An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection
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Minister Ó Cuív announces arrangements for 5,000 new Tús work placement opportunities in the community sector

Éamon Ó Cuív TD, Minister for Social Protection this afternoon (21 December 2010) announced the arrangements for the Government's new work placement initiative in the community sector. The initiative known as **Tús,** will provide 5,000 short term working opportunities for people unemployed for over a year. The placements will be with community sector organisations to support the delivery of their services. The Minister said that €30 million is being committed in 2011 to allow for the introduction of Tús and that this would grow to a commitment of €100 million in 2012. Tús joins a range of new and expanded initiatives designed to provide assistance to the unemployed recently announced by the Tánaiste.

Speaking about **Tús**, **Minister Ó Cuív** said: "This new measure will add to the suite of measures already announced by the Government and allows all sectors of society to play a role by supporting people who are unemployed while helping with the recovery of our national prosperity. We need to be innovative in how we can provide working opportunities for those who have lost employment over the past few years and how we can support service delivery in the private, public and voluntary sectors which are under pressure because of the downturn in economic activity."

Minister Ó Cuív continued: "In addition to any financial benefit to the worker, work brings other benefits to the individual, including to their psychological and general wellbeing from being involved in wider societal, community and employment activity."

Activation and support for those who are unemployed is a key priority for Government. Earlier this year, the Taoiseach, Brian Cowen TD announced a

number of changes to improve the delivery of employment, training and community services to the public by bringing together related responsibilities in these areas. These changes included the restructuring of departmental responsibilities, (including the Department of Social Protection), with the aim of providing a stream-lined integrated response to the income support and job search needs of people who are unemployed.

Minister Ó Cuív said he fully appreciated the economic realities that were "affecting so many businesses and that the voluntary and not-for-profit sector was not immune from the competing effects of reduced funding from both public sources and fund-raising, and an unprecedented increase in demand for services and support." The Minister believes that Tús will be able to address the twin aims of providing opportunities for those who are unemployed and support for community and voluntary activity.

Tús, which will operate in rural and urban areas will be delivered using the infrastructure developed for the Rural Social Scheme which has operated in rural areas since 2004. This will ensure that administrative and employment obligations are shared between the Department and Local Development Companies and not by community sector bodies.

The Minister said: "I aim to achieve a number of objectives with Tús. Firstly, people who are unemployed will have an opportunity to work in the community for a twelve month period. Secondly, community organisations will benefit by harnessing the skills of people who are willing to work, and thirdly, this measure will provide opportunities for my Department to develop its control processes for the Live Register."

NOTE TO EDITORS

TÚS – KEY FEATURES

- The introduction of Tús was announced in the Budget with an allocation of €30m in 2011.
- Up to 5,000 places will be funded once the initiative becomes fully operational later in 2011.
- Tús will provide short-term, quality opportunities for unemployed people to work in community and voluntary bodies providing a broad range of services of benefit to communities.
- Participants will be paid the full jobseekers rate plus an additional €20 per week. Under 25 year olds will be paid the maximum Jobseekers Allowance plus €20 per week which makes Tús attractive to this group.
- The employment will be insured for all benefits under the social insurance system.
- Participants will work for 19 ½ hours per week for a duration of 12 months and there may be some degree of flexibility in terms of the schedule of hours.
- While responsibility for the operation of Tús rests with the Department of Social Protection, it will be managed at a local level, on the Department's behalf, by each of the 52 Local Development Companies. Údarás na Gaeltachta will deliver Tús in the Gaeltacht.
- Community & Voluntary Organisations will be able to register their interest with the relevant Local Development Company and offer placements.
- Those who are unemployed for more than 12 months and in receipt of Jobseekers Assistance will be offered the opportunity to consider a placement by the Department of Social Protection.
- Local Development Companies will maintain panels of those identified by the Department for recruitment by community bodies.

- Tús will provide another outlet for the reinvigorated processes being rolled out under the National Employment Action Plan.
- It will support the control and management actions of the Department of Social Protection by identifying those not genuinely interested in work or those operating in the black economy.
- It has both an urban and rural focus and is built on the proven architecture of the Rural Social Scheme.
- A key feature of Tús will be to provide a new activation route that will support unemployed people in remaining job-ready for re-entry to employment as the economic environment improves.
- The first placements are expected towards the end of Quarter 1/2011 once implementation arrangements have been agreed with the Local Development Companies.

RATE OF PAY (PER WEEK)

Personal rate (includes €20 top-up payment)		€208.00
This will be increased where the following apply		
— Maximum Rate of Increase for a Qualified Adult ‡		€124.80
— Each qualified child∞	Full rate	€29.80
	Half-rate	€14.90

‡ A participant will retain the existing rate Jobseeker's Allowance in respect of a qualified adult.

∞ A participant will be paid an increase of €29.80 pw for each qualified child if they qualify for an increase for a qualified adult or if they are parenting alone. If they do not qualify for an increase for a qualified adult, they may receive a half-rate qualified child increase.

COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR

- Community, voluntary and charitable organisations form an important part of the fabric of society.
- There are upwards of 20,000 active organisations in the sector which operate across a broad range of service provision, advocacy, support, community development, religious, health and welfare provision.
- According to the sectors own representatives, some two-thirds of Irish adults are engaging annually in some form of social, cultural and humanitarian activities.
- The sector has estimated that it contributes over €2.5 billion in economic activity each year and that some 63,000 full-time and part-time staff are employed.
- Volunteers provide the equivalent work of a further 31,000 people according to the sector.

Number on Work Placement and Other Schemes

Programme/Scheme	Administered by	Number
Rural Social Scheme	D/Social Protection	2,730
Community Services Programme	D/Social Protection	2,700
Back to Work Schemes	D/Social Protection	10,200
Back to Education Allowance	D/Social Protection	24,920
Community Employment	FÁS	23,350
Jobs Initiative	FÁS	1,330

Note: The number of people participating on these programmes and schemes will be higher due to throughput and the nature of the contractual arrangements underpinning their operation.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

- On 18 November, the Government approved the creation of a new temporary Skills Development and Internship Programme to be managed by FÁS Employment Services. The precise details of the Programme are still being developed by the Department of Education and Skills.
- The Programme will provide support for up to 5,000 places.
- The Programme is aimed at those who are at least three months unemployed with priority to be given to National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) participants.
- The programme will consist of a training/education element and a placement in an organisation (excluding the public sector) for a period of up to twelve (12) months.
- The maximum duration for participants on the programme will be 15 months, which is comprised of the 12 month placement and the potential for a further 3 months to facilitate education and training. Participants will not be allowed to extend their participation on the programme beyond the 15 month limit.
- In order to participate in the programme, host organisations will have to pay €150 per week per participant for a 12 month period into a fund managed by FÁS. This contribution will be used to fund: an '*Upskilling Bonus' of €100 per week for each participant over and above their normal FAS training allowance entitlement, and €50 per week will be the host organisations contribution to the upskilling costs of the participant.*
- Take-up on the programme will be entirely dependent on the interests of potential participants and host organisations participating in the programme.

DEPT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION CURRENT CONTROL MEASURES

- **Identity & payment checks**: New claimants for Jobseeker's payments are now exclusively paid through post offices. This requires claimants to attend the post office each week thus confirming their residency in the country. Photographic identification is also required when collecting payments at the post office.
- **Reviews of entitlement**: Are systematically undertaken across all social welfare schemes having regard to the level of fraud risk associated with these schemes.
- **Direct mail shots**: The Department uses direct mail shots to validate with customers that the conditions for receipt of benefits, allowances and child related payments are met.
- **Medical eligibility assessments**: In the case of people receiving illness and disability payments, recipients are reviewed on a systematic basis through medical assessments and examinations to ensure that the medical eligibility entitlement is still fulfilled.
- **Non residency**: Residency checks on social welfare claims are undertaken nationwide by Departmental Inspectors in order to determine whether their residency status in the State is fulfilled.
- **Anonymous reports of possible fraud**: Since early 2010, the Department of Social Protection website facilitates making on-line anonymous reports of suspected abuse of schemes. All reports are dealt with in confidence.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK PLACEMENTS

- The availability of job opportunities, even short-term work placements, with some financial incentives are important where the labour market is

suppressed. In addition to any financial benefit to the worker, work brings other benefits to the individual, including to their psychological and general wellbeing from being involved in wider community and employment activity.

- Activation and support for those who are unemployed is a key priority for Government.
- The Employment and Community services programme operated by FÁS is transferring to the Department of Social Protection in January.
- As part of this integration, the National Employment Action Plan is already being revised in order to provide more efficient interventions with jobseekers on a more frequent basis. This process commenced last October.
- A key element of the reinvigorated NEAP is that there will be more intensive and more regular engagement by the Department's services with unemployed people in helping them get back to work and ensuring that all Jobseekers are genuinely available for and seeking work.
- Overall, it is anticipated that activation measures generally, including the refocused and reinvigorated National Employment Action Plan will save up to €100 million next year.

FRAUD CONTROL

The Department of Social Protection addresses the matter of fraud and wrongful claiming of benefits in a number of ways.

- Control work is undertaken on all benefit schemes and includes a range of measures to validate identity and validate customers' entitlements. Actions can include vehicle checkpoints and exchange of data between other public agencies and social protection services in other jurisdictions.
- This work is supported by a dedicated Special Investigations Unit within the Department.

- The Government intends to increase the level of control, through, for example, more use of new technology. Enabling powers have been put in place in recent Social Welfare legislation.
- A range of other security features, including the introduction of the new Public Services Card in 2011 will minimise the rate of fraud and error in social welfare schemes.
- The Department's services will continue to be developed to meet the needs of customers genuinely in need of support and entitled to benefits.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT COMPANIES

- There are 52 Local Development Companies covering all areas of the country. These companies have primary responsibility for the delivery of the National Rural Development Programme and the Local and Community Development Programme.
- The companies are involved in the development and delivery of a range of other Government programmes and interventions.
- Local Development Companies are independent companies and use a bottom-up approach to promoting and delivering their services.
- The Programmes delivered and managed by the Companies include the
- *Rural Social Scheme*
- *Rural Development Programme*
- *Local & Community Development Programmes*
- *Social Inclusion*
- *Rural Transport Programme*
- *Operation of Local Employment Services*
- *Education, Training and Enterprise supports for the unemployed*
- The Boards of the companies include representatives of local councils, business interests, the trade unions, agriculture, state agencies and the community and voluntary sectors.

OTHER MEASURES BEING INTRODUCED

The Department of Education and Skills will implement the following measures over the coming year:

- The creation of a new €20m multi-annual higher education labour market fund to enable unemployed people access innovative part-time higher education opportunities from certificate to post graduate levels (Levels 6 to 9 on National Qualifications Framework). The first call for proposals under the Fund, for €5m will issue in January 2011.
- The expanded Redundant Apprentice Placement Scheme, which will provide on-the-job training for up to 1,000 apprentices in the public and private sectors.
- The introduction of up to 700 places in the Institutes of Technology for redundant apprentices and craftsperson commencing in early 2011.
- The Skills Development and Internship Programme (see also earlier paragraph) is an enterprise led initiative aimed at those who are at least three months unemployed. Participants on the programme will receive a 12 month placement with host organisations and will undertake a significant education and training component. The Government has made provision for up to 5,000 places to be supported under this programme.
- The Work Placement Programme will be expanded to provide up to an additional 5,000 places in the public service and a further 500 placements for graduates in the private sector. This will bring the number of places on the Work Placement Programme up to 7,500.

END of NOTES for EDITORS.

Issued by the Department of Social Protection.

See www.welfare.ie for further details.