Review of employment support schemes published by Minister for Social Protection

The Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton T.D. has today (15 January 2013) published a policy review of the Employment Support Schemes provided by her Department to jobseekers. The review examines the current labour market context and the policies and programmes that exist within the Department of Social Protection to help people return to work.

Publication of the report comes as the Department prepares to roll-out an extra 10,000 activation places this year as announced in Budget 2013. This €11 million investment is consistent with the Government's priority of getting people back to work or getting them back to education or training so they will improve their chances of getting a job in the future.

Activation seeks to ensure engagement with jobseekers so they can get the supports they need to find a job, training or educational opportunity. The policy review examines a number of activation schemes currently in place in the Department of Social Protection, ranging from work programmes such as Community Employment to JobBridge internships and job placement programmes such as Tús and the Rural Social Scheme.

Minister Burton said: “I am pleased to publish and make the report available today. The review is focused primarily on assessing the contribution certain programmes can make to the Department of Social Protection’s activation policy. It aims to maximise employment, training and educational opportunities for jobseekers.”

The report envisages a reduction in the overall number of schemes, with several to be amalgamated, to provide the Department with a more streamlined and practical set of programmes to drive Government activation policy more efficiently.

“In 2012, about €900 million was spent on the schemes examined in this review, providing activation places to about 75,000 social welfare recipients. This outlines the significance of activation and the need to ensure appropriate schemes exist to support the unemployed,” the Minister said.

“Support and assistance in seeking and finding suitable work in the open labour market is a major focus of the activation approach. The Department must make every effort to ensure as many people as possible who are unemployed can be given the opportunity to acquire suitable work experience, skills and/or qualifications to do this.”

Minister Burton said many of the review’s recommendations envisage a greater role for the Department in directing people in receipt of Jobseekers payments towards appropriate activation measures. Last year, the Minister launched the Department’s new Intreo service – a “one-stop shop” approach where financial and employment supports are available for jobseekers in the one place for the first time. Intreo involves, among other things, active profiling and case management. This is central to the ability of many of the review’s recommendations to succeed.
A stakeholder conference is being arranged for February and Minister Burton hopes that this will encourage debate on the review and the broader activation agenda.

The review, which was compiled by the Department of Social Protection, is available at www.welfare.ie.

Appendix: Key Findings

Recommendations in broad terms that address the main elements of the terms of reference include:

• Community Employment (CE) to be strengthened as an activation programme: Participants to be referred to schemes from the Department of Social Protection Employment Schemes only. There should be a focus on progression into employment as a separate stream of the programme, with a service stream to be developed to support services to local communities. The report recognises that, in addition to its objectives for participants, Community Employment has become important over time in supporting the delivery of a range of community, care and other services.

• Amalgamation of Community Employment and Tús: As the recommendations for Community Employment and Tús will, if implemented, lead to closer alignment of the design of these two schemes, early consideration should be given to full amalgamation of the two schemes.

• Selective expansion of temporary employment: The review references the OECD commentary and analysis of temporary employment measures such as Community Employment and Tús and while the OECD viewed the level of such provision in Ireland to be high, long-term unemployment has risen further since the most recent OECD review of Ireland and seems likely to remain at an elevated level for some time which strengthens the case for selective expansion of temporary employment.

• The possible transfer of the Rural Social Scheme: There is a need to decide if the Rural Social Scheme is best suited to the Department of Social Protection or should be moved to a Department or body that is engaged with the development of rural and community services.

• Refocusing the Back to Education Allowance: A range of recommendations are made for the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) which are designed to address concerns around eligibility conditions and ‘lock in’ effects and also propose an enhanced role for the Department of Social Protection in the process by which clients gain access to programmes. In addition, the review recommends considering allowing certain shorter
duration courses such as short term full time and certain accelerated courses be eligible for BTEA, on a pilot basis, provided they are providing education in areas where labour shortage exists.

- Amalgamation of the Jobs Initiative and the Community Services Programme: As numbers continue to fall, the Jobs Initiative scheme might be amalgamated, on a local basis, with projects now funded under the Community Services Programme.

- Revisiting the Work Placement Programme: The report finds that JobBridge has effectively undermined the rationale for the Work Placement Programme. If, as recommended, JobBridge is amended to allow the registration of internships where the participant has no previous welfare entitlement and therefore receives no payment under the scheme, the Work Placement Programme can be closed to new entrants.

- Amalgamation of the TESG and TATS: The Technical Employment Support Grant and Technical Assistance and Training Scheme should be amalgamated.

- Possible transfer of the Small Credit Union Loan Guarantee Scheme: The Small Credit Union Loan Guarantee Scheme should be transferred to the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in the light of its development of a temporary partial credit guarantee scheme and a micro finance fund.

- Possible closure of the Part Time Job Incentive: Given the poor take-up on Part Time Job Incentive and recent relevant amendments to Family Income Support, termination of the scheme should be considered.

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