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#Pathways

Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Education Minister launch *Pathways to Work 2016-2020* Strategy's 86 actions to increase numbers at work to 2.2 million

Pathways to Work 2016-2020 will fuel the drive to full employment and the increase in the numbers at work to 2.2 million by 2020.

The strategy, devised by the Department of Social Protection, was launched by Taoiseach Enda Kenny T.D., Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton T.D. and the Minister for Education and Skills Jan O'Sullivan T.D. at the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin today (Wednesday, 13 January 2016).

It contains six key strands involving 86 dedicated actions to build on the employment progress to date under previous Pathways strategies.

Pathways to Work 2016-2020 will enhance employment, education and training services for jobseekers, continue with reforms to make work pay, and increase engagement with employers to provide greater opportunities for those seeking work.

Speaking at the launch, the Taoiseach said: "**Pathways to Work is an essential part of our long term economic plan to reach full employment and to keep the recovery going. The overhaul of our welfare system was absolutely necessary considering the massive unemployment challenge we inherited. My promise is that we are never going back to that passive welfare system that abandoned whole families to the dole queue. I want to see people independent in work, not dependent on welfare. We believe that a job is the best route out of poverty, that work should pay and that people should be actively helped into new jobs.**

"The first Pathways to Work strategy was successful in reducing by almost 40% the numbers of people unemployed since 2012. The next phase of our reform plan will do more to end the plight of jobless households and expand job support services to those traditionally excluded from the labour market. Together, it is the ambition of this Government to keep the recovery going, to make sure that nobody is left behind in that recovery, and that job creation and getting people into those jobs remains the top priority for us all."

The Tánaiste said: "Since *Pathways* was first introduced by my Department in 2012, unemployment has fallen from a crisis peak of 15.1% to 8.8% now. Long-term and youth unemployment have also fallen significantly. That represents significant progress, but there is more work to do. Behind every new job is a person or family benefitting from the economic recovery. The goal of *Pathways* is to ensure that as many jobs as possible go to people on the Live Register, so that the recovery benefits everybody and no one is left behind. This new

***Pathways* strategy sets out clearly how we will ensure full employment with 2.2 million people at work by 2020, by identifying key actions for us to deliver and challenging targets to meet."**

Minister O'Sullivan said: "In the context of the changing nature of skill needs, my Department is leading on the development of a new National Skills Strategy which will be published in the coming weeks.

"Significant reforms have also been made in modernising the existing apprenticeship system through the work of the Apprenticeship Council. The planning and development of 25 new apprenticeship programmes is currently underway and will lead to a number of these progressing to enrolment later this year. We are determined to work side by side with the Department of Social Protection on the implementation of Pathways to Work and to give jobseekers the opportunity to upskill and reskill, so that they are in a position to take up jobs as they are created and to participate fully in our economic recovery."

Speaking about the "Learning for Life" programme Oliver Loomes, Country Director at Diageo Ireland said: "The programme is all about empowering young people and finding meaningful and sustainable solutions to youth unemployment. Participants will be equipped with skills they need to get a job in the hospitality and tourism industry and will then get the opportunity to embark on work experience in a partner organisation in the area. Learning for Life reflects the fact that our company is at the heart of the hospitality sector in Ireland and our commitment to support its growth and development."

Whereas the Government's Action Plan for Jobs helps to generate jobs, the focus of the related *Pathways to Work* strategy is to ensure that as many jobs as possible go to those on the Live Register. The 2012-2015 *Pathways* strategies have been successful in contributing to a reduction of circa 42% in the number of people unemployed during that period, with overall unemployment now standing at 8.8%. As part of those strategies, the Department of Social Protection was transformed from the passive benefits provider of old to an active and engaged public employment service, with 60 new and refurbished Intreo Centres established across the country to allow jobseekers get income and employment supports in the one place. The number of caseworkers dealing with jobseekers was doubled, and a range of progressive reforms and new schemes were put in place, ranging from the Youth Guarantee and JobsPlus to the Back to Work Family Dividend and JobPath. The Department also stepped up its engagement with employers, such as Diageo, with whom the successful Learning for Life scheme was developed to train young jobseekers for careers in the hospitality and catering sector [see case study on page 25].

Pathways 2016-2020 will build on this progress as Ireland enters the next phase of the jobs recovery, spurred by strong economic growth. This will involve six key strands as follows:

Strand 1: Enhanced engagement with jobseekers – this will see the Department continue to improve the quality of engagement between the Intreo service and jobseekers, with a particular focus on helping the long-term unemployed into work.

Strand 2: Increase the employment focus of activation programmes and opportunities – this will ensure targeted, responsive, locally and regionally adapted opportunities such as work placements, education and training.

Strand 3: Making work pay: incentivise the take-up of opportunities – this will ensure that jobseekers have a financial incentive to work and that the tax, welfare and employment policies of the State act to encourage the take-up of work.

Strand 4: Incentivise employers to offer jobs and opportunities to unemployed people – the Department continue to incentivise employers to offer good quality and sustainable opportunities for jobseekers and assist them to recruit from the Live Register.

Strand 5: Continue to build organisation capability to deliver high quality services to unemployed people – this will see the Department build on the fundamental overhaul of employment services instigated since 2012 to further enhance those services for jobseekers and employers alike.

Strand 6: Building the workforce – this will ensure that strategic reforms under way in the education and training sectors are closely aligned with the needs of employers, workers and jobseekers.

The six strands will involve 86 specific actions, including:

- Increasing the frequency of case officer meetings with jobseekers
- Extending the activation approach to other people – such as lone parents, carers and people with disabilities - who have a capability and an interest in working
- Significantly expanding apprenticeships
- Continuing the roll-out of JobPath
- Introducing a new First Steps work experience and training programme for disadvantaged young people
- Enhancing the range of welfare services available online and redeveloping the JobsIreland.ie website
- Conducting in-depth evaluation of all programmes to inform future developments and improvements

The *Pathways to Work 2016-2020* Strategy is available on the Department's website at <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Pathways-to-Work-2016-2020.aspx>

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