



NEWS RELEASE

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Minister Hanafin opens 21st Annual INOU Conference

Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin T.D. today (*Thursday, 21st May 2009*) opened the 21st Annual Conference of the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE) in Dublin.

Speaking with the assembled delegates Minister Hanafin said, **“I want to acknowledge the invaluable service provided by the INOU over the past two decades to unemployed people and their families through its work at local and national level and in Social Partnership. Many of the delegates in attendance are from Voluntary and Community groups who have pioneered many creative approaches to tackling social problems. These organisations undertake important work as advocates for those who might otherwise not have a voice in society and can often influence policy in a real and immediate way for the benefit of all.”**

Minister Hanafin spoke of the current challenging economic situation. **“The Government is spending almost €21.3 billion on welfare services and supports in 2009, some €3.6 billion or approximately 20% higher than the amount spent in 2008. Most of the extra expenditure will provide income support to unemployed people.”**

Minister Hanafin went on to speak about processing times for jobseeker's payments saying, **“the Live Register grew from some 170,500 in Jan 2008 to 384,500 at end April 2009, an increase of over 125%. The number of claims processed in local offices in the first three months of this year was over 155,000 compared with 86,000 in the same period last year. This represents an increase of over 80%.**

Processing times nationally currently stand at an average of just over three weeks for Jobseeker's Benefit and seven weeks for Jobseeker's Allowance. I know that there are some offices with longer waiting times for deciding claims, and this is not something I want to see continuing. I want to reassure you that I will continue to target resources to ensure people receive their payments as quickly as possible.”

The Department of Social and Family Affairs has taken a number of actions to address processing delays through the recruitment and training of staff, implementing process enhancements and through restructuring back-office supports for local offices. Minister Hanafin has sought an additional 300 staff



Department of Social and Family Affairs

from across the Civil Service to help deal with the increasing Live Register and it is hoped that these posts can be filled over the next year.

On the issue of supporting unemployed people into training and employment Minister Hanafin said, **“the Government recognises that paying people welfare is not sufficient, and I, along with the other members of the Government, am strongly committed to getting people off the Live Register and back into employment or training as quickly as possible.”**

FÁS and the Department of Social and Family Affairs are extending the Job Search/National Employment Action Plan to cater for 12,250 cases each month, almost twice as many as were available last year. In addition, the Government is now providing, through FÁS, a total of 128,000 training and activation places for unemployed people this year. There are also some 147,000 places available in further education programmes in 2009. Minister Hanafin said, **“particular focus is being given to providing support to 18 and 19 year old jobseekers to enable them avail of education and training opportunities to prevent them from becoming welfare dependent from a young age.**

Changes in the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance and the Back to Education Allowance reflects the fact that people of all skill levels are losing their jobs. It is vitally important that we can provide a mix of responses in training and education best suited to the diverse needs of our newly unemployed as well as those who are longer seeking employment.”

Minister Hanafin concluded by wishing the delegates continued success in their future work.

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