



NEWS RELEASE

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Hanafin welcomes agreement to fast-track Jobseekers claims

Reduces queuing at local offices and improves processing times

A new fast-tracking of claims for Jobseekers payments is being introduced in about one third of Social Welfare Local Offices around the country. The new process involves taking, registering and deciding claims, where possible, in the one dedicated appointment for people coming to make a claim.

The process, which was trialled in the Dundalk Local Social Welfare Office, means claims can be cleared for payment in a matter of days following the customer's first contact with the office.

Welcoming the agreement which has been reached between the Department and the Civil and Public Service Union, Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Hanafin T.D., said **"this new fast-tracking process works very well for both the customer looking to make a claim and for the staff processing claims. It significantly reduces the waiting times for the customer and backlogs of claims waiting for a decision. As the payment is made very quickly there is no need for customers to avail of the supplementary welfare allowance, which is administered by the HSE's Community Welfare Officer.**

The feedback from customers and staff when this was initially trialled in the Dundalk office was very positive, so I am delighted that it can now be rolled out in 19 more offices between now and mid-September. The Department plans to further extend it to other local social welfare offices in the coming months."

How the new process works

Customers making new or repeat claims for Jobseekers Benefit or a repeat claim for Jobseekers Allowance are given an appointment when they first arrive in the local office. They are also given the relevant claim forms and details of the supporting documentation required. They are encouraged at this stage to complete the application forms in advance of their allotted appointment.

Appointments are generally scheduled for within two to three working days of the initial visit and the appointment can take up to 30 minutes. During this time, the vast majority of claims are taken, registered and decided with the customer present. It then only takes a matter of days for the customer to get the appropriate payment.



Department of Social and Family Affairs

As an example, when the Dundalk Local Office operated the new system over a 10 week period from December 2008-February 2009 some 87% of claims that could be dealt with in this way were awarded at the appointment stage. During this pilot project, 747 claims were identified as being appropriate for an appointment, of these 710 customers attended at their appointed time with 649 claims decided at the appointment and payment made within a matter of days. Customers who missed an appointment were either offered a further appointment or did not pursue their claim further.

The current national average processing times for Jobseekers Benefit is just over 3 weeks and for Jobseekers Allowance is 6 weeks.

Minister Hanafin went on to say **"everyone can see the huge pressure there is on the system over the past year. Staff processing claims for Jobseekers in local offices have to ensure that the right person is getting the benefits they are entitled to. So there are a number of checks which have to be made before a claim can be decided. But our customers also have an expectation that they will get their claim processed quickly. This new way of deciding claims means the straightforward claims can be dealt with in the shortest time possible.**

I do appreciate that processing times in some of our offices are unacceptably long and we are working to address this, including through the setting of up a number of support offices whose only function is to decide on and put claims into payment. Extending this fast-track decision process to more offices around the country should have a significant impact on the waiting times being experienced."

Up to the end of July 2009, staff in local offices decided over 358,600 Jobseeker and One Parent Family Payment claims, compared with 218,382 in the same period last year. This represents an increase of over 60%.

Implementation of the initiative

The initiative is being implemented in 20 Social Welfare Local Offices around the country over the coming weeks. Many of these were already offering appointments for customers to lodge claims, but now the additional process of deciding on the claim with the customer present will help speed up processing times:



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Tara Street	Ballymun	Bishop's Sq	King's Inns St (formerly North Cumberland Street)
Nutgrove	Thomas St	Ballyfermot	Tallaght
Dundalk	Navan	Letterkenny	Cork
Listowel	Carlow	Kilkenny	Waterford
Galway	Bray	Blanchardstown	Drogheda

There are no plans at present to introduce this initiative in our network of Branch Offices, as claims made at these offices are currently decided in the parent Local Office.

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