



NEWS RELEASE

JANUARY 24 2010

Graduates retain Social Welfare entitlement while on IBEC GRADLINK programme - Hanafin

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin, T.D., today (25th January 2010) announced that participants on the IBEC GradLink programme will be treated similarly to graduates participating in the FÁS Work Placement Programme, in retaining social welfare benefits.

Minister Hanafin said the IBEC graduate scheme, Gradlink, represents an important response to the difficulties facing recent graduates attempting to enter the labour market. The scheme is designed to assist recent graduates improve their skills during the current downturn and to ensure that they are better positioned to benefit when the economy recovers. For graduates, the scheme provides an important opportunity to gain valuable work experience and to improve their employment potential. **“The programme will ensure that the investment in our young people to date is not lost and it also provides talented, young, educated people with an accredited Certificate in Management that will add significant value to their CV”**, said the Minister.

“I would like to congratulate IBEC on its innovative work in developing the GradLink programme. This graduate internship programme offers 2009 graduates an opportunity to secure work placements and to gain invaluable experience in the workplace. GradLink complements the FÁS Work Placement Programme which is offering 9 months work to 2,000 unemployed persons and which now also caters for 2009 graduates and I am pleased to be able to announce that graduates availing of either programme will be treated in precisely the same way in relation to the retention of social welfare benefits.” Details of the criteria for the FÁS Work Placement Programme are attached below.

ENDS



REVISED FAS WORK PLACEMENT PROGRAMME

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR GRADUATE STREAM

GRADUATES (NINE-MONTH DURATION)

- All unemployed graduates will be eligible to apply to participate in the Work Placement Programme provided they meet the other criteria. Unemployed graduates who are not receiving a social welfare payment will also be eligible to apply.
- Graduates must have attained a full award at level 7 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications.
- Individuals in receipt of a Jobseeker's Benefit (JB) payment will now be eligible to apply and participate on the Work Placement Programme (WPP). Where a person exhausts their entitlement to JB while participating on a WPP they can apply for a Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) payment, which is subject to satisfying a means test. It should be noted that a participant who is not eligible for a Jobseeker's Allowance and has exhausted their entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit would then not receive a social welfare payment.
- Individuals in receipt of other Social welfare allowances/payments will be eligible to participate in the Programme, in accordance with existing arrangements. These include the following:
 - Disability Allowance,
 - Blind Pension,
 - Invalidity Pension,
 - Illness Benefit or
 - Lone parents allowance

Individuals in receipt of a disability or illness payment must get written approval from the Department of Social and Family Affairs to do rehabilitative work while participating in the Work Placement Programme and to retain their disability payment. This may involve a doctor certifying that the work placement will be rehabilitative.

Individuals in these categories will be directed by FÁS to the Department of Social and Family Affairs in the first instance and then once approval has been granted they will be eligible to participate in the programme.



Department of Social and Family Affairs

- The period, for which participants have to be in receipt of a Social welfare payment in order to be eligible, has been reduced to 3 months. Periods spent on FÁS training programmes for individuals who were in receipt of Social Welfare payments prior to the commencement of the training, will count in relation to the Work Placement Programme's qualifying period.
- The placement will be for a maximum nine-month period.
- Local FÁS offices will be the first point of contact for those interested in the Programme.
- FÁS will refer potential participants to providers. On referral from FÁS, the provider of the work experience may interview potential participants.
- The Department of Social and Family Affairs will continue to pay social welfare entitlements to participants on the Programme, for the duration that their entitlement exists.