Chairperson, Committee Members,
Thank you for the invitation to meet with you this morning to discuss the availability of activation services and other supports for unemployed people not on the live register.

You will have received copies of this speaking note. I am joined by my colleagues Niall Egan, Principal Officer with responsibility for jobseeker and lone parent income support policy, and Tom Lehane, Assistant Principal Officer in the our Dublin South Division.

Background

In talking about activation policy, it is useful to distinguish between the activation process that applies to people receiving job-seekers payments, and the broader concept of employment services and programmes that are available not only to registered job-seekers but also to other groups.

The activation process relates to how the public employment service pro-actively engages with people who are unemployed, who declare themselves to be fully available for work and who are in receipt of a jobseeker payment. An essential element of this approach is the concept of ‘rights and responsibilities’. People who are unemployed and seeking work have a right to receive an income support and to receive assistance from the public employment services but also have a responsibility, indeed an obligation, to engage with these services. Compulsory engagement with the INTREO service constitutes part of the conditionality for receipt of jobseeker’s payments. Registered jobseekers must attend at a group information session soon after becoming unemployed and they must attend for interview with a case officer if called on to do so. Penalty-rate reductions may be applied to their welfare payments if they fail to meet these obligations, or to take up reasonable offers of supports such as training. In addition their payment may be fully withdrawn if a deciding officer forms the view that their behaviour indicates that they are not available for and actively seeking work.

Employment services relate primarily to the assistance INTREO gives to clients, primarily through case worker support and guidance in the search for suitable work. As I have already indicated, engagement with these services is compulsory for recipients of jobseekers payments. The services are not however limited to people in receipt of jobseeker payments
and are available to any client who goes to an INTREO office seeking assistance in finding work.

Finally, the employment service can help clients to access a range of employment and training programmes, administered either by the Department itself or through the Department of Education and Skills and its agencies. Employment programmes provided directly or funded by the Department of Social Protection include schemes such as Community Employment, Tús, Gateway and JobBridge. In addition the Department provides a range of employment incentives such as JobsPlus and in-work income supports such as Family Income supplement (FIS) and the Back to Work Family Dividend. Although participation on a small number of the employment programmes is limited to recipients of job-seeker payments, in general they are accessible to recipients of a wide range of welfare payments. Some are also accessible to persons who are not in receipt of any welfare payment – though participation on such programmes will not entitle such clients to receive welfare payments or training allowances while participating.

Rationale for the policy approach

The key objective of activation policy is to offer assistance to those most in need of support in securing work and achieving financial self-sufficiency and on whom the State imposes an obligation to be ‘genuinely available for and seeking work’ as a condition for receipt of payment.

This policy objective was set in the context of the massive increase in the numbers of unemployed people on job-seekers payments that took place between 2007 and 2012; over this period the Live Register rose from 160,000 to 450,000. In this context it was necessary to prioritise scarce resources to those in receipt of a qualifying welfare payment whose payment was conditional on the recipient engaging, if and as requested, with the Public Employment Service. Accordingly activation services by the Department are focused in the first instance on this cohort of unemployed people.

Current situation for non-Live Register groups

Notwithstanding the focus of ‘activation’ policy on unemployed people in receipt of job-seekers payments, many services are available, as I have said, to people who are in receipt of other (or no) social welfare payments. It may be useful to outline the situation in respect of two of the main groups involved.

Recipients of Disability Allowance

The current policy in respect of people with disabilities who present at an Intreo centre requesting employment services is that they are to be referred immediately to a caseworker
within Intreo, at the Local Employment Service (LES) or at one of the EmployAbility Service providers funded by the Department of Social Protection. For such persons in receipt of disability/illness support payments, engagement with the Intreo service is on a voluntary basis – it is not a requirement for their payment.

A caseworker working with a person with a disability can arrange access for that client to most of the range of services and programmes that are available to people on jobseekers’ payments. This includes access to programmes such as JobBridge, the Back to Education Allowance, and SOLAS training for unemployed people. Exceptions include the JobsPlus recruitment subsidy, the Momentum training intervention and Tús, all of which were specifically designed for long-term recipients of jobseeker payments.

In addition, however, the caseworker can arrange access to a range of other services and supports that are specific to people with disabilities and are not available to other jobseekers. In 2014 the Department spent c €34m on the provision of various employment supports (excluding the Specialist Training Providers) for people with disabilities. These include:-

- **EmployAbility**

  EmployAbility, which I’ve already referenced above, is an open labour market initiative providing disabled people with supports to help them access the open labour market. The Supported Employment Service provided by EmployAbility is an employment and recruitment service to assist people with a disability to secure and maintain a job in the open labour market. This Supported Employment Service provides a range of supports to employers and people with a disability, through Job Coaches.

  It is implemented by sponsor organisations (EmployAbility) on behalf of DSP who employ Job Coaches to provide a range of supports tailored to the individual needs of a jobseeker. The ultimate objective is that the employee becomes independent of Job Coach support.

- **The Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS)**

  The purpose of this demand-led programme is to increase the number of people with disabilities participating in the open labour market. WSS provides financial incentives to employers, outside the public sector, to employ disabled people who work more than 21 hours per week. An employee must work a minimum of 21 hours per week up to a maximum of 39 hours per week. The rate of subsidy is €5.30 per hour and is based on the number of hours worked, giving a total annual subsidy available of €10,748 per annum based on 39 hour week. This payment is not time-limited and is paid for the full period of employment of the individual concerned. This is significantly more attractive
than the equivalent payment under JobsPlus for people in receipt of jobseeker payments under which the maximum amount payable is €5,000 p.a. for a limit of two years.

New applicants for WSS who are currently on Disability Allowance may also apply for a DA Disregard in conjunction with the WSS provided the minimum 21 working hours per week WSS threshold is maintained. Again this disregard of €120 per week is double that of the equivalent jobseeker disregard and, in addition, the withdrawal or taper rate in also more attractive than that of the jobseeker payment.

- Disability Support/Awareness

A number of different employment supports for people with disabilities are provided for under this heading, including grants for workplace equipment adaptation.

- Community Employment

The CE eligibility requirements for people with disabilities are not as demanding as for other Job seeker groups so as to encourage participation. Those on job-seekers’ payments generally must be aged over 25 and on a payment for a year or more. Effectively a person in receipt of DA who is aged 18 or over can be in receipt of their payment for 1 week and be eligible for CE.

- Specialist Training Providers

Apart from having access to the range of training programmes (other than Momentum) for unemployed people provided through Solas, people with disabilities also have access to Specialist Training Programme provision specific to their needs.

Key additional features of specialist vocational training, as compared with programmes for the generality of unemployed job-seekers, include longer training duration, improved trainer-learner ratios with specially qualified staff, and specially adapted equipment.

Overall, therefore, people with disabilities have access to a range of services comparable to, and in most cases superior to, the range available to those on the Live Register. The principal difference in approach is that engagement with these services is entirely on a voluntary basis for those with disabilities.

**Recipients of One-parent family payment (OFP)**

As with people with disabilities, the current situation in respect of people on a lone parents’ payment who present at a DSP office needing activation/intervention type supports is that
they are referred to a caseworker within Intreo or at the Local Employment Service (LES). For persons in receipt of lone parents’ payments, engagement with the Intreo service is on a voluntary basis – it is not a requirement for their payment.

A case officer working with a lone parent can arrange access for that client to virtually the full range of services and programmes that are available to people on jobseekers’ payments including the in-work income supports of FIS and the Back to Work Family Dividend. The only exceptions are JobsPlus, Momentum and Tús.

OPFP eligibility has been recently restricted to lone parents whose youngest child is aged less than 7 years of age. For people who are not cohabiting with another adult and whose youngest child is aged between 7 and 13 years inclusive, OFP has been replaced by the Jobseeker’s Transitional payment. This is a special arrangement under the Jobseeker’s Allowance (JA) scheme that aims to support lone parents into the workforce while they have young children. The payment is known as JST.

The arrangements for JST recognise the need to promote engagement and incentivise work for this group of clients while also acknowledging the child care issues for persons who are parenting alone. These lone parents will still have caring responsibilities for young children and, as a result, may not be able to meet all of the conditionality provisions that apply to the JA scheme – which currently require all JA recipients to be available for, and genuinely seeking, full-time work. To address their needs, the Jobseeker’s Allowance Transition (JST) provides access to the Jobseeker’s Allowance payment with reduced conditionality i.e. they are exempt from having to be available for and genuinely seeking full-time work and from the 4 days in 7 rule. This allows this group of clients to receive income support continue, to work and/or take up employment and receive access to employment supports from the Department in order to support them to become job ready.

At the same time, engagement with the INTREO service is a requirement for continued receipt of JST. The engagement, commencing with a Group Information Session and a 1-2-1 interview with a case officer, is with a view to bringing the client closer to the labour market and ultimately entering the workforce. Given the exemptions related to availability for work JST client are not required to avail of a suitable employment opportunity and therefore the question of ‘Genuinely Seeking Work’ sanctions does not arise. The aim of the process remains, however, that these individuals should be encouraged to take up suitable employment and fully supported to achieve that goal. Eligibility for participation in the JobsPlus recruitment subsidy scheme has been extended to persons on JST in support of this goal.

In summary, lone parents with children aged under 7 years have access to all of the services and to most of the programmes available to those on the Live Register. The principal difference in approach is that engagement with these services is entirely on a voluntary
basis for such lone parents. For lone parents with a youngest child aged over 7 years, the new arrangements under JST have introduced engagement with the INTREO service as a requirement; however this has been done in a way that acknowledges the continuing childcare responsibilities of this group.

A final group sometimes identified as being outside the scope of existing supports is made up of working-age adults who are qualified adult dependants on a primary claimant’s job-seeker’s payment. This payment has no conditionality in relation to the qualified adult him/herself being unemployed – indeed it is estimated that 40% of those involved are in fact in employment. Nevertheless qualified adults who are not the primary claimant on a jobseeker claim can access the full range of employment services and programmes and become full participants in the activation regime if they voluntarily self-identify as unemployed and register for a job-seeker’s payment in his/her own right. This will bring with it both the responsibilities and rights (in terms of employment services and programmes) that attach to job-seekers payments.

**Developments under Pathways to Work (PTW)**

The *Pathways to Work* 2015 strategy includes a commitment to develop and evaluate actions to extend services, as resources allow, to people not on the Live Register and improve the promotion/communication of existing activation options. As already outlined, some steps have already been taken through the reform of the OPFP payment and the introduction of JST. Further measures are now being considered as to how activation can be extended to other people of working age in the context of the development of an updated PTW strategy for 2016-20. In this regard the Department initiated a consultation programme during the summer of 2015 in the form of an online survey of c. 200 stakeholders and held a consultation forum for stakeholders on 9th October last. The inputs received through this process are now being collated. Inputs are still welcome and can be sent to the following email address EmploymentPolicyUnit@welfare.ie. It is intended that an updated Pathways to Work Strategy taking account of the inputs received will be drafted and submitted to Government by January of 2016.

**Conclusion**

I hope I have given you some insight into the approach to providing employment services to unemployed people who are not on the live register.

We are very happy to take any of your questions and provide any additional material that you may require.

THANK YOU

ENDS.