



Lone Parents

Forum Report No. 20

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FORUM

Copies of the Report may be obtained from the
GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS SALES OFFICE
Sun Alliance House, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.

or

THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FORUM
Frederick House, South Frederick Street,
Dublin 2.

Price IR£6.00 - €7.62

(PN 10074)

ISBN-1-899276-24-6

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
	vii
Foreword	vii
Section I Introduction and Overview	3
Section II Setting the Context	17
Section III Access to and Delivery of Public Social Services	33
Section IV Education, Training and Work Issues	57
Section V Family Formation: Cohabitation and Social Welfare Issues	79
Section VI Family Formation: Issues relating to Non-Resident Fathers	99
Annex 1 References	113
Annex 2 Project Team's Terms of Reference	126
Annex 3 Eligibility Across Programmes/Schemes for Lone Parents	127
Annex 4 Implications of Welfare, Education/Training and Employment Options for Lone Parents	128
Annex 5 Impact of Paid Employment on the Income of a Lone Parent with One Child	133
Annex 6 International Models of Lone Parents' Requirement to Work	135
Annex 7 Guidelines for Officers in relation to Cohabitation	136
Annex 8 Transition Options for Lone Parents	141
Terms of Reference and Constitution of the Forum	143
Membership of the Forum	145
Forum Publications	148

List of Tables

		<i>Page</i>
Table 2.1	Number of Lone Parent Households as a Percentage of all Private Households Classified by Composition and Size, 1986-1996	20
Table 2.2	Marital Status of One-Parent Households, 1996	22
Table 4.1	Participation by Lone Parents on Mainstream Education, Training and Work Programmes, 2000	58
Table 4.2	Highest Educational Qualifications of Married and Lone Mothers, 1996	65
Table 5.1	Social Welfare Payments, Pre- and Post-Cohabitation	86

List of Figures

		<i>Page</i>
Figure 2.1	Recipients of Lone Parent Allowance/OFP, 1979-2001	19
Figure 2.2	Recipients of Lone Parent Allowance/OFP by Age Group, 1991-1999	22
Figure 3.1	Households on Local Authority Waiting Lists, 1999	38
Figure 4.1	Levels of Educational Attainment among Lone Parents, 1997	66
Figure 4.2	Percentage of Lone Parents in Local Partnership Programmes, 1999	71
Figure 5.1	Continuum of Choice for Lone Parents who Cohabit	89
Figure 5.2	Illustrative Example of Household where Lone Parent Cohabits with/Marries UA Recipient	90
Figure 6.1	Framework for Classifying Family Policy Measures	111

List of Boxes

		<i>Page</i>
Box 1.1	Summary of Project Team’s Recommendations	8
Box 2.1	Provision for Lone Parents: A Chronology	18
Box 2.2	The One-Parent Family Payment (OFP)	19
Box 2.3	Profile of OFP New Claimants, 1999	25
Box 3.1	Consultations with Key Government Departments, Measures to Improve Service Delivery	34
Box 3.2	Views of MABS Personnel on Income Support for Lone Parents	44
Box 3.3	Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs Pilot Family Services Project	47
Box 4.1	Waterford Student Mothers’ Group	67
Box 4.2	Some Best Practice Principles Identified by Local Training Initiatives	72

Foreword

Given the NESF's remit from the Government on social inclusion and equality issues, the underlying focus of the present Report is on lone parents who are living in consistent poverty. While the overall number of lone parents has increased by over 20 per cent over the last decade, this has been associated at the same time with an alarming rise of almost 50 per cent in the number of these parents with children under 15 years of age who are living in poverty.

Key findings of the attached Report, which has been prepared by a Project Team established under the NESF's new working methods, are:

- The number of young lone parents (those in the under 25 age group) has been declining relatively in recent years, and almost 60 per cent of lone parents are now concentrated in the 25-39 age group;
- Participation by lone parents in the labour force (at about 35 per cent) is well below that in other countries e.g. in Finland the rate is 65 per cent;
- Almost half of lone parents have only primary level education, and they make up less than 2 per cent of those on mainstream training, education and work programmes;
- Two-thirds of first-time applicants for the One Parent Family Payment (OFP) are living with their parents; and
- Lone parents still experience stigma in our society and need a wide range of supports to access public services at local level.

It is now widely accepted and, as experience has shown in recent years, the best way out of poverty is through taking up paid employment. In this regard, the present Report builds on that of last year's review of the OFP (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000) and submits a comprehensive set of recommendations across a wider range of policies and programmes relating to lone parents, most notably:

- *Enhanced delivery and quality of public social services*, especially those dealing with
 - housing and accommodation;
 - income supports; and
 - health and personal services.
- *Improved access for lone parents to*
 - education;
 - training; and
 - employment.

The Report also highlights the need to tackle other barriers such as the need for more family-friendly arrangements, more childcare facilities and greater integration between the income tax and social welfare systems, if lone parents are to participate more fully on the above programmes.

The Report is for the most part based on the findings of a number of local hearings that the Team held at different locations (both urban and rural areas) with community groups, statutory providers as well as with lone parents themselves.

In its work, the Project Team also looked at the issue of cohabitation and considered a number of options as to how the regulations in this area could be eased to facilitate lone parents to form new families or develop relationships with a new partner.

Another important issue examined by the Project Team was that of those fathers, not living with the mother of their children, and whose needs have tended to be neglected in policy-making debates up to now.

Finally, the Report was debated at the Forum's most recent Plenary Session which was held in Dublin Castle on 14th May last and was strongly endorsed, subject to a number of drafting comments and amendments which have now been incorporated in the attached final version of the Report.

Section I

Introduction
and Overview

Introduction and Overview

Overview and Context

- 1.1 The Government's National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) has, as part of its guiding principles "*the reduction of inequalities and in particular, addressing the gender dimension of poverty*" (National Anti-Poverty Strategy, 1997). Research has shown the increasing risk of poverty for lone parent households, particularly those headed by women and the factors that have a bearing on this increase over time (e.g Nolan and Watson, 1999). In 1987, lone parent households faced roughly the same risk of poverty as couples with children and there was no difference between male and female lone parents. By 1994, however, the risk had increased sharply for female lone parents who were household heads (Nolan and Watson, 1999: 19). Factors which influence the risk of poverty include reliance on welfare payments, educational disadvantage, access to employment and availability of childcare. All of these in turn have a significant bearing on a lone parent's decision to participate in the labour market. This Report explores the range of issues which impact on the lives of lone parents and examines the current policy context in relation to lone parenthood.
- 1.2 This Section is divided into five parts:
- Project Team,
 - Scope of the Project,
 - Consultation and Research Undertaken,
 - Recommendations and
 - Acknowledgements.

Project Team

- 1.3 The decision to establish a Project Team on Lone Parents was made at the Forum's Plenary Session, held on the 22nd June 1999 when the current Work Programme was discussed and finalised. Given that the number of lone parents in the population is increasing, and that they constitute one of the groups most at risk of poverty, it was considered timely that the Forum assemble a Project Team *to identify the main issues of concern to lone parents in terms of social and economic life, and to make clear recommendations for the improvement of their situation within the policy context.* Particular emphasis was placed *on the need for greater and more effective integration of the wide range of social services that impact on lone parents.*
- 1.4 The membership of the Project Team was as follows:
Frances Byrne (One Parent Exchange and Network (OPEN))
Simon Coveney, T.D. (Fine Gael)

Paul Cunningham (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs)

Rosheen Callender (SIPTU)¹

Camille Loftus (INOUE)

Aebhric McGibney (IBEC)

Mary Murphy (St. Vincent de Paul)²

Enda Nolan (Local Authorities)

Mary O'Hara (ICA)

Maria Pierce (Independents)

Anne Vaughan (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs)

Forum Secretariat: Sarah Craig

- 1.5 A copy of the Team's terms of reference is attached (see Annex 2).

Scope of the Project

- 1.6 The Project Team was set up in June 2000 and met regularly (mostly at monthly intervals). A sub-group of the Team also met from time to time to progress specific issues. A wide range of issues pertaining to lone parenthood was considered before agreeing the terms of reference. In this respect, particular regard was paid to the fact that the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs was undertaking a major Review of the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP). This was published in September last. The Team was, therefore, especially keen to ensure that its work would add value to the work undertaken as part of the Department's Review (referred to hereafter as the Review of OFP, 2000) and, in particular, that it would build on the key issues identified in that Review.
- 1.7 In the course of establishing the Project Team's priorities a number of issues were identified. Many of these are sensitive and complex and enmeshed in broader sociological and ideological debates on the changing concept of the family in Irish society. Goals of family policy with particular reference to lone parent families are outlined in Section VI³. By and large, lone parents are highly sensitive to the needs of their children and the potential disadvantages which may accrue by virtue of their categorisation as the children of lone parents have

1. Replaced Kathleen Flanagan.

2. Acted as Chairperson to the Project Team.

3. Research for the *Commission on the Family* (Fahey, 1998) suggests that family policy comprises both distributive measures which provides supports to families in the form of income maintenance or services of various kinds and regulatory measures which consist of laws that define what the family is and how family members can and should behave towards each other (as in the law on marriage, marital breakdown, family property, etc). We mainly address the former.

been noted in the literature (e.g. Ryan, 1997; Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000).

- 1.8 We acknowledge that many lone parents do an excellent job in rearing their children and provide positive role models for parenting. We also recognised that for others, the absence of supports, particularly financial support, can lead to marginalisation and exclusion which result in a range of social problems that cannot be easily addressed in the short-term.
- 1.9 The key concerns of the Team were as follows:
- Promoting access for lone parents to public social services at a local level, given that the majority of them depend on social welfare as their main or only source of income. We agreed to look at key public social services in relation to income support, housing and health and social services. In this respect, this Report is broader in scope than the Review of OFP (2000) which is primarily about the OFP as a method of income support; and
 - Enhancing opportunities and choices for lone parents to access the labour market including education, training and work opportunities and against the backdrop that their participation in the workforce is 35 per cent (Central Statistics Office, 1997).

In addressing these issues, the Team was aware that there is a dearth of data and statistical information from which firm policy conclusions can be drawn.

- 1.10 In the course of its work, the Team identified a number of gaps in the analysis of lone parenthood and broadened the scope of its work to encompass some of these. It emerged in our local consultations that the issue of cohabitation and the application of the cohabitation rule was also having a bearing on lone parents' decisions to form new families or to continue/develop a relationship with a partner. While not all lone parents want to enter into a cohabiting relationship, the Team's view was that they should not be discouraged or penalised for doing so. Despite the evidence that the incidence of cohabitation among lone parents is low, the anecdotal evidence from our consultations was that it is higher than statistics suggest. The Team, therefore, examined this issue in more depth to devise ways of addressing it as a barrier to family formation.
- 1.11 Secondly, we recognised in a family formation context, that the role of fathers was relevant. We agreed, therefore, to explore the issue of fatherhood or more specifically, those fathers who do not live with the mothers of their children. This decision was taken on the basis that they were largely neglected in the discussion about lone parents *per se*. A small piece of qualitative research was commissioned to identify *albeit* in a limited manner, what the issues were for young fathers (i.e. the partners and ex-partners of the young, never married lone mothers). The

situations of these fathers differ greatly. For example, they may be absent from the lives of their children, or may see them during access visits. Some fathers may occupy the status of lone parent with full responsibility for the rearing of their children. It was agreed that fathers would be examined in the context of family formation issues and the changing profile of Irish families. Although the initial brief was to interview young fathers, this had to be expanded as it proved difficult to get in contact with young men who were willing to be part of the research. The Section of this Report on fathers is, therefore, presented as a contribution to the debate, based on the research undertaken with a range of different fathers. As such, it is more discursive in nature than the remainder of the Report. Nonetheless, it makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the complex roles and relationships that make up the changing family structures that are now evident in Ireland today.

Consultation and Research Undertaken

1.12 A series of consultations with groups and individuals who work with or have an interest in lone parent issues was undertaken in a number of different locations throughout the country. The Project Team consulted with a wide range of stakeholders and gathered information through a number of data collection processes. In particular, the Team was eager to engage with lone parents to establish their views on parenting alone and their experiences in relation to the range of services they access. Local hearings took place in Dublin, Longford and Cork to collect information in a local context. These hearings provided a wealth of information and detail about lone parenthood. In particular, the views of lone parents themselves gave a valuable insight into the issues and problems that exist for them in their everyday lives.

1.13 These consultations took place with a range of groups:

- Lone parents in receipt of social welfare payments; three focus groups were held with lone parents⁴; these were contacted through community development and locally-based projects in their area; approximately thirty lone parents participated;
- Local statutory service providers including Investigation Officers and Information Officers from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, Community Welfare Officers, Public Health Nurses and Social Workers from the Health Boards and Local Authority Housing Officers and other personnel. Staff from other statutory initiatives, including the Money Advice and Budgetary Service were also invited to attend;

4. Although both lone fathers and mothers were invited to participate in these focus groups, only lone mothers attended.

- Lone parent organisations and other community and voluntary sector groups in each area; and
- Non-resident fathers; participants for these focus groups were accessed through a variety of sources including formal and informal contacts. Six groups were convened, and in all forty fathers participated. Three of the groups were attended by fathers from disadvantaged backgrounds with no formal affiliations to father advocacy groups. The other groups were attended by fathers who are affiliated to groups whose primary purpose is to advocate the rights of fathers. In this respect, their views may differ from those in the rest of the Report which are based primarily on the views of disadvantaged lone mothers in receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment (OFFP).

1.14 In addition to the local hearings, other sources of information used to compile this Report included:

- A range of nationally-based lone parent organisations and other projects/initiatives were contacted and invited to send the Team any relevant documentation which would inform its deliberations. Their representatives were also invited to attend a meeting of the Team to consider recommendations and to make suggestions for areas of development;
- Representatives of Government Departments also outlined their Department's policies and programmes to the Team. This included the Departments of Education and Science, Environment and Local Government, Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Health and Children, Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Social, Community and Family Affairs and Sport, Tourism and Recreation as well as Area Development Management Ltd. Each Department also provided a written brief for the Team;
- A briefing on the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs pilot Family Services Project was also arranged;
- The Team commissioned briefing papers on improving access to the labour market and on non-resident fathers as well as qualitative research with non-resident fathers (noted above).

Recommendations

1.15 A summary list of the Project Team’s recommendations follows in Box 1.1.

Box 1.1

SUMMARY OF PROJECT TEAM’S RECOMMENDATIONS (NUMBERS REFER TO CORRESPONDING PARAGRAPHS IN THE REPORT)

Section II: Setting the Context

In relation to data issues, the main recommendation is:

2.37 Greater coverage of lone parenthood should be included in the official statistics that are collected regularly including the Census of Population and the Quarterly National Household Survey.

Other recommendations include:

2.38 A programme of research should be developed and supported by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs to provide better information to inform the policy debate on lone parenthood and family formation issues.

2.38 A reformulation of the unit of analysis in official statistics should also be considered by the National Statistics Board so that non-resident parents and families within families are more fully taken account of.

2.38 A system of tracking lone parents should be devised in conjunction with the main delivery agencies and data gathered on programme participation and completion.

Section III: Access to and Delivery of Public Social Services

In relation to housing and accommodation services for lone parents, the main recommendation is:

3.30 Lone parents’ particular accommodation needs in relation to social housing should be considered in the design, development and allocation by local authorities of a range of housing sizes and types that take account of the changing make-up of families.

Other recommendations include:

3.19 Bed and breakfast emergency accommodation for families with children should provide adequate facilities for laundry and cooking.

3.21, 3.23 The Commission on the Private Rented Sector recommendations should be implemented; in particular, the Private Residential Tenancies Board

should be set up as a matter of priority to look at rent levels and to check on malpractice by landlords. We recommend that the Board particularly addresses the discrimination by some landlords against lone parents on Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement and that it play a role in enforcing standards and implementing rent reviews.

- 3.25 The review of Supplementary Welfare Allowance reasonable rent limits which determine the maximum amount payable through the Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement should take account of rents charged in the market, particularly in larger urban areas.
- 3.30 Provision should be made by local authorities within housing estates for community support facilities.
- 3.33 The Joint Public/Private Rental Accommodation for Persons on the Rent Subsidy Initiative should be introduced by the Department of Environment and Local Government and once implemented should be monitored in order to establish its relevance for lone parents.
- 3.34 Direction should be given at the highest political levels to the Department of Environment and Local Government's Planning Group on a new Local Authority Based Rental Scheme to ensure that its work on supply issues addresses the currently unmet needs of many lone parents.

The main recommendation in relation to income support is:

- 3.35 The OFP should be benchmarked and updated taking into account the findings of the Partnership for Prosperity and Fairness Working Group on Indexing Adequacy.

Other recommendations include:

- 3.38 Issues with regard to maintenance should be reviewed by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs on a regular basis.
- 3.40 Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowances should be paid automatically to recipients of means-tested payments.
- 3.41 User-friendly guidelines should be developed for Supplementary Welfare Allowance by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, in particular, in relation to Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement and Exceptional Needs Payments.

The main recommendation for health, social services and other support is that:

- 3.9, 'Family Services Workers' should be appointed by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs to work with families, especially lone parent households at particular periods of crisis and to liaise with different statutory agencies.

Other recommendations include:

- 3.44 The Family Services Project should be extended to other areas; its focus on lone parent families should continue. The Family Services Workers should be located in the Family Services Project and Family Resource Centre structures, where available.
- 3.47, 3.48 The administration of the OFP should be localised and Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs local office staff should receive training on issues relating to lone parenthood. This training should be developed in partnership with lone parent organisations.
- 3.50 A programme of support is needed at both school and community levels to ensure that both young men and women have access to the range of information that they require regarding relationships, sexuality and parenting issues.
- 3.56 A budget line should be provided by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs for the development of peer support networks for lone parents as a matter of priority.
- 3.57 RAPID area implementation teams in urban areas and CLAR teams in rural settings should consult with lone parents as a matter of priority.
- 3.61 The valuable learning from community-based transport initiatives should be transferred to more rural areas.

Section IV: Education, Training and Work Issues

The main recommendation in relation to addressing barriers for lone parents to participate in education, training and work is:

- 4.13 Greater flexibility needs to be applied in the reimbursement of childcare costs for those participating in programmes; in particular, community projects rather than individual participants should be given responsibility by the main delivery agencies to vouch for programme participants' childcare costs. We also recommend that the £50 limit currently being applied to a range of initiatives be increased to keep pace with rising childcare costs.

Other recommendations include:

- 4.7 Within each Government Department, an official should be designated responsibility for identifying mainstreaming perspectives and the lessons learned in pilot initiatives. In particular, the newly-established National Employment Services Advisory Committee should play a role in mainstreaming the learning from valuable pilot labour market programmes.
- 4.15 There should be a substantial increase in the number of State-provided

childcare places, supported through the work of the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee.

- 4.15 Support should be made available for capacity-building for community groups who move from provision of sessional childcare to both sessional and full-day care provision, thereby allowing for a greater level of choice at local level. At central level, more planning is required to link needs with service provision.

The main recommendation in relation to education is:

- 4.28 Resources should be provided by the Department of Education and Science for mainstreaming the Waterford Student Mother's Project and other similar early intervention and support projects.

Other recommendations include:

- 4.31 Vocational Training Opportunities Schemes (VTOS) should be provided by the Department of Education and Science on a part-time basis to facilitate participation of groups such as lone parents.
- 4.33 Lone parents in third level education should be assessed for grants in their own right, as is the case for means-testing for the OFP.

On training the main recommendation is that:

- 4.43 Greater levels of flexibility should be introduced in the design and delivery of active labour market programmes by FÁS and other agencies for lone parents. In particular, the learning from Community Employment should be taken into account in the upcoming review of active labour market programmes by the Standing Committee on the Labour Market.

Other recommendations include:

- 4.22 A package of supports including pre-training, taster courses and personal development should be put in place for lone parents who participate in active labour market programmes.
- 4.23, 4.36 Targeted active labour market programmes should be made available and accessible to lone parents, following an assessment of their needs through the LES network, where it exists. Progression should be built into the options developed with individual lone parents by the main delivery agencies.

The main recommendation with regard to employment is that:

- 4.49 As an initial step towards the development of a Welfare to Work Unit, a Welfare to Work Colloquium should be held by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs which would bring together the main

players with an interest in issues relating to welfare/work transitions to explore the development of a welfare to work strategy for groups like lone parents.

Other recommendations include:

- 4.19 Guidelines developed by the Department of Health and Children in conjunction with the Health Boards on retention of the medical card on taking up employment should be published and disseminated by them.
- 4.10 Family-friendly policies which are developed for all parents should have due regard for the specific needs of lone parents.

Section V: Cohabitation and Social Welfare Issues

The main recommendation is that:

- 5.2 The Team's deliberations on changes in the current social welfare arrangements in relation to cohabitation should be taken up and developed, in the first instance by the Oireachtas Committee on Family, Community and Social Affairs.

Other recommendations include:

- 5.11 The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs should monitor the operation of the cohabitation guidelines to ensure that they are applied in a consistent manner across all regions. Training and regular updates should be given to Inspectors on difficulties encountered. Where appropriate, the Department should consult with lone parent groups as part of this process.
- 5.11 Support should be given by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs to advice centres/local groups to provide information on cohabitation and its effect on the OFP.
- 5.11 Information on how cohabitation is assessed should be issued by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs when a lone parent is initially awarded the OFP.

Section VI: Issues relating to Non-Resident Fathers

On the basis of its findings, the Team supports the following recommendations with regard to non-resident fathers:

- 6.4 Further research on the role of fathers should be undertaken. In this respect, a feasibility study on the development of a programme of research should be supported by the Family Affairs Unit in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. Areas to be addressed in this research should include:

- joint parenting and custody issues,
- access issues,
- liable relatives and maintenance and
- rights of married and unmarried parents.

Other recommendations include:

- 6.12 Social support networks should be developed for young fathers and community based programmes on parent/child communication should be provided to assist young fathers in making a contribution towards their child's development.
- 6.30 Housing policy should take account of the needs of non-resident fathers who have overnight access to their children.
- 6.30 Father/children facilities should be provided within the local community to help fathers who have access to their children but who do not have suitable accommodation.

Acknowledgements

- 1.16 The Project Team would like to acknowledge the contribution played by a range of individuals and organisations who assisted with its work. In particular, Mr. Paul O'Doherty of Hay Management Consultants who assisted at the early stages in the process of team-building. We would also like to thank Ann Clarke, Dr. Kieran McKeown and Dr. Mary Corcoran who undertook research on our behalf. The Team is also grateful to Freda Keeshan who acted as rapporteur for the local hearings and produced a summary report of the meetings held around the country.
- 1.17 The Team would like to thank the Longford Women's Centre, Ballyphehane/Togher Community Development Project and Tallaght Lone Parents Centre. We would also like to acknowledge Tallaght Unmarried Fathers, Parental Equality, and the Finglas Youth Development Project for their help in setting up focus groups with non-resident fathers. The Men's Centres in Ballymun also provided assistance in our consultations.
- 1.18 The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs greatly assisted the work of the Team by providing relevant data and expertise. The Secretariat was also helped by Joan O'Connor, a postgraduate student from Trinity College Dublin who was on temporary work placement.

Section II

Setting the
Context

Setting the Context

Introduction and Overview

- 2.1 Significant changes have occurred in the structure of Irish society over the last twenty years. Included in these changes are the decline in the marriage rate, the growth in births outside marriage and the increase in separations and divorces. There has also been a significant increase in the number of couples cohabiting, either as a precursor to or as a long-term alternative to marriage.
- 2.2 Traditional family structures and patterns of family formation are changing dramatically. Research undertaken by Fahey and Russell (2001, forthcoming), for example, shows a general trend towards an increase in single-family unit households including lone parent households while multi-family units have decreased. The Review of OFP (2000) also highlighted family formation changes. In short, there has been a reconfiguration of relationships between mothers and fathers, between parents and their children, and between different generations within the family. In this context, therefore, it is timely to look at the experience of lone parent families and how they are treated as a particular target group for policy purposes.

This Section is divided into seven parts:

- Identifying the Lone Parent Population,
- The One Parent Family Payment (OFP),
- Statistical Profile of Lone Parents,
- Risk of Poverty,
- Current Policy Issues,
- Overall Policy Framework and
- Data Deficiencies.

Identifying the Lone Parent Population

Definitional issues

- 2.3 One of the significant issues in the study of lone parenthood is that there is no consensus on the appropriate definition of a lone parent. Statistically, a lone parent is defined as one parent with one or more usually resident never married children of any age (Central Statistics Office). For the purposes of establishing eligibility for State benefits, lone parenthood has been defined as “*a parent rearing a child/children without the support of a partner*” (Swinburne, 1999). Lone parents vary in marital status, age, socio-economic background and entry into

lone parenthood. As a consequence, their treatment in the policy context has varied over time.

- 2.4 Since lone parents do not represent a homogenous group, there are different needs within the lone parent population and a range of solutions is, therefore, required for policy purposes. From the outset, the Project Team was most concerned with lone parents at a particular risk of poverty. In this regard, the emphasis was placed on those who are marginalised by virtue of their status as welfare dependents. We, therefore, concentrate on recipients of the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) rather than on lone parents *per se*. The focus of the Report is primarily on this group of the lone parent population.

The One-Parent Family Payment

- 2.5 Policies for lone parenthood have developed over time in response to a range of situations and the OFP is now the main provision for lone parents. Box 2.1 below sets out the key developments.

Box 2.1

PROVISION FOR LONE PARENTS: A CHRONOLOGY

The main developments, which resulted eventually in the One-Parent Family Payment include:

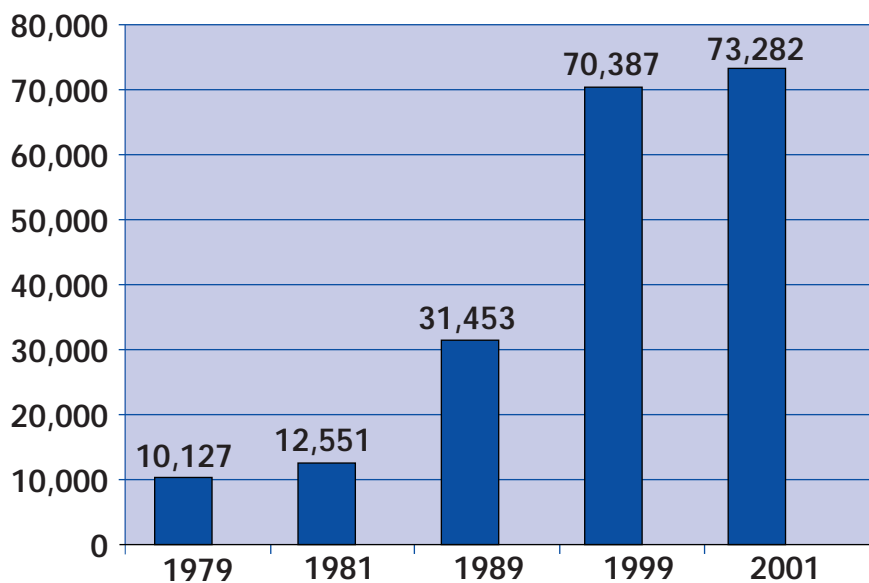
- 1935: Legislation to provide for widows was passed.
- 1970: The means-tested Deserted Wife's Allowance was introduced.
- 1973: Deserted Wife's Benefit was introduced as a social insurance mechanism.
- 1974: Introduction of the Unmarried Mother's Allowance made provision for income maintenance for this group.
- 1989: Introduction of Widower's Non-Contributory Allowance.
- 1990: Introduction of the Lone Parent Allowance, which was designed to:
 - unify the various schemes available for lone parents,
 - introduce equality and
 - remove the need for separated people to prove desertion.

The term 'unmarried mother' was also removed from the social welfare code at this time.

- 1994: Introduction of an earnings disregard as part of a pro-employment strategy.
- 1997: Consolidation of payments for all lone parents into one payment, the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP).

2.6 As the chronology shows, the present OFP scheme is a culmination of several policies responding to the range of situations that constitute parenting alone. The number in receipt of a lone parent payment (see Figure 2.1) shows an increase from just over 10,000 in 1979 to just over 73,000 in 2001. Since its introduction in 1997, the number of recipients of OFP has increased by almost 20 per cent (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000). The features of the present payment are described in Box 2.2 below.

Figure 2.1
Recipients of Lone Parent Allowance/OFP, 1979-2001



Source: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, *Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services*, various years.

2.7 The main features of the present OFP are that it is a means-tested payment, that an earnings disregard applies and that claimants must make an effort to secure maintenance (see Box 2.2).

Box 2.2

THE ONE-PARENT FAMILY PAYMENT (OFP)

- The present maximum rate of OFP for a lone parent aged under 66 is £85.50 per week plus an additional £15.20 per week paid in respect of each qualified child. (The maximum rate for a lone parent aged over 66 is £95.50 per week plus an additional £15.20 per week paid in respect of each qualified child).
- The qualifying condition for receipt of OFP is that the claimant must have main care and charge of at least one qualified child and be parenting alone i.e. not married or cohabiting.

- Claimants must satisfy a means test; all gross earnings up to £115.38 per week are disregarded, and one half of all earnings in excess of £230.76 per week are disregarded.
- New claimants must make an effort ('efforts' condition) to get maintenance from the other parent. Fifty per cent of maintenance payments are disregarded for the purposes of the means test. An allowance of up to £75 per week is also made for vouched housing costs.

Statistical Profile of Lone Parents

2.8 Until the Review of the OFP (2000) was published, there was very little data on the profile of lone parents in Ireland. There are still gaps in our understanding of the extent of lone parenthood. We know that the number is increasing and that, as in other countries, this can be accounted for in large part by the increasing number of births outside marriage. In Ireland, these births accounted for 1.6 per cent of all births in 1960, 8.5 per cent in 1985 and 24.8 per cent of all births in 1996 (Drew *et al.*, 1998). In 2000, the most recent year for which statistics are available, just over 30 per cent of all births were outside marriage. Not all of these can be attributed to lone parents, however. Almost 84 per cent of births in the under 25 years age group were outside marriage (Central Statistics Office, 2000), although the number of teenage births has not shown any decisive increase in recent years.

2.9 Table 2.1 below shows the number of lone parent household units in the State, classified by composition and size for 1986 and 1996.

Table 2.1
Number of Lone Parent Households as a Percentage of all Private Households
Classified by Composition and Size, 1986-1996

	1986		1996	
	No.	%	No.	%
Lone mother with children	66,156	6.8	88,342	7.9
Lone father with children	14,931	1.5	17,049	1.5
Lone mother with children and other persons	13,876	1.4	16,762	1.5
Lone father with children and other persons	3,026	0.3	3,339	0.3
Total lone parent households	99,975	10.0	127,488	11.2
Total households	976,304	100	1,123,238	100

Source: *Census of Population, 1986, 1996.*

- 2.10 It will be noted from the above Table that the number of lone parent households, as a percentage of households overall, remained relatively static in the 1986-1996 period. Nevertheless, the actual number of lone parent households increased substantially in that period. The number of mothers parenting alone increased by 22,000 in the ten years.
- 2.11 Data from the Quarterly National Household Survey (previously the Labour Force Survey) differ somewhat from Census of Population figures, reflecting the difficulties in measuring and enumerating the lone parent population. The main differences between the two are that the Census of Population is based on the total population and is taken at one point in time, every five years. As a result, absent parents can lead to a miscount in the number of lone parent households. In addition, lone parents may be miscounted if they are living in the family home as they are not enumerated as a separate family unit⁵. The Quarterly National Household Survey, on the other hand is based on a sample of the population. Certain demographic characteristics are requested that facilitate a more accurate count than that of the Census of Population. For example, it allows for short-term absences and counts family units using a reference person, which permits enumeration of lone parent units within households.
- 2.12 Labour Force Survey/Quarterly National Household Survey figures show that between 1989 and 1997, there was an increase of almost a quarter (23.7 per cent) overall in the number of lone parents. More significantly, from a poverty perspective, there has been an almost 50 per cent increase (47.3 per cent) in the number of lone parents with children under 15 years in the same period. The findings show that the majority of lone parents are women but that there is also an increasing number of lone fathers.
- 2.13 The Irish situation is broadly consistent with that across the European Union (EU) as a whole. In the EU, lone parents currently represent 14 per cent of all families with dependent children, compared to 13 per cent in this country⁶ (Barry, Gibney, and Meehan, 1998).

Marital Status and Age of OFP Recipients 1991-1999

- 2.14 Table 2.2 shows Labour Force Survey data on the marital status of one-parent households for 1996. The figures show that over half (51 per cent) were separated and over one-third (37 per cent) was never married. The breakdown

5. In the next Census of Population persons absent temporarily from the household will be recorded. In addition, an 'Other' category will be provided on each household member's relationship to the household head. This will allow respondents to record category of grandchild where lone parents with child/ren are living at home with their parents.

6. Within certain communities this figure is much higher as local studies have shown (e.g. Clondalkin Partnership, 1997; Galway City Partnership, 1998). For example, in Clondalkin, it was estimated that 25 per cent of households are one-parent households. In some local authority housing estates, the proportion of lone parent families exceeds 30 per cent (Corcoran, 1999).

by marital status of lone parents claiming a welfare payment changed in the period 1991-1999. The Review of OFP (2000) noted that there was an increase in the number of unmarried and separated parents and prisoners' spouse recipients and a decrease in the proportion of widows receiving payments.

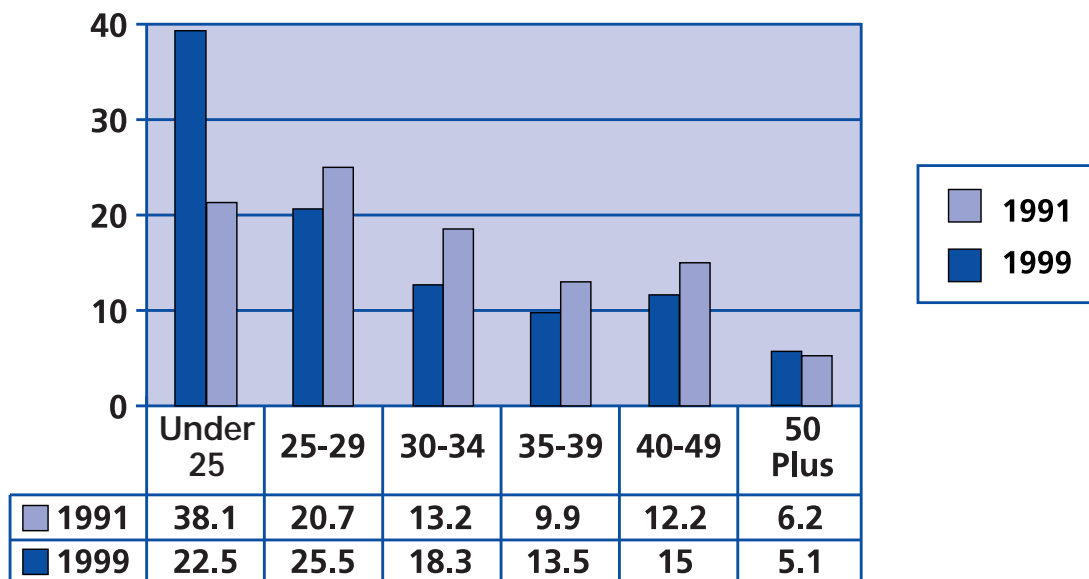
Table 2.2
Marital Status of One-Parent Households, 1996

Category	One-Parent Household
	%
Separated	51
Never married	37
Widowed	12
Total	100

Source: Fahey, Fitzgerald and Maitre, (1998: 196), based on the *Labour Force Survey, 1996*.
In this Table the concept of family is restricted to those families where there is at least one child under 15 years.

2.15 The age profile of OFP recipients has also changed over the period 1991-1999 (Figure 2.2). The picture is one of decreasing numbers of recipients under 25 years and those over 50 and an increase across all other age bands. This may be due to the increasing level of marriage breakdown and divorce. For further details see Review of OFP (2000).

Figure 2.2
Recipients of Lone Parent Allowance/OFP
by Age Group, 1991-1999 (expressed as percentages)



Source: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000: 22.

Tracking change over time

- 2.16 Very little research has been undertaken in an Irish context on the longitudinal effects of lone parents and welfare. A recent study (Swinburne, 1999) examined a sample of unmarried lone parents in receipt of Lone Parent Allowance in 1988 and compared it with a similar sample of OFP recipients in 1998. The research also attempted to document where the 1988 sample was in 1998. Over the ten-year period, there was an increase in the numbers of lone parents in local authority housing (up from 7 per cent to 10 per cent) as well as a substantial increase in the number paying rent in the private sector (up from 15 per cent in 1988 to 26 per cent in 1998). Of the 1988 sample, just over half (52 per cent) were still in receipt of payment in 1998. The average duration of claims was 7.5 years over the ten-year period⁷. Of those who were no longer receiving any payment, half had married and 18 per cent were cohabiting.
- 2.17 Swinburne (1999) also found that a much higher proportion of lone parents (25 per cent) in 1998 was in the workforce as compared to four per cent in 1988. This undoubtedly reflects the general upswing in the economy in the intervening period and the changes in the welfare code which makes it easier for OFP recipients to work and retain their benefits.
- 2.18 Nevertheless, it is notable that this figure falls well short of the labour force participation rates among lone parents in other countries. For example, a study comparing economic activity among lone parents in Ireland and Finland (Ryan, 1997) found that 22 per cent of lone mothers in Ireland were employed compared with 65 per cent in Finland. This can be accounted for in part by cultural factors and, more significantly, from the perspective of this study, the range of supports that are available to working mothers in the Finnish context.

Risk of Poverty

- 2.19 Lone parents have been identified as a grouping at particular risk of consistent poverty in the European context (Eurostat, 2000). This is also the case in Ireland where between 1987 and 1994 there was an increased risk of poverty for households in the State headed by a woman (Nolan and Watson, 1999). While the overall risk of poverty increased from 17.3 per cent in 1987 to 29 per cent in 1994, the risk of poverty for female-headed households with pre-school children (i.e. those less than 4 years of age) rose from 34.1 per cent to 59.9 per cent during the same period (Nolan and Watson, 1999: 27). Significantly, the study demonstrated the positive effect of paid employment in reducing a lone mother's risk of consistent poverty. A non-earning lone mother's risk of consistent poverty increased from 39 per cent in 1987 to 67 per cent in 1994. If

7. The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs carried out similar research for its Review with separated lone parents and got comparable results in relation to duration.

on the other hand, she worked outside of the home, her risk of poverty in 1994 had dropped to 3 per cent (compared to 17 per cent in 1987) (Nolan and Watson, 1999: 70). This issue is discussed in greater detail in Section IV of the Report.

- 2.20 The risk of consistent poverty has deleterious effects not only on the lone parent, but also on the children within the household. A recent study of child poverty highlighted the increased risk of poverty for children in lone parent families:

“Households where the head is working full-time in the home ... contain 17 per cent of all children below the 50 per cent line. In-depth examination of these households reveals that almost three-quarters of the household heads are never married lone parents” (Nolan, 2000).

- 2.21 Previous studies (e.g. McCashin, 1996) have analysed in some detail the adequacy of incomes of welfare-dependent lone parents. McCashin’s study identified an average income for the economy as a whole and looked at the poverty lines (of 40, 50 and 60 per cent) of this threshold. One third of the sample (32 per cent) were below the 50 per cent line and almost half (47 per cent) fell below 60 per cent of this threshold.

- 2.22 McCashin’s study also showed that the lifestyles and living standards of many lone parents were very meagre:

“Virtually none of the women [in the sample] enjoyed what might be called a social life. Almost none of them had had a holiday in recent years, very few of them had a hobby or leisure activity or even bought a newspaper” (McCashin, 1996: 99).

A more recent study by Russell and Corcoran (2000) endorses McCashin’s findings.

- 2.23 Box 2.3 presents in summary a general profile of lone parents taken from a random sample of one thousand new claimants of the OFP. The information provides a broad profile of lone parents in receipt of social welfare at that stage⁸. It suggests that lone parents continue to be among the most vulnerable groups with regard to poverty. As noted earlier, lone parents in receipt of the OFP represent a discrete sub-set of lone parents who have a broad range of needs that in many cases are not being adequately addressed, or at least not being addressed in any integrated way at present. In addition, this group of lone parents are most likely to experience exclusion from the labour market and from other opportunities. This is perpetuated by a range of barriers which prevent lone parents from taking up opportunities in education, training or work (see Section IV). Given that the average age of a lone mother in receipt of OFP is 24 years (Swinburne, 1999), this group is also unlikely to have any meaningful work experience.

8. It should be noted that these statistics differ somewhat from Labour Force Survey data. This is mainly due to the fact that they are compiled at initial claims stage. Data from the Labour Force Survey and data on earnings compiled by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs suggest that the financial position of lone parents improves after a time on OFP.

Box 2.3**PROFILE OF OFP NEW CLAIMANTS, 1999**

- The overwhelming majority (90 per cent) of new claimants were unmarried, while just under one tenth (9.2 per cent) were separated;
- Two-thirds of the sample (66.2 per cent) were aged between 20 and 22 years while 11.3 per cent were aged between 17 and 19 years;
- Two per cent of new claimants were male;
- Eighty-nine per cent of claimants had one child, 6.7 per cent had two children;
- About a quarter of those sampled (25.3 per cent) were in employment;
- At initial claims stage, 20 per cent of the sample were being paid maintenance;
- With regard to housing tenure, 28.9 per cent were paying rent or mortgage at an average of £63 per week;
- Two thirds of new claimants (65.8 per cent) were living with their parents and just over one quarter (26.7 per cent) were living alone.

Source: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000.

Current Policy Issues

2.24 The incremental development of policy regarding lone parents noted earlier has been based on a range of underlying features of the current welfare system. A number of features of the OFP relevant to our later discussion of lone parenthood are summarised beneath:

2.25 *Contingency.* The Irish welfare system is based on provision relating to a range of contingencies including unemployment, lone parenthood and old age and the need to provide supports for particular situations. The OFP is based on the contingency of lone parenthood and the need for social welfare support for parents with children. This element of contingency is expressed in the objectives of the OFP which aims to provide “*the relief of hardship where a person has not secured adequate, or any maintenance from the spouse or the other parent of their children*” (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000). The Review of OFP (2000) concluded that the payment is still justified, as the contingency of lone parenthood remains valid.

- 2.26 *Conditionality*: The long-term nature of the OFP is increasingly regarded by policy makers as inappropriate and one which can lead to welfare dependency. Under current provision, a lone parent can receive the payment until his/her child is 18 years old (22 years if in full-time education). The Working Group on the Treatment of Married, Co-habiting and One-Parent Families (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 1999) looked at this problem but did not agree on a strategy to address it. Equally, the Review of OFP recognised that “*developments in relation to compulsory work tests or time limits on claiming may be neither practical nor acceptable at this point in time*” (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000: 83). The lack of childcare was highlighted as the key barrier to any such approach. However, it also recommended that the issue be reviewed again within two years when access to childcare, training and education opportunities and progression paths to employment are more supportive. This issue is revisited in Sections IV and V.
- 2.27 *Cohabitation and Custody*: As with the issue of conditionality, the Review of OFP (2000) found it difficult to arrive at solutions to the issues of cohabitation and custody of children, two of the main issues in the provision of OFP. One of the concerns about cohabitation is how it is defined. No definition currently exists in statute law. Also, cohabitation is defined differently for social welfare and tax purposes.
- 2.28 With these policy features in mind, the Project Team has examined three key priority areas; access to social services, opportunities for education, training and employment and family formation.

Outline of the Report

- 2.29 Section III examines access to social services for lone parents. Given that they have a higher than average dependency on social services, the key questions are what can be done to improve current service delivery and access and what mechanisms can most effectively be used in this regard?
- 2.30 Section IV outlines the current situation with regard to education, training and access to the labour market for lone parents. In the Team’s view, increased support for individual lone parents is needed to deal with issues that arise in the transition from welfare to work. In addition, it explores some of the features of existing provision and what barriers exist with regard to their delivery and to increased participation.
- 2.31 Sections V and VI explore family formation issues. The Report of the Working Group Examining the Treatment of Married, Co-habiting and One-Parent Families Under the Tax and Social Welfare Codes (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 1999) highlights two features of the social

welfare system which work favourably for the lone parent while he or she remains alone, but which result in substantial loss of income if the lone parent changes his/her status through co-habitation or marriage:

- The social welfare system has identified parenting alone as a specific contingency that 'merits' additional support through a more flexible means-test arrangement than, for example, that which applies to Unemployment Assistance (UA); and
- Entitlement to OFP is not linked to a work test (as is UA) but implicitly recipients of OFP are encouraged to take up employment because of the earnings disregard available to them.

2.32 The key policy question is, therefore, what particular supports, including OFP, are needed and how can tax and welfare provisions be improved and better integrated to reduce disincentives and encourage self-reliance? The long-term nature of the OFP is increasingly regarded as inappropriate and as a failure to encourage self-reliance among people of working age and ability. Section V of the Report discusses these issues in more detail.

2.33 A further concern with regard to family formation issues is that, in reviewing the situation of lone parents, the focus has almost exclusively been on the mother and child. This is not just the case in Ireland, but in other countries too. Fathers in so far as they feature do so mainly in relation to the often thorny issues of maintenance payments and custody arrangements. The Team agreed, therefore, to explore the experience of a small number of fathers with regard to issues around becoming a parent and the supports that are needed (see Section VI).

Overall Policy Framework

2.34 A number of cross-cutting considerations and overarching frameworks have been taken into account by the Team in compiling the Report. In this regard, specific account was taken of the broader anti-poverty and equality frameworks that underpin current policy, and most notably, the commitments under the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. In particular, the Team considers that the broad principles outlined in the Equality Framework of the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* - which makes illegal, discrimination on the basis of gender and marital status - will have significance to the lone parent debate, as will the *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* (NAPS) whose aim is to promote equal access and opportunity as well as self-reliance. Lone parents are one of the target groups specifically identified in the NAPS (1997). The Review of NAPS, which is currently taking place, provides a particular opportunity to strengthen the commitment to addressing the social exclusion which lone parents experience.

2.35 In addition, the Team has taken account of the key role of the *Strategic*

Management Initiative (SMI). Quality customer service is one of the key aims of the *SMI*, which underpins the current modernisation of the public service. The high level of commitment to this change is reflected in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, which identifies the next phase of modernising the public service. The current phase is set to continue to embed the strategic management approach to improve service standards. In this context, it is important to note that the Programme states:

“Improved standards of service follow from a strong focus on the needs of recipients, the setting of challenging standards in service delivery, and making the best use of available resources. ... it is essential to provide for consultation with, and feedback from, both the providers and users of the services in order to identify the required improvements and validate the progress being made subsequently in improving service delivery” (*Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, 2000: 21).

2.36 The Team wishes to particularly emphasise that all of its recommendations should be seen in light of the above frameworks and that the principles underpinning these frameworks should be applied to all policies regarding lone parents. The Team also considers that its recommendations are consistent with the maintenance of sound fiscal policies as outlined by the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines and the Maastricht Criteria.

Data Deficiencies

2.37 The task of reviewing policy for lone parents was made all the more difficult by the fact that there is so little statistical data available on them as a target group. This applies equally to the manner in which official statistics both count and describe lone parent households as well as to the data collected on participation of and usage by lone parents of the range of programmes and services on offer. To address this, the Project Team recommends improvements in data-collection in the following key areas:

- **Greater coverage of lone parenthood in the official statistics that are collected regularly.** This would include:
 - in the Census of Population (and other official surveys such as the Quarterly National Household Survey and the Living in Ireland Survey), inclusion of specific questions about lone parenthood and non-resident parenthood. This would require, for example, that the Census of Population ask the following additional questions: (a) how many children have you parented, (b) how many of those children are living with you and (c) if you are not living with any one of your children, how frequently are you in contact with them? The returns from these questions would throw light on the complex ways people are members of families, even members of a number of different families at the same time. The Team proposes that the National Statistics Board should consider the implications of this in greater detail.

- Collection of additional information on fathers as well as mothers at the birth of each child (Vital Statistics), such as the household status, marital status, and education and employment status of both parents.

2.38 Other areas which need to be addressed include:

- **The development of a programme of research to provide better information to inform the policy debate on lone parents.** In particular, information is needed on the social and psychological well-being of lone parents and their children. A major gap is the absence of a longitudinal study, which would track the experiences of lone parents over time. As a result, it is virtually impossible to gauge people's route into lone parenthood, dependency on the OFP and out-flows. The Family Affairs Unit in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs might consider supporting this work.
- **Specific research needs to be undertaken with fathers to address, in detail, their experiences in relation to the development of policy for families and how that impacts on them.** Again, the Family Affairs Unit should support the development of a feasibility study for this work.
- **A reformulation of the unit of analysis in official statistics should also be considered so that non-resident parents and families within families are taken into account⁹.** At present, a family unit is defined as:
 - (1) a husband and wife (or cohabiting couple);
 - (2) a husband and wife (or cohabiting couple) together with one or more usually resident never-married children (of any age);
 - (3) one parent together with one or more usually resident never-married children (of any age) (Central Statistics Office, 1996: 3).This makes no allowance for non-resident parents (mothers as well as fathers) who may have a substantial degree of contact with their children. This issue is discussed in more detail in Section VI.
- **Within education, training and employment programmes, a system of tracking participants should be developed to provide a more comprehensive picture of the options that lone parents have access to and of their impact at both national and local levels.**

9. In the context of the proposed National Longitudinal Study of Children we also recommend that consideration be given as to how non-resident parents can be captured statistically.

Section III

Access to and Delivery of Public Social Services

Access to and Delivery of Public Social Services

Introduction and Overview

3.1 This Section outlines the key issues in relation to lone parents' access to social services. Here, the discussion concentrates on social services delivered by Government at national, regional or local level, including social protection measures for vulnerable groups. These include income support and welfare delivered by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, health and welfare services delivered by the Health Boards and the Department of Health and Children, taxation services delivered by the Revenue Commissioners and housing and other services delivered by the Local Authorities and the Department of Environment and Local Government. It is important to note that public services often overlap as does provision in conjunction with the voluntary and community sector. This often makes it difficult to determine where the lone parent should go to get assistance, as need is not defined in the same way as services are organised. In its deliberations, the Team concentrated on three broad policy areas; housing, income support and health and personal social services and their impact on lone parents.

The main areas covered in this Section are:

- Policy Concerns,
- Needs of Lone Parents in Service Provision,
- Housing and Accommodation Services,
- Income Support Services,
- Health and Personal Social Services and
- Conclusions.

3.2 Much of the information in this Section is drawn from the consultations undertaken by the Project Team at central and local level (see Section I). On the basis of these consultations, the Project Team identified a number of recommendations in the three policy areas that we examined.

Policy Concerns

3.3 The needs of lone parents for support services have been clearly articulated in much of the research on lone parenthood (Richardson, 2001; National Council for One-Parent Families (NCOPF), 2000a; Commission on the Family, 1998). In

summary, lone parents, because they parent alone, do not have access to the same level of resources, family and social support mechanisms or childcare back-up as two-parent families.

- 3.4 Notwithstanding the fact that a myriad of services has been developed over time, some of these may be unsuitable, difficult to access or lone parents may not know that they exist. There may also be reluctance on the part of some lone parents to take up some of the services on offer. In considering these issues, we have to take account of, and differentiate between, those interventions provided generally to all by statutory bodies, those provided specifically to lone parents by statutory providers and those provided by the community and voluntary sector (with or without the support of Exchequer funds). Our Report concentrates, for the most part, on the first two.
- 3.5 Moreover, a distinction needs to be made between central policy direction and local delivery. To deepen its understanding of the issues involved, the Team invited Government Departments to present their current policies and provision with regard to lone parents. Following on from this, the Team found that there was a lack of coherence between what these Departments understood was happening with regard to support services for lone parents and what was actually happening on the ground. *Generally*, central Departments accepted the need for greater co-ordination between them in addressing the cross-cutting issues that pertain to a range of target groups, including lone parents. Central policy makers also accepted the need for *specific* changes in the way services are delivered and these are outlined in Box 3.1.

Box 3.1

CONSULTATIONS WITH KEY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS: MEASURES TO IMPROVE SERVICE DELIVERY

- The need for training for front line officials within public service agencies who deal with lone parents on a regular basis.
- The refocusing of the SMI. The SMI is the driving force behind policy at Departmental level but often in the implementation process, it does not filter down adequately to the operational levels. It is often at this level that most barriers and blockages occur.
- Analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the targeted approach to the provision of services for lone parents, as opposed to their incorporation into general service provision.

- 3.6 A range of institutional mechanisms exists at central policy level to address the issue of integrated service delivery. The Team stresses, however, the need for delivery mechanisms to be refocused to enhance the interaction between

statutory agencies and Government Departments at central policy level to improve co-ordination and to develop greater integration.

Service Delivery Issues

- 3.7 At the outset of the Project, the Team identified a number of general issues which apply to the delivery of services for lone parents. First of all, interventions targeted at lone parents are often delivered by agencies that may not fully understand the realities of life for lone parents from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Team agreed that the important role that community development projects play in keeping in touch with the grassroots feelings should be especially acknowledged in addressing, *inter alia*, the gap that often exists between statutory providers and their constituencies.
- 3.8 Second, while structures such as Local Development Partnerships and County Development Boards have helped to improve co-ordination between and within agencies and to improve service delivery, this has also placed extra demands on time and resources for the main agencies engaged in delivery of services at local level. Although much has been achieved¹⁰ with regard to improving service delivery, there are still issues that remain unresolved.
- 3.9 In our consultations with lone parents, it was suggested that agencies do not work together in any co-ordinated fashion to address the needs of their target groups. For example, it was highlighted that the same information is demanded by each agency before decisions are made about eligibility for and availability of services. **To address this, the Project Team recommends that an official should be designated at the local level to work with families, particularly, lone parent families. The role of this 'Family Services Worker' would be to identify and remove barriers and blockages within and between agencies.** He/she would work within a local context on behalf of families using a self-help approach to addressing problems identified. He/she would also secure the commitment of agencies at a local level to the development of co-ordinated service delivery. Although support would be available to all families, the Family Services Worker would particularly target lone parents who have a greater dependence on services and who may require active support. The Family Services Worker would play a key role at particular crisis points in the lone parent's life, perhaps at initial claims stage or when there is a difficulty in relation to specific services. This recommendation is returned to later in this Section.

10. For example, an MRBI 'customer satisfaction' survey undertaken on behalf of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs this year recorded an overall satisfaction rating with the Department of 81 per cent among lone parents.

Improving Service Delivery

- 3.10 Attempts have been made to improve service delivery across the range of services that are now available to specific target groups such as lone parents. For example, the Commission on the Family recommended that local offices of the Department should be developed to provide a customised local service to families (Commission on the Family, 1998). The Commission also identified the need to develop an integrated package of support for lone parents and saw the customised service for families as having a distinct role in providing this support. The Team welcomes the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs' 'Families First' approach to the development of policies and services which encompasses a range of measures and programmes introduced in line with the Commission on the Family's recommendations. Such measures include Family Services Projects (discussed later), a families research programme, the development of parenting awareness programmes and the establishment of a Family Affairs Unit in the Department. The Family Resource Centres funded by the Department of Health and Children, where they exist, also provide valuable services at a local level.
- 3.11 In its work, the Team found that, for lone parent families, a number of initiatives have been developed in recent years as pilot programmes, usually in response to a specific identified need. However, the Team considers that the time has now come to mainstream much of the good work that is being undertaken at a local level. One of these initiatives is the Integrated Services Process (ISP), which is a pilot project to promote integration of State agency services in consultation with local communities in four targeted disadvantaged urban areas. Its aim is to develop new procedures to ensure a more focused and better co-ordinated response by the statutory authorities to the needs of the community (Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation, 2000b). The Team's view is that the ISP model offers a lot of potential with regard to developing an integrated approach to service delivery. Other initiatives we examined which attempt to address integrated service delivery are discussed later.

Cross-cutting Delivery Issues

- 3.12 In looking at mechanisms of delivery, a number of cross-cutting issues was identified by the Team. These issues relate more to delivery and access than to any individual service or policy area and include:
- *Need for greater local coverage:* At local level, the findings of the Team indicate that present provision for lone parents is often patchy and under resourced. This leads to gaps in provision. Key issues with regard to provision are quality and relevance to lone parents as a specific target group. For example, locally run programmes for lone parents are often provided on a pilot basis in a small number of areas and unless mainstreamed, are not accessible to all lone parents.

- *Need for greater integration:* The Team considers that, at present, there is a lack of integration across the services that are available for lone parents. It strongly endorses the findings of the NESF's Report No. 6 on *Quality Delivery of Social Services* (NESF, 1995) on the need for a set of operating principles to improve delivery of services to lone parents.
- *Need for more accessible information:* The availability of information for decision-making with regard to changes in an individual's welfare status is very important. The Team's consultations revealed a perception among lone parents that there is a lack of clear information and that they have to rely on informal networks to gain information about entitlements and services¹¹.

Needs of Lone Parents in Service Provision

3.13 A high level of dependence by lone parents on social services means that they have regular contact with service providers and with the range of agencies that operate at local level. A recent policy briefing by the National Council for One-Parent Families (NCOPE) in the United Kingdom (NCOPE, 2000b) supports the principle that improved health, education, childcare and personal social services all have a major part to play in tackling poverty in lone parent families but how they are delivered is crucial:

"Attempts to streamline provision of information and improve the systems for claiming and receiving payments of benefit are all welcome. Making services accessible and seeking the views of service users would also be a great step forward" (NCOPE, 2000b: 15).

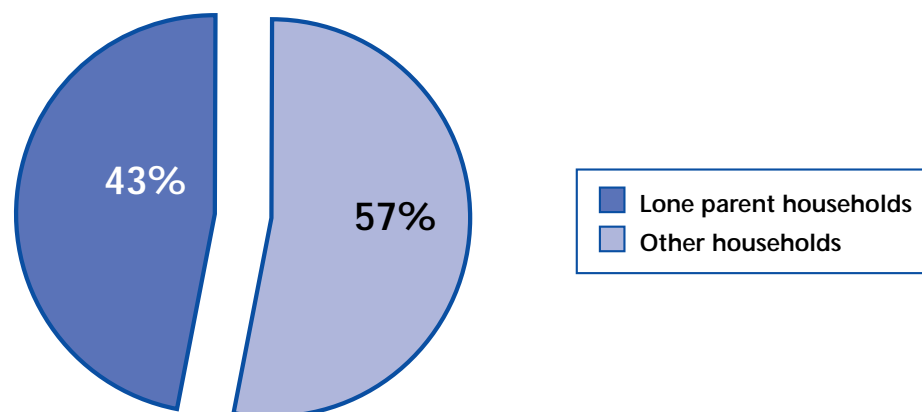
3.14 Difficulties with regard to delivery can sometimes be compounded by the fact that lone parents as a user group experience a lack of social acceptance. For example, early studies of single mothers and deserted wives in Ireland (O'Higgins, 1974; Darling, 1984) documented the stigma that many lone mothers experience. McCashin (1996) also explored the issue of stigma in his work with lone parents. In the United Kingdom, a recent study on housing and support needs of young mothers (NCOPE, 2000a) found that stigma is still something that lone parents experience when accessing services. In this study, young women commented on the lack of information about the process of applying for housing and feeling stereotyped by housing officers. Our local consultations also revealed that, in the Irish context, stigma still exists for lone parents with regard to delivery of services. The issues identified in relation to specific services are discussed below.

11. To address this information deficit, the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, in conjunction with various voluntary groups issues an Information Guide for One-Parent Families and last year an information mail-shot was undertaken to all lone parents in receipt of OFP.

Housing and Accommodation Services

3.15 Young lone parents in particular, often find themselves catapulted simultaneously into independent adulthood and parenthood. Research shows that many lone parents have to establish an independent home quickly and with limited family support (Speak, 1995). Their poor economic status has meant that increasingly, lone parents form a large proportion of households on local authority housing lists (Figure 3.1). The assessment of housing needs undertaken at the end of March 1999 indicated a total of 39,176 households in need of local authority housing (Department of Environment and Local Government, 2000a). Lone parents accounted for 43 per cent of the net need and 67 per cent of these households had one child. This highlights the very significant demand that exists among the lone parent population for social housing. This is returned to later in this Section.

Figure 3.1
Households on Local Authority Waiting Lists, 1999



Source: Department of Environment and Local Government, 2000a.

Living in the Parental Home

3.16 The Review of OFP (2000) found that two-thirds of lone parents, at initial claims stage, live in the parental home. The benefits of living at home are access to family support and lower financial outlay on rent. However, these are counter-balanced by difficulties such as overcrowding, inter-generational tension, and confusion over roles regarding parenting. A number of the lone parents that we consulted expressed dissatisfaction at the way their own mothers got involved in the parenting process and that this caused considerable friction. A further issue raised in the discussions was that many mothers of lone parents need support themselves. They may be relatively young, may have returned to the labour market but often have to leave again to provide childcare while their daughter goes back to school or work.

Homelessness

3.17 As noted earlier, due to the growing numbers on local authority waiting lists, lone parents often have to access emergency accommodation¹². This puts pressure on the limited emergency accommodation that is available. The Dublin Area Action Plan compiled by the Homeless Agency (Homeless Agency, 2001) on behalf of the four Dublin-based local authorities highlighted the need for improved access to waiting lists for all parents with children. The most recent census of homeless people (Williams and O'Connor, 1999) showed that there are proportionately more homeless families and women, some of whom are women parenting alone. A worrying aspect is that very little is known about the children of these women and whether or not they are attending school. A study by Focus Ireland on families in bed and breakfast accommodation in Dublin (Focus Ireland, 2000) highlighted that there has been a substantial growth in the number of households placed in bed and breakfast accommodation; in 1990 the Eastern Health Board placed 5 households and by 1999 this had increased to 1,202 households. One of the reasons for this is the shortage of emergency accommodation, especially for single women and adults with children.

3.18 A Cross-Departmental Team on Homelessness concluded that greater levels of integration between service providers are needed for the issue of homelessness to be addressed in any meaningful way. The Government's Strategy on Homelessness (Department of Environment and Local Government, 2000b) which was endorsed by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion¹³ sets out a number of key proposals which include:

“that local authorities and health boards in full partnership with the voluntary bodies, draw up action plans on a county by county basis to provide a more coherent and integrated delivery of services to homeless persons by all agencies dealing with homelessness”.

3.19 The Team welcomes the plan developed on behalf of the four Dublin local authorities referred to above. The Government's strategy also proposes that a variety of accommodation is required for a range of homeless households, which includes couples and individuals with children. **The Team recommends that, in the provision of accommodation for homeless families, bed and breakfast emergency accommodation used by Health Boards should provide adequate facilities for cooking and for laundry for parents with children.** It welcomes the development in the Eastern Regional Health Authority area that families no longer have to vacate this accommodation during the day and proposes that this be extended to other areas.

12. In 1999 in Dublin, 476 out of a total of 1,202 households (almost 40 per cent) placed in emergency bed and breakfast accommodation by the Health Board were lone parents (Department of Environment and Local Government, 2000a).

13. The Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion includes within its remit, the issue of integrated service delivery in relation to homelessness.

Accommodation in the Private Rented Sector

3.20 The principal comments made to the Team by lone parents on renting in the private sector centred on the *cost* and *insecurity* associated with this option. It was highlighted to the Team that there is insufficient affordable accommodation available in the private rented sector. The Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector (2000) recognised that “*paying market rents is creating hardship for some categories of tenant, particularly those on low incomes*”. The Commission acknowledged that the private rented sector can meet the needs of a range of target groups including those undergoing the break-up or forming of relationships until such time as their longer-term accommodation requirements are clear and those who qualify for, and will in time be allocated social housing. Both of these situations apply to lone parents. The Team endorses the recommendation of the Commission that a refocusing of public policy is needed so that the development of the private rented sector becomes more of a primary objective. In particular, it welcomes the view that there is a need for incentives to encourage an increase in supply as well as measures to make the sector more attractive to tenants such as lone parents.

3.21 In our consultations, it was suggested that landlords frequently have a negative attitude towards renting to people on Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement and to tenants with children:

“Private renting is such a hassle – the constant moving provides no security for the children – anyway, landlords don’t want to take children”.

We recommend that work be undertaken to address the discrimination by some landlords against lone parents on Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement. Proactive measures in this regard should be developed in the context of existing legislation (Equal Status Act, 2000) and implemented.

3.22 The constant need to move was considered to have an adverse effect on the family and, on children in particular, affecting access to extended family support, schooling, and overall physical and emotional security. Many lone parents we spoke with expressed fears about having to leave. In addition, raising money for large deposits, which are often requested is frequently a problem, which necessitates borrowing:

“It is impossible to get the money to pay the huge deposits needed and then you are afraid of getting notice to quit”.

3.23 **The Team recommends that the findings of the Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector Report (2000) be implemented speedily. In particular, it recommends that the proposed Private Residential Tenancies Board be set up as a matter of urgency to look at rent levels, to play a role in monitoring rents paid by groups such as lone parents and to check on malpractice by landlords. In**

addition, it recommends, as a matter of urgency, that the Commission's proposals on rent levels and reviews be implemented, in particular that tenants may not be asked to pay rents greater than the market rate and that they be subjected to rent review no more than once per annum (Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector, 2000).

- 3.24 The difference between the cost of rent and the amount received on Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement¹⁴ was highlighted as a cause of financial hardship. Greater consideration needs to be given in the administration of the payment to the fact that lone parents are seeking accommodation for themselves and their children. Lone parents in receipt of the payment noted that, because rents have increased so significantly particularly in Dublin, the payment is covering less and less of their actual housing costs:

“Rents are so dear at the moment and if you're lucky enough to get a place, there's a big gap because the Health Boards have a maximum that they pay out”.

- 3.25 To overcome the difficulties associated with this, **the Team recommends that the review of Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) reasonable rent limits which takes place each year should take account of rent levels in a given area to reflect actual market costs¹⁵. With regard to security of tenure, the Team welcomes the Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector's recommendation that all tenants be statutorily entitled to continue occupation of a dwelling for up to four years¹⁶ and recommends that this be implemented forthwith.**

- 3.26 Our work with non-resident fathers (see Section VI) also highlighted the importance to them of having good quality accommodation where they can bring their children. The Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness (Homeless Agency, 2001) highlighted the difficulties for single men – either unmarried or separated – to get access to accommodation in both the public and private rented sector. Because they are low down on the list of priorities for local authority housing, it is more likely that their needs will be met in the private rented sector. However, consideration needs to be given on a case by case basis to the housing needs of non-resident fathers, as, under current arrangements, it is unlikely that in applying for SWA Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement, that account will be taken of their needs with regard to their children. We, therefore, recommend that discretion is needed on the part of Community Welfare

14. In 2000 there were approximately 8,600 lone parent recipients of SWA Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplements, which represented about 20 per cent of all claimants (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs).

15. A Review of SWA, which will address the issue of rent limits is currently underway in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

16. The Government accepts this recommendation except where the landlord needs to recover possession for specific reasons. However, this recommendation will not be implemented in the short term.

Officers in making decisions regarding the housing needs of those non-resident fathers who have their children staying with them on a regular basis.

Local Authority Housing

- 3.27 Figure 3.1 earlier highlighted the over-representation of lone parents on local authority waiting lists. It is estimated that 60 per cent of those on Dublin Corporation's housing list are lone parents. The Team's view is that the current systems of waiting lists need to be reviewed and in particular, an examination of how one-parent families are treated should be undertaken. As lone parents represent a growing category of household for local authority housing, more attention should be given to their specific needs.
- 3.28 Greater levels of information are also needed as lone parents expressed concern at not knowing where they were on the waiting list. The Team welcomes recent changes in the systems used in both Fingal and Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Councils where time on the waiting list is taken into account in the allocation of housing. It proposes that similar measures should be developed in other areas so that lone parents on waiting lists for long periods of time will have their housing needs met.
- 3.29 The priority for many lone parents is to secure local authority housing. The importance of being housed in areas where there are support networks was seen by those consulted to be of major importance. In response to the crisis in housing supply (NESF, 2000b), attempts are being made to link type of housing need to the make-up of the households on the waiting list and in that regard the number of two bedroom units have significantly increased in recent years. The Team welcomes this development as it means that smaller families (including some lone parent families) will have improved access to the housing stock.
- 3.30 **We recommend that lone parents' particular accommodation needs should be considered in the design, development and allocation of a range of housing types. We also recommend that in the strategic plans on housing being developed within local authorities, provision should be made for community support facilities (including information services, resource centres and family support services).**
- 3.31 The Team's consultations found a lot of frustration on the part of lone parents with the poor levels of communication with the local Housing Department – it was often perceived to be impossible to get concrete information, for example, concerning an individual's standing on the waiting list:

"Housing officers won't give you five minutes – if you do get to see someone, you can't get information and nobody can give you an answer".

- 3.32 In our discussions, concern was expressed at the condition of some public housing estates where lone parents are housed – it was felt that these conditions negatively affect residents’ health and coping abilities and are totally unsuitable environments to raise children. Recent developments with regard to tenant estate management initiatives can have a significant bearing on the general conditions that prevail in local authority housing estates. We propose that continuing developments in this area should take account of the recommendations of the NESF’s Report on *Social and Affordable Housing* (NESF, 2000b) on the need for ongoing training and development of staff. To further compound their difficulties, it was felt that lone parents are often housed together with little or no social mix. The views of local authority staff were that as far as possible, housing is allocated to ensure a social mix but that residualisation of many estates has resulted in the situation whereby lone parents are over-represented in some areas.
- 3.33 Last November, the Department of the Environment and Local Government announced a new initiative on Joint Public/Private rental accommodation for those on rent subsidy. A new series of local authority-based pilot schemes to make private rental accommodation available to households eligible for local authority housing, who would otherwise be dependent on assistance through the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme, are to be established. The purpose of the pilot schemes is to set up direct arrangements between local authorities and private landlords/owners to accommodate households who would otherwise obtain SWA rent supplement. The launch of the scheme had been set for earlier this year subject to agreement of liaison arrangements between Health Board CWOs and local authorities. This has been delayed due to wider issues raised by CWOs with the Departments of Health and Children and Social, Community and Family Affairs regarding their future role in the welfare service. The Team’s view is that these types of initiative are potentially very valuable to lone parents and that once implemented can produce significant positive impacts on their housing needs. **It strongly supports this initiative and proposes that it should be implemented and, when it is set in train that it should be monitored for its impact on lone parents.**
- 3.34 The Team also welcomes the work of the Planning Group which was set up under the aegis of the Department of the Environment and Local Government following a Government decision in principle to develop a new local authority based rental assistance scheme to examine the issue of future rental assistance arrangements. In addition, the Government’s *Action on Housing* (Department of Environment and Local Government, 2000c) indicated that the Group would specifically explore the potential of a more supply-based approach to rental assistance (in contrast with the purely subsidy-based approach of the SWA rent supplementation scheme). This could involve arrangements and measures to promote improvement in supply and standards of rent-assisted accommodation,

including possible partnership or other arrangements between local authorities and the private sector. Work of the Planning Group is at an advanced stage. **The Team strongly recommends that direction be given at the highest political levels to ensure that its work on supply issues, addresses the currently unmet needs of many lone parents.**

Income Support Services

3.35 Adequate income support for lone parents is a key prerequisite to any discussion about their needs. The Commission on the Family (1998) explicitly states that:

“income support for lone parent families is and must continue to be an essential priority for State policy in relation to families” (Commission on the Family, 1998: 102).

In its consultations, the Project Team met with a substantial number of lone parents who expressed concern about making ends meet and about having enough resources to live on. Sources of income include OFP, SWA, income from earnings and maintenance from a former partner/spouse in some cases. We did not look at the OFP *per se* as the Review of OFP (2000) provides a very clear outline of the payment and its relevance as a source of income. The Team notes that under the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (2000), a Working Group was established to examine the issues involved in developing a new benchmark for adequacy of all welfare payments and this is to be welcomed¹⁷. **We recommend that the OFP be uprated taking account of this benchmark.**

3.36 In our consultations with local service providers, the issue of debt incurred by lone parents was highlighted. The experience of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) coordinators and money advisors consulted is presented in Box 3.2 below.

Box 3.2

VIEWS OF MABS PERSONNEL ON INCOME SUPPORT FOR LONE PARENTS

The issues highlighted in the Team’s consultations were:

- The ‘dire poverty’ of those lone parents who were living solely on the OFP and not availing of any other supports.
- The Household Budget support mechanism developed by MABs cannot be used unless all the household bills are in the lone parent’s name.
- Very often the self-esteem of some lone parents is very low and they frequently have health and social problems.
- Food poverty is an issue for themselves and their children.

17. A report is due in July of this year.

- 3.37 With regard to maintenance as a source of income support, it is difficult to assess the number of OFP claimants who are receiving maintenance from the other parent (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000: 107)¹⁸. A Maintenance Recovery Unit (MRU) within the Department determines the level of contribution which a liable relative has to pay, pursues those who fail to co-operate and monitors and reviews those who are making contributions. The 1999 Annual Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) (Government of Ireland, 2000) concluded that the total number of liable relatives making maintenance contributions (estimated at 3.5 per cent of the total number of recipients of OFP) is small and that the Department's performance in the collection of maintenance is "*ineffective and of little deterrent value for liable relatives to meet their commitments*"(Government of Ireland, 2000: 102).
- 3.38 Issues to address in the recovery of maintenance are detailed in the Review of OFP (2000). The Team considered that, at present, the payment of maintenance is problematic in two respects. First, the payment is sometimes unreliable and, therefore, insecure from the lone parent's point of view. Second, in the recent past maintenance received was deducted from the lone parent book so there is no incentive to seek it. The Team supports the principle that maintenance, where paid, should enhance the income of lone parents and that there should not be penalties for receiving a maintenance payment. In particular, the Team welcomes the recommendation in the Review of the OFP that recipients should be allowed to retain 50 per cent of maintenance received has now been accepted. This is now incorporated in the Social Welfare Act (2001). **The Team recommends that the issue of maintenance should be reviewed on a regular basis.**

Supplementary Welfare Allowance

- 3.39 In addition to the OFP, lone parents may also be entitled to Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplements and other payments¹⁹ if they are not in full-time employment. SWA is funded by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs but administered by the Department of Health and Children through the Community Welfare Officers (CWOs) in each Health Board area. The SWA Review being undertaken by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs is due to report shortly and will provide some direction for the future development of SWA. It is envisaged

18. At claim stage only separated claimants are required to make efforts to seek maintenance from the other parent. In the case of unmarried claimants, the efforts condition is not an issue until the claim has gone into payment.

19. The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme is operated within the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme and gives assistance towards the cost of clothing and footwear for children of school-going age. In addition, lone parents may be eligible for a £5 weekly allowance under the National Fuel Scheme during the winter months, subject to certain qualifying conditions.

that the streamlining of the SWA payment which is part of the review will improve access by groups such as lone parents.

3.40 During our consultations with lone parents, the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowances which are paid through SWA by the CWOs each year (from June to September) were specifically alluded to. In particular, it was noted that recipients had to apply each year and provide the same information even when their situations had changed very little. Following a recommendation by the Comptroller and Auditor General, there is provision now in the Social Welfare Act (2000) for Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowances to be paid automatically each year to recipients of Child Dependent Allowances. **The Team endorses the view that Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowances should be paid automatically to those in receipt of means-tested payments and recommends that this be implemented as a matter of priority.**

3.41 Other issues regarding SWA as an income support measure for lone parents include the lack of information about the payment – in particular the Exceptional Needs Payments²⁰ – and how decisions are made about eligibility. The lack of clarity about Exceptional Needs Payments leads to feelings of stigma among potential recipients. There is a commitment in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (2000) to the development of guidelines on SWA. In addition the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs is reworking the administrative guidelines, which it makes available to CWOs. **The Team recommends that in this work, lone parents' needs should be particularly acknowledged and that information on the payments should be readily accessible and user-friendly.**

Other supports

3.42 While adequate income may be regarded as one of the key supports needed, it is most effective when combined with a range of other supports that engage proactively with lone parents. For example, the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, in addition to its role in income support, has often engaged in proactive measures including employment services etc. A more recent pilot initiative, the Family Services Project (FSP) (1999-2000) which has lone parents as a key target group is presented in Box 3.3 below.

3.43 The scheme, which operates in three areas (Finglas in Dublin, Togher in Cork and Waterford) is designed to offer a one-stop shop approach to service delivery at a local level, for families at risk²¹.

20. Exceptional Needs Payments are generally paid for once-off exceptional expenditure, which could not reasonably be met out of weekly income. Payment may be made for bedding or other essential household equipment, funerals and other unforeseen large expenses.

21. The Northside Partnership has also recently introduced an initiative aimed at supporting families through the family conference method.

3.44 Through the FSP, an enhanced programme of support is available to a small group of customers with complex needs including very young lone mothers, other parents rearing children without the support of a partner and welfare dependent spouses in households with children. Evidence from the project to date shows that there is significant potential for this type of intervention which leads the lone parent through 'the system' and identifies opportunities on an individualised basis. The experience of those working in the FSPs is that some lone parents are highly articulate and self-reliant in seeking out these opportunities. Some, however, lack confidence and are not connected into their communities to any significant extent. The Team welcomes the FSP approach and its relevance to lone parents.

Box 3.3

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL, COMMUNITY AND FAMILY AFFAIRS PILOT FAMILY SERVICES PROJECT

In its consultations, the Project Team met with the three co-ordinators of the Family Services Project. A number of aspects of the project were highlighted.

The key target groups for the project are:

- One-Parent Families
- Families of the Unemployed.*

The objectives of the project are to:

- Provide expanded information on a range of services provided by the statutory, community and voluntary agencies in the local area
- Develop a process of strategic referral
- Case management of those who present themselves at the local office
- Co-operation with the range of other agencies that are also providing services in the local area.

Specific aspects of the work that have taken place to date in the pilot areas include:

- In Cork considerable enhancement of the information section within the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs Local Office has taken place. A database and local directory of services have been developed.
- In Finglas the project has engaged in a proactive approach with young lone mothers (under 20 years) to identify what their education levels are and what potential there is for them to return to education or training. With other community partners, the FSP has developed a programme to develop the skills of lone parents.

- In Waterford emphasis has been placed on co-operation through the hosting of inter-agency seminars on key issues such as literacy. Staff development and training has also been promoted as a means of changing perceptions about some of the target groups they are working with.

Source: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

* Carers also featured in the Cork pilot project.

An evaluation of the above pilot initiative (Nexus, 2000) also concluded that a significant demand for the services provided exists among ‘client groups’ and that the initiative should be developed into a Demonstration Phase which would extend provision to nine areas and would run over a period of two years. **We recommend the development and enhancement of the initiative in line with the results of the evaluation and that lone parents should continue to be a specific target group for its work.**

3.45 We considered that enhanced training and staff development within Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs Local Offices might also lead to better access and referral. However, we concluded that this would only go part of the way in meeting the demand that exists among lone parents for an individualised path through the services that are provided and that a non-threatening environment is needed for this to happen. We concur, however, with the evaluation of the pilot phase of the FSP initiative that

“virtually the entire staff of the Social Welfare Local Office, including Inspectors and others involved in service delivery should be involved in the FSP” (Nexus, 2000).

3.46 **Further to our earlier discussion, we also recommend that the position of a ‘Family Services Worker’ be established and that he/she should be located in the FSP structure or in the Department of Health and Children’s Family Resource Centres referred to earlier, where available.** We propose that the Family Services Worker would work with all families but that lone parent families would be particularly targeted. The Family Services Worker would work within the public service at local level and would liaise with the lone parent on helping him/her to identify needs and how those needs might be addressed most appropriately. The Team’s view is that the Family Services Worker would interface with the range of agencies that lone parents have to deal with on an ongoing basis. We considered a number of models in this regard and suggest that the Family Services Worker would most resemble the mediator in the Local Employment Service, except with responsibility for health and social service delivery issues. He/she would support the development of a self-help model for lone parents based on community development principles. He/she would also play a role in the

development of locally-based support networks for lone parents²². We concluded that, in some areas, the roles and responsibilities assigned to the Family Services Worker might be similar to those of some Community Welfare Officers and that in the restructuring of SWA, this should be taken into account.

- 3.47 Other issues were also considered by the Team to further streamline service delivery for lone parents. In particular, the Team welcomed the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs proposal on the localisation of OFP from Sligo to its local offices. While the Department has wide experience of operating and controlling schemes administered locally, concerns were raised on two grounds; first that decision-making at a local level might not be as objective as that at a centralised location and second, that localisation would result in the loss of a centralised body of knowledge and expertise on the claims process. However, on balance, it was agreed that meeting the income support needs of lone parent families at local level would result in a more efficient delivery of the payment. The Team welcomes the fact that a pilot initiative on localisation of payments has been recently established in Tallaght.
- 3.48 The Team recommends that an evaluation of the pilot scheme in Tallaght be undertaken at the earliest opportunity to identify issues of coherence. **Before the local delivery is put in place, the Team also recommends that a training programme should be developed for local staff at an inter-agency level on issues of sensitivity *vis a vis* lone parents. This training should be developed in consultation with lone parents.**

Health and Personal Social Services

- 3.49 The Team adopted a broad view of the services that are available to lone parents in this area. We agreed that the services provided by health care professionals such as Public Health Nurses are a potential source of support but that their level of contact with individual families is generally not significant unless that family is deemed to be at risk. As well as the health care and related supports from Public Health Nurses and childcare services provided by social workers, the Team explored the potential for greater levels of family and social support, including the development of support networks at a local community level for lone parents. It welcomed the recent establishment of a new Family Support and Mediation Service by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs which will provide support for families under stress as well as for couples who have decided to separate so that they can resolve issues such as joint parenting and the division of family assets.

22. The Family Services Workers would differ from the Family Support Workers employed by Health Boards whose aim is to assist families experiencing difficulties under the supervision of a social worker.

- 3.50 Our research with young fathers (Section VI) and other research (Richardson, 2001) found that information about contraception often comes from informal sources and that the ability to link sexual activity with the possibility of becoming pregnant was limited. The Team acknowledged that more work of a preventative nature is required with young people around issues relating to sexuality, pregnancy, relationships and parenting issues. We endorse the findings of the Joint Committee on Family, Community and Social Affairs (2001) and, in particular, the recommendation that a National Monitoring Committee should be established to monitor the effective implementation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in all schools. **We recommend that supports are needed at both school and community levels to ensure that both young men and women have access to the range of information that they require regarding relationships, sexuality and parenting.**
- 3.51 The Team supports the Teenage Parenting Support Project, run by the Department of Health and Children on a pilot basis, which offers support for single teenage parents in the local context, in conjunction with the local maternity hospital. It also welcomes the development of initiatives such as the Teenage Health Initiative supported by the Eastern Regional Health Authority which targets teenagers ‘at risk’ of pregnancy and which aims to bring about changes in attitude in relation to personal development and sexual activity. Our consultations with both young women and with young men (see Section VI) highlighted the need for these kinds of interventions.

Establishing Support Networks

- 3.52 A number of studies (e.g. Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Gingerbread, 1999) suggest that social networks for lone parents can greatly assist in addressing some of the difficulties experienced by them in relation to social isolation and accessing services. These networks are potential sources of material resources as well as of in-kind help. Social networks are also important in providing information about access to resources.
- 3.53 The need for social support networks and outlets was acknowledged, particularly by the older lone parents that we spoke to:
- “Some sort of support group would be great and to get the children involved as well – some time you could have a night out with the parents and the children could have a day out so your kids don’t feel that they are the only ones”.*
- 3.54 Lack of supports was regarded by those from the community and voluntary sector as a key contributor to the isolation experienced by lone parents and which often leads to depression or mental difficulties:
- “The whole issue of mental health affects all parents but particularly lone parents – there is a need to have some kind of support within the community – not necessarily counselling – sometimes that is a bit too dramatic”.*

- 3.55 The role of support groups was also highlighted in our consultations with non-resident fathers (see Section VI). It was agreed that men, although they do not participate in the same type of support networks as do their female counterparts or to the same extent, greatly benefit when they do.
- 3.56 **The Team recommends that a budget line should be agreed to provide resources for the development of support networks for lone parents i.e. peer support groups as a matter of urgency. This might be facilitated through the Family Support Projects (FSP) discussed above or the Family Resource Centres which are funded by the Department of Health and Children. The FSP network, when enhanced, could offer – in a local setting – meeting space and childcare so that lone parents could avail of support group facilities.**
- 3.57 The Team acknowledged the work that is being undertaken in programmes like Springboard, which focuses on families at risk in disadvantaged communities. It also noted the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* recommendation on the refurbishment and upgrading of local health centres and agreed that it is necessary that such centres should be “*multi-functioning providing a comprehensive range of services for different care groups*” (Government of Ireland, 2000a: 95). However, with specific regard to lone parents, the Team considered that programmes targeted at disadvantaged areas are also needed if lone parents are to be given the attention they require. In this respect, the Team recommends two particular initiatives, which it feels could respond more adequately to the needs of lone parents. These are:
- the Strategy documents of the County and City Development Boards, which will be in place by 2003. Each of these documents should contain proposals for addressing the needs of lone parents at county level.
 - RAPID – the Team’s view is that initiatives such as RAPID, which will focus on integrated delivery, could provide a significant opportunity for including a focus on lone parents, not only in relation to personal social services but across all policy areas – including housing and income support as well as labour market considerations (see Section IV) – in a more holistic manner.

Given that lone parents are overly represented in their usage of local services, we contend that they should represent one of the key target groups for the RAPID area implementation teams that are shortly to be set up²³. The consultation phase, which will form a key aspect of the initiative, offers an important opportunity to ensure that a focus on lone parents’ needs is incorporated.

23. RAPID stands for Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development. This programme was included in the National Development Plan (2000-2006) and focuses on the 25 most deprived communities in the country. Area Implementation Teams are being established to draw up a plan and to develop an integrated focus across the social inclusion measures in the National Development Plan.

Service Provision and Delivery in the Rural Context

- 3.58 Lone parents living in rural areas share many of the characteristics of those in urban areas, although some rurally-based lone parents experience additional disadvantages. These include distance from services and amenities, irregularity and expense of public transport and social isolation.
- 3.59 The NESF's Report on *Combating Social Exclusion in Rural Areas* (NESF, 1997a) identified the particular difficulties experienced by lone parents in rural areas including lack of access to childcare and transport facilities. In addition, it highlighted that many lone parents continue to live in their parents' house in rural contexts (as in urban settings) leading to overcrowding as well as a lack of accurate data on the numbers of lone parents in rural areas (NESF, 1997a: 36).
- 3.60 In our own consultations, transport was highlighted as a major issue for all lone parents when accessing services in the rural context. A car was considered a necessity for people living in rural areas and small towns. Lack of adequate transport caused huge difficulties for those who wanted to attend courses in nearby towns or to deliver their children to childcare facilities. In general, it was felt that public transport was suffering from severe neglect. As one lone parent in a rural area pointed out:
- “You need a car – it’s not a luxury – it’s a necessity especially if you have to bring kids a few miles to school”.*
- 3.61 A number of innovative approaches to the issue of rural transport has been operated through Local Partnerships, LEADER and the Community Development Programme. In addition, an Interdepartmental Working Group has been established to look at rural transport and a Public Transport Partnership Forum was established under the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. The Team welcomes these initiatives as well as the commitments in the National Development Plan to the development of policy on rural transport and on the establishment of pilot transport schemes. The Rural Transport Initiative supported by ADM also provides some valuable learning on how to tackle the issue of transport in rural areas. A rural transport study (Farrell, Grant, Sparks, 1999) commissioned by ADM recommended that appropriate resources be made available for rural transport. It also proposed that transport be factored into accessibility of all public services/programmes. **The Team strongly endorses this proposal and further recommends that the valuable learning from community-based transport initiatives should be transferred to a greater number of rural areas.**
- 3.62 Finally, the Team also considers that, as in disadvantaged urban areas, support structures for lone parents are also needed in disadvantaged rural areas and that this can best be pursued through the CLAR (the rural equivalent of RAPID)

programme. The Team recommends that rural areas be agreed upon as a matter of urgency within the CLAR programme by the Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development and Enterprise, Trade and Employment and that consultation with lone parents should take place as a matter of priority.

Conclusions

- 3.63 Much work still needs to be done to improve access to services for lone parents. In particular, the areas of housing, income support and social services are key areas of provision of essential supports for lone parenthood. We recommend that specific measures should be undertaken in the supply and allocation of housing and that greater levels of user-friendly information should be provided for groups like lone parents with regard to housing issues. We also recommend that income support issues should remain on the agenda for lone parents to ensure that they maintain an adequate level of income. We also propose that a range of community-based family support programmes and structures should be put in place to address the very specific needs that lone parent families experience in their day-to-day lives.

Section IV

Education, Training and Work Issues

Education, Training and Work Issues

Overview and Context

- 4.1 This Section concentrates on the labour market context and the supports that are available for lone parents with regard to education, training and employment. Participation in employment has been widely recognised both internationally (e.g. Finlayson and Marsh, 1998) and in the Irish context (e.g. Commission on the Family, 1998) as the means of offering lone parents the best prospects for improving income and standards of living for themselves and their children.
- 4.2 The NESF Report on *Alleviating Labour Shortages* (NESF, 2000c) examined participation in the Irish labour market and showed that considerable potential remains for mobilising domestic labour supply. The Report identified the labour market situation of the least skilled, and barriers to women's employment as the key challenges to be addressed. Both of these are particularly relevant to lone parents in receipt of OFP, the majority of whom are women with low educational attainment. Key policy issues in this regard include quality of provision, choice and flexibility.
- 4.3 The research available suggests that young women who become lone parents are especially at a disadvantage when compared with their peers. As highlighted in Section II, lone parents under 25 years represented over one fifth of all OFP recipients. The demands of parenting alone at such a young age and without adequate supports such as childcare and financial resources militate against continuing education and participation in training.

The Section is divided into four parts:

- Barriers to Participation,
- Addressing the Needs of Lone Parents in
 - Education
 - Training
 - Employment and
- Conclusions.

Barriers to Participation

- 4.4 Evidence of the difficulties faced by lone parents in accessing mainstream

programmes is reflected in the limited information available on their participation in these programmes (see Table 4.1) (information is based on number of starts rather than number of places).

Table 4.1
Participation by Lone Parents on Mainstream Education, Training and Work Programmes, 2000

Programme	Total no. of starts	No. of lone parent starts	Lone parents as a % of total
Specific Skills Training	15,395	187	1.2
Traineeship Programme	1,778	26	1.5
Apprenticeship Programme	14,137	2	0.01
Community Youth Training Programme	2,143	127	5.9
Back to Work Allowance/ Back to Work Enterprise Allowance	39,000	840	2.2
Jobs Initiative	3,300	743	22.5
Jobstart	343	81	23.6
Community Employment	47,475	14,196	29.9
Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme	5,189	633	12.2

Source: FÁS, 2000; Department of Education and Science, 2001.

The data show that Lone-Parents starts on mainstream programmes, with the exception of Community Employment (CE), Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), Jobstart and Jobs Initiative (JI) has been poor to date. In most cases, lone parents make up less than 2 per cent of the total number of participants.

- 4.5 The needs of lone parents with regard to education, training and work vary considerably. Many of their needs are similar to those of the long-term unemployed, to women returning to the work force and to women from poor households. However, the needs of lone parents are generally more acute than any of these.
- 4.6 Some lone parents, particularly those at a younger age choose ‘parenting’ as their ‘career’ for the immediate future (McCashin, 1997). However, serious disadvantages arise for those who have left school early and are not reintegrated into the education system at the earliest opportunity. By the time these lone parents are considering employment as an option, their choices are severely limited by the lack of basic qualifications, work experience and up-to-date skills.

Consequently, younger lone parents may view long-term reliance on social welfare as the only viable option. For all lone parents, combining work, education or training with family responsibilities can be extremely difficult, in the absence of State-funded childcare if support is not available from other family members or friends.

4.7 The overall finding of the Team with regard to education and labour market initiatives is that there is a range of programmes being provided by many different agencies, both statutory and community/voluntary. For statutory programmes, eligibility varies on criteria such as age, length of time on OFP and eligibility for retention of secondary benefits and FIS (see Annex 3). Allowances paid for participation on courses also vary. Much of what is provided at a local community level is valuable, *albeit* mostly run on a pilot or short-term basis. The lessons of the work to date in these programmes have been outlined in evaluations and the contribution of the work to lone parents well-recognised. However, we found that coverage of these programmes tends to be confined to particular areas, possibly a Local Partnership area or catchment area of a community group. It is the Team's view, however, that now is an opportune time to move on to a more structured programme of provision, with more comprehensive coverage at local levels and clearer direction from central policy level on the changes needed to improve access for lone parents as a key target group. The Team explored a number of avenues whereby the learning from community-based initiatives could be taken up and mainstreamed. **These included the designation, within each Department, of an official with responsibility for mainstreaming, similar to the model that currently exists for equality issues. We also recommend that the newly established National Employment Services Advisory Committee should, as part of its remit, consider issues in relation to mainstreaming.**

4.8 In the development of programmes for improving access by lone parents to education, training and the labour market, a number of institutional barriers present themselves. The more important of these are:

- lack of family-friendly arrangements;
- lack of childcare;
- lack of progression;
- complexities in the interaction between tax and welfare; and
- loss of secondary benefits.

Each of these is discussed briefly below.

Lack of Family-Friendly Arrangements

4.9 A report by the Equality Authority (Fisher, 2000) highlighted the need for family-friendly work arrangements, both formal and informal to assist employees

to combine employment with their caring responsibilities and personal life outside the workplace. A 1999 study carried out for the Equality Authority showed that 36 per cent of new mothers in the workforce called for more flexible work arrangements to enable them to combine a job with family commitments (Employment Equality Agency, 1999). According to employers lone parents, of whom 38,800 out of a total of 127,800²⁴ are at work, face particular problems in this regard.

- 4.10 The Team acknowledged that the need for family-friendly working arrangements applies to all parents but that, lone parents, because they are parenting alone, have very acute needs when it comes to reconciling work and family life. We welcome the work being undertaken under the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (co-ordinated by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Equality Authority), to devise a national framework for the development of family-friendly policies and reiterate the views expressed in a recent IBEC statement on the issue

“the development of appropriate measures to assist in reconciling work and family life are important to underpinning economic, social and equality objectives ... identifying different options that have the potential to meet the many diverse needs of different employers and their employees is particularly important” (National Framework Committee for the Development of Family-Friendly Policies, 2001).

- 4.11 One of the key issues for all parents, but more specifically for lone parents who wish to train or work is the availability of flexible working hours which allow for the combination of work and home life. For example, most courses are full-time (9.00am-5.00pm) and parents of school-going children find it difficult to participate. FÁS courses are run between 8.30am and 4pm. Examples of special arrangements do, however, exist at local level e.g. the Women Returners' Course in Tallaght starts at 9.30am. **The Team recommends that more emphasis should be placed on the development of flexible working times in programmes for lone parents.**

- 4.12 Apart from childcare provision (see below), work-related issues include discriminatory questions asked by employers regarding children and child-minding, the terms of parental leave and financial supports available during maternity and parental leave²⁵, the availability of flexi-, part-time and tele-working, and mobility/travel issues. In our discussions with the key national lone parent organisations, OPEN, Treoir and PARC, in particular, identified lack of family-friendly policies as a barrier to participation. Our consultations with fathers (see Section VI) also highlighted the need for family-friendly work arrangements.

24. This figure refers to all lone parents and not just OFP recipients.

25. The *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* provides for a review of the Parental Leave Act 1998, which is due to take place in 2001 in consultation with the social partners.

Lack of Childcare

4.13 Lack of quality, affordable childcare is the single biggest issue identified consistently by all parents, and in particular, those who are participating on education and training programmes as well as those who are in the labour market. Childcare has received much attention in the last number of years but there is no agreement as to how the issue should be resolved (see discussion in NESF, 2000c). From the perspective of lone parents, a number of specific issues in relation to childcare are important. For example, reimbursement of childcare costs is essential if lone parents are to be persuaded to participate in active labour market programmes. The Expert Working Group on Childcare (1999), for example, recommended that participants from low-income families on training or education programmes should have their childcare costs reimbursed. The current state of the childcare market presents particularly difficult policy challenges in relation to the reimbursement of childcare costs. Most childcare in Ireland takes place in the informal sector with a small proportion taking place in the formal sector. Efforts are being made to professionalise childcare provision, both in relation to standards and tax compliance. However, in the interim, parents have little option but to use informal arrangements. **In this regard, the Team recommends that more flexibility needs to be applied in the reimbursement of childcare costs; in particular, that community projects rather than individual participants should be given responsibility for the vouching of programme participants' childcare costs.** This type of arrangement should be viewed as a practical interim measure subject to childcare market conditions and should be reviewed regularly in order to ensure that such payment arrangements are used to reinforce rather than undercut formal childcare provision. **We also recommend that the £50 limit currently being applied to a range of initiatives be increased to keep pace with rising childcare costs.**

4.14 With the exception of the CE scheme (see below), provision for childcare is not available locally for many of the labour market strategies²⁶. Last April, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment announced a childcare package for women of £50 per week for those participating on selected training initiatives²⁷. Again, as with the childcare measures provided by other Departments, childcare costs will have to be vouched. The Team recognises that issues of quality assurance and support for the formal childcare sector underpin these policy decisions. However, it suggests that more flexible approaches like that proposed above are needed for lone parents with childcare needs.

26. Local Partnerships undertook special initiatives in conjunction with FÁS which were aimed at upgrading the skills of childcare workers on CE schemes. A new FÁS Traineeship in Childcare will shortly be available and it is expected that lone parents will have access.

27. It is not yet clear whether this will apply to lone parents who already receive an earnings disregard, which is considered as an allowance for childcare.

4.15 With regard to the supply of childcare, a National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee is responsible for the development of the childcare infrastructure and Childcare Committees are being established regionally to enhance provision at local level. Approximately £250 million has been allocated in the National Development Plan to improve the supply of childcare. **The Team recommends that, as part of this work, there should be a substantial increase in the number of State-provided childcare places, especially after school places in disadvantaged communities and that this should be supported through the work of the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee. Planning is required at central level in the allocation of these places so that they are responsive to local needs. We also recommend that resources should be allocated for capacity-building of community groups who, up to now have been involved in the provision of sessional childcare but are being strongly encouraged to develop full-day care. Community-based childcare providers should also be facilitated to undertake service planning so that provision is in line with usage of services.**

Lack of Progression to Employment

4.16 Implicit in most education, training and employment programmes is the assumption that participants will progress to employment or to further education and that the programme is an option on this pathway. There is, however, little awareness of the need for tailored progression pathways which would involve mentoring and facilitation of the lone parent in deciding where he or she wants to go. A study of participants on FÁS schemes between April and July 1997, tracked their progress one year after completion of the training or work scheme (Economic and Social Research Institute, 1997). Sixty-one per cent of those who completed training schemes were in jobs. While fewer CE participants found jobs (34 per cent)²⁸, they tended to be better paid. The highest placement rate (72 per cent) was for FÁS Specific Skills Programmes where lone parents are seriously under-represented. Progression to employment is discussed later in this Section.

Complexities in the Interaction of Tax and Welfare

4.17 The interaction of the social welfare and tax systems gives rise to many complexities which make it extremely difficult for a lone parent to work out the relative impact of taking up employment, education or training and which combination operates in his/her best long-term interest. For example, taking up a relatively low paid job to supplement the OFP may provide a higher income in the short term, but may not be beneficial in making a permanent transition from welfare to work (see below). Annex 4 outlines the range of options that are available to lone parents and what the impact of each option is on OFP, tax and secondary benefits. The information presented shows that decisions about some

28. This represents the proportion of participants in employment eighteen months after completing CE.

of the options identified may not be taken lightly as a range of factors may be affected. It also highlights that there is no consistency across options in relation to how entitlement is applied.

Loss of Secondary Benefits

4.18 Eligibility criteria and the impact of participation on social welfare payments and secondary benefits are important factors in the take-up of various programmes and employment opportunities by lone parents. The main benefits which have a bearing on the decision by lone parents to opt for employment include:

- Rent Allowance or Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplements
- Medical Card
- Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowances.

Where choices made impact on the loss of some or all of these benefits, this can have a severe effect on take-up. In particular, loss of Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement was identified in our consultations as a disincentive to taking up employment and this needs to be addressed. We note that measures introduced to ensure a tapered withdrawal of this benefit have been designed to offset this disincentive. This is discussed in more detail in relation to employment issues below. As already mentioned, we endorse the view, outlined in the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report and also presented in Section III, that Back to School Allowances should be paid automatically to those in receipt of Child Dependent Allowances or other means-tested payments.

4.19 With regard to medical cards, since 1996 these can be retained for up to three years when a lone parent (or other welfare recipient) takes up employment. **The Team recommends that, as a priority, the guidelines developed by the Department of Health and Children in conjunction with the Health Boards on retention of the medical card should be published and disseminated.** We welcome the recommendation in the Interim Report of the Medical Card Review Group (2000), set up under the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, that documentation explaining entitlement to a medical card and setting out guidelines for medical card assessment should be the same for each Health Board and should be available in printed form, on the Internet and accessible at a health facility in every locality. We propose that the administration system be reformed to proactively support automatic retention for the agreed three-year period so that entitlement does not have to be established each year. We suggest that the Family Services Worker recommended in Section III above could also have a role in the dissemination of information produced.

Other Barriers

4.20 Other barriers for lone parents in the take-up of education, training and

employment have been identified in the research and include low self-esteem and de-motivation, fear of the educational environment, and costs of participation (Ballyfermot Partnership Project, 1997; Murphy, 1998). Where opportunities for education and training are being developed with lone parents in mind, these personal development issues also need to be considered and addressed by putting in place the appropriate supports. This is discussed below.

Addressing the Needs of Lone Parents

- 4.21 From its deliberations, the Team concludes that with regard to education, training and work, the needs of lone parents can be met in two ways:
- (i) through programmes designed specifically to respond to the unique difficulties they have with regard to parenting alone; and/or,
 - (ii) through a process of adapting mainstream programmes for lone parents.
- 4.22 The Team's view is that both of these approaches are valid but that whichever model is applied, a range of personal and other supports also need to be put in place at local level. These might include lone parent support networks (see Section III), pre-training and taster courses, personal development and support for a range of issues. **The Team recommends in particular that, where mainstream courses (especially VTOS and Specific Skills Training) are provided, a package of supports for lone parents should be put in place to ensure that the specific needs of this group are addressed.**
- 4.23 The Team fully endorses the view in the NESF's Report that the Local Employment Service (LES) (NESF, 2000a), where it exists, can provide a personal network for the lone parent²⁹ and support her/him through a progression route which will eventually enable her/him to access mainstream programmes. In this regard the LES serves as a gateway to relevant options and, eventually to the labour market. Government policy at present is that the LES should focus on the long-term unemployed. However, the NESF Report recommends that lone parents should comprise one of the target groups for the service particularly in areas where there is a high incidence of lone parenthood. **We recommend, therefore, that more lone parents be specifically targeted through the LES, where it exists and that progression routes for lone parents should be developed through the LES mediation process.**

29. This Report indicated that in 1999, at 28 per cent, lone parents had the lowest placement rate amongst LES clients. Data supplied by FÁS would suggest that lone parents comprise 25 per cent of the 2000 caseload and a current placement rate in employment of 22 per cent. Various LES have reached local agreements with FÁS Training Centres regarding the allocation of places on programmes to lone parents. In 1997, lone parents accounted for 18 per cent of the LES caseload over a six-month monitoring period (Eustace and Clarke, 1998). In 2000, just over 3,500 lone parents availed of LES services.

4.24 At a specific policy level, the Team identified three key issues, which it considers underline the current problems for lone parents with regard to education, training and work. These are:

- Lack of in-school and out-of-school support for young lone parents to prevent early school leaving and lack of tailored programmes for those who wish to return to education;
- Lack of targeted and flexible training and poor rates of progression from programme to programme as well as lack of access to mainstream programmes particularly for lone parents in the 18-25 years age group; and
- Complexities in the tax and social welfare systems that make the transition from welfare to work difficult and a lack of incentives to take up paid work.

Each of these issues is discussed below, with recommendations by the Team for addressing the current difficulties.

Education Issues

4.25 Data from the 1996 Labour Force Survey (see Table 4.2) show that lone mothers are more than twice as likely as their married counterparts to have no qualifications, while married mothers are twice as likely as lone mothers to have a third-level qualification. Similarly, data presented in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs Review of OFP (see Figure 4.1) shows that almost half of the lone parent population (46.7 per cent) in 1997 had only primary level education (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000: 24). One quarter had education up to Junior Certificate level and less than 10 per cent had third-level education. As a result, access to educational opportunities which provide a route out of poverty is limited.

Table 4.2

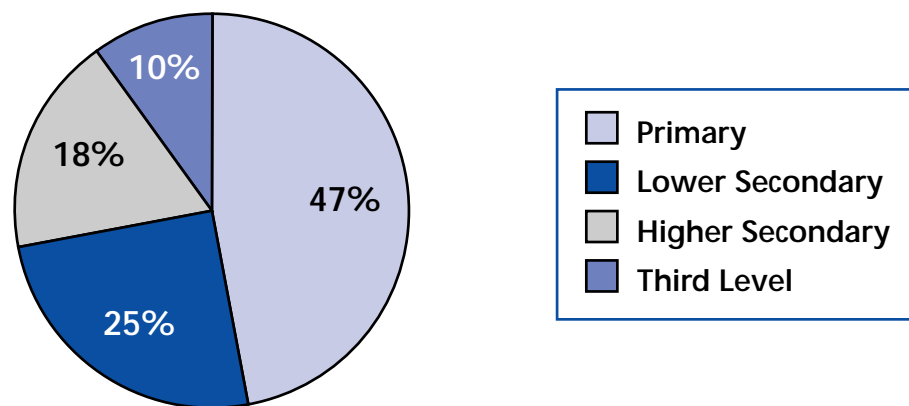
Highest Educational Qualifications of Married and Lone Mothers, 1996

Level of Education	Married Mothers %	Lone Mothers %
No Qualifications	9	23
Junior Certificate	25	38
Leaving Certificate	42	27
Third-Level Qualification	24	12
Total (%)	100	100

In this Table the concept of mother is restricted to those who have at least one child under the age of 5.

Source: Central Statistics Office, *Labour Force Survey*, 1996. Cited in McKeown, 2001.

Figure 4.1
Levels of Educational Attainment among Lone Parents, 1997



Source: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000.

The Team identified that one of the main problems for lone parents is that educational provision is not tailored to meet their specific needs, whether they are young mothers who want to remain in the education system while pregnant³⁰, or whether they are mothers with dependent child(ren) seeking to return to education.

4.26 Many lone parents leave school early with no formal qualifications. For those aged over 15 years who have left school, provision is mainly through Youthreach, which offers national certification, guidance counselling and psychological supports. Accessing vouched childcare so that they can attend Youthreach is for many of these lone parents a major difficulty. In the case of young mothers, in particular, little or no supports are available for them to remain in the education system. Apart from VTOS, lone parents are not identified as a specific target group within the education system. In later life, it is more difficult for them to take up adult and continuing education options. Research commissioned for the

White Paper on Education, *Learning for Life* (Department of Education and Science, 2000) highlighted the three major influences on participation in further education among those hardest to reach as:

- A financial incentive to participate;
- A job guarantee or clear evidence of improved job prospects resulting from participation; and
- The availability of suitable courses.

30. It should be acknowledged that teenage parents represent a small percentage of the overall lone parent population. However, their needs are important from the point of view of targeting to ensure that they do not become welfare dependent.

4.27 Within the education system, there is not enough support for the young women – still relatively small in number – who become pregnant and who wish to remain in school to complete the Leaving Certificate. In addition, for those who left school without a formal qualification there are few opportunities for them to re-engage with the system. Key issues for those who wish to remain in full-time education are:

- A lack of national strategies, policies or funding;
- Reluctance among schools to recognise that students who become pregnant may wish to remain at/return to school;
- Training for teachers on how to deal with pregnant students;
- Financial support at third level;
- Low self-esteem among pregnant students;
- Accessing childcare (cost and places);
- Assisting the student in finding time to study; and
- Specific counselling/support/guidance services.

4.28 In the course of its work, the Team looked at initiatives, which aim to ensure access to education for those who may become pregnant while at school. It welcomes the Department of Education and Science Home Tuition Scheme, which provides individual tuition for up to 10 hours per week for those who because of illness or pregnancy may be out of school for some time. We propose that awareness of this initiative should be better promoted. The Team also considered the work of a locally-based project in Waterford (see Box 4.1) that is trying to address some of the issues identified above.

Box 4.1

WATERFORD STUDENT MOTHERS' GROUP

Waterford Partnership and the local Home School Community Liaison co-ordinator developed an initiative to establish a student mothers' group in order to support pregnant secondary students to complete their education and to gain access to further education, training and employment. The project was originally funded by Area Development Management Ltd. but is now supported by the Department of Education and Science. The main aims of the project are:

- To enable young women who are pregnant, or who have babies, to stay on in mainstream education,
- To help them recognise the benefits of education in breaking dependence on the State in the long-term,

- To support the young mothers in their combined role of mother and student,
- To raise awareness about ‘teenage pregnancy’,
- To lobby for policy and legislation on ‘teenage pregnancy’ in Ireland.

Features of the programme include:

- The development of group-based support and personal development,
- Guidance on employment skills, job finding and interview skills,
- One-to-one sessions with students and parents.

The results to date show that the 12 students who participated all remained in school. The project has proposed the use of the Home School Community Liaison network to run a national programme, based on this model for student mothers.

One of the main conclusions from this work so far is that where counselling, childcare and peer support were available for young mothers, it was easier to stay at school and to complete examinations.

The Team recommends, as a first step, that resources should be provided for mainstreaming the Waterford Student Mother’s Project and other similar early intervention and support projects as a preventive measure for lone parents leaving school early.

4.29 For those lone parents who return to education, the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) provides financial assistance. The Team welcomes the changes in the BTEA since 1998, which equated the amount of the allowance with that paid to VTOS participants. However, persistent barriers to take-up included the non-availability of childcare. A major development impacting on lone parents was the introduction of childcare for VTOS, Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centre participants in 1998. The model provided funds to VECs for direct provision of crèches, purchase of places in existing crèches and payment of child-minders, subject to a limit of £50 per week per child in full sessions, tax compliance and registration as required under the Childcare Acts. There are 1,308 children and 1,050 parents on these programmes benefiting from the measure. However, the difficulties highlighted above with regard to vouched childcare apply here.

4.30 There are acknowledged gaps in current provision for educationally-disadvantaged women of which lone parents represent a particular sub-group. In recent years the new 8-15 Early School Leavers and the Stay in School Retention Initiatives have concentrated on giving flexible funds to schools to enable them

to target priority investment in an integrated in-school and out-of-school programme, in the context of concerted planning, targeting and monitoring arrangements. Under these initiatives, there is some flexibility to provide supports for lone parents, although funding is limited.

- 4.31 The Women's Education Initiative (WEI)³¹ (and its successor, the Education Equality Initiative (EEI)) was established to develop models of good practice that can be mainstreamed. A guide to the WEI identified a number of gaps in provision that relate to the needs of lone parents:

“there is a need to build local capacity in relation to women's education; support structures for women engaging in further education need to be developed; new ways and means of accrediting and certifying women's learning need to be explored; partnerships between women's groups and statutory organisations need to be developed; the learning processes from women's education need to be mainstreamed; progression pathways for women returning to learning need to be developed at all levels and policy lessons need to be identified and reported upon” (WRC, 1998).

These issues are especially relevant to the debate on lone parents' participation in education. In particular, flexibility in the design and delivery of education programmes for lone mothers is most likely to impact positively on participation rates among this group. **In this regard, the Team recommends, in particular, that programmes such as VTOS should be provided on a part-time basis with flexibility in relation to access.**

- 4.32 To determine the particular education needs of lone parents, the Project Team explored a number of local initiatives. It agreed that the Women's Education Initiative provided some useful examples of how programmes can be developed with the needs of the target group to the forefront³². The Team welcomes the development of the EEI as the demonstration phase of the WEI but notes that the initiative is already oversubscribed. **It recommends that similar initiatives like the WEI should be developed with flexible, locally-based provision so that lone parents can participate.**
- 4.33 For young lone parents (under 23 years) who go on to third-level education, difficulties often arise. For example, third-level participants are assessed for grants on the basis of their parents' income. This creates a disincentive for young parents who wish to progress through the education system. We welcome recent

31. Supported by the Department of Education and Science, this programme operated from 1998 to 2000 and funded 13 locally-based projects. Projects of most interest to the Team included the Cherish 'Moving On' course; a Mothers' Programme in Newbury House, Cork which delivered tailored adult education training to young mothers aged 18-22 and provided childcare to participants and the Dublin Adult Literacy Centre (DALC) Dreamcatchers project, which delivered basic education courses to mothers with literacy difficulties who were not participating in adult education courses.

32. Some of the lessons of the WEI are being implemented on a phased basis in the context of the White Paper on Adult Education.

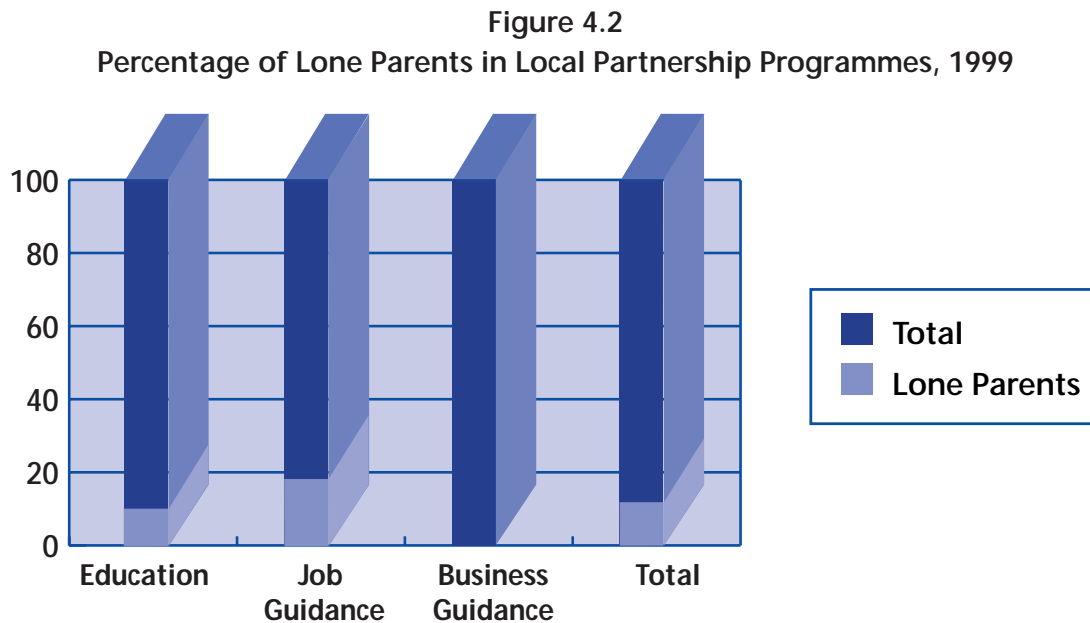
policy developments, which provide top-up grants for the poorest students which may include lone parents. **We recommend that lone parents in third-level education should be assessed in their own right, as is the case in the means-test for the OFP.**

Training Issues

4.34 Lone parents have difficulties with access to mainstream training due, *inter alia*, to a lack of targeting and tailoring of programmes. It is important to note that lone parents are not specifically named as a target group in the National Employment Action Plan. Factors affecting participation include:

- entry requirements,
- the full-time commitment required on the majority of courses,
- the times courses are run,
- the limited number of locations where they are run, particularly in rural areas; and
- courses are not structured in a family-friendly way.

4.35 The task of addressing these is compounded by the fact that there is very little information on the participation of lone parents on mainstream programmes (see Section II). Although a wide range of training programmes is offered by agencies like FÁS, the take-up by lone parents is negligible (see Table 4.1) mainly because most programme provisions are not primarily designed to address the needs of lone parents and help them to reintegrate into the labour market. With regard to locally-based and community initiatives the experience is the same. For example, data provided by ADM (see Figure 4.2) indicate that lone parents accounted for a small proportion (10 per cent) of those assisted by Local Partnerships in 1999 (ADM, 2000). When all of the participation rates are taken together, only a small proportion of economically active lone parents (possibly no more than 10,000 or 12,000 out of a possible 128,000) is being accommodated by current schemes, with the most significant take up on CE.



Source: ADM, 2000.

4.36 The Project Team accepts that many of the gaps identified above also apply to other groups in the population. However, the difficulties encountered by lone parents are intensified due to their particular circumstances. Provision is particularly limited for those aged under 25 who have low educational attainment and/or who left school early. Unless this group can be encouraged and better supported to return to education, their employment prospects, particularly over the longer term, will be poor and they are likely to remain dependent on social welfare, even when their children are older. While this group falls within the age criteria for FÁS mainstream programmes such as Traineeships, Apprenticeships and Specific Skills Training, other entry requirements (including education) can act as major deterrents to take-up by lone parents. Overall, lone parents represented only 2 per cent of participants who commenced training on FÁS programmes in 1999. Participation on work schemes, however was much higher with 30 per cent of 1999 starts represented by lone parents, 96 per cent of whom were on Community Employment. **The Team recommends that more active labour market programmes be made available and accessible to lone parents, following an assessment of their needs through the Local Employment Service network, where it exists.**

4.37 Another issue identified by the Team is that pre-training provision at a local level is *ad hoc* and not integrated or linked into mainstream programmes. The duration and quality of such training varies considerably. Box 4.2 outlines a number of principles of best practice which the Team noted in the course of its work. **In particular, the Team recommends the endorsement of these principles by all statutory agencies.**

Box 4.2

SOME BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES IDENTIFIED BY LOCAL TRAINING INITIATIVES*

- Tailoring programmes more to the needs of parents including suitable hours of working and childcare.
- One-to-one support/counselling/mentoring are important ingredients in ensuring completion and progression. Ideally, peers should provide such support. The importance of peer support should not be underestimated, particularly for lone parents who often feel a sense of isolation.
- Work placement should be a component of training and should include follow-up evaluation.
- Training which is linked to job prospects with a focus on skills for specific sectors is more attractive than general skills provision.
- Training provision needs to adopt a 'whole person' approach – personal development is as necessary as the acquisition of specific skills.
- Where training initiatives are aimed at specific employment sectors, employers should be involved from the start so that their needs are designed into the course and that they ensure a commitment to providing flexible employment.
- Clear information on the impact of tax and social welfare benefits of taking up various options is provided to lone parents from the outset.

*These reflect the results of evaluations of a range of initiatives undertaken at local level by Local Partnerships, women's groups and the LES.

Employment Schemes

4.38 By far the most significant programme to date, from the point of view of lone parents, has been Community Employment (CE). CE provides temporary part-time employment and support for training for up to one year for the unemployed and for lone parents³³. In the case of lone parents, income under CE is treated in the same way as earnings for OFP purposes. Secondary benefits can be retained provided total income is less than £250 per week. The medical card is retained regardless of income.

4.39 As previously noted, CE has the highest participation rate on the part of lone parents across all Government programmes. At the end of May 2000, lone parents accounted for 27 per cent of participants on CE. In areas where lone parents represent a high proportion of the population, participation in CE can be significantly higher than the average. For example, the Northside Partnership estimates that 46 per cent of CE participants in the Baldoyle area are lone parents.

33. Another component of CE, the Part-time Job Option allows for employment up to three years and is also available to lone parents.

4.40 The recent changes to eligibility rules regarding CE means that, in the absence of similar provisions in the work place or alternative schemes, there are now no real choices for lone parents under 25 years. For those for whom CE remains the only option, a further difficulty is the short-term nature of the scheme, which often does not allow for training to be completed to any satisfactory degree. In these circumstances, we propose that participants should be allowed to complete training undertaken in the course of CE schemes.

4.41 A key feature which ensures high levels of participation of lone parents on CE is that OFP can be retained in addition to the CE allowance. Other features are that it:

- is locally-based,
- is part-time,
- allows for the retention of secondary benefits, and
- provides childcare.

Other benefits of CE in addition to those noted above, included the personal development and confidence-building that the programme afforded participants.

4.42 In its consultations, the Team addressed the issue of CE and what lone parents in particular thought of the programme. All of the lone parents consulted considered that CE schemes had a lot to offer – opportunities to retrain, support and companionship, additional financial support which did not affect secondary benefits, and working hours which suited family responsibilities.

4.43 However, there is a lack of progression from CE to other initiatives in education, training or, indeed, in employment. Research has found that progression by lone parents to employment, at 15 per cent, was less than half of all CE participants (but that take-up of part-time work was higher). The proportion who returned to unemployment (35 per cent) was higher than for other participants (27 per cent) ³⁴ (Deloitte and Touche, 1998). Some restructuring of CE has taken place in the last year to address this and other issues. **The Team recommends that the learning from CE should be taken account of in the upcoming review of Active Labour Market Programmes being undertaken by the Standing Committee on the Labour Market.**

4.44 The Social Economy programme also offers opportunities to lone parents over 35 years to participate in social economy enterprises. However, the Team argues that the issues for CE with regard to lack of progression, also apply to the Social Economy programme. We endorse the viewpoint highlighted earlier that

34. These data is based on analysis conducted by FÁS Dublin North and Dublin West regions, which have the highest numbers of lone parents.

improved access to active labour market programmes for lone parents should be promoted to avoid the situation, that when they reach 35 years they are so labour market disadvantaged that it is virtually impossible for them to get a job. The 10 per cent exemption that applies to under 35s covers, for the most part, those lone parents who may wish to participate.

Employment Issues

Welfare to Work

- 4.45 The Team looked at the earnings disregard that lone parents have access to in recognition of the associated costs of employment including childcare. We endorse the findings of the NESF Report No. 19, *Alleviating Labour Shortages* (NESF, 2000c) that earnings disregards have a role to play in decisions about taking up employment opportunities and agree with its recommendation that all income disregards should be consistent, simple and transparent, that net pay should be used and that they should be reviewed regularly.
- 4.46 When the OFP Tax Allowance is combined with the OFP income disregard, the incentives for lone parents to return to work have been significantly improved in recent years. However, an analysis of the impact of a return to work by *the unemployed* on their secondary benefits (Goodbody Economic Consultants, 1998) found that the retention of certain benefits, e.g. Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement, Christmas Bonus, Fuel Allowance, etc. resulted in a bias in favour of part-time work over full-time work, particularly for lone parents. Moreover, for those in private rented accommodation, the loss or retention of the Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement had a major impact on the monetary incentives to take up either full-time or part-time work. The main problem is that the means assessment for SWA supplements considers any ‘additional’ income over and above the basic SWA rate (£84 personal rate, £13.20 child dependent rate) received by certain categories of social welfare claimant as means. The net effect is that anyone who has to claim an SWA supplement will have their weekly income reduced to the level of the basic SWA rate – i.e. the lowest rate payable³⁵.
- 4.47 This is consistent with views we obtained from lone parents, several of whom recounted situations where they had to give up employment because they lost out on benefits. Goodbody’s analysis also found that the changes introduced to the means-test applying to lone parents meant that those living at home had a strong incentive to work. The incentive for those living in local authority housing was significantly less while the incentive for those living in rented accommodation to work was extremely low. This is because extra income earned

35. For example, the OFP is paid at the rate of £85.50 for the parent, and £15.20 for each child. Thus a lone parent (with 1 child) applying for SWA rent supplement will have £3.50 of their basic weekly payment assessed as means, and deducted from the value of any supplement payable.

above a certain threshold will go exclusively £1 for £1 toward defrayment of rent, which is considerably higher in the private sector (see Section III). Changes introduced in the 2000 Budget are designed to reduce such anomalies.

- 4.48 The lack of comprehensive information on the financial implications of taking up education, training or employment options has been identified by many lone parent groups as a barrier to participation. Indeed, research by Mulvey (1995) indicates that decision-making about employment is highly influenced by financial implications. Annex 5 to the Report sets out a number of calculations, which show the net effects of taking up work for lone parents. This shows that there are many caveats to be considered for the individual lone parent and that professional assistance would be required to determine the net cost/benefit to the individual.
- 4.49 Lone parents with low levels of educational attainment are most likely to be accessing low-wage jobs in the labour market. Therefore, if they are to have any incentive to work, their overall income (in terms of wages earned and benefits retained) must be packaged equitably. To this end, the Project Team endorses the recommendation made in the NESF Report on *Alleviating Labour Shortages* that the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs should set up a Welfare to Work Policy Unit to review welfare to work provision across the social welfare system and to develop a comprehensive strategy. **As a first step in this approach, the Team proposes that a Welfare to Work Colloquium should be held by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs in conjunction with the main players to consider issues with regard to taking up employment for welfare-dependent groups. We recommend that lone parents' interests should be represented in the Colloquium so that their needs are taken account of.**

Lone Parents and Work

- 4.50 Most studies of labour force participation show that women with higher levels of education, greater levels of work experience and those able to command higher wages are more likely to participate in the formal economy. Those with pre-school children, or who have spent a long time out of the labour market and those married to unemployed men are significantly less likely to participate (see Yohalem, 1980; Lewis, 1992; Barry, 1996). As noted earlier, the obstacles faced by lone parents in taking up employment are similar to those faced by other low-income women with children. Lone parents, especially those with children have a preference for part-time flexible employment options, which offer routes to full-time employment at a later stage when children are older. Our consideration of this issue is outlined in more detail in Section V.
- 4.51 In the course of its consultations with lone parents, the Team explored the issues that influence decisions by women about returning to work. Consistent with the

research in this area, lone parents expressed a strong desire to return to the labour market but felt constrained and trapped for a variety of reasons. Chief among these was the certainty of the reduction or loss of the Rent Allowance/Supplement when they returned to work.

“When you go out to get employment, you’re going to be taxed, your Rent Allowance is going to be affected, you have no childcare benefits and your medical card will be affected” and,

“I feel that it is not financially viable to go back to work – I know exactly where I am with my book and my Rent Allowance and am able to budget”.

- 4.52 Losing secondary benefits, particularly the Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement and/or the Medical Card meant that returning to work was not considered a viable option. The sharp cut off in entitlement when people reached the exemption limit had serious consequences in terms of quality of life. It was noted that current regulations encourage lone parents to work in the informal economy.
- 4.53 The Team considered a range of approaches to improving the transition to employment for lone parents. We looked at international models of welfare to work strategies for lone parents (see Annex 6) and concur with the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs Review of OFP (2000) that, in the absence of *“childcare, training and education opportunities and progression paths to employment”* (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000: 85) and welfare reforms, the imposition of a work test on lone parents is not a viable option. (This is also considered further in the context of welfare reforms in Section V). Instead, we consider that the Welfare to Work Colloquium recommended above should highlight the issues for lone parents with regard to work options.

Conclusions

- 4.54 The Team’s view is that persistent barriers remain for lone parents in relation to access to education, training and employment. While many of these barriers apply to all parents, for lone parents they are exacerbated by the fact that they are parenting alone. Our findings show that particular supports are required for lone parents and greater levels of flexibility with regard to provision are needed if the participation rates of lone parents are to be increased to any significant extent. The Team identified that the key features which need to be applied to programmes if they are to be attractive to lone parents include flexible working hours and the provision of childcare.

Section V

Family
Formation:
Cohabitation
and Social
Welfare Issues

Family Formation: Cohabitation and Social Welfare Issues

Overview and Context

- 5.1 As noted earlier, the Project Team in its consultations found that cohabitation was a central source of concern for lone parents and for statutory agencies. The issue for lone parents was that the cohabitation rule prevented them from developing new relationships not even to mention cohabiting, as they were concerned that their OFP would be affected. The issue for statutory agencies and for IBEC was that a greater incidence of cohabitation exists than the official statistics suggest. A further area of concern, particularly for the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs inspection staff was the difficulty they experience in carrying out investigations and in determining cohabitation *per se*.
- 5.2 The Team decided to look in more detail at the issue of cohabitation as it relates to lone parents and their patterns of family formation. We accepted that it was a complex issue that has been discussed in much of the policy debate on welfare and tax in recent years (e.g. Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000; Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs 1999b; Expert Working Group on Integrating Tax and Social Welfare, 1996) but without any definitive agreed conclusions. In this Section, we set out our consideration of the issue. Our deliberations have been based on a number of policy directions that have been agreed in other policy fora and which include issues such as gender equality and choice. We have not made a specific recommendation for policy change as we suggest that this area requires more analysis than has been afforded it here. We explored possible ways in which the work could be further developed including its consideration by the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness Working Group on Administrative Individualisation and the establishment of a new group specifically to look at the issues. The Medium-Term Review of Tax and Social Welfare currently being undertaken by the National Economic and Social Council also has relevance to some of the issues raised here. **We recommend that the Oireachtas Committee on Family, Community and Social Affairs in the first instance, should consider the ideas presented below so that a direction is established for the continuing development of the work in this area of policy.**
- 5.3 We look at two issues in this Section. First, we consider the operation of the cohabitation rule in 5.4-5.11 below. Second, as lone parents are at a high risk of experiencing consistent poverty, we need to consider the possible impact that the current system is having on their likelihood of remaining in poverty long-

term and, in particular, on their decisions to form two-parent families where the poverty risk would be substantially less. In this regard, we consider, for the most part, the financial disincentives that face people moving off OFP that can act as barriers to family formation. These financial disincentives arise because the value of a payment to a single person and a lone parent taken together is greater than the payment to a cohabiting couple. This differential arises for a number of reasons, including the view that there is economy of scale savings for a cohabiting couple. The main areas addressed in this Section include:

- Application of the ‘Cohabitation Rule’,
- Current Policy Context,
- Mapping the Problem,
- Addressing the Disincentives,
- Implications for Policy and
- Conclusions.

Application of the ‘Cohabitation Rule’

5.4 At the outset, we have very little information about the number of cohabiting couples which makes it difficult to assess the extent of the disincentive that exists³⁶. It is also important to note that there is no definition in law of cohabitation and so establishing that a couple is cohabiting is complex. At present, Inspectors from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs visit the household and make an assessment, which is then passed to a Deciding Officer. To assist with the assessment process, the Department has produced guidelines (see Annex 7), which specify five criteria³⁷ that Officers should consider. These are listed in summary below, together with examples of the types of information collected under each heading.

- **Co-residence** – i.e. do they reside in a single residential unit?
- **Household relationship** – e.g. do they share finances and/or duties?
- **Stability** – e.g. how long have they been residing together?
- **Social** – e.g. do they socialise, take holidays together?
- **Sexual** – e.g. do they have a child/ren of their union?

36. The 1996 *Census of Population* was the first Irish Census in which information on cohabiting couples was explicitly sought. It found that just under 3 per cent (31,229) of households comprised cohabiting couples, two-fifths of whom (12,630 households) had children. About half of cohabiting couples with children (51 per cent) were in relationships where both partners were single, while in a further 13 per cent both partners were separated. The Working Group Examining the Treatment of Married, Cohabiting and One-Parent Families Under the Tax and Social Welfare Codes (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 1999b: 119), estimated the number of cohabiting couples was between 40,000 – 45,000 in 1999. It should be noted that only a small proportion of these may be lone parents who are cohabiting and not all of those will be in receipt of OFP.

37. It is not necessary that all five elements be present before cohabitation is established.

- 5.5 Officers are advised that it is necessary to establish co-residence – that the couple actually or normally reside at the same address – and that some of the other elements are also present.
- 5.6 As noted earlier, the issue of cohabitation occupied a central feature in our consultations with lone parents and with statutory and voluntary organisations. Comments were made about the intrusive nature of assessment visits and there was a perception among the lone parents with whom we consulted that homes can be searched for proof of cohabitation³⁸:
- “They check the bathroom in case you have Lynx (men’s deodorant) – they’re looking for some sort of thing to show that there is some male living there – they can look in your cupboards and things like that”;*
- “It’s almost like having an affair on the Social Welfare or on the Department”;* and
- “My fellow was in the house for two days and I got reported – I couldn’t believe it and I said ‘can he not come up and see his own child’”?*
- 5.7 Official records show that most cases of termination of OFP arise when the claimant informs the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs of his/her changed circumstances (this might include marriage). In total, about 2,000 claims (less than 3 per cent of the OFP claims in payment) were terminated on grounds of cohabitation in 1999, the majority of which (85 per cent) were the result of claimants voluntarily informing the Department of their changed circumstances and surrendering their book. Less than 300 cases (or less than 0.5 per cent of all claims) were terminated as a result of investigations though many more were investigated. This illustrates the difficulty involved in establishing cohabitation. We know very little about those cases and further research is required in this area. In 1999, there were 558 appeals to the Appeals Office in relation to OFP, of which 42 per cent were disallowed or withdrawn (Social Welfare Appeals Office, 2000: 11). Again, we do not know on what basis these appeals were made.
- 5.8 The information available would seem to indicate that the incidence of cohabitation among lone parents in receipt of OFP is not considerable. However, the Review of OFP (2000) commented that there is a general perception that cohabitation is more prevalent than these figures would suggest, while admitting that there is little hard evidence to support this contention. In our consultations with community groups and State agencies there was also a sense that cohabitation was more common than official figures would suggest.
- 5.9 The consultations we carried out also indicated that there was some ambiguity among officials in relation to the application of the cohabitation rule.

38. Social Welfare Inspectors do not have the power to search a house and can only do so with the consent of the person and if they are not willing no inference may be drawn from this.

A distinction tended to be made between couples where both were in receipt of social welfare and couples where the woman was in receipt of OFP and the man had a good job. There was a lot of sympathy for the former, where it was felt that the extra money meant a substantial cash difference for a poor family (see Table 5.1 below for actual differences). Key issues for these households are the difference in how the money is distributed within the household and the degree to which the main child-carer (often the mother) has access to sufficient money to pay for household expenses. These issues hold for all unemployed couples.

- 5.10 Mixed opinions were voiced with regard to the application of the cohabitation rule. Some officials voiced concerns that resources were not being directed to those in most need, and that the system was being abused. The following comment reflects this position:

“It causes resentment at local level and you wouldn’t blame them – they (married couples) see lone parents getting everything and they get nothing – there are huge discrepancies at the moment”.

- 5.11 **The Team recommends that, for the cohabitation rule to be applied more effectively to lone parents, the following should be implemented:**

- (i) the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs should monitor the operation of the guidelines to ensure they are applied in a consistent manner across all regions. Training and regular updates should be given to Inspectors on difficulties encountered. Where appropriate, the Department should consult with lone parent groups as part of this process;**
- (ii) information on how cohabitation is assessed should be issued when the payment is initially approved; and**
- (iii) support should be given to advice centres and local groups to provide information on cohabitation and the effect on one’s payment; this might be one of the roles of the Family Services Worker proposed in Section III.**

Current Policy Context

- 5.12 Our second concern with cohabitation was the disincentives that exist for lone parents who wish to enter into a relationship. Before addressing the disincentives that exist, a number of policy questions need to be considered. These are:

- If it is agreed that the State should not, even inadvertently or unintentionally, create disincentives for one-parent families to become two-parent families, how should the tax/welfare treatment of lone parents change on marriage or cohabitation (i.e. when their marital or family status changes)?
- Is it enough to merely remove the present disincentives to such changes; or

should the State go further and create positive incentives to the formation of two-parent families?

- If so, can this be done in a way which is not only socially and politically acceptable, but also does not unduly pressurise, or treat less favourably, or penalise, one-parent families who cannot, or do not wish to, change their family status?
- And finally, can better support and encouragement be given to non-resident fathers (and mothers) who wish to participate more actively in parenting – without infringing the rights of the resident parent?

Mapping the Problem

5.13 At the outset, the Project Team agreed to focus on the issues to be addressed in cases where lone parents cohabit with or marry someone on welfare or on low income. The Team was particularly concerned, therefore, with low income/welfare dependent households. Our initial starting point was that in the decision to cohabit, a lone parent faces two particular problems:

- (i) Loss of income through the surrender of her/his OFP book;
- (ii) Loss of independence or control over resources as, at present, in most cases the lone parent – in cohabiting with an Unemployment Assistance (UA) recipient – becomes a Qualified Adult.

5.14 Other ancillary problems include the loss of the earnings disregard, financial benefit of programmes such as Community Employment and the way in which the household means-test interacts with earnings. We regarded these as issues that can be addressed in further consideration of the issue. In our deliberations we were cognisant of a number of aspects that needed to be taken into account:

- the special status afforded marriage in the Constitution and the impact that this has on any changes in family policy;
- the current application in welfare of the limitation rule³⁹; and
- the potential cost of altering the current welfare system, not only for lone parents but for all Qualified Adults.

Perceived Impact on Family Formation

5.15 Solutions to the disincentives to form new relationships pertain not only to the OFP but also to the different treatment in the tax and social welfare systems of single people and couples, both married and cohabiting. The Team's consultations identified that the existing situation does not encourage joint parenting

39. Where both members of a married couple claim Unemployment Assistance, they do not receive two full payments but half of the sum of the Personal Rate plus the Qualified Adult Rate (See Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 1999b: 42-43 for discussion).

and, in many cases, that it acts as a disincentive to parents who may want to live together. As one lone mother we spoke to put it:

“If you meet someone you can’t see how it goes and whether it will work out or not – the book is your lifeline and if it’s cut off and you’re back dependent on a man again – you’re not on an equal footing”.

- 5.16 Richardson’s research (2001) found similar attitudes among young lone mothers, many of whom did not show much enthusiasm for marriage or long-term relationships with the father of their children. In some cases, the relationship had finished or was no longer strong, while in another, the mother had decided not to marry for financial reasons. She said:

“He asked me to marry him, but I said no, it’s hard financially ... if we get married then I’m worse off ... maybe if I got a good job, maybe ...”.

- 5.17 The officials we spoke to also identified the disincentive effect of the current system:

“The current system actively discourages young couples from living and parenting together – it promotes secrecy – we need to put our money where our mouth is regarding families – it is ridiculous that couples lose money”, and

“Current provision is an incentive to split up families and also a disincentive to go back into second relationships”.

- 5.18 It is very clear from previous work (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 1999b: 162-165) and from our consultations that lone parents can lose out financially if they decide to marry or cohabit. The Review of OFP (2000) also flagged the conflicting objectives associated with the cohabitation rule – on the one hand, Government policy encourages joint parenting while on the other, because of the contingency-based nature of the social welfare system, the OFP requires that a lone parent brings up his/her child/ren without the support of a partner.

Tax and Social Welfare System Implications

- 5.19 Both the tax and social welfare systems include specific provisions for lone parents. The social welfare OFP is provided for the contingency of parenting alone. With regard to taxation, lone parents are entitled to a special One-Parent Family Allowance⁴⁰, in addition and equal to the Single Person’s Allowance. Where a person enters a relationship and thereby ceases to be a lone parent these provisions no longer apply. The financial impact of this obviously depends on the prior situation of the lone parent (e.g. whether she was working without OFP, working and claiming OFP, or not working and claiming OFP). To simplify discussion here we generally proceed on the assumption that, prior to entering a

40. Non-resident parents can avail of this Allowance if they have care of their child/ren over night.

relationship, the lone parent is receiving OFP and is *not working*. The impact of withdrawing OFP then differs depending on the employment and/or social welfare status of her new partner. Also, where the new partner is employed it depends on his income level and whether or not the couple marry. These scenarios are set out below.

Scenario 1: Lone Parent and Employed Partner

- 5.20 In general, on marrying someone in employment the lone parent will not qualify for any social welfare payment (where a lone parent marries someone who is employed but on a low income she may be able to claim some element of Unemployment Assistance but only if she meets the '*actively seeking work*' requirement). However, on marrying she may transfer her tax credits to her spouse⁴¹ who may also claim the Home Carers Allowance⁴². The impact of the withdrawal of OFP on their combined incomes is offset by tax relief to a greater or lesser degree depending on the partner's income from employment. This does not address the issue of loss of independence highlighted above and it raises second-earner employment trap issues where the 'lone parent' takes up work.
- 5.21 A different situation arises where the couple cohabits. Cohabiting couples are treated as two single people for income tax purposes. Each partner is entitled to his/her own tax credits but these cannot be transferred to the other partner. The Working Group on the Treatment of Married, Cohabiting and One-Parent Families Under the Tax and Social Welfare Codes (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 1999b) considered that cohabiting couples with children should be treated more like married couples in terms of their entitlement to bands and allowances. This issue was raised in the Expert Working Group Report on the Integration of Tax and Social Welfare (1996). The key consideration is about extending the basis of joint assessment from married couples only to married and cohabiting couples however defined. In this situation, then, there are no tax benefits to offset the loss of the OFP. The independence of income issue also arises here but the second-earner employment trap does not⁴³.

Scenario 2: Lone Parent and Partner on Social Welfare

- 5.22 The social welfare system does not distinguish between cohabiting and married couples. Therefore, where a lone parent enters into a relationship with a person claiming social welfare the direct financial impact is the same whether they are

41. Married couples may be assessed for income tax as two single people or jointly as a couple.

42. Introduced in Budget 2000, the Home Carers Allowance is an allowance (currently £3,000), to married couples with one partner at home to care for children under 18, an elderly person or someone who is permanently incapacitated. This Allowance, which is at the standard rate of tax, does not apply to non-married couples in similar circumstances.

43. There is a commitment within the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* to progress individualisation in the context of joint means assessment.

married or cohabiting. However, while no distinction is made between married and cohabiting couples, the social welfare treatment of couples differs on other grounds. Both members of a couple may in fact qualify for a social welfare payment in their own right. Depending on which social welfare scheme is involved, each may then receive a full individual payment in his/her own right (as in Old Age Pension and Disability Allowance), or a restricted (by limitation) payment. As noted earlier, the most likely case is where only one partner qualifies for a social welfare payment in his own right, and he claims a Qualified Adult payment in respect of his partner. These payments vary but are roughly 0.7 of the full payment⁴⁴. Finally, we should mention here the treatment of dependant children. A Child Dependant Allowance (CDA) may be claimed in respect of each child, though depending on the social welfare scheme, these may vary. For example, the CDA for OFP is higher than that for UA.

5.23 In Table 5.1, we compare the financial situation of a lone parent and a UA recipient **as before and after cases** to show how the different eligibility criteria might impact on cohabitation. The Table demonstrates the financial loss to a couple cohabiting if they have a child, in that their social welfare payments reduce by £33.50. Further examples are presented in the Report on the Treatment of Married, Cohabiting and One Parent Families (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 1999b).

Table 5.1
Social Welfare Payments Pre- and Post-Cohabitation*

	Weekly Social Welfare Payments	
Before	£	
1. Lone parent with one child and non-cohabiting single person, both unemployed	One-Parent Family Payment	85.50
	Child Dependent Allowance	15.20
	Personal UA Rate	85.50
	TOTAL	186.20**
After		
2. Married or cohabiting couple, receiving Unemployment Assistance with one child	Personal UA Rate	85.50
	Qualified Adult	54.00
	Child Dependent Allowance	13.20
	TOTAL	152.70
Difference between 1 & 2		£33.50

* Child Benefit is not included as it is a universal payment

** CE allowance may also be payable which would increase this total

44. The level of the Qualified Adult Allowance varies but there is a Government commitment to bring them all to 70 per cent (or 0.7) over a number of budgets (started in Budget 2000). For ease of explanation we assume that all are currently 0.7.

Addressing the Disincentives

5.24 The Team agreed that any solution would have to reflect the issues raised in the Review of OFP (2000)⁴⁵ in relation to cohabitation and would have to try to build on these. A sub-group of the Team explored the issue in more depth and reported to the Team on its progress. The discussion below represents the considerations of this sub-group. We accept that there are many drawbacks that are inherent in the deliberations, not least of which is the cost of making radical changes to the current welfare system. The ideas are presented as a means of furthering the debate and of stimulating further discussion on the issues raised. The Team is not in a position to make firm recommendations at this point.

Sub-Group's Deliberations

5.25 In looking for a solution to the disincentives that exist, the Project Team sub-group agreed that a set of guiding principles was needed to clearly define what it would address. These are outlined below:

- The solution should be an anti-poverty measure and, therefore, would only apply to a lone parent who cohabits with another welfare recipient or with someone in low-paid employment;
- The solution should allow for a transition phase from lone parenthood to a new contingency;
- A lone parents' payment should remain in place for those lone parents who wish to remain on their own but who require welfare support⁴⁶; and
- If a lone parent decides to cohabit, the contingency of lone parenthood no longer applies to her/him.

5.26 It would seem realistic to base short- and medium-term policy on the assumption that, by and large, the existing welfare system will continue, for the foreseeable future, to give special help and support to people who experience specified contingencies like lone parenthood – and withdraw that special support when circumstances change or the contingency is no longer satisfied.

5.27 However, it is important to note that while this is still generally accepted in theory, it has become considerably blurred in practice. For example, unemployment payments are no longer invariably terminated when someone gets a job – it depends on what kind of job, how much it pays, and so on. Medical cards can also be retained as can other secondary benefits. The Family Income Supplement can top up the earnings of low-paid workers with children. Reforms

45. The Review concluded that cohabitation is a control problem in a scheme based on the contingency of lone parenthood and that developments in relation to larger questions of contingency-based arrangements and individualisation may provide mechanisms for addressing the issue.

46. The Team agreed, however, that some conditions may need to be attached to the OFP to align it with the proposals we looked at.

in the 1990s – part of a move to ‘more work-friendly welfare’ – have meant that the employment status of people on unemployment, disability, one-parent family and other payments can change without the penalties and disincentive effects of immediate withdrawal of welfare supports. The logic behind the move to ‘*work-friendly welfare*’ could be extended to the area of ‘*family-friendly welfare*’ and, more specifically, to one-parent families. If society wants to facilitate, rather than impede, unemployed people from taking up employment, it can do so (and has, with some success). Similarly, if it wants to encourage rather than obstruct the formation of two-parent families, the State can alter its financial incentives⁴⁷ to reflect this. The issues involved are more complex, however, for example, Constitutional issues relating to the treatment of different types of family come into play here.

5.28 In the context of the present social welfare system, the most effective way of meeting the disincentives that exist for lone parents with regard to cohabitation is to restructure present contingencies to facilitate those who decide to cohabit or marry. The main features of this new arrangement would be:

- (i) lone parents would move from OFP to UA; this would necessarily entail altering the way UA is paid at present so that lone parents who move onto this payment get a full UA entitlement on the basis of being unavailable, or available part-time/full-time for work depending on the age of their children;
- (ii) similar arrangements would be applied to Qualified Adults (QAs);
- (iii) the limitation that currently applies to UA recipients would be removed so that both adults would be entitled to a full payment in their own right.

5.29 This approach takes cognisance of the fact that for many lone parents, participation in the labour market will assist them in reducing their poverty risk. As noted in Section II, lone parents can potentially claim the OFP for 18 years (22 years if the child is in third level education), which can lead to long-term welfare dependency and an exclusion from participation in the labour market.

5.30 The potential decisions about the future consideration of lone parents who cohabit/marry can be located on a continuum in which caring is located at one end and labour market participation at the other end. Figure 5.1 shows the extremes of this continuum. The individual lone parent could decide to pursue one of a range of options on the continuum including:

- A full-time labour market option
- A part-time labour market option
- A full-time parenting option.

47. Financial incentives are not the only determinants of human behaviour for female-headed households in decisions regarding family formation (see Moffitt, 2000).

Choice could be provided in relation to the range of alternatives that exist within and between these options.

- 5.31 From an equality perspective, the sub-group considered that the application of this approach (i.e remaining at home either full-time or part-time to care for child/ren) would have to be fully transferable to the other partner/husband.

Figure 5.1
Continuum of Choice for Lone Parents who Cohabit



- 5.32 If this approach was adopted, a key concern of the sub-group was that, on moving to UA, the former OFP recipient should be entitled to starter credits⁴⁸, which recognise that she has been caring for children. An examination of the existing Homemakers Scheme (which caters for people who spend periods of time – up to a maximum of 20 years – outside the labour force caring either for children or incapacitated people) allows for the disregard of time spent caring in the calculation of a person's Old Age Contributory Pension entitlement. The question of converting these disregards to a system of credits is being considered in the second phase of the Review of Qualifying Conditions for Old Age Contributory Pensions which is ongoing at present (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2001, forthcoming).

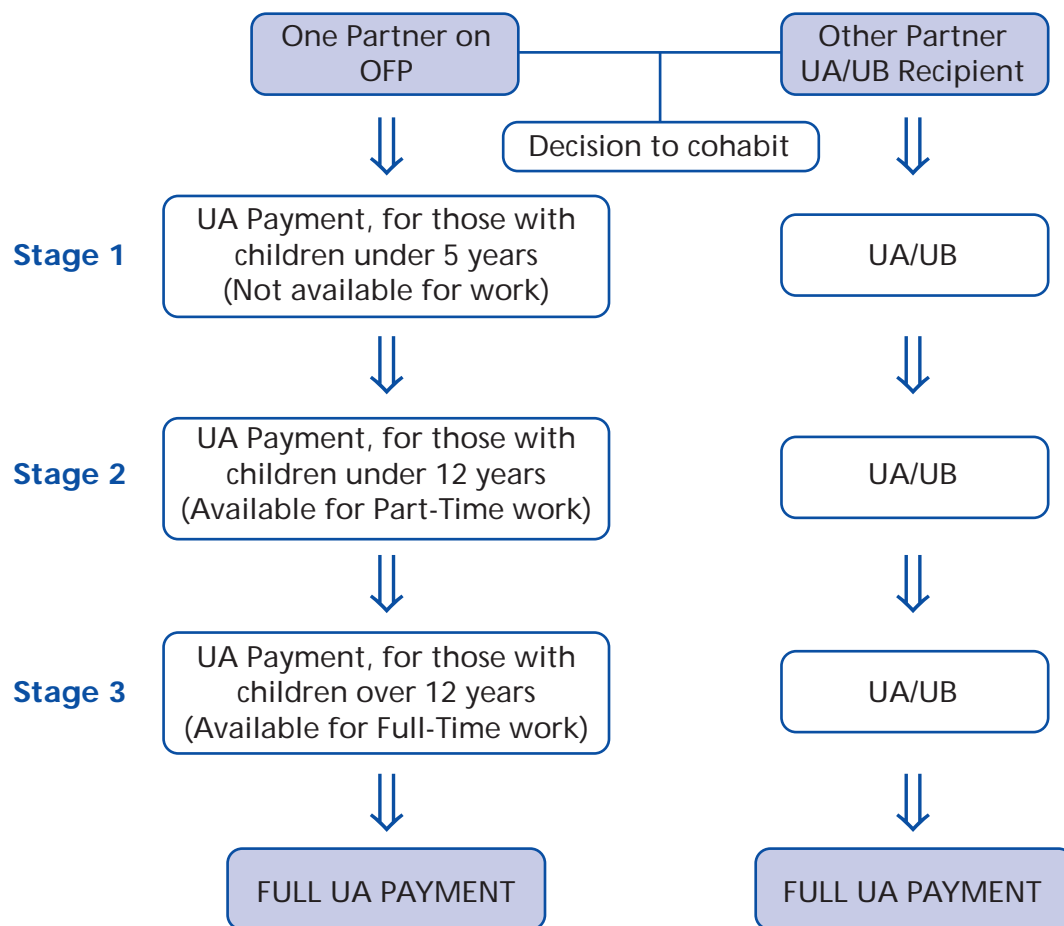
- 5.33 To explain this more fully, we took a mid-point on the continuum and set out an illustrative example of a hypothetical household situation (see Figure 5.2) where a lone parent with child/ren cohabits with a recipient of UA. Under the present arrangement, the lone parent surrenders her book and becomes a Qualified Adult. We suggest, however, that the adult in receipt of UA/UB continues to receive the payment and the adult in receipt of OFP is enabled to cohabit or marry by allowing her to have a new contingent payment. This payment, the equivalent to UA, would be paid to the lone parent but the contingency of

48. A 'credit' may be awarded in a range of circumstances to assist a person retain his/her status as an insured person during periods when he/she may be unable to pay contributions. For lone parents who move to UA, starter credits could be awarded for the period that they have been caring for their children.

‘actively seeking work’ would be phased in, over a number of stages, depending on the age of her children.

5.34 For example, in Stage 1, for a lone parent with children under 5 years, a payment would be received on the contingency that she is not available for work. The second Stage would apply where there are children between the ages of 5 and 12 years. She would receive a full payment but her contingency would change so that she is now available for part-time work⁴⁹. In the final Stage, for those with children over 12 years, the ‘actively seeking work’ contingency would apply in relation to full-time employment.

Figure 5.2
Illustrative Example of a Household where Lone Parent Cohabits with/ Marries UA Recipient



49. There are difficulties within UA in relation to part-time employment. Any work in excess of 3 days means a disqualification, no matter what hours are worked. A Working Group within the Department is examining issues relating to Atypical Employment and will report later this year.

- 5.35 This approach is based on a set of choices for parents about caring for children in the early years but recognising that part-time work and full-time work are often preferred options as the child gets older (this is in keeping with current trends in labour force participation of women with children). The result is that in the household, both adults have their own payment – *in their own right*. Each has his/her own independent income based on a household means test (thereby overcoming the existing problem of loss of independent means by the lone parent). This assumes, therefore, that the current limitation that applies to UA recipients would be abolished.
- 5.36 The knock on effect of this is that it would have to be available to *all adults* living with a recipient of UA, that is that Qualified Adults would have to be afforded the opportunity of an unemployed contingency in their own right. There are approximately 130,000 Qualified Adult Allowances paid (1999 figures) of which 50,000 are paid to pensioners, 24,500 to UA recipients and 8,270 to Unemployment Benefit (UB) recipients. Under the new arrangement, existing Qualified Adults could choose whether to go on to a UA payment in their own right or to remain on the lower Qualified Adult Allowance. In cases where there are children, the age-related criteria for availability for work would also apply to those Qualified Adults who choose to go on the higher payment. Qualified Adults with no dependent children would move on to UA. This would be subject to an upper limit of 55 years after which Pre-Retirement Allowance (PRETA)⁵⁰ would apply. For all new cases, the new arrangements identified above would also apply. The net effect of such a move is that if the Qualified Adult Allowance was replaced by an individual contingency, e.g. 'actively seeking work' this would increase income to welfare dependent homes (from 1.7 to 2). However, the *quid pro quo* is that Qualified Adults would have to be actively seeking work, or have some other contingency, to claim payment in their own right.
- 5.37 Some of the difficulties with this approach include:
- A number of situations exist where a spouse in a non-welfare household may be entitled to a welfare payment in her own right subject to a household means-test. At present, not many people activate this arrangement and means-testing ensures a cut-off at a very low level. If the system was opened up as outlined above more eligible people might apply. This has implications for the cost of the reform⁵¹.
 - Proposed changes may reduce the lone parent's choice regarding parenting, as she would be expected to seek employment. This could be ameliorated by reference to the age of the child i.e that the child be over 5 years and 12 years respectively before the lone parent is expected to seek part-time or full-

50. Pre-Retirement Allowance (PRETA) is a payment which allows those aged 55 or over to opt to retire from the labour force and receive a weekly allowance.

51. Costs are, however, capped by the household means-test where income above £14,000 prevents the spouse from getting her own payment.

time employment or by the choice of option from the continuum in Figure 5.1.

- Proposed changes would reduce replacement ratios. We agreed, however, that this would be less of an issue in the current environment of labour market shortages and also in the context of tax changes favouring lower and middle-income earners.
- The changes may be challenged on the basis that, in our example in Figure 5.2, all mothers are expected to be available for (part-time) work when their children are over 5 years old but for lone parents this does not apply until their children are over 12 years (see discussion below). Again, choice with regard to one's location at a point on the continuum would address this.

5.38 Some of the positive implications of the approach are:

- Positive labour market implications, in that more social welfare recipients would be classified as actively seeking work (however, this would mean that the Live Register may increase temporarily).
- Greater recognition of the role of parenting in the social welfare system.
- Increased gender equality and activating a gender equality framework into the social welfare code.
- Anti-poverty focus in that two-adult households are being created with both as potential earners.
- The ideas could be supported from a social rights perspective which would reduce the need for specific contingencies.

5.39 Another issue considered was that of the earnings disregard and how the loss of this would affect the decision of the lone parent to form a new relationship. We noted that the earnings disregard could be tapered over time to allow for the movement from lone parenthood to a new living arrangement. In so doing, account would have to be taken of the transitional element associated with cohabitation⁵² and so this could be agreed over a fixed time scale of maybe three years, as is the case with the Back to Work Allowance.

5.40 Overall, the ideas presented address a lot of the current difficulties associated with moving from lone parenthood to a two-parent family household arrangement. It may be construed that what we considered is overly far-reaching for a problem that, relatively speaking, occupies a small place in the social welfare system taken as a whole. However, these ideas, if developed into a realistic proposal for restructuring of present arrangements, would not only address

52. A lone parent would still lose out if a reduced earnings disregard is introduced, but as the additional earnings disregard for lone parents is to go towards their additional childcare costs, these too may reduce on cohabitation.

disincentives in relation to family formation but also, among others, the problems associated with women's status as dependents in the welfare system and the mobilisation of domestic labour supply.

- 5.41 In its deliberations, the sub-group also considered the introduction of a transitional arrangement for the payment of OFP for those who decide to enter into a relationship and cohabit, both in terms of the *principle* of transitioning the OFP and the *mechanisms* for doing do. Transitioning of payments allows for a tapered withdrawal over time, thereby ensuring that the loss of the payment is not too dramatic. The transitioning of payments is generally complex to administer; this needs to be taken into account in looking further at the issue. A more pressing argument against transitioning is that newly-formed households with an OFP recipient and a UA recipient will have a higher income than other households leading to an inequality within the system. This can lead to a situation whereby there is an incentive to all welfare recipients to progress towards the household formation stage via the lone parenthood route to avail of the more favourable conditions offered to those households. Possible mechanisms for transitioning are outlined in Annex 8 to the Report. As noted, this approach would be difficult to administer and might create additional disincentives. However, any restructuring of present arrangements might, by necessity have to incorporate some element of transition. This has already been noted in relation to the tapering of the earnings disregards (see above).
- 5.42 Any changes to the current system that are developed to facilitate lone parents who decide to cohabit would also have to take account of the relative position of those lone parents who continue to parent alone. In introducing a labour market focus for lone parents who go on to form new relationships (and for Qualified Adults), equivalent measures would have to be introduced for OFP recipients (contingent on the age of their child/ren). For those parenting alone, greater recognition of the associated pressures needs to be built into the changes proposed. In the absence of a well-developed childcare infrastructure, however, it would be very difficult to implement. In particular, the area of after-school care which has significant relevance in the context of working parents is seriously under-developed.
- 5.43 Any proposal for change, therefore, would have to take account of the specific needs of lone parents and would exempt them from labour force participation until their child/ren was/were over 12 years. In the interim, labour market opportunities such as training and reskilling could be offered which would be specifically developed with lone parents' needs in mind (see Section IV). In the absence of any change to existing arrangements, the sub-group does not recommend that the actively seeking work contingency be applied to lone parents.

Implications for Policy

5.44 The Team was cognisant of the fact that the outline ideas set out above would have major implications for the whole system of welfare as we know it. Key policy areas which would be impacted upon include:

- the debate about individualisation of tax and welfare;
- the future of the Qualified Adult Allowance in social welfare;
- the argument concerning economies of scale in welfare dependent households; and
- the debate about a parenting payment in the social welfare system.

The issues with regard to each of these are set out briefly below. In implementing any change each of these would require further investigation.

Individualisation and the Social Welfare System

5.45 The Project Team acknowledged that further consideration of the issues raised needs to take account of the fact that we do not have a comprehensive social insurance model⁵³. With regard to lone parents, in particular, we are cognisant of the concerns that have been raised about the role of caring for children and how it would be recognised in any individualisation of welfare.

5.46 Following the commitment given in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* on measures to increase administrative individualisation in the social welfare system, we accept that the implementation of the ideas presented above, where a person opts for an actively seeking work contingency would, in effect, result in individualisation of payments where each person would be entitled to a full payment (1:1).

Future of the Qualified Adult Allowance in Social Welfare

5.47 Implicit in the discussion is a question mark over the Qualified Adult status in welfare provision and whether this would continue to exist if changes were implemented. As noted earlier, people who are older may be exempt but this raises questions as to whether people should have the option of being a Qualified Adult or whether they should have to play a more active role in the economy.

Economies of Scale

5.48 At present a poverty trap exists for individuals on OFP in moving to a cohabitation arrangement. The provision of a full social welfare payment to each

53. A Working Group on the development of a fully inclusive social insurance model is to be established under the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*.

adult does not, however, take account of the economies of scale argument. The ideas outlined, if implemented would effectively remove the limitation rule that currently applies to couples. This already is the case for recipients of Disability Allowance and Non-Contributory Old Age Pension.

Recognition of Parenting in Welfare Provision

- 5.49 The Commission on the Family recognised the value of unpaid caring work and proposed that caring for children should be given financial recognition by the State in a more direct and effective way than at present (Commission on the Family, 1998). The Commission noted that tax allowances and tax credits may not be the most suitable mechanism for the provision of support for families as these do not benefit those on the lowest incomes or on welfare payments. However, it is also argued (see NESF, 2000c) that the contribution made to the economy by working parents should be recognised and assisted through the provision of tax relief.
- 5.50 The notion of a payment that is made in respect of the lone parent's role with regard to child-rearing allows for a greater consideration of the value of caring. The main difficulty with this, however, is that in Budget 2001 the Government clearly signalled its intention to deal with the childcare support issue for those at work and those who wish to remain in the home in the context of the Child Benefit system. The provision of UA on an age-related basis may be viewed as an additional measure in the childcare area, giving rise to demands for a wider application.
- 5.51 The policy of concentrating child income support in Child Benefit (CB) (as opposed to child dependent allowances (CDAs) payable with welfare payments) has been pursued by successive Governments since 1994. The rationale for this policy is that CB is neutral *vis-à-vis* the employment status of the parents and does not contribute to poverty traps or work disincentives. As a result, CDAs have not been increased since 1994 while substantial resources have been invested in Child Benefit. The Government is committed to investing an additional £1 billion in Child Benefit over three budgets, starting with Budget 2001. It can be argued that the ideas outlined here are at odds with Government policy in regard to child income support whereby the age-related arrangements outlined in Figure 5.2 would create a new poverty trap in the social welfare system. We accept that our ideas apply best in situations where both parties are unemployed. However, we note that tapering of the earnings disregard over three years may have a bearing on decisions to take up work (see above). This needs further consideration.

Conclusions

5.52 This Section has set out a range of ideas in relation to the issue of cohabitation. It identifies the range of policy problems that exist and how potential solutions can have implications for a range of welfare issues. The recommendation of the Team is that further examination of the issues concerning lone parents who cohabit/marry needs to be undertaken, in the first instance by the Oireachtas Committee on Family, Community and Social Affairs. We also recommend that the cohabitation guidelines should be applied consistently and that lone parents should have access to information about the cohabitation rule and how it is applied.

Section VI

Family Formation: Issues relating to Non-Resident Fathers

Family Formation: Issues relating to Non-Resident Fathers

Introduction and Overview

- 6.1 Much of the debate on lone parenthood to date has focused on lone mothers as they represent a substantial proportion of the lone parent population. However, there is a small but increasing number of lone fathers (see Section II) as well as a growing number of fathers who are not living full-time with their children and whose views are often absent in the debate about family policy issues⁵⁴. In addition, there is a dearth in the literature on the experience of fathers and little official data are available to inform our understanding of this target group. In response to this gap, the Team commissioned a position paper and some primary research to inform its deliberations.
- 6.2 In scoping out the exercise the Team was aware of the broad range of situations that fathers find themselves in; they may occupy the status of lone parent with primary responsibility for the rearing of their children or they may be wholly absent from the lives of their children, or partially present through joint custody or access rights. The research presented here takes account of these situations and, in a limited way, outlines some of the issues that fathers deal with on a regular basis. Given that the overall focus of the Report is on lone parents at risk of poverty, the Project Team attempted to meet with economically disadvantaged fathers, and, specifically, *non-resident fathers*⁵⁵ whom we felt represented a particular target group for anti-poverty strategies. However, difficulties in accessing such fathers meant that not all focus group participants fell into this category. As a consequence, the views in this Section come from fathers from a range of age groups and socio-economic backgrounds.
- 6.3 All families have both a “relational” and an “economic” dimension in the sense that their well-being is shaped by the quality of family relationships and by the family’s economic resources. In the following discussion the main focus is on the *relational* rather than the *economic* aspects of one-parent households, particularly the relationships between non-resident fathers and their children⁵⁶. The economic dimension is, nevertheless, important because of the relatively high

54. The Commission on the Family undertook research on fathers for its Report.

55. This term is used throughout the Section to refer to those fathers who do not live in the same household as their children.

56. Most family policy in Ireland, particularly policies concerned with one-parent households, is almost exclusively concerned with material well-being. The most recent example is the Review of OFP which makes no reference to the quality of relationships between parents and their children and makes only passing reference to the relationships between the parents of children (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000).

risk of poverty associated with lone parent households. Although non-resident fathers are not distinguished in the statistics, the available research suggests that this grouping exhibits indicators normally associated with a high poverty risk. Most non-resident fathers are not drug users but most drug users are men (around 70 per cent) and most of them (around 75 per cent) are lone fathers (see McKeown and Fitzgerald, 1999; McKeown, Fitzgerald and Deehan, 1993). Most non-resident fathers are not in prison but almost all prisoners are disadvantaged men and most of them (around 70 per cent) are fathers of whom 60 per cent have lost contact with their children (see O’Mahony, 1997: 37-38). Most non-resident fathers are not homeless but many homeless men are lone fathers (see for example, Collins and McKeown, 1992).

6.4 This Section presents, in summary form, the views of those that were consulted. In presenting this information, we are aware that we do not have data to compare the views of mothers and fathers on relational issues as our focus groups with lone mothers concentrated, for the most part, on their experiences with regard to access to services. However, it represents a useful starting point in developing an understanding of the complexity of relationships that exist within and between families today. We agreed that it was inappropriate for the Team to make recommendations with regard to legal issues such as custody, access, maintenance and conflict resolution and situations where access to children is denied because of abuse. Instead, we recommend that our work should be seen as an opening up of the debate on non-resident fatherhood and that more extensive work is needed on some of the issues highlighted. **In particular, we recommend that a feasibility study should be undertaken, assisted through funding from the Family Affairs Unit in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs or through the programme of research proposed as part of the new Family Mediation Service on a broader research piece which would compare the relational issues for mothers and fathers and which would address the legal and Constitutional issues which were highlighted in the focus groups.**

6.5 This Section presents the findings of our consultations with non-resident fathers under the following headings:

- Becoming a Father,
- Identification with the Fathering Role,
- Frequency of Contact between Fathers and their Children,
- Links between Maintenance and Access,
- Impact of Cultural Stereotypes,
- Goals of Family Policy and
- Conclusions.

Becoming a Father

- 6.6 There are many routes into non-resident fatherhood and all of these were reflected in the narratives of the participants in the Team's consultations. The most common routes were as follows:
- The break-up of a marriage when the father moves out of the family home and is subsequently granted access to the children through court order or informal agreement,
 - The break-up of a relationship after the child was born and consequent difficulty in maintaining contact,
 - The birth of a child after a casual encounter leading to attempts to establish paternity and a relationship with the child.
- 6.7 These different experiences were closely linked to the age and class position of those we interviewed. As one would expect, marriage and long-term relationships was much more common among the older participants who had frequently planned for and actively chosen fatherhood. In contrast, younger fathers (mainly in the 18-25 year age group) from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to have entered fatherhood as a result of a casual encounter or a non-committed, short-term relationship.
- 6.8 In some cases the issue of taking on a parenting role is complicated by the problem of establishing paternity. Among the young men interviewed there appeared to be a high degree of sexual promiscuity characterised by transient relationships and one-night stands. On the subject of taking responsibility for sexual activity, most of the young men felt that taking precautions was a matter for the young woman.

Identification with the Fathering Role

- 6.9 The assumption that children benefit from contact with their father is supported by a wide range of research which shows that on average, children are better off psychologically and developmentally in two-parent than in one-parent households, although the magnitude of the difference is not great.⁵⁷ However, within lone parent households there appears to be no significant association between the *frequency* of father-child contact and 'child outcomes', although child outcomes are influenced by the *quality* of the father-child relationship (see Amato and Gilbreth, 2000; Simons, 1996).

57. Amato, 1993; Amato and Keith, 1991; Amato, Loomis and Booth, 1995; Cooksey, 1997; Downey, 1994; Goodman, Emery and Haugaard, 1998; Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Hines, 1997; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; McLanahan and Teitler, 1999; Najman, Behrens, Andersen, Bor, O'Callaghan, and Williams, 1997; Seltzer, 1994; Thomson, Hanson and McLanahan, 1994.

- 6.10 Post-marital fathers we consulted with readily identified with the father role, primarily seeing themselves as co-parents in their children's lives even in cases where access was limited. They were strongly of the view that children needed two parents, and that at particular stages in the life cycle, e.g. male adolescence, the presence of a father figure was crucial. Younger fathers whose children were being raised by the mother in her parents' home, strongly felt that they could provide a masculine role model, especially for sons, growing up in a largely female environment. In general, younger fathers saw their parenting role as a supplement or support to the primary role of the mother, and the mother's family.
- 6.11 While acknowledging the changed situation and the fact that they had to make certain adjustments, they did not see the fathering role as fundamentally altering the structure of their daily lives. That is, fatherhood for them was not generally about the traditional model of making a commitment to a partner and creating and sharing a family home. Indeed, for some, their economic marginalisation effectively rendered such a model untenable. However, they were of the opinion that having a girlfriend and a child had "*quietened them down*". Furthermore, as is the case for many lone mothers, the birth of a child gave the young men "*a reason to better themselves*". They were determined that they should stay out of trouble and out of prison for the sake of the child. Parenthood had made them more aware of the consequences of their actions. This bears out the findings of a recently published British study, which indicated that almost half of young fathers (44 per cent) said that being a parent had "*given me a reason to work hard for the future*" (The Prince's Trust, 2001).
- 6.12 Many of the young disadvantaged fathers consulted had had very poor role models for fathering. Their own fathers had neglected them or had been absent from their lives through marital breakdown or imprisonment. They spoke of the lack of emotional care, which they felt had damaged them. As a result, they expressed determination to "*be there*" for their children and to provide their children with the love that they had missed out on. They felt strongly that their children should not make the same mistakes that they did, in the sense of leaving school early, engaging in criminal activity, and dabbling in drugs. In light of the disappointments and difficulties already faced in their young lives, fatherhood was perceived as the one positive experience that nobody could ever take away from them. **To enhance this experience, the Team endorses the recommendation of the Joint Committee on Family, Community and Social Affairs (2001) on the need for community-based programmes on parent/child communication to assist young fathers in making a contribution towards their child's development.**
- 6.13 Among the older, more educated fathers considerable emphasis was placed on an activist parenting role. They were concerned about developing meaningful relationships with their children. This they saw as only achievable through a

model of joint parenting. Fathers also expressed concerns about their children taking into their adult relationships, the legacy of dysfunctionality from their parents' relationship.

Frequency of Contact between Fathers and their Children

- 6.14 A major study on contact between non-resident fathers and their children undertaken in Britain in the mid-1990s found that nearly half of non-resident fathers (47 per cent) were in contact with their children at least once a week and two thirds (68 per cent) were in contact at least once a month. Conversely, a fifth (21 per cent) had not seen their children in the past year (Bradshaw et al, 1999a)⁵⁸. There is no comparable data in Ireland although a longitudinal study of non-marital births at the National Maternity Hospital in Dublin between 1986 and 1989 found that half the single parents were in a stable relationship at the time of the child's birth, while one year later, half of the fathers shared some of the parenting role with the mother (Richardson and Kernan, 1992: 83). These studies suggest a significant level of contact between non-resident fathers and their children in at least half of all cases.
- 6.15 Likewise, the men who participated in the focus groups fall along a continuum in terms of contact with their children. Experiences ranged from informal arrangements for access which facilitate intensive ongoing contact, through to formal legal arrangements that facilitate limited contact through to a situation where there is no contact whatsoever. Accordingly, participants in the Team's consultations can be broadly grouped into three categories: *involved fathers*, *activist fathers* and *estranged fathers*.
- 6.16 Involved fathers were in contact with their children to varying degrees. Some young men had informally worked out shared parenting arrangements with the mothers of their children, even when the relationship itself was over. Others saw their fatherhood in terms of helping out with a night of "baby-sitting" here or "a day in town" there. All those who fell into this category had a positive self-identification as fathers and were committed to playing a role in their children's lives, even if in some cases, that role was relatively marginal:

"Sometimes on a Sunday I'd baby-sit from 1:00 to 7:00 o'clock because she has to go to work, and on a Saturday I'd probably baby-sit for a few hours for her. I would just play with him in the house and bring him out for walks and all".

58. The authors point out that the level of contact reported by non-resident fathers is considerably higher than that reported by resident mothers in one-parent households in an earlier study (Bradshaw and Miller, 1991). This is not that unusual, however, and is one of the difficulties associated with research involving couples and families since men and women in family relationships perceive themselves and their contribution to the family differently (see for example, Marsiglio, 1995; Hawkins, Christiansen, Pond, Sargent and Hill, 1995; O'Leary and Arias, 1988).

6.17 Those who had formerly been married, who had shared a home and the upbringing of their children before marital breakdown were most likely (although not exclusively) to fall into the activist fathers category. While younger fathers had often entered fatherhood in a spontaneous and contingent way, activist fathers had generally planned for, and actively participated in the rearing of their children. They perceive the judicial system to be biased in favour of women and hence perceive themselves as embattled as they struggle through the courts to gain more access to and contact with their children:

“I was in court 34 times. She was granted sole custody, and I went in looking for joint custody and shared parenting ... after four years in and out of court I established my right to joint parenting. ... Then she [ex-wife] started to work with me and put a plan in place and we’ve never looked back since then”.

6.18 Estranged fathers had lost contact with their children for a variety of reasons. For example, one man had fathered a child 15 years ago, but lost contact when the mother moved to another part of Ireland. He says he thinks about her every day and is determined to re-establish contact but is unsure of how he should do this or to whom to turn for help. Another man, now 27 years fathered a child seven years ago. Although he acknowledges the child, his current partner and the mother of his other child will not permit him to have contact with his seven-year-old son.

Factors affecting levels of contact

6.19 Given the potential and proven benefits of contact between non-resident fathers and their children it is appropriate to examine the factors that influence level of contact. In a major British study, two sets of factors were identified as key determinants: relationship with the mother and socio-economic characteristics (Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner and Williams, 1999b). The importance of relationship with the mother also emerged in the Dublin study of non-marital births which found that the mother’s attitude to parenting was improved by contact with the non-resident father (Richardson and Kernan, 1992: 83). Access to children can be undermined or denied in three ways (see Dromey and Doherty, 1992): (1) where the child is given no information about the father and his name may not even be registered on the birth certificate⁵⁹ (2) where the child is given only negative information about the father and (3) where access is denied or severely limited if the relationship with the mother breaks down or the mother enters a new relationship. The experiences of participants in the focus groups would bear out this assessment.

59. In 1998 the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs surveyed a sample of 1,000 unmarried applicants for One-Parent Family Payment and found that 79 per cent of them had both parents’ names on their child’s birth certificate. A similar survey carried out in 1999 on 1,000 separated applicants for One-Parent Family Payment found that 83 per cent of these had both parents’ names on their child’s birth certificate.

- 6.20 Most activist fathers displayed deep ambivalence about the mothers of their children. The end of the marriage brought with it the reality that the family was reconfigured around the mother and the family home, with the father being allotted the role of “*visitor in his child’s life*”. This created considerable tension.
- 6.21 Many younger fathers reported feelings of alienation in relation to the mothers of their children. They felt that their girlfriends/former girlfriends had changed after the birth of the child and had great difficulty communicating with them. All felt that pregnancy and childbirth had changed their girlfriends/ex-partners and that this had put excessive pressure on the relationship.
- 6.22 A recent British study (The Prince’s Trust, 2001) found that relationships were a serious problem for young fathers. They were at the age of learning how to form relationships; pregnancy forced the issue. Often the child’s birth exacerbated the problems in a relationship that was already fragile. **This points to the need for educational interventions and relationship counselling both prior to and after pregnancy, so that young people can be supported (see also Section III).**

Links between Maintenance and Access

- 6.23 One of the fundamental issues affecting the payment of maintenance by a non-resident father is the perceived legitimacy of the arrangement; particularly in the context where non-resident fathers are expected to pay maintenance while access to the children may be restricted. A study of non-resident fathers in Britain is particularly useful in highlighting how the perceived legitimacy of the maintenance arrangements, and the manner in which they are negotiated, are crucial in determining if those arrangements are honoured by non-resident fathers. According to this study, “*the mother’s right to claim maintenance on behalf of the children was accepted if she at least recognised, if not actively supported, the father’s independent relationship with his child(ren)*” (Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner and Williams, 1999b: 424). The importance of maintenance arrangements which are legitimised in the context of joint parenting was also underlined by the Commission on the Family:

“The Commission considers that realising the potential of improving income for lone parents through adequate maintenance arrangements for children, has to be part of a longer term strategy involving the promotion of responsible joint parenting by young women and men which is desirable in their child’s interest” (Commission on the Family, 1998: 115).

- 6.24 In practice, however, while there is considerable legal, moral and social pressure on fathers to financially support their children, there are few supports in place to foster an active fathering role (Commission on the Family, 1998).

- 6.25 Some of the difficulties which arise in Ireland are illustrated dramatically in a recent study which found that young single mothers would prefer not to accept maintenance since “*if the father paid maintenance this would undermine their ability to control access and to protect their children (as they saw it)*” (Russell and Corcoran, 2000: 17). These mothers would prefer the State to deduct maintenance straight from earnings or benefits “*as a way of ensuring the payment was more regular and of avoiding contact with an ex-partner*”.
- 6.26 Our discussions revealed that the key mechanisms through which contact is maintained between fathers and their children are the payment of maintenance and the rights of access. These are inextricably linked in the eyes of most non-resident fathers, particularly if they have been through the court system. The adversarial nature of the Irish court system and the *in camera* requirement in the family courts are widely condemned not only by those fathers who have had experience of the system but also by a number of lone parent organisations that we consulted with in the course of this work. They strongly believe that the courts do not take the role of fathering seriously and that this impacts on decisions in relation to access and joint parenting. Mediation services were viewed as window dressing rather than a serious option within the legal system.
- 6.27 Even for younger fathers who had worked out only informal arrangements with the mothers of their children, a clear connection was made between the payment of money and a reciprocal right to see the child. It follows that if a young man was not able to pay the money, or had annoyed the young mother in some other way, access to the child could be immediately withdrawn. That is, they believed that the payment of maintenance indicated their commitment to their children and that, accordingly, they should be granted more generous access to those children.
- 6.28 Relationships between non-resident fathers and children were seriously affected by what they perceived as the shortcomings of the access system. When the court delineates access hours they tend to be relatively restrictive. This leads to fathers spending short periods of time in intensive interaction with their children. This affects the bond that evolves between child and parent as well as the potential to develop relations with other extended family members on the father’s side. Many felt that this was inherently unnatural and put additional strain on all concerned:

“The thing is the dynamic that happens with the child. If you have a child for only a few hours it is highly intensive. Whereas it would be healthier if you have long spaces of time when you can settle down, even in separate rooms and they can wander in and out if they have something to say to you”.

“I found that with my children ... I used to do a bit of cooking with my daughter, ... and I found it was only in the last half hour of the access that you were getting to know them”.

6.29 Furthermore, access to children is generally granted on the basis that the father takes all of the children together for the allotted time period. This may present serious difficulties if there are significant age gaps between children, and if they are at different stages developmentally. Similarly, it has the effect of treating the children as a collectivity when in fact they are individuals and may require varying levels of care and attention. In a number of cases, fathers found that while they could recognise that their adolescent child required more one to one attention, this proved impossible because they had to take care of the younger children at the same time:

“It’s impossible to cater for all three. I remember one time when we were going to the Rug Rats movie and my older son just didn’t want to go. He didn’t want to be seen going to a Rug Rats movie ... What he needed and couldn’t get was time with me on his own”.

Housing and Access

6.30 Many non-resident fathers do not have *an adequate home of their own* (see Section III) and are dependent on the private-rented sector to meet their housing needs. In terms of public housing provision, they are assessed as single individuals after marital or relationship breakdown, which gives them low priority on the housing list. No allowance is made for a father who has overnight access to his children with the result that few fathers have the necessary facilities to make such an overnight stay possible. Without an adequate home, access time with children must be spent in public places such as shopping centres. The Men’s Centre in Ballymun recognises the need for non-resident fathers to have somewhere to go and provides a room equipped with cooking facilities so that a father can cook a meal with his children during access time. **The Team recommends that more of these facilities be made available at a local community level to enable access between parents and their children.**

Impact of Cultural Stereotypes

6.31 In Ireland, as in the rest of the Western world, the public image of fathers is laced with ambiguity and uncertainty. One of the consequences of the image associated with fathers – particularly the image that parenting is really mothering – is that most support services for families tend to avoid fathers (see McKeown, Ferguson and Rooney, 1998, Chapter Seven). As one researcher in Ireland has observed, services tend to “filter out fathers” (Buckley, 1998: 7). Other researchers have also observed that family support is characterised by “the predominant focus on mothers and the apparent invisibility of fathers” (Roberts and MacDonald, 1999: 63; see also French, 1998: 187-188; Murphy, 1996: 95). Even in prison, where the majority of inmates are young fathers, there is no provision to support these young men in their fathering role or help them sustain links with their children (McKeown, 2001).

- 6.32 All of the non-resident fathers consulted by the Team strongly contested the negative imagery and stereotypes which they feel currently exist. Participants reported that after marital or relationship break-up they found themselves re-labelled from a co-parent, involved with their children, to a detached visitor in their child's life, to the more negative "deadbeat dad" or "feckless father". These stereotypes, they believed, were strongly dependent on the structural constraints imposed by a system that acknowledges and promotes the rights of the mother over the father. After family or relationships break up, men tend to lose the status of parenting. Older fathers labour under the label that "*they must have done something wrong*".
- 6.33 Non-resident fathers also reported that frequently, they were advised to walk away from their families or children, to pick up the threads of their lives and move on. They strongly believed that the State (in terms of both the judicial and social welfare systems) encourages people to leave, reinforcing the culture of "*walking away*". Fathers were advised to wait until their children were older and came looking for them. Non-resident fathers perceived such responses as indicative of a cultural assumption that as long as a child has a loving and caring mother there is no need to support or encourage active parenting by the father.
- 6.34 Furthermore, non-resident fathers said there was a general inability to recognise, much less address, the trauma they were feeling. Focus group participants frequently referred to this as "*an invisible pain*". For example, one man spoke about how he felt when the mother of his child told him she was moving into a new relationship and taking their child with her:
- "I was in bits. I mean it was like as if, you know, I was in a dream ... but you know at the beginning ... I felt an utter failure. I was utterly isolated ... I found that I didn't have the vocabulary to talk about what I was feeling"*.
- 6.35 Most found solace in sharing their experiences with each other in the context of men's support networks or groups. **This endorses our recommendation in Section III on the need for a budget line for peer support networks for men and women. Even among the young disadvantaged men who were not generally affiliated to any support group, it was clear that the affirmation of friends was crucial to their attempts to internalise a positive father role.**
- 6.36 The impact of marital breakdown and consequent negotiation with regard to access to children were far reaching. The Project Team's group participants described feelings of being cut adrift, disenchanted and disillusioned. Paradoxically, while many of the older fathers in a post-marital situation felt they were standing on quicksand, and that their lives had become increasingly disordered and chaotic, younger, marginal men felt that becoming a father had brought stability and order into their lives.

Goals of Family Policy

6.37 In Ireland, as elsewhere, public policy on the family tends to be expressed in terms of the goal of protecting and supporting the family. The Programme of the present Government, for example, states that:

“We are committed to protecting the family through political, economic, social and other measures which will support the stability of the family” and again, “The Government is committed to putting families at the centre of all our policies” (Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrats, 1997: 15).

Similarly, the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (2000-2003)*, contains the following objective: *“To support family life, to offer choices for families and to offer equal opportunities for both men and women to play an active caring role in families”* (Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, 2000: 119). Typically this policy is expressed in terms of a wide range of measures which have a family or ‘family-friendly’ dimension such as childcare, tax and social welfare measures, family support services, counselling and mediation services, etc.

6.38 A core assumption underlying all of these policies and measures is that the family is defined by the household in which it lives so that “two-parent families” and “one-parent families” are seen to be given appropriately equal support and protection. The difficulty with this formulation is that conflating families and households effectively excludes non-resident parents (both fathers and mothers) from the purview of family policy. Given the growing prevalence of non-resident parents, especially non-resident fathers, resulting from increased marital breakdown and non-marital births, it is appropriate to ask if this assumption is truly reflective of family life in Ireland today and, more importantly, if it is a useful framework for formulating family policy, particularly in terms of protecting the rights of children and promoting the corresponding rights and responsibilities of non-resident parents.

6.39 If released from the assumption that a family and a household are necessarily the same thing – although in many cases they are – the goal of family policy might be formulated more appropriately and inclusively as follows: *the goal of family policy is to promote the relational and economic well-being of family members irrespective of the parents’ marital status and irrespective of the residential status of parents and children*. In order to turn this goal into a strategy for families, careful consideration needs to be given to the known factors, which protect relational and economic well-being in families as well as the risk factors that tend to threaten it.

6.40 This formulation of the goal of family policy has a number of advantages from the perspective of both children and adults. From the perspective of children, it is consistent with the right of each child “to know and be cared for by his or her parents” (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 7, paragraph 1, published in Council for Social Welfare, 1991: 97) and “to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis” (UN

Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 9, paragraph 3; published in Council for Social Welfare, 1991: 98). From the perspective of adults, it underlines the importance of parenting responsibilities and, by implication, the responsibilities that are evoked by having parenting rights, even where these create membership of more than one family. In practice this means that, even when relationships between parents are legally severed – or never existed in the case of single parents – the relationship with the child still remains and this is worth reinforcing in both law and in public policy. This approach to formulating the goals of family policy is also consistent with one of the core principles laid down by the Commission on the Family:

“Joint parenting should be encouraged with a view to ensuring as far as possible that children have the opportunity of developing close relationships with both parents which is in the interests both of children and their parents” (Commission on the Family, 1996: 14).

Perhaps even more importantly, it is consistent with a large body of research which shows that the quality of relationships between parents, whether married or not, living together or not – is strongly related to the well-being of children (e.g. Najman, Behrens, Andersen, Bor, O’Callaghan and Williams, 1997; Thompson and Amato, 1999).

- 6.41 The goal of family policy proposed here has the advantage, in addition to being more inclusive of families where one parent is non-resident, of giving equal importance to both the relational and the economic aspects of family well-being. In general, it is probably true to say that most public policies affecting the family in Ireland and elsewhere tend to focus on the economic rather than relational aspects of well-being and there is often little awareness of how the economic and the relational interact with each other. Perhaps even more worrying is the fact that the indicators of child well-being (see for example, Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1999; Micklewright and Stewart, 1999) which make no reference to the quality of relationships between children and their parents despite their fundamental importance. This is pertinent given that the National Children’s Strategy proposes to “develop a set of ‘child well-being’ indicators” (National Children’s Strategy, 2000).
- 6.42 If the goal of family policy is to promote the relational and economic well-being of family members, this calls for both proactive measures to achieve these goals as well as preventative measures to avoid reductions in relational and economic well-being. This creates a framework, summarised in Figure 6.1, within which one might conceptualise existing and new measures available to achieve the goal of family well-being.
- 6.43 The most fundamental difference which would follow from this re-formulation is that it would create an understanding of families that is based on relationships rather than households. Non-resident fathers would, therefore, be seen as

Figure 6.1
 Framework for Classifying Family Policy Measures

Category	Relational Well-being	Economic Well-being
Proactive Measures	1. Examples of proactive measures to promote relational well-being in families could include parenting courses, marriage and relationship enrichment courses and promoting public awareness, particularly in places like the work place, of the importance of family relationships.	2. Examples of proactive measures to promote economic well-being in families include tax and social welfare measures to ensure that, as a minimum, no family lives in poverty.
Preventive Measures	3. Examples of preventive measures to promote relational well-being in families could include marriage preparation and relationship education programmes as well as counselling for couples in distressed relationships.	4. Examples of preventive measures to promote economic well-being in families would include economic policies generally but especially policies which invest in human capital through the education and training of children and adults, with particular emphasis on early intervention for children.

Source: McKeown, 2001.

members of the family. That reality is not adequately recognised at present either by society generally or by the State. From the perspective of the State, there is little doubt that the entire institutional framework for regulating and supporting families where there is a non-resident father would be substantially different if the perspective proposed here were to be adopted.

Conclusions

6.44 On the basis of the work undertaken with fathers, the Team recommends that further research be undertaken on some of the issues raised in our consultations. As an initial step, we propose that the Family Affairs Unit within the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs should commission a feasibility study which would map out the main areas which require investigation and that a programme of research be agreed forthwith. The findings of the work to date also suggest the need for enhanced support mechanisms, for parents at a local level, that takes account of the range of issues that apply to the changing family context.

Annex 1

References

- Airey, S. (1998) *'Hoarsing our Voices': An Analysis of Groups engaged in Work on Issues and Areas of Disadvantage and Women*, Report for Comhar Chathair Chorcaí Teo., Cork.
- Amato, PR. (1993) Children's Adjustment to Divorce: Theories, Hypotheses and Empirical Support, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 55: 23-38.
- Amato, PR. and Gilbreth, JG. (2000) 'Non-Resident Fathers and Children's Well-Being: A Meta-Analysis', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62.
- Amato, PR. and Keith, B. (1991) 'Parental Divorce and the Well-Being of Children: A Meta-Analysis', *Psychological Bulletin*, 110: 26-46.55.
- Amato, PR., Loomis, LS. and Booth, A. (1995) 'Parental Divorce, Marital Conflict and Offspring Well-Being During Early Adulthood', *Social Forces*, 73: 896-916.
- Area Development Management Ltd. (2000) *Annual Report, 1999*, Dublin: ADM.
- Ballyfermot Partnership (1997) 'Developing the Capacity of the Community to Respond to the Needs of the Long-Term Unemployed over 35', *Partnership Insights Series, No. 4*, Dublin: ADM.
- Barry, U. (1996) 'Trends and Prospects for Women's Employment in Ireland in the 1990s', *UMIST Working Papers*, University of Manchester.
- Barry, U., Gibney, R. and Meehan, F. (1998) *'Provision for Care and Pattern of Women's Employment in Ireland'*, Gender and Employment Network, Equality Office, European Commission.
- Bradshaw, J. and Millar, J. (1991) *Lone Parent Families in the UK*, Department of Social Security Research Report Number 6, London: HMSO.
- Bradshaw, J., Stimson, C., Skinner, C. and Williams, J. (1999a) *Absent Fathers?*, London: Routledge.
- Bradshaw, J., Stimson, C., Skinner, C. and Williams, J. (1999b) 'Non-Resident Fathers in Britain', in McRae, S. (Editor), *Changing Britain: Families and Households in the 1990s*: 404-426, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Breen, R., Hannan, D., Rottman, D. and Whelan, C. (1990) *Understanding Contemporary Ireland: State, Class and Development in the Republic of Ireland*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.

- Buckley, H. (1998) 'Filtering Out Fathers: The Gendered Nature of Social Work in Child Protection', *Irish Social Worker*, Volume 16, Number 3: 7-11.
- Burgess, A. (1997) *Fatherhood Reclaimed: The Making of the Modern Father*, London: Vermillion.
- Callan, T., Nolan, B., Whelan, B., Whelan, C. and Williams, J. (1996) *Poverty in the 1990s*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.
- Central Statistics Office (1996) *Labour Force Survey*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Central Statistics Office (1997) *Labour Force Survey*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Central Statistics Office (1997) *Census of Population: Household Composition and Family Units*, Volume 3, November, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Central Statistics Office (1998), *Report on Vital Statistics*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Central Statistics Office (2000) *Report on Vital Statistics*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Children's Rights Alliance (1997) *Small Voices: Vital Rights – Submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child*, Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance.
- Clarke, A. (2000) 'Access to Education, Training and Employment: Opportunities for Lone Parents', *Working Paper prepared for the National, Economic and Social Forum* (unpublished).
- Clondalkin Partnership (1997) *One Parent Family Research Project*, Clondalkin Lone Parents Research Committee, Dublin.
- Collins, B. and McKeown, K. (1992) *Referral and Settlement of Homeless People by the Simon Community: Main Report*, Dublin: Simon Community (National Office).
- Commission on the Family (1996) *Strengthening Families for Life, Interim Report*, November, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Commission on the Family (1998) *Strengthening Families for Life, Main Report*, July, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector (2000) *Report*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Conroy, P. (1998) 'Lone Mothers: The Case of Ireland', in *European Welfare Regimes, Shifting Policy Logics*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publications.
- Cooksey, E. (1997) 'Consequences of Young Mothers' Marital Histories for Children's Cognitive Development', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 59: 245-261.

- Corcoran, M. (1999) 'Social Structure and the Quality of Life, in Fahey, T. (Editor) *Social Housing in Ireland, A Study of Success, Failure and Lessons Learned*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.
- Council for Social Welfare (1991) *The Rights of the Child: Irish Perspectives on the UN Convention*, Dublin: Council for Social Welfare.
- Cowan, C. and P. (1988) 'Working with Men Becoming Fathers: The Impact of a Couple's Group Intervention', in Bronstein P. and Cowan C. and P. (Editors), *Fatherhood Today*, New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Darling, V. (1984) *And Baby Makes Two*, Dublin: Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children.
- Deloitte and Touche (1998) *Review of the Community Employment Programme, Final Report*, September.
- Deloitte and Touche (1999) *Review of the Jobs Initiative Programme, Report*, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.
- Department of Education and Science (2000), 'Learning for Life': *White Paper on Adult Education*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Environment and Local Government (2000a), *Briefing Note to NESF Project Team on Lone Parents on Housing Provision and Needs*, unpublished.
- Department of Environment and Local Government (2000b) *Homelessness - An Integrated Strategy*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Environment and Local Government (2000c) *Action on Housing*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, *Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services, 1971 - 2000*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (1999a) *Report of the Partnership 2000 Working Group on Women's Access to Labour Market Opportunities*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (1999b) *Report of the Working Group Examining the Treatment of Married, Co-habiting and One-Parent Families under the Tax and Social Welfare Codes*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (2000) *Review of One Parent Family Payment, Programme Evaluation Report No 7*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

- Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (2001, forthcoming) Review of Qualifying Conditions for Old Age Contributory Pension, *Report of Second Phase*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Social Security (2000a) Evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents: Early Lessons from the Phase One Prototype – Synthesis Report, *Research Report No. 108*, HMSO.
- Department of Social Security (2000b) Evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents: Early Lessons from the Phase One Prototype – Findings of Surveys, *Research Report No. 109*, HMSO.
- Department of Social Security (2000c) Evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents: Early Lessons from the Phase One Prototype – Cost-benefit and Econometric Analyses, *Research Report No. 110*, HMSO.
- Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation (2000a) *Briefing Note to NESF Project Team on Lone Parents*, Unpublished.
- Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation (2000b) Integrated Services Process (ISP) *Second Progress Report for the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion*, May.
- Downey, D. (1994) 'The School Performance of Children from Single-Mother and Single-Father Families: Economic or Interpersonal Deprivation', *Journal of Family Issues*, 15: 129-147.
- Drew, E., Mahon, E. and Emerek, R. (Editors) (1998) *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*, London: Routledge.
- Dromey M. and Doherty, M. (1992) 'Fathers' Involvement with their Non-Marital Children', *Workshop Conference Paper Presented to the Conference: Surviving Childhood Adversity*, Trinity College Dublin, July, Dublin: Treoir: Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children.
- Duncan, S. and Edwards, R. (1999) *Lone Mothers, Paid Work and Gendered Moral Rationalities*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Economic and Social Research Institute (1997) *Follow-up Survey of FÁS Participants*, FÁS/Economic and Social Research Institute.
- Employment Equality Agency (1999) *New Mothers at Work*, Dublin: Employment Equality Agency.
- European Commission Network on Childcare (1990) *Men as Carers for Children*, Brussels: European Commission Network on Childcare.

- European Commission Network on Childcare (1993) *Men as Carers: Report of an International Seminar*, Ravenna, Italy, 21-22 May, Brussels: European Commission Network on Childcare.
- European Network of One Parent Families (2000) *Models for the Social and Economic Inclusion of One Parent Families*, ENOPF, February.
- Eurostat (2000) Statistics in Focus, *Population and Social Conditions, No 1/2000: Social Exclusion in the EU Member States*.
- Eustace, A. and Clarke, A. (1998) *National Evaluation of the Local Employment Service*, on behalf of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Dublin.
- Expert Working Group on Childcare (1999) *National Childcare Strategy: Report of the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare*, January, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Expert Working Group on the Integration of the Tax and Social Welfare Systems (1996) *Report*, June, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Fahey, T. (1998) Family Policy in Ireland, A Strategic Overview, *Report to the Commission on the Family*, Dublin.
- Fahey, T., Fitzgerald, J. and Maitre, B. (1998) 'The Economic and Social Implications of Demographic Change' *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, Vol. 27, Part 5: 185-222.
- Fahey, T. and Russell, H. (2001, forthcoming) *Family Formation in Ireland: A General Profile*, Dublin: ESRI.
- Farrell Grant Sparks (2000) *Rural Transport: A National Study from a Community Perspective*, Dublin: ADM Ltd.
- FÁS (1998) *Labour Market Update* No. 5/98 'Women in the Irish Labour Force', Dublin.
- Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, (1999) *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*, Washington DC: US GPO.
- Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrats (1997) *An Action Programme for the Millennium*, June, Dublin: Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrats.
- Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrats (1999) *An Action Programme for the Millennium*, As revised by Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrats in Government, November, Dublin: Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrats.
- Findlay, J. (2000) Routes to Employment, in *Lone Parent Families: Routes to Social Inclusion, Report of a Conference* organized by Gingerbread UK, 2000.

- Finlayson, L. and Marsh, A. (1998) *Lone Parents on the Margins of Work*, Department of Social Security, *Research Report No. 80*, HMSO.
- Fisher, D. (2000) *Investing in People, Family Friendly Work Arrangements in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises*, Dublin: Equality Authority.
- Flanagan, N. and Richardson, V. (1992) *Unmarried Mothers: A Social Profile*, Dublin: Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University College Dublin.
- Focus Ireland (2000) *Focusing on B&Bs: The Unacceptable Growth of Emergency B&B Placement in Dublin*, Dublin.
- Forum on Youth Homelessness (2000) *Report*, Dublin: Northern Area Health Board.
- French, G. (1998) *Enhancing Our Future: A Profile of Parenting Programmes in Ireland*, Dublin: Barnardos and the Department of Health and Children.
- Furstenberg, F. Jr., and Cherlin, A. (1991) *Divided Families: What Happens to Children When Parents Part*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Furstenberg, F. Jr., Morgan, S. and Allison, P. (1987) 'Paternal Participation and Children Well-Being After Marital Dissolution', *American Sociological Review*, 52: 695-701.
- Galway City Partnership (1998) *The Nature and Extent of Lone Parenting in Galway City*, Galway.
- Garfinkel, I. et al. (2001) *Fathers Under Fire: The Revolution in Child Support Enforcement*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Garfinkel, I. and Klawitter, M. (1990) 'The Effect of Routine Income Withholding of Child Support Collections', *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 9: 155-177.
- Gingerbread (1999) *Supporting Black Lone Parents*, A Report by Gingerbread UK.
- Goodbody Economic Consultants (1998) 'The Disincentive Effects of Secondary Benefits' Dublin.
- Goodman, G., Emery, R. and Haugaard, J. (1998) 'Developmental Psychology and Law: The Cases of Divorce, Child Maltreatment, Foster Care and Adoption', in Damon, W., Sigel, I. and Renninger, A. (Editors), *Handbook of Child Psychology*, Fifth Edition, Volume 4, Child Psychology in Practice: 775-874, New York: Wiley.
- Government of Ireland (1999) *National Development Plan 2000-2006*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

- Government of Ireland (2000a) *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Government of Ireland (2000b) *Annual Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General and Appropriation Accounts, Volume 1*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Hawkins, A., Christiansen, S.L., Pond Sargent, K. and Hill, E.J. (1995) 'Rethinking Fathers' Involvement in Child Care: A Developmental Perspective'. In W. Marsiglio, (Editor), *Fatherhood: Contemporary Theory, Research, and Social Policy*, London: Sage.
- Heslin, J. and Kiernan, P. (1998) *Discussion Document on Teenage Pregnancy*, South Eastern Health Board.
- Hetherington, E. and Stanley-Haagen, M. (1997) 'The Effects of Divorce on Fathers and Their Children' in Lamb, M. (Editor), *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, Third Edition: 191-211, New York: Wiley.
- Hines, A. (1997) 'Divorce-Related Transitions, Adolescent Development and the Role of the Parent-Child Relationship: A Review of the Literature', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 59: 375-388.
- Homeless Initiative (2001) *Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2001-2003*, Dublin Corporation.
- Hooper, C. (1995) *Rural Lone Parents: Evaluation of a Self-help Support Project*, York: York Publishing Services Ltd.
- ISIS (1998a) *Barriers to Labour Market Measures*, Research Commissioned by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs Working Group on Women's Access to Labour Market Opportunities, Dublin: Trinity College.
- ISIS (1998b) *Women, Work and Family Responsibilities*, Dublin: Trinity College.
- Jackson, B. (1984) *Fatherhood*, London: Allen and Unwin.
- Johnston, H. and O'Brien, T. (2000) *Planning for a More Inclusive Society: An Initial Assessment of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.
- Joint Committee on Family, Community and Social Affairs (2001) *Teenage Parenting Contemporary Issues*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Lamb, M. (1999) 'Non-custodial Fathers and Their Impact on the Children of Divorce', in Thompson, R. and Amato, P. (Editors), *The Post-divorce Family: Children, Parenting and Society*: 105-125, London: Sage.
- Lewis, J. (1992) Gender and the Development of Welfare Regimes, *Journal of European Social Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3.

- Mahon, E. (1998) *Women and Crisis Pregnancy*, Report to the Minister for Health and Children, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Marsiglio, W. (1995) 'Fathers' Diverse Life Course Patterns and Roles', In W. Marsiglio (Editor), *Fatherhood: Contemporary Theory, Research, and Social Policy*, London: Sage.
- McCarthy, D. and Cronin, C. (2000) *To Identify the Needs, Perceptions and Experiences of Young First Time Mothers*, A Report Prepared for NICHE, Northside Initiative for Community Health, Cork: University College Cork.
- McCashin T. (1993) *Lone Parents in the Republic of Ireland, Enumeration, Description and Implications for Social Security*, Dublin: ESRI.
- McCashin, T. (1996) *Lone Mothers in Ireland: A Local Study*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.
- McCashin T. (1997) *Employment Aspects of Young Lone Parenthood in Ireland*, Trinity College, Treoir.
- McGivney, V. (1999) *Returning Women, Their Training and Employment Choices and Needs*, London: National Organisation for Adult Education.
- McKeown, K. (2000) 'Families and Single Fathers in Ireland', Paper presented to Cherish Conference on The Changing Family in the New Millennium, Dublin, May.
- McKeown, K. (2001a) 'Non-Resident Fathers', *A Position Paper for the National Economic and Social Forum* (unpublished).
- McKeown, K. (2001b) 'Families and Single Fathers', *Administration: Journal of the Institute of Public Administration*, Volume 49, Number 1, Spring.
- McKeown, K. and Fitzgerald, G. (1999) *Treating Drug Addiction: An Evaluation of Addiction Response* Crumlin, Dublin: Addiction Response Crumlin.
- McKeown, K., Ferguson, H. and Rooney, D. (1998) *Changing Fathers? Fatherhood and Family Life in Modern Ireland*, Cork: The Collins Press.
- McKeown, K. and Sweeney, J. (2001) *Family Well Being: Benefits and Costs*, Dublin: Department of Health and Children.
- McKeown, K., Fitzgerald, G. and Deehan, A. (1993) *The Merchants' Quay Project: A Drugs / HIV Service in the Inner City of Dublin, 1989-1992*, Dublin: Franciscan Friary, Merchants' Quay.
- McLanahan, S. and Sandefur, G. (1994) *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

- McLanahan, S. and Teitler, J. (1999) 'The Consequence of Father Absence', in Lamb, ME. (Editor), *Parenting and Child Development in 'Non-Traditional' Families*: 83-102, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Medical Card Review Group (2001) *Interim Report*, Dublin.
- Meyer, D. (1999) 'Compliance with Child Support Orders in Paternity and Divorce Cases', in Thompson, R. and Amato, P. (Editors), *The Post divorce Family: Children, Parenting and Society*: 127-157, London: Sage.
- Micklewright, J. and Stewart, K. (1999) 'Is Child Welfare Converging in the European Union?' Innocenti Occasional Papers, *Economic and Social Policy Series 69*, Florence: UNICEF.
- Millar, J. (2000) 'Welfare to Work for Lone Mothers: The UK New Deal', Paper Presented to 'What Future for Social Security?' Cross-National and Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives Conference, University of Sterling, June 15-17 2000.
- Millar, J., Leeper, S. and Davies, C. (1992) *Lone Parents, Poverty and Public Policy in Ireland*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.
- Moffitt, R. (2000) Policy Effects on Family Structure and Fertility, Welfare Benefits and Female Headship in US Time Series, *American Economic Association*, Vol. 90, No. 2: 373-377.
- Mulvey, C. (1995) *'Bridging the Gap': An Exploration of the Needs of Women Seeking to Make the Transition from Unpaid Work to Employment in Clondalkin*, Clondalkin Women's Network: April.
- Murphy, M. (1996) 'From Prevention to 'Family Support' and Beyond: Promoting the Welfare of Irish Children', *Administration*, Volume 44, Number 2, Summer: 73-101.
- Murphy, P. (1998) *'Parenting Alone in Blanchardstown': The Views and Experiences of Lone Parents and Local Service Providers*, Dublin: October.
- Najman, J.M., Behrens, B.C., Andersen, M., Bor, W, O'Callaghan, M. and Williams, GM. (1997) 'Impact of Family Type and Family Quality on Child Behaviour Problems: A Longitudinal Study', *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Volume 36 (10): 1357-1365.
- National Anti-Poverty Strategy (1997) *Sharing in Progress*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- National Children's Strategy (2000) *Our Children – Their Lives*, November, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- National Council for One Parent Families (2000a) *The Housing and Support Needs of Young Lone Mothers, Summary of Key Findings*, July.

- National Council for One Parent Families (2000b) *Policy Briefing: New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare*, Response to the Green Paper.
- National Economic and Social Council (1999) *Opportunities, Challenges and Capacities for Choice*, Dublin: Stationery Office, December.
- National Economic and Social Forum (1995) *Quality Delivery of Social Services, Forum Report Number 6*, Dublin: Government Publications.
- National Economic and Social Forum (1997a) *Rural Renewal – Combating Social Exclusion, Forum Report Number 12*, Dublin: Government Publications.
- National Economic and Social Forum (1997b) *Unemployment Statistics, Forum Report Number 13*, Dublin: Government Publications.
- National Economic and Social Forum (2000a) *Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Local Employment Service, Forum Report Number 17*, Dublin: Government Publications.
- National Economic and Social Forum (2000b) *Social and Affordable Housing and Accommodation, Forum Report No. 18*, Dublin: Government Publications.
- National Economic and Social Forum (2000c) *Alleviating Labour Shortages, Forum Report No. 19*, Dublin: Government Publications.
- National Framework Committee for the Establishment of Family Friendly Policies (2001) *An Introduction to Family Friendly Arrangements*, Dublin.
- Nexus (2000) Family Services Project: Evaluation of Pilot, *Final Report*, Commissioned by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, Dublin.
- Nichols-Casebolt, A. and Danziger, S. (1989) 'The Effect of Childbearing Age on Child Support Awards and Economic Well-Being Among Divorcing Mothers', *Journal of Divorce*, 12(4): 34 -38.
- Nickel H. and Kocher, N. (1987) 'West Germany and German Speaking Countries' in Lamb, M. *The Father's Role: Cross Cultural Comparisons*, Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Nolan, B. (2000) *Child Poverty in Ireland*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press and the Combat Poverty Agency.
- Nolan, B. and Russell, H. (2000) *The Impact of Non-Cash Benefits on Poverty in Ireland*, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.
- Nolan, B. and Watson, D. (1999) *Women and Poverty in Ireland*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press and the Combat Poverty Agency.

- Nolan, B., O'Connell, P. and Whelan, C. (Editors), (2000) *Bust to Boom? The Irish Experience of Growth and Inequality*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration and the Economic and Social Research Institute.
- O'Higgins, K. (1974) Marital Desertion in Dublin, *Broadsheet No. 9*, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.
- O'Grady, T. (1991) *Married to the State: A Study of Unmarried Mother's Allowance Applicants*, Unpublished, Dublin: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.
- O'Mahony, P. (1997) *Mountjoy Prisoners: A Sociological and Criminological Profile*, Dublin: Department of Justice.
- OECD (1992) Lone Parent Families: The Economic Challenge, *Report No. 8*, Paris: OECD.
- O'Leary, K. and Arias, I. (1988) 'Assessing Agreement of Reports of Spouse Abuse'. In Hotaling, G., Finkelhor, D., Kirkpatrick, J. and Straus, M. (Editors), *Family Abuse and Its Consequences*, London: Sage Publications.
- OPEN (1997) *Lone Parents Visible in the Statistics, OPEN Briefings No.1*, December.
- Pedersen, L., Weise, H., Jacobs, S. and White, M. (2000) 'Lone Mothers Poverty and Employment' in Gallie, D. and Paugam, S. (Editors), *Welfare Regimes and the Experiences of Unemployment in Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peters, H., Argys, L., Maccoby, E. and Mnookin, R. (1993) 'Enforcing Divorce Settlements: Evidence from Child Support Compliance and Award Modifications', *Demography*, 30: 719-735.
- Quill, S. (2000) *Lone Fathers in Ireland: A Descriptive Study*, Unpublished Masters Thesis, Dublin: Trinity College.
- Ralaheen Ltd. (1999) Information Provision at Local Level: Developing an Integrated Approach, *Working Paper*, prepared for the National Social Services Board, March.
- Ralaheen Ltd. (2000) *Lone Parents returning to the Labour Market: Prospects in the Retail Sector*, Research undertaken on behalf of OPEN.
- Richardson, V. (2001) *'Young Mothers': A Study of Young Single Mothers in Two Communities*, Dublin: Vincentian Partnership for Justice.
- Richardson, V. and Kernan, E. (1992) 'The Family Life Styles of Some Single Parents in Ireland', in Kiely, G. (Editor), *In and Out of Marriage: Irish and European Experiences: 70-86*, Dublin: Family Studies Centre, University College Dublin.

- Roberts, H. and MacDonald, G. (1999) 'Working with Families in the Early Years', in Hill, M. (Editor), *Effective Ways of Working with Children and their Families, Research Highlights in Social Work 35*: 79-69, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Russell, H. and Corcoran, M. (2000) *The Experiences of those Claiming the One-Parent Family Payment: A Qualitative Study, Report Commissioned by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs*, Economic and Social Research Institute / National University of Ireland, Maynooth.
- Ryan, L. (1997) *Working Families: A Comparative Study of Economic Activity among Lone Parents in Ireland and Finland*, Dublin: Parents Alone Resource Centre.
- Ryce-Menuhin, J. (1996) *Naked and Erect: Male Sexuality and Feeling*, Illinois: Chiron Publications.
- Seltzer, JA. (1994) 'Consequences of Marital Dissolution for Children', *American Review of Sociology*, 20: 235-266.
- Simons, RL. (1996) *Understanding Differences Between Divorced and Intact Families*, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Social Welfare Appeals Office (2000) *Report*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Sonenstein, FL. and Calhoun, CA. (1990) 'Determinants of Child Support: A Pilot Survey of Absent Parents', *Contemporary Policy Issues*, 8: 75-94.
- Speak, S. (1995) *Young Single Mothers: Barriers to Independent Living*, Family Policy Studies Centre.
- Speak, S., Cameron, S. and Gilroy, R. (1997) *Young Single Fathers: Participation in Fatherhood – Barriers and Bridges*, Family Policy Studies Centre.
- Stack, S. and Eshleman, J. (1998) 'Marital Status and Happiness: A 17-Nation Study', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Volume 60: 527-536.
- Swinburne, B. (1999) *Unmarried Lone Parents on Welfare – A Changing Profile? A Comparative Survey of Unmarried Lone Parents Awarded Welfare Payment in 1988 and 1998*, Unpublished Dissertation.
- The Prince's Trust (2001) *Its Like That: The Views and Hopes of Disadvantaged Young People*, London: The Prince's Trust.
- Thompson, E., Hanson, T. and McLanahan, SS. (1994) 'Family Structure and Child Well-Being: Economic Resources Versus Parental Behaviours', *Social Forces*, 73: 221-242.

- Thompson, R. and Amato, P. (Editors), (1999) *The Post divorce Family: Children, Parenting and Society*, London: Sage.
- Treoir (1995) *Lone Parents in Ireland, Summary Report*, Dublin: Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children.
- Treoir (1999) *Submission to the One-Parent Family Payment Review*, unpublished.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991) in *Council for Social Welfare, The Rights of the Child: Irish Perspectives on the UN Convention*, Dublin: Council for Social Welfare.
- United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (1998) *Concluding Observations on the Report Submitted by Ireland under Article 44 of the Convention*, Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance.
- Walsh, J. (1997) *'Lone Parents, Labour Market Policy and the Community Employment Scheme', Discussion paper for the Working Group on the Tax/Welfare Treatment of Households*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.
- Ward, P. (1990) *The Financial Consequences of Marital Breakdown*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.
- Wijnberg, M. and Weinger, S. (1998) 'When Dreams Wither and Resources Fail: The Social Support Systems of Mothers', *Families in Society*, Vol. 79: 212.
- Williams, J. and O'Connor, M. (1999) *Counted In: The Report of the 1999 Assessment of Homelessness in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- WRC Social and Economic Consultants (1998) *Women's Education Initiative: Guide*, Dublin.
- WRC Social and Economic Consultants (1998) *Women's Participation in Education, Training and Employment Programmes*, Research commissioned by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs Working Group on Women's Access to Labour Market Opportunities.
- Yohalem, A. (Editor) (1980) *Women Returning to Work*, London: Frances Pinter.

NESF Project Team on Lone Parents

Terms of Reference

The Project Team on Lone Parents will examine the current position of lone parents in the Irish context as a high-risk group of poverty. The work will focus exclusively on low-income lone parents, and more specifically, those in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment. The Team will adopt a problem-solving approach and will aim to ensure that policy makers and participants in the policy debate are better informed.

The objectives of the Project Team's work are:

1. To develop an overview of lone parents which will highlight the issues which give rise to them being an at-risk group.
2. To examine the experience of lone parents with regard to accessing public services. It is recognised that lone parents have a higher than usual dependence on local level statutory services. The study will explore issues with regard to access to, quality and relevance of services used by lone parents.
3. To evaluate current education, training and labour market opportunities for lone parents including:
 - policy issues which influence the participation of lone parents in the labour market.
 - current needs and the extent to which there are gaps in meeting needs with regard to lone parents' access to the labour market.
4. To address the issue of data deficits with regard to lone parents and to highlight inadequacies with regard to current data collection processes.

The overall aim of the project is to identify budget oriented, practical policy recommendations/conclusions in three areas:

- Public services
- Education, training and the labour market
- Data collection and research.

It is intended that the work of the Team will, where possible, challenge attitudes and develop alternative perspectives based on the lives, living experiences and real choices of lone parents.

It is envisaged that the Project Team will take up to 6 months to complete its work and will have a final report completed by the end of 2000.

Secretariat
July 2000

Annex 3

Eligibility Across Programmes/Schemes for Lone Parents

	Age limit	Length of time on OFP	Retention of secondary benefits	Eligible or FIS
BTEA	21 or over (24 if doing post-grad studies)	6 months	Depends on whether claimant is also working and level of income	Possibly
VTOS	Over 21	6 months	Yes	–
Youthreach	15-18	–	Yes	–
FÁS mainstream training	Depends on the programme	Generally not specified	Varies	–
Work Place	–	6 months	Yes	–
CE	Over 25	12 months	Yes	No
Jl	Over 35	5 years	No but medical card is retained for 13 weeks	Yes
BTWA/ BTWEA	–	12 months	Yes if income is below £250/wk.	Yes
Job Start	–	3 years	Yes	Yes
Revenue Job Assist	–	12 months	Yes if income is below £250/wk	Yes
Part Time Job Incentive	–	Lone parents leaving CE		

Source: Clarke, 2000.

Annex 4

Implications of Welfare, Education/Training and Employment Options for Lone Parents

Options	Impact on OFP	Tax Implications	Impact on other Benefits	Entitlement to FIS	Qualifying Requirements
Employment	Yes. Can earn up to £115.38 gross/week and keep full OFP. Only half the earnings over this are assessed. If earnings go above £230.76 gross/week OFP paid at half the rate for one year and then payment ceases	Tax paid on all income including OFP. Entitled to One Parent Family Tax Allowance (£4200) in addition to single person tax allowance (which combined effectively brings the tax allowance up to that of a married person), but only single tax bands apply. There may be entitlements to extra allowances under Revenue Job Assist	Can lose medical card, back to school allowance, clothing and footwear allowance, rent or mortgage interest supplement depending on the level of income	May qualify if work for at least 19 hours/week or 38 hours/fortnight and combined income and OFP is below a certain threshold	Becoming employed
Revenue Job Assist	Yes. Can earn up to £115.38 gross/week and keep full OFP. Only half the earnings over this are assessed. If earnings go above £230.76 gross/week OFP paid at half the rate for one year and then payment ceases	Tax paid on all income including OFP. Entitled to One Parent Family Tax Allowance (£4200) in addition to single person tax allowance (which combined effectively brings the tax allowance up to that of a married person), but only single tax bands apply. Also entitled to: Year 1 extra personal allowance of £3000 and £1000 for each child, Year 2 two-thirds of Year 1, Year 3 one third of Year 1	Can keep secondary benefits for 3 years provided income is below £250/week. The Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement limit of £250/month has been abolished and will be tapered over 4 years at the rate of 75% of the previous rate entitlement in Year 1, 50% in Year 2, 25% in Year 3 and 25% in Year 4. Medical Card can be kept for 3 years	May qualify if work for at least 19 hours/week or 38 hours/fortnight and combined income and OFP is below a certain threshold	Must be on OFP for 12 months, job must be 30 hours/week or over and be capable of lasting at least 12 months

Options	Impact on OFP	Tax Implications	Impact on other Benefits	Entitlement to FIS	Qualifying Requirements
CE	Yes. CE income is assessed against the OFP. However as the first £115.38/week of earnings is disregarded and only half the earnings over this is assessed a lone parent with one child will keep their OFP in full while on CE	Tax paid on all income including OFP. Entitled to One Parent Family Tax Allowance (£4000) in addition to single person tax allowance (which combined effectively brings the tax allowance up to that of a married person), but only single tax bands apply. There may be entitlements to extra allowances under Revenue Job Assist	Can keep secondary benefits provided total income is below £250/week. Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement limited to £250/month. Keep Medical Card for duration of CE	Not entitled to FIS	Must be 21 or over and on OFP for at least 12 months
BTWA	Yes. Keep 75% of OFP in first year, 50% in second year and 25% in third year as well as any earnings	Pay tax on earnings, not on BTWA. Entitled to One Parent Family Allowance on top of normal allowances	Will keep secondary benefits if total income under £250/week. The Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement limit of £250/month has been abolished and will be tapered over 4 years at the rate of 75% of the previous rate entitlement in Year 1, 50% in Year 2, 25% in Year 3 and 25% in Year 4. Medical card kept for 3 years regardless of income	May qualify if work for at least 19 hours/week or 38 hours/fortnight and combined income and OFP is below a certain threshold	Must be on OFP for 12 months. Work must be for at least 20 hours/week and be new employment which is likely to become a lasting job

Options	Impact on OFP	Tax Implications	Impact on other Benefits	Entitlement to FIS	Qualifying Requirements
BTWEA	Yes. Will keep 100% of OFP year 1, 75% year 2, 50% year 3 and 25% year 4	Pay tax on earnings, not on BTWEA. Entitled to One Parent Family Allowance on top of normal allowances. Must register as self employed with the Revenue Commissioners	Will keep secondary benefits if total income under £250/week. The Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement limit of £250/month has been abolished and will be tapered out over 4 years at the rate of 75% of the previous rate entitlement in Year 1, 50% in Year 2, 25% in Year 3 and 25% in Year 4. Medical card kept for 3 years regardless of income	Not entitled to FIS	Must be on OFP for 12 months
Jobstart	Yes. Can earn up to £115.38 gross/week and keep full OFP. Only half the earnings over this are assessed. If earnings go above £230.76 gross/week OFP paid at half the rate for one year and then payment ceases	Pay tax on all income including OFP. Entitled to One Parent Family Tax Allowance in addition to normal allowances	Will keep secondary benefits if total income under £250/week. Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement limited to £250/month. Medical card kept for 3 years	May qualify if work for at least 19 hours/week or 38 hours/fortnight and combined income and OFP is below a certain threshold	Must be on OFP for 3 years. Job must be full time for at least 5 days a week

Options	Impact on OFP	Tax Implications	Impact on other Benefits	Entitlement to FIS	Qualifying Requirements
Jobs Initiative (JI)	Yes. JI income is assessed against the OFP. The first £115.38/week of earnings is disregarded and only half the earnings over this are assessed	Tax paid on all income including OFP. Entitled to One Parent Family Tax Allowance (£4000) in addition to single person tax allowance (which combined effectively brings the tax allowance up to that of a married person), but only single tax bands apply	Retain Child Dependence Allowance for 13 weeks instead of secondary benefits. OFP claimants can apply for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance and the Fuel Allowance. Medical card kept for 3 years	May qualify for FIS	Must be on OFP for 5 years and aged over 35 living in a Partnership Area
Work place	Retain OFP plus get £25 towards meal and travel expenses				Must be on OFP for 6 months. Five weeks work placement
Employers PRSI Exemption Scheme	Can be used in conjunction with BTWA				Must be on OFP / must be aged under 23. Must be a full time new job

Options	Impact on OFP	Tax Implications	Impact on other Benefits	Entitlement to FIS	Qualifying Requirements
Mainstream Training	Yes. The first £115.38/week of earnings (including FAS child dependent allowance and training allowances) is disregarded and only half the earnings over this are assessed		Can keep secondary benefits provided total income is below £250/week. Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement limited to £250/month. Keep Medical Card		
BTEA	BTEA is equivalent to the maximum OFP	If work can keep BTEA but wages will affect any Rent or Mortgage interest Supplement	Can keep all secondary benefits and the Medical Card (unless working in which case the Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement can be affected). A cost of Education Allowance of £150 is also paid at the start of the academic year for second level, PLC and third level courses (but not for VTOS) [Note: there is no childcare allowance and many colleges have no childcare facilities]	No	Must be on OFP for 6 months. Periods spent on FAS training or CE counts towards this 6 months. Second level and PLC courses must be FT and result in a qualification recognised by DES or approved by NCVA. VTOS courses must be 30 hours/week FT and lead to a qualification recognised by DES or NCVA. Third level under graduate courses and in certain circumstances post graduate courses

Source: INOU, Goodbody Consultants, 1998; Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 1999a; Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000.

Annex 5

Impact of Paid Employment on the Income of a Lone Parent with One Child

Income when unemployed:

One Parent Family Payment (OFP)	£100.70 per week
Rent Allowance	£650 per month
Back to School Clothing & Footwear	£78 per year
Total weekly income for this family	£252.20 per week

Mary also has a medical card

Mary has been offered a job at £5 per hour for 39 hours a week. She wants to know how this will affect her payments.

Gross income from employment	per week	£195.00
	per annum	£10,140.00

Step 1: How will this impact on her OFP?

£115.38 of income is disregarded	(£195 – £115.38)	£79.62
Means assessed	(£79.62 divided by 2)	£39.81
New rate of OFP		£66.70

Step 2: How much tax will she have to pay?

Total gross income	(£195.00 + £66.70)	£261.70
As OFP is taxable, this is her total taxable income	(£261.70 x 52)	£13,608.40
Tax liability	£13,608.40 x 20%	£2,721.68
Tax credits		
Personal credit	£5,500 x 20%	£1,100.00
Lone parent's credit	£5,500 x 20%	£1,100.00
PAYE credit	£2,000 x 20%	£400.00
Total tax credits		£2,600.00
Income tax payable	£2,721.68 – £2,600	£121.68
(As Mary's earned income is less than £280 per week, she is not liable for PRSI or the Health Levy)		
Mary's net income		
per annum		
£13,608.40 – £121.68		
£13,486.72		
per week		£259.36

Step 3: Will Mary be eligible for Family Income Supplement?

As Mary is working more than 19 hours a week, she is eligible for FIS		
FIS income guideline: £278	£278 – £259.36	£18.64
	£18.64 x 60%	£11.18
Total net income including FIS	£259.36 + £11.18	£270.54

Step 4: What will the impact be on Mary’s secondary benefits?

Medical card

As Mary was unemployed for a year, she will be entitled to keep her medical card for 3 years after taking up employment, regardless of her income

Rent Allowance:

Mary is working more than 30 hours a week, so she is not eligible for Rent Allowance

Back to School Clothing & Footwear Allowance:

The income limit for a lone parent with 2 children is £141 per week, and is based on gross income. Mary’s gross income is £266.12, therefore she will lose this payment

Step 5: Comparison of out-of-work and in-work incomes

When Mary was unemployed, her household income was £252.20

Having taken up employment, her household income is £266.12. She will keep her medical card, but will have to pay childcare costs from her in-work income.

Would Mary be better off on Back to Work Allowance?

BTWA in year 1	£100.70 x 75%	£75.53
Wages (as BTWA is tax free, no tax is payable)		£195.00
Total		£270.53

As Mary’s total income is more than £250 a week, she cannot retain her secondary benefits. She will be able to qualify for FIS

FIS income guideline: £278	£278 – £270.53	£7.48
	£7.48 x 60%	£4.49
Minimum FIS payment		£10.00
Total net income including FIS	£270.53 + £10.00	£280.53

Comparison of out-of-work and in-work incomes

When Mary was unemployed, her household income was £252.20

Having taken up employment on BTWA, her household income is £280.53 – in the first year (her BTWA supplement will reduce to £50.35 in year 2, and £25.18 in year 3). She will keep her medical card, but will have to pay childcare costs from her in-work income.

Source: Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed (INOEU).

Annex 6

International Models of Lone Parents' Requirement to Work

Intervention	Features	Countries
High	Work required in order to receive benefits	USA
	Work test (obliged to seek work) regardless of age of children	Denmark, Italy, Spain, Sweden
	No work test if children under 3 years	Austria, Finland, France, Germany
	No work test if children are under school starting age	Canada, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway
	No work test if children are under 14-18	Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, UK
Low		

Source: Millar, 2000: 12.

Case Studies

LONE PARENTS AND ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

Case Study 1: The New Deal for Lone Parents (UK)

The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) was introduced in 8 areas in the UK as a prototype in 1997 and extended nationally in 1998. The aim of the NDLP is 'to help lone parents on Income Support move into work or towards preparing for work through the key mechanism of the support of a personal adviser' (DSS, 2000, Report No. 108). The scheme is voluntary in nature and is designed to cater for lone parents with children over 5 years.

Case Study 2: Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Programme, Australia

The JET Programme is the main Australian initiative to encourage lone parents into the work force. The JET Programme was introduced in 1989 to address the barriers to lone parents entering the work force. These barriers included lack of childcare facilities, low levels of education and skills among lone parents and negative attitudes towards lone parents. As is the case in the NDLP, in the UK, participation in JET is voluntary and is centred on the availability of local JET advisers as well as the provision of education, training and employment services and childcare places.

Case Study 3: New Chance Programme in the United States

As part of its liberalist welfare state, provision for lone parents in the US is based on participation in work. Policy with regard to lone parents does, however, vary somewhat between states. One initiative aimed at teenage mothers is the New Chance Programme which helps young mother to acquire educational and vocational credits to that they can secure employment. The object of the programme is to reduce the dependence of young lone mothers on welfare. Those eligible for New Chance include those in the 16-22 years age group who received Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), had their first child as a teen, and lack a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Guidelines for Officers in relation to Cohabitation

Table of Contents

GENERAL

- Points of Note
- Five criteria for assessing cohabitation
- Co-Residence
- Household Relationship
 - (a) Finances shared.
 - (b) Duties shared.
- Stability
- Social
- Sexual

SUMMARY

General

The question of whether a couple is cohabiting as husband and wife affects entitlement under the Social Welfare Acts in a number of ways:

- A person may be entitled to an increase for a qualified adult for a person who is not a spouse, provided the couple is cohabiting.
- A disqualification applies in various schemes where there is cohabitation.
- Means are calculated similarly for a cohabiting couple as for a married couple.
- In Unemployment Assistance, Disability allowance and Pre-retirement allowance cases a limitation is applied to payment rates where the person with whom the claimant is cohabiting is also in receipt of certain Social Welfare payments.

For Social Welfare purposes, cohabitation exists where the claimant and another person are living together as husband and wife.

As there is no other definition in law of what constitutes cohabitation, the relationship between the man and the woman must be shown to be the same as that of a husband and wife. As relationships and domestic and financial arrangements between husbands and wives vary considerably each individual case must be considered on its own particular facts.

Points of Note

The following general points should be borne in mind when examining the various aspects of a particular case.

In establishing entitlement to an increase in respect of a partner, the onus is on the claimant to produce satisfactory evidence to indicate that cohabitation exists. In the other contexts listed above, where an entitlement may be limited or withdrawn, the onus is on the Department to satisfy the Deciding Officer that cohabitation exists.

1. No **single** criterion can necessarily support a decision that a couple is living together as husband and wife. It is essential to have as much information as possible on all the criteria before arriving at a decision.
2. **Evidence**, or the lack of it, in any criterion may not necessarily be conclusive.
3. A **Voluntary admission** of living together as husband and wife is accepted as sufficient evidence where the person makes the admission in the knowledge that his/her own entitlement will be adversely affected by it. Such admission should be obtained in writing, as far as possible in his/her own words, and the statement should be read over to him/her before being signed.

Where such a signed statement is not received, both parties should be interviewed if possible. The second party should also be interviewed where his or her claim to benefit or assistance may be affected, and/or where his or her means are being taken into consideration.

Five criteria for assessing cohabitation

The elements may be subdivided as follows:

LIVING TOGETHER as husband and wife:

1. CO-RESIDENCE
2. HOUSEHOLD RELATIONSHIP: FINANCES SHARED
DUTIES SHARED

Living together AS HUSBAND AND WIFE:

3. STABILITY
4. SOCIAL
5. SEXUAL

Co-Residence

The first question to examine is whether they reside in a single residential unit.

Is the accommodation a single flat, apartment, caravan or other dwelling place?

If it is a house, is it officially a single household unit? Do the local housing rules permit it to be subdivided into more than one unit?

What type of accommodation is available and how is it shared?

Is the ESB, telephone, etc. covered by single or separate accounts?

Do either maintain (or live in) another home, or use another address? If so, which place is the effective residence?

(Even if one or both of the couple own or rent alternative accommodation they may still be regarded as living together as husband and wife, particularly where the alternative accommodation is seldom used. Evidence should therefore be obtained in such cases on the ownership/tenancy of the shared accommodation, the ownership of furniture etc.)

(*Note* – a married couple may also live apart for significant periods of time because of work abroad or elsewhere in Ireland, or because of providing care for relatives, but the marriage relationship remains intact. All the circumstances of each case need to be taken into consideration where similar factors affect a permanent but unmarried relationship.)

Household Relationship

The fact that the couple resides in a common residence is insufficient by itself to determine that they are living together as husband and wife. There also needs to be consideration as to whether they constitute a single household:

(a) Finances shared

Evidence of a common household fund is an indication of living together as husband and wife. Joint bank accounts used for household expenses would be strong evidence of such a relationship.

The following questions should be considered:

Who owns the property? Was it purchased jointly, and/or is it registered in joint names?

Are both parties named as mortgage holders?

If it is rented property, is it rented in joint names?

Is one party supported by the other?

Is there a pooling of financial resources?

Who pays the household expenses (rent, gas, electricity)?

Where one of the parties claims to be a subtenant or lodger but the amount paid is not realistic, comment should be made as to the average local rate for a lodger to pay for what he/she is receiving by way of accommodation, meals etc.

The absence of a common fund, however, is in itself not conclusive evidence that the couple is not living together as husband and wife, as financial arrangements vary frequently in marriages. An evaluation will be made by the deciding officer as

to whether the financial arrangement mirrors a householder- tenant or lodger, a householder- housekeeper, or a husband- wife relationship.

(b) Duties shared

Where household duties such as those listed below, are done by one partner for the other, or by both for each other, in the same way in which husbands and wives ordinarily perform such tasks then that is further evidence that the couple are living together as husband and wife.

Does the couple share any of the following:

1. Providing meals and shopping.
2. Cleaning and laundry.
3. Caring for each other and members of the household during illness.
4. Decorating, gardening, washing up.
5. Caring for the children. Do they share baby-sitting responsibilities?

Stability

Marriage is entered into as a stable relationship and therefore in deciding whether a couple is living together as husband and wife regard should be had to the stability of their relationship.

This may be reflected either in the duration of the relationship, or in the level of commitment to one another.

A couple who have decided to share together for a temporary period only (e.g. an unmarried couple where one party lives elsewhere and is only on holiday in Ireland) is not therefore cohabiting as husband and wife, and one could not claim an increase for the other as a qualified adult.

- Is there a financial commitment to a joint mortgage, joint bank accounts, etc.?
- Is there a commitment to raise (their) children together?
- Does the couple have plans to marry?
- What were the circumstances in which they took up residence together? Have they moved from house to house together?
- How long have they been residing together?

It must be remembered that it is not only the motive which caused the parties to live together which is important but the facts and circumstances which apply after they have done so.

Social

If a couple is acting socially or representing themselves to others as husband and wife such evidence should be included where it is known.

Do the couple socialise together?

Does the man act as father or the woman act as mother to their/each other's children?

Are they known locally as a couple or as man and wife?

Have they any plans to marry or would they marry if they were free to do so?

Did they represent themselves as a couple in applying for tenancy/mortgage?

Do they use a common surname?

Do they take holidays together?

Sexual

Where a couple has a child or children of their union, there is a strong presumption that they are living together as husband and wife.

Proof of sexual relations is not an essential element of cohabitation between a man and a woman. However, if such relations are admitted this is strong evidence of cohabitation.

Summary

It is not necessary that all the above five elements be present before cohabitation is established but some of the elements must be established. It would be necessary to establish co-residence – that the couple actually or normally resides at the same address – and that some of the other elements are also present.

The questions above are illustrative of the type of questions, which may be useful in different situations in trying to determine whether cohabitation exists.

Source: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

Transition Options for Lone Parents

Options include:

- (i) Enable retention of OFP or a lump sum equivalent, for some period after a person's change from one-parent to two-parent family status by:
 - (a) Freezing personal and child payments at OFP level until the person's new 'appropriate' payment catches up⁶⁰.
 - (b) Paying a lump sum equivalent to the difference between OFP and the 'new rate' for an agreed period – so that in the example of (a) above, the lone parent contemplating marriage/cohabitation could receive a 'bonus'⁶¹.
 - (c) A choice of system (a) or (b), on the clear understanding that if they opt for (b) that only in very exceptional circumstances (such as death of their new partner) would claims for restoration of OFP be considered. Giving people this choice would at least enable them to make their own financial decisions based on their own personal judgment of the likelihood of their new 'two-parent family' status continuing into the medium-term future.
- (ii) Retention of the One Parent Tax-Free Allowance/Tax Credit⁶² payable to lone parents⁶³. This could be done in similar ways to those suggested at (i) above, that is,
 - (a) Retention of the person's pre-cohabitation tax credits, until his/her new credits 'catch up', *or*:

60. At present social welfare rates, this would mean, for example, that a lone parent with one child who started cohabiting (but did not qualify for UA/UB, DB, or similar payment – only QAA) would continue to receive £85.50 per week and £15.20 per child until the relevant Qualified Adult Allowance (QAA) – probably £54 per week and per child payment – probably £13.20 per week. – increased to at least these levels.

61. The amount of the bonus would be £31.50 (the difference between the OFP and the QAA+ £2 (the difference between the CDAs) x 52, i.e. £1,742, if based on one year or £3,484 (if based on two years, (and so on) at the point when his/her status changes and the weekly payments are therefore reduced.

62. Legal difficulties exist regarding the definition of cohabitation for tax purposes (see Expert Working Group's Report on Integrating Tax and Welfare (1996)). These would have to be addressed.

63. Loss of this acts as a major disincentive to the commencement and/or declaration of cohabitation. If, for example, a lone parent is working, and benefiting from this favourable tax treatment, and commences a long-term relationship, his/her real living costs will not necessarily fall, in the short term, as a result of cohabitation – particularly if the new partner is also a parent with children to support (whether on a residential, non-residential or part-time basis). It is very likely, therefore, that cohabitation may be postponed, or concealed from the Revenue Commissioners.

(b) Payment of a lump sum equivalent of the difference between the person's 'old' and 'new' tax credits – a sort of 'buy-out' of, say, one, two or three years' 'loss', *or*:

(c) A system which allows a choice between (a) and (b), with similar restrictions as in (i) above.

(iii) Applying the BTWA arrangement to OFP and phasing out the amount received by the lone parent over a period of say three years to 75 per cent in year 1, 50 per cent in year 2 and 25 per cent in year 3.

Clearly, the advantage of (i) and (ii) (b) is that they give a very definite and immediate incentive for lone parents to not only *enter* a 'two-parent family' arrangement, but to *declare* cohabitation sooner rather than later. The main difficulty might be in administering the new system, particularly in the event of cessation of the cohabitation, and claims for restoration of OFP within the time-period in respect of which a lump sum has already been granted (be it one year, two years, or whatever). Such claims might be easy to decide in cases of death or migration, but not in cases in which a new relationship has broken down, for whatever reason, within weeks or months of the receipt of the lump sum.

The advantage of system (a) in (i) and (ii) would be that it lessens the difficulty (since the former lone parent who subsequently reverts to lone parenthood had remained on the original rate of OFP anyway). However, there is less of an incentive, under system (a), to declare cohabitation immediately.

Terms of Reference & Constitution of the Forum

1. The main task of the Forum will be:
 - to monitor and analyse the implementation of specific measures and programmes identified especially those concerned with the achievement of equality and social inclusion;
 - to do so through consideration of reports prepared by teams comprising the social partners, with appropriate expertise and representatives of relevant Departments and agencies and its own Secretariat;
 - with reports to be published by the Forum with such comments as may be considered appropriate; and
 - to ensure that the teams compiling such reports take account of the experience of implementing bodies and customers/clients, including regional variations in such experience.
2. The Forum may consider such policy issues on its own initiative or at the request of the Government.
3. Membership of the Forum will comprise representatives from the following four strands:
 - the Oireachtas;
 - employer, trade unions and farm organisations;
 - the voluntary and community sector; and
 - central government, local government and independents.
4. The terms of office of members will be for an initial period of at least two years during which alternates may be nominated. Casual vacancies will be filled by the nominating body or the Government as appropriate and members so appointed shall hold office until the expiry of the current term of office of all members. Retiring members will be eligible for re-appointment.
5. The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Forum will be appointed by the Government.
6. The Forum will decide on its own internal structures and working arrangements.
7. The Forum will be under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach and funded through a Grant-in-Aid which will be part of the overall Estimate for that

Department. The Annual Accounts of the Forum will be submitted for audit to the Comptroller and Auditor General.

8. Finally, the staffing and conditions of employment of the Forum's Secretariat will be subject to the approval of the Department of the Taoiseach.

Membership of the Forum

Independent Chairperson: Maureen Gaffney

Deputy Chairperson: Mary Doyle

(i) Oireachtas

Fianna Fáil:

Noel Ahern T.D.
Seán Haughey T.D.
Beverley Cooper-Flynn T.D.
Michael Kitt T.D.
Senator Margaret Cox
Senator Paschal Mooney

Fine Gael:

Gerry Reynolds T.D.
Paul McGrath T.D.
Bill Timmins T.D.
Senator Mary Jackman
Senator Therese Ridge

Labour:

Derek McDowell T.D.
Senator Joe Costello

Progressive Democrats:

Senator Jim Gibbons

Independents:

Michael Lowry T.D.

(ii) Employer/Trade Union and Farm Organisations

(a) Employer/Business Organisations:

IBEC:	Jackie Harrison
Aileen O'Donoghue	
Small Firms Association:	Lilian O'Carroll
Construction Industry Federation:	Mirette Corboy
Chambers of Commerce/Tourist Industry /Exporters Association:	Carmel Mulroy

(b) Trade Unions:	Eamonn Devoy Blair Horan Jerry Shanahan Manus O’Riordan Joan Carmichael
(c) Agricultural/Farming Organisations:	
Irish Farmers Association:	Betty Murphy
Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association:	Pat O’Rourke
Irish Co-Operative Organisation Society:	Seamus O’Donoghue
Macra na Feirme:	Eileen Doyle
Irish Country Womens Association:	Eva Coyle
(iii) Community and Voluntary Sector	
<i>Womens Organisations:</i>	Ursula Barry Gráinne Healy Susan McNaughton
<i>Unemployed:</i>	Camille Loftus Joan Condon Mary Murphy
<i>Disadvantaged:</i>	Joe Gallagher Frances Byrne Janice Ransom
<i>Youth:</i>	Ciairín de Buis
<i>Older People:</i>	Paddy Donegan
<i>Disability:</i>	John Dolan
<i>Environment:</i>	Jeanne Meldon
<i>Others:</i>	Fr. Seán Healy Mary Murphy

(iv) Central Government, Local Government and Independents

(a) Central Government

Secretary-General, Department of Finance
Secretary-General, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Secretary-General, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs
Secretary-General, Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation
Secretary-General, Department of the Environment and Local Government

(b) Local Government

General Council of County Councils: Councillor Constance Hanniffy
Councillor Tom Kelleher
Councillor Enda Nolan

Association of Municipal Authorities: Councillor Tadhg Curtis

County and City Managers Association: Donal O'Donoghue

(c) Independents

Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, National University of Ireland, Galway
Ms. Marian Vickers, Northside Partnership
Ms. Helen Johnston, Surg Equipment Ltd.
Mr. Niall Fitzduff, Rural Communities Network
Ms. Noreen Kearney, Trinity College, Dublin

Secretariat

Director: Seán Ó hÉigeartaigh
Policy Analysts: David Silke
Laurence Bond
Sarah Craig
Executive Secretary: Paula Hennelly

Forum Publications

(i) Forum Reports

Report No.	Title	Date
1.	<i>Negotiations on a Successor Agreement to the PESP</i>	November 1993
2.	<i>National Development Plan 1994 – 1999</i>	November 1993
3.	<i>Commission on Social Welfare – Outstanding Recommendations</i>	January 1994
4.	<i>Ending Long-term Unemployment</i>	June 1994
5.	<i>Income Maintenance Strategies</i>	July 1994
6.	<i>Quality Delivery of Social Services</i>	February 1995
7.	<i>Jobs Potential of Services Sector</i>	January 1996
8.	<i>First Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum</i>	June 1995
9.	<i>Jobs Potential of Work Sharing</i>	January 1996
10.	<i>Equality Proofing Issues</i>	February 1996
11.	<i>Early School Leavers and Youth Employment</i>	January 1997
12.	<i>Rural Renewal – Combating Social Exclusion</i>	March 1997
13.	<i>Unemployment Statistics</i>	May 1997
14.	<i>Self-Employment, Enterprise and Social Inclusion</i>	October 1997
15.	<i>Second Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum</i>	November 1997
16.	<i>A Framework for Partnership – Enriching Strategic Consensus through Participation</i>	December 1997
17.	<i>Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Local Employment Service</i>	March 2000
18.	<i>Social and Affordable Housing and Accommodation: Building the Future</i>	September 2000
19.	<i>Alleviating Labour Shortages</i>	November 2000
20.	<i>Lone Parents</i>	July 2001

(ii) Forum Opinions

Opinion No.	Title	Date
1.	<i>Interim Report of the Task Force on Long-term Unemployment</i>	March 1995
2.	<i>National Anti-Poverty Strategy</i>	January 1996
3.	<i>Long-term Unemployment Initiatives</i>	April 1996
4.	<i>Post PCW Negotiations – A New Deal?</i>	August 1996
5.	<i>Employment Equality Bill</i>	December 1996
6.	<i>Pensions Policy Issues</i>	October 1997
7.	<i>Local Development Issues</i>	October 1999
8.	<i>The National Anti-Poverty Strategy</i>	August 2000

(iii) Forum Opinions under the Monitoring Procedures of Partnership 2000

Opinion No.	Title	Date
1.	<i>Development of the Equality Provisions</i>	November 1997
2.	<i>Targeted Employment and Training Measures</i>	November 1997