



## **Targeted supports to help Social Welfare customers access training or employment opportunities in 2008**

### **Additional facilitators appointed to help identify needs – Hanafin**

**“Giving people the right skills to access employment in an ever changing work environment is a key priority for the Government. Having a flexible, adaptable and skilled workforce will ensure that our key asset - our men and women - do not become long term unemployed and dependant on social welfare assistance”** said Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Hanafin T.D. today (4<sup>th</sup> September 2008).

**“Fifty Facilitators are now in place in Social Welfare Local Offices throughout the country, working with their colleagues in FAS and other agencies, to help social welfare customers identify and access training and development opportunities.”**

Minister Hanafin met the Facilitators at a special cross-departmental seminar in Dublin, which was attended by representatives of FAS, Guidance Counsellors and adult education and guidance experts.

Each of these Facilitators work closely with people who have been signing on the Live Register for an extended period of time as well as other social welfare recipients, with the aim of assisting them to get into new careers or to help them access educational or training programmes.

Welcoming ten new Facilitators who were appointed this month, Minister Hanafin said **“in each region of the country there are Facilitators working to help social welfare recipients to identify appropriate training or development programmes which will enhance the skills that individuals have and ultimately improve their employment chances as well as help them continue to develop personally. They work by either arranging directly with local employers or education institutions or with other Government agencies to seek out the most appropriate programme which will help each individual reach their potential.**

**I am delighted that we have this opportunity for officials in the Department of Social and Family Affairs to engage with a range**



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**of agencies and services. These front-line staff deal with customers who may for the first time in their lives experience losing a job. It is only through being flexible and adaptable and having the right advice to steer jobseekers on a new career path or course option that we can ensure we keep pace with the ever changing demands of the modern workforce."**

Funding of €160million for the two programmes - **Back to Education** and **Back to Work** - under the National Development Plan will support 9,000 people this year alone to participate in full-time education and more than 8,000 others to take up employment or self-employment.

The **Back to Work Allowance** assists long term unemployed people, lone parents and other social welfare recipients to return to the active labour forces. Over 100,000 people have availed of this scheme since its inception in the mid 1990s. By providing a monetary incentive, returning to work is financially viable for those on the scheme. Participants are entitled to the Back to Work Allowance for up to 3 years, based on 75% of their qualifying social welfare payment in year 1, 50% in year 2 and 25% in year 3. They also may retain entitlement to certain other benefits, such as the medical card.

The **Back to Education Allowance** programme includes educational opportunities for unemployed people, lone parents and people with disabilities who are in receipt of particular social welfare payments. Participants can improve their educational qualifications by attending full time second or third level approved courses. Participants receive a weekly rate of payment equivalent to their social welfare payment and can avail of €500 annual Back to Education allowance to help with book costs etc.

During the seminar, Facilitators will get up to date information on various training and jobs opportunities from experts in FAS and representatives of local Partnership Companies. The co-ordinator for the session is Guidance Counsellor and careers expert Brian Mooney who said "**there are literally thousands of courses and training options available right throughout the country, which will continue to meet the future needs of a higher skilled and competitive workforce. Websites like Qualifax.ie walk people through the options whether they are considering returning to second level, or higher and further education. This website is available for everyone to use, not just professionals working in career guidance.**



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**Having a specially focussed seminar, with input from agencies involved in education and training, means that everyone will be aware of what options are there for people either seeking new careers, additional qualifications, further training and up-skilling. It will also assist the agencies in learning what the concerns of people signing on the Live Register are in relation to accessing these opportunities."**

Under the Government's Employment Action Plan people who are approaching three months on the Live Register are identified by the Department of Social and Family Affairs and referred to FÁS for interview with a view to job placement or offer of training. Between January and May of this year over 25,300 people were referred to FÁS under the EAP, an increase of over 4,300 on the same period in 2007. This, Minister Hanafin said **"is part of the active ongoing engagement that Government Departments and State agencies are continually involved with in order to ensure that the workforce of the future will be highly skilled and responsive to the demands of an ever changing economy."**

**ENDS**

