



Relate

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The journal of developments in social services, policy and legislation in Ireland

Supports for getting back to work

Introduction

In this issue, we describe the new structures that are being put in place for job placement, training and further education and the main supports that are available to help unemployed people get employment or become self-employed. These supports are categorised under the following main headings:

- Work programmes, including internships
- Training and education programmes
- Supports for self-employment
- Incentives for employers

The *Action Plan for Jobs 2013* sets out a number of actions that the Government proposes to take to increase employment. The aim is to help create the right environment for businesses to create 100,000 net new jobs by 2016. See: djei.ie/publications/2013APJ.pdf. Among other things, this plan reiterates the objectives set out in *Pathways to Work* (see *Relate* April 2012) that outline how the State engages with and supports unemployed people to get back to work.

New structures

The structures for delivering supports to unemployed people and people in need of education and training are being changed. The main changes are:

- The development of the Intreo service by the Department of Social Protection
- The reorganisation of the delivery of further education and training involving the establishment of Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and SOLAS

The Part-time Job Option provides for placements of up to three years for unemployed people aged between 35 and 55 (four years for certain recipients of disability payments) and for disadvantaged people aged 18 and over and placements of up to six years (seven years for certain recipients of disability payments) for people aged 55 or over.

You may be eligible for one of these options if you:

- Meet the age requirement
- Are unemployed and getting Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance, One-Parent Family Payment (OFP), Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension, Deserted Wife's Benefit or Farm Assist for at least one year. If you were getting Carer's Allowance this can also count towards the one-year eligibility period, but your caring responsibilities must have ceased and you must currently be getting either a jobseeker's payment or the OFP.
- Are a qualified adult who is dependent on someone who has been getting Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance, or Farm Assist for at least one year
- Are getting an illness or disability payment
- Are disadvantaged, for example a member of the Traveller community or a refugee, and getting a social welfare payment for a period

In general, time spent on a recognised training programme may be regarded as time spent getting a social welfare payment for the purposes of qualifying for the scheme. Time spent on CE no longer counts towards continued time on CE for new participants who start on or after 8 October 2012.

In each option, you are required to work 39 hours a fortnight. You are paid the full personal rate of Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) plus €20 a week with increases for qualified adults and children where relevant. You get the full personal rate of JA even if you were previously getting a lower rate. Tax may be deducted from your pay if applicable, but you pay a special lower PRSI contribution at Class A8/9. You are not liable for the Universal Social Charge on your CE payment. You may retain your extra benefits. You are free to do any other work at times when you are not working on the scheme.

The CE scheme is voluntary in that you may apply to get a placement and are not sent by the DSP. The CE scheme is expected to cost just over €350 million in 2013.

Tús

Tús is a community work placement programme that has 7,500 places (2,500 new places in 2013) for people who have been on the Live Register for over a year. The aim is to provide short-term, quality work opportunities. It is being delivered at local level by each of the 52 local development companies and by Údarás na Gaeltachta. Participants are selected by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and referred to one of the local development companies. If you are selected, you are expected to take part unless you have good reasons not to and there may be sanctions for failure to take part or for leaving a placement without good reason.

Unlike the Community Employment scheme, Tús is only for people who are getting Jobseeker's Allowance. In order to participate in the scheme you must:

- Be currently getting Jobseeker's Allowance
- Have been continuously unemployed for at least 12 months and "signing on" on a full-time basis and
- Have been getting a jobseeker's payment from the Department of Social Protection for at least 12 months

The hours of work and the payment arrangements are the same as for the CE scheme. A placement lasts for one year. There is no training element. Tús is expected to cost €96 million in 2013.

Rural Social Scheme

The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) aims to provide income support for farmers and fishermen who qualify for specified social welfare payments. Farmers who are getting Farm Assist are eligible for the scheme. You may also be eligible if you are actively farming or fishing and you are getting Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit (if previously on CE or RSS within the last 12 months), Disability Allowance, OFP, Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension, or an Increase for a Qualified Adult under 66 years of age as part of your spouse's, civil partner's or cohabitant's State Pension (Non-Contributory).

The scheme is operated by the Department of Social Protection and delivered at local level by 35 local development companies and by Údarás na Gaeltachta in Gaeltacht areas. There are 2,600 places on the scheme. The scheme is voluntary and the work and payment arrangements are similar to Community Employment. There are no time limits for taking part in the scheme. It is expected to cost €45 million in 2013.

The RSS is currently the subject of a *focused policy assessment* by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Focused policy assessments are short evaluations of particular

Springboard programme

Springboard provides part-time third-level courses that are mainly geared to meeting skills needs. It is managed by the Higher Education Authority. A large number of third-level institutions, both public and private, are offering courses under the scheme. The courses vary in length and some can be undertaken by distance learning. The entry requirements depend on the particular course. In some cases, you may be able to get entry to a course without having a Leaving Certificate.

You may be eligible to take part if you:

- Have been getting Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance, OFP, Disability Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Farm Assist/Fish Assist, Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's pensions, Blind Pension or Deserted Wife Allowance or you are a qualified adult of working age or signing on for credits for at least six months before the course starts **and**
- Have been previously employed (the scheme is not available to recently qualified people who have no history of employment) **and**
- Are actively seeking and available to take up work

If you want to pursue a post-graduate course, a period of at least one year must have elapsed since completing a full time undergraduate degree course.

You retain the social welfare payment that you were getting before the course starts as long as you remain eligible for it. You do not have to pay registration fees or charges. You must remain available for work and, if you get a job, you may also be able to continue with the course.

You apply online at springboardcourses.ie. Information on the courses that are available is also on this site. There are 6,000 places available on the scheme. Evaluation reports have been published on hea.ie.

Youthreach

The Youthreach programme provides education, training and work experience for early school leavers without any qualifications or vocational training who are between 15 and 20 years of age. There are almost 6,000 places available on the scheme that is operated by the Department of Education and Skills. Almost 3,700 of these places are provided by Vocational Educational Committees in just over 100 Youthreach centres. The majority of the remainder of places are provided by FÁS in about 38 Community Training Centres.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)

VTOS provides a range of courses to meet the education and training needs of unemployed people over 21 years of age with a particular focus on early school leavers.

Redundant Apprentice Placement

Under the Redundant Apprentice Placement scheme, FÁS places redundant apprentices with employers to enable them to complete the on-the-job components of their apprenticeship. Since 2008, almost 7,000 of about 28,000 apprentices were made redundant. The Minister for Education and Skills has established a review group to examine the future of apprenticeship training. See: education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2013-Press-Releases/PR13-05-19.html#sthash.DtRiZRN8.dpuf.

Supports for self-employment

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance

The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) is an allowance that enables unemployed people to take up self-employment while retaining some of their social welfare payment for two years. Your self-employed business must be approved by the Department of Social Protection or a Local Development Company (also known as Partnership Companies).

You may qualify for the Short-Term Enterprise Allowance (STEA) if you are entitled to Jobseeker's Benefit. This allowance lasts for the duration of your entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit, either six or nine months.

You may qualify for the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance if you have been getting Jobseeker's Allowance for a year. You can also qualify if you have been getting Jobseeker's Benefit for a year with an underlying entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance (this means that that you would pass the means test and other criteria).

You may also qualify if you have been getting certain other social welfare benefits for at least a year. If you have previously participated in the BTWEA scheme and exhausted your entitlement, you may participate a second time after a period of at least five years has elapsed. If you qualify, you get your full social welfare payment for the first year and 75% of it in the second year.

Almost 12,000 people are being supported by these schemes at present.

The Citizens Information Board provides independent information, advice and advocacy on public and social services through citizensinformation.ie, the Citizens Information Phone Service and the network of Citizens Information Services. It is responsible for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and provides advocacy services for people with disabilities.

Head office

Ground Floor

t 0761 07 9000

George's Quay House

f 01 605 9099

43 Townsend Street

e info@ciboard.ie

Dublin 2

w citizensinformationboard.ie

Incentives for employers

JobsPlus

The JobsPlus incentive scheme is expected to be implemented from July 2013. It replaces the Employer Job (PRSI) Exemption Scheme and the Revenue Job Assist Scheme. The aim of the scheme is to encourage employers to recruit from among the long-term unemployed.

An employer who recruits a person who has been long-term unemployed qualifies for a direct payment of:

- €7,500, if the person was unemployed for between one year and two years
- €10,000, if the person was unemployed for more than two years

The payment is made monthly in arrears over a two-year period. The Revenue Job Assist Scheme and the Employer Job (PRSI) Exemption Scheme both cease from 30 June 2013. Existing participants on both schemes can continue to avail of them until their entitlement ceases.

Enterprise grants

The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Enterprise Ireland and the City and County Enterprise Boards provide a wide range of supports for people taking up self-employment and to employers who recruit new employees. These supports include:

Job Expansion Fund

A maximum grant of €15,000 for each new job may be paid towards the recruitment of new employees. This scheme applies to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that have been trading for at least two years with 10 or more full-time employees, in manufacturing and/or high-growth potential traded services. Companies must be looking to recruit a minimum of three new employees per application.

Pre-Investment Supports for High Potential Start-Ups

There are a number of supports including training, grants for developing business plans and exploring business opportunities, equity investment and mentoring.

City and County Enterprise Board grants

The City and County Enterprise Boards (CEBs) may provide grants for business start-ups. The typical Priming Grant payable is 50% of the investment or €80,000, whichever is the lesser, although funding of up to €150,000 may be provided in exceptional circumstances. Website: enterpriseboards.ie.

The planned reorganisation of the CEBs that involves the abolition of the 35 boards and the integration of the CEB services into the local authorities is being implemented. Enterprise Ireland and the local authorities have agreed a service level agreement that sets out the role of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) which will replace the CEBs. The legislation necessary to fully implement the changes is expected to be published soon. The LEOs will be stand-alone units within the local authority structure and will report to Enterprise Ireland.

Microfinance Ireland

This fund was established in September 2012 to improve access to credit for entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises and to facilitate the growth and expansion of viable businesses which have been refused access to credit by banks. The fund may provide loans of up to €25,000. Website: microfinanceireland.ie.

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