Tánaiste launches two new programmes to help young jobseekers return to work and training

3,500 people expected to benefit in 2015

The Department of Social Protection has today (Wednesday, 4th February, 2015) launched two new programmes to help young jobseekers return to work and training. The programmes are expected to benefit 3,500 young jobseekers in 2015.

**First Steps** and **JobsPlus Youth** were announced by the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton, T.D. and the Minister of State with Responsibility for Employment, Community and Social Supports, Kevin Humphreys, T.D..

**First Steps** will offer young jobseekers aged between 18 and 25 the opportunity to gain valuable work experience and training with the help of dedicated assistance from Department of Social Protection case officers. The target is to provide up to 2,000 work experience placements of six or nine months’ duration for young jobseekers during 2015.

**JobsPlus Youth** is an expansion of the JobsPlus employer incentive scheme, and will see employers receive cash grants to assist with wage costs when they hire young people from the Live Register. It is expected to support 1,500 young jobseekers return to work this year.

The Tánaiste said: “Through the Department’s *Pathways to Work* strategy, we have made a focused effort to reduce youth unemployment. That work has paid off, with a significant reduction in youth unemployment from 31% in 2012 at the height of the crisis to 21.6% at end of 2014. But that is still far too high. While the recovering economy will vastly improve the prospects for many young people leaving school and college, others will still find it hard to take that first step onto the employment ladder. The purpose of First Steps and JobsPlus Youth is to give them that opportunity.”

Minister of State Humphreys said: “Our Government has made helping unemployed young people a top priority. Rolling out First Steps country wide will be key to giving young people the opportunity and experience of work. We were able to double the number of places on JobsPlus to 6,000 and its success in getting the long term unemployed back into work shows us this tailored scheme for young people will make a big difference to their lives and future prospects.”

**First Steps:**
The Tánaiste and Minister Humphreys launched a call seeking expressions of interest from organisations right across the private, public, voluntary and community sectors inviting them to participate as a sponsor in the **First Steps** programme.
The objective of First Steps is to provide participants with an opportunity to learn and develop basic work and social skills while on a placement in a real work situation in organisations in the private, public, voluntary and community sectors.

Each placement will last for six or nine months during which time the participants will work for four days per week and will be expected to use the fifth day of each week to undertake other activities related to job-search. Towards this end, all participants will be supported by a dedicated Department of Social Protection case officer and a mentor will also be assigned by the sponsoring organisation. All participants will receive a pre-placement training course, funded by the Department, to prepare them for their work placement. Participants on First Steps will also receive, through the Department, a single allowance consisting of €50 per week in addition to any existing social welfare entitlements.

First Steps builds on experience over the past two years of placing young people into work training and experience programmes with employers such as Tesco and Diageo. Employers can register their interest in offering a First Steps placement by emailing firststeps@welfare.ie. First Steps placements will start by April 2015.

JobsPlus Youth:
JobsPlus incentivises businesses to hire jobseekers from the Live Register by providing monthly cash payments to offset wage costs. The JobsPlus incentive is payable on a monthly basis over a two-year period and provides two levels of payment:

- A payment of €7,500 over two years to the employer for each person recruited who has been unemployed for between 12 and 24 months. This equates to approximately €312 a month;
- €10,000 over two years to the employer for each person recruited who has been unemployed for more than 24 months. This equates to approximately €416 a month.

Since its launch in 2013, almost 4,000 jobseekers have returned to work via the scheme, three in five of whom had been unemployed for two years or more.

The Department is now building on the success of the scheme by launching a dedicated JobsPlus Youth strand for young people. Under this strand, the qualifying period for employing such young people has been reduced from 12 months to four months. It is envisaged that JobsPlus Youth will support an additional 1,500 jobs for under 25s this year.

JobsPlus Youth is now live and available with immediate effect. Employers can register their interest at www.jobsplus.ie

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Note to Editors:
Both programmes form part of Ireland’s Youth Guarantee system. The EU-wide Youth Guarantee aims to ensure that young people under the age of 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of entering the labour market.

The European Commission is providing co-funding for some elements of the Youth Guarantee plan through the Youth Employment Initiative and the European Social Fund.