a Household Focus

**Ireland's level of household joblessness is comparatively high, yet most unemployed people are dealt with on an individual basis.** As highlighted earlier, low work intensity households are diverse, containing people who are officially unemployed and seeking work, but also qualified adults (the partners of people receiving jobseeker benefits, sometimes referred to as adult dependents), people with disabilities, lone parents, carers, and young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs). Many of these people would like to engage in education and training, or be in paid employment, possibly on a part-time basis, yet the income and employment support services often do not engage directly with them if they are not on the Live Register.

***Pathways to Work 2016-2020***, which is the Government's strategy to get people back to work, is focused on both getting people who are long term unemployed back to work, but also activating other people who, though not classified as jobseekers, have the potential and the desire to play a more active role in the labour market. These people are identified as the partners of existing Intreo clients (qualified adults), people with disabilities who wish to find work, and those carers whose caring responsibilities allow some time for employment, among others. The interviews undertaken for the study across the range of interviewees indicated that more effort is required to action these commitments.

The ***Action Plan for Jobless Households***, published in September 2017, concentrates on household joblessness in a number of ways. It **focuses on broadening active engagement to qualified adults who have a capacity to work**, by extending the Jobseeker's Transition model of activation (JST). In consultation with the disability sector, there is an intention to reconfigure the main illness and disability payments, along with early intervention to support people with disabilities to take up or retain employment. There is a commitment to try to remove barriers through expanding access to free and subsidised childcare, further roll out of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and additional reform of welfare schemes to support working families. Interestingly, **the *Action Plan for Jobless Households* also proposes piloting a family-focused case management approach where there are two or more jobless people in a household. This would involve them attending together, voluntarily, for interview with a case officer to look jointly at their employment prospects and address any barriers to employment that may be shared. These are welcome initiatives.**

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<sup>140</sup> The ESRI has also been commissioned to evaluate the effectiveness of Intreo processes, see <https://www.esri.ie/projects/an-initial-evaluation-of-the-effectiveness-of-the-intreo-activation-process-reforms/>, accessed 14 March 2018.

**In our study we found that many qualified adults in particular sought work and engagement.** Some were better qualified than their partners who were being engaged with by the employment support services and who were seeking work. However, many qualified adults were constrained in their ability to take up work by care arrangements. Also, as described in Chapter 5, there are various ways in which qualified adults can receive payments and activation in their own right, such as split payments, swapping eligibility between spouses (spousal swap) or establishing their own claim. However, often neither the qualified adult, nor in some cases the officials are aware of these options. In many cases the agreement of their partner has to be sought.

**So, these proposals to extend the JST to qualified adults who seek it, on a voluntary basis, and the possibility to seek part-time work (to dovetail with care arrangements) would seem to be progressive improvements. The family-focused case management pilot is also an innovative development** and it will be interesting to see the outcomes from the pilot, albeit that it challenges traditional family roles. It could signal a gradual advancement from the male breadwinner model that still underpins the social welfare system, but is much less evident in the labour market.

### 10.2.3 Better Co-ordination Needed

**Better institutional co-ordination was one of the strongest themes to emerge in relation to supporting people into work.** Connections are seen as key to gain maximum benefit from services and interventions, for example, better links from the public employment services, work programmes and training colleges to employers and the open labour market. Clarity on the specific roles of the three main employment support services would be useful, i.e. between Intreo, the LES and JobPath providers, so that people can be referred to the employment support service best able to meet their needs. Other supports which connect individuals with employment are also necessary. For example, does the recently trained person have adequate affordable childcare, transport and housing to be able to take up work?

**Some of the mechanisms which the study interviewees found effective in co-ordinating service provision** include:

- having policies which are both vertically and horizontally integrated;
- having regional rather than local bodies;
- using committee sub-groups;
- having good communication;
- talking to relevant parties before implementation of a policy or programme;
- having greater data sharing and work planning between service providers, which can help reduce costs and free up time;

- having good relationships among those working on the ground;
- focusing on common areas of interest; and
- paying attention to the pace of change.

**A number of co-ordination difficulties were highlighted in this study, particularly in relation to co-ordination bodies set up to bring together policies and programmes**, e.g. CYPSCs, and LCDCs. These included a lack of dedicated time and resources for co-ordination, including staff and funds. There can also be insufficient buy-in from key organisations, staff without sufficient authority on the co-ordinating body, and staff who do not move past their agency of origin. In addition, government departments tend to deliver policy and allocate resources from central to local level, with reporting mechanisms from local to central level which can make co-ordination across policy areas and departmental boundaries difficult. This structure is sometimes referred to as a ‘siloe’d’ approach or a lack of ‘joined-up’ or whole of government approach. As acknowledged in a number of policy documents, these shortcomings need to be addressed to provide more effective and co-ordinated service provision. For example, in Slovenia a case management approach is adopted involving a variety of services for those who are far from the labour market, in order to address problems which are not directly related to activation (Stropnik, 2015).

#### 10.2.4 Greater Intensity of Support Required

**As the number of people who are unemployed continues to fall, and those remaining unemployed are further from the labour market, it will be necessary to have more intensive engagement and supports for unemployed jobseekers.**

The research has shown the range of policies and programmes which are being delivered to support unemployed jobseekers, but in some cases these initiatives are not being delivered at an intensity to make a substantive difference. Resources are important in this regard, as during the recession a number of services were cut back. Lack of resources can limit services’ ability to have an intense engagement with the people using their services and to tailor supports for people who need them. It can also result in the inconsistent availability of services or lack of intensity in the provision of services. For example, some literacy training is only available for 2 hours per week, but other services are more intensive, such as special needs assistants in schools, which have played a significant role in increasing literacy and English language ability among vulnerable groups. Other programmes, such as SICAP 2015-2017, have placed more emphasis on throughput than on the depth or intensity of engagement, and found this to be less effective than hoped.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> See, for example, Crowe Howarth (2017). The new SICAP programme being rolled out is addressing this problem through allowing more tailoring to local needs. See <http://drcd.gov.ie/community/sicap>, downloaded 16 April 2018.

**Services should be available when people need them, and at an intensity where they can make a difference. For those who are furthest from the labour market and who face a number of obstacles to overcome, the intensity and quality of engagement is important.**

## 10.3 Model of Activation

In general, we found Ireland to have a supportive social welfare and employment support system, but with some shortcomings. In the previous section we identified the need to incorporate a household focus, to have better co-ordination and greater intensity in the delivery of some policies and programmes. This section highlights the need to pay particular attention to vulnerable groups, and how the role of the case officer is central to this.

### 10.3.1 Helping Vulnerable Groups Overcome Barriers

**The study identified a number of vulnerable groups who find it difficult to get jobs and who may be further from the labour market. These groups face a number of barriers to overcome before they were in a position to take up a job.** Some people have low levels of literacy or limited English language or computer skills. Others had not been in a paid job for a long time or had never worked, including young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs). Some also had considerable caring responsibilities, either for children or for family or relatives who were sick, disabled or elderly; while some had an illness or disability or mental health issues; and some had housing issues. Several interviewees had experience of discrimination, e.g. some Travellers and migrants, particularly Africans; plus it was difficult for people with addiction issues or who had prison records to get jobs. A number of people from the low work intensity households, as well as local service providers especially from the community sector, emphasised that being from an area 'labelled' as disadvantaged could also make it difficult for people to get a job. People living in these areas could also lack contacts with the labour market to assist them in seeking work.

**Those facing such barriers often need considerable supports and tailored interventions before they are in a position to take up paid employment, but a mutually agreed personal progression plan setting out a journey towards a desired end goal is a useful starting point. Figure 10.3 outlines these issues.**



**Figure 10.3: Supports required for Vulnerable Groups**

- Vulnerable groups include lone parents; people with a disability, literacy difficulties, poor English, no work experience or contacts, a history of addiction or time in prison.
- Vulnerable groups need tailored supports, e.g.
  - activation into part-time work
  - childcare, literacy supports
  - actions to tackle discrimination
  - particular supports for people with a disability.

Recent research by the ESRI found that **lone parents and working-age adults with disabilities stood out as having high poverty risks across a range of EU countries, but particularly in Ireland**, (Watson *et al.*, 2018). These vulnerable groups were identified as needing specific tailored interventions to reduce their risk of poverty and, where possible, support to enter into paid work, maybe on a part-time basis. Many studies, including this qualitative study, noted that, **for lone parents, child care services are key, as is the ability to work and train part-time**. People with a disability are also over-represented among low work intensity households. The *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities* (see Government of Ireland, 2015) aims to address the low employment rates of people with disabilities, but **much work remains to be done to support disabled people into employment**.

Research on discrimination in Ireland has found that people with disabilities, people of black ethnicity, Travellers, women, and those in the 45 to 64 year old age group are more likely to experience discrimination in recruitment and at work than others (McGinnity *et al.*, 2017).

For the other vulnerable groups a range of tailored supports are required. These include equivalent recognition of the qualifications of migrants, and English language supports. **More intensive literacy and numeracy education is required for those with low literacy levels, as well as vocational literacy supports to ensure better access to employment and training**. Particular initiatives are needed for those facing discrimination in the labour market, involving a number of agencies working together.

### 10.3.2 The Critical Role of the Case Officer

**A notable finding is the critical role of the case officer**, particularly in Intreo.<sup>142</sup> Many household interviewees spoke of their case officer, often in complimentary terms, but not in every instance. Case officers themselves seem attuned to the issues faced by jobseekers, while managers, decision makers and national stakeholders are cognisant of this role.

**The main points made in relation to case officers are the need for adequate time to listen to the person and understand their interests, skills, circumstances, motivations, barriers to employment, and so on. The ability to demonstrate empathy seems to be important, as well as building a relationship of trust.** See Figure 10.4.

**Figure 10.4: The role of the Case Officer**

- Case officers need adequate time to engage with clients
- Trust between clients and case officers needs to be fostered
- The most disadvantaged clients are likely to benefit from working with the most experienced & qualified case officers
- Case officers need good training to ensure they are aware of all options for clients in a complex system
- Managers have a key role in influencing the culture of activation

For Intreo case officers, being able to refer people in receipt of social welfare and jobseekers payments (often referred to as clients) on to appropriate services is important. While they themselves may not have the information or knowledge to deal with the particular concerns of their client, they should be in a position to know who can and refer their client on to them as seamlessly as possible.

**Personal progression plans (PPPs) were referred to by Intreo case officers and seem like a good idea to record decisions made jointly between the case officer and the client.** However, many jobseekers interviewed did not mention having a PPP or were not aware of the significance of it. Some of them also referred to the

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<sup>142</sup> The term used here is case officer, but they can also be referred to as job facilitators, key workers, personal advisers. They are the frontline workers who directly interface with people seeking services—employment supports, in particular.

**power imbalance between themselves and the case officer**, and that the case officers had the power to threaten their household resources by reducing their benefit if they did not agree to the officer's recommended action. This often led to a lack of trust by the jobseeker or benefit recipient. **The challenge is to reach agreement in a mutually supportive way, through building trust, and making the PPP a working document, so that people can see the long-term possibilities and the steps required to get there.**

For the role of the Intreo case officer to be effective, **good quality training and support is required.** Following the establishment of Intreo in 2012, staff were reassigned from FÁS, and other parts of the public service, to be case officers. While these officers received training there was much change going on in the provision of the service at the time, plus large numbers of people unemployed and few available jobs. Circumstances have changed now, in that the Intreo service has become more embedded, there is greater experience available in delivering the service, the numbers of people who are unemployed has fallen (though many of those now unemployed are further from the labour market), and there are more job opportunities available. Nevertheless, **the system is complex, with new initiatives from time to time, so that there is a need for ongoing training and supports for Intreo case officers to continue. It may also be more effective to allocate the most qualified and experienced case officers to the most disadvantaged job seekers.**

**Office managers in Intreo, and in other employment support offices, have a critical role informing and training their staff.** Managers often influence the culture of the office, and can encourage staff to foster supportive engagement with clients, and to have good communication within the office, e.g. briefing on new initiatives and debriefing based on case officers' experiences.

## 10.4 Need for Tailored Supports

As stressed throughout the report, the research shows the need for tailored services. NESC's report on the *Developmental Welfare State* (NESC, 2005) promotes a 'tailored universalism' approach where services for vulnerable groups are accessed through mainstream services, but are tailored to meet the needs of those who are disadvantaged.

To some extent, **several services are already tailored, for example personal progression plans, and initiatives such as the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS), both of which provide tapered financial support on the basis of household means.** The existing system of payments and supports can look complex (as outlined in Chapter 3), yet this reflects a tailoring and targeting of payments, services and supports to meet the needs of particular subgroups of the population.

Nevertheless, because of the rules and conditions attaching to many of these schemes, people can 'fall through the gaps' or can become confused or frustrated by the range of requirements to access services, courses or programmes. Greater

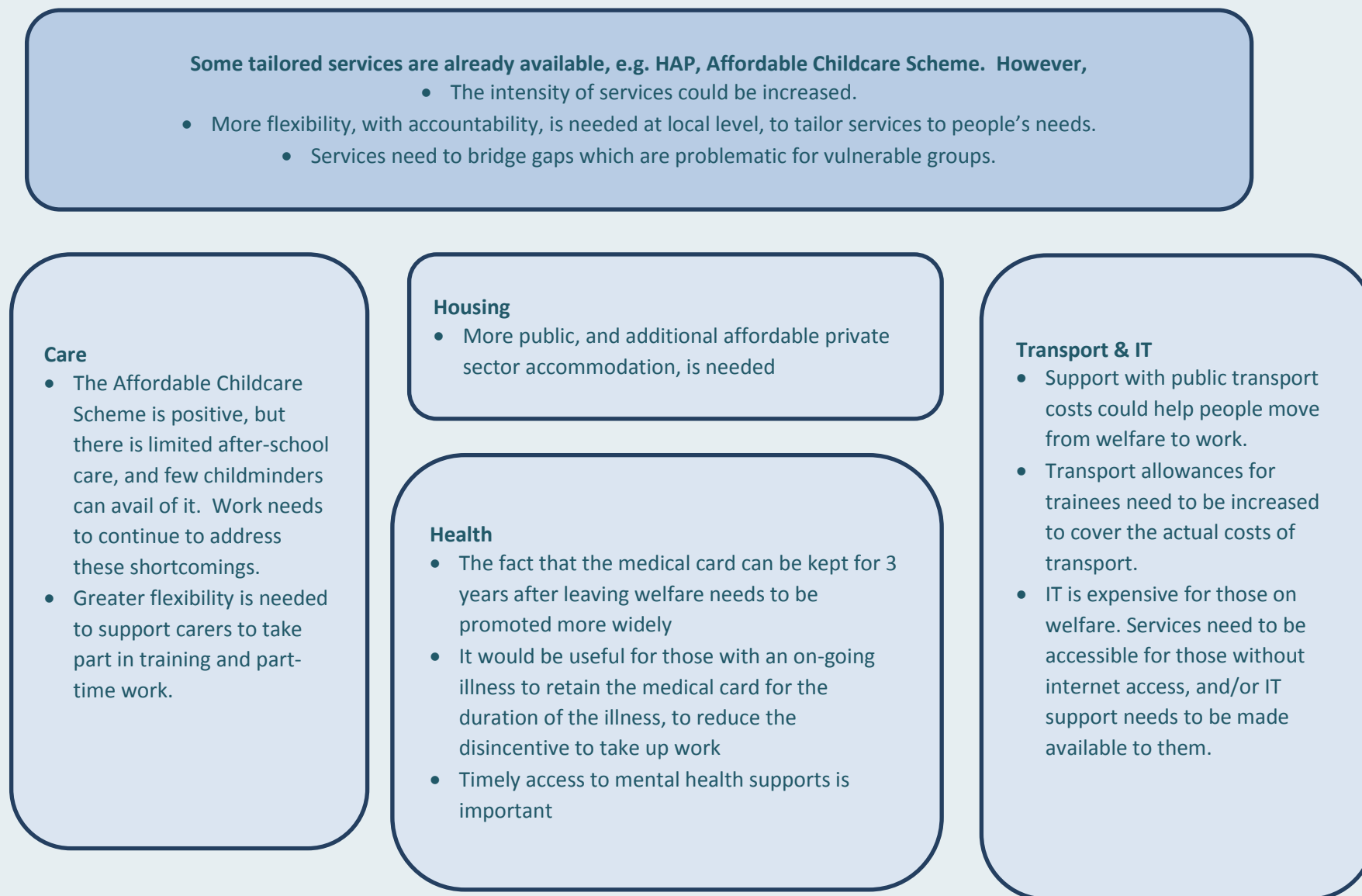
flexibility at local level to tailor services to meet people's needs, within a framework of guiding principles, would be useful. Such provision is already being developed in some programmes, such as the Affordable Childcare Scheme, and could be adopted more widely.

Information is a key support to connect those who are not working to the services they need. Hence, **the importance of providing up to date, clear and easily understandable information on what is available and the conditions attaching to them.** The Citizen's Information service was considered a good resource in this regard.

**Also important are services that link and bridge,** as is emphasised throughout this report. Services need to ensure that they link users adequately to the supports that they need to progress, and that, where linkages are not strong, these are improved. For example, there needs to be stronger links between work experience programmes and the labour market, and between employers and both employment support services and training providers. **Greater data sharing and collaborative work planning between service providers can help to ensure good connections between services, as well as reducing costs in the long run, and freeing up people's time.**

The following sub-sections highlight the main findings and implications in relation to care, housing, health, transport and information technology; and figure 10.5 summarises all of these issues

Figure 10.5: Tailored Services



### 10.4.1 Providing Care Supports

**One of the main barriers faced by people who want to get back to work, particularly women and especially lone parents, is childcare—both its availability and affordability.** While there are some childcare schemes in operation for low income families, these are quite limited in terms of their coverage. **The Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) has the potential to make a difference and enable people to access childcare to take up education, training or a job, so long as there are places available and the ACS is adequately resourced.** It is a good example of tailored universalism where there is a universal subsidy available to everyone with children who wants to avail of registered childcare, with a targeted means-tested payment for low income families. With the introduction of quality standards, access to childcare should also contribute to children’s development, which is particularly beneficial to children from disadvantaged backgrounds and can give them a good start in life. Childminders, however, are not covered by the ACS unless they are formally registered, and few are. The most used type of non-parental childcare for both pre-school and primary school children is a childminder/au pair/nanny (CSO, 2017a). Work needs to continue to ensure that as many childminders can avail of the ACS as possible.

**Afterschool care was raised by a number of the household interviewees with concerns about being able to drop children to, and collect them from, school and how they would manage this if they were engaged in education, training or paid employment.** Many sought part-time employment or flexible working arrangements. Many employers were also aware of childcare requirements and tried to accommodate them, while others were not in a position to do so or did not want to do so. **The ACS offers a ‘wrap around’ service of afterschool provision for parents who require it and who meet the relevant criteria. However, currently there is limited afterschool childcare provision,** and more will need to be available to assist with this problem. Overall, though, the ACS is a significant development in affording people with children, and young children in particular, the opportunity to engage in education, training or paid work.

**A number of the household interviewees were providing care for other family members or relatives** and some were in receipt of a carer’s allowance which allows them to be in employment or to take part in training of up to 15 hours per week. However, some of them found it difficult to find training or employment of 15 hours which they could combine with their care requirements. Variability in the condition of the person they were caring for also meant it could be difficult to follow a set routine. Caring for family or relatives is a complex and emotional activity (‘labour of love’), and can be demanding. Family caring also reduces the extent to which the State needs to provide care supports. Yet, people may require respite care to be available, or to be able to participate in education, training or employment, albeit to a limited extent. **It is an area where tailored supports, and some flexibility in their application, would be beneficial. More funding for buying in carers and/or extending home care should be considered.**

#### 10.4.2 Ensuring Access to Affordable and Secure Accommodation

**A striking finding from this study of low work intensity households was the number of multi-family, intergenerational households interviewed.** The lack of affordable or available accommodation for renting, along with family breakup, accounted for a significant proportion of the households living with other family members, often parents or siblings. **Those who were living in local authority housing were comparatively better off, as they had a secure home and if they moved into paid employment they continued to pay 10 per cent of their income on rent.** The issue was getting access to a local authority house, though the choice-based letting system seemed popular with potential local authority tenants.

A number of the interviewees had been living in private rented accommodation but for various reasons it was no longer available to them and now they were living with relatives or in emergency accommodation. **The main concern was the availability of accommodation to rent, and it was very difficult for low income households to get accommodation in a very competitive environment.** Some people were in receipt of rent supplement and for many it would be difficult for them to take a low paid job if it meant they lost their rent supplement, as private rents are generally very expensive. Long-term rent supplement is now being replaced by Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), which is tailored to people's means, but this payment is still being rolled out. In addition, not all landlords seemed willing to take tenants in receipt of HAP, with demand greater than supply. **The availability of both public and private rented accommodation (the latter with HAP), is a key issue to be addressed which would assist people in taking up available jobs.**

**A number of household interviewees had mortgages and were finding it difficult to service the mortgage when they lost their jobs, many of them accumulating debt.** Help was sought and gained from the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), but often people had to call on family to help them pay bills. Living with debt was very stressful, and affected people's mental health. **The support of a service, such as MABS, is invaluable.**

#### 10.4.3 Meeting Health Needs

As all of the households interviewed in the study were in receipt of a social welfare benefit, they would be eligible for a medical card. Those who were healthy or those who felt that their net income would be such that they would still be entitled to a medical card did not have concerns about losing it if they took up a job. However, **a number of the interviewees who were actively seeking work and who have an illness, or an illness in the family, were concerned about the possibility of losing the medical card if they took up paid employment. People who have been unemployed for over a year can keep their medical card for three years after taking up employment. Not all household interviewees seemed to be aware of this.** However, it is a good support mechanism to enable people to take up paid employment without the immediate fear of losing their medical card. **It may be useful for a family member with an ongoing illness to be able to retain their**

**medical card throughout this illness period, to reduce any disincentive for household members to take up employment.**

**Mental health issues were mentioned by a number of the household interviewees**, both in relation to the benefits of working for good mental health or the negative impact of job loss or not working on mental health. Relationship break up and addiction also impacted negatively on people's mental health. A number of service providers and employers spoke about mental health difficulties and how they affected people's ability to look for jobs. **The provision of work opportunities and access to employment support programmes can support good mental health among the long term unemployed, especially men. Timely access to mental health supports is also required for school children and adults experiencing mental health difficulties.**

#### 10.4.4 Ensuring Access to Transport and Information Technology

**The expense of transport was raised by a number of households as an inhibiting factor in seeking work.** Some interviewees had cars from when they were previously employed, but found them expensive to run. Many were reliant on public transport. Although there was a good public transport service to the city centre **many found transport expensive** when they were on a social welfare payment, and some gave the expense of having to get a number of buses to low paid jobs in a different suburb of the city as a reason for leaving a previous job. **It may be useful to consider providing jobseekers about to take up a job with a public transport ticket (e.g. a LEAP card) for a transitional period.**<sup>143</sup> **The travel allowances which are available to some unemployed trainees also do not cover the cost of transport, and consideration could be given to increasing these.**

In relation to information technology, a lot of services assume that people have access to IT but as the findings of this NESC study show, this is not necessarily the case. Lack of access to IT has implications for people's ability to apply for jobs on-line, to do on-line training courses and to connect to other services which are accessed on-line. **Service providers should ensure that services and information are available to those who do not have on-line access, and/or that supports are provided to enable people to obtain IT equipment or other forms of IT access.**

## 10.5 Transitioning from Welfare to Work

A number of issues were raised by household interviewees when they were either considering moving from welfare to work, sometimes when they were offered a job, and sometimes when they took up paid employment. Service providers, employers,

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<sup>143</sup> Bearing in mind that the research was carried out in a disadvantaged urban area - alternative supports would be required in rural areas.



decision makers and national stakeholders also raised issues for people making the transition from welfare to work. The main issues are discussed in the following subsections in relation to tapering payment withdrawal, the availability of career guidance, experience of the education system, training pathways and progression, the expansion of apprenticeships, and the value of employment programmes and social enterprise.

### 10.5.1 Tapering Payment Withdrawal

**The State supports families to transition from welfare to paid employment through Family Income Supplement (FIS) (now Working Family Payment), the Back to Work Family Dividend, retention of the medical card for three years, and more recently through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS).** The first two specifically support families where the income earners are in low paid employment. **However, high replacement rates are still an issue for families with a number of children.** Low earnings potential, the upward adjustment of unemployment payments for family size and the loss of this adjustment on entering employment, taken together, can deter parents of some large families from moving into low-wage employment. This highlights **the need to ensure that tapering is aligned appropriately with replacement rates.**<sup>144</sup> Some similar issues arise for those working part-time while claiming jobseeker's allowance, or FIS. Employers reported that employees do not want to take extra hours of work where this will negatively affect their primary and secondary benefits. This is a difficulty associated with targeted supports, where employment and poverty traps occur at withdrawal thresholds. Gradual tapering can help to smooth these withdrawal impacts. **Consideration could also be given to awarding FIS (now Working Family Payment) automatically** when a person is moving from a social welfare payment into employment, to increase take up rates and address any delays in assessment and review.

**The certainty of payments and other supports are very important for jobseekers,** who value the certainty of unemployment payments, of local authority-owned housing, and of the medical card. Uncertainty can reduce the motivation for some to move into the open labour market. **Timely assessment for access to in-work supports, along with supports to help with the costs of moving into a new job (as highlighted previously in Section 10.4.4), could help families to make this transition.** It is also important that those on disability and caring payments feel sure that these payments can be re-accessed if employment which they gain proves unsustainable. These issues are summarised in figure 10.6.

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<sup>144</sup> Replacement rates are the amount of income from paid work required to replace social welfare benefits.

**Figure 10.6: Welfare to work supports, secondary benefits and income supports**

**Supports exist to help people move from welfare to work, e.g. Working Family Payment, HAP, Affordable Childcare Scheme, etc. However:**

- For people with children, and/or in precarious employment, these supports may not provide enough certainty to take the risk of moving into work.
- To facilitate more parents to move into employment, it would be useful to taper benefit withdrawals so that there is better alignment between these and the income that can be gained from paid work.
- Timely assessment and payment of income supports and secondary benefits is crucial for those on low incomes with no savings.
- It would be helpful to award the Working Family Payment automatically to eligible families moving from welfare to work.

### 10.5.2 Expanding the Availability and Quality of Career Guidance

**Career guidance is crucial to ensure people are aware of career options, and that they work and train in an area that suits their aptitudes and abilities.** It can also promote a better match between the aspirations and aptitudes of unemployed people, and the courses/career direction to which they are referred by Intreo. Good career guidance is also particularly useful for disadvantaged groups, who do not always have a good grasp of career opportunities available. Currently, the provision of career guidance in the public employment and training services is patchy.

**Investing more resources in career guidance in schools, training facilities and Intreo could help** to address these problems. **More targeted use of career guidance expertise in the public employment services could also help, including matching the most disadvantaged with the most experienced and qualified career guidance staff.** The review of guidance being undertaken by the Department of Education and Skills should help to highlight some of these issues and set out how best they can be addressed.

These issues, and others in relation to training pathways and progress, are summarised in Figure 10.7.

Figure 10.7: Training pathways and progression

**Ensure disadvantaged groups can access training and education**

- Financial support needs to cover the costs of attending training, including childcare and transport
- The new apprenticeships being developed need to be accessible to disadvantaged groups

**Strengthen links between further education and training, and the labour market**

- Link training resources to skills needs
- Involve employers more in curriculum development, work placement, recruitment and upskilling
- Promote the value of further education & training

**Improve career guidance provision**

- Career guidance is particularly important for disadvantaged groups, who are less likely to be aware of the full range of career opportunities
- Current career guidance provision is patchy, but needs to be consistently available
- The most experienced & qualified career guidance professionals should be matched with the most disadvantaged clients

**Focus on low skilled adults**

- Upskill the low skilled who are in employment. The National Training Fund and Skillnets can support this.
- As many disadvantaged adults had a poor experience of school, ensure adult education uses a different approach

**Ensure investment in education is effective**

- Reduce early school leaving further
- Provide more alternatives to school-based education
- Some disadvantaged people with degrees face other barriers accessing appropriate employment, e.g. recognition of qualifications, childcare. Supports are needed to address this
- Investigate why some people are not progressing, despite undertaking multiple training courses
- Investigate why large waiting lists for ETB courses do not translate into high numbers on courses

### 10.5.3 Experience of the Education System

As outlined in Chapter 8, the majority of household interviewees had lower than average levels of education, and this left them in a poor position to compete for jobs, particularly during a recessionary period. While the parents interviewed wanted to see their children get as much education as possible, so that they could get good jobs, some early school leaving is still apparent. **This raises questions about how attractive school is as an option for some young people, and whether or not there are enough alternatives to school-based education.** A number of household, service provider and national policy maker interviewees argued that more needed to be done on these issues, such as more forms of alternative education, the ability to gain QQI qualifications in school, etc. This is an issue whose feasibility could be explored further. It is also worth noting that special educational needs support for Travellers shows that tailoring services to meet varying educational needs has had positive outcomes. Such benefits are also apparent in evidence from Finland which shows that tailored support reduces unequal educational outcomes (OECD, 2013).

Several household interviewees also had literacy difficulties, particularly older people and middle-aged Travellers,<sup>145</sup> suggesting **the need for more intensive supports for each individual accessing literacy services**, as highlighted previously.

**A number of interviewees had third level degrees, some in areas in which there were skills shortages, but they had not been able to progress into employment** (recent studies of Back to Work Education Allowance recipients and of PLC programme provision showed some similar findings (Kelly *et al.*, 2015; McGuinness *et al.*, 2018). The reasons why they had not progressed are outlined in Chapter 8, and include lack of equivalent recognition for foreign qualifications, poor English language ability, lack of childcare, lack of relevant work experience and gaps in a person's CV, the rules of some welfare payments, and lack of jobs in some sectors. **Several of these issues can be tackled effectively through supportive services, highlighting their importance in allowing individuals and society to capitalise on investment in an individual's qualifications.**

### 10.5.4 Training Pathways and Progression

International comparisons show that Ireland does not invest heavily in skills training for the low skilled (O'Connell, P.J. *et al.*, 2010; Hughes *et al.*, 2004).<sup>146</sup> **Upskilling and re-skilling can help the low-skilled to progress into better quality jobs, and put**

<sup>145</sup> The literacy of younger Travellers was reported by their parents to be much better, with the support of special education and resource teachers important here.

<sup>146</sup> People who are unemployed are more likely than those who are employed (7 per cent compared to 5 per cent) to be involved in life-long learning in Ireland, but Ireland's rates of life-long learning for both the employed (5 per cent in Ireland compared to 12 per cent in the EU28) and the unemployed (7 per cent in Ireland compared to 10 per cent in the EU28) are still below the EU average (Solás, 2017).

**them in a better position to avoid future unemployment.** It is an issue of growing importance given the likelihood of increased automation of low skill employment in future and the potential impact of Brexit on some sectors. The implications of these future developments for occupations and sectors in the medium to long-term needs to be considered, especially in relation to the type of courses being provided. The *Action Plan on Education* (DES, 2017) does contain steps to increase rates of life-long learning, and the *National Skills Strategy 2025* (DES, undated) aims to deliver an education and training system which provides the right mix of skills needed now and in the future. In general, access to supports for reskilling and upskilling low-skilled employees need to be increased. **The National Training Fund and Skillnets could be used as vehicles to incentivise employers to upskill staff, particularly with accredited qualifications, as well as re-skilling and upskilling those out of the labour force.** Care needs to be taken to **ensure that the education experience for adult learners is not like that which they had in school.**

**Greater value also needs to be placed on further education and training (FET),** which is often viewed as inferior to higher education, but can qualify trainees with useful work-related skills. This is particularly the case when higher levels of qualification in FET are available.

**FET places need to be better linked to skills needs in the economy.** Further issues that arise here are whether or not there are adequate numbers of places on courses that will provide these types of qualifications. Sometimes these courses are more expensive to provide, but, if they lead to good employment and are targeted at those with the right aptitude, they are useful to provide. **There also seems to be a disparity between waiting lists for courses, which can be large, and the numbers who start courses, which can be small. More work is needed to assess the extent to which this is the case, and why, and how to address it.**

**Access for those from disadvantaged communities to training is important, and it is important here that financial support which covers the full cost of attending courses can help ensure that they are in a position to take part in them.** As outlined above, low travel allowances for some trainees mean that those taking public transport to a course are at a financial loss. Progression from some courses was not possible for some parents at the time of the study, as childcare supports did not always follow on to the next level. The rollout of the ACS should help to address this.

The link between further education and training, and employers, is key, and the interviews showed that engagement between this sector and employers is not consistent across all providers. Among some providers, there seems to be **room for greater employer involvement in curriculum development, work placement, recruitment and upskilling of low-skilled employees. Employers highlighted the importance of soft skills, and not all training incorporated this, but it should do so.** Job placement services in training colleges could also be useful, or referral of those who have completed their training to employment support services which have strong links with employers.

The interviews showed that **some people do several courses without progressing into employment**. This is sometimes because adequate levels of supportive services are not available, such as English language training, literacy, childcare, or because of the inadequacy of services linking trainees to employment opportunities. It is important to identify and address the reasons why people do not progress.

### 10.5.5 The Expansion of Apprenticeships

**The new apprenticeship model is positive, opening up new sectors to this model of training, and offering advantages to both employers and those taking up apprenticeship places.** For employers it supplies staff who are trained in this specific area of work, while for apprentices it offers an employment-linked, paid training model. As the new apprenticeships are rolled out, **it is important that those from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to access these opportunities. In addition, older jobseekers who would like to undertake apprentice training may face difficulties with supporting a family on an apprenticeship wage.** Support for this group, to help them meet the cost of family living while undertaking an apprenticeship, could be useful. SOLAS is currently reviewing pathways to participation in apprenticeship, and this should highlight some of these issues and propose how they can best be addressed.

### 10.5.6 The Value of Employment Programmes and Social Enterprise

**The interviews showed that employment programmes have a number of benefits.** They can help socially excluded groups, particularly those with a large gap since previous employment, to re-engage with the labour market. Participants on employment programmes also play an important role in helping community organisations to deliver much-needed services. **However, greater links between employment programmes, training on these programmes, and the open labour market could help increase progression into employment.** Some employment programmes are based in community or voluntary organisations which have fewer links to the open labour market, and as those on the programmes are usually particularly disadvantaged, they can struggle to access employment following completion of an employment programme. **Those who have just completed an employment programme could be given enhanced activation support to help them find employment in the open labour market.** Training is an important component of some employment programmes yet is absent from others. In general, training adds value to employment programmes, and should be included in them.

Some of those who have completed employment programmes may be able to progress to employment in social enterprises.<sup>147</sup> **Self-sustaining social enterprises**

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<sup>147</sup> The European Commission defines a social business as one: whose primary objective is to achieve social impact rather than generating profit for owners and shareholders; which operates in the market through the production of goods and services in an entrepreneurial and innovative way; which uses surpluses mainly to

**have the potential to address long-term unemployment, and more supports to allow this would be helpful, especially in areas where there are fewer job opportunities.** Employment in social enterprises can be particularly beneficial for vulnerable jobseekers who may find it more difficult to get jobs in the open labour market. In addition, jobs in self-sustaining social enterprises pay a wage, do not have a programme time limit and provide useful local services. The role of these social enterprises in addressing long-term unemployment and supporting local communities could be promoted more proactively to give them greater visibility.

**Figure 10.8: Employment schemes**

**Employment schemes provide a range of benefits, including work experience, and an increase in confidence. However,**

- All employment schemes should incorporate training, to upskill the disadvantaged groups taking part
- Better links are needed between employment schemes and the labour market. Participants could be given enhanced activation support, e.g. through JobPath, as their time on a scheme draws to a close
- The potential of self-sustaining social enterprises to address long-term unemployment should be promoted

## 10.6 The Role of Employers

In the study area there was a wide range of employers: private, public and community; large and small; from multi-nationals to SMEs. A number were interviewed for this study, and they were generally offering low skill, low wage jobs (as this is what the interviewees had been employed in, and/or were searching for employment in), although some of the employers interviewed had jobs at a range of skill levels. **The recruitment and retention of employees is a key concern of many of the employers, particularly in a growing economy.** Some of these positions could be filled by people from the Live Register, or from people not currently in the labour force. The latter figure is high, with the methodology adopted by the new Labour Force Survey showing an additional potential labour supply of 111,100

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achieve these social goals, and which is managed by social entrepreneurs in an accountable and transparent way, in particular by involving workers, customers and stakeholders affected by its business activity.

people in the fourth quarter of 2017.<sup>148</sup> Some of these people are likely to be in low work intensity households. However, there is a need for greater engagement with employers by employment support services and education and training agencies, to support such a development.

### 10.6.1 Need for Greater Engagement with Employers

**There is a challenge for employment support services, and education and training providers, to engage more with employers and their representative organisations.**

A number of mechanisms were identified to better match jobseekers with employers. Public employment services need to support jobseekers to be ‘job-ready’, and to find out how employers recruit their staff and prepare potential candidates accordingly. The services need to be more able to share relevant data on potential employees with employers, such as the skill level of those on the Live Register. More co-ordination between the range of state-funded organisations in the activation area (Intreo, LES, JobPath and SICAP) would also assist engagement with employers. Promotion of incentives such as JobsPlus and the Family Income Supplement (now Working Family Payment), as well as retention of the medical card, need to continue. For trainers, the skills that employers are looking for need to be identified (the Regional Skills Fora have begun work on this), and employers need to be more involved in curriculum development, work placements and trainee programmes.

While preparation of a CV is necessary to set out a person’s education, skills and experience, **the ‘dropping off’ of CVs into employers does not seem to be a fruitful exercise in most cases, as employers prefer a more targeted approach seeking specific skills or attributes for specific roles. In particular, many employers sought what they called a good ‘attitude’ or ‘work ethic’ in potential employees, i.e. attendance, punctuality, good presentation and politeness.** For people with atypical CVs, containing gaps or qualifications gained at older ages or abroad, it can be challenging to engage employers’ interest. **Reasons should be given to explain any absences, plus highlighting any volunteering experience.** If employers are open to employing people with atypical CVs, it can often help to fill skill gaps.

**A number of employers spoke of wanting to connect with the local community, through supporting initiatives in schools and local community centres.** Such collaboration can be encouraged and opportunities found to develop innovative interactions with mutual benefits for local employers and the local community. **Ways to encourage such collaboration include tapping into a company’s Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives and through the use of social clauses, particularly**

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<sup>148</sup> The potential labour force supply is the sum of the two groups – ‘persons seeking work but not immediately available’ and ‘persons available for work but not seeking’. From Q3 2017, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) has replaced the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), and the statistics from before and after the introduction of the new survey may not be directly comparable. The data is available here: <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lfs/labourforcesurveyquarter42017/>, downloaded 21 May 2018.



**for public sector contracts.** Such social clauses can include the requirement to employ a proportion of the workforce from the Live Register, from the local area or from vulnerable groups.

### 10.6.2 Attention to be Paid to the Quality of Work

**The quality of work was raised by household interviewees, service providers, decision makers and national stakeholders, particularly the issue of precarious work.** Some people found that it was difficult to secure enough hours on a regular basis to make it beneficial for them to work, especially if they were the main household earner and bill payer. Even for those able to secure regular full-time work, if they had a family it could be difficult to cover their costs at national minimum wage rates. Also, some interviewees wondered if the model of the State subsidising low paid work was effective, although it is not possible to answer this question in this research study.

Concerns have been raised about precarious work, particularly in the low skilled and service sectors. **Legislative changes to protect vulnerable workers on ‘zero hour’ and ‘if and when’ contracts, or those who have to declare themselves self-employed to secure work, i.e. the so-called bogus self-employed, are welcomed.** Action could also be taken to penalise exploitative employers who use precarious work contracts, for example, through making changes to the social insurance or income tax systems. Furthermore, employment support services should be careful not to compel people to take precarious employment, but should continue to support people into sustainable jobs.

### 10.6.3 Supports for Self-employment

**A number of the household interviewees would have liked to set up their own business, but felt they lacked the wherewithal.** Various issues were raised, ranging from literacy difficulties to lack of familiarity with legal requirements, to lack of funding. While there are supports available to help the long-term unemployed move into self-employment, such as the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, **greater flexibility in the allocation and spending of grants for self-employment may help more long-term unemployed into self-employment.** Current supports to help with funding the purchase of equipment, and hiring premises, are not always accessible to a long-term unemployed person who has no savings left to provide matching funding.

Some of the household interviewees had tried to set up their own business, but it had failed. This underlines the importance of ensuring that job-seeking supports are available to the previously self-employed, and that people are aware of this. As outlined in Chapter 8, **not many people are aware that self-employed people whose businesses have failed may be entitled to jobseeker’s allowance on a means-tested basis.** In addition, social insurance supports for the self-employed are being improved, which should encourage more people to consider the possibility of

self-employment if they have the skills and support, and can meet an identified niche in the market.

These findings in relation to the role of employers are summarised in figure 10.9.

**Figure 10.9: Role of Employers**

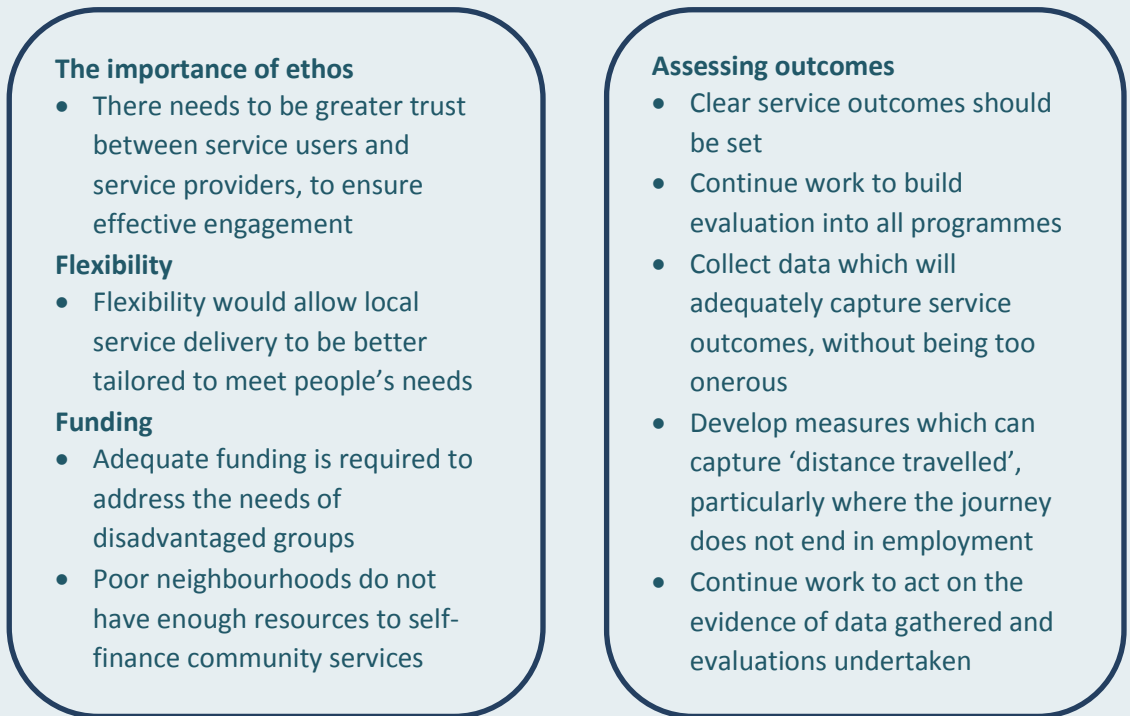


## 10.7 The Important Role of Institutions in Service Provision

The role of institutions in supporting people into employment has been highlighted throughout the report. Particular dimensions to the discussion include the diverse range of institutions involved and the extent of change which has taken place over the last 10 years. Earlier in this chapter the need for better co-ordination was

discussed. This section presents conclusions in relation to the importance of institutional ethos, the significance of resources, mechanisms of policy delivery and the need to assess and act on outcomes. These are summarised in figure 10.10.

**Figure 10.10: Institutions and service provision**



### 10.7.1 Importance of Service Ethos

**The ethos, values and culture of an organisation are important in terms of how it operates and how it is perceived by its staff, service users, other institutions it engages with, and the general public.** With a huge amount of organisational change in recent years, it takes time for new institutional cultures to develop and become embedded. However, in terms of supporting people into work, **the building of trust emerges as very important.** Work to challenge prejudice is necessary as well. Service providers also need to be clear about what they can and cannot provide and where to refer people for the services they require. Regular engagement with service users is important, by decision makers, as well as by managers and front-line staff, to gain feedback about service provision.

### 10.7.2 Significance of Resources

**Resources, by way of funding and staff, are necessary for policy implementation, and to support co-ordination.** Many tailored supportive services, especially at community level, were cut back at the time of the economic crisis, but they can make a real difference in the lives of people experiencing disadvantage. Some of these supports have since been restored, but **where gaps and need remain, consideration should be given to providing additional supports, if and where, they add value to mainstream services.** Consideration also needs to be given to the extent to which community services can be self-financing in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, as a requirement to be self-financing can mean that the local community cannot afford to benefit from the service.

### 10.7.3 Mechanisms of Policy Delivery

Sometimes well intentioned policies fail to be adequately implemented for a variety of reasons including lack of leadership, resistance to change, and lack of clarity as well as lack of resources. A number of interviewees talked about action plans and working groups as useful mechanisms for policy implementation. Restructuring of services, along with training and use of IT systems can also help. **Greater flexibility at local level to tailor services to meet people's needs would be useful, if operationalised under a framework of guiding principles with accountability for actions taken.**

**An issue raised by a number of interviewees at all levels** (household, service providers, employers, managers, decision makers and national stakeholders) **was the impact of competitive tendering and the contracting of services previously provided by the state to private providers.** While some were of the view that contracted services provide more focused, outcomes-led services, others expressed reservations about the cost and quality of the services provided, and whether they provided good value for money. Private providers also tend to be less well co-ordinated with other supportive services, and so are not aware of other supports to which they can refer clients. Contracting of services can mean greater competition and so limit co-operation and co-ordination between services. **It is suggested that all services, including those provided through competitive tendering, are kept under review to ensure they are providing a quality service which is value for money.**

### 10.7.4 The Need to Assess and Act on Outcomes

It is good practice to ensure that services are provided as efficiently as possible, while at the same time meeting certain quality standards and achieving quality outcomes. This requires being clear about what outcomes are being sought and what actions are being taken to achieve this. **Assessing outcomes requires good data from a baseline position to track progress, outputs and impact. However, there needs to be clarity about what data is required, by whom and for what purpose, so that it is most useful for funders, service providers and service users. Depth, or quality, of engagement, may be as important as number of**

**interventions, so it is important that such data are collected in a way that is useful, and not too onerous.** Depending on people's starting points, and circumstances, progress may be at variable rates, and this should be captured, where possible, and addressed where necessary. For example, a jobseeker with literacy difficulties may make much slower progress towards employment than someone with a Leaving Certificate. Nonetheless, this is still progress. So **'direction of travel' and 'distance travelled' can be important indicators of progress.**

**Finally, it is important to carry out timely evaluation of policies and programmes, publish the outcomes from these evaluations, and take into consideration the evidence provided.** Most of the recent policies and programmes being delivered by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and Department of Education and Skills, are part of evaluation programmes and a range of revisions have taken place. This is good practice, makes processes transparent and engages service users and service providers in consultative exercises where their contributions are acknowledged. Continuation of this work, and its extension to all programmes that support those in low work intensity households, is important. Ideally, a plan for evaluation would be built into all new programmes as they are designed.

# Appendices

# Appendix 1

## STUDY ON UNEMPLOYMENT SERVICES



- A study by the National Economic and Social Council is taking place in [Area A].
- We would like to talk to households from **[Areas X, Y and Z], where the adults are not working,** or working less than 10 hours a week or less than three months a year (including people on jobs schemes, and lone parents on JST).
- We would like to find out their experience of using public employment services (such as Intreo, Solas, the LES, etc).
- The purpose of the study is to get feedback on how public services can better support households where the adults are not working.
- All information given will be completely confidential.
- Those that take part in the study will receive a **Dunnes Stores giftcard for €25.**

*If you would like to talk to us about your experience of services for the unemployed, please contact Helen Johnston or Anne-Marie McGauran at 089 465 7301.*

For more information, ask Helen or Anne-Marie, or see <http://www.nesc.ie/en/nesc-work-programme/jobless-households/>

## Appendix 2

### Interview Schedule—Households

**Introduction:** Thank you for agreeing to talk to us about your household, work and any interactions you have with employment and other services.

**First** of all, I want to assure you that the interview is confidential and anonymous. By that, I mean that the information you give us will not be able to be associated with you in any way after this discussion, and that only myself and my colleague will have access to all the information that you provide. Things you tell us may be used to illustrate points in the report we will publish but you and your family will not be identified.

**Secondly**, if you are comfortable with it, we would like to record our discussion as we want to be able to concentrate on what you are telling us and to be able to capture that accurately afterwards. We will get someone to type it up for us but they will not know who provided the information. Are you ok with that?

**Thirdly**, while we would like you to tell us about your household and work background we do not want you to feel you have to tell us anything you do not feel comfortable talking about.

**Fourthly**, just to let you know we will be talking to about 30 families like yourself in the local area and then to some of the service providers, like people who running training, education and employment programmes. From this research we hope to be able to understand better how services can help people to get jobs.

**Finally**, before we get started, would you mind signing this consent form. It just says that the research study has been explained to you and you are happy to take part. That you are aware that the information is being recorded but that it will be kept confidential and anonymous.

I will also sign a researcher's responsibility form.

[INTERVIEWER GUIDE:

Q1: ask of everyone in the household

Qs 2-6: ask of all adults 18+ (not in F/T education) in the household

Qs 7&8: ask of respondent only]



### 1. Household Information

So, just to start off then, can you tell me a little bit about who lives in this household?

- NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE HOUSEHOLD, gender, ages, relationship to reference person
- WHAT IS EVERYONE DOING—working, minding the family, in education, disabled, etc
- Note any other household features eg. Ethnicity

### 2. Work History

Can you tell me if you have ever worked? And if so, a bit about it?

- IF HAVE EVER WORKED—what types of jobs, doing what, hours, when, where, FT/PT, temp/perm, why left

Are you working now at all? Tell me about it.

- IF WORKING NOW—type of job, doing what, hours, where, FT/PT, temp/perm, how did you get it, what do you like/dislike about it
- IF NOT WORKING—how long have you been not working, why not, have you been offered jobs, why have you not taken them? What would encourage you to take a job

IS ANYONE ELSE IN THE HOUSEHOLD WORKING NOW? Tell me about it. (Probes as above)

HAS ANYONE ELSE IN THE HOUSEHOLD EVER WORKED? Tell me about it. (Probes as above)

### 3. Job-seeking

And now, can you tell me have you (and others in the household) been looking for work? Can you tell me how you have gone about it and what has happened?

- Have you been to INTREO (social welfare/dole office), tell me about the experience, how were you treated, what did they offer you? Have you a personal progression plan? What do you think of it?
- Have you been on EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES? Eg. CE, Tus, Gateway. If so, which ones and for how long? Who decided on this work experience programme for you? How did you find it/them? Are you on one or what have you done since it finished?
- Have you been on a TRAINING COURSE/APPRENTICESHIP? If so, what training course(s) and for how long? Who decided on this training programme? How did you find it/them? Are you on one now or what have you done since it finished? Do you think it has been useful?
- Have you been on an EDUCATION COURSE? If so, what course(s) and for how long? Who decided on the course? How did you find it/them? Are you on one now or what have you done since it finished? Do you think it has been useful?
- HAVE YOU ANY CONTACTS WHO CAN HELP YOU GET A JOB (networks)? Who are they and are they trying to help you out now? Have they helped you to get a job in the past?

- Have you a CV? If so, who put this together for you? Do you think it helps? If not, why not? Do you think a CV would help you in finding a job?
- Have you been in touch with LOCAL EMPLOYERS—who, how did you make the connection, and how have you found the experience, do you think they'll be able to get you a job?
- Have you thought about WORKING FOR YOURSELF? (Being self-employed) or SETTING UP YOUR OWN BUSINESS? (or having a family business)—if yes, what and when and if not, would they ever think about it? Do you think you'd be able to make a living from it?
- HOW ABOUT THE OTHER ADULTS IN THE HOUSEHOLD?

#### 4. Expectations

What sort of work would you like? What do you think needs to happen for you to be able to get this type of job?

- SORT OF WORK YOU WOULD LIKE—type of job, doing what, where, number of hours, FT/PT, ST/LT, pay
- DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD BE ABLE TO GET THIS TYPE OF JOB? HOW? IF NOT, WHY NOT? Explore the BARRIERS—personal circumstances (skills, family responsibilities, health, etc), external factors (available jobs, tax/welfare system, childcare, transport, etc) , other (housing, medical cards etc)?

#### 5. Qualifications and experience

Can you tell me what qualifications you have?

- Check QUALIFICATIONS—LC, FETAC level, Certificates, Diplomas, degrees
- ASK ABOUT EXPERIENCE OF SCHOOL/EDUCATION
- Check if they think their qualifications and work experience are any use to them in trying to get a job
- DO THEY THINK QUALIFICATIONS AND/OR EXPERIENCE, in general, ARE USEFUL IN LOOKING FOR WORK, and if so, what qualifications /work experience would they need? And do they have any plans to acquire these, and if so, how? And if not, why not?

#### 6. Engagement with other services

We've been talking about employment, training and education services. Are you in touch with any OTHER SERVICES?

- CHECK SERVICES ENGAGED WITH—such as the local Council, local politicians, housing services, (mental health, addiction), community services, money services (MABS)—ask why, did they find them useful, how, and how were they treated

#### 7. Hopes for the future?

What do you see for yourself in the future? Do you see yourself being able to get a job? If so, what sort and how?

- How do they see themselves in 1 years- , 5 years-, 10 years-time? WILL THEY BE ABLE TO WORK, GET A JOB? What needs to happen for them to be able to get a job?
- IF DON'T SEE A FUTURE WORKING/GETTING A JOB—WHY NOT?

## 8. Hopes for children's future?

And what do you see for your children in the future?

- Check to see if they think EDUCATION is important for their children, and if yes, what level of education, what type of qualification? If not, why not?
- Do they think it is important for their children to get a JOB/WORK when they are older? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- WHAT DO THEY THINK NEEDS TO HAPPEN for their children to be able to get a job when they are older?
- When they're older, would you like your children to LIVE LOCALLY OR MOVE OUT OF THE AREA OR MAYBE EVEN MOVE ABROAD? Why?

## 9. Close of Interview

That's me finished. Is there anything you want to say, that we didn't ask you about? Or is there anything you want to ask us?

We have information here about services in the area if you want to follow up on this.

Thank you very much for your time and information—we really appreciate it.

### GIVE THEM THE VOUCHER

When we have all the interviews done and had a chance to analyse all the information we will come back and let you know what we have found. We plan to do this as part of a group discussion with all the families we meet (about 30), then you can tell us whether or not we have understood you correctly and everyone will be able to get an overview of what the main things people in this area are concerned about in trying to get a job.

This is our number (089 4657301) if you think of anything else you want to tell us.

Thank you and good bye.

## Appendix 3

### Profile of Household Interviewees

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Household composition	Social welfare status	Type of paid work done in past	Highest education	Other relevant information
Alan	58	White Irish	Self, wife and adult daughter	Job Initiative	Builder's labourer	Primary	Literacy difficulties
Anna	23	White Irish	One adult & two children	One Parent Family Payment	Hotel security	Fetac 5/6	Homeless
Barbara	42	White Irish	Self, two adult children, two children under 18	Community Employment	Factory, spraying	?	
Brian	20s	White Irish	Self, mother, three sisters and niece	Tus	Only on an employment scheme	Leaving Cert	
Casper	38	Somalian	Self, wife and two children	Jobseeker's Allowance	n/a	No qualifications	Refugee
Catherine	33	Irish Traveller	Self, husband, 7 children under 12	Carer's Allowance	n/a	No qualifications	Literacy difficulties, two children with disabilities
Danny	40	White Irish	Self, mother & niece	Jobseeker's Allowance	Manager/personal trainer	Fetac 5/6	Recently separated
Diane	30s	White Irish	Self and 3 children	One Parent Family Payment	Dental nurse, carer	Fetac 5/6	Homeless
Ed	30s	Irish Traveller	Self, wife, 4 children	Jobseeker's Allowance?	Only on an employment scheme	No qualifications	Literacy difficulties
Elsa	50s	White Irish	Self, husband, and 17 year old child	Tus	Catering, cleaning	Junior Cert?	Part-time carer for father, household mortgage arrears

Frances	55	White Irish	One adult	Jobseeker's Allowance	Retail, catering	No qualifications	Suffers from depression, separated for several years
Fred	30s	English Traveller	Self, wife & wife's parents	Jobseeker's Allowance	Mechanic	Apprenticeship	
Grainne	38	White Irish	Self, husband & 3 children	Adult dependent	Bar work, cleaning	Junior Cert	Recently recovered from serious illness, have been to MABS about their mortgage payments
Greta	30s	Irish Traveller	Self, husband, children under and over 18	Carer's Allowance	n/a	No qualifications	Literacy difficulties, two children with a disability
Hannah	38	White Irish	Self, husband & 3 children	Adult dependent	Receptionist, cleaner	Leaving Cert	Household mortgage arrears
Irene	40?	White Irish	Self, partner & 17 year old	Adult dependent	Retailing, security	No qualifications	History of addiction when younger, son has a disability
Julia	30s	White English	Self, husband & 3 children	Invalidity pension	Post office, cash in transit	GCSE?	Has a serious chronic illness
Krystal	30s	Mixed race Irish	One adult and 2 children	Jobseeker's Transition	Retailing	Degree	
Linda	55	White Irish	Self, 4 adult children, grandchild	Jobseeker's Allowance	Receptionist, education facilitator, cleaner, field surveyor	Fetac 3/4?	On JobPath
Mercy	30s	Nigerian	One adult and 2 children	Jobseeker's Allowance	Technical support, clothing	Degree	
Nathaniel	40?	Nigerian	Self, wife & 4 children	Qualified adult?	Tax official in Nigeria, canteen, general operative in Ireland	Degree	The family gets FIS
Olive	61	White Irish	Self and adult daughter	Disability allowance	Hotel, catering, retailing	No qualifications	Has mobility difficulties
Orla	40	White Irish	Self and mother	Jobseeker's Allowance	Cleaning, catering & deliveries	Fetac 3/4?	
Pamela	32	White Irish	Self, partner and 2 children	Adult dependent	Office manager	Leaving Cert	Household mortgage arrears

Queenie	58	White Irish	Self, husband & adult son	Invalidity benefit	Machinist, retailing, cleaning	?	Suffers from depression, currently separating, mortgage arrears, has a sister with a disability and elderly mother
Ruth	43	Rwandan	Self and 3 adult children, all in college	Carer's Allowance	Accountant in Rwanda	Degree	Refugee, one child has had serious illness
Simon	40?	White Irish	Self, mother, disabled sister	Jobseeker's Benefit	Mechanic, security, retail management	Leaving Cert	Recently separated
Tammy	40?	Nigerian	Self, husband and 3 children	Jobseeker's Allowance	Childcare	Fetac 5/6	
Ulysses	40s?	Nigerian	Self, wife & 3 children	Insecure work	AirCon engineer; security	?	The family gets FIS as Ulysses' wife is working
Vinny	34	White Irish	Self, partner, daughter	Jobseeker's Allowance	Sales person	Leaving Cert?	Homeless
Will	40s	White Irish	Self, brothers, parents, niece, nephew	Tus	Printer, & then builder	Junior Cert	Separated
Xavier	61	White Irish	Self & wife	Jobseeker's Allowance	Plumber	Apprenticeship	
Yann	55	White Irish	Lone adult	Invalidity pension	Carpenter	Apprenticeship	Separated, in ill health, mortgage arrears
Zac	46	White Irish	Self & father	Jobseeker's Allowance	Builder's labourer	No qualifications	Separated



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