



POLICY AND PRACTICE REPORT

KEY LEARNING FROM THE BALLYMUN YOUTH GUARANTEE PROJECT



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Photos:

Collage of photos taken at various BYG events during 2014, including Partner Organisations, participants etc.

Page 7: Former EU Commissioner Laszlo Andor's visit to Ballymun Youth Guarantee Pilot Project, May 2014

Page 32: Various BYG participants, Commissioner Andor's visit.

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MAURICE DEVLIN

Department of Social Protection (DSP)

Aras Mhic Dhiarmada, Store Street, Dublin 1.

www.welfare.ie

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Author: Prof. Maurice Devlin.

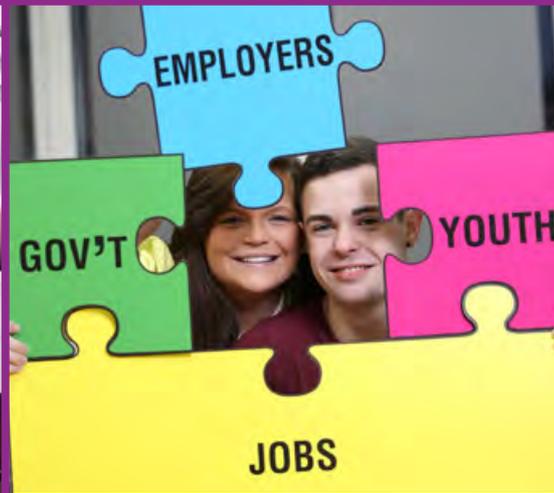
Maurice Devlin is Jean Monnet Professor and Director of the Centre for Youth Research and Development at Maynooth University.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the context and implementation of the Ballymun Youth Guarantee (BYG) pilot project. It attempts to distil the key lessons learned and to identify the implications for policy and practice. It should therefore be of interest and relevance to policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders concerned with youth employment and unemployment.

The report itself cannot be exhaustive. However it draws on a very large body of information and documentation relating to the BYG project, including:

- policy statements, background reports and other documents relating to the Youth Guarantee and youth (un)employment in Ireland and the European Union;
- local and national labour force data;
- statistical data on the numbers and types of offers made to young people by the BYG;
- case studies of BYG clients;
- testimonials from participants in programmes, placements and initiatives associated with the BYG;
- minutes of meetings of the National Steering Group and Local Implementation Group for the BYG, and other organisational and administrative reports, including a detailed report on 'lessons learned' prepared by the NSG;
- a comprehensive independent evaluation of the BYG conducted by Franklin Research which itself is based on extensive qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis;
- separate evaluations, consultancy reports and information reports on individual elements of the BYG project (for example the guidance process) or specific initiatives associated with it (education and training programmes, employer-led interventions);
- written comments by members of the NSG, LIG and other stakeholders while the report was in preparation.

The work of all of those who contributed to the materials on which this report is based is gratefully acknowledged. It is hoped that, both through their own efforts and through the synthesis presented in this report, their experience and insights can help to inform the roll out of the national Youth Guarantee in Ireland.



2. YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The global economic crisis that followed the near-collapse of worldwide financial markets in 2008 has had a profoundly negative effect on young people, manifested most obviously in the dramatic increase in youth unemployment rates. Even prior to this, in a broadly positive economic climate, youth unemployment was often a concern in many countries, reflecting the persistent pattern whereby young people are at a relative disadvantage in the labour market (Bell & Blanchflower 2011; O'Higgins 2012). But the scale of the problem in recent years has led to an unprecedented focus, at national and international levels, on the need to develop effective responses.

It is usual for the rate of youth unemployment to be considerably higher than that of adults, and in times of recession the difference can be magnified. In recent years for example unemployment among 15-24 year-olds was on average 2.8 times higher than among older members of the labour force in both EU and OECD countries. But in several countries, including Norway, Italy and the UK, it was between three and four times higher and in Sweden and Iceland it was more than four times higher (Furlong, 2013; Scarpetta et al., 2010). During the recent recession youth employment in Ireland reached its lowest ever level, with the decline particularly concentrated in construction and services. In the years 2007-2012, people aged 15-24 accounted for 90% of the overall decline in labour market participation (Eurostat; Gonzáles Pandiella 2013).

There are a number of reasons for young people's higher rates of unemployment: they account for a disproportionate share of new jobseekers and are more likely to be affected when employers stop recruiting; they are more likely to be in temporary positions; and they are more likely than older workers to be laid off (Furlong 2013; O'Higgins 2001). In addition, young people tend to be over represented in jobs that are sensitive to economic cycles, such as construction and related sectors (Oireactas Library & Research Service 2013; ILO 2011). While in general young people tend to be unemployed for shorter periods than older adults, the difference is not large enough for the problem to be treated as one of transient 'frictional' unemployment. Furthermore, the time a young person spends unemployed can have 'permanently damaging consequences on the rest of that person's "working" life' (O'Higgins 2001: 161). This is related to the concept of 'path dependency': early unemployment increases the likelihood of subsequent unemployment, with its attendant ill effects. Some writers refer to labour market 'scarring' which has a number of dimensions:

- precluding accumulation of work experience and deterioration of general skills;
 - negative signaling effects on future earnings and impeded future work transitions;
 - social network losses.
- (Arulampalam 2001; Dietrich 2012)

2.1 Policies to address youth (un)employment

Most European countries have for some time had specific policies or programmes in place to address youth (un)employment. In some other countries it is dealt with as part of broader government policy on employment and unemployment. Ireland has up until now been among the latter group. According to the European Commission: 'In Ireland... issues relating to youth employment tend to be addressed in the context of labour market policy as a whole. However, as there are a number of measures in place to support young people this does not imply that youth matters receive less than adequate attention' (European Commission 2010: 29). The introduction of the Youth Guarantee means that, by definition, the specific situation of young people is intended to receive careful attention in all EU countries. The advantages of youth-specific interventions can be summarised as follows:

- Young people face specific challenges in accessing the labour market so tailored responses are more likely to be effective.
 - Unemployed young people incur significant economic costs as the national workforce is not being used to its full potential. Such underutilization can trigger a cycle of intergenerational poverty and social exclusion.
 - Lack of employment opportunities leads to a range of other social problems, which, in turn, have negative human consequences and incur high social costs.
- (Adapted from Coenjaerts et al. 2009: 120)

Measures to tackle youth unemployment – and promote youth employment – can take a number of forms and can be targeted at different stages in the transition experienced by young people as they move through the latter stages of schooling and into the labour market or on to further education or training programmes. Figure 1 is drawn from a Eurofound review of 'policy measures to increase the employment participation of young people' (Eurofound 2012). It shows that some measures seek to intervene before risk factors occur whereas others intervene at later stages of the young person's pathway to employment. The relevance of this framework for the Youth Guarantee will be revisited later in this report.



Figure 1: The pathway to employment (Source: Eurofound 2012)

As regards the steps that should be taken, and the key issues to be addressed, in promoting youth employment, the following were among the recommendations that emerged from an OECD conference on this theme in Dublin:

1. Create the right institutional setting

There is a need to ensure that labour market institutional settings are youth friendly and protect young people through sufficient regulation, while maintaining an appropriate balance so that employers are not dissuaded from taking on more young workers. Moving to an individualised system can ensure that each young person is engaged with on a personal basis.

2. Take an integrated approach, taking care to involve employers and young people

Establish partnerships across agencies, institutions and with employers. Greater collaboration at the local level with employers has a number of advantages and often if programmes do not work it is due to lack of employer involvement. Young people also need a say in the services which are being created for them. Build an opportunity for young people to make connections with policy making and involve them in programme design.

3. Develop the right kind of skills

Young people need to acquire basic foundation skills for life-long learning, with early and sustained support. This requires action on multiple fronts: education and training, early years supports, labour market programmes and labour market institutional settings.

4. Stress connections between education and work and build in work experience

Providing young people with work experience is key: skills can be taught but this is not the same as experience. Making connections between education and work builds work readiness, can be a motivating force and raises self-esteem. It is important for young people to acquire periods of work experience early and not just when they are looking for their first job. Subsidised job training/work experience, job guarantee schemes and adapted apprenticeship approaches (in-school vocational education paired with work experience) can also be effective.

5. Target the disadvantaged, but also those who can benefit most

In an era of limited resources there is a need to target interventions. The main target group for intensive assistance should be hardest-to-reach young people - those not in education, employment or training. Preventative work to stop vulnerable young people dropping out of school is essential as once out of the system it is much harder to get them back in.

6. Youth entrepreneurship has untapped potential

In light of rising youth unemployment, young people need to be encouraged to take advantage of opportunities in the smart economy and create their own employment opportunities. The local 'eco system' can be made more conducive to entrepreneurial activity by making everything young entrepreneurs need available under one roof e.g. funding information, training, mentoring from experienced entrepreneurs and successful peer role models, and peer support. Support requires creating a culture which does not punish young people for failing. (Adapted from OECD 2012: 22-24)

The theme of partnership, mentioned at point 2 above, is a consistent one in recent literature on youth employment and unemployment, as indeed in other areas of social and economic policy.

Partnerships among governments, employers' organizations, trade unions and other organizations can be instrumental in determining the most appropriate action to be taken at national and local levels for the promotion of decent work for young people. To bring high youth unemployment rates down, it is essential that employers, unions and governments not only dialogue together about how to achieve

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a socio-economic recovery, but mobilize to develop specific projects and interventions, including in partnership with young people. (ILO 2012: 36)

In relation to the last point above – partnership with young people – there has been a growing emphasis in recent years on the contribution of youth work to young people’s employment prospects and indeed to economic and social development as a whole. This is just one aspect of a wide range of benefits young people gain from their participation in youth work (Devlin and Gunning 2009; NYCI 2013; Youthnet 2013). A study commissioned by the European Youth Forum into the impact of non-formal education in youth organisations on young people’s employability concluded that regular engagement and participation in youth organisations brings high ‘soft-skills’ development:

Amongst the six skills mostly demanded by employers, five are also among those developed through involvement in youth organisations: [these are] communication, team work, decision-making, organisational skills and self-confidence [the exception being numeracy]’. (Souto-Otero et al. 2013: 17)

While it is important to recognise that there may be a tension between ‘a labour activation model and a more holistic personal development/non-formal learning model favoured by youth work’ (Bamber and Garvey 2014: 8), initiatives to combat youth unemployment can benefit not just from youth work approaches and methods but from the high level of trust and confidence that young people tend to have in youth workers and youth organisations:

Youth work can play a key role in reaching out to all young people. For those with fewer opportunities, youth work supports re-integration, through its close and informal contacts with young people, youth-friendly outreach and ability to instil trust in young people to get in touch with authorities. It provides individual support on occupational orientation and counselling, tailored to the particular challenges of different young people, in an informal environment. (European Commission 2014a: 5)

However all efforts to promote youth employment must begin by recognising ‘the limitations of the labour market itself’ (Behle 2010: 80). Since youth unemployment is so closely tied to the general unemployment problem ‘the most important solution is to improve the macroeconomic environment’ (Görllich 2013: 6). But as already noted unemployment among young people is consistently more severe than among other groups, and even in employment young workers face a range of particular challenges and disadvantages (European Commission 2011: 25-27), so it is important to develop solutions that can have a lasting benefit for young people.

Even before the crisis, the situation with regard to youth employment was unsatisfactory in most countries. Consequently, the crisis should be seen as an opportunity to solve long-standing youth employment problems and to develop youth employment strategies that take into account all the dimensions of decent work, and not just youth employment in quantitative terms. (Ha et al.: 2010: 23)



3. THE EUROPEAN UNION YOUTH GUARANTEE

The Youth Guarantee (YG), as defined by the Council Recommendation of April 2013, is a pledge by all Member States of the EU to ensure that ‘all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education’. Young people should be provided with a personalised offer that addresses the specific barriers they face in gaining a strong foothold in the labour market. Similarly, young people’s school-to-work transitions can be long and complex, including alternating phases of education, work and potentially periods of unemployment and inactivity. In many cases this will require re-thinking the ‘sequencing’ of interventions such that the transitions for the young person are positive and as seamless as possible in order to keep young people connected to the labour market.

The Youth Guarantee takes into consideration both immediate and long-term perspectives. When it was adopted, immediate action was considered necessary to relieve the unacceptably high levels of youth unemployment and inactivity. This included, for instance, financial incentives to support work placements, apprenticeships and training. The YG also stressed that these actions should be accompanied by long-term reforms to address the structural barriers faced by young people as they transition to working life (e.g. investing in multi-stakeholder partnerships, apprenticeship reforms, outreach strategies or PES capacity-building to work with young people not in employment, education or training (‘NEET’). Although youth unemployment is falling (to variable degrees) across the EU, including in Ireland, the objectives of the YG are still important to ensure that as the recovery takes hold, young people are able to benefit fully from that recovery.

The Youth Guarantee is complemented by two European initiatives aiming to increase the provision of two types of quality offers: traineeships and apprenticeships. The Quality Framework for Traineeships aims to ensure that traineeships outside formal education provide high quality learning content and fair working conditions so that traineeships effectively support education-to-work transitions and increase the employability of trainees. The European Alliance for Apprenticeships aims to increase the quality and supply of apprenticeships across Europe and to change mind-sets towards this type of learning.

Since the Youth Guarantee is an outcome-focused structural reform, the means of implementation may vary both within and across Member States. Indeed, there is no single, one-size-fits-all Youth Guarantee scheme that could respond to the needs of different groups of young people across all European countries. As the Council Recommendation establishing the Youth Guarantee of April 2013 specifically states: ‘the Youth Guarantee should [...] be geared to national, regional and local circumstances’. This means that Member States should base their actions on a comprehensive analysis of youth unemployment and inactivity in their country/regions, carry out a mapping of existing policies on youth employment and link these measures to a comprehensive YG scheme (e.g. by introducing appropriate referral systems and avoiding duplication of activity), and fill policy gaps by means of targeted reforms or new initiatives to ensure that the approach is comprehensive and does not leave any one behind. Even if there is no one way of organising or structuring the YG, there are key elements – building blocks – which support successful design and implementation of the approach. These are introduced in Figure 2 below, together with other supportive conditions.

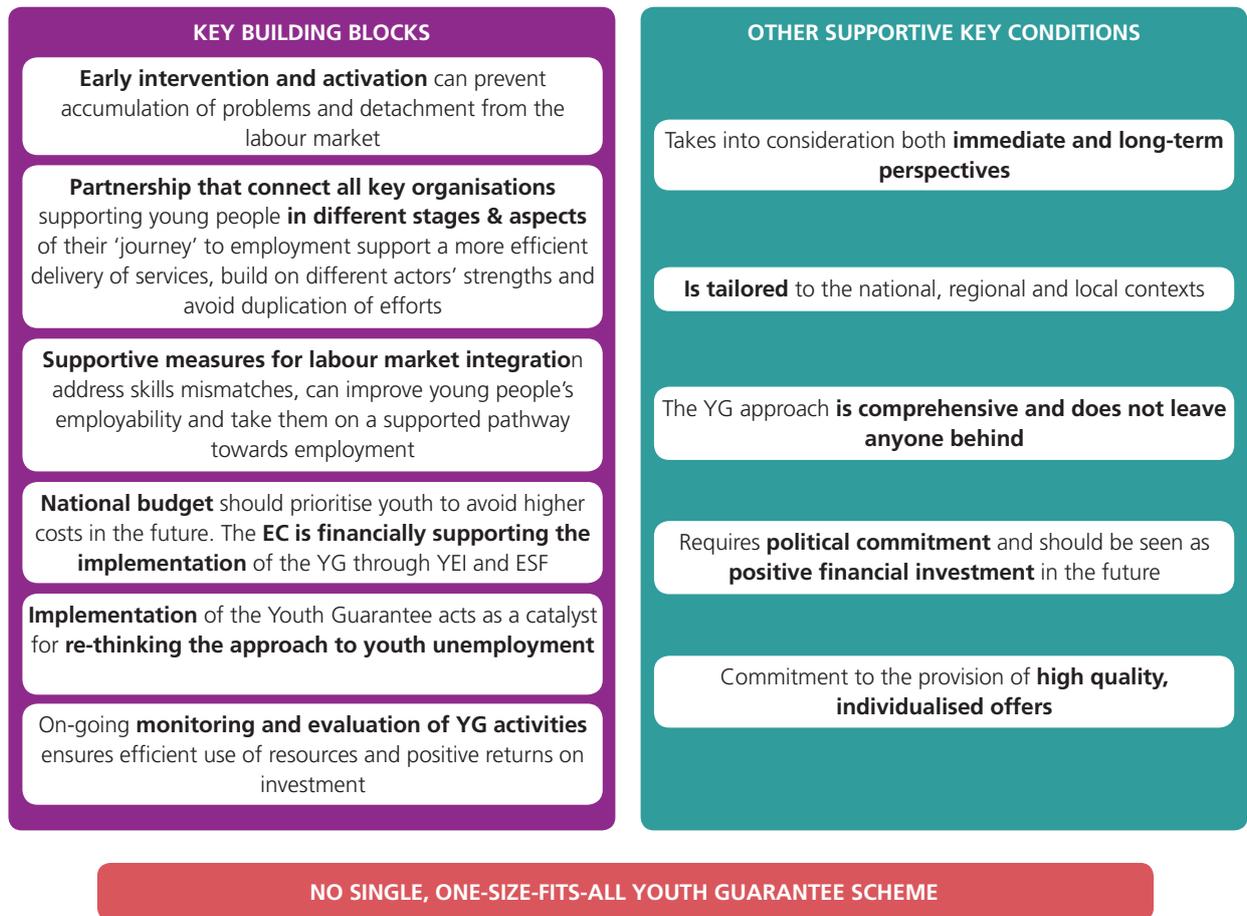


Figure 2: Key building blocks of the Youth Guarantee (Source: European Commission 2014b)



YOUTH GUARANTEE

Pilot in Ballymun

Supporting young people into employment, education & training





4. THE YOUTH GUARANTEE IN IRELAND

The approach to a Youth Guarantee for Ireland is set out in *Pathways to Work: The Implementation of the EU Council Recommendation for a Youth Guarantee*. It is designed to take account of the current institutional structure, most specifically in terms of the transition from education to working life and the way in which the benefits system and Public Employment Service engages with the young unemployed. The Irish Youth Guarantee identifies two separate groups of young people to whom the concept of a guarantee will operate in different ways.

- a) Young people under the age of 18 years, who have left the school system without completing secondary education, and who have failed to find employment, will be provided with a quality 'second-chance' educational /training pathway outside the school system, such as Youthreach, or be supported in re-entering the school system;
- b) Young people aged 18-24 years who become unemployed (whether on loss of a job or while seeking first employment) and register with the benefits/employment service, and who subsequently remain unemployed for four months, will be provided with assistance to secure work or alternatively with a quality offer of training, education or work experience.

Achieving these targets is a medium-term policy objective of the Irish government. It is envisaged that the guarantee as it affects those aged under 18 years will be implemented by the end of 2015. The guarantee of an offer of training, education or work experience for those aged 18-24 years after a four month period is being implemented on a phased basis as follows:

- Starting in 2014, processes and programmes are being progressively rolled out to ensure that all of those young unemployed people who need most support (i.e. are assessed as having a low probability of securing employment in the absence of support from the Public Employment Services) will receive a Youth Guarantee offer within four months.
- Starting in 2014, and for completion by the end of 2015, processes and programmes will be progressively rolled out to ensure that all those young unemployed people assessed as having a medium-to-high probability of finding employment will, if still unemployed after nine months, receive a Youth Guarantee Offer.
- During 2014-2015 all long-term unemployed young people under 25 will be engaged by the Public Employment Service and will receive a Youth Guarantee offer if still unemployed after four months of this engagement process commencing.

Specific recent Youth Guarantee initiatives being implemented in the context of *Pathways to Work 2015* include *JobsPlus Youth*, under which the qualifying period for jobseekers under 25 has been reduced from 12 to 4 months (JobsPlus incentivises businesses to hire jobseekers from the Live Register by providing monthly cash payments to offset wage costs) and *First Steps*, which offers young jobseekers aged 18-25 the opportunity to avail of funded training and work experience with the help of dedicated assistance from Department of Social Protection case officers and mentors in sponsoring organisations (the target is 2000 placements of 6-9 months duration during 2015).

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The operation and coverage of the Youth Guarantee as set out above will be reviewed before the end of 2015, in the light of developments in the economy and in the labour market. Should the labour market situation of young people improve during this period the review will examine opportunities to broaden and deepen the level of supports offered in respect of those young people who continue to be unemployed.

The Department of Social Protection (DSP) has been identified as the lead co-ordinating organisation for the Youth Guarantee, and as the central point for communication with the European Commission in relation to the YG in Ireland. The Department has responsibility for the Public Employment Service, activation of the unemployed and the payment of social welfare payments to jobseekers. These three services were previously provided by separate agencies but are now integrated within the Department and are provided under the service name *Intreo*. A number of other government departments and statutory agencies will be involved and are members of an interdepartmental Youth Guarantee Implementation Group. These are:

- Department of Education and Skills (DES)
- Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI)
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)
- Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER)
- SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority

Other national partners that the government has indicated will be invited to participate in the delivery and/or review of the Youth Guarantee include:

- Irish Business & Employers' Confederation (Ibec)
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
- National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
- Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)
- Labour Market Council (LMC)
- Skillnets
- Business In the Community (BITC)
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

The government has indicated that the approach at a national level will be mirrored at local level by 'the direct involvement of the local representatives of the national stakeholders'.

The co-ordinator at a local level is the DSP, or more specifically the local PES (*Intreo*) office. The *Intreo* Office will provide the point of entry for most young people entering the Youth Guarantee process, and its referral function is intended to ensure the involvement of other stakeholders, such as employers, training/ education providers such as the ETBs, and in the case of the most disadvantaged young people/areas the Local Employment Service (which operates for the most part through Local Development Companies) and other community and voluntary groups. The national implementation plan for the Youth Guarantee noted that one model of stakeholder involvement at the local level was being tried out under the pilot YGS in Ballymun and indicated that lessons from the pilot would inform stakeholder involvement in other areas of the country as the implementation plan is rolled out.



5. THE BALLYMUN YOUTH GUARANTEE PILOT

5.1 Introduction

Prior to the adoption of the Council Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee during Ireland's EU Presidency (as outlined above), the European Parliament had asked the European Commission to implement preparatory actions to support the setting-up of pilot Youth Guarantee schemes in Member States. The call for proposals was launched in 2012 and this resulted in 18 pilot projects being funded, in seven countries: Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom. Almost all of the targeted localities were areas of social and economic disadvantage in which large numbers of young people have low levels of educational attainment and face multiple obstacles in gaining a foothold in the labour market. The intention was to use the experience gained from the pilot projects to provide Member States with practical recommendations for implementing national Youth Guarantee schemes and programming related actions under the European Social Fund and Youth Employment Initiative.

In response to the call from the Commission, Ireland's Department of Social Protection (Lead Agency) submitted a proposal (VS/213/0232-S12.659060) to establish the pilot Ballymun Youth Guarantee (BYG), which was approved for funding to the value of €302,279.

Having been built in the 1960s, primarily as a tower block scheme, and experienced many years of persistent and severe social problems, Ballymun has in recent years undergone a process of regeneration through the construction of 2700 new housing units, a new main street, civic centre, primary health care centre, arts centre and two new hotels. But it remains among the most socially and economically disadvantaged areas in Ireland. In the Census of Population 2011 the proportion whose principal economic status was unemployed was 36%, compared with a figure for Dublin of 18% and a national one of 19% (the corresponding figures for employed persons were 44%, 58% and 57% respectively).

Young people's participation in the labour force in Ballymun is quite high (46% compared with a national average of 30%) largely due to the fact they tend to leave the education system much earlier. This is reflected in their low level of educational attainment, with 88% of young people in Ballymun having at best a Leaving Certificate qualification. One result of this is that the labour force in Ballymun consists of a much larger proportion of unskilled/semi-skilled workers than the national average – 21% compared with 14% (Census 2011).

The BYG model was developed and delivered by a partnership of key stakeholders at national and local level. A National Steering Group (NSG) was responsible for finalising the design of the pilot and monitoring its implementation. The membership of the NSG comprised senior representatives from:

- Department of Social Protection (Chair)
- Activating Dublin (collaboration between Dublin City Council and Dublin Chamber of Commerce)
- City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb)
- Department of Education and Skills (DES)
- Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI)

- Dublin City Council
- Irish Business and Employers' Conference (Ibec)
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
- Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)
- National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
- SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority

This broad stakeholder partnership was mirrored on the Local Implementation Group (LIG) whose role was to identify and refer participants, offer advice on progress and generally support the implementation of the BYG pilot project. The membership of the LIG included representatives from local service providers, employers and youth organisations, including:

- Department of Social Protection (Chair)
- Ballymun Job Centre/Local Employment Service
- Ballymun Regional Youth Resource (BRYP)
- Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership
- City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB)
- Fast Track to Information Technology (FIT)
- North Dublin Chamber of Commerce

5.2 Policy framework and principles

At the outset of its work, the National Steering Group adopted a policy framework to underpin the design and implementation of the pilot Youth Guarantee. This consisted of ten principles identified by Eurofound (2012) on the basis of an analysis of the effectiveness of policy measures on youth unemployment in a range of EU member states. They were as follows:

1. Successful policy measures specify their target group and find innovative ways to reach them, e.g. by establishing a good reputation or working with relevant community groups for hard-to-reach groups.
2. Young people vary in their level of labour market readiness and policies have to cater for a range of minor to complex needs.
3. Policy delivery relies on appropriate personnel, who need to be trained and supported.
4. Young people should be set up on a long-term sustainable pathway, e.g. by providing them with necessary skills and stable employment, rather than low-quality quick fixes.
5. Successful policies offer good quality career advice and comprehensive holistic guidance.
6. Youth employment measures should focus on the client, not the provider, e.g. by offering tailored, personalised advice by mentors.
7. Inter-agency collaboration and involvement of all stakeholders can be a cost-effective way to implement policies, when the specific roles and responsibilities of different actors are specified.
8. Measures that aim to increase the employability of young people should focus on existing and future labour market needs and ensure a buy-in of employers and their representatives.

9. Youth unemployment requires flexible responses, which have to be adapted to economic cycles, whereas social exclusion is a structural issue and has to be addressed consistently.
10. Robust monitoring and evaluation should be used to inform policymaking and development.

5.3 Activation approach and client groups

The model adopted an activation approach tailored to the needs of the individual and designed to support each young person on a sustainable pathway to employment. The BYG was more ambitious than the national YG both in the nature of the offer and the implementation schedule. It set itself the target of guaranteeing a good-quality offer of a job, apprenticeship, traineeship, work-experience, or continued education to:

- all young people aged between 18 and 24 living in the Ballymun area within four months of registration at the DSP Intreo Centre and to
- all existing registrants aged between 18 and 24 within four months of a first “1-2-1” meeting with a guidance practitioner.

The offer would be made within a four month period after the initial guidance interview with the Ballymun Job Centre. It was decided that the offer would be extended to a maximum of 90 participants per month.

The BYG gave each client a guarantee of access to career guidance/assistance leading to identification of an individual career plan for the young unemployed person with follow-through to training, education, work experience or full-time employment, provided in partnership with a range of stakeholders as described later in this report. Depending on the needs of the person, the steps in the career plan might include personal assessment, job search assistance, skills training, work experience internships, but the objective in all cases was to lead the young person to employment placement or further education or training.

An important part of the overall approach to activation (based on policy principle 2 referred to above) was an acknowledgement that young jobseekers are not a homogeneous group. One of the first things the partners on the Local Implementation Group did was to conduct an analysis of young people in Ballymun using data from various sources including the CSO and the Public Employment Service in order to build a profile of potential beneficiaries so as to assist in capacity planning. The analysis facilitated the identification of groups of young people that would require different types of interventions based on their perceived employment readiness. When matched against existing capacity in the locality, shortfalls and gaps were identified. A decision was made to provide for increased capacity to meet the anticipated need (if necessary by redistributing resources from other areas) in order to maximise the learning from the BYG. The LIG also recognised the need to respond flexibly to clients presenting for guidance as individual needs could only be fully identified during the course of the guidance process. It was anticipated that the need for particular types of intervention would also have to reflect the emergence of other opportunities (e.g. the allocation of a significant number of places on the Gateway scheme) or emergent labour market needs, work experience or employment opportunities.

The NSG and LIG also recognised that certain clients (particularly those with multiple barriers) might require a number of interventions as part of a structured supported pathway to employment. A particular focus of the BYG has been to increase the volume and range of options available to meet the disparate needs of the client base. This includes extending eligibility for participation in certain programmes to the YG cohort (see reference to Community Employment below), prioritising young people for certain programmes (e.g. Tús) and developing new innovative approaches (e.g. the collaboration with the UCD Innovation Academy referred to in section 6.4).

The analysis conducted by the LIG resulted in the identification of three groups of young people each of which would require different types of interventions based on their perceived employment readiness (although it was acknowledged that there may be some overlap between the groups):

- Target Group 1: clients with Junior Certificate/equivalent or less and little or no work experience (45%). Some of these clients would also face additional barriers such as literacy/numeracy, substance misuse and/or criminal records.
- Target Group 2: clients with Leaving Certificate/equivalent or some work experience (40%)
- Target Group 3: clients with above Leaving Certificate/equivalent or good work experience (15%)

The percentages given above represent the breakdown of the overall Ballymun youth cohort. However, the breakdown of those actually participating in the BYG were somewhat different: TG1 accounted for 35% of clients, TG2 for 47% and TG3 for 18%. This confirms the difficulty of engaging the most disadvantaged young people, a point returned to later in this report.

The original proposal for the pilot YG envisaged that a 'quality offer' would be made to 810 young people during the project (90 per month by 9 months). However, the number of potential beneficiaries turned out to be lower than initially estimated and because of this the BYG National Steering Group decided to extend the guarantee to *all* registered jobseekers under 25 years of age in the area. By the end of the project there were 739 clients.

		Number (%)
GENDER	Male	483 (65%)
	Female	256 (35%)
AGE	< 19 years [DSP payment €100 p/w or €5,200 p/a]	242 (33%)
	20-25 years [DSP payment €188 p/w or €9,776 p/a]	497 (67%)
STATUS (before taking part in the Pilot Project)	In education or training (full-time or part-time)	Nil
	Unemployed (registered jobseeker for less than 6 months)	355 (48%)
	Long term unemployed (registered jobseeker for over 6 months)	384 (52%)

Table 1: BYG participants by gender, age group and duration of unemployment

Approximately two thirds of participants were male and approximately two thirds were aged 20 and over. Just over one half had been unemployed long-term. Table 1 provides the details.



6. KEY ELEMENTS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BYG PILOT

6.1 Offers, progressions and initial outcomes

As already indicated, of the total 739 clients dealt with by the YGS, 255 (35%) were categorised as Target Group 1 (highest level of need), 345 (47%) were Target Group 2 and 139 (18%) were Target Group 3 (lowest level of need). Many clients presented very significant labour market barriers including no employment history, poor educational qualifications and limited expectations regarding employment. In this respect, they reflected the local Ballymun context. The objective of the BYG was to improve their long term sustainability on the labour market and not merely the achievement of short term outcomes.

As of the end of December 2014, 60 clients had dropped out of the BYG (some had changed to a Lone Parent payment or disability payment; others closed their payment) leaving 679 clients who had completed or were completing the process. A total of 593 clients were involved in training, work programmes or employment (including eleven young people on 'pre-offers'¹) and the vast majority of those – 98% - had received their offer within four months. This left 86 who were still in the guidance process at the end of December, and it was expected that most of these would also receive an offer.

Figure 3 provides a summary of offers made. By far the largest category was Further Education and Training (338 or 46% of the total number of clients). Figure 4 provides a more detailed breakdown of offers in state-funded programmes other than FET.

An analysis of offers per target group would appear to confirm the assumption that different types of offer are required to address the disparate needs of the clients.

The most popular offers for clients in Target Group 1 were FET programmes at NQF Levels 3, 4 and 5 (120) with smaller numbers availing of the publicly-funded employment options (35), or blended learning programmes (15). Only 7 secured fulltime and 3 secured part-time employment in the private sector.

Target Group 2 availed of FET options at all levels (165) and publicly-funded employment opportunities² were also popular (77). In addition, 27 secured full-time employment and 14 secured part-time employment in the private sector.

Unsurprisingly, much higher numbers of Target Group 3 secured private sector employment – 17 full-time and 9 part-time. The most popular offers for FET programmes were at NQF Level 5 and above (24), but a significant proportion required Level 4/5 (20) and nine actually required Level 3. Twenty availed of internships under the JobBridge programme.

1 The BYG implemented a pre-offer stage for those most marginalised including addiction counselling and mental health support. This was to allow the participants the time to engage with supports that would assist them to address their issues prior to their formal engagement with the BYG.

2 Such as the Community Employment (CE) programme

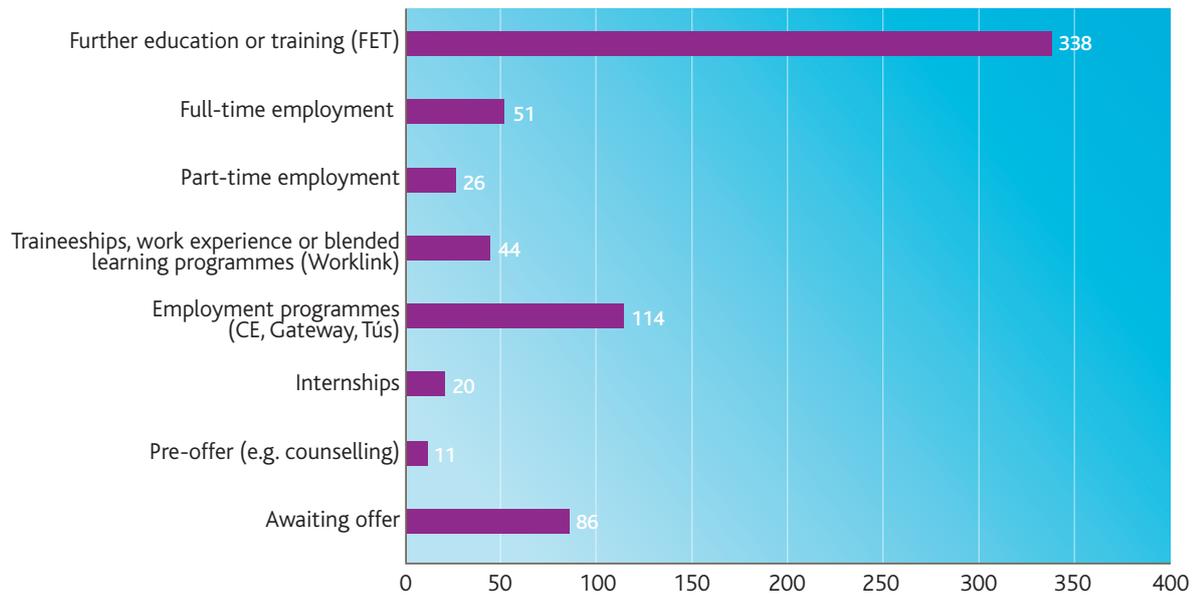


Figure 3: Classification of offers

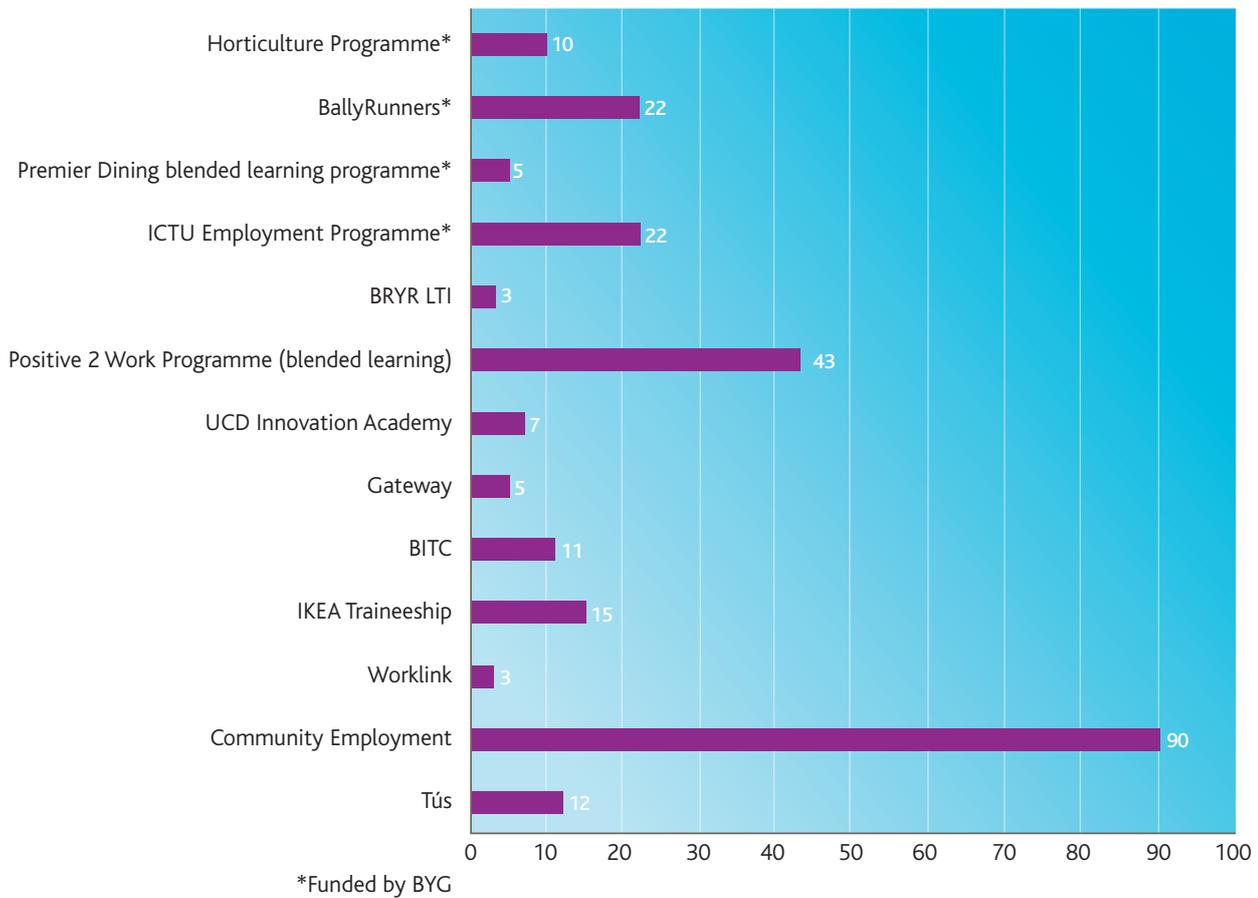


Figure 4: Offers funded by State/partners (not including FET programmes)

It is notable that so few participants gained employment in the private sector. Many of the young people indicated that what they really wanted was a job – any job - but the experience during the pilot was that there were insufficient private sector employment opportunities for job-ready clients. Many other young people were not job-ready or did not have the requisite skills or experience to avail of such opportunities as were available. The issues are complex and, among other things, they point to the importance of intensifying employer engagement to maximise private sector employment potential and ensure the relevance of FET to the labour market. Meanwhile there is significant pressure on the state sector to provide suitable FET or publicly-funded work experience options. This has significant human and financial resource implications. It should also be noted that JobsPlus Youth (referred to earlier in the section on the Youth Guarantee in Ireland) was unavailable during the BYG pilot.

Outcomes to date and feedback from BYG staff indicate that the 'offer' is seen as the start of a process and not the end. Many of the options available are stepping stones along a structured and supported pathway to sustainable employment. The length of that journey will vary enormously from client to client. While the short-term outcome can quickly be determined (e.g. the client has commenced an intervention), the impacts will, necessarily, not be seen for some time and cannot be determined within the BYG timeframe. The issue of tracking BYG clients over time (by way of a longitudinal study) warrants further consideration. The question of monitoring and evaluating the Youth Guarantee nationally is returned to at the end of this report.

6.2 Partnership and interagency work

Partnership at both national and local level was a defining feature of the BYG pilot. From the evaluation report, feedback from participants and other sources, there appears to be universal agreement that a partnership approach is beneficial, especially for supporting seamless, effective pathways in the progression to the labour market and for engaging the most marginalised young people. Partnership can release synergies, capitalise on the experience and expertise of partners, identify gaps and solutions, and reduce the risk of duplication of activity. At national level the partnership allowed for an exchange of information and insights between the DSP, which was leading the project, and other key stakeholders in the statutory and civil society sectors and among employers and trade unions. At local level it had a discernible impact on the range and quality of supports and offers to clients through enhanced formal and informal contacts between the partners in identifying opportunities that might be suitable for individual young people.

A particularly valuable example of a pre-existing partnership arrangement which made an important contribution to the BYG was the Equal Youth Network, which operates a multi-agency casework approach to the provision of supports and 'integrated progression' options to 16-24-year-olds who are early school leavers and most distant from the labour market³. The Equal Youth Network meets on a monthly basis and works through a case load of clients, providing updates on progression and discussing cases which require more targeted support. This interagency approach enables the provision of a continuum of seamless support from career guidance, through education/training interventions and into the workplace. The BJC/LES applied this methodology within the BYG pilot, thereby engaging the full range of Equal Youth Network organisations in delivering the guarantee to participants. Significantly, the Equal Youth Network has a very low level of non-engagement or disengagement among the young people it works with.

3 The initiative was developed as an EU EQUAL-funded project (2005-2007) and has continued to operate. Organisations involved in Equal Youth include the Ballymun Job Centre, Ballymun Community Training Centre, Ballymun Youthreach, Young Persons' Probation, Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force, Ballark Community Training Centre, An Garda Síochána, Trinity Comprehensive, Ballymun Regional Youth Resource and the DSP.

6.3 Guidance process

The career guidance component of the BYG pilot was delivered by the Ballymun Job Centre, a community based organisation providing employment related supports and services to local people since 1986. It was established as a community response to a chronic unemployment situation and since 1996 the BJC has managed the Local Employment Service in the Ballymun area, under contract with Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership and funded by DSP (it will henceforth be referred to as the BJC/LES). Intreo did not provide a guidance service within the framework of the BYG apart from the initial Group Information Session⁴. Instead, the BJC was appointed by the Department of Social Protection to provide the service and five LES Mediators were assigned to deliver guidance to the BYG client cohort - a level of provision significantly greater than the current, or anticipated, guidance practitioner/client ratios elsewhere. All the BJC/LES guidance staff hold at a minimum the Certificate in Adult Guidance (Maynooth University) along with training in specific diagnostic tools and psychometric tests that are not commonly available to DSP Case Officers (for example EGUIDE, eMERGE). The BJC/LES guidance process is more intensive than the DSP norm, typically involving three to four interviews. An advantage from the perspective of the DSP was that the partnership with BJC/LES facilitated more intensive engagement with young people in a manner that did not compromise the delivery of services to other unemployed jobseekers in the local Intreo centre.

The BYG approach to guidance is compared with the standard Intreo approach in Figure 5.

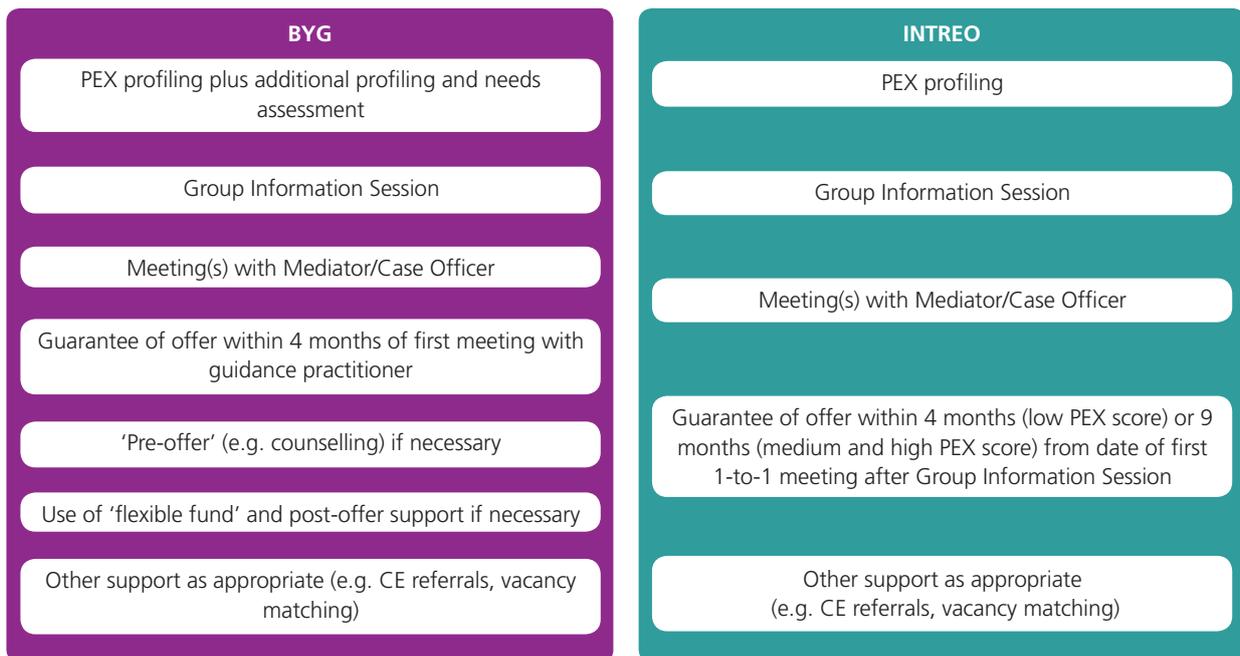


Figure 5: Comparison of BYG and Intreo guidance processes

The BYG guidance process involved the collection of additional data about all clients – over and above that collected for PEX purposes – at the outset of the engagement process. Guidance staff commented that this provided a more comprehensive basis for determining need and facilitating the progress of individual clients. PEX values are expressed in a composite score which has proven to be robust in predicting a person's probability of exiting the Live Register (which the model was designed to do) and can assist in targeting resources at those most at risk of long-term unemployment, but are of limited assistance to guidance practitioners when it comes to identifying an individual client's needs, aptitudes or competences.

⁴ This term replaces "Group Engagement" which was used during the BYG pilot.

Staff also believed there was a 'fundamental difference' between the BYG and Intreo models in terms of the content of meetings and the use of allocated time. In the BYG, meetings were used to conduct an initial in-depth needs assessment, career exploration and guidance (often utilising the tools and methods indicated above) and career planning. Time was spent developing the career plan with the clients rather than 'checking on progress'. Mediators in the BYG noted that because the Group Information Session took place in the Intreo offices, clients were sometimes apprehensive about availing of the service, although they were usually put at ease during their first meeting.

BYG clients were given an offer within four months of a meeting with a guidance practitioner. The average number of meetings leading to an offer was between two and three (for all Target Groups). The requirement to give an offer within four months in *all* cases was considered by guidance officers to be inappropriate, as further time was required in some cases to agree a suitable progression route. The delay between some offers being made and the offer becoming available was also considered problematic; for example an offer of a PLC course made in January, but not being available until September. Some clients availed of (potentially less suitable) interventions in the meantime. This also had an impact on capacity planning (waiting list clients not turning up for a course as they had commenced an alternative).

A small number of BYG clients did not have the capacity to avail of a 'quality' offer. In keeping with the client-centred approach of the project, they were instead given a 'pre-offer', including mental health or addiction counselling. This was to allow participants the time to engage with supports that would assist them to address their personal problems. In such cases if clients missed counselling twice the guidance team was informed and the client was brought back to a review meeting. The take up of addiction counselling was better than for mental health support but overall it was described as poor by BYG staff. The BYG has committed to continuing to work with these clients to support them along what will necessarily be a longer pathway to employment.

It was the experience of guidance practitioners on the BYG pilot that a small amount of money could make the difference between a client being able to take up an offer or not. The economic and social profile of the area, the family and community environment and the personal profile of some clients was such that the availability of an offer was sometimes not sufficient in itself to ensure that the young person could take up the 'guarantee'. As a result a 'flexible fund' was established to support individualised responses to barriers faced by BYG participants. It was used when a solution could not otherwise be found from existing actions, programmes or resources. Over 90 participants accessed the fund. In the evaluation of the BYG guidance model the additional funding was identified as a very important support by both guidance practitioners and young people.

An additional element of flexibility was introduced through the provision of continued support for clients after they took up the offer of employment or work experience, education or training. This included ongoing contact with clients while on FET programmes or work experience/placement to reduce the risk of drop-out or return to unemployment on cessation. Given the starting point of many participants, the offer may be a first step on what could be a long journey requiring further interventions and ongoing support. Following agreement from the Local Implementation Group, BJC/LES staff contacted participants and their tutor/host organisation or employer to identify additional/complementary supports linked to their current experience and their career plan in order to enhance post-offer sustainability. By the end of the pilot 76 participants had benefitted from this support.

Client engagement

While the large majority of clients engaged well with the BYG there was a problem of persistent disengagement among a small number of participants. In particular there was a high level of no-show/non-response to the initial invitation to the Group Information Session, although the vast majority of young people had attended by the third call. The problem of non-engagement was particularly marked among Target Group 1 young people, 33% of whom disengaged at some point in the process, but the vast majority of these re-engaged after follow-up from the guidance staff.

These responses led the guidance team to make a number of changes (revising the content and tone of the invitation, literacy proofing, change of venue), but while staff believed such changes to be warranted in their own right they did not in fact result in higher levels of attendance at the initial Group Information Session. This would appear to confirm that some young people are particularly far removed from the labour market and from other forms of 'institutional' provision and the problem of engaging with them is especially severe.

As noted in the evaluation of the BYG guidance model, the imposition of financial penalties when clients failed to engage or subsequently disengaged from the process was a delicate issue. The standard Department of Social Protection approach is to impose a financial penalty when a client fails to respond to two invitations to engage or declines or drops out of a suitable offer/ intervention without a satisfactory explanation. However, the DSP piloted a more relaxed regime following representations from BYG partners.

The view of mediators was that when applied strategically this was a constructive element of the model, allowing young people to re-engage. Good communications with the Department and with service providers helped to ensure that penalty rating was for the most part perceived as beneficial to the client and was sometimes avoided. In engaging with young people, mediators emphasised the mutual responsibilities that were expected to be upheld within the BYG process. The idea of incentivising participation (for example through training allowances or lunch allowances) rather than penalising non-participation was raised by some providers (and also by clients). Reward-based trips did prove successful in motivating learners to complete academic tasks and other assignments in some of the BYG programmes.

6.4 Education and training

The City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb) was a key partner of the BYG, represented on both the NSG and the LIG. The main challenge for CDETb was to create a flexible model of training and education that met the needs of the identified target groups, could be delivered as the young people completed the guidance process and could also be planned and budgeted for. This required detailed planning where programmes agreed at the LIG had to be accommodated within a range of funding models that existed in the Training Centre that had only recently been transferred from FÁS (under the reform of the FET sector as part of the establishment of SOLAS) and in the further education colleges. An internal planning and co-ordinating group was established within CDETb comprising the Education Officer, the Adult Education Officer, the Youthreach Co-ordinator, the Guidance Counsellor, the Literacy Organiser and the Training Centre Manager and all of these also liaised directly with other BYG partners as appropriate.

In considering the principles that should inform its engagement with the BYG, the CDETb stressed the importance of providing:

- A *person-centred* approach, enabling the young person to actively participate in a programme that addressed their needs;

- *Tailored services* for those at risk of long-term unemployment and social exclusion;
- A scheme that reflected the *disparate needs* of the client groups (i.e. with a focus on the educational needs of younger clients, whereas for the older age group with higher educational attainment the focus was on skills development and job placement);
- An *expansion of capacity* to respond to need (the programme could not only be about co-ordinating existing provision or prioritising certain young people for entry into the existing programmes because this would merely displace young people who had not signed on the Live Register and were therefore not entitled to avail of the Youth Guarantee scheme).

Under the terms of the BYG the following education and training initiatives were taken:

- All BYG clients were guaranteed an interview for a place on a programme of their choice, pending the meeting of requisite entrance requirements and the joint recommendation of the suitability of the programme following their guidance interview.
- There was priority access for BYG clients to the range of training programmes provided in the CDETB Training Centre (Finglas).
- CDETB increased the number of places in the local Community Training Centre and in Youthreach to take account of the profile of young people in Ballymun.
- The CDETB Adult Education Service provided additional part-time courses at Levels 3 and 4 on the National Qualifications Framework and study skills and specialist courses in science, physiology and anatomy were provided to those young people who had got places in courses in FE colleges or universities.
- Funding was made available for the provision of a training programme by BRYR Youth Service (a registered QQI centre) targeting early school leavers who were not likely to engage with the further education and training services directly.
- The Literacy Organiser of Ballymun Read and Write Scheme, funded by CDETB, provided additional part-time literacy and numeracy programmes.
- Additional counselling and career guidance supports were provided for learners.
- There was continuous liaison between CDETB and Ballymun Job Centre and other local organisations to discuss and progress and progression routes for learners.
- CDETB developed a new traineeship programme in partnership with IKEA.
- Exit interviews took place with those learners who left to ascertain reasons for doing so.

Other innovations that took place in the education and training field included the following:

- BYG collaborated with University College Dublin Innovation Academy to develop and deliver a Level 7 Certificate in Enterprise, Innovation and Entrepreneurship with additional supports for students with literacy/numeracy/personal difficulties. Following this successful pilot a proposal has been developed to deliver a similar programme at Level 4/5 and test a 'train-the-trainer' model to facilitate delivery by the ETBs. This would enable the programme to be mainstreamed nationwide.
- A blended education programme was developed in the catering sector (a further iteration of the successful Postive2Work programme in the retail and warehousing sector).
- The Irish Congress of Trade Unions delivered an 'employability skills' programme which included a work placement which the participant researched in the initial module.

6.5 Employer engagement

The section above has made it clear that a particular focus of the BYG was to increase the volume and range of options available to meet the diverse needs of the young unemployed and to develop innovative responses. Another was to engage and build links with employers to ensure that the guidance and training elements of the YG were tailored to the needs of the labour market and also to generate work placement/experience opportunities for the participants.

As stated earlier in this report, business and employer organisations were represented on both national and local partnership structures for the BYG and have supported the Public Employment Service to better understand how best to engage with employers to promote the range of existing supports and services and better leverage their Corporate Social Responsibility. Activities included:

- Dedicated DSP and BJC/LES Employer Engagement officers were assigned to drive both local and regional engagement;
- A suite of communication tools was introduced:
 - o Promotion of BYG website with a specific section targeting employers;
 - o Development of a database of email address and contacts for local employers;
 - o Use of mailshots and leaflets;
 - o Communicating through business/employer network newsletters, e.g. the Dublin and North Dublin Chambers of Commerce, Dublin City Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Ibec.
- A database of local employers was developed to facilitate communication and relationship building. This has involved ‘cold calling’ of employers by phone and physical visits within the local Ballymun area and the collation of a resulting database of interested employers.
- ‘Breakfast briefing sessions’ were hosted to raise awareness of the YG and gauge willingness to support it. Employers gave testimonials and encouraged their peers to participate.
- Current DSP promotional material was critically assessed and a leaflet produced which summarised supports available and presented a ‘menu of options’ for how employers could assist the YGS, including:
 - o recruitment from the register of unemployed;
 - o hosting interns;
 - o providing short work sampling/experience opportunities;
 - o collaborating in the development and delivery of blended learning opportunities;
 - o giving motivational talks at JobsClubs and indicating the skills/qualities sought from prospective recruits;
 - o facilitating onsite visits by young jobseekers to demonstrate the careers available.

The latter has since been subsumed in the national Employment and Youth Activation Charter.

- A survey of local employers was conducted. Of 99 local employers who responded, 64% indicated that they were willing to recruit from the Live Register (of jobseekers), 20% said that they were willing to host a site tour and 18% were willing to give a talk at a JobsClub, provide advice regarding CV preparation and give mock interviews.

- A survey of leading Dublin employers was conducted at the outset of the project through the Dublin Chamber of Commerce to gauge general awareness of government supports in place to support recruitment of young people. Awareness levels were low among the 169 respondents in relation to Intreo services, the DSP's 'JobsIreland' website and the JobsPlus incentive.
- A number of HR managers participated in workshops which were organised as part of the evaluation of the BYG guidance process.
- Fifty employers were 'door stepped' and three subsequently met with the PES Employer Engagement Team.
- Two companies participated in the 'Feeding Ireland's Future' initiative, providing 2-3 day workshops on confidence building/CV preparation and work sampling (25 participants).
- One company ran two 'Positive2Work' blended work programmes in warehousing and subsequently recruited 18 participants.
- One company is developing a new blended learning opportunity in the catering sector.
- One company is collaborating to develop a new traineeship programme in the retail sector (15 participants).
- Participants on an ICTU 'employability skills' programme were provided with work experience by 18 employers (26 participants, of which six were subsequently recruited).
- Two employers who were approached by the Job Centre provided work experience to four participants and subsequently recruited two of these.
- Two employers attended JobsClubs and gave mock interviews (60 participants).
- The NSG has formulated a number of recommendations to inform the development of an Employer Engagement Strategy.
- The Irish Congress of Trade Unions proposed and the NSG adopted a Memorandum of Understanding in relation to work placements and work experience opportunities to ensure that:
 - o a valuable quality experience is provided for the trainee and
 - o the assignment does not displace or negatively impact on the existing workforce.

In a separate but complementary initiative to the examples listed above, the Department of Social Protection funded a collaboration with Business in the Community (BITC) to trial a new intervention for very marginalised clients comprising a short pre-employment course and a four-week work placement. In the case of BITC the business sector itself engages with employers with a view to assessing their CRS appetite and promoting CRS activity. At the interim stage of this pilot 80% of businesses who had been approached had engaged immediately or committed to future engagement. Eleven participants had undertaken training (out of a target of 45 for the entire programme), six of these had commenced a work placement and five had completed the placement. All five of these had secured employment with the host firm. The primary difference between the pilot and existing BITC programmes is the assignment of an in-house Training and Employment Officer to provide guidance support to each participant.

6.6 Publicly-funded employment programmes

A key challenge identified early in the BYG pilot was the difficulty of providing a sufficient number of suitable offers within the limited timeframe available. As already stated a particular focus of the BYG was to increase the volume and range of options available to meet the disparate needs of the client base, and the shortage of private sector employment opportunities in Ballymun placed additional pressure on state provision. It was within this context that the BYG Project Manager sought a relaxation of the standard Community Employment Scheme programme eligibility criteria so as to extend access to BYG clients. The DSP agreed to sanction derogation from standard CE eligibility to facilitate mediated access to BYG clients who were:

- aged 20 years and over, and
- in receipt of a jobseeker payment for 12 months or assessed as having a low/medium Probability of Exit from the Live Register (PEX), i.e. at risk of long-term unemployment.

Eligible BYG clients could access appropriate existing CE schemes. Ballymun Job Centre/LES under the stewardship of the Department of Social Protection delivered the mediated referral and placement process, and 16 local Community Employment schemes participated in the initiative. Apart from FET programmes (further education and training), CE was the single most popular type of offer among young people participating in the BYG pilot. While research has questioned the value of community based employment schemes in active labour market terms (O'Connell 2002; O'Connell et al. 2012) the feedback from sponsors, supervisors and participants to this BYG innovation was particularly positive, with one guidance practitioner describing the initiative as having 'probably the greatest impact on my clients'. The role of the CE programme in the context of the Youth Guarantee is returned to later in this report.

In a further related innovation, new recruitment processes for the Gateway and Tús schemes have been trialled as part of the BYG.

6.7 Youth work approach

As indicated earlier in this report, the benefits of a youth work approach to combating youth unemployment have been widely acknowledged in the European and international literature and this was one of the themes highlighted during Ireland's Presidency of the European Union in 2013, during which formal agreement was reached on the Youth Guarantee. The credibility, accessibility and relative informality that youth work projects and organisations have from a young person's point of view can be a great advantage in attempting to engage them in a range of other types of provision and in ensuring that services are responsive to their needs and interests, but there may also be risks in this from the youth work perspective that need to be taken into account. For example they may become less attractive to young people if they come to be associated with more formal education or training provision.

As well as the National Youth Council of Ireland being represented on the National Steering Group for the BYG, a local youth work organisation, Ballymun Regional Youth Resource, was a member of the Local Implementation Group and was directly involved in the design and delivery of the project.

There were a number of dimensions to BRYR's role:

- Capturing the feedback of young people in relation to the BYG through its outreach and in-house services and providing this feedback to the LIG partners.

- Providing practical support for the most marginalised young people to assist them to engage with the programme from the initial guidance process through to their offer and beyond. Such one-to-one support was provided for a substantial proportion of BYG participants.
- Acting as an advocate for young people at all times – putting the needs of young people in the community ‘front and centre’ on the agenda of the pilot.
- Participating in promotional and information work.
- Hosting interns and trainees.

BRYR delivered a Local Training Initiative for marginalised young people as part of the BYG pilot. As the programme contained a Level 3 award and this level had already been attained by many potential participants, a derogation was required to enable participants to receive a payment. A number of issues and challenges arose during the programme, relating to undiagnosed learning difficulties, mental health and behavioural issues, literacy and numeracy problems, substance misuse, group dynamics (influenced by events and relationships outside the programme), the lack of incentives for participation (there was no training allowance) or sanctions for non-engagement. The setting and content of the original proposal was altered in response to concerns about the suitability of a classroom setting as a learning environment for early school leavers who may have had a negative attitude to didactic learning or difficulties in maintaining the levels of concentration required to participate in such a setting. Notwithstanding ongoing revision of course content, provision of intensive support and proactive monitoring, attendance remained poor, highlighting the extent of the challenge in developing an appropriate response to the needs of the most marginalised young people.





7. LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The description of the key elements of the BYG presented above implicitly contains a number of important lessons that have been learned from the pilot project. These are made more explicit below, along with other insights developed through the independent evaluation of the overall project (O'Reilly, forthcoming) and a range of other evaluations and consultations. Implications of the BYG for policy and practice in the national implementation of the Youth Guarantee are also set out.

7.1 Partnership

Partnership was a critical success factor in the delivery of the Ballymun pilot Youth Guarantee, providing further justification for the emphasis on partnership in the national Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan. It is vital that the right partners are identified from the outset. It is appropriate therefore that the range of national partner bodies provided for in the national plan is somewhat broader than in the National Steering Group for the BYG (for example including the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Justice and Equality and the recently established Labour Market Council).

Inclusive and effective partnerships at local level are also vital. These should be tailored to the local context and, in as far as is practicable, build on existing networks/channels of cooperation, such as Local Community Development Committees and Local Area Partnership Companies. While replicating the local BYG structures in other areas would be difficult and not necessarily appropriate, in principle it is always advisable to take advantage of existing sources and networks of expertise and experience and these should be full partners in the Youth Guarantee process.

Recognition and support for the resources and time needed to build effective partnerships is important. For community organisations this is a particular challenge; any addition to their existing programmes of work has resource implications which need to be taken into account. For State service deliverers, partnership approaches need to be acknowledged as part of their everyday work, for example by reflecting it in internal job descriptions and building in partnership engagement as part of performance evaluation criteria. For employers, establishing initial contact with potential partners is a challenge; allowing time and resources for employer engagement is critical, and a targeted approach is required to establish and maintain such engagement. Networks such as Ibec, Business in the Community and the Dublin Chamber of Commerce have shown the potential both for improving engagement and for fostering partnership approaches with employers.

Successful partnership requires a 'driver' or 'motivator' to ensure that interagency approach works. There is often a lack of a 'partnership culture' and agencies tend not to come together unless they are mandated by their funders. Consideration needs to be given to supporting and incentivising partnership work (through funding criteria for example) and providing appropriate training for organisations and individuals.

Tensions may arise when there is a team of equal partners but one is in a position of leadership. A lead partner is needed to provide vision, direction and encouragement, and take ultimate responsibility for the project, but there are risks that other partners may not feel sufficiently valued, or not fully engage if it is perceived that they are not responsible or accountable for success. This is particularly the case when participating organisations have severe resource constraints. The problem might be mitigated by having greater clarity about the issues mentioned directly above, and by practical steps such as an introductory workshop at the start of the process, team-building initiatives, an independent/revolving chair or external facilitation.

There is a need for clarity in relation to such matters as:

- roles and responsibilities of partners (a 'Memorandum of Understanding' is advisable at a minimum);
- key shared objectives;
- KPIs, reporting and monitoring;
- governance;
- management (including dedicated project management for partnership work).

All partners have a key role in raising awareness among their own constituencies of the opportunities provided by the Youth Guarantee. Employer and youth organisations can make very significant contributions in this regard. Partners in the BYG believed that there was a very low level of awareness of the Youth Guarantee among key stakeholders, including young people themselves.

There is a need therefore to review the effectiveness of the current approach to promotion and develop a comprehensive communication strategy to raise awareness of the Youth Guarantee, tailoring the messages and media for different audiences and stakeholders, and making it very clear what is different about the YG as compared with the standard Public Employment Service.

7.2 Guidance model

It is recognised that the approach adopted in the BYG is not replicable in its entirety in all DSP regions, both for reasons of cost and because of the need for responses to be tailored to local situations, as stated above. It is also recognised that, even in the special circumstances of a pilot project with additional resources, some young people's distance from the labour market and from the formal education and training systems, along with their (in many cases multiple) personal problems, made it exceptionally difficult to engage or re-engage them. Feedback from guidance practitioners, young people, education and training providers and employers suggests that certain key features are likely to make the guidance process more effective and successful in the context of the national Youth Guarantee. These include the following.

- An approach that is above all client-centred and tailored to the needs and circumstances of the individual, rather than process-driven.
- A holistic approach that aims to empower people to make the most of their existing strengths and resources and address their difficulties, rather than simply focusing on finding a job.
- A focus on clear progress being made through the guidance process.
- Suitably trained, qualified and experienced guidance practitioners making use of appropriate tools and methods.

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- Provision of guidance supports to all clients who can benefit from them, irrespective of PEX profile; and the collection of additional data allowing for a more tailored individual response.
 - A guidance setting that is accessible and attractive to young people (Group Information Sessions as currently operated may not be the most effective way to engage the most disadvantaged young people).
 - Close and ongoing contacts with employers and with education and training providers.
 - Strong links with other relevant support agencies to facilitate referral where appropriate.
 - Adequate resources to reach and engage the target group(s).
 - Effective management and quality-assurance processes, and a commitment to evaluation and quality enhancement.

The BYG experience also shows that for some young people, a level of ongoing support after the take up of an offer can be a key factor in retention and completion.

On the basis of the above the following points are worthy of consideration in the context of the national Youth Guarantee:

- Adoption of a broad guidance policy and operational framework specifying the role of guidance within the Public Employment Service generally and the delivery of the Youth Guarantee in particular. Clear objectives and clear definitions of the main concepts, for example 'guidance', 'employability', 'quality offer' should also be provided.
- Specification of the core data set required to identify and assess client needs/barriers and the means (tools and processes) by which this information is best captured.
- Reassessment of the degree to which the current client profiling and assessment processes capture information on core 'soft skills' and provide the basis for interventions that build client capacity in this area.
- Adoption of a flexible client-centred guidance service both at the initial stages, focused on agreement of a personal progression plan, and in supporting the client to successfully implement it.
- Implementation of the multi-agency/multi-disciplinary case management approach to support clients facing multiple barriers.
- A study of the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the current Penalty Rate regime in securing young people's engagement.
- Provision of local flexibility to develop appropriate responses to youth engagement depending upon the client profile and the availability of progression opportunities and resources.

As the delivery of a quality guidance service relies on appropriate personnel who need to be trained and supported, consideration should also be given to identifying the how this is best addressed, particularly for new Case Officers who have no professional career guidance background or qualification.

7.3 Education and training

The profile analysis of young people on the Live Register in Ballymun enabled the Local Implementation Group for the BYG to plan for a range of options to be provided. This also allowed the City of Dublin Education and Training Board to put in place additional training and education places for those young people participating in the Youth Guarantee.

There were challenges in such capacity planning. There was an expectation at the outset that Key Performance Indicators would include the availability of places for all young people covered by the Guarantee. It was not possible for the CDETB to plan a programme for every referral in advance of the guidance engagement with the client groups. Additional provision was put in place for each of the target groups but not in the numbers that the statistics would seem to indicate. There are two models for delivery. One is to establish courses with specific start dates for referral by the guidance service; the other is to put in place courses for client groups when the numbers are viable. In practice the BYG pilot required a combination of both approaches and getting the balance right was an important part of delivering a flexible model.

The CDETB was successful in securing additional funding from SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, because of the pilot nature of the BYG initiative. However, in the national roll out of the Youth Guarantee it will be the responsibility of each ETB to plan its response within its budget allocation. Timing will be a vital consideration. If they are to include additional and innovative programmes plans will have to be finalised in time for the annual negotiations with SOLAS relating to the budget for the following year.

A significant policy issue requires careful consideration. The need to respond to young people on the Live Register under the Youth Guarantee will require the ETBs to prioritise access to existing courses without additional places being made available. This may require the ETBs to displace young people who are 'self-referrals' and who have not signed on to the Live Register. In addition, the young people availing of the Youth Guarantee will be in competition with other DSP clients who may also be a departmental priority under other policy areas, such as that relating to the long-term unemployed. This will necessarily impact on the capacity of the ETBs to respond effectively and flexibly to the diverse needs of the young unemployed as was done in the case of the BYG pilot.

There will be a practical challenge in avoiding the creation of barriers to participation or progression. The ETBs will be providing programmes under different budgets each of which carries its own entry requirements and restrictions. Matching the right fund to the right initiative, while also ensuring that barriers are not inadvertently created for young people, will be a challenge. For example, a course at Level 5 provided by PLC funding through a Further Education College will require young people to pay a fee. The same course provided in a Training Centre will be free and may provide a training allowance to the young person. The 'flexible fund' used in the BYG pilot initiative was effective in addressing such situations and supporting young people to access the programmes that carried fees or required support with travel and subsistence.

Finally, the BYG experience highlights the importance of the ETB working in partnership with community-based youth work and community education providers to support the most marginalised young people to engage with the guidance process and to complete the education and training or work opportunities offered.

7.4 Employer engagement

At the outset of the BYG pilot, a survey of leading Dublin businesses found that they had relatively low levels of awareness of employment services and supports, and they expressed the view that marketing and promotional material for these was ineffective. However, once relationships had been established they expressed positive views about the supports in place and as the pilot BYG progressed there were a number of examples of successful and effective engagement with local employers. A number of additional lessons were learned.

- There is a need to articulate a clear Employer Engagement Strategy, setting objectives, targets and KPIs (for example measuring levels of satisfaction of employers with the Intreo service).
- Relationships need to be carefully built and nurtured with employers, representative groups and business chambers at the national, regional and local level. Active engagement is essential (one-to-one contacts, targeted communication, regular presence at networking events and so on).
- There should be a more consistent approach to engagement between Intreo services and employers (for example a standard package or service for employers that engage with Intreo; a standard job description for Intreo employer liaison officers). The idea of Intreo staff participating in employer representative groups in a liaison capacity merits consideration. It is frustrating and counterproductive when employers attempt to engage with the Intreo service and find that it does not live up to expectations.
- Employers will also be discouraged from engaging with the Intreo service if large numbers of unprepared candidates are referred to them. From an employer perspective, therefore, guidance and interview preparation is the critical element if the Public Employment Service is to become a realistic alternative to other recruitment methods (e.g. referrals from their own staff, private recruitment agencies, internet etc.).
- The system would benefit from stronger liaison between the education and training providers and employers to ensure that the investment in training and education are matching the needs of employers and the labour force in general. Greater awareness of what employers seek in terms of skills, aptitudes and attitudes will enhance the employability of programme participants. The Department of Education and Skills is examining a strategy for employer engagement in this regard.
- Promotional and marketing materials need to be tailored to the circumstances and needs of employers of all sizes, including those with small numbers of staff; and all approaches and engagements should take account of the fact that most employers are 'micro' in scale (≤ 10 employees).
- The straight business case for employer engagement in the Youth Guarantee needs to be made more explicit, in addition to the emphasis on corporate social responsibility. Not enough is made of positive employer experiences through the use of testimonials both in print and in online forums.

The establishment of the national Labour Market Council and its relationship with the Department of Social Protection provides an opportunity for enhanced communication about employment services between the DSP, employers and other stakeholders, as will the participation of the LMC as a partner in the implementation of the national Youth Guarantee.

7.5 Youth work approach

Some lessons that were identified by the BYG relating to the youth work approach were as follows.

- Youth work has a key role to play as an advocate for young people, ensuring that their views and perspectives are taken into account.
- Youth work organisations need to be clear from the outset about their role and potential contribution to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee.
- Youth work organisations need to be aware of and address the challenges that participation in the roll out of the initiative poses, such as the fact that their focus on the overall wellbeing of the young person can be in tension with the focus on progression to employment in the Youth Guarantee.
- Youth work organisation needs to engage with other partners and make them aware of the role, principles and values of youth work.
- Government and other partners need to recognise that the contribution of youth work organisations in supporting the implementation of the Youth Guarantee must be funded and resourced.

7.6 Very marginalised young people

The pilot Youth Guarantee has highlighted the difficulty of engaging those young people who are most vulnerable and most distant from the labour market. These are usually young people who have left school early, with limited or no formal educational credentials, and by the time they come into contact with the Public Employment Service at the age of 18 their educational disadvantage has often been compounded by other negative experiences and their problems have become even more intractable. The BYG demonstrates that certain activation measures (for example the Local Training Initiative, internships) may not always be suitable for such young people, at least without appropriate adaptation. Given the reality of their lives, questions arise about the meaningfulness of these young people's 'live register' status as they are a very long way from being 'job ready'. A modified designation of vocational or training status might enable them to receive the intensive support necessary to secure vocational qualifications and enhance their employability, but any such modification would need to be carefully proofed against unintended negative consequences for the young people in question.

It is likely that no one agency will have the requisite skills to meet these young people's needs. What is strongly recommended is an approach similar to that implemented by the Equal Youth Network in Ballymun, which uses an intensive, interagency case management approach.

Much could be gained if all training programmes, employment schemes and work placement options reconsidered their approach to the most disadvantaged young people, including initial engagement, profiling, selection onto the right initiatives and ongoing supports.

7.7 Adjustments to employment programmes

Flexibility, in a number of respects and in various contexts, was identified as a key factor in the achievement of positive outcomes during the BYG pilot project. It was evident, for example, in the timing and scheduling of education and training programmes, or the derogation from regulations regarding the receipt of payment while participating in training at an award level already attained. The 'flexible fund' was also regularly cited as a vital support.

In particular, in the absence of alternatives, the relaxation of eligibility criteria for participation in the Community Employment programme was identified as vitally important in enabling the BYG to make an offer to so many young people, and the response among young people themselves was very positive (although it is recognised that it is too early to say whether there are longer term benefits and what they will be). The trialling of new recruitment processes for Gateway and Tús schemes was also found to be beneficial. While there are obvious resource implications and possible displacement issues, a failure to extend such initiatives across the national Youth Guarantee scheme may lead to serious capacity problems (in numbers of offers available) unless the overall labour market situation improves markedly.

While it is clear that an adaptation of existing programmes was successful in enabling participation in the pilot YG of a significant number of young people who could otherwise probably not have done so, this very point may also confirm that existing programmes were not designed to take adequate account of the situation of young people, particularly those who are disadvantaged. In addition to the youth-oriented variants of existing schemes, consideration should therefore be given to the design of a 'youth-specific' employment programme, which would have sufficient flexibility within it to respond to the diverse needs of different groups of young people.

7.8 Information systems

While the interagency approach was important to the success of the BYG it presented considerable challenges in terms of the collection and analysis of data and the tracking of individual young people through the engagement and guidance processes and on to one or more offers of education and training, work placement or employment. Specifically, the BYG has generated learning which should be taken into account in the development of procedures and protocols governing the interaction between the DSP and the ETBs.

For long-term research and policy purposes the issue of information systems for the Youth Guarantee requires close attention. Some comments by O'Higgins (2002) are relevant here:

A key element in the design and subsequent modification of youth (as indeed for adult) employment policies is the monitoring and evaluation stage. This very much relies on an established labour market information (LMI) collection system. This is something that is often entirely lacking or at least inadequate. LMI is necessary also at the planning stage. One needs to know with some precision the difficulties that the target group or groups face on the labour market. Which of those amongst, for example, the general category of 'youth' are most in need of assistance and so forth. Once programmes are actually implemented, monitoring of the programmes (sometimes referred to as process evaluation) can be used to ensure that for example, the programmes reach the designated target group, that programme costs are kept within target limits, that a target proportion of the group complete programmes, that a target proportion of participants find employment after the programme

and so on. These are very obvious albeit fundamental points, however, experience shows that the importance of their role is clearly underestimated in the implementation of youth labour market policies in many countries.

The ongoing relevance of O'Higgins's observations are borne out by the BYG pilot. The evidence shows that it was very successful in making offers to unemployed young people in Ballymun. These offers were timely, with almost 100% made within the intended four month period. They also had 'quality', as judged by the participants themselves, by guidance practitioners, educators and trainers, and employers. But, because this was a pilot, their longer term effectiveness in terms of labour market activation necessarily remains to be seen (and at least some of them may be fulfilling objectives – very important and worthwhile objectives – whose primary benefit may not in fact relate directly to labour market activation). Even within the terms of the pilot (largely because of the complexity of the problems, processes and relationships involved) systems were not in place to record detailed information about the progression of individual participants and the many variables relevant to their participation and their experience during the guidance process and beyond, as they participated in education and training, in work placement or in employment. Some of the difficulties and challenges involved in the development of such systems may be insurmountable but it is very important to grapple with them at the earliest stages in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee nationally. It will otherwise not be possible to arrive at confident conclusions in the future as to its effectiveness or ineffectiveness, or to disentangle its contribution from a range of other factors or from the effects of an improvement or disimprovement in the overall economic environment (European Commission 2014c: 18).





8. CONCLUSION: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BALLYMUN PILOT YOUTH GUARANTEE

An independent evaluation has been conducted of the BYG pilot and, separately, evaluations and consultations have also been conducted relating to a number of specific initiatives and dimensions of the project. Some key statistical data regarding the number and breakdown of offers and interventions have been presented above. It is too early to make a full assessment of the effectiveness of the BYG as a response to youth unemployment. The European Commission's Frequently Asked Questions on the Youth Guarantee, in considering what constitutes a 'quality offer', stresses that 'what it does NOT mean is any counselling or any activation measures or any occupation that would have an immediate effect to reduce the statistics of youth unemployment for a while'. Time will need to elapse before it can be known whether the employment, education and training opportunities offered to, and taken up by, young people through the BYG have had a longer term positive impact on both their individual circumstances and on unemployment rates in general. Indeed even with the passage of time questions of this type will be difficult to answer without better information systems being put in place, a point made in the previous section.

However, it does appear that in terms of what could be achieved within a very tight (one year) timescale, and in an area that was selected precisely on the basis that its youth unemployment problem was severe, the pilot has achieved considerable success. The vast majority of young people were offered a relevant opportunity in a timely fashion, and the feedback from the participants themselves as well as from education and training providers, employers and other stakeholders was for the most part very positive. The project experience does confirm the intractability of the problems affecting the most marginalised among the young unemployed, even when extensive and intensive, multi-disciplinary and multi-agency supports are provided. It also confirms the basic structural and contextual problem of a shortage of private sector job opportunities for young people (and older people) in Ballymun, although the employment situation both locally and nationally continued to improve over the duration of the pilot.

It is not possible, on the basis of the short time that has passed since the completion of the pilot, the nature of the data collected or the research and evaluation design that was practicable within the context of the project, to say that any decrease in youth unemployment in Ballymun, or any particular portion of such a decrease, can be directly (causally) attributed to the BYG itself. However it is striking that the Live Register figure for under 25s in Ballymun decreased by 29% between the end of December 2013 and the end of December 2014, the period of the project's implementation, compared with a national decrease of 19%. Other areas of North Dublin recorded decreases of between 14 % and 24%, and an area of Dublin selected on the basis that its PEX profile is most similar to Ballymun's recorded a decrease of 19% (other factors would need to be taken into account in a more rigorous analysis). Within Ballymun, the fall in the Live Register among persons aged 25 and over was just 4%. Despite the difficulty in attributing cause, therefore, and the uncertainty about sustainability or longer term success, it is certainly the case that the youth unemployment situation in Ballymun, in a comparative sense, improved considerably during the period of the pilot Youth Guarantee.

Some other conclusions can be arrived at with reasonable confidence. It is clear that in addition to the tangible outcomes to date for most young people who participated (in terms of education, training, work placement or employment) the project appears to have been highly successful in influencing clients' subjective perceptions of themselves, their place in the labour market and their expectations and readiness for the future. The client feedback in the overall project evaluation was highly favourable, and the evaluation of the BYG guidance model concluded that the 'self-definition' of clients had improved in a way that was 'likely to have long-term effects'. It also stated:

The core objective of the BYG pilot was to make an investment in young people to enable them to be sustainable on the labour market in the long-term by increasing their employability. Within the Pilot, making a referral to education or training programmes [was] not necessarily considered to be an end [in itself] but a stepping stone on the career path of the young person. The evidence to date from the pilot suggests the success of this approach, with the clients expressing their confidence in their future direction and ability to move towards employment...From the perspectives of both the participants and the staff involved in the delivery of the service, the BYG guidance model contributes towards the development of career identity (e.g. seeing themselves as part of the labour market and having a clearly defined role within it), adaptability (e.g. the development of career management skills such as resilience, self-efficacy and flexibility) and human and social capital (e.g. improved skills developed through their quality offer and improved social skills, team participation, interview skills).

Attempts to develop a coherent and sustainable national response to youth unemployment will certainly be boosted by approaches and initiatives that enable these skills and attributes to be acquired by larger numbers of young people. It may be noted that such 'soft outcomes' for participants are included in the framework recommended by Eurofound for analysing the effectiveness of youth employment measures. These, along with alternative measures of success such as 'distance travelled' by individual young people and the quality of the services provided, can be placed alongside rates of unemployment, participation in education and training or increases/decreases in social cost to give a fuller picture of the effectiveness of interventions (Eurofound 2012: 23).

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Department of Social Protection (DSP)
Aras Mhic Dhiarmada, Store Street, Dublin 1.
www.welfare.ie