

Research Series 2014

Working together

Research on the role and contribution
of employment programmes in
CIS service delivery



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Background

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) commissioned a study on the role and contribution of Employment Support Schemes to service delivery within the network of Citizens Information Services. Tom Martin & Associates/TMA, management consultants, were retained by the CIB to carry out the study which commenced early 2013.

The first two Community Information Centres were established in Tipperary and Carlow by Muintir na Tíre in the late 1960s. In the following decades Citizens Information Centres (CICs) were established across the country, and these were later organised into Citizens Information Services (CISs) covering specific geographical regions.

CISs are independent voluntary bodies established as companies limited by guarantee. Their CICs offer citizens information services to the public on a drop-in basis from 253 locations nationwide, comprising 104 centres and 149 outreach services in residential institutions, hospitals, prisons, and remote locations.

Today, forty-two Citizens Information Services act as 'service delivery partners' for the Citizens Information Board, a statutory body which funds the voluntary network of CISs and offers strategic management guidance and training. In 2012, the CIS network helped over 629,000 callers who presented almost a million queries. To provide these services, the CISs utilise a mix of permanent staff, volunteers and participants from Employment Support Schemes (ESSs).

Study objectives

The two main questions addressed in the research were:

1. Taking into account current demographic and social factors, what role could Employment Support Schemes play in maintaining and developing a professional CIS service and what was the best possible fit for these programmes with the CIS service delivery model into the future taking account of the three different service strands — information, advice/assistance and advocacy?
2. What contribution did the CIS model of engagement with Employment Support Schemes make to the work placement and employment activation agenda?

Methodology

The consultants' work programme comprised a number of data collection approaches:

- > Literature review;
- > Field research:
- > Consultation with Chairpersons, Development Managers and Employment Scheme Participants in the CIS sector;
- > Questionnaire-based survey of Development Managers and Employment Scheme Participants;
- > Consultation with other relevant stakeholders.

During the course of the study, the consultants attended a number of meetings with a steering committee established to oversee the study. The membership of the steering committee comprised executives from the Citizens Information Board and Development Managers from the Citizens Information Services.

Context

As noted above, the staffing of Citizens Information Services consists of permanent employees, volunteers and Employment Scheme Participants (ESPs). Because of the economic crisis, the Government was forced to impose constraints on hiring new permanent staff in CISs; these constraints proved doubly acute considering that the CIS workload was escalating with the fiscal austerities. The result is that there is now a very heavy reliance on volunteers and ESPs who, together, make up 55% of the total CIS staff complement in whole time equivalent terms.

The vast majority (c. 80%) of the ESP cohort is comprised of Community Employment (CE) participants, with the balance spread between Tús, Job Initiative, Rural Social Scheme and JobBridge schemes. These schemes form part of Ireland's Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) and are intended to support unemployed people to get back to work, training or education.

Depending on the particular employment scheme and personal circumstances, an ESP's placement could potentially be extended by the scheme funding organisation to last from two to over five years. This extended duration offers the CIS a number of advantages including continuity of personnel and the opportunity to provide comprehensive accredited training to equip ESPs for the core CIS position of Information Provider.

However, several national and international policy reviews over the last decade have criticised Irish ALMPs as being, to a large degree, ineffective and wasteful. Acknowledging these critiques, the Department of Social Protection (DSP) — which had taken over responsibility for all ALMPs over the 2010-2012 period — published its own *Review of Employment Support Schemes* in early 2013, together with a companion *High Level Issues Paper*. In discussing the administration and eligibility conditions of the various schemes, the Review outlined a number of significant proposals, including:

- > Duration of participation for new entrants to Employment Support Schemes should be limited to one year for participants from the unemployed and lone parent streams;
- > For those generally limited to one year, there should as at present be an option for a second year if they are participating in learning that leads to a qualification at the end of the 2 year period.

The Department's proposal to restrict the duration of Employment Support Schemes for new entrants to one year has serious implications for the CIS sector. It will mean more CIS management time taken up in ESP recruitment and more disruption to staff continuity.

But, much more crucially, the proposal has grave implications for the quality of training CISs can provide to ESPs vis-à-vis the core role of Information Provider (the 2012 CIB data show that 57% of ESPs currently perform the Information Provider role in CISs). In April 2013, the CIB launched a new, upgraded, 2-year FETAC-accredited training programme for this pivotal role. It declared Year 1 mandatory for all new Information Provider recruits, while the provision of Year 2 training, covering advocacy skills and advanced communication skills, would be left to the discretion of the CISs. In this context, the DSP proposal to restrict employment scheme durations to one year would mean that:

- > It will not be possible to provide year 2 of the new training programme to ESPs — this bars them from acquiring the higher-level information-providing/advocacy skills and the full FETAC Level 6 Advanced Certificate award which would boost their progression hopes; and it limits the quality of service ESPs can hope to provide for their CISs;
- > Where CISs do opt to provide year 1 of the training programme to ESPs, there will be scant time for the ESPs to practise and consolidate the skills acquired, and, hence, only limited payback will accrue to the CISs.

Then there is the scenario of the optional second year on the employment scheme held out by the DSP to ESPs who sign up for a 2 year training course. This may strike some CISs as a more advantageous arrangement, though the same scant consolidation and limited payback arguments hold. The ideal scheme duration in the interests of both ESP and CIS would be three years.

Main conclusions from the research findings

Satisfaction with Citizens Information Service–Employment Support Schemes (ESSs) engagement

A major conclusion from the research findings (from both the consultations and the online surveys) is the unequivocal satisfaction expressed by the principal stakeholders (both CIS management and ESPs) with the engagement.

Good fit between the goals of CISs and Employment Support Schemes

There is a clear win-win situation: the ESPs benefit from the work experience and training, and the CISs benefit from the boost to their staff numbers.

CIS dependency on Employment Support Schemes is escalating

The mix of paid, volunteer and ESP cohorts has been welcomed as a robust CIS staffing model, offering a rich blend in backgrounds and perspectives. But there is a growing feeling among stakeholders that the balance is getting out of kilter — volunteers and ESPs now make up 55% of the whole-time-equivalent staff. This is leading to an unsustainable dependency.

Uncertainty due to changes in Active Labour Market Policies

The researchers detected a mounting sense of unease among CIS management stemming from the series of activation policy critiques and the two recent Departmental reviews of Employment Support Schemes. The cessation of the double payment and the cuts to the CE 'materials and training budget' posed challenges for management in terms of recruiting ESPs. The proposed restriction of scheme durations to one year and the introduction of placement by referral were additionally disconcerting.

Dual nature of Employment Support Schemes

The 'unsatisfactory progression rate' critique reflects the tension at the core of Employment Support Schemes due to their 'dual mission'. They were originally developed as counter-cyclical measures to provide temporary employment in the community and voluntary sector; simultaneously, they developed as a means of delivering key services to disadvantaged communities. While providing a work routine for long-term unemployed, the low quality of work experience and training in many of these community services meant that they were often ineffective in terms of yielding progression to the mainstream labour market. But, in the case of the CIS engagement of ESSs, the research found that the schemes score very highly in terms of both the service they deliver to the local community and the progression opportunities they provide to ESPs.

Progression of CIS Employment Scheme Participants

The Progression results for the past five years reported by the CISs are impressive with 138 ESPs obtaining paid employment positions in the last five years. If it is assumed that, on average, 200 ESPs stay in the CIS for a 2-year period, then 500 ESPs will have exited the CIS sector over the 5 years. This would put the rate of progression into paid employment at 138/500 or 28%. Given the recessionary economic background this is a commendable achievement and would rank the CIS engagement among the top ESS performances.

Tracking of Employment Scheme Participants after exiting CISs

The lack of formal 'tracking' of exiting ESPs is becoming a critical issue given the increasing DSP emphasis on progression, and it is clearly an aspect that CIB/CIS must address.

Training of Employment Scheme Participants

The research shows that both CIS staff and ESPs acknowledge the high quality of training provided to ESPs, both in-house and external FETAC-accredited training. This is seen as a substantial boost to both CIS service quality and ESP progression prospects. However, if the scheme duration is restricted, the time devoted to training becomes a very significant fraction of the ESP's overall stay, prompting the query: "Are we an Information Provider or are we a Training Organisation?"

Advocacy

Development Managers generally acknowledge that the stress in clients' personal circumstances due to the economic austerity requires more interventionist advocacy inputs from the CIS staff. The issue is whether the limited scheme duration affords adequate time to train up ESPs and this is where opinions divide. The climate of uncertainty generated around the possible curtailment of scheme durations to one or two years may explain the reluctance of so many DMs to countenance year 2 IAAP training for ESPs.

Sponsoring of Employment Support Schemes

The latest Department thinking on sponsorship is that it can be more efficient and effective if a 'lead sponsor' specialises in one sector, be that Childcare, Information Provision, or whatever sector. This allows the sponsor to develop an expertise in training and progression. In the case of CISs, the 'lead sponsor' concept could be operationalised by two or more neighbouring counties agreeing to have one CIS act as sponsor for the group.

Outreach and Social Inclusion

The economic recession has added to the number of vulnerable client groups and this is stretching the staff resources of CISs. The research confirmed that ESPs are providing invaluable cover in CISs so that 'core staff' can be released to deliver outreach services to these marginalised groups.

Recommendations

1. Main recommendation:

The Citizens Information Board should acknowledge the increasing role of Employment Scheme Participants (ESPs) in its service delivery strategy by instituting a dedicated overview system to monitor their recruitment, training, contribution to CISs, and ultimate progression.

2. Anticipate DSP policy changes to Employment Support Schemes

To secure the CIS network's future access to ESPs at this fluid time in the evolution of Irish Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs), the CIB should ensure that it is tapped into the latest Departmental deliberations on modifications to its ESS portfolio such as scheme amalgamations, scheme duration extensions to facilitate high-quality accredited training, and new thinking on scheme sponsorship. One key forum in this regard is the Employment Schemes Advisory Committee set up in late 2012 to advise the Minister for Social Protection.

To take one example, CIB should closely monitor the pilot two-year CE childcare project currently being implemented in two DSP regions. Of interest here is the trialling of a three-year CE placement, featuring two years of formal learning (FETAC level 5 award) and one year of work practice, and incorporating the 'lead sponsor' concept. It is envisaged that this CE paradigm will systematically be rolled out in all nine CE sectoral strands. The CIB should anticipate events by focusing on the high quality of its Information Provider and Advocacy training and enlist other information providing organisations as allies to create a critical mass in the Advice and Information strand.

3. Implement a pilot tracking initiative to measure progression

As part of the campaign to secure extended-duration ESP placements, the CIB/CISs management should proactively implement a pilot tracking project that would enable it to furnish formal evidence of progression rates from CISs. They should take on board the DSP CE Financial Review recommendation to follow-up participants for a minimum of 4 months after completing the scheme. They should also investigate the latest situation regarding the Tús tracking system commissioned by the DSP and see if any economies or efficiencies could be exploited.

4. Ensure training includes solid general market skills to enhance progression

Given the lack of permanent information provision job vacancies in prospect in the immediate future in the public sector and in the community & voluntary sector, the CIS should support the activation agenda by auditing their training programmes to ensure that these incorporate a solid base of fundamental information provision skills that are applicable across a wide range of service sectors — tourism and call centres are just two examples of buoyant sectors in the wider labour market where sound generic information provision skills such as customer relations and data retrieval would empower ESP graduates to attract employment offers.

5. Promote ESPs' transferable skills to local private industry

One of the 'five strands' in Pathways to Work was incentivising employers to provide more jobs for people who are unemployed. This implied a national level policy, but local DSP employment services, and CISs too, can stimulate take-up of ESPs by showcasing the ESPs' *transferable skills* to local private industry.

6. Enhance job-search skills provision for ESPs

Another front in the effort to improve progression rates from CISs is the support given to ESPs for job search activities during their placement. ESP respondents to the online survey called for an 'exit training course' (this could be provided at regional level). In addition to the standard topics such as CV preparation and interview skills, this training should focus on helping ESPs to 'consolidate and market' the skill sets they have acquired using role-play and other interactive learning techniques.

7. Implement a pilot sponsorship initiative

The CIB should launch a sponsorship information programme by inviting the two sponsoring CISs to make a formal presentation of their sponsorship case studies to the CIS network and solicit comments and queries from the other CISs. If no insurmountable hurdles surface during this consultation period, the CIB should proceed to set up a pilot ESS sponsorship project which would involve one or more CISs playing a sponsorship role to serve all CISs at a regional or sub-regional level. The Longford and Limerick CISs (who are currently CE sponsors) could act as valuable consultants to the pilot. The goal would be to determine if such a model is feasible and resource-efficient.

8. Exploit group efficiencies

The CIS network should study the example of the 'Dublin Network' (16 CISs located in the Greater Dublin and surrounding counties) of pooling training resources for ESP induction, and explore if this model can be replicated in other regions or in other common CIS activities.

9. Vision of ideal model for CIS-ESS engagement

The ideal model for CIS-ESS engagement is a three year Community Employment scheme which enables ESPs aspiring to work as Information Providers to complete the 2-year IAAP course and use the third year to apply what they have learnt for the benefit of the CISs and their clients.

The IAAP calendar would dovetail with the recruitment schedule of ESPs so as to expedite the transition onto the course and thereby maximise the 'payback period' when they apply what they have learnt.

Members of the CIS network would sign up to act as 'lead sponsors' of regional or sub-regional employment scheme projects dedicated specifically to information provision placements.

The ideal CIS-ESS model of engagement would allow CISs to select the employment support scheme that best matches the needs of the job. Some jobs within a CIS, e.g. receptionists, do not require the extensive training necessary for information provider roles, and a CIS could engage with an Employment Support Scheme with a shorter duration. The ESPs working in these roles would still benefit from the excellent work environment within CISs and the opportunity to develop their public-interfacing skills. In the ideal scenario they could also avail of a pathway to the dedicated CE scheme for ESPs wishing to train as information providers.

Introduction and Terms of Reference

1.1 Introduction

Tom Martin & Associates/TMA were commissioned by the Citizens Information Board to undertake a study on the role and contribution of Employment Support Schemes to service delivery within the network of Citizens Information Services (CISs).

1.2 Research objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- (i) Describe the overall nature of engagement of employment scheme workers in services, including in particular their role in face to face work and in advocacy
- (ii) Provide a profile of these employment programme workers (socio-economic, skill base, work/life experience)
- (iii) Describe the arrangements currently in place for hosting and or sponsorship of schemes in CIS's and consider the implications of potential sponsorship for services into the future
- (iv) Outline the role and contribution of employment programmes to the development of the CIS model and the benefits to the various stakeholders below arising from the use by CISs of these schemes
 - > the CIS network
 - > the participants
 - > CIS clients
 - > the local community
 - > the State
- (v) Identify the 'progression' of CIS community employment staff into more mainstream roles in services, e.g., as paid information providers or as managers and into other paid employment
- (vi) Identify any blocks/barriers to securing/selecting, training and retaining employment programme workers
- (vii) Identify issues arising out of the heavy reliance by certain CISs on employment programme workers and recent or potential changes to Community Employment and other schemes
- (viii) Critically examine these issues in the overall context of the strategic development of the CIS model
- (ix) Inform Citizen Information Board strategic thinking in relation to the usage of employment programmes within a service delivery strategy
- (x) Propose initiatives to enhance the role and contribution of employment programme workers in CISs
- (xi) Make recommendations arising from the findings to inform CIB and CIS strategic thinking.

1.3 Main research questions

Two main questions addressed in the research were:

1. Taking into account current demographic and social factors, what role can community employment programmes play in maintaining and developing a professional CIS service and what is the best possible fit for these programmes with the CIS service delivery model into the future taking account of the three different service strands — information, advice/ assistance and advocacy?
2. What contribution does the CIS model of engagement with community employment programmes make to the work placement and employment activation agenda?

The following were related questions:

- > What are the experiences and perspectives of employment programme workers involved in CIS services?
- > What are the advantages and disadvantages of having employment programme workers?
- > Are there different experiences in different parts of the country?
- > What is the experience of having employment programme workers operating side by side with other paid workers and volunteers?
- > How, if at all, does the involvement of employment programme workers in CISs contribute to the social inclusion agenda?
- > What needs to be done to enhance the contribution of employment workers?
- > What are the resource implications of securing and training employment programme workers and implementing quality standards?

Methodology

TMA's work programme comprised a number of work packages (WPs) which are described below. The work programme involved a number of different data collection approaches including interviews and questionnaire-based surveys.

During the work programme, the consultants had a number of meetings with a steering committee established to oversee the study. The membership of the steering committee comprised executives from the Citizens Information Board and Development Managers from the Citizens Information Services; the list of members is shown in Appendix 1 below.

Review of the literature

The consultants undertook an extensive review of the literature with particular regard to government labour market activation measures and the experiences of employment programme workers in the CIS sector.

A range of published and unpublished reports produced by the CIB and the CIS sector were accessed as were Government policy documents and reports.

Consultation process with CISs

The research team carried out an extensive consultation process to collect data on the access to, and utilisation of, employment programmes by services and to determine the extent of the difficulties that the services are experiencing as a result of changes to these employment programmes.

As part of the consultation process, personal and telephone interviews were carried out with the Chairs, Development Managers (DMs) and Employment Scheme Participants (ESPs) in 20 CISs. Ten of the CISs were interviewed personally and the balance were interviewed by telephone.

In total, TMA interviewed seventy informants (20 Chairs, 20 DMs and 30 ESPs) as part of the consultation process. Additionally, the consultants interviewed three Community Employment (CE) programme supervisors, two of which were employed by CISs through their role as a CE sponsor organisation while the third was employed by an organisation of which one of the CISs surveyed was a co-sponsor.

The CISs interviewed were selected by the research team in consultation with the steering committee. The selection of the CISs had regard for their geographic location, size and the number of ESPs; two CISs that had no ESPs were also included in the consultation process.

The list of topics to be discussed during the interviews with Chairs, DMs and ESPs (see Appendix 2) were also agreed by the steering committee.

Questionnaire-based survey of Development Managers and Employment Scheme Participants

This Work Package involved the development and application of a web-based survey of all CISs in relation to their usage of employment programme workers and the contribution that they make to their services. The survey sought data from the respondent services on their experiences with recruiting and training employment programme workers.

The survey also sought data on initiatives utilised by CISs to address the difficulties experienced with the lower numbers and availability of employment programme workers.

A separate online questionnaire was developed for the survey of Employment Scheme Participants. This sought to gather data on their experiences and reflections of working in the CIS sector. Additionally, it sought data on their progression paths since exiting programmes such as Community Employment to the CISs and beyond.

The content of both questionnaires was developed by the TMA research team and was approved by the project steering committee. It was piloted in the Wicklow CIS before its application to the wider CIS sector.

A total of 41 Development Managers and 151 Employment Scheme Participants responded giving survey response rates of 98% and 76% respectively.

Consultation with relevant stakeholders

TMA consulted with a number of key stakeholders in relation to employment programme policies and practices, with particular focus on the Community Employment programme which accounts for a large number of ESPs.

Data analysis and reporting

During the course of the project, the research team made a presentation to the CIB Board on their interim findings and conclusions.

Thanks

The TMA team members, Tom Martin and Jim McDevitt, wish to thank the members of the steering group and all the Chairs, DMs and ESPs who participated in the survey; without their help and assistance, this study would not have achieved such a high response rate.

Context

3.1 Evolution of CIS model

The history of Citizens Information Centres dates back to the late 1960's when Muintir na Tíre set up the first two Community Information Centres in Tipperary and Carlow. From the 1970's onwards Citizens Information Centres were established across the country and these were later organised into Citizens Information Services (CISs) covering specific geographical regions. The development of services into a national network was the responsibility of the National Social Service Council/Board¹, the forerunner to the Citizens Information Board.

CISs are independent voluntary bodies established as companies limited by guarantee. They offer citizens information services to the public on a drop-in basis from 253 locations nationwide, including 104 centres and 149 outreach services in residential institutions, prisons, hospitals and remote locations.

Today, forty-two Citizens Information Services act as 'service delivery partners' for the Citizens Information Board (CIB), the statutory body which funds the voluntary network of CISs and offers strategic management guidance. The CISs draw up individual annual work plans guided by this overarching CIB strategy (see an example of a CIS work plan in Appendix 4).

CIB represents a major training resource for the CIS network. As a registered FETAC training provider, CIB delivers training services at regional level to organisations providing public and social information to the public. Courses are available on information provision, legal, interpersonal, management, organisational skills and money advice topics. Training courses are offered free of charge to CIS personnel.

In 2003 the CIB introduced the Information Providers Programme (IPP) as a nationally recognised accreditation and certification for Information Providers. The IPP was validated by FETAC (the Further Education and Training Awards Council) and designated at level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Accreditation served two important functions, establishing certified standards of competency for information providers, and providing quality assurance for customers seeking information, advice and advocacy services.

The IPP was delivered in three modes:

- > through a taught programme at designated centres,
- > by distance learning
- > by recognition of prior learning (RPL).

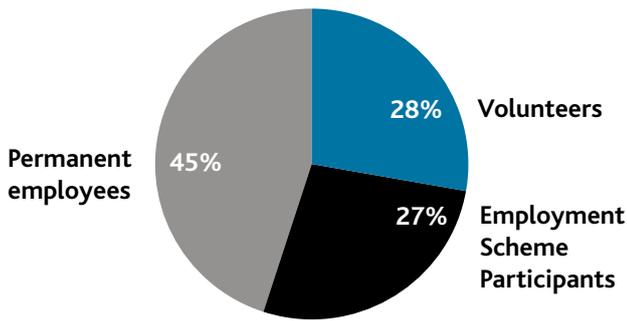
In 2013 CIB replaced the 1-year IPP with its new 2-year Information, Advice and Advocacy Programme (IAAP), designed to augment the IPP training in information provision skills with training in advocacy competence. The IAAP will offer a full FETAC Level 6 Advanced Certificate award. Year 1 of this new programme is mandatory for new Information Providers in the CISs to that quality of service is maintained.

Moving on from quality to quantity of CIS service delivery, documentation shows that, in 2012, the CIS network helped over 629,000 callers and dealt with almost a million queries. These figures constitute a high workload plateau following a rising trend in recent years. The heavy workload is compounded by escalating query complexity (multi-faceted queries requiring greater advice and advocacy inputs). This exacerbates the challenge of sustaining quality service delivery in the face of pressing CIS staff constraints.

Because of the constraints on hiring new permanent staff in CISs, there is now a very substantial reliance on volunteers and Employment Scheme Participants (ESPs). Together they make up 55% of the staff complement as shown in Figure 3.1.

¹ In 1974 the Government requested the National Social Service Council which subsequently the National Social Service Board to act as the organising body for the development of Community Information Centres (later renamed Citizens Information Centres (CICs)). In 2000 it was merged with the National Rehabilitation Board to form Comhairle and was renamed the Citizens Information Board in 2007.

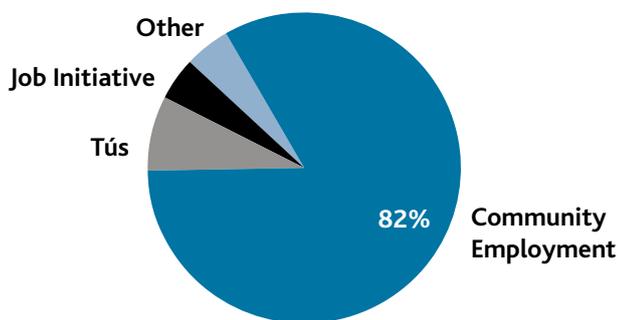
Figure 3.1: CIS staffing (full-time equivalent)



The breakdown of Employment Support Schemes (ESS) as indicated in our online DM survey is shown in Figure 3.2. Just over three-quarters of Employment Scheme Participants (ESPs) were on the Community Employment scheme with 12% on the Tús scheme.²

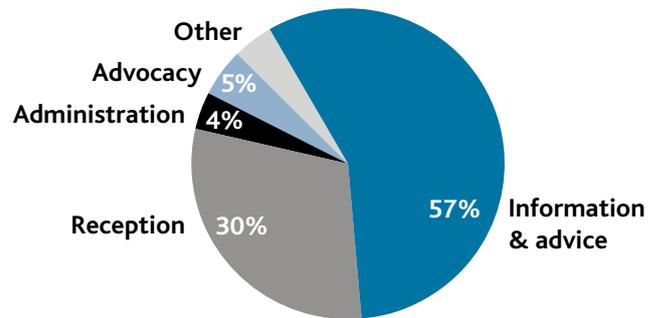
The deployment of ESPs across the various roles in the Centres is shown in Figure 3.3. Figure 3.3 shows that more than half of the ESPs work in the Information & Advice role. Because this role entails very substantial training — our online survey indicates that 57 ESPs have applied for the newly introduced 2 year FETAC-accredited Information, Advice and Advocacy Programme (IAAP) designed by the CIB for new Information Providers — the CISs understandably advocate that ESPs be allowed to remain in placement for a minimum of 3 years so that both ESPs and CISs get the full benefit of the training.

Figure 3.2: Classification of Employment Scheme Participant by employment support scheme



² Appendix 3 presents a short profile of the principal ESSs: CE, Tús, RSS and Job Initiative.

Figure 3.3: Deployment of Employment Scheme Participants across CIS roles



This call for a minimum placement duration brings current developments and reviews in the evolving Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP) in Ireland into sharp focus.

3.2 Evolving Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP) in Ireland

Irish activation policy has been outlined in Department of Social Protection (DSP) (2012) *Pathways to Work: Government Policy Statement on Labour Market Activation*.

This paper identified five strands or objectives for ALMP:

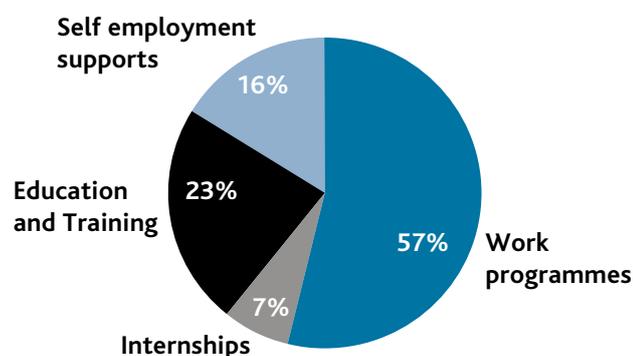
- > more regular and on-going engagement with the unemployed;
- > greater targeting of activation places and opportunities;
- > incentivising the take-up of opportunities;
- > incentivising employers to provide more jobs for people who are unemployed;
- > reforming institutions to deliver better services to the unemployed.

The DSP (2012) *High Level Paper* outlined a typology of Activation Support schemes under 4 'Strands' comprising 16 Schemes:

- > **Temporary work programmes** [Community Employment programme (CE), Tús; Rural Social Scheme (RSS); Job Initiative (JI)]
- > **Internships** [JobBridge; Work Placement Programme]
- > **Training and Education supports** [Back to Education allowance; etc]
- > **Self-employment supports** [Back to Work Enterprise Allowance; etc]

Five schemes — CE, RSS, Tús, JI and Part-time JI — were identified under the Temporary Work Programmes strand. In 2012 it is estimated that these schemes provided places to almost 32,000 DSP clients at a cost in the region of €473m.

Figure 3.4: Relative expenditure by activation scheme type, 2012 (estimated)



These five are the principal schemes used by CISs and it will be observed that the 200 ESPs engaged in the CISs form a very small percentage (0.6%) of the national cohort for these schemes.

Figure 3.5: ALMP typology

Market orientation		
Labour market leverage	Weak	Strong
Supply - Training	General training Back to Education Allowance Part time Education Allowance	Specific Skills Training Certain BTEA courses — such as those with work placement, LMAF, etc Certain PTEO courses such as ICT skill courses
Demand - Employment	Direct Employment Schemes Community Employment Rural Social Scheme Tús Jobs Initiative	Employment Subsidies JobBridge Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Short-Term Enterprise Allowance

Critique of Irish ALMP

Ireland's record in ALMP has come in for sharp criticism over recent years from several national and international research institutions including ESRI, NESC, Forfás and the OECD.

In 2011, ESRI (*The Impact of Training for the Unemployed*) had presented a four-quadrant typology of ALMPs reflecting the position of programmes on two "axes" (supply/demand, and closeness to the market). This typology is shown in Figure 3.5 below.

Research had shown that the closer activation measures are to the labour market, the more likely they are to be effective; public sector jobs programmes (bottom left quadrant) were less successful than other types of ALMP. Moreover, international evidence had shown that private sector subsidies (bottom right quadrant) may involve a high level of 'displacement' (i.e. an increase in employment for the targeted group occurring at the expense of jobs for others) and 'deadweight' (i.e. the employment would proceed without the subsidy).

This typology and argumentation were again presented in Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2012), *Labour Market Activation and Training*.

OECD (2011) *Economic Surveys: Ireland 2011* pointed out that Irish spending on ALMPs was heavily tilted towards job creation schemes which had remained essentially unreformed despite ample evidence of their ineffectiveness as an activation tool. It found that post-programme outcomes remain disappointing; and stated that such schemes "*should be used as a last resort activation tool*".

In early 2013 the DSP published its own *Review of Employment Support Schemes* together with the companion *High Level Issues Paper* cited above.

Significant proposals in terms of eligibility conditions and administration were made for a number of the schemes (these proposals built on the recommendations made in the earlier DSP (2012), *Community Employment Financial Review*):

- > Recruitment to the scheme should be mediated and directed, based on referral from DSP Employment Services only.
- > Duration of participation for new entrants should be limited to one year for participants from the unemployed and lone parent streams.
- > For those generally limited to one year, there should as at present be an option for a second year if they are participating in learning that leads to a qualification at the end of the 2 year period.
- > Eligibility for participation should continue to focus on those who have been receiving payments for a year or more.
- > There should be a greater focus on ensuring job-search and progression planning for participants well in advance of their scheduled exit from CE.
- > The recommendations for CE and Tús, if implemented, would also lead to closer alignment of these two schemes and amalgamation should be considered.
- > In relation to RSS and JI, the review found that neither of these schemes currently contributed to activation policy. Consideration should be given to amalgamating JI schemes, on a local basis, with projects now funded under the Community Services Programme, and to transferring RSS to a Department or body that is engaged with the development of rural and community services.

The Review conceded that these recommendations might pose challenges for the service delivery role of CE in certain areas. If major difficulties arose they might be addressed by either:

- > re-focusing into two strands (an activation and a service strand) within the scheme itself for individual projects, with the service strand existing outside the Departments suite of activation schemes,
- > or
- > (as suggested by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform) a move towards lead core funding of all community projects by the public agency responsible for the relevant kind of service delivery, with CE supporting only part — generally a minority — of staff in any individual organisation/project.

Consultation with CIS sector and key stakeholders

This section outlines the results of the consultation process that the TMA research team undertook with Development Managers and Employment Scheme Participants within the CIS sector and with key stakeholders.

4.1 Interviews with Development Managers (DMs)

Workload

The great majority of DM respondents point to an increasing workload due to a combination of rising Caller numbers, an increasing Query-to-Caller ratio, and increased complexity of Queries.

Staffing Pressures

DMs commented that the constraints on staff levels introduced in 2005 which curtailed the recruitment of new personnel was making life difficult in the wake of the 2008-2011 Financial Crisis. The resultant surge in CIS workloads due to economic and social welfare austerities has escalated the dependency of the Centres on the contribution of volunteers and Employment Scheme Participants.

Mix of ESPs and Volunteers: Management challenge?

The DMs realise that they have to accept the reality of staffing pressures and the fact that the CISs have become heavily dependent on some combination of volunteers and ESPs. Opinions differ concerning the relative advantages of recruiting volunteers and ESPs. The volunteers typically work for only a half-day per week (although the CIB has proposed a minimum 7 hours per week for new recruits) while ESPs work for a half-week. But countering this ESP advantage is the fact that the Volunteers typically remain with the Services for many years while ESPs generally offer a more restricted placement period.

It is generally agreed that many volunteers can draw on a fund of work and life experience and several volunteers have deep expertise in fields particularly advantageous to the Information Services. On the other hand, one salient point commending ESPs is that they have the very important advantage of familiarity with the live register together with the attendant DSP supports and procedures for jobseekers — all of which is relevant to the queries of many callers.

Roles of ESP in CIS

The principal roles in an Information Service comprise Information Provider, Advocate, Administration Assistant and Receptionist. There are interesting views on the suitability of these roles for ESPs. Some DMs pride themselves on their even-handed allocation of all roles (usually with the exception of Advocate) across the three cohorts — paid staff, volunteers and ESPs. For these DMs the paramount objective is high team-morale and a seamless cover, and they believe that their undifferentiated approach delivers the best service for their Clients. Some Services feel that ESPs, by dint of the limited scheme duration, lack the necessary length of experience in the Service to be able to perform the Information Provider role to the quality standard that clients deserve. The majority of DMs take the middle view and support the progression of ESPs who exhibit the requisite qualities and skills during their induction period. In their initial face-to-face dealings with clients, these ESPs are 'shadowed' by qualified Information Officers; when they become familiar with the general pattern of queries and how to source the information that callers request, they are allowed to 'fly solo'.

Duration of Employment Scheme

The current policy signals intimating a pruning of scheme durations worries DMs who argue that all the substantial investment in training will be for nothing, and both CISs and ESPs will lose out. They are particularly exercised by the prospect that this highly trained resource will most likely return to the live register because of the lack of employment opportunities obtaining in the ongoing economic downturn.

The CIS Chairs also had concerns on the shorter duration of employment schemes; one chair person remarked:

"The shorter duration ... will be bad for the CIS, for the individual and for the public."

Diversity of Employment Schemes used in the Information Services

A wide range of Employment Schemes are used by the CISs. These include Community Employment (CE), Tús, JobBridge (JB), Job Initiative (JI), the Rural Social Scheme (RSS) and the Work Placement Programme (WPP). By far the most widely used of these schemes is CE.

There are characteristic differences between the Schemes. Firstly, most schemes involve a voluntary dimension in so far as the participants themselves proactively apply to join the schemes. Tús, however, is a pure 'activation' scheme whereby participants are selected from the live register, interviewed and accepted onto the Tús scheme which places them with CISs (or other host organisations).

Sponsoring v Hosting

Two of the CISs interviewed were themselves sponsors of the Employment Scheme which supplied their ESPs as well as supplying ESPs to other host organisations in their local areas. Both DMs were extremely positive about the arrangement and suggested the model be replicated in other CISs. Advantages included more direct access to candidate ESPs for the CISs, greater managerial control over the recruited ESPs, and the in-house assistance of the scheme supervisor. While the merits of internalising sponsorship remains a debating point, all DMs agreed that it was crucial to foster a good working relationship with the sponsoring organisation.

Recruitment

Over the years DMs have honed their job specifications and candidate attributes to inform an efficient recruitment procedure. But success also depends on the strength and quality of the applicant stream, and several DMs commented on a severe drop in ESP applications following the Budget 2012 announcement that 'double payment' (continuing the social welfare payment as well as providing the CE allowance) would be phased out. Particularly affected would be single parents who traditionally formed a considerable share of the CE cohort in CISs.

A key point highlighted by several DMs was that they were looking out for qualities much wider than educational attainment; character and life experience, interest and motivation for the job, empathy and discretion with confidentiality, these were all judged to be at least as important as formal qualifications.

Training

The subject of training was one of the liveliest issues emerging from our discussions with the DMs. As explained above, training is clearly a compelling necessity for an organisation providing complex information and advice to the public. What made for the animated discussions was the sense of disproportion between the substantial training time required and the limited 'payback time' due to the limited duration of the placements, prompting more than one Development Manager to ask:

"Are we an Information Provider or are we a Training Organisation?"

Opinions were quite positive regarding the FETAC accredited Information Providers Programme (IPP) launched in March 2008, though most DMs mentioned the heavy time-commitment falling on CIS staff who had to supervise the IPP on-the-job assignments. A difficulty CISs experienced with the external FETAC courses was the fixed academic calendar, courses typically following the October-May pattern. The new Information, Advice and Advocacy Programme (IAAP) was also a lively topic with a minority of DMs harking back to the debate on whether an Advocacy service should be offered by overloaded CISs who should husband their resources for their core Information & Advice (I&A) mission; for them the IPP, and now the first year syllabus of the IAAP, seemed a sufficient goal for ESPs.

Job Search support for ESPs while with the CIS

Our direct discussions with the ESPs revealed a mixed performance regarding the scheme supervisors' support for job searching, some being very active and holding fortnightly job-search meetings, others not seeming to treat the matter with the same urgency. The sluggish labour market may explain some of this inertia.

Progression and Tracking

Almost all of the CISs contacted during these interviews were able to report positive case studies of their ESPs progressing to paid employment in the public sector, the community and voluntary sector, or the private sector. However, there was no systematic 'tracking' of ESPs when they completed their placements. The CE supervisors provided annual reports to FÁS including the 'immediate next step' of ESPs who have left the scheme.

4.2 Interviews with Employment Scheme Participants (ESPs)

Uncertainty of Placement Duration

A common overarching concern expressed by almost all the ESPs that we interviewed was the uncertainty of tenure that characterised the employment schemes (they were operated on an annual roll-over basis — with the exception of the Job Initiative scheme which offered indefinite employment). This duration uncertainty was particularly problematic when ESPs were asked to sign up for external training courses that extended beyond their nominal placement duration.

Motivation to Apply for the CIS job

Many ESPs observed that they were motivated to apply for the advertised employment scheme placements in CISs by an interest in the general area of information provision. Quite a few applicants had been spurred by the advice of acquaintances who had worked as ESPs in CISs. It was a common opinion that the €20 'top up' did not constitute a financial incentive.

Training

By and large the ESPs were satisfied that the CISs invested great effort in the design and delivery of their in-house induction programmes.

The external FETAC training courses (particularly the IPP) were highly regarded by the ESPs who had undertaken them. Opinions varied on the merits of taught versus distance training delivery methods. Those for whom it had been some time since their previous participation in formal education preferred the taught method. For others the distance education's inherent advantage of less travel commitment commended this method.

Many remarked on the importance of obtaining a full induction drill before beginning the FETAC course. This raised the issue of the clash between sponsorship and academic calendars.

Work Experience

The ESPs invariably commented very positively on the overall work experience they enjoyed in their CISs. The feeling of providing a really valuable service to the community engendered a very strong team ethos.

“My time has given me the experience, training and confidence to progress to full time employment. I put a lot of effort and commitment into my work and training and was supported at all levels to progress. I feel any CE participant would benefit from a placement in a CIS.”

— Employment Scheme Participant

Benefits & Skills

The first tangible benefit of the employment scheme was the confidence ESPs got from being employees again. The strong sense of being involved in delivering a vital community service was a further boost to morale.

The hectic office environment was perceived by the ESPs as an excellent grounding for progression to mainstream employment and ESPs felt that it would feature as a strong plus on their CV when approaching potential employers.

As regards the technical skills of information provision, what participants valued in their training and work experience was the skills they were acquiring in how to research, access and interrogate the different knowledge bases. As one ESP noted:

“The trick is knowing where and how to look.”

Job Search

Most ESPs confirmed that their scheme supervisors kept in touch with them on a regular basis to monitor their progress in the CISs and to discuss future progression opportunities. Many of the Supervisors offered short informal courses on CV Preparation and Interview Skills. In the case of the Community Employment scheme, CE Supervisors actively matched up their ESPs with appropriate accredited courses under the Individual Learner Plan (ILP) provision mandated by the scheme.

Progression choices

An overwhelming number of ESPs indicated their first choice would be to continue to work in the information provision sector, ideally as paid Information Officers (IOs) in CISs.

“Training and work experience opportunities are excellent within the CIS but there are few advancement opportunities within the sector to employ the skills obtained.”

— Employment Scheme Participant

Frustration

ESPs echoed the exasperation of the DMs that this cohort of highly trained and skilled information providers should end up back on the Live Register, just when they had consolidated their learning and experience. Also mentioned was the fact that the disruption in staff continuity can have a very negative effect on the outcome of cases where staff have built up a relationship with vulnerable clients.

Volunteering

To counteract regression some ESPs said they would consider returning as volunteers to “keep ticking over” but they were not sure how many hours they would be able to work while retaining their job-seekers allowance.

4.3 Consultation with key stakeholders

TMA in association with the project steering committee identified a number of key stakeholders to be consulted.

Department of Social Protection

A meeting was held with DSP officers working in the Community Employment & Job Initiative section of the Department.

The DSP personnel outlined the Department thinking on upcoming reforms to the Employment Support Schemes as foreshadowed in its November 2012 publication "A Review of Department of Social Protection Employment Support Schemes."

TMA was very interested to learn of the Department's plans to streamline the CE schemes:

- > DSP is working to rationalise the sponsorship structure for CE schemes by promoting a 'lead sponsor' system that will encourage regional sponsors focused on ESPs in the same service sector.
- > In CE scheme placements where there is an approved structured training course being offered to ESPs, DSP will grant a 2nd year extension of placement duration (as has been stated in the DSP Review).

The Department has commenced work on the CE Childcare strand³ and seeks to provide these CE participants with a career path and access to qualifications which will equip them to work as qualified practitioners in the childcare sector. A new formal Childcare learning programme will lead to a FETAC Level 5 Major Award. The Department is currently running a pilot programme in two regions where it is trialling a new 'lead sponsor' structure.

However, pending reforms, DSP confirmed to TMA that the eligibility criteria and operating procedures for the two CE options (Part-Time Integration Option and Part-Time Jobs Option, see Appendix 3) remain unchanged (they have recently issued an updated CE Operating Guidelines: Sponsor Manual which re-states the rules).

Specifically, CE participants continue to be recruited on a one year basis with the possibility of "re-engagement (rollover)" for a further project period where it is shown that a participant would benefit in terms of additional

development and training as per his/her Individual Learning Plan. A maximum of 10% of Part Time Integration participants on a project can apply for re-engagement, but there is more flexibility in the case of the Part-Time Jobs Option.

Re-entry to the CE Scheme is also an option after the elapse of 12 months where the candidate has been in receipt of qualifying DSP payment.

TMA also discussed the issue of tracking CE participants when they exit the scheme and DSP confirmed that the Scheme Supervisor should be recording the 'next move'. The FÁS database is being bedded in with the DSP system to provide access to these records.

TMA also spoke with two other stakeholder organisations to gain insights from their experiences with Employment Support Schemes.

The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)

INOUE was formed in 1987 against a backdrop of high unemployment, low participation rates, long-term unemployment and mass emigration. From its fledgling roots the organisation has developed over the last 26 years and now has 200 member groups including community based resource centres, Citizens Information Services, Money Advice and Budgetary Services, national NGOs, trade unions and branches of unemployed people.

INOUE affirmed that it is a large employer of ESPs and stated that many of its affiliates are heavily dependent on the contribution of ESPs and would be unable to operate without them.

INOUE acknowledged that ESSs had a poor record of progression in the past. Performance under this metric was patchy with only some bright sectors (e.g. childcare schemes) amidst a very heterogeneous portfolio of placements. However, they pointed out that researchers failed to appreciate the importance of the community service goal of these dual-purpose schemes of which as many as one third were totally focused on the service goal.

INOUE remain to be convinced that the proposed changes to ESSs will necessarily improve the situation. Placements where there is only a modest training element can be limited to a 1 year duration, but will such short-term placements have any chance of yielding progression to wider market jobs?

Commenting on the need for ESSs to impart transferable (near-market) skills, INOUE suggested that sponsor organisations should target new 'growth areas' such as childcare and services for senior citizens.

³ DSP (2012) Financial Review of Schemes identified 9 CE 'strands' including an Advice & Information strand which will apply to CISs.

INOUE agreed that much more needs to be done by DSP employment services to improve the Tracking of ESPs. The establishment of INTREO marks a strong proactive measure at the front end of ESSs; now DSP needs to deliver on its 'duty of care' by paying similar attention to exiting ESPs. Perhaps some of the onus falls on sponsors and host organisations as well, so DSP should build up its relationships with these organisations.

On the issue of the reduced flow of ESP applications INOUE believes that the onus is on DSP and its agencies to do much more promotion of ESSs. Again they could collaborate with the sponsor and host organisations in this regard. INOUE cited the very effective promotion work being undertaken by the Limerick Resource Centre for the Unemployed, a member of ICTU's Congress Centres Network.

ICTU Congress Centres Network

The Congress Centres Network (formerly the ICTU Network of Unemployed Centres) came into being during an era of mass unemployment in the 1980s. The Centres were established to provide support, resources and a range of services to the growing numbers of unemployed workers, many of whom were trade union members. Centres also served as campaigning organisations on issues around unemployment, poverty and social exclusion.

The Congress Centres Network (CCN) comprises twenty four Centres around Ireland (<http://www.ictu.ie/ccn/centreslisting.html>). Each Centre is a company limited by guarantee which is managed by a full-time Co-ordinator and a voluntary Board of Management made up mainly of local Trades council and other trade union and community representatives.

CCN manages approximately 750–1,000 ESPs in some forty placement centres including Citizens Information Services. CCN itself employs ESPs as information officers to provide local community services including form filling, information on rights and entitlements such as medical cards, social welfare payments, etc. Their training includes the Social and Civil Information module (one of the two IPP modules delivered to ESPs in CISEs which earn a FETAC level 6 component certificate). The recent establishment of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in November 2012 — amalgamating FETAC, HETAC, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) — has disrupted training but services are now restored.

It was noteworthy that CCN see the immediate threat to ESSs coming not so much from the mooted restrictions on scheme durations as from the actual reductions in 'material & training' grant to sponsors. While the original grant retrenchment announced in November 2011 has been partly mitigated (the €25m in cuts was reduced to €12m), they claim that the financial viability of ESS sponsorship remains very fragile.

The pruning of ESS grants may be defended by invoking critical reports such as the 2010 Forfás *Labour Market Review* which struck CCN as very severe and damaging to the ESS project. This work gave no credit for the important community services being provided by ESSs including elusive societal benefits such as relief from isolation in disadvantaged communities. There is a need for robust community service metrics so that a proper holistic value-for-money exercise can be conducted.

CCN itself has no reason to be defensive with a striking 70% progression rate from its ESSs. But, their 'successful outcomes' include not just direct moves from ESS to full-time employment but also, in cases where exiting ESPs remain quite distant from the labour market, a move to further training and education to enhance employability. CCN pointed out the wide variation in ESP backgrounds, in particular the fact that ESPs, by definition, have been out of the workforce for a considerable time and need 'bridging' support before they can hope to enter the job market. CCN also adverted to the current economic climate and remarked that if higher education institutions are finding it challenging to place graduates in jobs it shouldn't come as a surprise to find modest progression rates from ESSs.

CCN remarked that ESS sponsors can experience regional variations in their relationship with the DSP because of the transition of CE administration from FÁS to the DSP resulting in a change in personnel in some of these relationships.

Regarding the cessation of double payments, CCN commented that the affected constituencies (lone parents, widows and people with disabilities) comprised a substantial fraction of ESPs throughout the past decade. The significant impact of the cessation is manifested by the difficulty now experienced in filling the recent 2,000 extra CE places announced by the Minister in January 2013.

Survey of Development Managers and Employment Scheme Participants

5.1 Introduction

This Section of the report presents the findings of the survey of Development Managers (DMs) and Employment Scheme Participants (ESPs).

5.2 Development Managers

The responses from the 41 Development Managers who responded to the online questionnaire are presented in this sub-section.

Profile of ESP engagement

At the time of the survey (February–March 2013) the total number of ESPs engaged in the 41 responding CISs was 198.

Table 5.1 Profile of Employment Scheme Participants engagement

Number of ESPs	Number of CISs
19	1
13	2
11	1
9	6
7	3
6	2
5	4
4	3
3	3
2	4
1	6
0	6
Total: 198	Total: 41

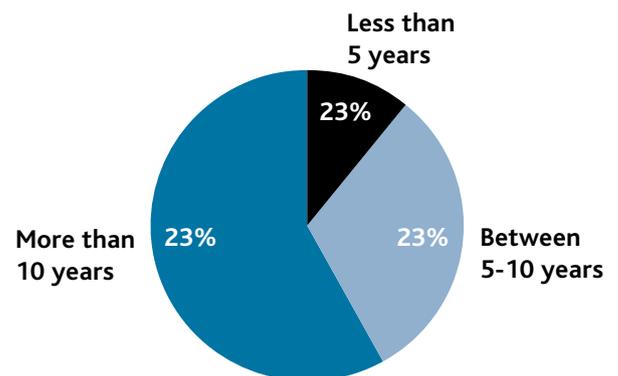
The distribution shows that zero-ESP and single-ESP CISs have the highest frequency but it peaks again at nine-ESPs.

Six CISs indicated that they did not engage any ESPs. Varied reasons for non-engagement included the particular historical origin and strong volunteer ethos, lack of management resources, a previous 'bad experience' with an employment scheme, and a FÁS region declining to make ESPs available to a 'state-funded organisation'.

Length of engagement with employment schemes

Over half of the 36 responding CISs had been engaging ESPs for more than 10 years.

Figure 5.1 Length of engagement with employment schemes



Interflows between ESPs, Volunteers and Permanent Staff

The Development Managers were asked for their perspectives on the interflows between scheme participants, volunteers and permanent staff.

Number of ESPs who had previously worked as Volunteers in any CIS

In twenty CISs no ESP had previously worked as a volunteer. Six of the 36 responding CISs said they had 1 ESP who had previously been a CIS volunteer; a further six CISs said two of their ESPs had worked as volunteers. Three CISs had 3 ESPs who had previous volunteering experience.

One CIS said it had five ESPs who had previously been volunteers.

Table 5.2 Number of Employment Scheme Participants who had previously worked as a volunteer

No. of ESPs who had previously worked as a volunteer	No. of CISs	%
0	20	55.6%
1	6	16.7%
2	6	16.7%
3	3	8.3%
4	0	–
5	1	2.8%
Responses	36	100.0

Number of Volunteers who had previously worked as ESPs in a CIS

In 22 CISs none of the volunteers had previously been ESPs. In six CISs one volunteer had been an ESP. A further 6 CISs had 2 volunteers who had previously been ESPs. Three CISs had 3-5 volunteers and two CISs had 6-10 volunteers who had previous ESP experience.

Table 5.3 Number of volunteers who had previously worked as ESPs

No. of Volunteers	No. of CISs	%
0	22	53.7%
1	6	14.6%
2	6	14.6%
3-5	3	7.3%
6-10	2	4.9%
Responses	39	100

Number of current CIS Permanent Staff who had previously worked as ESPs

These responses confirm the strong progression from ESPs to permanent posts in CISs. Only ten CISs reported no such progression. Three CISs indicated that between 6 and 10 of their current permanent staff had previously been ESPs.

Table 5.4 Number of CIS permanent staff who had previously been ESPs

No. of Permanent Staff	No of CISs	%
0	10	24.4%
1	10	24.4%
2	5	12.2%
3-5	13	31.7%
6-10	3	7.3%
More than 10	0	0
Responses	41	100.0

Length of Time ESPs have been with the CIS to date

Looking at the total complement of 198 ESPs, 44% were less than a year with their CIS. Twenty-one percent were between a year and two years, and eighteen percent were between two and three years. The percentage then drops sharply for the three-to-four and four-to-five year categories but rises again for the five-plus category because of the long-term stay of the Job Initiative participants.

Table 5.5 Length of time ESPs have been with the CIS to date

	<1yr	1–2 yrs	2–3 yrs	3–4 yrs	4–5 yrs	5+ yrs
150 CE	39.3%	25.3%	22.7%	8.0%	2.7%	2.0%
26 Tús	92.3%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
13 JI	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%	84.6%
4 RSS	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%
4 JB	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%
1 Other	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total 198	43.9%	20.7%	18.2%	6.1%	3.0%	8.1%

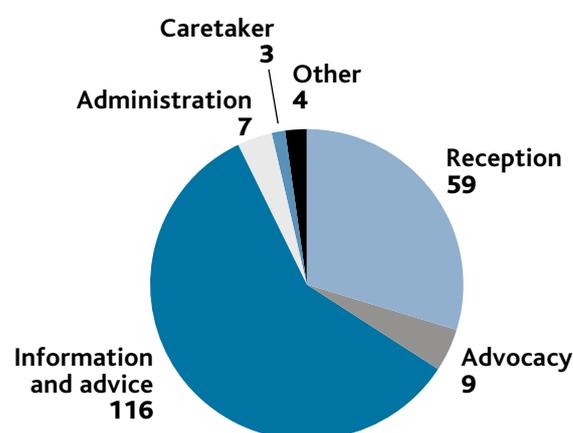
Key: CE: Community Employment; JI: Job Initiative; RSS: Rural Social Scheme; JB: JobBridge.

The profile for the CE scheme ESPs mirrors this overall pattern. If one assumes the stay for each category to be at the mid point, then the average length of time of the 150 CE ESPs works out at 1.65 years.

Primary CIS Roles of ESPs by Scheme

For the overall 198 complement of ESPs, DMs indicated that 59% have Information & Advice as their primary role. The next most frequent role is Reception (30%). Administration and Advocacy posts engage 3.5% and 4.5% of ESPs, Security & Caretaker roles account for another 1.5% of ESPs, and the residual 2% of ESPs are occupied in 'other' roles.

Figure 5.2 Primary CIS roles of ESPs



This overall role distribution pattern changes for the individual schemes. The 150 CE participants have a higher percentage (65%) working in Information & Advice; the 13 JI participants have an even higher percentage (69%) in Information & Advice, and a much higher percentage (15%) working in Advocacy. The 26 Tús workers are predominantly deployed in Reception roles (89%) with only 4% in Information & Advice.

Table 5.6 Primary CIS roles of ESPs by employment support scheme

	Reception	Administration	Information & Advice	Advocacy	Security/Caretaker	Other
150 CE	33	5	98	7	3	4
26 Tús	23	2	1	0	0	0
13 JI	2	0	9	2	0	0
4 RSS	1	0	3	0	0	0
4 JB	0	0	4	0	0	0
1 Other	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total 198	59	7	116	9	3	4

DM assessment of number of months for ESPs to become significant contributors to CIS services

DMs indicated that it took around 3 months for ESPs to become competent in the Reception role. A similar learning period was indicated for Administration. Half the responding DMs indicated a learning period between 6 months to a year for ESPs to get up to speed in Information & Advice, but more than 30% of DMs believed ESPs only achieved true competency in their second year in this key CIS role.

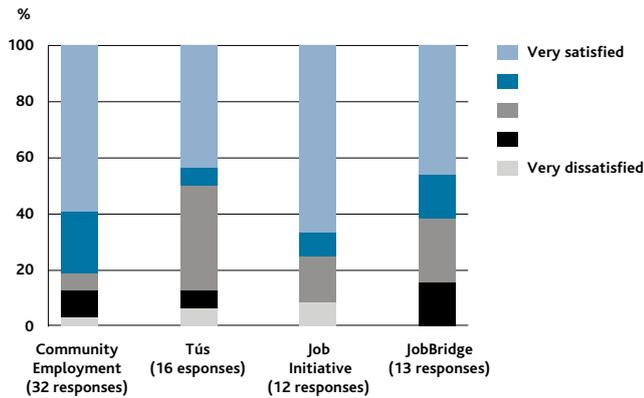
DM satisfaction ratings for the employment schemes

Overall, 71% of DM responses indicated satisfaction with the employment schemes, 58% declaring strong satisfaction. Only 11% of total DM responses expressed dissatisfaction with the Schemes.

Table 5.7 Number of months for ESPs to become significant contributors to CIS services

	< 3 mnths	3-6 mnths	6-9 mnths	9 mnths-1yr	1-2 yrs	> 2 yrs
33: Reception	18	12	2	-	1	0
20: Administration	9	5	5	1	-	-
35: Information & Advice	1	5	8	10	11	-
18: Advocacy	-	-	2	1	5	10
7: Security/Caretaker	6	1	-	-	-	-
6: Other	3	1	1	1	-	-

Figure 5.3 DM satisfaction ratings for the employment schemes



The DM satisfaction ratings were higher for certain individual schemes — CE and RSS received satisfaction ratings of over 80%, and JI achieved a 75% rating. The underperformers were Tús (50%) and JB (60%).

The main misgivings cited were the limited duration of the scheme (particularly so in the case of JB), the involuntary nature of recruitment onto the Tús scheme, and challenging relationships with some scheme sponsoring organisations and supervisors.

Advantages and Disadvantages of recruiting ESPs versus Volunteers to supplement staff numbers

The Table below summarises the main advantage and disadvantages cited by DM respondents.

Table 5.8 Advantages and disadvantages of recruiting ESPs versus volunteers

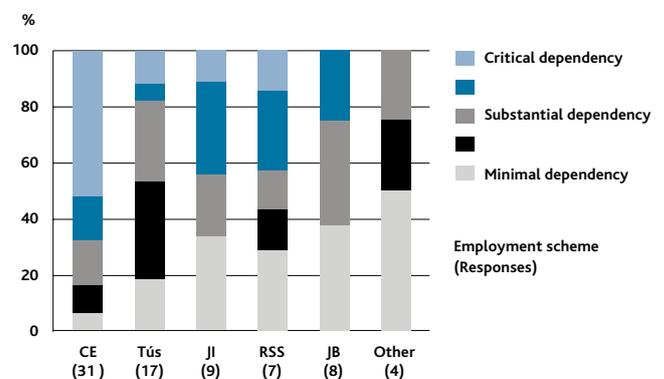
Advantages of ESP engagement	Disadvantages of ESP engagement
ESP provide 19.5 hours versus 4–7 hours from volunteers	The frequent turnover of ESPs can be very disruptive on CIS services
ESP treat the placement as a job; they are quasi-employees and more amenable to line management	CIS spends a lot of time and effort training, mentoring, bringing people on, only to lose them shortly afterwards
ESP offer greater continuity in service cover, and greater availability for training courses	DMs have to negotiate with the ESP Sponsors & Supervisors; this can be a difficult relationship
Span of management: easier to manage 1 ESP than 4 volunteers	There can be a motivation deficit where an ESP may have been 'pressed' to accept the position

DM assessment of the CIS dependency on Employment Schemes

As a percentage of total DM responses, 55% indicated that the CISs were dependent on ESPs for service delivery — 33% judging that dependency was critical and that their CISs would be unable to function without the availability of ESPs.

The high dependency assessment was particularly marked in the case of the dominant CE scheme where 52% of responses rated it as critical.

Figure 5.4 DM assessment of the CIS dependency on employment schemes



Training provision

The DMs were asked to respond to a series of questions on the training provided to Employment Scheme Participants.

The extent of internal CIB/CIS training received by ESPs over the past 3 years

The responses indicated that some two thirds of CISs provided induction training courses that exceeded 5 weeks, with 48% of CIS induction courses lasting 6-10 weeks, 13% between 11-15 weeks, and about 6% between 16-20 weeks.

Similarly some 80% of responses indicated that their mentoring ('shadowing') period extended beyond 5 weeks, with a fairly uniform distribution of these CISs offering from 6 weeks up to more than 20 weeks of mentoring provision. Over two thirds of CISs indicated the provision of additional internal CIS training. Approximately 71% of CISs provided access to some 5 weeks of CIB calendar training events while a minority offered access to considerably more of this source of training.

Table 5.9 Internal CIB/CIS training provided to Employment Scheme Participants

Training Duration (weeks)	CIS formal Induction Training course	Subsequent CIS internal training (shadowing/mentoring)	Other formal local CIS training	CIB Training Calendar events	Other CIS internal training
0-5 wks	32.3%	20.0%	61.9%	72.7%	71.4%
6-10 wks	48.4%	24.0%	28.6%	4.5%	4.8%
11-15 wks	12.9%	12.0%	–	9.1%	14.3%
16-20 wks	6.5%	16.0%	4.8%	4.5%	–
More than 20 wks	–	28.0%	4.8%	9.1%	9.5%
Total CISs	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

FETAC-accredited training provided to ESPs over the past 3 years

Thirty four CISs reported providing access to Information Providers Programme (IPP) training to 124 ESPs over the last 3 years. Seventeen CISs reported providing access to the Advocacy Practice for Information Providers Programme (APP) to 34 ESPs while seven CISs provided the Higher Certificate in Advocacy training to 5 ESPs. Eleven CISs reported offering 'other' accredited training courses to 40 ESPs in this period.

Table 5.10 Provision of FETAC-accredited training to ESPs over the past 3 years

Training Duration (months)	Category	Information Providers Programme (IPP)	Advocacy Practice for Information Providers Programme (APP)	Higher Certificate in Advocacy	Other accredited training already provided
0–6	CISs	6	2	4	6
	ESPs	16	0	3	16
6–12	CISs	23	8		2
	ESPs	91	24		6
12–24	CISs	1	3		1
	ESPs		7		7
More than 24	CISs	1			
	ESPs	5			
Not Specified	CISs	3	4	3	2
	ESPs	12	3	2	11
Total	CISs	34	17	7	11
	ESPs	124	34	5	40

Information, Advice and Advocacy Programme (IAAP)

Thirty-six DMs responded to the questions on the newly launched Information, Advice and Advocacy Programme (IAAP) training which offers a FETAC level 6 Advanced Certificate. A total of 57 ESPs have been put forward for the inaugural IAAP course. Six CISs are not putting ESPs forward at this time.

Year 1 of this new 2-year Programme is mandatory for new Information Providers in the Citizens Information Service (CIS) and focuses on the information and advice setting and practice. Year 2 addresses social policy issues and advocacy skills.

Seventy-two percent of DMs indicated that ESPs should only take year 1 of the IAAP while nineteen percent believed that they should take the full two year course. Fourteen percent of DMs said that ESPs should not take the IAAP course at all; their cited reasons included the limited duration of the ESP schemes and the lack of synchronisation of sponsor organisation and academic calendars. Some DMs mentioned that it might make sense if ESPs indicated a willingness to return to work in the CISs as volunteers.

Asked should the curriculum of FETAC-accredited training courses (particularly the new IAAP) be broadened beyond CIS-specific content to enhance the progression opportunities of ESPs, 30% of DMs said yes, but the great majority felt strongly that the existing curriculum was sufficiently broad.

The DMs reported a wide range of other external training courses provided to the ESPs (by their sponsoring organisations). These included the ECDL, Customer Service, Counselling Skills, Employment Law, Social & Civil Information — as well as the more general Health & Safety courses.

Identification of the key transferable progression skills that ESPs gain from their CIS Placement

Asked to identify the key transferrable skills that ESPs could expect to take away from their CIS experience:

- > 97% of DMs selected "People Skills/Teamwork"
- > 92% selected "Communication skills"
- > 100% chose "Customer Relations"
- > 100% chose "Office & IT Skills"
- > 86% selected "specific CIS technical skills" — information research (sourcing/retrieval), advice skills & advocacy skills

Table 5.11 Key transferable progression skills which DMs indicate that ESPs gain from their ESP placement

Skill type	Yes	Percentage
People Skills/Teamwork	35	97%
Communication skills	33	91%
Customer Relation skills	36	100%
Office/IT skills	36	100%
Specific technical skills — information research (sourcing/retrieval); advice skills; advocacy skills	31	86%
Other	32	88%
Responses	36	

Eighty-eight percent of DMs added 'Other' skills:

1. Negotiation skills, administrative skills, networking;
2. Problem solving;
3. Analytical skills;
4. Office/IT Skills including ECDL level;
5. Workplans and project work;
6. Confidence building;
7. Mediation;
8. Critical thinking;
9. Knowledge of social services;
10. Presentation skills;
11. Working independently on their own initiative;
12. Listening skills, report writing, planning, teamwork;
13. Information Provision;
14. Reception Skills;
15. Book-keeping;
16. Keeping informed of current legislation including budget changes;
17. Organisational skills, interpersonal skills;
18. Respect transmission.

Relation of CISs to employment scheme Sponsoring Organisations

Only 2 CISs are full sponsoring organisations (both of these relate to the CE scheme). However, a further 7 CISs are co-sponsors of employment schemes, and 10 CISs have cross-board participation with their sponsoring organisations.

Table 5.12 CIS relationship to employment scheme sponsoring organisations

Scheme	Host only	Cross-Board	Co-Sponsor	Full Sponsor	Responses
CE	14	9	4	2	29
Tús	16	–	1	–	17
Jl	6	–	1	–	7
RSS	4	–	–	–	4
JB	6	–	–	–	6
Other	2	1	1	–	4

Effectiveness of relationship between CIS and Sponsoring Organisation

This topic was probed under the following headings:

- > Supply/volume of ESP candidates
- > Suitability of ESP candidates
- > Efficiency of selection/recruitment process
- > Ongoing support of ESPs by Sponsor and Supervisor during CIS placement.

The general impression from the responses was that a productive relationship exists between the majority of CISs and their scheme Sponsors/Supervisors.

But certain deficiencies were identified:

- > some 25% of responses adverted to difficulties with access to an appropriate volume of candidates;
- > however, less than 10% expressed dissatisfaction with the suitability of ESPs supplied;
- > only 5% were dissatisfied with the efficiency of the recruitment process,
- > but almost 20% expressed dissatisfaction with the ongoing support of ESPs by the Sponsor and scheme supervisor following placement.

As regards the two principal individual employment schemes:

Community Employment (CE)

- > Of the 20 DM respondents addressing the CE scheme, 5 registered a degree of dissatisfaction with the volume of candidates made available; 12 DMs were satisfied (8 highly satisfied);
- > Only 2 DMs expressed problems with the suitability of candidates supplied, and only 1 DM was unhappy with the joint recruitment procedures for CIS placements;
- > However, 4 DMs were dissatisfied with the ongoing support.

Tús

- > The relationship was much less satisfactory for the Tús scheme.
- > Of the 16 DM respondents commenting on the Tús scheme, 6 were unhappy with the volume of candidates provided, and 4 with their suitability (it should be noted, however, that 5 DMs were highly satisfied with volume, and 8 DMs were highly satisfied with suitability; so we are getting a mixed response);
- > Responses on the efficiency of the recruitment process revealed 9 satisfied DMs and 3 dissatisfied DMs;

- > The assessment of ongoing support showed 7 satisfied DMs to 4 dissatisfied DMs.
- > **Other 3 Schemes (Rural Social Scheme, Job Initiative and JobBridge)**
- > The 5 RSS responding DMs expressed a high level of dissatisfaction with the supply of candidates but were perfectly happy with the other three dimensions of the relationship. The 5 JobBridge DM respondents had no issues. The 6 Job Initiative DMs lamented the fact that that the beneficial supply stream had been stopped.

Perceived advantages and disadvantages of being a scheme sponsor

The advantages of being a scheme sponsor were summarised by Development Managers as "more control and ownership":

- > direct access to the pool of "good ESP's"
- > ability to recruit ESPs that suited the vacancies.

DMs also anticipated a dividend from 'internalising' the scheme supervisor as an extra management resource. And they hoped that being a scheme sponsor might bring much needed extra funding into the CIS.

Disadvantages of sponsorship identified by DMs included:

- > onerous reporting requirements by the DSP
- > more personnel to manage (the sponsor would have responsibility not just for the CIS ESPs but also for the ESPs placed in other local host organisations)

For several DMs it meant "extra HR work and responsibility for little or no real gain".

The split opinion among the DMs on the sponsorship question was crystallised in the response to the question asking if their CIS would consider becoming a Sponsor:

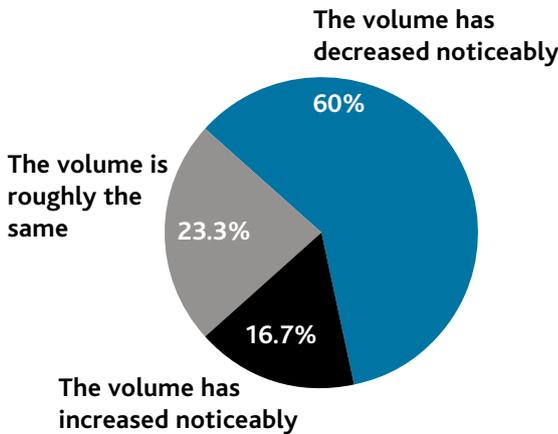
- > 16 DMs said yes
- > 11 said no.

The consensus was that this was clearly an area that required further thought.

Perceived trend in the volume of applications for advertised ESP positions

Of the 30 DM responses addressing this topic, 18, or 60%, indicated that the volume had decreased significantly; however, just under a quarter of DMs declared they were unaware of any noticeable change, and 5, or 16.7%, actually perceived an increase in availability of ESPs.

Figure 5.5 DMs' perception on the volume of applications for advertised ESP positions



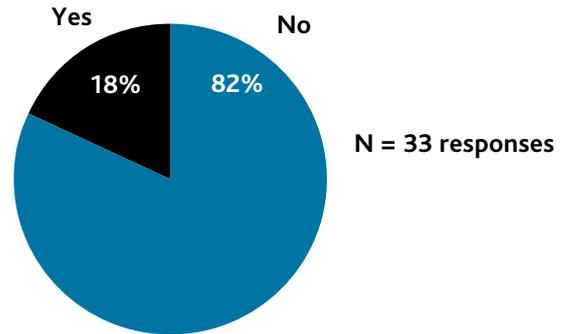
Of the 18 DMs who identified a decline in 'suitable' ESP availability, some pointed to the increasing uncertainty surrounding scheme durations as a contributory factor. Several more ascribed the "dramatic decrease" to the withdrawal of the double-payment to single parents — this cohort had traditionally constituted a very substantial portion of the ESP complement in CISs. These DMs observed that the €20 'top-up' offered to job seekers is a very inferior financial incentive.

The cessation of double payment may have a silver lining according to more sanguine DMs. They anticipate a new, more motivated stream of candidates who apply to become ESPs not because of financial attractions but because they are highly focused on progression. This can only benefit the CISs.

Tracking of ESPs exiting the CISs

The online survey defined 'tracking' as "keeping an official record of the ESP's next career move, e.g. a move to employment in the open labour market, or back to education, or back onto the Live Register".

Figure 5.6 Does your CIS 'track' Employment Scheme Participants?



Of the 33 DMs who addressed this question, only 6 indicated that they tracked their ESPs. Of the other 27 DMs the majority indicated they operated an informal tracking system, and several adduced progression figures to substantiate this claim.

"We do not have an official record but we would be aware of numbers successfully gaining suitable employment."

Thirty-four DMs responded to a question asking if their Sponsoring partners tracked the CIS ESPs:

- > Eight DMs replied 'Yes'
- > Eight DMs said 'No'

But eighteen DMs said they did not know.

Progression of ESPs over the past five years

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of Employment Scheme Participants over the last five years that had achieved progression to permanent positions either in a CIS, the community and voluntary sector, the public sector or the private sector.

Table 5.13 Progression of ESPs over the past 5 years

Number of ESPs ...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total	Responses
progressed to permanent positions in your CIS	10	4	6	1	0	0	1	47	22
progressed to permanent positions in other CISs or other CIB service partners (MABS etc)	3	3	1	0	1	0	0	17	8
progressed to permanent positions in other organisations in the Community & Voluntary sector or Public Sector	5	3	3	0	2	0	0	30	13
progressed to permanent positions in the Private Sector	4	5	3	1	1	2	0	44	16

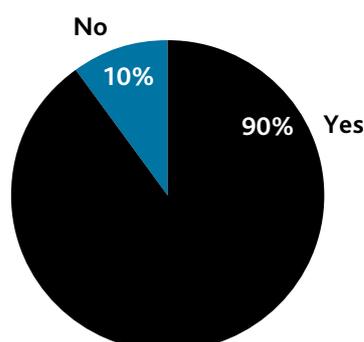
The Table above presents the responses to this question:

- > 47 ESPs progressed to permanent positions in their own CISs
- > 17 ESPs progressed to permanent positions in other CISs or other CIB service partners (MABS etc)
- > 30 ESPs progressed to permanent positions in other organisations in the Community & Voluntary sector or in the Public Sector
- > 44 ESPs progressed to permanent positions in the Private Sector

Increased demand for advocacy services

Thirty-five, or 90%, of the thirty-nine DM respondents who addressed this question in the survey confirmed that they had found a significantly increased demand for advocacy over the last five years. Only 10 per cent of DMs said 'no'.

Figure 5.7 Significantly increased demand for advocacy services in last 5 years?



The Development Managers noted:

- > a dramatic increase in the need for more complex and in-depth casework and advocacy work (requiring time, human resources and space), as well as more complexity in the day-to-day information and assistance needs;
- > the request and need for advocacy has increased 100% over the last 2-3 years both in employment and social welfare issues; it has become a vital part of the CIS service;
- > advocacy seems to have increased due to the current recession where citizens have far more difficult and complex queries;
- > queries are often more complex and require greater levels of skill and capacity.

Asked did they believe an advocacy service could be provided by ESPs (after appropriate training), 25 of the 33 respondents said 'Yes' and 8 said 'No'.

Several DMs qualified their affirmation by stipulating 'lower-level advocacy':

- > "It takes several years of experience and training to do advocacy work properly".
- > "Appropriate Training is insufficient. There is a need for practise and experience and a competence profile to engage as an advocate."
- > "Once an ESP's worker has completed the two year IAAP, together with work related training, mentoring and coaching, then after that period ESP workers could provide significant advocacy supports to a CIS".
- > "Though the level of advocacy would not be targeted at Employment Appeals Tribunal level"
- > "Social Welfare reviews and supported oral hearing are areas which could be accommodated in year three of ESP employment"

ESPs enhance the CISs' ability to provide services to marginalised, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups

Twenty-nine DMs agreed that their ESPs provided them with the necessary cover to enable their 'core staff' to deliver outreach services to marginalised groups, e.g. Travellers, people with disabilities, people with addiction problems, people in prisons, etc.

DM concerns in relation to the future development of Employment Schemes

The DMs were asked to comment on the possible outcomes indicated in the Table below.

Table 5.14 Concerns of DMs in relation to the future development of Employment Schemes

Statement	Yes	No
Placement duration period will be too short to allow training — both CIS and ESPs will lose out	35	97%
Volume of CIS applicant flow will diminish	17	47%
Suitability of CIS applicant stream will deteriorate	21	58%
Motivation of ESPs will be adversely impacted	17	47%
Impact on our CIS will be minimal because we don't use ESPs as Information Providers	6	17%
36 Respondents		

Clearly the predominant concern to DMs is the potential adverse impact of changes to employment scheme durations on the feasibility of ESP training provision in CISs and 35 DMs acknowledged this was a real and present danger.

It has been conjectured that curtailing CIS training provision to ESPs would trigger a reduction in ESP flow, and 17 DMs envisaged such a reduction. Twenty-one DMs feared that the 'suitability' of the CIS applicant stream would suffer.

Seventeen DMs indicated a fear that the motivation of ESPs could suffer as a result of changes to the schemes, particularly if enforced activation became the norm.

Six DMs indicated that they did not expect any serious impacts from employment scheme changes because their CISs did not deploy ESPs in Information Provider roles.

Consequences of restricting the Community Employment scheme to 1 year

The responses of the DMs indicate a clear preponderance of opinion in agreement with the outlined pessimistic scenarios flowing from a restriction of the CE scheme to 1 year duration. They confirm the view that the implications for CISs services would be very grave — ESPs would not be trained in Information Provision skills and hence would not be competent to serve in the key Information & Advice role in the centres. The implications would be equally ominous for ESPs who would miss out on the valuable FETAC training which constitutes the mainspring of ESP progression opportunity in the CISs.

Table 5.15 The consequences of restricting Community Employment to one year

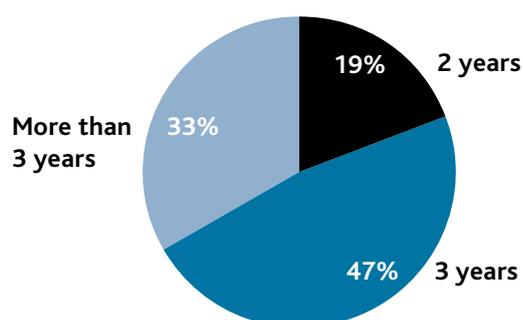
Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Shorter Employment Scheme cycle time will mean significantly greater portion of management time devoted to recruitment/training of ESPs	3	0	7	3	20
CISs will be forced to cease engaging ESPs in Information Provider roles	4	2	2	3	23
CISs will be forced to cease offering accredited training to ESPs	3	1	5	4	20
Fewer people will be attracted onto CE schemes	3	1	10	6	12
CIS opening hours will be reduced	3	3	10	2	15
Client access to CIS services will be reduced to 'by appointment' only	4	4	9	4	11
Some centres/outreach venues will be shut down	7	0	4	8	13
The menu of CIS services will be curtailed, e.g. withdrawal of Advocacy Services	7	3	11	5	7
33 Responses					

1-5 is the likelihood score where 1 denotes zero likelihood and 5 denotes very likely

Realistic minimum Employment Scheme duration if ESPs are to act as Information Providers in CISs

The DMs were asked to specify a realistic minimum Employment Scheme duration for the case of recruiting ESPs as Information Providers in their CIS; their responses are presented in the Figure 5.8 below.

Figure 5.8 Realistic minimum employment scheme duration if ESPs are to act as information providers



The responses indicate that 3 years is the preferred minimum duration. Supporting comments include:

- > I think that a minimum of 3 years is required; more than 3 would be great and take the pressure off a very busy service.
- > 2 years basic with an option to extend to 3 years based on competence rather than age.
- > Once an ESP worker has completed the two year IAAP, together with work related training, mentoring and coaching, then he or she could provide significant advocacy supports to a CIS.
- > 2 years as a minimum but 3 (or more) would be better as I'd see them taking IAAP over the first two years.
- > Three years plus is the ideal for the service, though from the point of view of the participant, after 3 years in an organisation it can be a huge disappointment that no employment opportunity may arise, and this can be very difficult to handle for the person. Volunteering is of course the obvious option but may not be the person's choice.
- > Depending when ESPs start, they may not get onto a course for almost a year, the gain for the CIS needs to be at least two years after accreditation, to make the investment worthwhile.
- > If FETAC training is to be of value to the ESP then work experience in the service needs to be built in.

Practical suggestions on how the contribution of ESPs to the CIS service delivery could be enhanced

The following are some of the comments and suggestions received from DMs. They are arranged according to main themes in Table 5.16.

Table 5.16 How the contribution of ESPs to CIS service delivery could be enhanced

Theme	Comments & Suggestions
Scheme Duration	Should be a minimum of 3 years. Length of scheme duration has the highest impact on service quality, as the longer the scheme participant is in the service the higher is the probability of them becoming a stage 3 level worker.
	A lot of time and resources goes into the scheme regarding recruitment, training and development of ESPs. The CIS should be able to retain ESPs for a longer period — maybe 5–6 years. Some schemes, e.g. TUS, are not practical as the duration is too short. The duration would need to be a minimum of 2 years with goals/reviews set.
	I think a minimum of 3 years for people taking on Information Provider roles would be good. It takes many months to become proficient in the role.
	It takes a lot of time to become familiar with the process of disseminating and interpreting information and the training can take up to two years.
	Three years plus is the ideal for the service. However, from the point of view of the participant, after 3 years in an organisation it can be a huge disappointment that no employment opportunity may arise, and this can be very difficult to handle for the person. Volunteering is of course an obvious option but this may not be the person's choice.
	Increase duration to a minimum of 3 years ... with an option for a 2 year extension based on training and development.
	ESP workers who are aged over 55 years should be allowed to extend the three years by an additional two.
	As we have trained up ESPs, and they are good at their job, we should be able to keep them indefinitely.
ESP Training	A dedicated training/development scheme for CIS'S that is recognised for providing quality training and enhanced delivery of services
	All ESP's workers should complete the IAAP if they are to undertake information provision.
	Introduce an IAAP quota system for each County.
	Special induction training organised each year on the CIB calendar for new CE participants
Sponsorship	Greater CIS involvement in sponsorship
	Where a full scheme is not required by one service, CISs could share the sponsorship by operating across county borders.
	Ownership and involvement in sponsorship would minimise the diversity of implementation and standardise terms and conditions.
	Planning for training would be greatly improved as it would become more relevant to invest in ESPs
Employment Standards	An ESP Handbook is a priority for agreement between CIS and ESP's, so that the industry standards applicable in CIS's are clear to all potential applicants, and scheme supervisors/coordinators.
	Greater input from CIB re policies, good practice, etc, like they provide to volunteers
	The CIS and the CIB should get together and produce an ESP employer handbook which provides the same supports as the CIS Employer Handbook.
Recognition of contribution of ESPs	Explicit recognition of the contribution and role of ESPs to CISs
	The work of ESPs should be recognised and valued more. Good work and real organisational progress does not seem to be recognised or rewarded in any meaningful way.

One respondent transcended the question and volunteered that

"ultimately, the best way forward would be access to CIB funded staff".

Practical suggestions on how the contribution of the CIS to the progression of ESPs might be improved

Among the many creative comments offered by DMs, a representative selection has been arranged by main themes in Table 5.17 below.

Table 5.17 How the CIS might contribute to the progression of ESPs

Theme	Comments and Suggestions
Job Opportunities	Development of more roles within the CIS network, e.g. regional roles in the network for Maintenance/ Training/Administrative support positions
Links with Private Sector	Develop improved links in the local community with private sector for the enhancement of ESP employment taking on board the skills gained in our services
	Greater emphasis on the advertisement of the ESPs' transferable skills to private industry
Public Sector jobs	Prioritise CIS ESPs for progression into public service (this is happening in practice in our service with positive progression into public service on work contracts). A proposal to this effect has been drafted in October 2012.
Job Search support	For many ESPs the end of their placement comes as a shock and they are not prepared for it
	In addition to the training provided (IAAP, Train the Trainer, health and safety courses), CISs should consider providing courses to facilitate CV preparation and interview techniques
	Assist ESPs in their job search, such as CV, mock interviews etc
	Develop an exit training course delivered within the Region to deal with interview skills, CV Skills; this training should be as role play or applied learning
	Create a Jobs Club module in training programmes to assist in CV preparation, Interview skills, etc
	Supervisors need to work more with participants on job search — but then this results in a loss to CIS's with a void in service delivery and greater pressure on remaining staff
	A specific skills audit should be undertaken with the ESPs prior to leaving their placement. Skills to be audited to include Communication skills (including writing skills), Numeracy skills, Computer skills and People skills
	Training courses for ESPs (including 'soft skills' and ICT skills) to help them develop their career goals and paths so that they can maximise the benefits of working with CISs.
Work experience	Implement a quarterly requirement to show proof of job search efforts
	Rotate ESPs between roles (e.g. reception, admin, Info Provider) to broaden the range of skills they acquire
Training	Arrange work experience in different CISs/MABS offices
	Provide more job-focussed training
Sponsorship	Greater CIS involvement in sponsorship
	ESP's should be supported by their Supervisors on an ongoing basis about job search after the first year. Even if this means people moving on sooner than 3 years it would keep them motivated
	Our CE Supervisor's new title is Learning & Development Co-ordinator and this is helping to focus her on these areas
	If CIS becomes scheme sponsor, work experience in other sectors could be arranged
Progression	Progression is not a straight forward process. Some ESPs are lone parents and have limited availability to work because of high childcare costs. Older ESPs also experience added challenges in finding work.

Again there were circumspect voices:

- > "I don't see the role of the CIS as seeking ways to enhance the progression of the CE worker. That is the role of the CE supervisor."
- > "The CIS provides an excellent training ground for the CE worker to gain expertise in a number of areas in a busy office environment with the opportunity to engage in high level training. I see that contribution as more than sufficient."

Final additional comments concerning the engagement of ESPs in Citizens Information Services

Among the final comments advanced by DMs the following themes emerged:

Table 5.18: Comments concerning the engagement of ESPs in Citizens Information Services

Theme	Comments & Suggestions
The case for a dedicated employment support scheme for CISs	CIB and CISs need to make a solid case to the Department for a dedicated scheme; although we are not a training agency the benefits of the way we work as an organisation could be used as an innovative labour market employment scheme, particularly in this climate where new ways of working, training and development are meant to be welcome, with the added advantage of being cost effective. Proposals have already been submitted.
	I think Minister Joan Burton should look at having a 3 year CE scheme for CISs.
	Giving CE Workers an extended time (3 years min.) on a scheme would be cost neutral. It would assist in maintaining a high service level in CISs and would make the CE workers far more employable on completion of their time on a scheme.
	Dedicated schemes for CIS'S that are recognised for providing quality training and enhanced service delivery — otherwise we will be in trouble
Modular Training	Accredited training needs to be delivered in a modular fashion so that CE participants starting at different times of the year can gain faster access into the training programme.
ESPs trump volunteers	In our experience the CE model has worked better than the volunteer model as participants spend 19½ hours per week with the service as opposed to 3–7 hours. As a result they gain experience much more quickly and are better able to cope in a very busy, challenging environment
Increasing workload and dependency on ESPs	Without the support of the CE scheme our CIC would not be able to deliver the quality service we provide to our clients. The numbers of callers and queries have increased since the downturn. There is a lot of pressure on staff in the CIC offices to maintain the quality of service to the clients.
Innovative thinking	There is great scope to adjust the existing structures within CIB/CISs to work at regional level and adopt training provision, etc, to suit.
	Perhaps various employment supports in addition to the sponsor's training/administration grant for ESP's can be combined to create new positions within the existing CIS network. There is the potential for new possibilities
Disparate regional interpretation of ESS administration	Obtain DSP clarification that all CISs are 'entitled' to apply for ESPs.

5.3 Employment Scheme Participants

This sub-section outlines the responses received from the 151 employment scheme participants (ESPs) who completed the online questionnaire.

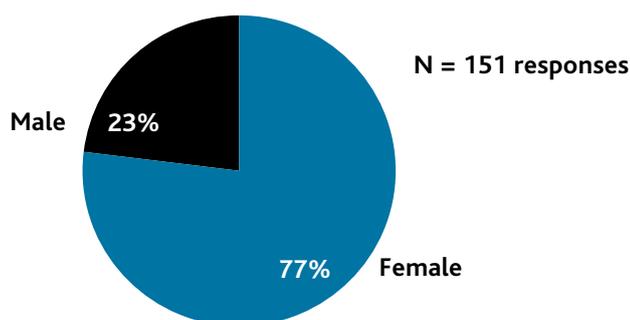
Participant profile

The first part of the questionnaire sought information on the respondent’s profile.

Gender

Over three quarters of the respondents were female with the balance (23%) being male.

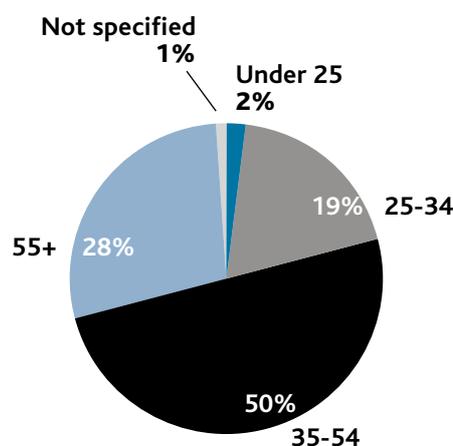
Figure 5.9 Employment Scheme Participant by gender



Age category

In terms of age category, half of respondents were in the 35-54 age bracket. 28% of respondents were in the second largest age category, 55+, while 19% were in the 25-34 age bracket.

Figure 5.10 Employment Scheme Participant by age category



Marital status

Forty three per cent of respondents were married with a further 9 per cent living with a partner. Eleven per cent of respondents were separated while 9 per cent were divorced. Just over a quarter of ESP respondents were single.

Table 5.19 Employment Scheme Participant by marital status

Marital status	No.	%
Divorced	13	9
Living with partner	13	9
Married	65	43
Separated	16	11
Single	40	26
Widowed	2	1
Not specified	2	1
Total	151	100

Number of dependents

The majority of ESP respondents, 84, had dependent children of which 23% had one dependent child while a similar percentage had two dependent children. Six per cent of respondents had 3 dependent children while five per cent had more than 3 dependent children.

67 respondents said they had no dependent children while 4 respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 5.20 Employment Scheme Participant by number of dependent children

Number of dependent children	No.	%
0 dependent children	67	44
1 dependent child	34	23
2 dependents children	35	23
3 dependent children	6	4
More than 3 dependent children	5	3
Not specified	4	3
Total	151	100

Nationality

The majority of respondents were Irish nationals, 128 or 85% of respondents stated that they were Irish nationals while 20 said they had other EU nationality. Three respondents did not specify their national identity.

Table 5.21 Employment Scheme Participant by nationality

Nationality	No.	%
Irish	128	85
Other EU national	20	13
Not specified	3	2
Total	151	100

Educational qualifications

This question asked respondents to specify their educational qualifications from a list ranging from Primary Education to a Professional Qualification.

Seventy two respondents indicated that they had a Leaving Certificate while 54 said they had obtained a Diploma or Certificate at Third Level. Twenty six respondents said they held a Primary Degree at Third Level while 14 had attained a Postgraduate qualification.

Thirteen respondents said they had a professional qualification while 24 said they had another qualification, mainly FETAC Levels 5-7.

Table 5.22 Employment Scheme Participant by educational qualifications

Educational qualifications	No.
Primary education	46
Group Certificate	10
Junior/Intermediate Certificate	55
Leaving Certificate	72
Third Level (Diploma/Certificate)	54
Third Level (Primary Degree)	26
Third Level (Postgraduate)	14
Professional qualification	13
Other	24

It is important to note that respondents could tick more than one Educational qualification category.

Employment status

This question asked respondents to indicate all the various employment statuses that applied to their career prior to their CIS placement.

108 ESPs said they had been full-time employed while 68 said they had part-time employment. A number of the respondents in these categories gave details of the sectors they had worked in and the length of time they had been in employment.

Fifteen respondents said they had been self-employed. Three said they had been working from home.

Seventy three respondents indicated that they had been unemployed prior to their CIS placement.

Forty four respondents said they had been a homemaker. Thirteen respondents indicated the "Other" category and a number said they had been in the education sector while two respondents said they had previously been on a CE scheme.

Table 5.23 Employment Scheme Participant by employment status

Employment status	No.
Full-time employed	108
Part-time employed	68
Self-employed	15
Working from home	3
Unemployed	73
Homemaker	44
Other	13

It is important to note that respondents could tick more than one Employment status category.

Special needs requirements

Respondents were asked to specify if they had any special needs requirements to support their work activities in their CIS. All but two of the 151 respondents said that they did not have any special needs requirements.

Table 5.24 Employment Scheme Participant by special needs requirements

Special needs requirements	No.	%
Yes	2	1
No/not applicable	149	99
Total	151	100

Employment scheme and CIS placement

The respondents were asked a series of questions in relation to their employment scheme and their placement in the CISs.

Employment scheme

Respondents were asked to indicate the name of their employment scheme from the following selection: Community Employment, Tús, Job Initiative, Rural Social Scheme, JobBridge and Other.

Just over four-fifths of the respondents said they were on the Community Employment scheme while 12 respondents said they were part of the Tús scheme.

There were 7 participants on the Job Initiative programme while there were 3 respondents each on the Rural Social Scheme and JobBridge programmes.

Two respondents said they were on Other employment schemes.

Table 5.25 Employment Scheme Participant by employment scheme

Employment scheme	No.	%
Community Employment	124	82
Tús	12	8
Job Initiative	7	5
Rural Social Scheme	3	2
JobBridge	3	2
Other	2	1
Total	151	100

Sponsoring organisation

Respondents were asked to specify the sponsoring organisation of their employment scheme i.e. the organisation that operated their employment scheme and organised their placement in the CIS.

This question elicited a multitude of answers ranging from the Department of Social Protection (2 mentions) and FÁS (15 mentions) to individual CISs.

Length of time in CIS

Respondents were asked to state how long they had been working in their CIS.

The largest number of ESP respondents were in the first category, Less than 1 year; 50 respondents or 39% of all respondents were in this category.

Just under a quarter of respondents said they had been in their CIS for between 1 and 3 years. Twenty four respondents said they had been employed in their CIS for between 2 and 3 years while a further 10 respondents had been with their CIS for between 3 and 4 years.

Ten respondents stated that they had been employed in their CIS for between 4 and 5 years while 16 said they had been working in their CIS for more than 5 years.

Table 5.26 Employment Scheme Participant by length of time in CIS

Length of time in CIS	%
Less than 1 year	39
Between 1 and 2 years	24
Between 2 and 3 years	16
Between 3 and 4 years	7
Between 4 and 5 years	3
More than 5 years	11
Total	100

Previous CIS volunteering experience

The ESPs were asked if they had previously worked as a volunteer in any CIS.

A total of 33 respondents or 22% of all respondents said they had previously worked as a volunteer in a CIS.

Table 5.27 Employment Scheme Participant by previous CIS volunteering experience

Previously worked as a volunteer?	No.	%
Yes	33	22
No/not applicable	118	78
Total	151	100

Learning about the CIS vacancy

Respondents were asked to state how they learnt of the CIS vacancy. This question generated a range of answers. The most common source of information mentioned by the ESPs was FÁS while other sources were local newspapers, CE supervisors, word of mouth and, in the case of respondents who had been volunteering, the CIS itself.

Did vacancy notice give clear job description?

When asked if the vacancy notice gave them a clear sense of the job description, 89% of respondents said yes while 11% said no. Respondents in the latter category added comments to support their response; some said they level of detail about the job had been insufficient while others said that a number of jobs had been advertised (receptionist, administration, information provision) but that it had not been clearly specified which position they were being interviewed for.

Table 5.28 Did vacancy notice give a clear job description?

Did vacancy notice give a clear job description?	No.	%
Yes	134	89
No	17	11
Total	151	100

Motivation to apply for CIS vacancy

The respondents were asked to select from a range of pre-selected answers what their motivation for applying for the CIS vacancy was. Additionally, they were given the opportunity to specify other motivations for applying.

Table 5.29 Motivation to apply for CIS vacancy

Motivational factor	No.
I am very interested in the area of citizens Information	118
I see Information Provider skills as a good skill set for my CV	50
A friend recommended the position as a good progression opportunity	11
Other	28

The "Other" category included respondents who said they were interested in helping people or who had previously held an information provision or counselling role. Other respondents said they had wanted a change in careers.

Training

Internal CIS training provision

The ESPs were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the following internal CIS training they had undertaken — on a score of 1–5 where 5 meant highly satisfied and 1 meant highly dissatisfied.

The results shown in the Table below indicate high levels of satisfaction with internal CIS training provision.

Two-thirds of respondents said that they were highly satisfied with the CIS formal induction course while a further 19% said they were satisfied.

A similar percentage also gave a highly satisfaction rating to other CIS internal training (shadowing and mentoring) provision.

Eighty five per cent of respondents awarded other localised CIB training provision a satisfied or very satisfied rating.

CIB training calendar events did not attract the same high levels of satisfaction rating. Seventy two per cent of ESPs gave a satisfied or highly satisfied rating to this category of CIB training provision.

Table 5.30 Internal CIS training provision

Internal CIS training provision	1	2	3	4	5
CIS formal induction course	3%	2%	8%	19%	67%
Further CIS internal training (shadowing & mentoring)	1%	3%	10%	21%	65%
Other localised CIS training provision	2%	1%	12%	29%	56%
CIB training calendar events	3%	-	23%	24%	48%

Note: 1 = highly dissatisfied; 5 = highly satisfied

External FETAC-accredited training provision

The next question asked respondents to indicate their satisfaction rating with external FETAC-accredited training provision, again on a scale of 1–5.

Respondents who had participated in the Information Providers Programme (IPP) gave this course a high satisfaction rating. Seventy per cent indicated that they were highly satisfied with the IPP programme and a further 21% said they were satisfied with it.

A smaller number of respondents, 13, had participated on the Advocacy Practice for Information Providers (APP) course. While 46% of respondents were highly satisfied with the course, 23% were highly dissatisfied with the APP training provision.

Nine respondents had participated on the Higher Certificate in Advocacy programme. Here, a higher percentage of respondents gave the training provision a dissatisfied rating. Over half of the respondents were with dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied with the programme.

Twelve respondents indicated that they had gone on other external FETAC-accredited training courses, of which two-thirds were highly satisfied with the training provision.

Table 5.31 External FETAC-accredited training provision

External FETAC-accredited training provision	1	2	3	4	5
Information Providers Programme (IPP)	3%	-	6%	21%	70%
Advocacy Practice for Information Providers (APP)	23%	8%	23%	-	46%
Higher Certificate in Advocacy	33%	22%	22%	-	22%
Other	17%	-	8%	8%	67%

Note: 1 = highly dissatisfied; 5 = highly satisfied

Other External Training provision

Eighty eight respondents said they had participated in other external training provision. These courses included ECDL, First Aid, Manual Handling, Health and Safety, Receptionist Skills and Train the Trainer.

Seventy-seven respondents provided a rating for this external training provision. Sixty per cent expressed themselves as highly satisfied with this form of training provision while a further 27 per cent said they were satisfied.

Table 5.32 Other external training provision

External training provision	1	2	3	4	5
External training provision	1%	1%	10%	27%	60%

Note: 1 = highly dissatisfied; 5 = highly satisfied

Adequate and ongoing training for role within CIS

The ESPs were asked if they felt they were getting adequate induction and ongoing training to fulfil their allocated role(s) in the CIS.

Over four-fifths of those queried said that they had received adequate induction and ongoing training to fulfil their allocated role(s) while 14 said they had not.

Table 5.33 Adequate induction and ongoing training for role within CIS?

Adequate/ongoing training	No.	%
Yes	130	86
No	14	9
Not specified	7	5
Total	151	100

Availed of all the training opportunities offered by the CIS

When asked if they had availed of all the training opportunities offered by their CIS, 82 per cent of respondents said they had while the balance said they had not or the issue was not applicable to them.

Table 5.34 Avail of training opportunities offered by CIS?

Availed of training opportunities offered by CIS	No.	%
Yes	124	82
No/Not applicable	27	18
Total	151	100

Reason for declining CIS training opportunities

The ESPs were asked to state the reason why they had to decline any training opportunity offered to them by their CIS.

Nineteen respondents said that personal time commitments precluded committing the necessary time to the training course. A slightly smaller number, 17, noted that the uncertainty of the duration of their employment scheme meant they could not be sure that they would be long enough with the CIS to complete the course. Five respondents said they were concerned that they had been too long out of the educational cycle.

Other reasons for declining CIS training opportunities included a mismatch between the courses offered and the needs of the ESP, issues relating to the timing and location of the courses offered and personal-related reasons (ill-health, caring role, etc).

Table 5.35 Reason for declining CIS training opportunities

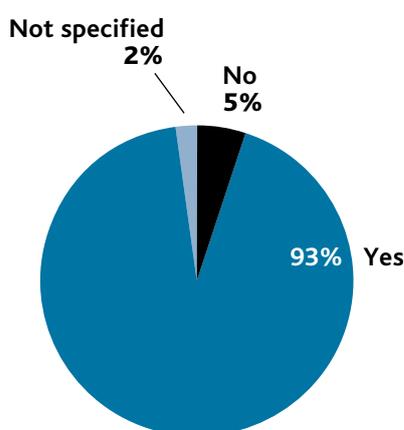
Reason for declining training opportunities	No.
Personal time commitments precluded committing the necessary time to the training course	19
Uncertainty of duration of my Employment Scheme meant I couldn't be sure I would be with the CIS long enough to complete the course	17
Fear that I was too long out of the educational cycle	5
Other	23

CIS training provision: useful for future job seeking?

This part of the survey questionnaire asked respondents if the CIS training provision would be relevant and useful in their future job seeking.

Respondents overwhelmingly — 93% — indicated that the CIS training they had received would be relevant and useful in their future job seeking. Five per cent of respondents said the training provided would not be useful while 2 per cent did not give a response.

Figure 5.11 Was CIS training provision useful for future job seeking?



Potential skill benefits of CIS training

The final question of this section on Training requested that respondents rate the impact of the CIS placement and training (on a score of 1 to 5, where 5= substantial benefit and 1 means no benefit) on a range of skill attributes (see the Table below).

Overall, respondents believe there had been substantial benefits from the training provided by the CIS.

Respondents indicated that their public-interfacing and communication skills had benefitted substantially (71% and 68% respectively). They also gave high scores for Teamwork and interpersonal skills and Technical skills.

They also indicated that the CIS placement experience and training provision had been substantially beneficial to them in restoring their confidence.

The respondents did not believe that the advocacy training skills provision would be as beneficial compared to the other skill areas: only 36 per cent of respondents felt that this training provision had substantially improved their skills.

Table 5.36 Potential skill benefits of CIS training provision

Skill type	1	2	3	4	5	No.
Restored confidence	-	3%	10%	29%	58%	146
Teamwork & interpersonal skills	1%	1%	8%	35%	55%	147
Broad office/IT skills	3%	5%	20%	34%	37%	145
Public-interfacing skills	1%	1%	8%	20%	71%	146
Communication skills	1%	1%	10%	21%	68%	145
Problem solving skills	-	3%	10%	30%	57%	145
Technical skills (information research/sourcing/retrieval/presentation)	1%	3%	17%	28%	50%	144
Advocacy skills	10%	6%	25%	23%	36%	138

Note: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

Contribution to CIS

This section asked the respondents to give their responses to four questions on their role in the CIS.

Role performed in the CIS

The first question in this section asked the ESPs to specify what roles they could perform in their CIS.

The role that the largest number of respondents said they could perform was that of reception, with 138 respondents saying they could do this role. A total of 109 respondents indicated that they could undertake the role of Information and Advice.

Eighty nine respondents stated that they could carry out the role of administration. Forty six respondents said they could fulfil an Advocacy role in the CIS while 12 said they could perform the Security/Caretaker role.

Roles mentioned by 18 respondents in the "Other" category included data input, facilities management, outreach services and stock control.

Table 5.37 Role(s) performed in the CIS

Role	No.
Reception	138
Administration	89
Information and Advice	109
Advocacy	46
Security/Caretaker	12
Other	18

In a related question, the respondents were asked to indicate what was their principal role in the CIS.

Half of the respondents stated that their principal role in their CIS was Information and Advice while 32% of respondents said that they principally worked on reception.

For 9% of respondents, their main role in the CIS was administration while 7% mentioned roles falling into the "Other" category (cleaning, IT work, outreach).

Advocacy and Security/Caretaker were principal roles for approximately 2 per cent of respondents.

Table 5.38 Principal role performed in CIS

Principal role	No.	%
Reception	48	32
Administration	13	9
Information and Advice	75	50
Advocacy	3	1
Security/Caretaker	1	1
Other	11	7
Total	151	100

Perform all appropriate ESP roles

The ESPs were then asked if they had the opportunity to perform all appropriate ESP roles in the CIS including Information Provider and Advocacy roles.

Just under two-thirds of respondents (64%) said they had the opportunity to perform all relevant ESP roles while 27% said they had not the opportunity. Nine per cent of respondents did not respond to this question.

Table 5.39 Did you get the opportunity to perform all ESP roles in the CIS?

Opportunity to perform all appropriate ESP roles	No.	%
Yes	96	64
No/Not applicable	41	27
Not specified	14	9
Total	151	100

Respondents were given an opportunity to elaborate on their answer; some indicated that they had not been long enough in the CIS to sample other roles. Others stated that they wished to perform a specific function in the CIS such as information provision or advocacy but had not yet received training to carry out this role.

Time needed to make a significant contribution to CIS

Respondents were asked to indicate how many months it took before they felt they were able to make a significant contribution to the CIS.

Forty two per cent of respondents said it took less than 3 months to make a significant contribution to the CIS while thirty seven per cent indicated that it took between 3 and 6 months to do so.

Eleven per cent stated that the time taken for them to make a significant contribution to the CIS was between 6 and 9 months. Five per cent of ESP respondents indicated that the necessary time was between 9 and 12 months while 2 per cent said that more than 12 months was required to make a significant contribution.

Table 5.40 Time needed to make a significant contribution to CIS

Time needed to make a significant contribution to CIS	No.	%
Less than 3 months	63	42
3 to 6 months	56	37
6 to 9 months	17	11
9 months to 1 year	8	5
More than 1 year	3	2
Not specified	4	3
Total	151	100

Work and contribution to CIS

The final question in this section asked the ESPs to respond to a series of statements on their work in and on their contribution to the CIS. The scoring system was 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Eighty nine per cent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were making a valuable contribution to the CIS service.

Ninety per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their work in the CIS was valued by the Development Manager and the permanent staff.

Ninety one per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their work in the CIS was valued by CIS clients.

Finally, eighty eight per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their work and training in the CIS would impress future external interviewers.

Table 5.41 Work and contribution to CIS

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	No.
I feel I am making a valuable contribution to the CIS service	-	2%	9%	30%	59%	149
My work in the CIS is valued by the Development Manager and the permanent staff	-	2%	8%	32%	58%	149
My work in the CIS is valued by the CIS clients	1%	2%	7%	34%	57%	148
My work and training in the CIS will impress future external interviewers	1%	1%	11%	32%	56%	148

Note: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree

Job seeking activity

This section of the questionnaire asked the ESPs to respond to a series of questions regarding their job seeking activities and their career plans after their time in the CIS is finished.

Time and support is allocated for future job searching

The ESPs were asked to indicate how much time and support is allocated for future job searching during their time in the CIS, and were asked to choose from a list of specified answers.

82 respondents said they were not aware of any set period formally allocated for future job searching while 4 said that time was formally allocated for job seeking activities during the last months of their placement.

34 respondents indicated that their Employment Scheme Supervisor encouraged and supported their job searching activity.

A slightly smaller number, 27, said that their CIS Development Manager supported their job searching activities.

Table 5.42 Time and support allocated for future job seeking

Response	No.
I am not aware of any set period formally allocated for my future Job Searching	82
Time has been formally allocated for my future Job Searching during the last months of my placement	4
My Employment Scheme Supervisor encourages and supports my Job Searching activity	34
The CIS Development Manager supports my Job Searching activity	27

Respondents were provided with an opportunity to elaborate on their answers. A number of respondents emphasised that both their Development Manager and Employment Scheme Supervisor were supportive in their job seeking activities. Others indicated that they were carrying out job seeking activities in their own time.

ESPs' immediate career progression hopes and plans

The ESPs were asked to comment on their immediate career progression hopes and plans after their time with the CIS e.g. permanent employment in an organisation in the information provision sector; return to education and training.

This question elicited a wide range of responses; these included obtaining a permanent position in the CIS or in another information providing or community-based organisation.

The majority of respondents said they were seeking permanent employment. Some respondents indicated that they were contemplating a return to education to enhance their information provision skills in order to further their career aspirations in this area.

Overall conclusions and suggestions for future improvements

The final section of the questionnaire sought the ESPs' overall conclusions of their experience in the CIS and their suggestions for future improvements.

Overall benefit rating of their CIS experience

The respondents were asked to rate the likely overall benefits of their experience (work and training) in the CIS towards their progression to permanent work or other positive career outcomes — on a score of 1–5 where 5 was highly beneficial and 1 equalled zero benefit.

A total of 57 per cent of respondents said their CIS experience would be highly beneficial towards progression to permanent work or other positive career outcomes. Twenty eight per cent of respondents indicated that their CIS was beneficial while 12% gave it a mid-point rating. Two respondents gave it a low rating and three did not specify a response.

Table 5.43 ESPs' rating of CIS experience

Rating of benefit of CIS experience	No.	%
1 = zero benefit	-	-
2	2	1%
3	18	12%
4	42	28%
5 = highly beneficial	86	57%
Not specified	3	2%
Total	151	100%

Suggestions on how the CIS experience for ESPs could be improved to assist their progression to a permanent job or other positive career move

Eighty-four respondents responded to the invitation to submit suggestions on how the experience for ESPs in CISs could be improved to assist their progression to a permanent job or other positive career move.

A number of the respondents stressed the importance of having certainty in relation to undertaking training courses such as the IAAP. They expressed concern that their employment scheme duration would finish before they had completed the IAAP course and thus leave them in a limbo. The solution suggested was that the duration of the employment scheme be extended to allow ESPs to undertake the IAAP and to apply their skills; one respondent said: *One year is too short a period to do proper training and gain enough experience to access full-time employment. CE participants would need at least 3 years for positive outcomes.*

Others indicated that more clarity on the duration of their employment scheme would be helpful. As one respondent noted: *The uncertainty of the time given on a CE Scheme is very unsettling. In my opinion if person knows from day 1 how long they will be working then they can make plans. At the moment people are just told a few months beforehand that they have to leave the scheme and does not give them the chance to look for other work.*

Other respondents suggested that more time and training be allocated to job seeking skills and that more interaction should be facilitated between ESPs so as to share job vacancy information.

Other suggestions made by respondents included greater job rotation within the CISs and providing financial and childcare support to facilitate CE participants during their training and work experience.

A number of respondents said they were happy with the training and support provided within the CIS and expressed the hope that more permanent positions might become available within the service.

Additional comments regarding the placement of ESPs in Citizens Information Services

The last question provided the responding ESPs with an opportunity to make additional comments regarding the placement of ESPs in CISs, and 78 respondents availed of this opportunity.

A number of the respondents used this answer to highlight their appreciation of the opportunity to work in the CIS and provide what they termed as a worthwhile service to clients. They also stated that they appreciated the training that they had been given. Some expressed frustration that their CE or Tús placement was ending before they got to finish their training and implement what they had learnt.

One respondent wrote: "Citizens Information provide very good training to people and one gains a lot of confidence but unfortunately when the scheme ends all the training is lost. The CE schemes need to be longer than they are in order for people to make use of the training they receive."

Another respondent stated: "The CE participants are an invaluable addition to the CIS. We take the pressure off the staff and volunteers at the centre, aiding and allowing them to give the best service they possibly can. The experience we learn and use even in 1 year is amazing and it is a shame to think that this resource can be lost time and time again. We are a valued asset of the CIS."

Another respondent had this to say: "I think that the placements of ESP's in Citizens Information Services is vital. For the service itself and also for the people on employment schemes. It provides ongoing training and brilliant opportunities along the way. Even though while on an employment scheme we are not permanent paid staff, i do not feel we are treated any differently. I am thoroughly enjoying my time here and gaining so much experience."

Another had this contribution: "I feel that the CE placement in the CIS has been very beneficial as it has given me the opportunity to undertake training options which I would not have the opportunity to do if I was not on the CE scheme. Also the development of skills and knowledge gained from the work will be beneficial after I finish the scheme for other employment opportunities."

Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

1. Satisfaction with Citizens Information Service–Employment Support Schemes (ESS) engagement

A major conclusion from TMA's findings (both quantitative and qualitative) is the unequivocal satisfaction expressed by the principal stakeholders regarding the Citizens Information Services' engagement with Employment Support Schemes (ESSs):

> Citizens Information Services (CIS)

Feedback from CIS personnel at board and management level has been virtually unanimous in its endorsement of the Employment Scheme Participants' (ESPs) contribution to their service delivery.

Overall, 71% of Development Managers (DMs) responses indicated satisfaction with the employment support schemes, 58% declaring strong satisfaction. Only 11% of total DM responses expressed dissatisfaction with the Schemes.

Another indicator of the significance of the contribution of Employment Scheme Participants (ESPs) is the fact that, overall, approximately 60% of ESPs are working in the key roles of Information Provider and Advocate. This ratio is even higher if we just consider Community Employment (CE) participants.

The ability of ESPs to take on these challenging CIS roles reflects the high calibre of applicants. The survey data shows that more than 50% of the ESPs have not just a Leaving Certificate but a post-Leaving Cert educational qualification. This contrasts with the DSP Review information that:

"almost 60% of those starting on CE in 2011 had education qualifications below Leaving Certificate. CE participants have significantly lower levels of education than does the labour force overall (where 25% have less than Leaving Cert) or the generality of unemployed people (40%)."

> Employment Scheme Participants (ESPs)

Likewise the ESP feedback received from face-to-face interviews and the ESP online survey has confirmed their appreciation of the excellent work experience and training they receive in CISs and their perception of the difference it is making to their employability and progression opportunities.

ESP respondents overwhelmingly (93%) indicated that the CIS training they had received would be relevant and useful in their future job seeking.

2. Good fit between the goals of CISs and ESSs

The research has pointed up the excellent fit between the CISs and the ESSs. Over the past six years, following the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2007, the resultant fiscal austerities have imposed enormous economic and social hardship on the vulnerable sections of the community. This has translated into a mounting workload for the CISs as indicated by the rise in caller numbers and the fact that the queries are increasing in complexity, requiring greater inputs of advice and advocacy from CIS staff.

Paradoxically this same fiscal austerity has placed severe staffing constraints on organisations in the community and voluntary sector who depend on exchequer subvention to meet their payroll. With the 'freeze' on the recruitment of paid staff, CISs are very thankful for the access to ESPs.

Thus there is a clear win-win situation: the ESPs benefit from the work experience and training, and the CISs benefit from the boost to their staff numbers.

3. CIS dependency on Employment Support Schemes is escalating

The mix of paid, volunteer and ESP cohorts w has been welcomed as a robust CIS staffing model, offering a rich blend in backgrounds and perspectives. But there is a growing feeling among stakeholders that the balance is getting out of kilter — as have shown in Section 3, volunteers and ESPs now make up 55% of the whole-time-equivalent staff (see Figure 3.1). This is leading to an unstable dependency.

TMA's online DM survey shows that 51.6% of CISs believed they could not stay open without access to CE ESPs.

The high level of dependency within the CIS sector on Employment Support Schemes, which has come to the fore as a result of rapidly changing Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP), raises issues concerning the extent to which there was sufficient prior strategic monitoring of these developments and their implications for the CIS service delivery model.

4. Uncertainty due to changes in Active Labour Market Policies

Given the heavy reliance on Employment Support Schemes, the research found a growing sense of unease among CIS stakeholders in light of current ESS policy revisions.

Reports indicate that the cessation of the double payment in January 2012 resulted in an overall drop of 33% in the numbers of lone parents on the CE scheme. TMA's research shows that this is having a huge impact on CIS recruitment of ESPs. Several DMs reported that applications for ESP vacancies have fallen off "dramatically".

Cuts to the CE 'materials and training' budget announced in December 2011, though later partially reversed, have also added to the sense of uncertainty.

But the greatest source of unease over the future engagement with ESSs is the current 'revision' of ALMPs as outlined in the DSP *Pathways to Work* report, following harsh critiques of Irish ESSs (particularly work experience programmes such as the CE, Tús, JI and RSS schemes) for their general lack of progression. The DSP *Review of Employment Support Schemes* reveals that policymakers are contemplating reducing scheme durations to one year. This would create a very serious problem for CISs. If the duration is restricted to one year it doesn't give them time to provide the appropriate 2-year Information, Advice and Advocacy Programme (IAAP) training to ESPs. In turn, this curtailment of training militates against ESP progression and so completes a vicious circle.

TMA's survey of the DMs confirmed the view that the implications for CISs services would be very grave — ESPs would not be trained in Information Provision skills and hence would not be competent to serve in the key Information Provider role in the centres. The implications would be equally ominous for ESPs who would miss out on the valuable FETAC training which constitutes the mainspring of ESP progression opportunity in the CISs.

Difficulties with Employment Scheme Participants availability would pose organisational challenges for the CIS sector in providing outreach services; a number of CISs have said that without ESPs they would not be able to operate their outreach centres. The shortage of trained ESPs would also result in difficulties for the CIS sector in fulfilling CIB's quality agenda.

5. Dual Nature of Employment Support Schemes

The '*lack of progression*' critique reflects the tension at the core of Employment Support Schemes because of their '*dual mission*' (see note on ESSs in Appendix 3). They were developed as counter-cyclical measures to provide temporary employment in the community and voluntary sector, but, in addition, the ESSs delivered key services to disadvantaged communities such as improving the local physical environment, fostering local services, assisting statutory bodies such as Drug Task Forces, the HSE and VECs, and voluntary/charitable organisations.

While they have definite merit in providing a work routine for long-term unemployed participants, the low quality of the work experience and training meant that they were often ineffective in terms of yielding progression to the mainstream labour market.

The DSP *Review of Employment Support Schemes* noted that:

"the average duration of participation has risen gradually over time and greatly exceeds the duration of one year originally envisaged for this type of programme. This longer duration reduces the number of opportunities that can be offered on the scheme with any given level of resources; it also runs the risk of participants becoming 'institutionalised' on the scheme itself rather than being encouraged to progress."

TMA's research confirms that the engagement of ESSs in the CIS sector is clearly an exception to this adverse critique of the overall ESS experience. Here the ESSs score very highly in terms of both the crucial service they deliver to the local community and the progression opportunities they provide to ESPs. The numbers of CIS clients seeking information, advice and advocacy is testimony to the importance of the community service. The ESPs themselves confirm the progression value of the work experience and training.

6. Progression of CIS Employment Scheme Participants

The progression results for the past five years reported by the CISs in the TMA survey are impressive with 138 ESPs obtaining paid employment positions:

- > 47 ESPs progressed to permanent positions within the responding CIS;
- > 17 ESPs progressed to permanent positions in other CISs or other CIB service partners (MABS, etc);
- > 30 ESPs progressed to permanent positions in other organisations in the Community & Voluntary sector or Public Sector;
- > 44 ESPs progressed to permanent positions in the Private Sector.

If it is assumed that, on average, ESPs stay in the CIS for 2 years, then 500 ESPs will have exited over the 5 years. This would put the rate of progression into paid employment at 138/500 or 28%. Given the recessionary economic background this is a commendable achievement and would rank the CIS engagement among the top ESS performances.

7. Tracking of Employment Scheme Participants after exiting CISs

The above figures on progression were elicited by TMA's online survey based on informal records kept by the DMs. But the survey also revealed that there is no systematic CIS 'tracking' of exiting ESPs. This is becoming a critical issue given the increasing DSP emphasis on progression, and it is clearly an aspect that CIB/CIS must address. The only formal tracking at present is the final exit report completed by the scheme supervisors. The DSP Financial Review recommended that sponsors should follow-up participants for a minimum of 4 months after the completion of a CE scheme. In the case of Tús, the DSP *Review of Employment Support Schemes* noted that:

"the Department has commissioned the delivery of a tracking system which is made available to each Implementing Body (i.e. sponsor organisation) and will track each prospective participant and activity undertaken with respect to all engagement, placement, activation or other support that might be provided. It will also track outcomes post engagement with Tús. This system was rolled out nationally in July 2012 and is expected to be fully populated, including historic data, by the end of November 2012."

TMA's information is that this Tús tracking system has not yet been operationalised.

8. Job-search support

The flip side of tracking is the support given to the ESPs for job-search activities during their placement.

The DSP *Review* noted that:

"While there is no requirement for participants to engage in active job search while on Community Employment, provision is made for the agreement of an exit plan for each participant at the latest two months before the end of his/her period on the scheme, and for provision of additional work experience outside the project. The actual extent of job-search support is felt to be variable across projects."

The companion *High Level Issue Paper* stated that:

"There needs to be a greater focus on ensuring job-search and progression planning for participants well in advance of their scheduled exit from CE."

Respondents in the survey of Employment Scheme Participants felt that ESPs should be supported by their supervisors on an ongoing basis after the first year:

"Even if this means people moving on sooner than 3 years it would keep them motivated. For many ESPs the end of their placement comes as a shock and they are not prepared for it."

The requirement to offer job-search support to ESPs brings the ESS 'duality tension' to the surface and it is no doubt challenging for both the DMs and the supervisors to have to put the ESP's progression above the needs of the service; but that is the inherent challenge of ALMP.

9. Training of Employment Scheme Participants

The research has revealed the high quality of training provided to ESPs, both in-house and external FETAC-accredited training.

Thirty four CISs reported providing the Information Providers Programme (IPP) to 124 ESPs over the last 3 years. Seventeen CISs reported providing access to the Advocacy Practice for Information Providers Programme (APP) to 34 ESPs while seven CISs provided the Higher Certificate in Advocacy training to 5 ESPs. A total of 57 ESPs have been put forward for the inaugural IAAP course.

Development Managers appreciate that this level of training is essential to equip the ESPs for the high quality standards set by the CISs. Likewise they appreciate the contribution it can make to ESP progression, as of course do the ESPs. The DMs have shown in the past that, given the appropriate scheme duration, they were happy to devote the necessary time to supervising training assignments; the problem is that, if the scheme duration is restricted, the time devoted to training becomes a very significant fraction of the ESP's overall stay, prompting the oft-cited question:

"Are we [the CISs] an Information Provider or a Training Organisation?"

The problem becomes exacerbated when the scheme cycle is out of sync with the academic year and this can mean up to a whole year of placement time elapses before training commences, resulting in an even shorter 'payback period'.

Another issue regarding training is its market relevance. There are differing opinions on this. While the work experience gained in the CIS was believed to provide relevant 'transferable' skills including office and IT skills, teamwork, communication and public-facing skills, the actual training is 'more job-specific' to the information provision and advocacy sector. However, when asked should the curriculum of FETAC-accredited training courses (particularly the new IAAP) be broadened beyond CIS-specific content to enhance the progression opportunities of ESPs, only 30% of DMs said yes, and a clear majority felt strongly that the existing curriculum was sufficiently broad. ESPs may avail of parallel Individual Learner Plan (ILP) training courses provided by their sponsor to bolster near-market skills, but the budget for this training has been cut and just about covers the 'mandatory safety courses'.

10. Advocacy

The subject of the new IAAP course resurrected the debate on the role of the CIS in advocacy services. The survey reveals that seventy-two percent of Development Managers indicated that ESPs should only take year 1 of the IAAP (i.e. the information provision modules) while nineteen percent believed that they should take the full two year course which includes the advocacy modules in year two.

The qualitative interviews made it clear that most CISs recognised the changed demands on 'information providers'. DMs acknowledged that the obvious stress in clients' personal circumstances due to the economic austerity required more interventionist advocacy inputs from the CIS staff. The issue was whether the limited scheme duration afforded adequate time to train up ESPs and this is where opinion divided. The climate of uncertainty generated around the possible curtailment of scheme durations may explain the reluctance of so many DMs to vote for the second IAAP year.

11. Sponsoring

At present there are only two CISs who act as 'full sponsors' of ESSs. Both have very positive experiences from the arrangement, and the DMs list advantages including more direct access to candidate ESPs, greater managerial control over the ESPs, the in-house assistance of the scheme supervisor, and closer contact with DSP thinking on modifications to ESSs.

Many DMs tend to focus on the perceived extra demands on administration and managerial resources that sponsorship would entail. Appendix 5 offers a brief profile of the sponsor organisation (Westmeath Community Development) that provides ESPs to the Westmeath CIS. This description piece comments on the not inconsiderable demands that an ESS places on a sponsor's managerial resources due to 'stringent' DSP reporting and audit requirements in addition to the ongoing tasks of managing employment issues. DMs particularly dislike the idea that sponsorship would mean having to manage ESPs in other host organisations in addition to their own CIS.

Thus TMA's survey revealed a split opinion among DMs on the question would they consider becoming a sponsor, with 16 DMs saying yes and 11 saying no.

TMA's interview with DSP personnel working on CE and JI schemes revealed that the latest Department thinking on sponsorship is that it can be more efficient and effective if the ESPs managed by a sponsor are all working in the same sector, be that Childcare, Information Provision, or whatever; this allows the sponsor to specialise in that particular sector and develop an expertise in training and progression. In the case of CISs, this concept of a 'lead sponsor' structure at

a region or sub-region level to achieve efficiencies could be operationalised by two or more neighbouring counties agreeing to let one CIS act as sponsor for the group. TMA's interviews with DMs suggested that there are pluses in keeping sponsorship relatively 'local' in terms of 'insider knowledge' of local placement opportunities, local training resources and local job opportunities.

Certainly TMA's conclusion from the interview with the DSP personnel indicates that the whole question of sponsorship effectiveness is a very live issue and one that the CIB should be considering.

12. Outreach and Social Inclusion

CISs provide services to the public on an outreach basis from over 130 fixed outreach locations and on the basis of response to requests from local organisations or particular needs identified by the CIS. In addition to outreach services to the general community, vulnerable groups targeted through such initiatives include:

- > People with disabilities
- > Unemployed people
- > Travellers
- > Immigrants
- > Women's Groups
- > Prisoners
- > Older people.

The economic recession has added to the number of vulnerable client groups and this is stretching the staff resources of CISs. TMA's research confirmed that ESPs are providing invaluable cover in CISs so that 'core staff' can be released to deliver outreach services to these marginalised groups.

6.2 Recommendations

1. Main recommendation:

The Citizens Information Board should acknowledge the increasing role of Employment Scheme Participants (ESPs) in its service delivery strategy by instituting a dedicated overview system to monitor their recruitment, training, contribution to CISs, and ultimate progression.

This overview system should encompass:

- > Scanning the policy environment, particularly in respect of Active Labour Market Policies, for changes that might impact on ESP availability;
- > Developing communication channels and linkages with non-governmental organisations that also rely on ESSs to underpin their service provision;
- > Collecting and analysing data from the CIS sector on issues relating to ESP recruitment, training, placement duration and tracking of progression;
- > Providing advice and support to the CIS network in their interaction with ESS sponsor organisations;
- > Assisting the implementation of initiatives to enhance the role and contribution of ESPs within the CIS sector;
- > Providing relevant inputs to CIB management in the development of strategic and operational plans for the CIS sector.

2. Anticipate DSP policy changes to Employment Support Schemes

Given the fact that the majority of CISs are heavily dependent on ESSs for the full operation of their Centres, it is clear that the first consideration in identifying initiatives to enhance the role and contribution of ESPs to the CISs should be to secure the CIS network's future access to ESPs.

At this fluid time in the evolution of Irish ALMP this means ensuring that the CIB is tapped into the latest Departmental deliberations on modifications to its ESS portfolio. One key forum in this regard is the Employment Schemes Advisory Committee set up in late 2012 to advise the Minister for Social Protection.

Principal issues to monitor include mooted scheme amalgamations, scheme duration criteria, exemptions granted for high-quality accredited training, and new thinking on scheme sponsorship.

CIB should also closely monitor the pilot CE childcare project currently being implemented in two DSP regions and study any interim reports for pointers to the evaluation criteria the DSP will apply to CIB proposals for extended-duration ESP placements.

TMA's information is that the DSP selected the Childcare strand (see the 9 strands listed on p. 11 of the CE Financial Review) as the first to pilot because of the large number of ESPs involved and because of the availability of a respected accredited training course for its homogeneous skill set. The lesson for CIB is that it needs to focus on the Information Provider and Advocacy skills and to identify other information providing organisations as allies to augment its own modest cohort of some 120 ESP information providers.

3. Implement a pilot tracking initiative to confirm progression

As part of the campaign to secure extended-duration ESP placements, the CIB/CISs management should proactively implement a pilot tracking project that would enable it to furnish formal evidence of progression rates from CISs. They should take on board the DSP CE Financial Review recommendation to follow-up participants for a minimum of 4 months after completing the scheme. They should also investigate the latest situation regarding the Tús tracking system commissioned by the DSP and see if any economies or efficiencies could be exploited.

4. Ensure training includes solid general market skills to enhance progression

Given the lack of permanent information provision job vacancies in prospect in the immediate future in the public sector and in the community & voluntary sector, the CIS should support the activation agenda by auditing their training programmes to ensure that these incorporate a solid base of fundamental information provision skills that are applicable across a wide range of service sectors — tourism and call centres are just two examples of buoyant sectors in the wider labour market where sound generic information provision skills such as customer relations and data retrieval would empower ESP graduates to attract employment offers.

5. Promote ESPs' transferable skills to local private industry

One of the 'five strands' in *Pathways to Work* was incentivising employers to provide more jobs for people who are unemployed. This implied a national level policy, but local DSP employment services, and CISs too, can stimulate take-up of ESPs by showcasing the ESPs' 'transferable skills' to local private industry.

6. Enhance job-search skills provision for ESPs

Another front in the effort to improve progression rates from CISs is the support given to ESPs for job search activities during their placement. ESP respondents to the online survey called for an 'exit training course' (this could be provided at regional level). In addition to the standard topics such as CV preparation and interview skills, this training should focus on helping ESPs to 'consolidate and market' the skill sets they have acquired using role-play and other interactive learning techniques.

7. Implement a pilot sponsorship initiative

The research confirmed that the two CISs who are full ESS sponsors (Counties Limerick and Longford) are very positive about their situation. Moreover it was also learned that the DSP is interested in developing a more rationalised sponsorship structure.

For these reasons the CIB should launch a sponsorship information programme by inviting the two sponsoring CISs to make a formal presentation of their sponsorship case studies to the CIS network and solicit comments and queries from the other CISs. If no insurmountable hurdles surface during this review period, the CIB should proceed to set up a pilot ESS sponsorship project which would involve one or more CISs playing a sponsorship role to serve all CISs at a regional or sub-regional level. The Longford-Limerick team could act as valuable consultants to the pilot. The goal would be to determine if such a model is feasible and resource-efficient.

8. Exploit group efficiencies

The CIS network should study the example of the 'Dublin Network' (16 CISs located in the Greater Dublin and surrounding counties) of pooling training resources for ESP induction, and explore if this model can be replicated in other regions or in other common CIS activities.

9. Vision of ideal model for CIS-ESS engagement

The ideal model for CIS-ESS engagement is a three year Community Employment scheme which enables ESPs aspiring to work as Information Providers to complete the 2-year IAAP course and use the third year to apply what they have learnt for the benefit of the CISs and their clients.

The IAAP calendar would dovetail with the recruitment schedule of ESPs so as to expedite the transition onto the course and thereby maximise the 'payback period' when they apply what they have learnt.

Members of the CIS network would sign up to act as 'lead sponsors' of regional or sub-regional employment scheme projects dedicated specifically to information provision placements. A significant benefit flowing from such an arrangement would be the availability of 'in-house' supervisors who would be motivated to acquire information provision qualifications themselves, thereby greatly enhancing their effectiveness as coaches/mentors to the ESPs participating on the IAAP programme. An allied virtue of the 'lead sponsor' structure is the fact that all participants in the sponsored CE project would be acquiring a homogeneous set of skills and, hence, there is the potential for much more efficient and effective group learning.

The ideal CIS-ESS model of engagement would allow CISs to select the Employment Support Scheme that best matches the needs of the job. Some jobs within a CIS, e.g. receptionists, do not require the extensive training necessary for information provider roles, and a CIS could opt for an Employment Support Scheme with a shorter time duration. The ESPs working in these roles would still benefit from the excellent work environment within CISs and the opportunity to develop their public-interfacing skills. In the ideal scenario they could also avail of a pathway to the dedicated CE scheme for ESPs wishing to train as information providers.

The positive training impacts of this ideal model would clearly feed through to a superior CIS service delivery. They thus stand in sharp contrast to the consequences envisaged by DMs in TMA's online survey where the prospect of a restricted scheme duration evoked the following ominous scenarios:

- > Placement duration period will be too short to allow training — both CIS and ESPs will lose out
- > Our CIS will be forced to cease offering accredited training to ESPs
- > Our CIS will be forced to cease engaging ESPs in Information Provider roles
- > Shorter scheme duration will mean a significantly greater portion of management time devoted to recruitment/training of ESPs
- > Our CIS opening hours will be reduced
- > Some of our centres/outreach venues will be shut down
- > Our menu of CIS services will be curtailed, e.g. withdrawal of Advocacy Services.

Members of the CIS employment study steering committee

The members of the Steering Committee were:

- > Geralyn McGarry (Chair) (Social Policy and Research Manager, Citizens Information Board)
- > Seán Mistéil (Regional Manager, Citizens Information Board)
- > Bernie Kennedy (Social Policy Executive, Citizens Information Board)
- > Martina Cronin (Co Wicklow CIS)
- > Teresa McCourt (Westmeath CIS)
- > Connie Gerety (Longford CIS)
- > Marion Browne (Limerick CIS)
- > Mary Dunne (Dublin North West CIS)
- > Tom Martin, Tom Martin & Associates/TMA (researchers)
- > Jim McDevitt, Tom Martin & Associates/TMA (researchers)

CIS consultation topics

Chairs and Development Managers

CIS profile (Board; Staff; Centres)

CIS work plan

Changing demand profile (clients, queries)

Quality assurance

Management reporting/performance measurement

Areas where innovation (technology, practices) can improve efficiencies

Major CIS challenges (increased demand; resource pressures)

Management challenges arising from the 'mix' of scheme worker, paid staff and volunteers

Suggestions for Improvement (especially solving staff challenge)

Staffing challenges

Paid (embargo, restricted to 'core' complement)

Volunteer (is flow reducing)

Specific Employment Programme staff challenges

(How) are you hurting because of Employment Scheme staff shortages

CIS experience with the different Pathways to Work activation schemes (Community Employment (CE), JobBridge, the Job Initiative programme, Tús, the Rural Social Scheme, the Community Services Programme)

CE pipeline (adequate response to advertisements)

Extra burden on CIS caused by recent restrictions on CE Scheme (end of double payment; cutbacks in Training & Material Grants;

Further proposed restriction to 1-2 year cycle

Advantages and disadvantages of sponsoring a CE scheme versus being a recipient of Scheme Workers from a local sponsor

Training: Board and staff training

Suggest front-loading Information Module in 2 year IAAP

Progression of Employment Scheme workers

Employment Scheme Participants

Which activation schemes are used?

Why did you apply for CIS position?

Duration of placement

Role in CIS (information provision; face to face; advocacy; receptionist; other)

Comments on CIS experience:

- > Recruitment
- > Induction
- > Training (on the job; accredited training courses)
- > Job satisfaction

Individual Learning Plan, managed by CE Supervisor

Progression opportunities (not equal across all CISs?)

How much job seeking activity is undertaken during CIS placement?

Scheme worker suggestions for improvement of experience in CIS

Employment Support Schemes (ESSs)

A3.1 Introduction

Employment Support Schemes (ESSs) are labour market schemes designed to assist people who are long-term unemployed and people who are disadvantaged to move back into open employment.

Long-term unemployment undermines the employability of individuals and the capacity of afflicted communities to function as cohesive social structures. The alienation experienced from unemployment often breeds a sense of disempowerment in the communities.

Very often, ESSs fulfil a dual role, combining employment interventions and/or training for the individual with key services to communities in remote rural areas and areas of urban disadvantage. These key community services include:

- > Childcare
- > Elder Care
- > Health & Social Care
- > Drugs Rehabilitation
- > Youth Services
- > Community Amenities
- > Environment
- > Sports & Leisure
- > Arts, Tourism and Culture
- > Advice & Information

Community Employment Programme (CE)

Work experience programmes have been part of the package of labour market provision for adults since 1984 when the Social Employment Scheme (SES) was introduced. Between 1984 and 1994, the SES catered for approximately 14,000 people annually, making it the largest programme, at that time, for the long-term unemployed. During that time it was the subject of much comment and criticism. Evaluations at both local and national level indicated that the programme was, to a great extent, achieving short-term objectives, but that these were not translated into durable post-scheme benefits for participants. From the outset there was a tension in the dual objectives of the scheme — should it be meeting the employment needs of participants or the human resource needs of local organisations and communities?

Some of these issues were addressed in 1991 when the Community Employment Development Programme (CEDP) was introduced on a pilot basis in the twelve Area Based Partnership Companies established under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress. The new programme introduced a number of significant improvements.

- > Project-time training and own-time training were incorporated into the new programme, involving a minimum of 105 hours and a budget of £300 annually for each participant. Worker development plans were also introduced, through which the individual needs of participants, in relation to technical and employment skills were identified.
- > The duration of the programme was extended allowing participation for two, and in some cases, three years.
- > Participants were also allowed to retain their secondary benefits up to certain limits and childcare disregards were made available to some participants.
- > The new programme also relaxed the eligibility criteria to allow participation by the younger long-term unemployed (aged 21 or over), those in receipt of a Lone-Parent Allowance and those on disability allowances.

At the beginning of 1994, both the CEDP and the SES were abolished and replaced by a new national programme, the Community Employment (CE) scheme. CE embodied the same provisions as the CEDP and its introduction effectively meant that the improvements first introduced with the CEDP were now available nationally. In addition, training for supervisors and for sponsors was introduced. At the same time the eligibility criteria was amended to extend the time period between ceasing participation on one scheme and commencing participation on another.

The introduction of CE was accompanied by a massive expansion of places to 40,000 annually, making it by far the largest labour market programme for the adult long-term unemployed.

But the original tensions identified in the SES persisted in the CE scheme. Firstly, with the growing emphasis on achieving progression outcomes, and the administrative and practical responsibilities that this placed on sponsors, the ambiguity between meeting the employment needs of the participants and the human resource needs of the sponsors began to intensify. Secondly, the growing emphasis on progression was not paralleled by attempts to address the actual labour market needs of participants and was not reflected in the limited training budget provided.

In 1996, following the report of the Task Force on Long-Term Unemployment, a number of modifications were made with the objectives of improving the experience of participation and the subsequent outcomes for participants. These modifications refocused the programme to provide different options to two different target groups:

- > **The Part-Time Integration Option** is targeted at those aged over 25 who were perceived to have reasonable prospects of employment. Participation on the Part-time Integration Option is for 1 year. In certain limited circumstances a second year may be available, subject to DSP approval and the availability of places and budget. Eligibility was restricted to persons in receipt of specified social welfare payments for 12 months or more. There are also smaller eligible groups usually associated with long-term disadvantage (e.g. ex-offenders, people with drug dependency problems, people from the travelling community), who may enter at younger ages and without meeting the requirement to have been on welfare for a year.
- > The **Part-Time Jobs Option** is targeted at those aged over 35 whose prospects of employment were considered poor. Participation is for 1 year initially with annually renewable contracts for a further 2 years, subject to annual DSP approval and the availability of places and budget. Eligibility was restricted to persons in receipt of specified social welfare payments for 3 years or more.

Community Employment participants are required to work 19.5 hours per week to fulfil the conditions attached to receipt of a CE payment.

Selection is voluntary and participants are self-selecting. The sponsor, as an employer, makes an independent decision on whether a person may participate on a scheme, subject to confirmation of the person's eligibility by the Employment Service office.

Pay is set at the current weekly €188 personal rate of Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) plus a top up of €20. Up to Budget 2012, persons previously receiving lone parents or disability payments could also retain their welfare payment while on CE. This has now been discontinued for new entrants

Permitted participation on CE ranges from 1 year to 7 years for different groups of participants. Duration is determined by length of time on a welfare allowance combined with age. For participants aged under 35, duration is set at one year with an optional second year in certain limited circumstances. Applicants between 35 and 54 years have eligibility for CE for 3 years with an extra year for persons on disability allowances. On the other hand applicants that are 55 years or older can remain on CE for a period of up to 6 years. If that applicant is on a disability related payment, they can remain for a further year.

Identity and location of CE Sponsoring Organisations

Data published by FÁS indicate that in March 2013, there were 1,104 Community Employment schemes with 24,961 participants (including CE Supervisors). The schemes are managed by a myriad of organisations drawn from a number of sectors including:

- > State agencies (e.g. Údarás na Gaeltachta, HSE)
- > Local Authorities (Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Mayo County Council)
- > Leader/Partnership companies
- > Disability/health organisations (Irish Wheelchair Association, Special Olympics, Enable Ireland, Cork Centre for Independent Living)
- > Arts/heritage organisations (Drimnagh Castle Restoration, Offaly Heritage Centre)
- > Community groups (Bailieboro Community Association, Ballymany Area Project)
- > Youth organisations (Scouting Ireland, Youth Work Ireland)
- > Childcare groups (Finglas Childcare, Wicklow County Childcare)

- > Sports clubs (Irish Amateur Boxing Association, Fermoy Sports and Culture Group).

A FÁS list of CE Sponsors (broken down by FÁS regions) is available at:

<http://www.fas.ie/NR/rdonlyres/694D0522-D4FE-416D-A354-22B7A765518F/2474/CE SponsorContactDetailsat31March2012.xls>

The Table below summarises these figures by FÁS regions (31 March 2012).

Table A3.1 Identity and location of CE sponsoring Organisations

Regions	No. of CE Schemes	No. of Participants
NorthWest	95	1791
Dublin North	62	1469
Dublin West	84	1966
Midlands	104	2292
MidWest	129	2424
NorthEast	68	1829
SouthEast	180	3783
SouthWest	149	3288
West	126	2790
DublinCentral	107	3329
Total	1,104	24,961*

* Figures include c. 1300 CE Supervisors

Further Sponsor Organisation details provided by Minister for Social Protection Deputy Joan Burton on 18th April 2012 are available at:

<http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2012/04/18/00472.asp>

The most recent figures for CE Participants (29th April 2013) showing a total of 22,569 (including 1381 Supervisors) is available at:

<http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/takes/dail2013050800060?opendocument>

Tús

Tús is a community work placement programme which was announced in Budget 2011. The scheme is delivered at local level by each of the 53 local development companies and by Údarás na Gaeltachta and benefits the community in both urban and rural areas.

The aim is to provide short-term, high-quality work opportunities and contribute to the work readiness of the long-term unemployed. It has up to 5,000 places for people who have been on the Live Register for over a year. Participation is for one year only.

Participants on Tús can take up other part-time employment provided it does not interfere with the work and times of the Tús work placement.

Unemployed people who are eligible for the scheme will be randomly identified and contacted by their social welfare local office and offered the opportunity to participate in the scheme. If they agree to participate in the Tús scheme they will be referred to their local development company or Údarás na Gaeltachta where they will be recruited for a suitable placement when it becomes available. The scheme thus contributes to the management of the Live Register in highlighting those who are unemployed but may not be actively seeking work. Under the National Employment Action Plan someone getting Jobseeker's Allowance is required to take up work opportunities such as the offer of a Tús work placement. If they refuse a work opportunity without good reason, they may have their social welfare payment reduced or terminated.

Working conditions are as per the Community Employment scheme. Participants will work for 19 ½ hours a week and the minimum weekly payment is €208. When the placement finishes, they sign on again with their local social welfare office. They cannot participate in the Tús scheme again for 3 years.

Rural Social Scheme

The aim of the Rural Social Scheme is to provide income support for low-income farmers and fishermen/fisherwomen who qualify for specified social welfare payments. The Scheme provide services that benefit rural communities.

The scheme is operated by the DSP and delivered at local level by 35 local development companies and by Údarás na Gaeltachta in Gaeltacht areas. The Department monitors the implementation of the RSS and supports the various bodies that manage the RSS locally.

The type of work carried out by RSS participants includes:

- > Maintaining and enhancing various walking routes (that is, waymarked ways, agreed walks) and bog roads;
- > Energy conservation work for older people and those at risk of poverty;
- > Village and countryside enhancement projects;
- > Social care and care of older people;
- > Community care for pre-school and after-school groups;
- > Environmental maintenance work — maintenance and care-taking of community and sporting facilities;
- > Projects relating to not-for-profit cultural and heritage centres;
- > Community administration or clerical work;
- > Any other appropriate community based project identified during the course of the scheme.

The work arrangements and payment are similar to Community Employment (participants work 19.5 hours per week). While it is not intended that anyone should remain on the scheme permanently, there are no time limits for taking part in the scheme. There are 2,600 places on the scheme.

Job Initiative Scheme

The Job Initiative Scheme (JI) was introduced in July 1998 (piloted in 1996 and extended to all 38 partnership areas in 1998). It was a three-year work experience scheme for persons over 35 who had been unemployed for five years or more and were in receipt of one of the following payments:

- > Jobseeker's Benefit
- > Jobseeker's Allowance
- > One-Parent Family Payment (OFP)

The main aim of the scheme was to provide full-time work experience and training in 'not for profit' organisations to help participants progress into mainstream employment.

The programme specifically favoured organisations with a strong record in recruiting long term unemployed persons. Pay was at the 'going rate for the job' — in 2012 the minimum payment to a Job Initiative participant was €416.

Since November 2004, there has been no further recruitment onto the Scheme. There is no prescribed termination time for those already participating on the Scheme.

A3.2 Expenditure on Employment Support Schemes

Table A3.2 gives the recent trends in relative spend by ESSs over the last 6 years.

Table A3.2 Employment Support Scheme by expenditure

Programme	Expenditure (€m)			
	2007 Out-turn	2010 Out-turn	2011 Estimate	2012 Estimate
Community Employment Programme	357.5	368.3	356.7	315.2
Rural Social Scheme	47.8	46.0	46.1	45.7
Tús – Community Work Placement Scheme	0.0	0.0	30.0	84.0
Job Initiative	40.0	30.2	28.5	27.2
Back to Work Allowance	71.0	87.9	91.5	137.9
National Internship Scheme — JobBridge	0.0	0.0	20.0	65.8
Back to Education Allowance	64.1	179.8	198.8	183.0
Other programmes reviewed (est.)	10.0	16.0	17.3	15.0
Total above	590.4	728.2	788.9	873.81

(Source: DSP Review of ESSs, 2012)

Profile of a CIS: Dublin Northwest Citizens Information Service (DNWCIS)

DNWCIS began life as a Finglas ICTU Centre. In 2007 it became part of the CIS network administered by CIB. The Finglas Centre moved to its current premises in 2009.

DNWCIS serves the Finglas, Cabra and Ballymun areas. It comprises 3 main CICs (Finglas CIC, Ballymun Civic Centre and Cabra Resource Centre) and 2 fixed outreach centres (Navan Road and Ballymun Social Welfare Offices). It also deploys a Mobile vehicle to offer outreach services to:

- > Youth Groups
- > Senior Citizen Homes
- > Groups with Disabilities
- > Prisons
- > Unemployed groups.

The DNWCIS Board is comprised of nine directors, with backgrounds in HSE, Local Authority, Local Development Companies, MABS, and the general community.

Data on the DNWCIS workload shows a rising trend in recent years (see Table A4.1 below).

Table A4.1 DNWCIS workload, 2010–2012

	2010	2011	2012
Callers	13,685	16,755	18,681
Year on year change		22.4%	11.5%
Queries	21,265	25,742	31,953
Year on year change		21.1%	24.1%
Queries per caller	1.55	1.54	1.71

Another aspect reflecting the mounting workload is the increasing complexity of queries. This is indicated by the rising percentage of Callers requiring a CIC meeting lasting longer than 40 minutes:

> 40 minute meeting: 7% (2010) => 15% (2012)

< 10 minute meeting: 31% (2010) => 14% (2012)

Queries are categorised by the following standard CIS themes (Table A4.2).

Table A4.2 Categorisation of queries

Social Welfare	Employment
Health	Housing
Money	Justice
Consumer Affairs	Birth, Family and Relationships
Death and Bereavement	Travel and Recreation
Moving Country	Environment
Education and Training	Government in Ireland

Table A4.3 presents the complement of DNWCIS Staff and indicates the whole time equivalent figures.

Table A4.3 Staffing within DNWCIS

Category	Numbers	Whole Time Equivalents
Development Manager	1	1
Administrator	0	0
Information Officers	4 (1 Full Time, 3 Part Time)	2.5
Volunteers	16	2.76
ESPs	13	6.69
Total*	34	12.95

* DNWCIS also enjoys the services of a regional Advocacy Support Worker one day per week

The Table reveals that the Service is heavily dependent on ESPs [6.69/12.95 = 52%].

The close association of DNWCIS with ESPs is further evidenced by the facts that:

- > 2 IOs and the DM were previously ESPs
- > Some of the current volunteers were also previously ESPs

Breakdown of ESPs by scheme

Ten of the 13 ESPs are on the Community Employment (CE) scheme:

- > 3 are less than 1 year at the Service
- > 2 are between 1 & 2 years
- > 5 are between 2 & 3 years

The remaining three ESPs are Tús scheme participants (all are less than 1 year in DNWCIS).

Sponsors

The sponsor for the CE scheme is Fingal ICTU Centre which administers 45 CE participants in total (the CE Scheme Supervisor meets with all 45 ESPs once every 2 months).

Tús scheme sponsors are Ballymun Partnership and Tolka Road Partnership.

Roles of ESPs in DNWCIS

Table A4.4 shows the deployment of ESPs across the various CIS roles:

Table A4.4 Deployment of ESPs in DNWCIS

Category	CE participants	Tús participants
Administration	1	
Information Officer	8	
Receptionist		3
Other	1	

Because the Tús scheme duration can not be extended beyond one year the Tús participants can not be trained for the Information Officer positions.

ESP training

Quality of service delivery is paramount in DNWCIS so that the public receives correct information and advice. All ESPs receive a comprehensive 6 week induction course (originally offered by the ICTU Centre, but now provided by CIS staff). This lays the foundation for a constant flow of supplementary in-house training. ESPs are 'shadowed' by experienced CIS staff during their 'apprenticeship' before they are asked to deal with Clients on their own.

Their confidence is particularly bolstered by undertaking the external FETAC-accredited IPP course through either taught or distance delivery models. Five ESPs have undertaken this course in the last three years.

Advocacy

Demand for Advocacy services in DNWCIS has risen 100% in the last 3 years in areas including Social Welfare entitlements, Employment Rights, Health, Consumer Affairs and Housing. Some of what is reported as 'Guidance' contains an advocacy element (the new Electronic Case Management System (ECMS) introduced to record advocacy case work operates outside of the Oyster Caller and Query Recording system).

The DM was one of fourteen Development Managers who completed a new FETAC level 7 'Certificate in Management Skills for Managers of Advocacy Services' course in the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown in late 2012. She is confident that a few of the ESPs will be able to contribute to the advocacy services after they receive IAAP training (four ESPs have signed up for the inaugural course in 2013), though further experience will be required before they can tackle the challenging employment tribunal cases.

DNWCIS Yearly Work Plan

CISs are required to produce a yearly work plan as part of the service level agreement between CIB and their CIS delivery partners. The aim of the work plan is to ensure that all CISs work towards the overall CIB strategy.

The CIB Strategic Plan 2012–2015 listed the following Strategic Actions:

- > Priority A: Meet the changing information, advice, advocacy and budgeting needs of citizens, particularly of marginalised and vulnerable groups and individuals - by connecting and responding;
- > Priority B: Implement consistent, high quality service by CIB and our delivery partners — by providing services to a high standard;
- > Priority C: Work to develop and implement an integrated service delivery model that puts the citizen at the centre — by organising to deliver;
- > Priority D: Lead the design and implementation of creative and flexible responses to meet emerging demands for information, advice, advocacy and budgeting support- by creating and adding value;
- > Priority E: Measure the efficiency and effectiveness of our service delivery approach — by demonstrating outcomes through feedback from users.

In January 2012, the Manager, staff, volunteers and Tùs participants met to formulate the 2012 Dublin Northwest Citizens Information Service (DNWCIS) work plan. The plan was approved by the DNWCIS Board.

Table A4.5 Dublin Northwest Citizens Information Service work plan, 2012

Priorities		Actions taken during 2012
1	<p>Keep the citizen at the centre by providing a Seamless Service</p> <p>Service to include Information Provision, Advocacy & Social Policy feedback</p> <p>Hallmarks — availability; flexibility; integrity; credibility; open door; private and confidential; non-judgemental</p>	<p>Identified and prioritised vulnerable target groups (youths; seniors 60+; unemployed; travellers)</p> <p>Compiled/maintained a local services referral directory for use of CIS staff and outside agencies</p>
2	<p>Assure the Quality of the service</p> <p>Goal: a uniform 'CIC brand' across the national CIS network</p> <p>Key instrument is the standardised CIB training — IPP/ IAAP</p>	<p>Set up Joint Working Group user testing</p> <p>Deployed improved in-house Customer Feedback questionnaire (Receptionist assisted clients)</p> <p>Piloted a Customer Survey in November 2012 to elicit clients' satisfaction with CIC Reception and Interview experiences (received an excellent rating — apart from waiting time complaints)</p> <p>Will develop further in conjunction with the 2013 Gold Star Quality Assurance Mark exercise</p>
3	<p>Act as an Intermediary between clients and public services by meeting the Information and Advocacy needs of the clients</p> <p>In the current austerity period, advocacy skills are becoming an indispensable component of an Information Officer's toolkit</p>	<p>Year opened with 15 open advocacy cases on Electronic Case Management System (ECMS).</p> <p>76 new cases were added during 2012, 56 cases were closed => 35 open cases at year end.</p> <p>38 employment law cases were recorded on the ECMS, 32 were successfully closed;</p> <p>€75K redundancy awards were won; 3 clients were reinstated in their jobs;</p> <p>DNWCIS recruited a new volunteer with professional experience in employment law;</p> <p>DNMCIS was the first CIS to avail of the new 'early resolution service' of the Rights Commission Service/ Employment Appeals Tribunal</p> <p>Other advocacy work included Social Welfare appeals and Consumer Protection</p>
4	<p>Maximise the potential synergies with MABS</p>	<p>DM is a board member of Finglas/Cabra MABS</p> <p>DM participates in a cross referral project with MABS</p>
5	<p>Ensure good Corporate Governance</p> <p>Carry out and review Risk Assessment of the Service</p> <p>Health & Safety of all stakeholders to be taken into consideration</p>	<p>DNWCIS introduced a new risk register and updated its safety statement</p> <p>Implemented Best Finance practice, adherence to CIB Financial Controls handbook</p>

Sponsoring Organisations of Employment Support Schemes

A5.1 Introduction

Employment Support Schemes (ESSs) are sponsored by groups wishing to benefit the local community, namely voluntary organisations and public bodies involved in not-for-profit activities.

Besides the goal of contributing to community development, a collateral goal of ESSs is providing development and training for the employment scheme participants (ESPs). DSP encourages that ESS projects employ 15 or more participants and a full-time Supervisor (the DSP (2012), Community Employment: Financial Review of Schemes report spoke of a ratio of 1:25).

The ESS sponsoring organisation will be a company limited by guarantee and fully responsible for the management and administration of the ESS project — it will be capable of keeping adequate financial records and controls for the project. The Sponsor will establish a Project Management Committee which should include the organisation's chairperson, secretary and treasurer. One of the members of the Committee should be nominated as a Participant Development Officer (PDO) and work with the Supervisor in respect of Participant development. The Supervisor may not be a member of the Committee.

DSP gives financial support in the form of allowances and funding to assist with the ESS. These include participant wages, Supervisor wages, certain overheads ('materials grants'), and specific skills development and training grants as approved within the individual learner plans — the training provided through ESSs is delivered within a quality assurance framework.

DSP pays a wages grant (minimum €208) to Participants for the full period of employment. If a Participant's Social Welfare entitlement exceeds €188, a grant equivalent to this entitlement plus a €20 top-up is paid. Participants are encouraged to engage in part-time work outside the time spent working on the ESS.

A5.2 Profile of a typical Sponsor: Westmeath Community Development (WCD) — provides ESPs for the Westmeath CIS

Westmeath Community Development (WCD) was formed in 1993 to access funding under the LEADER II programme in order to carry out a programme of rural development throughout County Westmeath. In 1996 it also became the Area Based Partnership for the County and as such qualified to deliver Local Development Social Inclusion programmes (LDSIPs). Today, following the merger of Partnership and LEADER companies, WCD is one of 52 Local Development Companies (mainly county-based) in the country.

WCD still operates 2 core programmes:

- > **Leader** (Liaisons entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale), an EU CAP initiative to aid the development of sustainable rural communities
- > **Local Community Development Programme** (formed from the integration of the LDSIP and the Community Development Programme) administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

In addition to these two core programmes, WCD acts as a Sponsor for several ESSs at the behest of its client organisations and, in the case of Tús, at the behest of the DSP.

In total WCD sponsors some 190 ESPs on behalf of approximately 80 host organisations including GAA clubs, Tidy towns, CIS, Child Care centres, etc. The ESSs involved are:

Employment Support Scheme	Number of ESPs
Community Employment	45
Tús	100
Job Initiative	11
Rural Social Scheme	33

WCD engages some ESPs for its own programmes (e.g. the Entrepreneur Development Programme in its Business Development Centre) but most ESPs are placed with WCD clients.

Typically, to initiate a sponsorship project, WCD applies to DSP for a sponsorship project for a particular ESS and proposes to sponsor a specified number of ESPs. If successful, WCD then hires a scheme Supervisor. The Supervisor issues a call to local Community & Voluntary organisations to apply for ESPs. Respondents supply job specifications for vacancies and these are put up on the local employment services website. Recruitment interviews are conducted by a joint panel made up of personnel from WCD and the host organisation.

Once the system is up and running, the Supervisor administers the re-engagement ('rollover') or replenishment of ESPs on an annual basis. ESP placements have varying durations depending on the individual ESP's circumstances (age, length of time unemployed, etc). All are nominally for a 1 year contract, but the Supervisor can 'make a case' to the DSP and re-engage "key workers" for a prescribed number of years.

The Sponsor (not the Supervisor) is responsible for all liaison with the DSP and sponsorship can take up a considerable amount of management resources, particularly the returns and audits required from the sponsor's financial department. Other demands on Sponsor management time can arise from employment law issues (discipline; grievances, etc.).

WCD achieves between 65% and 75% 'progression' levels but this includes ESPs who go on from the ESS to other schemes or training programmes. The rate of progression to paid employment is closer to 10%–20%.

Tracking of ESP exits is done by the ESS Supervisors who report ESPs' immediate next step to DSP but that is the extent of the monitoring. This limited tracking contrasts with the LCDP programme which has a dedicated IT tracking system which provides much greater information on participants' progression.

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 +353 1 605 9000

George's Quay House

f +353 1 605 9099

43 Townsend Street

e info@ciboard.ie

Dublin 2

w citizensinformationboard.ie

