



**An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection**

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**Minister for Social Protection launches Pathways to
Work**

***Getting 75,000 people who are currently long-term
unemployed back into the workforce by 2015***

Joan Burton TD, Minister for Social Protection, today (23rd February 2011) announced [Pathways to Work](#), a radical new plan to get unemployed people back to work.

Speaking at the Digital Skills Academy Minister Burton said: “We will engage with every unemployed person to make sure that their first day out of work is also their first step on the pathway back to work. No-one who loses his/her job will be allowed to drift, without support, into long-term unemployment.”

“We will not repeat the mistakes of the 1980s and 1990s when unemployment remained high even after economic recovery took hold. This time, our people will be job-ready when the recovery comes,” she said.

“Unlike previous governments, my colleagues and I are ambitious for those who are out of work. We want to be the catalyst for them to get on the pathway to a new job and better prospects.”

Speaking at the launch, the Taoiseach said: "Pathways to Work is all about people and making sure that, when economic recovery comes, those who lost their jobs in the recession are not left behind. We are completely overhauling the way the State supports jobseekers by introducing best international practice. Pathways to Work will introduce a new code of rights and responsibilities where, in return for welfare support, jobseekers must actively seek employment or engage with employment or training services. When new job opportunities come we want unemployed people to be at the front of the queue. Pathways to Work is fundamentally linked to our Action Plan for Jobs."

The Tánaiste said: "I warmly welcome the publication today of Pathways to Work. It is absolutely vital that we re-invent the way in which public bodies interact with people who are unemployed. I have long argued that the day a person loses their job should also be the first day of their journey back to employment. The reform programme that we are launching today represents one of the biggest reforms in the history of our social welfare system. As the document makes clear, the Taoiseach and I are personally committed to ensuring the success of this transformative project."

Minister for Training and Skills, Ciaran Cannon added: "The Department of Education and Skills and the wider education sector are committed to helping people upskill. We are implementing a major reform programme – the establishment of SOLAS - in the further education and training sector to ensure that we can provide 21st century skills for 21st century jobs."

Pathways to Work is primarily focused on those who have been out of work for a year or more. The aim is to get 75,000 people who are

currently long-term unemployed back into the workforce and to reduce the average time spent on the live register from 21 months today to less than 12 months by the end of 2015.

A key element of the Pathways to Work approach is the transformation of social welfare offices into new one-stop-shops in the first half of the year where clients can access their entitlements and get help with planning their return to work. Four will open in King's Inn, Parnell Street, Dublin; Tallaght, Dublin; Arklow, Co. Wicklow and Sligo by May with a further ten coming on stream by the end of the year.

Customers will be asked to complete a profile questionnaire when they register with these one-stop-shops so that their case worker can assess the Probability of Exit (PEX) from unemployment during the subsequent 12 months and put the right supports in place. This will allow the Department of Social Protection to profile 150,000 customers this year.

Case workers will also hold group interviews with 30,000 customers this year as well as 130,000 one-to-one interviews with those most in need of assistance in returning to employment.

The Department of Social Protection will require people to engage with the Pathways to Work approach. The Department will also review the current rules and strengthen them where necessary to ensure that individuals do engage with Pathways to Work.

Also as part of the Pathways to Work process, claimants will sign a rights and responsibilities contract and commit to a progression plan with the Department of Social Protection.

The Department will engage with and provide supports (such as education, training, work placement or job search assistance) to each unemployed person to increase their prospects of securing a job.

The Department will reset the relationship with employers, with more and better contact to ensure they have access to and are offered the right candidates to fill vacancies. The Department will also explore contracting with the private sector as a means of complementing its own resources in areas such as job matching and job placement.

The Department of Social Protection will spend €977 million on employment supports including Community Employment schemes in 2012, up from €882 million in 2011. This increased spending of €95 million, against a backdrop of significant fiscal consolidation, underlines the Government's commitment to enhancing support for employment. Overall, the Department will offer 85,650 job placement or work experience initiatives in 2012 including JobBridge, the National Internship Scheme, Tús, the Rural Social Scheme and the Jobs Initiative.

The priority is to ensure that employment opportunities go to people currently on the live register. For that reason, the Employer Job (PRSI) Incentive Scheme, which exempts employers from liability to pay their share of PRSI for certain employees for twelve months, is now being extended into 2012. The scheme will also be extended to cover the first 18 months of employment.

The relief will also be extended to 18 months for any business set up under the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance or Short-term Enterprise Allowance that takes on additional members of staff. Eligibility criteria for

the scheme will be amended to allow time spent on the Work Placement Programme and JobBridge count as the qualifying period for the scheme.

Notes to Editor:

1. About the new look Department of Social Protection

The Department of Social Protection now has overall responsibility for providing employment support and guidance to people of working age as well as continuing to provide income support. This follows the transfer of FÁS Employment Services and Community Employment Programmes to the Department on the 1st of January this year.

2. About Digital Skills Academy

Founded in 2008 by educator and entrepreneur Paul Dunne, Digital Skills Academy, based in Dublin, is the innovative provider of digital industry-linked programmes in higher and further education & training.

Developing talent for the 21st Century digital workplace, the digital media and technology programmes are designed to support participants to take advantage of employment opportunities in the Irish technology sector – in excess of 2,500 jobs are currently unfilled in the digital and gaming industries in Ireland. The aim of the programmes is to move people back into the labour market by equipping them with the skills that are now in demand. See www.digitalskillsacademy.com.

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