



**Minister Brennan Says Transition From
Welfare to Work Must Be Seamless**

**Over 110,000 Have Returned To Employment Under
Back To Work Incentive Scheme**

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., said today that he is strongly committed to promoting measures that make the transition from welfare to work for jobseekers a seamless and rewarding experience. More than €1 billion had been invested in recent years in assisting people get a foothold in the labour market.

Minister Brennan was speaking in Dublin when he launched the 12th edition of "**Working for Work**", an information book for unemployed people, employers and front-line staff, in both the state and community sector, published by the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) with support from the Department of Social Affairs.

The Minister said: "It is well established that the best form of social and financial inclusion and security comes from having a job. For those on welfare entitlements, particularly the long-term unemployed, returning to work or education can be an anxious and challenging time. We must all redouble our efforts to provide the supports that make that transition as seamless as possible so that it opens up opportunities, fosters self-sufficiency and promotes independence on the road from welfare dependence to financial independence. A large percentage of all expenditure on unemployment payments now goes towards supporting people to return to work or return to education and training as practical means of boosting their job prospects."

Minister Brennan said that the most up to date statistics confirm the extent of investment in welfare to work supports and the numbers who have successfully made the transition:



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- More than €1 billion has been invested in the period 1998-2004 to assist people get a foothold in the labour market. This year alone €107 million will be made available in employment supports.
- Since the Back to Work Allowance was introduced in 1993, the support scheme has encouraged over 110,000 long-term unemployed people, lone parents and persons with disabilities to return to work.
- This has been achieved by permitting those on the allowance to retain their social welfare entitlement - on a tapered rate over a three or four year period - when they take up employment or self-employment, as well as secondary benefits.
- An independent evaluation of the scheme encouragingly shows that 78% of those who participated in the scheme had not returned to the live register.
- At present there are almost 11,000 participants in the scheme, with almost 6,500 engaged in a wide range of self-employment options.
- Two thirds of participants who have participated in the Back to Education scheme progressed to employment or further education. At present 7,308 people are availing of it, 5,338 of whom were previously receiving unemployment payments.

Minister Brennan said the Back to Work scheme, administered by the Department's Social and Family Support Service through the local network of Facilitators working in Social Welfare Local Offices around the country, clearly demonstrated that the right mix of financial and other supports and encouragements delivers a smooth integration into the regular world of work.

He said the growth of the employment support approach by all the relevant Departments and agencies over the years has resulted in a complex series of options and opportunities which can be difficult for people to negotiate their way through. It was important for the agencies involved to provide clear, accurate and comprehensive information so as to ensure that people can access the options that best suit their own circumstances.

Minister Brennan said: "I am of the view that information should not be the sole preserve of Government Departments and that there is a need for accurate



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independent information. The INOU is in the unique position of being able to articulate and represent the needs of unemployed people through its networks of nearly 200 centres and affiliate organisations. It works directly with unemployed people, providing not only information and guidance but also practical services which help people take that first step back into work, training or education. The obvious need for a comprehensive and co-ordinated information pack which would enable unemployed people to compare the various support schemes and programmes available to them provided the springboard for this impressive publication. It unravels many of the more complex issues and gives practical examples to convey the essential details of each programme, together with information and guidance on how to access the programmes and where to seek further information and help when required. In that way it is a valuable guidebook that will help many along the route from welfare to work”.

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