



Integrated approaches to active welfare and employment policies

Ireland

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Summary

1. Introduction

The following report outlines the results of a research process carried out in Ireland as part of a European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EFILWC) project to:

- Identify mechanisms for effective inter-agency co-ordination of active welfare and employment policies; and
- Assess the implications of such mechanisms on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the labor market. The main groups covered in this respect are minimum income recipients, i.e. those relying on means-tested social welfare benefits as their principal source of income.

In line with these aims, this report on Ireland provides an overview of the main social welfare schemes, the main active welfare and employment policies directed at the disadvantaged and the overall policy context for inter-agency co-ordination. It then focuses on two of the main co-ordination initiatives in this area – the Local Employment Service and the implementation of Guidelines 1 and 2 of the National Employment Action Plan – examining factors facilitating and constraining co-ordination and the implications for final beneficiaries of the services provided.

2. Methods

The report is based on:

- A review of relevant literature and interviews with a range of policy makers and experts at national and local level.
- Three case studies, which were undertaken to explore operation of the principal co-ordination mechanisms - the Local Employment Service (LES) and the National Employment Action Plan (EAP)- at local level. These were: Blanchardstown Local Employment Service; the operation of the Employment Action Plan in Cork City; and the operation of the Employment Action Plan in Cobh, County Cork.

The case studies are not intended to be representative but to allow for an examination of processes and causal relationships at local level through which useful lessons can be obtained on the operation of these programs on the ground. The purpose of this more detailed case study analysis therefore was to:

- Obtain a fuller picture of how the main co-ordination initiatives are translated into local implementation structures;
- Assess how they ultimately impact on minimum income recipients within their own communities.

The selection of case studies on both co-ordination measures was very much determined by the nature and extent of analytical work already undertaken. In particular:

- No substantial evaluation had yet been undertaken on the operation of the Employment Action Plan (nationally or locally). Because of this, it was felt that two case studies was a minimum requirement in order to gain an insight into the operation and impact of this relatively new co-ordination mechanism within the local context. In order for differences in operational environments to be taken onto account, one rural and one urban area were selected for analysis.
- On the other hand, a series of detailed evaluations and reviews have been undertaken on the operation of the Local Employment Service (locally and nationally). Furthermore, a comprehensive evaluation process was ongoing in the particular area selected for this case study (Blanchardstown). All this allowed for a more detailed elaboration around many of the issues already raised

3. Report Structure

In line with the common structure developed for the compilation of national reports in the Member States of the EU covered in the research, the report is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the principal means tested social assistance schemes available to people of working age. It also gives a more detailed description of some of the main schemes including their regulatory framework, resources and actual practices in terms of implementation on the ground. Chapter 2 provides an overview of labor market developments and describes the main active welfare and employment schemes in this context. The general policy context around addressing disadvantage and promoting social inclusion is then described and finally, an outline is provided of the main co-ordination mechanisms designed to promote the inclusion of minimum income recipients in the labor force. Chapter 3 discusses the national context in relation to inter-agency coordination in general and the implications of these for active welfare and employment policies and measures. This includes a discussion on some of the factors that have facilitated and constrained effective inter-agency co-ordination. Chapter 4 outlines the results of the case studies undertaken to explore the operation of the main co-ordinated initiatives – the Local Employment Service and the Employment Action Plan - at local level. Finally,

Chapter 5 concludes the report and lists some of the opportunities (in terms of new institutional changes) through which the barriers to effective co-ordination can be addressed.

4. Context and Key Conclusions

Minimum Income Schemes

The basic system of unemployment compensation in Ireland, as in most other EU countries, involves two elements: insurance based Unemployment Benefit (UB) and a means tested system of Unemployment Assistance (UA), which is the main minimum income scheme. UB lasts up to 15 months for those aged 18 to 66 years and to qualify one must have paid Pay Related Social Insurance contributions for a specified period. Persons who do not qualify for UB or who have exhausted their entitlements to UB may receive UA for which the benefits are somewhat less. Many of those most disadvantaged in the labor force, for example the long-term unemployed and young people who may never have worked, will be in receipt of UA.

The other major general minimum income scheme is Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA), which provides assistance for those in need who do not qualify for payments under any other state scheme or for special or emergency needs not met by other social assistance payments. People on low incomes also qualify for SWA to meet certain needs or in the event of certain emergencies. There are also a range of other state supports that are specific to certain groups such as lone parents, people with disabilities and carers.

Labor Market Context and Activation Policies for Minimum Income Recipients

From the early 1980s and continuing through the early 1990s, the Republic of Ireland had one of the highest unemployment and long-term unemployment rates in the EU. The increase in levels of unemployment was particularly marked in the 1980s as numbers employed declined and subsequently stagnated side by side with a rapid growth in the working age population.

In response to growing levels of general unemployment, there was, in common with other OECD countries, a shift in Irish labor market policy towards active labor market measures. A large and diverse range of programs was established throughout the 1980s and the number of organisations with responsibility for implementing active labor market measures increased. However, from the early 1990s, national policy began to see long-term unemployment as requiring a different response to short-term unemployment. A range of active measures were then developed, specifically targeting the long-term unemployed and others particularly disadvantaged in the labor force such as lone parents and people with disabilities. The principal programs can be grouped under the following categories

- Direct employment schemes (the most important being Community Employment);
- Tax and welfare measures to encourage the movement from welfare to work (including programs such as the Back to Work Allowance, which allows people moving into work to keep a proportion of their social welfare entitlements);

Training Programs and Services (important here has been a commitment to increasing access by long-term unemployed and others disadvantaged in the labor market to mainstream training provision).

These measures have principally been designed at national level by different central government departments and the agencies and delivered locally within this national framework. The most important institutional actors in this respect have been the Government Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and FAS, the National Training and Employment Authority, which operates under the aegis of the Government Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The labor market conditions for the integration of minimum income recipients into employment have improved significantly in the latter part of the 1990s. Especially significant has been rapid growth in employment levels, which have led to dramatic falls in rates of unemployment and long-term unemployment despite substantial increase in the total labor force. However, the effects of disadvantage and poverty arising from social and labor exclusion (experienced individually and by specific communities) continues to be a major barrier for some in accessing sustainable employment or in availing of training/education opportunities that would lead to such an outcome..

Provision for Co-ordination in Activation Policies

Considerable progress has been made in Ireland over the past ten years in providing a basis for greater co-ordination in the design and delivery of public services. This has been facilitated by a number of important developments including the further and more consolidated development of social partnership structures at local and national level. Also important has been the introduction of key government initiatives such as:

- The Strategic Management Initiative, a key theme of which has been improving co-ordination among policy makers and service providers, between central government agencies and between central and local levels.
- The National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS), which was launched in 1997 with the broad target of reducing the numbers of people who are consistently poor. The need for co-ordination between Government Departments in achieving this goal has been strongly emphasised in the Strategy and is reflected in the structures for its implementation.

These developments have also had an impact on active welfare and employment policies, programs and services targeted at minimum income recipients. In particular:

- Increasingly formalised horizontal co-ordination structures can be observed at national level including the Strategy Group on Employment and Unemployment and various structures in the context of social partnership arrangements, such as the Standing Committee on the Labor Market. These structures have provided a new and important basis for co-ordination on policy in this area at national level.
- At a local level, the Local Area Partnerships and the Local Employment Service (LES) in particular, have provided a basis for inter-agency co-operation at local level in partnership with an increasingly vibrant community sector representing service end users.

The implementation of Guidelines 1 and 2 of the National Employment Action Plan has also provided the impetus for more formalised co-operation at national and local levels between the two central actors in the areas of active welfare and employment policies: FAS (The National Training and Employment Authority) and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA).

Co-ordination in Practice

While recognising the considerable progress made, a number of important constraints can be observed in terms of the overall effectiveness of these mechanisms for co-ordination. In particular:

- There has been a lack of appropriate vertical mechanisms to link co-ordinated actions at local level to the policy-making structures at national level. National policy can, in this context, appear to be unresponsive to local conditions and slow to mainstream best practice co-ordinated initiatives developed and tested on the ground.
- The limited provision for linking local and national co-ordinating structures is especially critical given that key active welfare and employment support schemes directed at minimum income recipients are highly centralised and delivered by FAS and DSCFA within a national framework. As a result, key areas of policy or programme design cannot be changed at local level, thus restricting the capacity of local co-ordination mechanisms, such as the LES and the local offices of the DSCFA and FAS involved in the implementation of the EAP to respond to local conditions.
 - Many people face a range of barriers in accessing training and employment support services which are not necessarily within the remit of the main co-ordinating actors (such as FAS and DSCFA) to address. Issues identified in this respect include literacy problems, substance abuse, health problems,

transport needs and the effects of prejudice and discrimination against groups such as ethnic minorities (including Travellers).

- The LES has been able to build on the work already undertaken by the Local Area Partnerships in building what might be described as a new culture of inter-agency and inter-sectoral collaboration and joint action. However, as noted by the National Economic and Social Forum (2000), the extent to which various agencies engage with the LES or Partnership structures more widely has often depended on local personalities rather than organisational protocol. It has also been difficult to involve employers in LES structures.
- The limited linkages between the EAP and LES highlight the difficulties of co-ordinating programs which appear to have similar goals, but in practice have a very different ethos. The LES has an ethos of voluntary participation and is also designed to complement the work of the Local Area Partnerships in tackling disadvantage. The EAP, as noted by the NESF, is perceived to some extent as having a particular policy emphasis on tackling social welfare fraud. This, and the non-voluntary aspect of participation in the EAP process, has led to some concern among LES managers that involvement with the EAP would destroy the distinct ethos of the LES and undermine the voluntary and confidential nature of the service it provides.

The Impact on Minimum Income Recipients

While both the EAP and the LES have had considerable success in placing clients in employment and various training interventions, a number of issues have been raised as to the implications of these outcomes in terms of judging the effectiveness of each initiative. In particular;

- While both programs have made considerable progress in placing people in employment, this has been achieved in the context of rapid growth in employment levels and emerging labor shortages in a whole range of sectors. Evaluation tools, it has been suggested, will need to consider the possible 'dead weight' effects if the true value of the initiatives is to be effectively assessed and applied in less favorable labor market conditions.
- The information available from both initiatives does not allow for any assessment of the security and sustainability of employment obtained. This has particular implications for the LES, which has an important overall objective of addressing poverty and disadvantage. A high rate of job placement among young people for example, could be a negative rather than a positive indication of progress if they have left education or training early to take up low paid and less secure employment options..

Similar concerns can be expressed in relation to the EAP, if job placement only, rather than any assessment of the nature of employment obtained, is used to evaluate the final impact of the plan. While no comprehensive evaluation has yet been undertaken of the EAP, it has been suggested that evaluation indicators in this respect be developed and applied with reference to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. This would require some consideration of the likely poverty effects of all outcomes.

- A related issue emerging from the LES in particular, has been the significant numbers of people for whom immediate take-up of training and employment options is not a realistic possibility. As outlined above, a range of barriers can be identified in this respect, many of which are not within the remit of the main co-ordinated actors to address. However, no systematic information collection has yet taken place on the extent of these problems and their significance in terms of those not progressing through either the LES or EAP process. This will be important if the necessary service responses are to be put in place to address the various barriers highlighted to date.
- Also of concern have been those minimum income recipients for whom mainstream training and employment may never be a feasible option. Particular concern in this respect was expressed about people in this category who might be currently on unemployment assistance but would actually be entitled to other benefits, for example, disability benefits due to reasons such as mental health problems. Due to lack of knowledge on entitlements there is the potential for these people to simply go off the Live Register and give up their welfare entitlements rather than be referred to employment or training options to which they are unsuited.
- Lack of knowledge on entitlements and the consequent fear about the effect on net income as a result of taking up particular employment or training options was found to be an important constraint to progression. Progress made by some LES's in addressing this problem has been considered an extremely important outcome of co-ordination at local level and a priority area for mainstreaming at national level.

Ways Forward

A number of opportunities now exist for addressing the barriers identified. In particular:

- The establishment of the dual stranded National Employment Service incorporating FAS Employment Services and the LES. The arrangements for this new service allows for the LES's to maintain their links to the Local Area based Partnerships and their voluntary ethos. This is an important development given the role the partnership structure has played in co-

ordinating services to meet different client needs. As noted above however, the NESF Review of the LES found that participation by various agencies in the LES structures tended to be based on local personalities rather than organisational protocol. This suggests the need for more formal protocols to be developed outlining the precise role and contribution to be made by agencies participating in the LES/Partnership process.

- The establishment of a National Advisory Committee to advise FAS on the planning and operation of new dual stranded service provides an important opportunity to ensure that the lessons learned from local practice (especially in terms of best practice) are translated into policy and mainstreamed nationally. However, the Advisory Committee will need to address the concerns raised about the LES Policy Advisory Committee, which is acknowledged to have been underutilised. Suggestions made in this respect have included:
 - Representation of key agencies (especially DSCFA given the strong links between benefits entitlements and access to employment and training) , social partners and the community/voluntary sector (including adequate representation of local level interests);
 - Clear terms of reference outlining the role and functions of the Committee and working methods;
 - Adequate independent resources to support research and other actions necessary to support the policy advisory function.
- Even where vertical linkages are in place, it is still important that local level co-ordination mechanisms are equipped to respond to local conditions on an on-going basis. The range of policy instruments in terms of active welfare and employment available to local levels actors are very limited- the main schemes continue to be part of national frameworks. Changes in local government structures, including the establishment of the County Development Boards provide an important opportunity to devolve greater powers to local actors in this area. In fact, it has been suggested that without influence on welfare and employment policies, the role of the County Development Boards in developing effective local development initiatives will be limited.
- It is important that any evaluation of co-ordinated outcomes be judged in the context of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). The Poverty Proofing Guidelines issued by NAPS and being applied by Government Departments should inform the evaluation processes of the EAP, and the LES in particular, given its central importance in addressing poverty and disadvantage. These require each government department and state agency to consider the poverty effects of key policies and programs. In relation to the EAP and the LES this should

be used to assess the effect of all outcomes to ensure that potentially negative effects of what might appear to be positive outcomes (for example, young people leaving education early to take up employment) are fully explored and addressed.

Chapter 1 – Minimum Income Schemes

1.1 Panorama of Minimum Income Schemes

The Government Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) has primary responsibility in Ireland for the formulation of social protection policies and the delivery of minimum income social assistance/protection schemes. The principal schemes are outlined in Table 1.1, which sets out the aims, eligibility criteria and numbers covered.

Table 1.1 Summary of Social Welfare Schemes in Ireland

Scheme Name	Aims & Criteria	Numbers Covered	Actors
General Schemes:			
Unemployment Benefit (UB)	A weekly payment to insured unemployed people.*	53,779 (Dec. 2000)	DSCFA
Unemployment Assistance (UA)	A means-tested weekly payment for people who don't qualify for UB, or have used up their entitlement to UB.	75,531 (Dec. 2000)	DSCFA
Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA)	A means-tested weekly payment which provides assistance to those in need who do not qualify for payment under other state schemes. Ensures a standard basic minimum income.	<u>Basic Payment:</u> ('98) Recipients = 16,300 Beneficiaries ¹ = 30,170 <u>All SWA:</u> ('98) Recipients ² = 76,488	Administered by the regional Health Boards on behalf of the DSCFA.
Targeted Schemes:			
Child Benefit	Non means-tested benefit paid (usually to the mother) for each child aged up to 18, who is normally living with and being supported by the applicant/parent.	Families = 510,840 Children = 1,018,175 (2000)	DSCFA
One-Parent Family Payment	A means-tested payment for parents who are raising a child without the support of a partner.	74,119 (2000)	DSCFA

* As part of the qualification criteria for both UB and UA applicants must be: under the age of 66; capable of work; available and genuinely looking for work; are fully unemployed for at least 3 days in any period of 6 consecutive days.

¹ Includes Qualified Adults and Qualified Children.

² Includes Basic payment, Supplements (Rent, Mortgage, Heating, Diet, Others), and Exceptional Needs Payments. Those who receive more than one element of SWA are counted only once.

Disability Allowance	An allowance paid to people (aged 16-66) with a disability. Disability must be expected to last for at least one year and the allowance is subject to both medical suitability and a means test.	54,303 (2000)	DSCFA
Family Income Supplement (FIS)	Allowance for families on low pay. Applicants should: be working full time; have at least one qualified child; have an income below threshold for their family size.	13,181 (2000)	DSCFA
Carers Allowance	A means-tested payment for carers on low incomes who live with and look after people who need full-time care.	16,478 (2000)	DSCFA

Note: At the time of writing the latest statistics for numbers on SWA were for 1998.

There has been a significant reduction in the numbers claiming unemployment assistance and unemployment benefit since 1996. The principal reason for this has been numbers finding work which has been precipitated by rapid increases in labor demand. (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, March 2000: 5)

1.2 Detailed Description of Key Minimum Income Schemes

1.2.1 Unemployment Assistance

Unemployment Assistance is a weekly payment made to unemployed people who do not qualify for Unemployment Benefit or who have used up their entitlement to that benefit (Unemployment Benefit, as noted in the above table is a social insurance based payment which is discontinued after 15 months of unemployment. Eligibility depends on previous social insurance contributions³).

Those not qualifying for Unemployment Benefit initially go on to Short-Term Unemployment Assistance and move on to Long-Term Unemployment Assistance if still unemployed after 15 months. The latter entitles them to small extra payments. People on Unemployment Benefit also move on to Long-Term Unemployment Assistance when their eligibility for Benefit is discontinued after 15 months.

³ To qualify for Unemployment Benefit people must have paid 39 weeks of Pay Related Social Insurance contributions since starting work and have 39 weeks of paying such contributions in the relevant tax year i.e the last complete tax year before their claim.

Regulatory Framework:

As with many elements of statutory practice in Ireland, the administration of most social protection schemes is of a highly centralised nature. This is the case with Unemployment Assistance, which has no regional differentiation, both in terms of administration/delivery and type/rate of payment. The legal framework which governs Unemployment Assistance is found in Chapter 2, Part 2 of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 1993.

Practice & Implementation:

UA payment is made up of a personal rate with additional amounts for dependants. The amount received depends on an applicant's means and length of unemployment. The current (short-term) rate of payment, as set out in the Budget 2000, is IR£76.00 per week. Payment for a qualified adult dependant is a further IR£47.00, with an additional IR£13.20 for each dependant child. These rates break down into the following proportions for the domestic unit:

1.00	First Adult/Applicant
0.62	Qualified Adult Dependand
0.17	Each Qualified Child

Additional payments are made for those moving on to Long-term Unemployment Assistance. These additions are quite marginal involving receipt of £1.50 per week extra and receipt of the Christmas Bonus (£77.50).

Qualification for UA depends on Applicants being:

- Unemployed;
- aged between 18 and 66;
- capable of work;
- available for and genuinely looking for work;
- fully unemployed for at least 3 days in any period of 6 days.

Applicants must also satisfy a means test, and live in the State.

Means are assessed as any income which an applicant or their spouse/partner have, property (except the home) or an asset which could bring in money or provide an income. The value of any benefit and privilege is also assessed.

Claims for UA are made at the applicants' local Social Welfare office and decided by specially appointed Deciding Officers. On applying for UA, applicants will be asked to provide details of their means by a Social Welfare Inspector. The Inspector may do this at the applicants' local Social Welfare Office or may call to the home. The Inspector may also ask applicants to produce documents such as accounts or bank statements. The decision on an applicants means is made by

a separate Deciding Officer. If unsatisfied with the decision of a Deciding Officer, applicants can appeal to an independent Appeals Officer at the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

UA payments can be made in any of the following ways:

- Personalised Payable Order (PPO) payments are made using books which may be cashed at a chosen Post Office.
- Direct Payments are lodged directly to a Bank / Building Society account or to a savings account with An Post.
- Postdraft payments are made by payable order which is available for collection each week at a designated Post Office.
- Electronic payments are made, using a Social Services Card, each week at a chosen Post Office.

Payment is made for as long as applicants are unemployed and satisfy the qualifying conditions for receipt of payment.

Throughout 1999, almost 445,000 reviews were carried out by DSCFA investigators across all schemes. Of these 97,000 were checks on unemployment payments. The Department reports that IR£82.87m was saved through such investigations into unemployment payments (which accounts for 43% of all payments). Prosecutions were also on the increase with the number of cases referred by the DSCFA to the Chief State Solicitors Office rising by 39% in 1999 compared with the previous year.

Population Covered by Scheme:

The Live Register⁴ shows that there were 75,531 recipients of UA at the end of December 2000 compared to 99,101 in the same period in 1999. Table 1.2.1 below gives the breakdown by age and gender of the UA figures for December 2000 and December 1999.

Table 1.2.1: UA Recipients by Age and Gender, 1999 and 2000.

	December 1999			December 2000		
	Under 25	Over 25	Total	Under 25	Over 25	Total
Male	12,005	58,528	70,533	9320	45,299	54,619
Female	9,169	19,399	28,568	6703	14,209	20,912
Total	21,174	77,927	99,101	16,023	59,508	75,531

⁴ The Live Register consists of persons under the age of 65 years who are registered at local offices of the DSCFA and in receipt of : claimants for Unemployment Benefit (excluding systematic short-time workers); applicants for Unemployment Assistance (excluding smallholders and self employed persons); and other registrants including applicants for credited Social Welfare contributions but excluding those involved in an industrial dispute.

The figures show that 72% of all UA recipients at the end of December 2000 were male and 28% female, compared to 71% and 29% respectively for the previous year. There was no change in the age profile of recipients between the same period. In total, UA claimants represented 53% of the Live Register in December 2000- the corresponding figure in December 1999 being 56%.

The expenditure on UA reflected by these figures was, for 1999, IR£484.7m. Expenditure estimates for 2000 are IR£418.8m, which would represent a fall of 14% in the total expenditure on Unemployment Assistance.

1.2.2 Supplementary Welfare Allowance

The Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) Scheme provides a basic weekly allowance as a right to eligible people who have little or no income. People with low incomes may also qualify for a weekly supplement under the Scheme to meet certain special needs. In addition, payments can also be made in respect of urgent or exceptional needs. The main purpose of the scheme is:-

- to provide a residual and support role within the overall income maintenance structure;
- to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes;
- to guarantee a standard basic minimum income;
- to provide people with low incomes with a weekly supplement to meet certain special needs (e.g. rent and mortgage interest payments) or a payment to help with the cost of any exceptional needs they may have;
- to help those whose needs are inadequately met under the major schemes and those confronted with an emergency situation.

Regulatory Framework:

The legislation governing the scheme is incorporated in:

- Chapter 11 of Part III and Chapter 3 of Part VII of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 1993
- Third Schedule Part III of Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 1993
- Rules as to Calculation of Means, and
- The Social Welfare (Consolidated SWA) Regulations, S.I. 382 of 1995, as amended.

As in the case of Unemployment Assistance and other payments, there is no regional differentiation *per se* in the administration and delivery of SWA. However, the following section will outline a certain discretionary nature in payment which is dependant on the particular Social Welfare Officer (SWO).

Practice & Implementation:

Basic SWA is made up of a personal rate for the applicant and additional amounts for any adult dependant and/or child dependants. This payment is equivalent to the short term rate of UA, namely, IR£76.00 per week for the applicant, IR£47.00 for a qualified adult, and IR£13.20 for each qualified child dependant (as of Budget 2000). For the Basic SWA this breaks down into the same domestic unit proportions as UA, namely:

1.00	First Adult/Applicant
0.62	Qualified Adult Dependand
0.17	Each Qualified Child

In addition to the Basic SWA payment, there are a number of supplements for which applicants may qualify. These include:

- Rent And Mortgage Interest Supplements
- Diet Supplement
- Exceptional Needs Payments
- Urgent Needs Payments
- Back-To-School Clothing And Footwear Scheme
- National Fuel Scheme
- Heating Supplement

The qualification criteria governing SWA states that every person in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and the needs of their adult or child dependants(s) shall be entitled to Supplementary Welfare Allowance. There are two categories of claimants for basic SWA. The first category are people who fail to meet the conditions for entitlement to a weekly social welfare or health board payment. The second category are people who have applied for a social welfare payment and are getting a basic SWA payment pending a decision on their claim.

In certain circumstances you may have to repay any assistance you have received under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme. Such circumstances include, for example:

- if Supplementary Welfare Allowance is paid while an applicant is waiting for Social Welfare benefit, assistance or pension, the amount paid will be deducted from the arrears of the Social Welfare payment
- if an Urgent Needs Payment is paid, the claimant may have to pay back all or part of what they have been paid if they are working or once an insurance claim has been settled.

The SWA scheme is administered by the eight regional Health Boards (which operate under the aegis of the Department of Health and Children) on behalf of the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs. The DSCFA has no function in deciding entitlement in individual cases. It's function is in relation to expenditure on the scheme and policy issues.

On applying for SWA, applicants are asked by the Community Welfare Officer (CWO) to give information about their means and other circumstances. The CWO may visit the applicant's home to discuss their circumstances and any special needs they may have. The CWO then decides on whether payment is made under the SWA scheme. SWA may be paid by cheque, postdraft or directly into a bank account. Applicants have the right to appeal against a decision made regarding their claim by writing to the Appeals Officer at their regional Health Board.

Population Covered by Scheme:

Table 1.2.2: Recipients of Supplementary Welfare Allowance by Payment Type, 1998.

Type of SWA	Total
<i>Basic Payment:</i>	
Recipients	16,300
Qualified Adults	3,232
Qualified Children	10,638
Total Beneficiaries	30,170
<i>Supplements:</i>	
Rent	40,000
L.A. Mortgage	2,500
Other Mortgage	3,800
Heating	850
Diet	6,700
Other	2,600
Total Supplementary Welfare Allowances ⁵ : Recipients	76,488

⁵ Includes Basic Payments, Supplements and Exceptional Needs Payments. Persons who receive two or more elements of SWA, such as a Basic Payment and a Rent Supplement, are counted only once in this figure.

Chapter 2: Activation Policies for Minimum Income Recipients

2.1 Overview of Labor Market and Key Developments

From the early 1980s and continuing through the early 1990s, the Republic of Ireland had one of the highest unemployment and long-term unemployment rates in the EU. The increase in levels of unemployment was particularly marked in the 1980s as numbers employed declined and subsequently stagnated side by side with a rapid growth in the working age population. The increase in the working age population throughout the 1980s however, was not fully reflected in increases in the labor force due to increased participation in third level education and a marked increase in net emigration.

Labor market conditions have been transformed over the 1990s, particularly in the latter part of the decade. Especially significant has been rapid growth in employment levels, which have led to dramatic falls in rates of unemployment and long-term unemployment despite substantial increase in the total labor force. Table 2.1 illustrates some of the key developments since 1993.

Table 2.1: Labor Force, Employment and Unemployment April 1993 to February 2000 (000s)- ILO

	April 1993	April 1994	April 1995	April 1996	April 1997	2 nd quarter 1998	2 nd quarter 1999	1 st quarter 2000
Labor Force	1,403	1,432	1,459	1,508	1,539	1,621	1,688	1,732
Participation Rate	52.8 %	53.3%	53.6%	54.5 %	54.7 %	56.5%	57.9%	58.5%
Employment	1,183	1,221	1,282	1,328	1,380	1,495	1,591	1,651
Employment Rate ⁶	44.5 %	45.4%	47.1%	48.0 %	49.0 %	52.0%	54.5%	55.8%
Unemployment	220	211	177	179	159	127	97	82
Unemployment Rate	15.7 %	14.7%	12.2%	11.9 %	10.3 %	7.8%	5.7%	4.7%
Long-term unemployment (LTU)	125	128	103	103	86	64	42	30
LTU rate	8.9%	9.0%	7.1%	6.9%	5.6%	3.9%	2.5%	1.7%

⁶ Calculated as a proportion of the population 15 years and over.

Source: Central Statistics Office, Labor Force Surveys (LFS), 1993-97; Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) 2nd quarters 1998 and 1999 and 1st Quarter 2000.

In the seven years up to the first quarter of 2000, the labor force increased by 329,000 (an average of over 3% per annum). A significant part of this growth is accounted for by demographic trends (including a reversal in migration flows) which have seen a large increase in the population of working age. However, as outlined in the table, rising labor force participation rates have also played a role. Much of this increase relates to women, whose participation rates rose from 38.2% in 1993 to 46.8% in the first quarter of 2000. Male participation rates have risen less dramatically, from 67.9% to 70.7% in the same period.

Employment grew by 468,000 between 1993 and 2000 (over 5% per annum), significantly above the increase in the labor force. This has led to an increase in the employment rate from 44.5% in 1993 to 55.8% in 2000.⁷ As a result, unemployment fell by 138,000 - from 220,000 in 1993 to 82,000 by the 1st quarter of 2000- bringing the unemployment rate down from 15.7% to 4.7%.

2.1.1 Exclusion from the Labor Market

At 82,000, the number unemployed in the first quarter of 2000 (identified as such using the ILO economic status measure) is considerably below the numbers actually signing on for Unemployment Benefit and Unemployment Assistance. There is a range of reasons for this including the fact that the ILO definition of unemployed is based on those actively engaged in job search and thus excludes those still signing for unemployment payments but who have not looked for a job for some time.

Another measure of unemployment used by the Central Statistics Office is Principal Economic Status, (PES), based on people's own assessment of their employment status. Using this measure, 117,00 people were classified as unemployed in the 1st quarter of 2000, significantly above the ILO measure at this time.

A range of commentators has raised the implications of these different assessments of unemployment for labor market policy. Fitzgerald et al (2000) for example, notes that those who have been regarded as unemployed on the PES definition but as 'inactive' on the ILO definition of unemployment have formed about a quarter of the PES unemployed throughout the 1990s and with lower unemployment this share has grown to more than a third in the first quarter of 2000. The numbers involved in this respect have remained constant throughout the 1990s (see

⁷ The employment rate for women increased from 32% to 44.6% in this period. The rate for men grew from 57% to 67%.

Appendix 1) at about 40-45000 nationally (Fitzgerald et al, 2000:26). While economic success has played a major role in reducing unemployment, the persistence of high numbers of people deemed 'inactive' would suggest that economic success alone cannot be relied on to reach those who are detached from the mainstream job market (Fitzgerald, et al, 2000:26).

Other groups in this respect, who may not be classified as unemployed, but include among them significant numbers who might be willing to work but can be precluded from doing so due to various barriers include:

- Lone parents. As outlined in Chapter 1, 74,119 people were in receipt of One Parent Family Allowance. Some lone parents are working and some might be counted as unemployed using the ILO measure. However, it is reasonable to assume that there is additional hidden unemployment among lone parents who are willing to work but are not currently on active job search because of childcare problems (Fitzgerald et al, 2000: 27).
- Older People. The boundaries between describing oneself as 'unemployed' or as 'retired' under the PES measure are reasonably fluid, with (as noted by Murphy and Walsh, 1998) a greater tendency for redundant workers to describe themselves as retired as they get older. This self-description may in reality be due to discouragement from job search due to the difficulties older workers face (men in particular) in obtaining employment due to factors such as discrimination⁸.
- People with Disabilities. The precise position of people with disabilities in the labor force is difficult to establish from current statistics. According to the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996), many people with disabilities are discouraged from job search due to access problems in particular.

It should also be noted that 39,581 people are currently on some form of work experience scheme targeted at minimum income recipients including the long –term unemployed and others disadvantaged in the labor force such lone parents. While on such schemes, participants are not included in the live register figures as they are paid by FAS (usually at a rate set above employment assistance and with additional benefits). Various analyses of Community Employment, the largest of these schemes (O'Connell and McGinnity, 1997; DeLoitte and Touche 1998) have identified relatively low rates of progression from this scheme to mainstream

⁸ Barrier to employment faced by older workers have been explored in range of publications. See for example, reports by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions: 'Combating age Barriers in Employment' (1997) and 'Managing an Ageing Workforce' (1999).

employment indicating continued risk of unemployment among participants (this is explored in more detail in the next section).

2.2 Activation Policies and Measures

In line with trends in other OECD countries, the 1980s saw a shift in Irish labor market policy towards active labor market measures in response to growing levels of general unemployment. A large and diverse range of programs was established throughout the decade and the number of organisations with responsibility for implementing active labor market measures increased (O'Connell and McGinnity, 1997).

Since the early 1990s, national policy began to see long-term unemployment as requiring a different response to short-term unemployment. A range of active measures have been developed in the 1990s specifically targeting the long-term unemployed and others particularly disadvantaged in the labor force such as lone parents and people with disabilities. The principal programs can be grouped under the following categories

- Direct employment schemes;
- Tax and welfare measures to encourage the movement from welfare to work;
- Training Programs and Services.

These measures have principally been designed at national level by different central government departments and the agencies and delivered locally within this national framework. The most important institutional actors in this respect have been the Government Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and FAS, the National Training and Employment Authority, which operates under the aegis of the Government Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

- The **Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA)** , is divided into two main parts – the Aireacht and Social Welfare Services. The Aireacht is responsible for policy formulation, legislation and general administration.

Social Welfare Services is responsible for the day to day running and delivery of services. The country is organised into ten social welfare regions each of which is managed by a regional manager who is responsible for the delivery of services in that region. Services are delivered through a network of 158 local offices and 89 branch offices.⁹

In addition to the basic social welfare payments and active labor market schemes outlined in the following sections, the Department also has an employment support service co-ordinated

⁹ Local offices are run directly by the Department with Departmental staff. Branch offices deliver the same service under contract from the Department.

by a national director and eight regional co-ordinators. They are assisted by locally based Job Facilitators who advise and assist unemployed people and lone parents to avail of various employment, education, training and self-employment options.

The Department also administers a range of programmes and grant schemes in support of community development – the most significant being the Community Development Programme.

- **FAS, the Training and Employment Authority**, comes under the remit of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Its functions include: the operation of training programmes; the provision of an employment/ recruitment service; and advisory service for industry; and support for co-operative and community based enterprise. These services are provided by a number of separate divisions or services including:
 - Services to industry;
 - FAS Employment Services, with responsibility for employment placement support services;
 - FAS Community Services, with responsibility for community based initiatives such as Community Employment;

The Authority has regionally based administrative structures and services are provided through a network of 53 local Employment Services Offices and 20 Training centres throughout the country.

Other institutional players in terms of active labor market measures include the Department of Education and Science and the Revenue Commissioners. Also important are the Local Area Partnerships, which have been the basis for the implementation of the Local Employment Service.

2.2.1 Direct Employment Schemes

The principal direct employment schemes for minimum recipients are Community Employment, Whole- time Job Initiative and Workplace – each of which is administered in FAS. Numbers and expenditure on each in 1999 are outlined in the following table.

Table 2.2.1 Number and Expenditure on Main Direct Employment Schemes (1999)

Scheme	Number of Recipients (December 1999)	Expenditure	Implementing Agency
Community Employment	39,579	£295,740,091	FAS
Job Initiative	2,198	£1,935,216	FAS
Workplace	183	£222,680	FAS

Source: FAS, 2000.

The schemes are outlined in more detail as follows.

a. Community Employment

Community Employment (CE) has been the largest single national programme on unemployment over the past six years.

The program was officially established in 1994, replacing the Social Employment Scheme (SES) which had existed since 1985. Like the SES, it is run by FAS. It serves a number of purposes:

- It provides work opportunities for the long-term unemployed in the public, voluntary and community sectors.
- It forms part of a re-integration strategy for the unemployed, with the objective of improving their chances of progression to work. A key element of this objective is the inclusion of a training and personal development component in the employment experience.
- It provides a resource for local development and for the voluntary and community sectors through the provision of personnel (i.e. the participants) and other financial supports.

CE was restructured in 1996 on the advice of the government's Task Force on Long-Term Unemployment¹⁰ so as to focus more on the long-term unemployed. Two options, with different eligibility criteria and conditions were introduced:

- Option One: Part-time Integration Option is targeted at the long-term unemployed with 'reasonable prospects of employment'. It provides work for up to one year for: 1) individuals 21 years of age or over in receipt of Unemployment Benefit, Unemployment Assistance or Lone Parents Allowance for one year or longer, 2) Travellers¹¹ of any age in receipt of the same payments and 3) individuals referred by the National Rehabilitation Board.

¹⁰ The Task Force on Long-Term Unemployment was established by the government in 1994 under the auspices of the Department of the Tanaiste (Deputy Prime Minister).

¹¹ Ireland's largest indigenous ethnic minority. Travellers are a particularly disadvantaged group, both generally and in terms of access to the labor market.

- Option Two: Part-time Job option is targeted at the long-term unemployed with 'poor prospects of employment'. It provides work for up to three years for: 1) individuals 35 years of age or over in receipt of Unemployment Benefit, Unemployment Assistance or Lone Parents Allowance for three years or longer, 2) Travellers of any age in receipt of the same payments for three and longer and 3) individuals referred by the National Rehabilitation Board.

CE has been the subject of a number of reviews and evaluations. A consistent finding of these reviews has been concern about the rate of progression from CE to mainstream employment. A full evaluation of the program was undertaken in 1997-1998 (DeLoitte and Touche et al, 1998) and the Government has subsequently acted on a number of its recommendations. Key in this respect have been:

- An increase in age eligibility to 25 years for participants in receipt of Unemployment Benefit, Unemployment Assistance and Lone Parent allowance. This is in response to the findings of the evaluation that the part-time nature of the scheme was not the most appropriate introduction to the workforce for young people and that it would be better for them to participate on training schemes with better employment rates. The increase in age eligibility does not apply to specially disadvantaged groups such as refugees, Travellers, ex-offenders, persons with disabilities, people referred under the Drugs Task Force and 18-24 years olds on the Live Register for more than 18 months.
- The duration of breaks between participation on CE has been raised from 6 to 12 months and the maximum participation by an individual cannot in the future exceed 12 months. This was largely in response to the evaluation findings that numbers of people had been on CE for long periods of time and were not progressing into employment.
- Planned reduction of total CE and Job Initiative places combined to 28,000 by 2003 and the transfer of resources saved to a dedicated social economy program. This was principally in response to findings of the evaluation that the size of CE should reflect the more positive labor market trends since the introduction of CE. It is also intended to address the increasing difficulties CE has faced in meeting its dual objectives, i.e. providing progression opportunities for the unemployed as well as resourcing local services/community objectives with social objectives. The latter it is felt would be better served by a more strategic approach to resourcing the 'social economy'.

b. Whole-Time Job Initiative

The Whole-Time Job Initiative (usually called Job Initiative) is a pilot initiative designed to provide full-time employment for persons who are over 35 years of age and have been registered unemployed or for One Parent Family Allowance for more than five years.

The Program provides full-time work for three years at the going rate of pay with local 'not for profit' managing agents and is designed to meet the needs of the Social Economy.

FAS has overall responsibility for the delivery of the Program under the aegis of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Delivery at local level is through FAS community Services Units. At national level, there is liaison between FAS and the Department on the overall development of the program.

The Local Employment Service is responsible for referring individuals, who are eligible to partake in the Program, to Managing Agents.

When launched in 1996 with 1000 places, it was confined to Local Partnership Company areas in urban areas. These were Cork City, Limerick City and Dublin which included the areas of Tallaght, Coolock, Darndale, Kilbarrick, Ballymun, Finglas, Cabra and Dublin Inner City.

The Initiative was extended to 38 Local Area Partnerships in 1999. A total of 2,198 people were on Job Initiative at the end of 1999.

c. Workplace

Developed and administered by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, Workplace provides up to five weeks works experience for unemployed people (also including Travellers, people with disabilities and those in receipt of One Parent Family Payment).

2.2.2 Tax and Welfare Measures

A range of tax and welfare to work schemes has been devised and implemented by different institutional actors over the years. The schemes, numbers participating and implementing bodies for each are outlined in the following table.

Table 2.2.2 Numbers and Implementing Agencies for Main Tax and Active Welfare Measures

Scheme	Number of Recipients (December 1999)	Implementing Bodies
Back to Work Allowance	31,931	DSCFA
Family Income Supplement	14,549	DSCFA
Part-time Job Incentive	567	DSCFA
Revenue Job Assist	NA	Revenue Commissioners
Jobstart	833	FAS

Particularly important schemes for minimum income recipients are those involving in-work benefits: Back to Work Allowance and Family Income Supplement. These and other schemes are outlined below.

a. Back to Work Allowance

The Back to Work Allowance (BTA) was introduced in 1994 to allow long-term unemployed people, lone parents and people with disabilities returning to work to keep a proportion of their social welfare payments over a three year period. BTA is administered by the Government Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. The programme has two streams, one for employees and one for the self employed, with roughly equal numbers of participants.

The national total on BTA at the end of 1999 was 31,931 people, not far below the numbers on CE, making it the second most important labor market activation measure in the country.

An evaluation of the program is currently being prepared.

b. Family Income Supplement

Family Income Supplement (FIS) is a weekly allowance paid to person's with families who are on low wages. There were 14,549 families in receipt of FIS at the end of 1999. The scheme is administered by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

To qualify for the scheme, a person must be working for an employer for at least 19 hours a week in a job that is expected to last for 3 months. The person must also have at least one dependent child and their net income should be below the set figure for their family size.

c. Other Tax and Welfare Activation Measures

Other activation schemes include:

- *Revenue Job Assist.* Developed and administered by the Revenue Commissioners, Revenue Job Assist allows employers who employ a person for 12 months or more to claim a double deduction in their accounts for wages and employer's contribution in respect of such wages.
- *JobStart:* JobStart is a recruitment subsidy program administered by FAS targeted at the long-term unemployed, people in receipt of One Parent Family Payment, Travellers, and people with disabilities registered with NRB.
- *Part-Time Job Incentive.* This program, administered by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, is available to persons on long-term unemployment assistance (or persons leaving Community Employment) who take up part-time employment which is expected to last at least two months (no particular type of employer is specified). Recipients receive a weekly non-taxable supplement.

2.2.3 General Training

In addition to the targeted direct employment schemes such as CE (which involved, as referred to above, a core training element) FAS has committed to increasing the proportion of long-term unemployed people participating in its mainstream training programmes. Some progress has been made in this respect with the FAS Action Plan 2000 noting that long-term unemployed people made up 22% of those starting main-line FAS training programmes. The principal training programs in this respect included Specific Skills Training, the Job Training Scheme and Traineeship.

2.3 Wider Approaches to Addressing Poverty/disadvantage

The 1990s has seen the development of a number of important initiatives to address poverty and disadvantage in Ireland. Of particular significance (with important implications for inter-agency co-ordination) have been the social inclusion provisions of the national partnership agreements, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and the establishment of Partnership Companies to promote local development in areas designated as disadvantaged.

2.3.1 Partnership Agreements at National Level

One of the most important developments in policy making over the past 20 years in Ireland has been the development of social partnership forms of decision making at national and local levels. A key starting point for these developments was the negotiation of a national agreement on pay and taxation levels between the government, trade unions, employers and farming groups in the

mid 1980s, in the midst of a major crisis in the public finances. Successive agreements have been negotiated which have extended beyond considerations of pay and taxation to include various aspects of economic and social policy.

The last national agreement, Partnership 2000 (1997-1999) committed the Government to additional spending of £525 million in full-year terms on social inclusion measures during the period of the agreement. These included expenditure on targeted employment measures, Child Benefit and Family Income Supplement, community development, rural exclusion, drug abuse and disadvantaged urban areas. The Agreement also committed the government to improving the real income position of those dependent on social welfare through the implementation of the minimum rates recommended by the Commission of Social Welfare. As a result of various social inclusion measures announced in the three national budgets since 1997, additional spending of some £950 million in full year terms will have taken place over this period (Combat Poverty Agency, 2000: 79). Partnership 2000 also committed the government to the adoption of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The latest national Partnership Agreement, the *Program for Prosperity and Fairness* (PPF) contains a number of 'operational frameworks' one of which (Framework III) covers social exclusion and equality. Areas covered under this framework include income adequacy, urban disadvantage, rural poverty, health and housing. Expenditure on these commitments through the course of the program will be £1.5 billion in the year 2003. One of the objectives of the framework will be to promote cross-departmental action and integration to address poverty issues comprehensively (Government of Ireland, 2000: 78).

2.3.2 National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS)

The publication of the national Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) report *Sharing in Progress* in April 1997 was a critical landmark in the development of Irish social and economic policy. NAPS set a ten year target for poverty reduction in Ireland and identified five areas as needing particular attention in tackling poverty: income adequacy, unemployment, educational disadvantage, urban concentrations of poverty and rural poverty.

As noted in recent assessment of the strategy (Combat Poverty Agency, 2000), one important and novel features of NAPS is that it established specific targets for poverty reduction (2000:19). In fact Ireland is the first EU Member State to adopt a global poverty target. NAPS contains six targets. These are:

- *Global*. An original global target of reducing the numbers of those who are consistently poor from 9-15% to less than 5-10% (based on 1994 data). By 1997, the numbers in consistent poverty had fallen to 7-10% of the population. Based in this information, the government set a new global target that consistent poverty be reduced to below 5% by 2004.
- *Unemployment*. The original target was to reduce the rate of unemployment from 11.9% to 6% by 2007 and to reduce the rate of long-term unemployment from 7% to 3.5%. Given the rapid rate of employment growth from 1997, this target was reviewed by Government in June 1999 and a new one set – unemployment below 5% and long-term unemployment to be reduced to 2.5% by 2002. However, this target was met by September 1999. The Employment Action Plan has more ambitious targets for unemployment reduction – to reduce unemployment to below 5% and long term unemployment below 2% by the end- year 2000.
- *Educational Disadvantage*. The target here is to eliminate problem of early school leaving so that the percentage proceeding to senior cycle at secondary school level increases to at least 90% by year 2000 and 98% by year 2007. The target also states that there should be no students with serious literacy and numeracy problems in early primary education within the next five years.
- *Income Adequacy*. The income adequacy target restated the global target and set out a short-term goal of reaching the minimally adequate social welfare rates set by the Commission on Social Welfare. These were reached in 1999.
- *Urban Disadvantage and Rural Poverty*. Targets on these issues were less specific than for others and progress has, as a consequence, been more difficult to measure (CPA, 2000:20).

2.3.3 Local Area-based Partnerships

In relation to addressing poverty and disadvantage, a significant outcome of the national agreements has been the extension of social partnership to local level decision making with the development of the Local Area Partnership Companies in areas designated as disadvantaged. These partnerships broadened the social partnership model to include the community/voluntary sector¹², the first time the sector had been treated as formally equal to the traditional social partners in a decision-making forum

Twelve partnership companies were established in 1992 under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (the national agreement covering 1992 –1995) and funded by the EU through the Global Grant (1992-1995). The number of partnerships was extended in 1993 and part funded by EU Structural Funds under the Program for Integrated Local Development of Designated Disadvantaged and Other Areas (commonly referred to as the ‘Local Development Programme’). This programme was sub-Program 3 of the broader Operational Program for Local Urban and Rural Development, one of the ten operational programs of the Community Support Framework for Ireland (1994-1999).

They are currently 38 Partnership Companies, whose aims are:

- To improve the prospects for long-term unemployed people in terms of obtaining jobs becoming available in the economy and in terms of setting up their own businesses;
- To support positive discrimination in favour of employing long-term unemployed people in local jobs;
- To provide additional supports to enable early school leavers to participate in education;
- To enhance the capacity of local organisations and communities to participate in local development;
- To improve substantially the physical environment of the areas.

¹². Compared to other countries in the EU, community based and voluntary organisations play a significant role in the delivery of a range of services in Ireland - the main focus being on social and health services, although some have increasingly focused on economic and employment generation. Organisations receive funding from relevant state organisations, but they also have a significant independent fund-raising capacity.

A sizeable proportion of these groups and organisations, usually known as the community or community based sector, have an important role in lobbying and campaigning for social change. This is in contrast to what is known as the NGO or voluntary sector in other EU countries where there is a greater tendency for the charitable model to persist. This part of the sector has increasingly been recognised as a social partner at local and national level.

The actions available to them include: initial contact, education, training, work experience, strengthening of community leadership, physical development, employment development and enterprise development.

Area Development Management (ADM) Ltd. has direct responsibility for managing the Program. ADM is an independent intermediary first established by the Irish government and the European Commission to implement the first Global Grant on Local Development. It is a Company limited by guarantee with a Board of 16 directors, originally appointed by the Government, drawn from the social partners, community voluntary sector, area partnership, local authority managers, business interests and the lead government Department of the Local Urban and Rural Development (originally the Department of the Taoiseach - now the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation).

The functions of ADM are:

- To evaluate local development plans;
- To allocate funding accordingly;
- To monitor expenditure and performance.

ADM also provides supports to the partnerships, including assistance at set-up stage, information and guidance, encouraging and dissemination of good practice, and assistance with improving state service delivery locally. Although independent, it works with the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation, which is represented on its Board.

The Local Development Programme has been the subject of on-going monitoring and evaluation. The final evaluation is due to be completed by September. The Local Development Programme, and the Partnership Companies in particular, have also been the subject of some attention internationally as innovative approaches to addressing poverty on a local area basis (See for example, Sabel, OECD, 1995).

As the CSF (1994-1999) has drawn to a close, provision has been made for continued funding of the Area Based Partnerships under the National Development Plan (2000-2006). The programmes under which they will be funded are Community Development, Disadvantaged Youth and Services to the Unemployed. Partnerships are currently finalising their action plans for this next planning period.

2.3.4 Community Development Programme (CDP)

The Community Development Programme, which was established in 1999, has played an important role in resourcing communities to develop their own responses to social exclusion. By 2001, the Programme will be funding more than 100 community development projects

throughout the country with a total budget of approximately £13 million. The majority of projects are area based, but a proportion are also addressing social exclusion amongst particular sections of the population including long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, lone parents, Travellers and lone parents.

The Programme has been developed and managed by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. It is currently being evaluated.

2.3.5 Family Services Project (FSP)

An important new initiative introduced by Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) are the Family Services Projects (FSPs) which are underway on a pilot basis in local offices of the DSCFA in Waterford, Finglas (a suburb of Dublin) and Cork. The aim of the pilot projects is to provide enhanced access to information services for families in their own locations through the development of the one-stop-shop concept.

Within the pilots an enhanced program of support is available to a small group of families with complex needs- for example, very young lone mothers, other parents raising children alone, dependant spouses in households depending on social welfare and (in Cork) carers.

The government have committed in the Program for Prosperity and Fairness to the development of the successful aspects of the pilot projects and some £12million has been provided in the National Development Plan for that purpose.

2.4 Labor Market Measures for Minimum Income Recipients Involving Inter-agency Co-ordination

While the majority of active labor market schemes continue to be administered by separate Government departments and agencies, a number of initiatives have been developed over the past years to provide a more co-ordinated, inter-agency response to unemployment and other aspects of labor market disadvantage. The most important initiatives in this respect have been the establishment of the Local Employment Service and, more recently, the development and implementation of the National Employment Action Plan. A broad outline of these key initiatives is outlined below. A more detailed outline of the institutional structures for their delivery, including mechanisms for co-ordination is then outlined in Chapter 3.

2.4.1 Local Employment Service

The Government established the Local Employment Service (LES) in 1995 following the recommendations of the Task force on Long-term Unemployment (1994)- the Task Force had itself been influenced by a report of the National Economic and Social Forum *Ending Long-Term Unemployment* (1994).

The Task Force had highlighted the fact that were many statutory and community groups playing a role in tackling long-term unemployment. It then stated that “effective co-operation and co-ordination of services by all these groups was essential to make better and more effective use of available resources and, ultimately, deliver a better service to the unemployed” (Task Force on Unemployment, 1995: 105).

The Task Force had also noted the fact that the long-term unemployed were not a homogenous group and that the needs of communities differed from area to area. As a result, it concluded that an LES be established to provide a mechanism that would enable the providers of the various services, statutory, social partner and community based, to work together to respond to the needs of the unemployed in their areas. In doing this, it further recommended that the LES be put in place under the auspices of the Area Based Partnership, which had already established a local framework for inter agency and inter-sectoral co-operation and co-ordination of measures to address disadvantage.

In line with the Task Force recommendations, the framework proposed for the Local Employment Service was that of a ‘bridge’ for the individual long-term unemployed person between unemployment and work. In constructing this ‘bridge’ key tasks of the LES were to include:

- The development of strong links with local employers to identify emerging opportunities, involve them in the design and implementation of training and encourage a positive view of long-term unemployed people who have completed training;
- Influencing the range and design of mainstream programs (education and training in particular) by making recommendations and suggestions as to how services might be improved or changed;
- Providing services which were not previously available, in particular, the provision of an intensive job matching and career guidance/mediation service.
- Making the service accessible by, among other things, locating access points in areas most convenient to the target groups.

Four broad priority groups were identified for the service – the registered long-term unemployed; the registered unemployed for more than six months; dependent spouses of the unemployed and the young unemployed. Priorities in allocating resources between these different groups were to be set at local level, having regard to national criteria and priorities. Again in line with Task Force on Long-Term Unemployment recommendations, registration with the Service by

unemployed people was to be voluntary, but a proactive approach would be adopted in reaching out to those in need of help in getting back to work.

In line with these provisions, the LES was established in 1995 under the overall management of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. It was initially established in fourteen areas designated as disadvantaged under the Local Development Programme and has subsequently been extended to include 25 such areas in all. In each area, the LES is managed by a Local Management Committee operating under the auspices of the Local Area Based Partnership Company. In common with the Partnerships, the Local Management Committees have a tripartite structure involving statutory, social partner and community/voluntary sector interests.

The LES was evaluated in 1997/1998 (Eustace and Clarke, 1998) and has more recently been reviewed by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF, 2000). As noted in the latter review, by January 2000, the total number of clients registered with the LES was 36,971 (total registrations in 1999 amounted to 10,520). Of these:

- 40% had been placed in jobs;
- 14% were in mediation;
- 7% were referred to training or education;
- 7% had been referred to Community Employment or another employment Programme;
- 23% had been 'dead-filed' - suspended or marked 'process complete'.

The original budget for the development of the LES in 1995 was £6million. For 1999, the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment had a total of £13 million for the LES, £9.5 million of which went to individual LES's and the remainder covering certain central costs incurred by FAS and the Department in support of the LES.

2.4.2 National Employment Action Plan

Ireland's Employment Action Plan (1998) was drawn up to implement the European Union Employment Guidelines agreed in November 1997 at the Luxembourg Employment Summit. The implementation of Guidelines 1 and 2 (on tackling youth unemployment and preventing long-term unemployment) have included a set of co-ordinated measures requiring new forms of cooperation between FAS and the DSCFA. These measures include the following:

- Every young person (under 25) is to be offered a new start before reaching six months of unemployment, in the form of training, retraining, work experience, a job or other employability measures;

- Unemployed adults (over 25) are to be offered a fresh start before reaching twelve months of unemployment through similar measures or through vocational guidance.

The National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) has been progressively extended to cover the target groups unemployed:

- Under 25s at six months threshold (September 1998);
- Under 25s at 18 months threshold (March (1999));
- 25 – 34 year olds at 12 months threshold (May 1999);
- 35-54 year olds at 12 month unemployment threshold (February 2000)
- Pilot, all unemployed 6 months plus Ballyfermot and Kilkenny (October 1999).

Under the Plan, unemployed people who reach the threshold for their age group are referred by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) for interview with FAS. Those who do not attend for interview or who do not accept an offer of intervention may be referred back to the DSCFA for review of their payments.

Table 2.4.1 NAP Referral Outcomes 1999 (as at end December)

Categories	Number of Clients (%)		
	Aged < 25, at 6 months on LR	Aged < 25, at 18 months on LR	Aged 25 - 34, at 12 months on LR
1. Referred from DSCFA	15,791 (100%)	5,132 (100%)	5,072 (100%)
Did not attend 1 st interview	5,041 (32%)	1,697 (33%)	1,318 (26%)
Interview still pending	367 (2%)	166 (3%)	162 (3%)
Active in LES	714 (5%)	331 (6%)	187 (4%)
2. FAS Interviewees	9,669 (61% of 1.)	2,938 (57% of 1.)	3,405 (67% of 1.)
Placed in FAS training/employment Programme	1,867 (19%)	526 (18%)	574 (17%)
Placed in other training/education	468 (5%)	138 (5%)	131 (4%)
Placed in employment	2,752 (28%)	638 (22%)	664 (20%)
Total Placements	5,087 (53% of 2.)	1,302 (44% of 2.)	1,369 (40% of 2.)
Not progression ready (on LR)*	432 (4%)	198 (7%)	242 (7%)
Others, No further progression (on LR)	1,327 (14%)	592 (20%)	878 (26%)
Left Live Register	2,823 (29%)	846 (29%)	916 (27%)
Total Non-Placements	4,582 (47% of 2.)	1,636 (56% of 2.)	2,036 (60% of 2.)

*Source: EAP Monthly Progress Report No.16, January 2000. * 'Not Progression Ready' means those considered not currently having the capacity to progress to the type of training or employment. on offer.*

Over 25,000 people have been referred by the DSCFA to FAS through the EAP process in the period of operation to the end of December 1999. Table 2.4.2 overleaf breaks these figures down by the main target groups and indicates outcomes for those who then attended FAS interviews

once referred. As can be seen from the table, the job placement rate was highest for the younger shorter term (less than 6months) unemployed. A higher proportion of longer term unemployed were also judged not progression.

No cumulative figures were available to establish the outcomes for those who did not attend FAS interviews and who left the Live Register. Figures for December provide some indication of trends in this respect, showing that 36% of those not attending found work and 6% were moved on to other social welfare benefits. Twelve per cent of those not attending interview with FAS were judged not to be entitled to the benefits they were receiving.

Table 2.4.2: Did not attend FAS interview and left LR (Dec 1999)

Current status	No. of People (%)		
	Aged < 25, at 6 months on LR	Aged < 25, at 18 months on LR	Aged 25 - 34, at 12 months on LR
Working	163 (36%)	34 (24%)	30 (28%)
FAS	8 (2%)	3 (2%)	3 (3%)
In education	10 (2%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)
Other benefit	29 (6%)	9 (7%)	11 (11%)
Not entitled	52 (12%)	16 (12%)	17 (16%)
Gone abroad	16 (4%)	4 (3%)	2 (2%)
Did not sign	92 (21%)	30 (22%)	12 (11%)
Other/unknown	78 (17%)	38 (28%)	30 (28%)
TOTAL	452 (100%)	136 (100%)	110 (100%)

Source: *EAP Monthly Progress Report No.16, January 2000*

Chapter 3: Co-ordination in Activation Policies: the Institutional Perspective

3.1. Description of Co-ordination Measures in General

Context for Implementation of Co-ordinated Initiatives

Government in Ireland is highly centralised at national level. There are no regional government structures, the most important sub-national structures being the system of local government consisting of elected local authorities organised largely on a county basis. However, the local authorities have relatively narrow functions and powers that, in the last few decades, have been further curtailed with the abolition of domestic rates, their major autonomous stream of income.

Within this institutional context, the bulk of public services, including social protection and employment support services, remain highly centralised and delivered within a national framework. This level of centralisation, and the 'top down' approach to service provision it has given rise to, has acted as a significant constraint to more effective co-ordination of services at local level. Provision for co-ordination at national level however, has also been weak with limited mechanisms for various departments to co-operate around issues that 'cut across' their specific policy and operational functions.

A number of important developments over the past few years have moved the issue of co-ordination and integration of services higher on the agenda. Provision for greater inter-agency co-ordination has comprised a major element of the government's Strategic Management Initiative, which has been designed to improve the effectiveness of public services. Co-ordination is also a key theme of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. Other important driving forces towards greater co-ordination have been the further development of 'partnership' (at national level and in the context of local development), changes in the structure of local government and the frameworks and programmes established for the expenditure of EU Structural Funds. These key developments are briefly described as follows.

3.1.1 Strategic Management Initiative

The Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) was launched in 1994 to improve the strategic focus of government departments and state agencies and increase the effectiveness of the services they deliver. To develop and implement this initiative, a Co-ordinating Group of Departmental Secretaries (top civil service officials in each Department) was convened. This Group produced the report *Delivering Better Government* in 1996, which among other things highlighted the

range of vital national issues which “can no longer be resolved from within the functional remit and skill base of a single Department or agency”. The report also stated that the existing civil Service Structure was not well geared to meeting this challenge. According to the report:

“Each Department’s work is firmly focused on a sectoral and functional basis; there are limited structures for consultation, co-ordination and co-operation and the current system rewards ‘territorial protection’ at the expense of active co-operation to achieve results” (1996: 14).

In order to address this problem, the Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries established three working groups to consider more appropriate mechanisms for cross departmental actions in the areas of child care, competitiveness and environmental issues. Drawing from the reports of the working groups, *Delivering Better Government* identified a number of proposals to strengthen the approach to the management of cross-cutting issues. These included:

- The development of Strategic Result Areas to identify the key issues where cross-departmental action, commitment and expertise are required to solve problems;
- The establishment of cabinet sub-committees for key areas of government policy;
- The allocation of specific co-ordinating roles to cabinet ministers and ministers of state.
- Pending the development of Strategic Result Areas, the establishment of cross-departmental teams with co-ordination provided by a minister/minister of state and a specific lead department. Issues to be covered to include: child care; drugs; employment; unemployment and social exclusion; financial services; and local development. The aim of the teams is to ensure that action is taken and the required outcomes achieved.

Legislative Change to Support Cross-Departmental Responses

Delivering Better Government identified specific legislative constraints to more effective administration. Particularly important in this respect was the Ministers and Secretaries Act (1924) under which each department was assigned to and administered by the Minister as its head. This Act set out the principle of “corporation sole” which, with the passage of time had sometimes been seen as excluding any other person or agency from taking on the powers, duties and functions invested in the Minister. This and other structural barriers were considered to have promoted a risk-averse environment in the public service where taking personal responsibility was not encouraged and, equally, where innovative approaches to service delivery had not been developed (Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries, 1996: 22).

In response to this legislative constraint, the government drew up the Public Service Management Act, which was enacted by the Oireachtas in 1997. The Act addressed the issue of

responsibility for cross-departmental matters. Section 12 of the Act (as noted by Boyle, 1999) deals with assignment of responsibility. It:

“...empowers ministers of state, jointly with their counterparts in one or more other departments, to assign responsibility to civil servants for the performance of functions relating to both or all of the departments concerned. The Ministers continue to have the right to perform the functions concurrently. A specific provision is made in the Act for consultation with the secretaries general of the department involved (Boyle: 1999: 28).

Departmental Strategy Statements

An implementation group of nine secretaries general (the highest ranking civil servants in each government department) and heads of office was mandated to drive the public service modernization agenda along the lines set done in *Delivering Better Government*. Early in 1998, the implementation group issued guidelines to government departments and offices on the preparation of strategy statements, which each department is obliged to prepare under the Public Service Management Act 1997. As part of this guidance, they noted that each department’s strategy statement should identify and address relevant cross-departmental issues, and the steps to be taken to consult with other relevant departments and agencies.

In his review of Departmental strategy statements developed in line with these guidelines, Boyle (1999) notes a number of means highlighted by departments in promoting cross-departmental co-operation. These include:

- Through cabinet sub-committees. For example, the Department of Education and Science note their Minister’s membership of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion, Local Development and Drug Misuse Prevention;
- Through a minister of state with cross-departmental responsibilities. For example, the Department of Health and Children note that the Minister of state with responsibility for the Child Care Act and the Adoption Acts was delegated additional responsibilities concerning vulnerable children within the remit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Education and Science.
- Inter-departmental teams or committees. Examples here include the National Drugs Strategy Team and inter departmental committees such as that set up by the Department of Agriculture and Food to address rural development issues. Also important have been ad hoc, once off events designed to promote better co-ordination such as the National Forum for Early Childhood Education hosted by the Department of Education and Science in 1998.

3.1.2 National Anti-Poverty Strategy

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) provides an important framework and impetus for the integration of measures across agencies with the purpose of addressing the causes and effects of poverty. A number of institutional mechanisms have been established in order to achieve the targets set out in the strategy. These include:

- A Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion, Chaired by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister);
- A Senior Officials Group to advise the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion;
- An Inter-Departmental Policy Committee;
- A NAPS Unit in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs;
- NAPS liaison officers in each Government Department.

Other important stakeholders include:

- The National Economic and Social Forum, which was established in 1994 to develop proposal to tackle long-term unemployment. The Forum has a tri-partite structure including Government, the main social partners (employers and trade unions) and the community/voluntary sector. It has responsibility for monitoring the social inclusion element of Partnership 2000 (the previous national agreement developed through negotiation by government and social partners);
- The Combat Poverty Agency, which was established by statute to advise the Government on poverty issues. It has a role in monitoring NAPS.

Within this institutional context, a range of actions has been undertaken to meet the NAPS targets. These have included the following:

- Each government department was required to address the question of poverty in their statements of strategy prepared under the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI).
- Each department was asked to prepare a baseline document in relation to poverty and social exclusion within its own area of responsibility and present it to the Inter-departmental Policy Committee;
- Poverty Proofing has been implemented on a pilot basis in government departments only. This is a process by which Government departments assess policies and programmes at design stages in relation to the likely impact they will have or have had on poverty and inequalities that are likely to lead to poverty with a view to poverty reduction. Guidelines were drawn up to assist each department in implementing proofing in a consistent way.
- A range of cross-departmental approaches to tackling poverty and social exclusion was developed. Areas covered included literacy for the unemployed and homelessness. A Family

Services Pilot Project was developed by the Department of Social, Community and Family affairs to focus on the integration of public services in conjunction with local communities. An Integrated Services Process (ISP) was also developed to develop more co-ordinated responses by statutory authorities in urban blackspots. It has been piloted in four areas of intense urban disadvantage.

A recent review of NAPS by the Combat Poverty Agency (2000) notes that NAPS and other strategies to address poverty and disadvantage have had an impact on the institutional environment. Government departments, which had hitherto not seen it within their respective remits to deal with social issues are now considering the impact of their policies on people who are poor and socially excluded (2000: 83). However, the Review also states that much remains to be done to ensure that poverty reduction becomes a strategic objective in each government department. Many departments according to the review, “have yet to recognise the cross cutting nature of poverty and to identify the arrangements that would facilitate co-ordination of actions across departments”(2000:83).

3.1.3 Partnership at National Level

The development and consolidation of ‘partnership’ structures at national and local levels, as noted in the previous chapter, has been a marked feature of the Irish policy making environment over the past ten years. This has had important implications for the co-ordination of measures both across government departments and agencies and between different institutional sectors including ‘traditional’ social partners such as employers, trade unions and farmer organisations and, more recently, the community voluntary sector.

The main mechanism for partnership at national level has been the structures developed for the negotiation and implementation of successive ‘national agreements’. The latest agreement is the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF). A distinguishing feature of the PPF and the last national agreement (Partnership 2000) has been the inclusion of the community/voluntary sector in the negotiations for the first time. This sector has been part of the fourth ‘pillar’- the others comprising the traditional social partners, ie government, employers, farmers organisations and trade unions.

The PPF sets out five Operational Frameworks for the implementation of actions in different areas. Framework V concerns the renewal of partnership, setting out the structures for monitoring the agreement and for developing partnership at national level. Important institutional arrangements with respect to the former include:

- A meeting of all parties to the programme, chaired by the Taoiseach, to be convened annually;
- The Central Review Mechanism, representing the four pillars in the partnership process, will identify the appropriate arrangements to oversee the operation frameworks, assess progress and address strategic issues arising;
- Quarterly meetings of the members of the four pillars, under the auspices of the Department of the Taoiseach will be held to review and monitor the operation of the Programme.

In addition to these provisions for the overall implementation of the PPF, different Operational Frameworks also contain specific commitments to improve the co-ordination of measures between various institutional actors. For example, under the Framework III for Social Inclusion and Equality, a key objective will be “to promote cross departmental action and integration to address poverty issues comprehensively, using the SMI [Strategic Management Initiative] process to develop cross-cutting agendas” (2000: 78).

Of particular relevance to this study, Framework IV for Successful Adaptation to Continuing Change contains a commitment to undertake an overall appraisal of active labor market programmes (ALMPs) with the participation of the social partners. The objectives of this appraisal will be:

- To ensure that they contribute to national competitiveness by increasing labor supply, through the integration of unemployed person into the labor force;
- To eliminate any unnecessary anomalies between various interventions and to secure the fullest possible measure of overall synchronisation”;
- To reorient ALMPs, including the training component of Community Employment, so that the collective focus will be on the needs of disadvantaged groups (the long-term unemployed, lone parents, people with disabilities, Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers who have the right to work, and women, dependent spouses and young people who are disadvantaged) with the aim of progression into the open labor market. (2000:117).

3.1.4 Local Development

A number of important attempts have been made over the past ten years to decentralize public services to local levels in some areas, improving the possibilities for integrating and co-ordinating services. Significant in this respect has been the Area Based Partnership Companies established in 38 local areas designated as disadvantaged. Operating within the framework of the Local Development Programme (see Chapter 2) the Partnership Companies promote integrated economic and social development measures targeted at disadvantaged groups such as the long-

term unemployed. They are run by Boards of Management with a tripartite structure involving statutory, social partner and community/voluntary interests. Key players include the local offices of the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, FAS, the Health Boards (regionally organised health authorities which operate within the remit of the Department of Health and Children) and the community/voluntary sectors (including community based services or development groups).

Other important partnership arrangements, which like the Area Based Partnerships have been developed in the context of national programmes, include local LEADER groups which are funded through the LEADER Programme nationally, and local Drugs Task Forces, operating under the National Drug Strategy Team.

Partnerships at local level are limited in scope however, both geographically and in terms of the policy and service areas they cover. They also sit within a national policy context whereby Local Authorities have a limited role in the provision of social services and no role with respect to employment support measures. The need to strengthen the democratic base of the Local Authorities and widen their remits so as to improve overall co-ordination of services and their responsiveness to local condition has been recognised by government. The government has initiated a reform of local government under which the local authorities are to have an enhanced role in strategic economic and social planning. A key development in this reform process has been the establishment, in early 2000, of County/City Development Boards (CDBs) which bring together local government, local development (such as the Areas Based Partnerships), the state agencies active at local level and the social partners. The Boards have two main functions:

To increase co-operation between members, including enhanced information flow;

- To work on an agreed county/city strategy on economic, social and cultural development which is to be place by 2002.

The CDBs will be supported by new Directors of Community and Enterprise who have recently been appointed in the 34 County/City councils.

3.1.5 Structural Fund Spending

The expenditure of EU Structural Funds in Ireland has been an important impetus for inter-agency co-operation¹³.

The need for inter-agency co-ordination in the implementation of measures was reflected in the structures developed for the development and monitoring of measures within the Community Support Framework 1994-1999 (CSF). An overall CSF Monitoring Committee and monitoring committees for each operational programme within it were established, involving relevant institutional actors, to monitor progress and ensure the maximum and most effective co-ordination of measures.

The structures developed for implementing and monitoring the CSF were also influenced by, and in turn have helped strengthen, the development of social partnership. Compared to previous frameworks for Structural Fund spending, social partners, including the community voluntary sector, were given a much stronger role in the structures for monitoring and implementation. They were represented on the CSF Monitoring Committee and on monitoring committees for individual operational programmes. The Operational Programme for Local, Urban and Rural Development played an important role in developing partnership at local level through funding provided for the Local area Based Partnership Companies. Community Initiative such as the LEADER programme also played a role in promoting partnerships for the promotion of economic and social development in rural areas

3.2. Levels of Coordination of Active Welfare and Employment Policies

Introduction

As outlined in the previous sections, key active welfare and employment measures directed at minimum income recipients have largely been developed and implemented separately by a range of government departments and state agencies – the most important being the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) and FAS. The need for greater co-ordination of policies and schemes so as to increase their effectiveness and avoid duplication has consistently

¹³ The Community Support Framework for Ireland (CSF 1994-1999), agreed by the Irish Government and the EU Commission, sets out the objectives and priorities for the expenditure of 5.62 billion ECU from the four structural funds: ERDF, ESF, FEOGA and the FIFG. Four principal priorities: the productive sector; economic infrastructure; human resources; and local urban and rural development. These four priorities translated into nine sectoral or thematic Operational Programmes (OPs), each of which was administered nationally under a lead government department. (the next round of structural fund spending is currently being negotiated with the submission by the Government of the National Development Plan 2000-2006).

been noted by various commentators and acknowledged by government in a range of policy documents, including the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*.

Key developments in co-ordination at different levels are outlined in the following sections.

3.2.1 Horizontal Co-ordination at National Level

a. Government and the Partnership Agreement

At a broad policy making level, an important horizontal mechanism for the co-ordination of active welfare and employment policies at national level has been the Strategy Group for Employment and Unemployment (SGEU). The Group was established by Government in 1994 as a means of co-ordinating policies to promote employment and address unemployment. The Group has engaged in a range of actions including an examination of labor market activation policies and their inter relationship with control issues in relation to social welfare benefits. It also produces regular reports for government on the implementation of labor market schemes.

The SGEU is chaired by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment and includes representatives from other key departments (including the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs) as well as social partners. The secretariat for the Group is provided by the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), which has a major co-ordination role in the public service, being responsible for social partnership and the implementation of the Strategic Management Initiative.

The SGEU has a role in ensuring that the commitments contained in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) are acted upon. This will include the commitment under the PPF, as referred to in the previous section, to an overall appraisal of labor market programs (ALMPs) which will aim to, *inter alia*, eliminate any unnecessary anomalies between various interventions and to secure the fullest possible measure of overall synchronization. (Government of Ireland, 2000: 117).

The PPF itself provides an important impetus for the co-ordination of measures. Co-ordination mechanisms established to act on commitments within the Programme include:

- A Standing Committee on the Labor Market, chaired by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and including representatives from other departments and the social partners. This Committee is currently looking at essential services for the long-term unemployed including Community Employment;
- A Task Force on Lifelong Learning has been established which aims to develop specific initiatives to upgrade the skills of workers in low paid sectors and those facing the challenge of rapid technological change.

- A Special Task Team on Apprenticeships to respond to gaps in provision in this area.

Detailed progress reports will be produced by each of these structures and overall progress will be reviewed by the Plenary meetings of the PPF held each year and chaired by the Taoiseach.

The SGEU has a role in ensuring that progress is made in implementing the measures emerging from these different action groups.

b. Employment Action Plan

The Employment Action Plan (EAP) is prepared annually and initiated with the agreement of the EU Council of Ministers of Employment on the Employment Guidelines for the coming year. A draft Plan is initially developed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and then sent to various government departments and agencies for comments and feedback. It is also distributed to social partner representatives at national level including employers, trade unions, and the 'community/voluntary sector' Pillar of the PPF.

In addition to this consultation, the work of the Standing Committee on the Labor Market referred to above, has, according to key personnel interviewed in the course of this research, provided an important input into the policy areas and associated programmes contained in the EAP for 2000.

c. FAS, DSCFA and the Implementation of the Employment Action Plan **Memorandum of Understanding**

In order to implement the provisions of the Employment Action Plan in (EAP) in 1998, particularly Guidelines 1 and 2, it was clear that closer co-operation between FAS and the DSCFA in relation to individual clients would be required. This requirement provided an important impetus for the Memorandum of Understanding between FAS and the DSCFA at national level, which was agreed and signed by both organisations in 1998. However, the Memorandum does not only cover the EAP. It is designed to build on the increasing levels of co-operation already achieved between both organisations, particularly at local level through structures such as the Local Area Based Partnership companies. It is also fair to say the Memorandum is designed to 'iron out' some of the tensions that have on occasion arisen in terms of the precise remit of both organisations with regard to active labor market measures.

In line with these, a key objective of the Memorandum is to:

“secure improvements in inter-organisation liaison and co-operation at central, regional and local levels, including co-location of services and sharing of other facilities to the maximum possible extent, and in the exchange of information between them relevant to the business aims and objectives of both organisations”.

In meeting this objective, the Memorandum agrees to the development of a joint programme covering a number of specific areas set out in a series of 'protocols'. These protocols cover areas such as: data and information exchange; IT system development and compatibility; Youth; long-term unemployed; activation measures; access to FAS schemes; control of abuse; and Community Employment.

The Memorandum provides for the appointment of a Co-ordinating Group under the joint chair of DSCFA Social Welfare Services and FAS, to monitor at national level the implementation of the Memorandum. It also provides for the establishment of Regional Teams chaired by nominees of both organisations.

Co-ordination In Practice

The area of co-operation in which most progress has been made is in the implementation of Guidelines 1 and 2 of the EAP. This, as noted in Chapter 2, involves the systematic referral by the DSCFA of various categories of the unemployed to FAS employment services. Those who do not attend for interview or do not accept an offer of training, employment or other intervention are then referred back to DSCFA where their social welfare payments are reviewed. A key factor facilitating the co-ordination of this process (the operational details of which are described in Chapter 4), has been the development of the EAP computerised Tracking system. This sits on the existing information systems of both organisations and designated staff in both have access to it. The Tracking system allows for the selection at national level of clients for the EAP, the communication of these to local offices and, through the use of a series of codes, for the monitoring of their progression from DSCFA to FAS and from there to employment training or other options. The System also allows for aggregated data on EAP client progress to be fed back to FAS and the DSCFA at national level. This data then facilitates the work of the structures established to co-ordinate the operation of the Plan. These include:

- The EAP Monitoring Committee which is convened each month by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and attended by staff from the DSCFA and FAS. The EAP output figures, compiled and produced by the Labor Market Unit of the DSCFA, are considered by the Committee and progress, anomalies and other matters of concern or interest discussed.
- An informal 'Co-ordinating Group' is convened every three months or as needed and comprises key personnel from FAS and the DSCFA. The 'Group' mainly covers the operational side of the EAP, focusing on administrative and technical issues arising.

The Regional Teams provided for under the Memorandum of Understanding have not yet been established.

d. Local Employment Service

The Department Enterprise, Trade and Employment has overall responsibility for the management of the Local Employment Service (LES) and the distribution of funding to the individual services operating at local level.

Provisions for the co-ordination of this initiative at national level have included the establishment of an Inter-Departmental Advisory Group to oversee the development of the Programme and to advise the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in relation to plans submitted and amounts to be distributed.

A Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) was also established, including representatives of government Departments (including the DSCFA), FAS, Local Area Partnerships, trade unions, employers and voluntary/community representatives. The role envisaged for the PAC was, as noted in the initial review of the LES (Forfas, 1997), a mechanism for feeding the experience of the individual LES's at local level into the national policy debate on long-term unemployment. The PAC has not met very often since the establishment of the LES and has generally been viewed as a mechanism that that is undeveloped and underutilised (Eustace and Clarke 1998).

The structures for the implementation of the LES are now in the process of change. This follows the decision by Government in 1999 to bring together the LES and FAS Employment Service to form the dual stranded National Employment Service. In line with this decision a National Advisory Committee is to be established by FAS comprised of all key stakeholders relevant to the employment service function. This Board will advise FAS on the planning and operation of both strands of the Employment Service at national level.

3.2.2 Horizontal co-ordination at Local Level

a. Local Employment Service

The Local Employment Service (LES) and the wider framework of the Local Area Based Partnerships provides the most structured basis at local level for inter-agency co-ordination around active labor market and employment support measures.

Each of the 25 LES's, as stated in Chapter 2, is managed by a Local Management Committee (LMC). These have the same tripartite structures as the Local Area Based Partnerships, i.e. involving relevant statutory, social partner and community/voluntary sector stakeholders. In most cases the LES's have been established in areas designated as disadvantaged under the Local Development Programme with Local Area Partnership Companies in place. In these cases, the

LES operates under the auspices of the Partnerships (the LMC usually being a sub-Board of the Partnership Board). The Area Action Plan of the Partnership provides the basis for the nature and type of service to be provided in order to ensure the integration of the employment service into the wider local developmental context and to avoid duplication.

The tripartite management structures of the LES at local level is designed to provide a mechanism for delivering on the key objectives of the service. In particular:

- The involvement of key statutory agencies such as FAS, the Vocational Education Committees and the DSCFA, should allow for the circumstances and needs of clients emerging from the one to one mediation service to be translated into mainstream service responses including appropriate training/education services;
- The involvement of the community/voluntary sector, including representatives of the target groups for the service should allow for the needs and circumstances of the target groups (including the barriers faced in accessing employment and relevant services) to be articulated at management level. This should help inform the direction of the service, especially in critical areas such as outreach to the most disadvantaged who may have been reluctant or faced barriers in using existing mainstream services.
- The involvement of social partner representatives, especially employers, should provide a basis for matching training and other services provided to clients with actual labor demand conditions.

The limits to what these structures have been able to achieve has been raised in a number of evaluations and with key personnel interviewed in the course of this research. This is explored in more detail in the next section.

b. FAS, DSCFA and the Employment Action Plan

The level of contact between FAS and the DSCFA at local level has increased significantly with the introduction of the EAP. Most of this contact, which is facilitated through the sharing of data bases (the EAP Tracking system), concerns the referral and placement of clients. Outside the EAP structure however, there are no formal organisational structures at local level, other than the Local Area Partnerships and the LES, that provide a basis for networking and co-operation between these central players in the areas of active welfare and employment supports. The Memorandum of Understanding between FAS and DSCFA is, as noted above, seeking to address this situation. Measures proposed include the establishment of 'Regional Teams', involving personnel from both organisations, to implement the joint programme agreed and the various component 'protocols' at regional and local level.

At the time of writing, these 'Regional Teams' had not yet been established.

Vertical Co-ordination

While considerable headway has been made in the establishment of horizontal co-ordination mechanisms at national and local levels, little progress has yet been made in developing structures that would link these mechanisms vertically. The implications of this are considered in the next section.

3.3 Analysis of Co-ordination in Practice

The following section focuses on some of the key issues emerging from the main co-ordination initiatives described above and the implications for minimum income recipients on the ground. The analysis here is based on discussions held with a range of policy makers at national level and a review of relevant evaluation studies.

3.3.1 Co-ordination at Local Level

As noted, the Local Employment Service (LES) has been one of the most significant approaches to developing a local mechanism for inter-agency co-ordination around services for those most marginalised in labor market terms. The role of the LES is not just to provide new services such as one-to-one vocational guidance counselling, but to influence the provision of mainstream training and other services to ensure that they are accessible and relevant to client needs. While acknowledging the considerable progress made by the LES in this respect, a number of important constraints to the effectiveness of this approach can be identified.

- The bulk of public services remain highly centralised and delivered within a national framework. Many aspects of mainstream active welfare and training/employment support services are consequently not open to change at local level. For example, local DSCFA staff would not have the power to adapt the entry criteria for the Back to Work Allowance if local circumstances required it. As a result, there is a perception that local co-ordination mechanisms have more influence on the 'quantity' rather than the nature of or access criteria for mainstream services or schemes.
- Even in those areas where flexibility on local service provision is possible, the response of local agencies to the needs of LES clients has been uneven. While many examples of effective networking/co-ordination were identified by the NESF in their review of the service, they note that these tended to rely more on local personalities rather than organisational protocol and in some cases various agencies were barely communicating at all (NESF: 2000:91). It has also been noted, that those participating on the management

structures of the LES were not always sufficiently senior to actually effect change within their own organisations.

- The LES model is not necessarily applicable to very rural areas. As noted by the NESF, the logic of the mediation process in the LES, is that the client will proceed to a training or education opportunity or to a job. In remote rural areas however, there is a lack of such opportunities within the geographic reach of the client. In response to this the NESF recommended that one of the first tasks for the new Employment Service Advisory Committee should be the development of an appropriate model for an LES type service in rural area, developed for, example, as part of a broader integrated strategy for rural development.
- The participation of members of the various target groups themselves in the management structures (which is extremely important in ensuring their needs are articulated and translated into appropriate actions) has been uneven. In common with the Area Based Partnerships, there can be a very real problem in involving the most disadvantaged in the overall management structures of the LES. This requires, according to a number of those interviewed, a strong commitment of the part of the LES (in conjunction with the Partnership) to community development, involving building the organisational capacity of local groups of those most disadvantaged in labor market terms.

Another issue emerging is that many people face a range of barriers in accessing training and employment in areas which are not necessarily within the remit of the key institutional actors involved in active welfare and employment support services to respond. This has become more apparent with the rapid growth in employment nationally over the past few years, leaving the most disadvantaged groups and individuals on the Live Register. For example, an analysis by FAS of those judged 'not progression ready' in the EAP process indicates problems such as illness, substance abuse and poor literacy (FAS, 1998). Similar issues have been identified by the NESF Review of the LES, which suggested that the targeting of clients, and the provision of appropriate services, should not be based on Live Register categories such as 'long term unemployed' but on actual distance from the labor market (2000:73). 'Distance' from the labor market includes a range of factors such as: gender; ethnic/cultural background (for example discrimination against members of the Traveller community); transport needs; childcare needs; disabilities; substance abuse; criminal record and so on.

Meeting these varying needs has a number of implications for the LES. In particular, it suggests a need for more active involvement of a wider set of institutional actors in the local co-ordination process (such as health authorities, disability services, drug rehabilitation services and so on)

than has been the case up to this point. Some progress has been made in this respect by individual LES's – in the case of Blanchardstown presented in the next section for example, the LES Management Committee has included representatives of the local Community Drugs Team. However, it has been noted by a number of those interviewed in the course of the research, that progress in this area will require a re-orientation of the LES in general. This could include the involvement of a wider set of institutional actors on the new National Advisory Committee for the dual stranded National Employment Service (for example, the Department of Health and Children) which would help facilitate the participation of the local divisions of these services in the LES structures on the ground.

3.3.2 Co-ordination at National Level and Links to Local Structures

As noted in the previous sections, considerable progress has been made at national level in developing mechanisms for the co-ordination of programmes and policies cutting across the specific functions of Government departments and state agencies. Important with respect to active welfare and employment policies has been the establishment of the Strategy Group on Employment And Unemployment, and the various structures established under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF), including the Standing Committee on the Labor Market. The broader structures established to monitor the implementation of the various provisions of the PPF have, according to a number of policy makers interviewed, been an important impetus to action, as they require government departments and agencies to account for progress to the social partners and other levels of government.

While acknowledging the progress made, there continues to be some concern as to the actual effectiveness of co-ordination mechanisms now in place. There are still, for example, a diversity of active labor market programmes and schemes designed and implemented by different Government departments and state agencies. These, according to one commentator, 'form a complex web of measures in which it is all too easy to get lost'. Despite the existence of new co-ordination mechanisms, it has been noted that considerably more progress needs to be made to weld these different measures and initiatives into a single coherent policy, to rationalise overlapping programmes, to prioritise the most effective programmes and to assign clear overall responsibility for policy (Fitzgerald, 2000:47).

A number of factors would appear to be constraining progress in this area. In particular:

Resourcing the Inter-Agency Co-ordination Process

It is clear, according to a number of policy makers interviewed, that successful inter-agency co-ordination in any area requires more than just regular meetings of key institutional stakeholders, but also ongoing support and resources for the implementation and review of co-ordinated initiatives agreed. This has been referred to in the Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy-NAPS (Combat Poverty Agency 2000) which noted the importance of developing cross departmental units, drawn from but independent of line departments, with the operational capacity to support co-ordinated initiatives that cut across the functions of different departments. While such a unit was established to assist in the implementation of NAPS, the Review recommended further resources including the secondment of staff from a range of departments and the provision of funding for on-going research to provide a more effective basis to support the implementation of the strategy.

This has direct implications for the co-ordination of active welfare and employment policies. There is, for example, no overall operational support unit to assist key co-ordinating bodies, such as the Strategy Group on Employment and Unemployment, to effectively follow through on strategic decisions taken on an ongoing basis. This serves to highlight the need for dedicated resources to be made available for the implementation of inter-agency co-ordination initiatives agreed.

Links between Local and National Level

An important additional constraint on effective co-ordination has been the lack of appropriate vertical co-ordination mechanisms to feed the experience at local level into policy making structures at national level. This is particularly problematic for local initiatives such as the area based Partnerships and the LES, which, although limited in terms of the geographic areas they cover, have been designed to foster and test innovative new approaches at local level which in turn could be mainstreamed and thus have a national impact. The Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) referred to earlier in the context of the LES was established with this function in mind, i.e. to feed experiences on the ground into the national policy making environment. However, as noted by the NESF, the PAC met infrequently and is considered to have been underutilised.

Similar issues apply to the Employment Action Plan. There are currently very limited structures at local or regional level that would allow for staff within or between the various divisions of either the DSCFA or FAS to come together to consider the qualitative or policy issues arising from the process followed to date and to communicate these issues to decision making structures at national level. Thus, while the EAP Monitoring Committee or Co-ordinating Group might be

in a position to consider the policy issues arising, they are primarily relying on the data produced by the EAP Tracking system, which does not allow for any detailed assessment of the reasons for particular outcomes and the policy issues arising as a result.

3.3.3 Links Between the LES and EAP

The level of co-ordination between the LES and the EAP, the main co-ordinated initiatives, has itself been the subject of some concern. There are, as noted by one commentator, complementary strengths to both initiatives which together could be used to provide a more effective and integrated service to those most disadvantaged in labor market terms. In particular:

- The EAP involves a very systematic process of engagement with the unemployed in all areas of the country;
- The LES, while less systematic and more limited in geographic scope, is intended to be a model of in-depth personal engagement with an ethos of voluntary participation. It is also built around local networking/co-ordination structures which provide some basis for the development of services necessary for the progression of clients.

However, a range of difficulties have been noted in terms of integrating the two approaches. The NESF for example, note that Guidelines 1 and 2 of the EAP are, to an extent, popularly perceived as representing a policy emphasis on benefit fraud. This, and the non-voluntary aspect of participation, has led to some the concern among a number of LES managers that involvement with the EAP would destroy the distinct ethos of the LES and undermine the voluntary and confidential nature of the service which it provides. As a result, many LES's ,while taking referrals from the EAP, have been unwilling to participate in the control elements of it and have not provided feedback to FAS on the progress of individuals referred.

In response to this, the NESF recommended a national protocol that is designed to allow the LES to fully engage in the administration of Guidelines 1 and 2 of the EAP in a way that its distinct ethos is actively maintained. This Protocol has now been accepted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment as part of the new arrangements for the development of the service. Key provisions include the requirement for LES to accept 'appropriate referrals' from the EAP. However, in the case where the LES mediation process reaches an end without the client having progressed, or where the mediator considers the client has not seriously engaged with the process, the clients file will be marked 'process complete' and returned to FAS minus any confidential notes. At the beginning of the mediation process the client referred through the EAP will be informed of this reporting requirement, but that other wise the service is confidential.

Other issues arising identified in the NESF Review include the difference in targets groups for both initiatives. As referred to earlier, the EAP has had a strong preventative function and has, in the initial stages at least, concentrated on younger shorter-term unemployed. The LES on the other hand, has, from the very start, concentrated on the most disadvantaged in the labor market, and have delivered the service within the broader Local Area Partnership development plans which are designed to address disadvantage. However, both the LES and the EAP use a centralised data base developed by FAS to assess the progression of their respect clients. Concern was expressed to the NESF that the data base, and the codes used to monitor and evaluate progress, was not an appropriate tool to measure the quality of the service as it did not reflect the process or extent of engagement with the client. Given the different nature of the services and the priority target groups of the LES, it was felt that a direct comparison between the two, particularly on a cost-per-client basis, was not valid (NESF, 2000: 104). In response to this, the NESF recommended, inter alia, that each LES should ensure that financial, operational and service-quality performance indicators are in place appropriate to its aims, objectives and particular client base. (2000: 105).

Chapter 4: Co-ordination in Practice

The following Chapter outlines the results of three case studies undertaken to explore the operation of the Local Employment Service (LES) and the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP)- at local level. The reason for selecting these two programs for case study analysis at this level is that they represent the two most significant examples of inter-agency co-ordination around active welfare employment policy and practice. Given the terms of reference of this study, one draw back in focusing on the EAP is that it is targeted at shorter term rather than long-term unemployed people, the latter being more likely to be in receipt of minimum income payments and more disadvantaged in labor market terms. However, no comparable national program is currently in place in relation to the long-term unemployed, and the EAP provides important lessons on the factors facilitating and constraining effective inter-agency co-ordination and the impact of such co-ordination in meeting the needs of the unemployed. Furthermore, it should be noted that the EAP does include people in receipt of Unemployment Assistance, many of whom (for example, educationally disadvantaged young people) are at risk of progressing to longer term unemployment. The program is also being progressively extended to include people who are unemployed for longer periods.

In line with these points, the purpose of this more detailed case study analysis was to:

- Obtain a fuller picture of how these methods of co-ordination are translated in to local implementation structures;
- Assess how they ultimately impact on minimum income recipients within their own communities.

The selection of case studies on both co-ordination measures was very much determined by nature and extent of analytical work already undertaken. In particular:

- No substantial evaluation has yet been undertaken on the operation of the EAP (nationally or locally). Because of this, it was felt that two case studies was a minimum requirement in order to gain an insight into the operation and impact of this relatively new co-ordination mechanism within the local context. In order for differences in operational environments to be taken onto account, one rural and one urban area were selected for analysis.
- On the other hand, a series of detailed evaluations and reviews have been undertaken on the operation of the Local Employment Service (locally and nationally). Furthermore, a comprehensive evaluation process was ongoing in the particular area selected for this case study (Blanchardstown). All this allowed for a more detailed elaboration around many of the

issues already raised. For example which management and other co-ordination mechanisms proved the most effective in co-ordinating the actions of different stakeholders? What were the implications of various changes in the operational environment (both nationally and locally) for co-ordination?

Case study backgrounds and findings are presented below individually.

4.1 Blanchardstown Local Employment Service (LES)

4.1.1 Case Study Methodology

The case study on Blanchardstown LES was undertaken as part of an overall evaluation of the service undertaken by the researchers in May 2000. The evaluation exercise was being undertaken to review achievements and gaps in the service; with the ultimate intention of informing a Strategic Plan for the next phase of its development. The process involved detailed consultations with a wide range of stakeholders – both internal and external to the service. These included:

- Staff;
- Management committee members (including key statutory agencies);
- Voluntary and community sector groups and organisations;
- Long term unemployed people and representative groups and organisations;
- Employers

To feed into this case study, additional information on the service's institutional context, management and coordination procedures was collected and analysed.

4.1.2 Introduction and Background to the Service

Blanchardstown

Blanchardstown is one of the three new towns on the western fringe of Dublin City identified for growth in the 1972 Dublin County Development Plan. The population has now reached 70,000 from 3000 in the early 1970s.

A key feature of the town has been the development of large local authority housing estates for people on low incomes in particular areas. Growth in private housing has been less significant, although this is now changing with large areas of development land around the town being made available to accommodate the rapid demand for private housing in Dublin.

The areas with the highest concentrations of local authority housing have been characterised by significant levels of disadvantage. Long-term unemployment rates in these areas have been high and although falling, continue to be substantially higher than the national average and the average for Dublin as a whole. The proportion of lone parent households has also been very high – for example 29% of total households in Mulhuddart, one of the most disadvantaged areas in Blanchardstown, are headed by a lone parent compared to 10% of households nationally.

The provision of basic services in the most disadvantaged areas of the town have been limited, and despite considerable investment in the town over the past few years (including the development of a large 'town centre' shopping complex) more local area provision remains limited.

Establishment and Aims of the LES

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment approved Blanchardstown for a Local Employment Service in February 1997. Approval was granted following a submission by Blanchardstown Area Partnership (BAP)¹⁴ of its Local Development Plan (1996-2000) that set out a range of proposals to tackle disadvantage in the area. On the basis of this plan, BAP was given the remit of developing and implementing a Local Employment Service (LES) for the area. The approach taken by BAP was to develop the LES as an integral element of its Local Development Plan.

In line with this approach, BAP, upon approval from the Department, undertook a research and consultation process to develop a specific action plan for the development of the LES. The plan, which was published in May 1997, set out detailed proposals for the establishment of the LES to be named Blanchardstown Local Employment Service (LES/JOBLINK).

The principal aims set out for the service were:

- To provide the gateway, or access point, to the full range of opportunities, which should be available to enable a long-term unemployed person to return to work or training. These services to include guidance, training, education and employment supports made locally.
- To provide a professional placement service to match users to suitable training, education and employment opportunities while servicing the needs of local employers.
- To utilise and influence statutory agencies to provide innovative programmes and service delivery to the long-term unemployed.
- To complement the existing employment, enterprise and social inclusion measures undertaken by Blanchardstown Area Partnership.

Based on Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment guidelines and key socio-demographic information collected through the planning process, stated target groups for LES/JOBLINK included young unemployed and over 25s long-term unemployed. The plan also

¹⁴ BAP is one of the 38 Area based Partnership Companies funded under the Local Development Programme.

proposed targeting particularly marginalised groups including lone parents, Travellers, dependent spouses of unemployed people, ex-substance mis-users and ex-offenders.

Outline of Service

LES/JOBLINK was established in November 1997 and the various component services put in place soon after. Key services provided have included:

- A mediation and support service for clients provided through offices (Contact Points) based in the main disadvantaged areas of Blanchardstown: Blakestown, Corduff, Mulhuddart and Mountview. A fifth Contact Point was opened in Huntstown in early 2000. Four of the Contact Points are located in resource centres established by groups representing the disadvantaged communities and funded through initiatives such as the Community Development Programme.
- Service to employers operated from the LES head office based in BAP premises in Blanchardstown village.
- The development of specialised training courses (including pre-training initiatives) for LES clients.
- Liaison and networking with service providers in the Blanchardstown area to enhance their accessibility and relevance to the needs of LES clients.

Staffing

There is currently sixteen staff working in all. These are:

- The Co-ordinator, who has overall day to day responsibility for the management and co-ordination of the service (based in BAP premises).
- Six mediators and five support staff based in Contact Points located in Blakestown, Corduff, Mountview, Mulhuddart and Huntstown. Core mediation tasks, based on one to one contact with clients, include:
 - Exploration of client's circumstances, needs and expectations;
 - Development and agreement of career path;
 - Contact or negotiation with service providers (eg training, education etc.) to place the client;
 - Curriculum vitae preparation;
 - Preparation of clients for interviews;
 - Contact or negotiation with employers;
 - Aftercare and monitoring of client placed in training, employment etc.

Mediators also engage in outreach to the various target groups for the service (for example, through dissemination of information about the service locally or through active networking with community groups).

- The Employment Liaison Officer, with responsibility for promoting the service to employers and placing clients in employment who have been referred by the mediators;
- Guidance Counsellor, who runs a range of course for groups of clients on various skills necessary for accessing employment.
- Administrator of the service and receptionist based in the BAP central office in Blanchardstown village;
- A Jobsclub Facilitator. This scheme, funded by FAS provides a numbers of job skills to clients in a group setting.

One important staff role, which is no longer in place, was that of Special Guidance and Benefits Officer. This was a person seconded from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs who advised LES/JOBLINK clients on social welfare and employment support benefits.

Management

LES/JOBLINK is managed by a Board of Management comprised of representatives of a range of statutory and voluntary community sector interests. The Board of the LES is a sub-Board to that of BAP. As such, it has the power to make recommendations to the BAP Board for ratification.

There are currently twelve Board members representing the following:

- FAS Employment Services (2 members, one representing FAS locally, the other FAS at regional level);
- Blanchardstown Area Partnership (2 staff members and 2 members of the Partnership Board);
- Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (1 member);
- Blanchardstown Youth Service (1 member);
- County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (1 member who is also chair since late 1999);
- Unemployment Action Group (2 members who represent unemployed people in the area);
- Community Drugs Team (1 member).

The Management has responsibility for planning and review.

In 1999, the Board established four sub-groups on:

- Management and structures;
- Staff;
- Finance;
- Training and progression

Resources

LES/JOBLINK is core funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. BAP also contribute resources to the service with direct financial allocations, the provision of a range of support services including use of office and training space and in personnel time (the Manager of BAP for example has played an important role in supporting the planning and operations of the service).

Additional resources were also secured from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment since the establishment of the service to assist in the implementation of the Fast Track to Information Technology Programme (FIT) in the Blanchardstown area. This is a training initiative designed to enable long-term unemployed people in the Dublin area to develop skills to enter information technology industries.

4.1.3 Institutional Context

Labor Market

Latest estimates indicate that unemployment in Blanchardstown has fallen by more than half from its 1996 level of 18% to a level of between 7% and 9% in 2000 (Lynch, 2000). This is well above the national average of 4.9% and greater even more than the Dublin average of 4%. Rates of long-term unemployment have traditionally been high in Blanchardstown, and particularly high in areas with large concentrations of local authority housing. These include areas where LES/JOBLINK has established a presence through its Contact Points.

Key Agencies

The local authority for the Blanchardstown is Fingal County Council, one of the four local authorities for the Dublin region. In common with other local authorities, the principal function of the authority has been the area of physical infrastructure including housing, road maintenance etc. To date the authority has not played any significant direct role with respect to employment policy. The establishment of the County Development Board however, (as noted in Chapter 3) is likely to change this situation.

The key statutory players in Blanchardstown with respect to active labor market measures are, as in other areas, FAS and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA). FAS Employment Services has a 'walk-in' placement service based in Blanchardstown village. FAS Community Services funds a range of initiatives in the area – Community Employment schemes being the most important. The DSCFA office, which delivers the range of social welfare schemes described in Chapter 1, is based outside the area.

Other relevant statutory actors in the area include:

- The County Dublin Vocational Committee (CDVEC) - operating under the remit of the Department of Education and Science. The CDVEC has recently opened an adult education centre in Blanchardstown village.
- Blanchardstown Youth Services, which provides a range of services directed at disadvantaged youth.

Each of these agencies have been represented on the board of BAP and, in partnership with the community/voluntary sector, have been involved in a various measures to address poverty and disadvantage in the Blanchardstown area. They are also, as noted above, represented on the Board of Management of the LES.

4.1.4 Outputs

Clients

Since its establishment in late 1997, LES JOBLINK service has had 1,272 registered clients up to May 2000. Thirty one per cent of clients were long-term unemployed, 27% lone parents, 19% were young unemployed and 9% were dependent spouses. Only 2% of total clients were short – term unemployed.

From the data-base used by the LES (the FAS Central database): the following outcomes could be discerned:

- 33% had been placed in employment;
- 42% were deemed client active, in other words at some stage of ‘progression’, mainly on some form of training course including Community Employment.
- 8% of total clients had dropped out of the service or were suspended from it. Suspension usually resulted from consistent non-compliance by the client (for example, consistently failing to turn up for mediation sessions or training services to which they might have been referred).
- 3% of clients were ‘on hold’ - usually because they were currently unavailable for job search or training, for example due to pregnancy - but who were still ‘on the books’ and would be re-contacted by the mediator at an agreed date.

Shorter-term unemployed had a higher job placement ratio, significantly above lone parents who had the lowest at 27%. However, three times more lone parents than any other group were referred to training, particularly Community Employment (CE). According to key personnel interviewed, lone parents are more likely to be interested in Community Employment schemes because of childcare considerations (CE has flexible hours). Childcare commitments (and lack of

childcare services) were also considered to be major barriers to employment for lone parents and most likely explain the considerably lower rate of job placement.

Younger unemployed people and those who are long-term unemployed had the highest drop out rates from the service.

Employer Linkages

A considerable amount of time was spent by the Employer Liaison Officer and the Co-ordinator in promoting the service to employers. Ongoing linkages with employers were considered important in allowing the LES to be kept up to date on trends in labor demand that could in turn help the service in influencing the direction and nature of training responses for their clients. Examples of activities undertaken in relation to these functions included

- Chamber of Commerce –Business Link. This was part funded by the LES and Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce. The objective of the day was to introduce small traders in the area to large companies including multinationals.
- Trade/Recruitment Fair. The ‘Fair’ was launched to give an opportunity for ‘start-up’ companies supported by BAP to promote their businesses to other companies in the area. The services of the LES were also promoted and follow-up contacts made to place LES clients.
- To facilitate employers without appropriate facilities in the area, the LES Employment Liaison Officer worked with Human Resource managers of a number of companies to set up recruitment facilities in different locations in the area. Leaflets were distributed in the area and LES mediators encouraged clients to attend.
- The development of a comprehensive data base on more than 100 employers including activities engaged in, key contacts and employment and skill needs.

Influencing Services for the Progression of Clients

A significant issue for LES/JOBLINK has been the lack of local services necessary for the progression of clients to employment. Blanchardstown for example, does not have a FAS training centre and clients often have to move outside the area to access to the training courses they need. Of even more significance however, is the fact that many clients are not eligible or lack the capacity for mainstream training. Barriers to training take-up identified through the mediation process include factors such as disability (including mental health problems), literacy/numeracy problems, low levels of educational attainment, drug use, low self esteem and discouragement (particularly for older unemployed men), discrimination (for example, in relation to Travellers), and lack of childcare provision.

To influence the development of services in response to these gaps, LES/JOBLINK has actively networked with relevant agencies to influence the development to services and other supports for LES clients. Real advances were made with regard to the following:

- The establishment of a strong working relationship between the LES and FAS Employment Services locally involving sharing of data bases and mutual support and referral;
- The development of new services by the County Dublin Vocational Education committee (CDVEC) to provide basic skills training for LES clients;
- The secondment by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs to the LES of a person to provide advice and guidance on social welfare and employment support payments (although the post was terminated following the redeployment of this person by the Department this year);
- Agreement in principle by FAS to increase access by LES clients in Blanchardstown to the nearest FAS Training Centre (in Cabra, North of Dublin City Centre).
- The development of closer linkages around Community Employment (CE) through participation by the LES on the CE Framework Committee, which was set up to co-ordinate CE projects in the area.

Work has also been undertaken to influence policy and programmes at national level. The LES Co-ordinator actively participates in national LES Co-ordinator Network meetings (held once a month) and is a member of the Co-ordinator Network Policy Advisory Group. She is also a member of Dublin Employment Pact Focus Group¹⁵. Outputs from this participation have included key policy oriented research reports such as *Solving Unemployment In Dublin* (Fitzgerald, 2000) undertaken for the Dublin Employment Pact (which documented best practice emerging from LES's around Dublin) and *Combating Prejudice against the Unemployed* (Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed, 1999).

As well as influencing local and national service development, LES/JOBLINK, in conjunction with BAP, has developed and delivered a number of training programmes tailored to the needs of clients. These have largely been 'pre-training' courses, covering basic skills and personal development. The main interventions in this respect have been:

¹⁵This is a sub-group of the Dublin Employment Pact, one of the four Territorial Employment Pacts established in Ireland. The Dublin Employment Pact has adopted a policy influencing role around unemployment in the region and

- The Core Skills Programme, that aims to develop skills used in all occupations and in everyday life, such as communications, teamwork, numeracy, literacy and information technology. The course has formed the model for the development of similar initiatives by FAS on a pilot basis throughout the state entitled the Foundation Skills Programme. The course has also been included as an example of local innovation in the Dublin Employment Pact report *Solving Long-term Unemployment in Dublin* (Fitzgerald, 2000).
- In 1999, LES/JOBLINK was responsible for the recruitment of participants for the Fast Track to Information Technology Programme (FIT) in the Blanchardstown area. This is a training initiative designed to enable long-term unemployed people in the Dublin area to develop skills to enter information technology industries. FAS was responsible for the training elements of the course and the CDVEC delivered core skills modules. A number of employers in the area were also involved and provided work experience placements.
- To meet the needs of those people who did not meet the assessment criteria for participation on the FIT Programme, the LES organised a Pre-FIT Programme incorporating core skills.

4.1.5 Impact on Minimum Income Recipients

The impact of LES/JOBLINK on minimum income recipients in the Blanchardstown area has to be assessed with reference to two of its overriding objectives. These are:

- *Outreach.* The LES aims to reach the most excluded and disadvantaged in labor market terms who have been discouraged (due to a range of barriers) from approaching mainstream training services or from engaging in job search. Key aspects of this outreach function have included the promotion of the non -statutory ‘community based’ ethos of the LES and the location of ‘contact points’ to the service in the most disadvantaged areas of Blanchardstown.
- *Combating Disadvantage.* The LES is intended to complement the work of BAP in addressing disadvantage in the area. The impact of the service on its target groups therefore, must be judged not just in terms of increasing their capacity to access employment, but increasing their capacity to obtain employment that actually addresses the disadvantage they face.

Measuring the impact of the service with respect to these key objectives is considered in more detail as follows.

Outreach

Given that it has been in existence for a relatively short period of time, considerable progress has been made by LES/JOBLINK in engaging with the various target groups for the service. As

stated above, between early 1998 and May 2000, the service has had 1,272 registered clients. Of these:

- 31% were long-termed unemployed;
- 27% were lone parents;
- 19% were young unemployed;
- 9% were dependent spouses of the unemployed;
- 2% were short –term unemployed.

A further 8% were designated ‘other’, which included, according to LES staff interviewed, Travellers and, increasingly non-Irish nationals (mainly people with refugee status).

While acknowledging the advances made, the *Barriers to Employment Report 1999* suggests that further work will be necessary to ensure that the service is connecting with the most disadvantaged and most excluded from the labor force. The report was commissioned by the LES and is based on a survey of 130 long-term unemployed people in the area. Twenty one per cent of respondents had not used any local employment/training support service and of those who did, 18% had used the services of the LES (1999:21).

A significant number of respondents in the *Barriers to Employment* report stated that finance and having to live on social welfare payments were the major stresses associated with being unemployed. This in turn acted as a strong disincentive to accessing training or employment options. While the vast majority of respondents wanted to work, there was a strong anxiety about making a bad financial situation worse (or even critical) if take-up of employment or training options led to a reduction in net income (taking basic social welfare and loss of secondary benefits such as medical cards into account). The report notes however, that many people were not fully informed of the financial supports, allowances and income thresholds that are in place in relation to taking up employment or accessing training courses. It went on to recommend the need for more focused and co-ordinated information provision on the part of key agencies such as DSCFA and FAS in relation to what is on offer.

The positive effects of such provision have been demonstrated in the case of the LES. A point mentioned by all beneficiaries in the course of the evaluation was the value of the Special Advice and Benefits Officer, seconded by DSCFA to the service. This person was able, in a very friendly setting (though visits to each of the Contact Points), to provide accurate and up to date information to LES clients on the exact financial implications of job or training options, thus breaking down one of the principal barriers of access.

Impact of Job Placement

Thirty three per cent of LES clients have been placed in employment since the beginning of 1998. However, the extent to which this employment actually addresses disadvantage will be determined by a number of factors including:

- Pay: does the employment accessed allow for an income above that available from various social welfare payments.
- Security of the job or opportunities for advancement.

At present, no figures were available on pay levels among job placed clients. Assessing factors such as job security or in-work progression opportunities will only be possible in the longer term and in order to do so will require the LES to have follow-up contact with people who might have left the service for some time. The importance of this follow-up contact is especially important given some of the issues identified by stakeholders in the service. For example, it has been noted that increased job opportunities has actually discouraged young people from staying on in school for higher qualifications or from accessing training courses. Some of the jobs obtained, however, can be low paid, insecure and hold out few prospects for advancement. With little or no formal qualifications, these young people could be stuck in low paid employment and have a higher risk of unemployment in the long-term. A high rate of job placement among such young people therefore could in fact be a negative rather than a positive indication of progress if factors such as pay levels and prospects for advancement are not taken into account.

Impact of Mediation and Training

Given the relative newness of the LES and the fact that many clients are still in progression, the precise impact of specific training and education courses accessed through the service in moving people into employment is difficult to assess in the short -term. For example, it is difficult to make any judgement at this stage on the impact of the FIT Programme until those involved have completed their courses and engaged in job search in the IT sector. For those who have completed Pre-FIT courses, indicators of progression in the short term will relate to the numbers actually qualifying for FIT rather than any immediate entry into employment.

In planning for its next phase of development, the service has recognised the need to develop more comprehensive indicators of 'progression' for those who might need a range of services before employment is possible and hence might be clients of the LES for some time. For example, the impact of a literacy programme, accessed through the LES, might be judged by the numbers who are then able to access mainstream training services as a result.

Overall impact of the Service

The impact indicators discussed above relate to the constituent functions of the service and the circumstances of the particular target groups. Only if these are applied consistently over a period of time will the cumulative impact of the service be apparent in Blanchardstown as a whole. Given the newness of the service (and that that clients are either in progression or else have only recently been placed in employment) it is not likely that such a cumulative impact can be assessed at general community level for some time (perhaps another two years). Nevertheless, the fact that the LES has succeeded in attracting 1,272 clients in a relatively short period suggests that the potential impact of the service in the future could be considerable.

The development of realistic impact indicators based on the actual needs and circumstances of clients will be particularly important if (as noted by the NESF in their recent review of the LES) undue comparisons between the impact of the LES and other employment placement services are to be avoided. The LES is faced with an increasing proportion of more difficult to place clients requiring increasing resources, including mediator time. Actual information on the particular developmental issues clients face and on longer-term progression, will be important in establishing the rationale for more 'resource intensive' approaches. While more streamlined approaches to job placement may on first analysis appear more cost effective, they may be more costly in the long-run if, as noted in the case of young people, the underlying causes of labor market disadvantage are not tackled.

4.1.6 Key Findings and Conclusions

a. Factors Facilitating or Helping Success

Management

Areas of management identified by stakeholders as facilitating the work of the LES included:

- Good representation on the Board of Management of relevant agencies and increasing representation of unemployed people themselves. The involvement of the latter was considered very important and it was hoped that the Board would provide a more effective forum for their input in the future;
- The existence of a clear strategy/plan in advance, and an experienced Co-ordinator and staff who put the service in place in a relatively short period of time;
- Good participation of most Board members, which allowed for some 'problem solving' and the introduction of new ideas;
- Involvement of new areas of expertise relevant to clients groups (Community Drugs Team);

- Use of sub-groups since 1999, involving Board members and LES staff has facilitated decision making and ‘problem solving’. It has also provided an opportunity for staff to have an input at Board level and to inform Board members of the day to day difficulties or opportunities arising within their work.

The development of the LES within the broader framework of Blanchardstown Area Partnership (BAP) was also considered an extremely important factor in facilitating the speedy establishment and effective operation of the service. As noted, the LES has been successful in establishing a service that has incorporated active outreach and innovative new services. Much of this work, (including approaches to employers and key statutory agencies), has been directly facilitated by the networks, linkages and opportunities for liaison created by BAP.

Broader Facilitating Factors

In addition to participating in the management structures for the service, a number of agencies contributed a range of services which have been important to the effectiveness of the LES. In particular:

- FAS Employment Services in Blanchardstown village were supportive to LES staff in terms of referral and sharing of information on training and employment options;
- The contribution of the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs in seconding a staff member for the post of Special Advice and Benefits Officer was also mentioned by most of those interviewed as being an extremely important input into the work of the LES. The work of this person was felt to break down one of the key barriers people faced in accessing training or employment, i.e. fear about the income/ benefit implications of taking up various training options;
- The commitment and proactive involvement of CDVEC Adult Education Organiser, which has led to the development of services directly relevant to the needs of LES clients.
- The development of the FIT Programme in the Dublin region has provided an opportunity for Blanchardstown to address the lack of targeted interventions to link the long-term unemployed to higher skilled occupations

More general factors facilitating the success of the LES have included:

- The significant increases in employment opportunities in the Blanchardstown area as a whole. This has been particularly important, as due to labor shortages, employers have been more willing to engage with the LES in relation to clients who might not have been considered for employment before.

- The work of a wide range of community groups in the Blanchardstown which have been providing a range of services in areas of particular disadvantage. Without the existence of these groups it would not have been possible to have established Contact Points in the different locations so quickly. The credibility of these services among the target groups has contributed significantly to the LES's outreach capacity, allowing it to engage with clients that might have been reluctant to access mainstream employment support services.

b. Factors Blocking, or Acting as Barriers to, Success Management

Management issues considered by stakeholders to have constrained the effective operation of the LES included the following.

- The absence of representation of expertise in some areas key to service. A particular gap mentioned in this respect was the lack of an employer representative on the Board. Other gaps identified included representatives from health services and Traveller groups.
- Sub-groups have not worked as effectively as they could. If they are to work they will need the necessary commitment in time and organisation.
- New Board members were not always not given sufficient 'orientation' which can make it difficult to participate. This affected unemployed representatives in particular, who were often unsure about other Board members names and their functions within their respective organisation/agency. Board consequently missing out on their views and insights into the situation 'on the ground'.
- Some Board members felt that statutory agency representatives did not have the power to effect changes in their own organisations which restricted the capacity for influencing service development in the area.
- Some members felt that the agenda of Board meetings tended to be restricted and frequently focused on day to day management issues, for example new staffing etc. this was felt to limit the time available for discussion of new ideas.

Other Internal Barriers

The LES uses the FAS Central Data Base (CDB) for recording the registration and progression of clients (LES has its own access codes to its own clients). While the value of this contribution is acknowledged by the LES, there are limitations on the use of this database for on-going monitoring and evaluation of client progress. In particular, it is difficult to extract information that would allow for an assessment of clients in terms of:

- Precise outcomes in terms of numbers in mediation and on training and education courses. Also, the type of training course involved (eg CE etc.).
- How long they been registered, and the length of time in mediation or on the training course to which they have been referred.
- How many services have they accessed through the LES and the length of time on each;
- Changes in the absolute number and relative composition of the LES target groups over a 12 month period - what was in May 1999 compared to May 2000?

At a broader level, no provision is made for systematic recording of development issues arising for clients eg, health, drug use, literacy, discrimination (a significant issue for Travellers). Information on these issues was felt to be particularly important by Board members. Having such statistics it was felt would allow for more effective lobbying for relevant service responses to the emerging needs of clients.

Barriers More Generally - Services

The most significant barrier to progression of LES clients identified in the course of the evaluation has been the lack of sufficient pre-training, training and education options in the area. The lack of a FAS Training Centre in Blanchardstown was frequently mentioned. Other areas mentioned however, included lack of childcare facilities, limited provision for youth and insufficient provision of courses that meet the needs of those currently not qualifying for, or without the capacity to access, mainstream education or training.

These gaps have proved very difficult for LES mediators who are increasingly faced with clients with a range of problems without appropriate services to which they can be referred. As outlined already, the LES has responded by developing various courses itself. There are problems in doing this however,

- Firstly, establishing courses diverts mediators away from their core mediation role;
- Secondly, the LES has limited resources with which to establish or run training services on its own. For example, while funding was obtained for running the FIT programme, resources for Pre-FIT had to be met from the Mediators Fund¹⁶.

This problem raises important issues for the co-ordination of actions by the main service providers. While there have been some evidence of new service responses (for example, in the

¹⁶. Every LES is entitled to additional funds for mediators to be used for clients at their discretion (can include provision for transport or other expenses incurred by clients). The funds come from the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment at a rate of £2000 per year for each mediator in an LES.

area of literacy by CDVEC), it is hoped that in the future, the Board of Management will provide a more effective mechanism for ensuring that training and other services are adapted, extended or developed to meet the emerging needs of LES clients.

Barriers More Generally – Employers

Given the huge increase in employment in Blanchardstown, the challenge for the LES is not necessarily about accessing employment per se but rather the fact that many clients are not yet ready or equipped to enter employment.

These problems illustrate a key dilemma for the LES. On the one hand it must build its reputation among employers as a credible job placement agency. On the other hand, it is faced with an increasingly less 'job ready' client base, requiring a range of training and other interventions before employment can feasibly be obtained.

In addition to developing more appropriate service responses, these issues also indicate the importance of developing more structured linkages between the LES and employers that might allow for:

- A greater awareness among employers of the barriers faced by unemployed people in accessing jobs. Given the significant demands for labor in the area, employers might be encouraged collectively (for example through the Chamber of Commerce) to address some of these barriers for example, lobbying for more extensive funding of childcare facilities, developing joint approaches around training provision etc..
- A greater awareness in the LES of the needs and expectations of employers which could inform the approach of LES and other key agencies (including FAS) in terms of employment support and longer-term service development.

Developing these linkages with employers is not easy however. As with other LES's it has been difficult to get employers represented on the Board of LES/JOBLINK. However, employers in Blanchardstown have noted significant labor shortages in a range of areas and there is some evidence that they are more willing to connect with agencies, such as the LES, around longer-term training initiatives. This is a very positive environment for the LES to engage with employers around the needs of client who are distant from the labor market in the short-term.

However, it should also be noted, according to people interviewed in the course of the evaluation, that for some clients, employment may never be a feasible option. In other words, for some clients the only feasible outcomes may be supported or 'sheltered employment' options. This has important implications for new social economy initiatives announced by Government in the context of the National Development Plan (see Chapter 2).

4.1.7 Ideas for Improvement

LES/JOBLINK is now engaged a planning process for the next phase of its development (2000-2003). The planning process aims to build on the considerable progress already made and to address the gaps identified in the evaluation. Suggested areas of action in this respect have included:

- *Outreach*: In order to enhance outreach to the most disadvantaged groups in the area, it has been considered important to develop a post of ‘outreach co-ordinator’ with responsibility for facilitating and developing outreach strategies to the different local communities. A key aspect of outreach work will be to ensure more effective targeting of services at those most excluded from the labor market including the long-term unemployed and other marginalised groups.
- *Enhancing Service Development*: The LES is to seek additional resources to influence the development and co-ordination of external services necessary for the progression of clients – one of the most significant gaps identified in the evaluation. To assist in this function, more use is to be made of the Board, in particular, the establishment of action sub-groups at LES Board level (involving all relevant agencies and other stakeholders) organised around key development themes e.g. improvement of literacy services, services for young people etc.
- *Linkages with Employers*. A strategy is being developed involving employers and relevant training agencies to establish training and pre-training paths appropriate to the circumstances of LES clients (for example those who do not have the qualifications for mainstream training provision) and linked to the actual skills needs of employers. This will build on successful initiatives such as the Fast Track to Information Technology programme (FIT) (which was delivered jointly with FAS , the CDVEC and in co-operation with a number of local employers) and the PreFIT course designed to progress those not immediately qualifying for FIT.
- *Information Provision*: Given its importance the LES is seeking to restore the post of Benefits Guidance Officer. An important aspect of success in this respect was that the Officer was on secondment from DSCFA and thus had a good working knowledge of the social welfare system and key personnel within it. It is considered important that the new officer would have similar familiarity and knowledge of the system.

4.2 Employment Action Plan Cork City

4.2.1 Methodology and Approach to the Case Study

The case study on the operation of the Employment Action Plan (EAP) in Cork City is based on a series of interviews held with:

- Management and staff involved in the implementation of the EAP in FAS South West regional office (covering the counties of Cork and Kerry);
- Members of staff in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) regional office;
- Members of staff in the DSCFA local office in Cork City directly involved in the implementation of the NEAP;
- Representatives of community and partnership sector including the Manager of Cork City Local Employment Service.

4.2.2 Cork City and Institutional Context

Cork City

Cork City is the second largest city in Ireland with a population of approximately 127,500 people. In common with other areas the city has seen a rapid growth in employment opportunities. A number of areas in the city are characterised by high levels of disadvantaged including relatively high levels of unemployment and long-term unemployment. These include Knocknaheny, Mahon and Tohair.

Institutional Context

As in other areas, the key institutional actors in Cork in relation to active labor market policies and programmes are the DSCFA and FAS. The regional offices for both (taking in Cork County and county Kerry) are both based in Cork city. The DSCFA also has a local presence in the city.

The NEAP is administered jointly by the Regional FÁS Office and by the Local Social Welfare office of the DSCFA.

Other key actors, include the regionally based Vocational Education Committee. There is also a Local Area Partnership Company (covering the most disadvantaged areas) and a Local Employment Service. As in other areas, the relevant local authority, Cork Corporation, has had a very limited and indirect role in relation to employment and social welfare policies and programmes. Key areas of involvement include housing and other physical infrastructure.

4.2.3 EAP: Establishment and Process on the Ground

The EAP was launched in Cork, as elsewhere, in September 1998, and gradually gathered pace and progressively extended to new groups. There have been four groups, all on the Live Register (i.e. receiving Unemployment Benefit or Assistance), covered so far, each referred to as a 'phase':

- Aged 18 to 25 years and approaching six month unemployed.
- Aged 18 to 25 years and approaching eighteen months unemployed.
- Aged 25 to 35, and approaching 12 months unemployed.
- Aged 35 to 45 and approaching 12 months unemployed.

The period of unemployment is cumulated from the beginning of the EAP in September 1998, and may represent several period of unemployment; and 'approaching' refers to their activation very shortly before they reach that period.

In practice, the EAP brings clients through a sequence of steps, with a number of possible outcomes at each. It involves many interactions between the DSCFA and FÁS, and very close coordination facilitated by the computerised EAP tracking system.

The EAP Tracking System sits on top of the existing information systems of DSCFA and FÁS, and designated staff members in both have access to this it. Each week, files are exchanged between the two, updating the information on clients. The Tracking System is a critical aspect of the EAP, and without it, the close cooperation required would have been far more difficult, if not impossible. It is rigorous in design: A feature is its current completeness – even those departing from the Live Register are entered, by whatever means are available, under a finite number of coded possibilities. A further feature is that, with one limited exception, clients entered in the system are never deleted and can be reactivated at any time.

The following are the steps that EAP clients are brought through.

Step 1: Identification

The identification of clients for the EAP is done centrally by the DSCFA in Dublin and each Monday morning a new set of names and RSI numbers is selected. It is sent electronically to the local Social Welfare Office in Cork, to the correspondence section, whose job it is to manage the EAP System and maintain basic correspondence with clients. At this point, all clients are designated as *Code 1: Active*, which they retain until they leave the EAP system into employment or training, or leave the Live Register.

Their first task is to contact the four FÁS EAP Placement Officers, one for each phase, to check their availability to take interviews in two weeks time. They then write out to all names on the list (as well as a number who have been 'rescheduled' for interview – see below), giving them a

time and date at which they must attend for a FÁS interview and allowing ten days notice. They then forward these names, now designated as *Code 12: Interview Pending*, to the EAP placement officers, electronically, along with the allocated times.

A few clients may contact the correspondence section to indicate that the allocated time is not appropriate, and to reschedule. This is usually agreed to. (A very small number of cases, however, repeatedly reschedule, in which case in the end the request is refused, and the appointment is fixed.)

Step 2A: The FÁS Interview

The interview with the FÁS EAP Placement Officer is the first step for a client, that will eventually lead to a number of possible outcomes.

FÁS Placement Officers receive specific training for the EAP¹⁷, and their task is to ensure clients are assisted into employment, training or education, or another appropriate outcome enabling them to leave the Live Register. They see themselves as providing a range of options tailored to the needs of clients, and developing an action plan with clients to help them find those most suited to their needs. The target timescale for placement is set at five to six weeks, and a successful result will usually require several interviews.

This first interview is divided between gathering basic information from the client about their skills, education, hobbies, employment history and other details, and providing initial guidance on the options. The implied outcome is agreement with the client to engage (at least temporarily) in the process, and some indication of the direction that might be appropriate. The terms of the EAP are explained to the client, along with the consequences of not engaging with it.

This first interview is also important in that attendance, or failure to attend, demarcates the first streaming of clients. An interview always leads on to placement or further contact. Those failing to appear for interview are entered into the EAP system with *Code 6: Did not Attend*. This leads on to a further chain of events, as they are referred back to the DSCFA.

Step 2B: Failure to Attend First Interview

Some of those asked to interview may, after receipt of the letter, sign off the Live Register, and this will be fed back to the Placement Officer by the DSCFA¹⁸. No further action is taken in

¹⁷ Certificate in Adult Vocational and Guidance Counselling, in Maynooth College.

¹⁸ If a person signs off the Live Register, entitlement to Supplementary Welfare Allowance, as stated in chapter 1, will depend on the judgement of the Health Board Community Welfare Officer.

these cases, though the client remains, as in virtually every case, on the EAP information system for future activation.

For those still on the Live Register, Code 6 (i.e. did not attend) is picked up electronically by the DSCFA Staff Officer who normally deals with the client, who writes seeking a meeting at the DFSPA office to explain why they failed to respond.

Each case is assessed individually at this meeting. If a client offers a reasonable explanation, his or her case is referred to the correspondence section for rescheduling. It will be added to the list for the following week, and given *Code 15: Referred for a second/third time*. In general, failure to turn up for one interview is considered acceptable. If, as in a small minority of cases, the explanation is inadequate, and after repeated failure to show up for an interview, then the DSCFA officer has the authority to refuse payment for a period of up to nine weeks, though there is a right to appeal. This occurrence is extremely exceptional. Afterwards, the client may apply for Social Welfare again, at which point they will be once again picked up immediately for an EAP interview.

If, however, a client fails to respond to the request for a meeting with the Staff Officer, and to a subsequent letter inviting them in, they can be removed from the Live Register, as always, with the possibility of appeal.

Step 3A: Ongoing Support to Get a Placement

Those attending the first interview will continue in a relationship with FÁS, through a series of meetings with the Placement Officer. A number of outcomes are possible.

At any time clients may, of course, choose to sign off the Live Register. They will then be entered by the DSCFA as no longer EAP active, which will be seen by the FÁS officer when next the case comes up for consideration (e.g. at failure to show for a scheduled interview). The Placement Officer will use whatever means available to follow up on the reasons for signing off, and to enter the appropriate code for the client.

Most will continue through with the process until employment, training or placement is found within the five to six week period. A number of avenues are pursued by the FAS Placement Officers, working with the client:

- Within the FÁS services themselves several avenues are available. They register for job placement, and can go for interview and take up available employment, including CE schemes. They can also be assisted to set up their own business. If they succeed in becoming employed, full-time or part-time, they are entered as *Code 3: Job Placed*. (In general, it is not acceptable for a person to turn down a job because they have been trained

for a different area of work or because they do not like the job on offer. There are however, no specific guidelines or criteria on what jobs can be refused without affecting social welfare payments. The decision is largely at the discretion of the DSCFA).

- They are (like some other categories) offered priority placement on FÁS Training courses, and offered a place on the next programme starting. Given the lengthy waiting lists for some, this offers a distinct advantage over others. All FÁS training and education referrals upon offer of a place commencing within four weeks, are given *Code 2: Training/education referral*.
- They may be referred outside to non-FÁS training or education, and are given a *Code 14: Non FÁS Training*. These include VEC courses (including VTOS), Technology Institutes, colleges and other third level institutions. Although representation may be made on their behalf by the FAS officer, no priority can be guaranteed.
- The option of referral to community based progression or training is available, and the FÁS officer will advise on what is currently on offer. (In this region, a directory of services has recently been produced, which is used for such referrals).
- There is one exceptional category of placement: referral to the LES. Its unique distinction is that it is the only one where the client is, in effect, deleted from the EAP Tracking System (though they remain registered with FÁS and, unless they sign off, on the Welfare system), and the file is transferred to the LES information system, which is relatively compatible. This is used sparingly, and is generally for people who need special support in getting employment or onto vocational training. Clients referred here are scheduled for an interview with the LES, and if they are accepted, the LES informs the Placement Officer. Since the file is transferred and deleted (partly, at least, to avoid duplication in the two systems), no code is required for these cases.

Step 3B: FÁS Intervention does not yield Placement

Placement within the six weeks is achieved in a great many cases, usually above 50%. However, this is not the only outcome possible. During the process, some move out of the region or abroad, or their claim with DSCFA changes from EAP Active to another, such as Lone Parents, or their eligibility for Unemployment Benefits expires and they are ineligible for Unemployment Assistance. Where these outcomes are detected, *Code 9: Process Complete*, is entered by FÁS placement officer.

Other cases may conclude this step with a judgement by the FÁS officer on the best approach to adopt. A number result in referral back to the DSCFA, with the client departing the FÁS service at least for a while.

- Some clients are classified as having declined what the FÁS officer considers to be a reasonable offer. This may be expressed as a refusal to accept the offer, failure to take it up, or repeated failure to keep appointments. These are entered as *Code 10: Declined Intervention*. A similar, and hence largely redundant and rarely used assessment, is *Code 5: Suspended*, where relation between client and Officer due to lack of cooperation.
- Clients can be assessed as not yet ready to continue on to a next stage of progression, through training, employment or other option. This may be because of, for instance, drug or alcohol addiction, health problems, or issues relating to criminal proceedings. These are given a *Code 13: Not Progression Ready*. They may be referred to social and community services to cater for alcoholism, drug addiction or other social services, though taking up these services will not usually affect their status with the FÁS EAP i.e. attending such a social service is not considered a placement, unless it results in full-or part time employment, training or departure from the Live Register. Code 13 clients are again picked up by the DSCFA, but from the FÁS perspective, no specific action is recommended and they are generally allowed remain on the Live Register.

There is also the possibility of remaining active on FÁS NEAP for a given period after the six weeks.

- A number of clients may be put on hold for a period (*Code 7: On Hold*), in the expectation that they will become active again at a specific time, or will leave the Live Register.. This can be the case for pregnant women, in effect a form of ‘maternity leave’. Women on unemployment benefit soon to expire may also be put on hold, after which, in general, they will anyhow be taken off the Live Register. In these cases, the FÁS officer checks the file of the person after the period to see if they are still on the live register. If they are, their file can be reactivated. DSCFA takes no specific action on Code 7.

There remains one other possibility.

- A very small number of clients will, for an indefinite period after the initial interview, remain in principle actively engaged with the FÁS system, and will thus not come to the attention of the DSCFA. These are people who seem to be genuinely engaging with the process, in principle are capable of and ready for progression, but for whom no suitable option is found. They remain on the Live Register maintaining some contact with the FÁS officer. With one

officer, these constituted no more than ten cases from a total of 600 who came for initial interview. In practice, the client remains on the active list and can continue to avail of FÁS services.

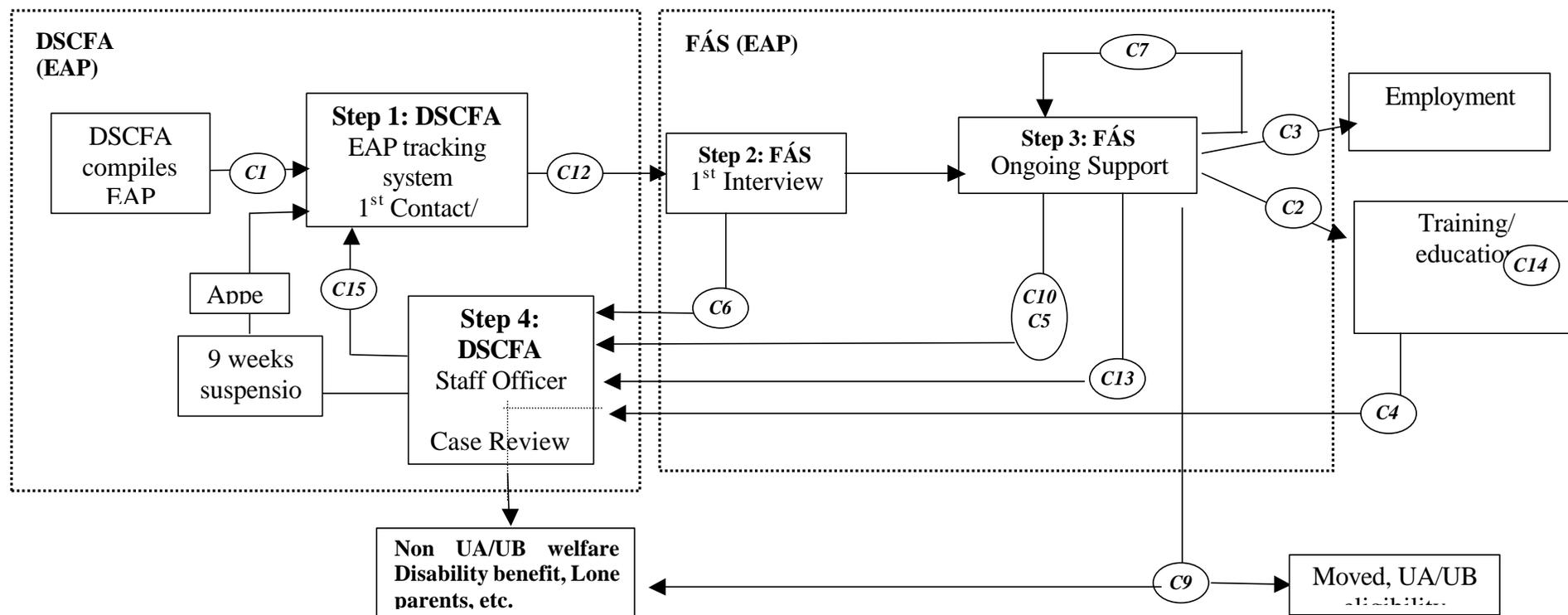
Step 4: Back to DSCFA

As indicated, apart from signing off the Live Register and refusing the first interview, there are a number of routes from the FÁS EAP service back to DSCFA.

- Code 10, covering those judged to have declined intervention, are picked up by the DSCFA, where it is considered as an indication of a failure to comply with the NEAP process, and an indication that the client is not available and actively seeking employment. These clients face the same process as those refusing a first interview. (It is notable that no information concerning the rationale for applying Code 10 to a client is transferred from FÁS to DSCFA. See below.) They are written to, and asked for a meeting to explain the circumstances; and may subsequently be taken from the Live Register for a period of nine weeks. *Code 5: Suspended*, will yield the same result for the client though these are, as indicated, largely redundant and rarely used.
- In some cases, clients may begin a course or scheme and dropout after a period of time. Whether or not they remain on the Live Register, they are allocated a *Code 4: Dropped Out* (though in, practice, obtaining this information for entry into the system can be problematic, especially for non FÁS placements). This code, if they are still on or return to the Live Register, will result in a review of their eligibility.
- Those assessed as not ready at this time for further progression through the FÁS service, Code 13, also come to the attention of the DSCFA officer dealing with their claim. Their case may be examined regarding whether they are on the appropriate welfare payment, and in some cases they may be advised to apply for Disability or other Benefit. However, no sanction is likely to be applied in these cases as this code does not, in itself, indicate unavailability for employment.

Thus a number of decisions may result from the case review by the DSCFA Staff Officer. They may be referred back for interview, and begin the process again (usually from Code 6). They may have a sanction of up to nine weeks suspension of payments. They may be removed from the Live Register. They may be taken off unemployment benefit or assistance and put onto another payment, such as disability benefit. Or they may simply continue to receive their entitlements.

Figure 1: The EAP Progression Process



- | | | | |
|------|--|--|---|
| Key: | Code 1: EAP Active | Code 5: Suspended | Code 10: Declined Intervention |
| | Code 2: Training referral within 4 weeks | Code 6: Did not show for 1 st interview | Code 12: First Interview pending |
| | Code 3: Working full-time/part-time | Code 7: On hold (e.g. pregnancy) | Code 13: Not Progression Ready |
| | Code 4: Dropped out of FÁS training | Code 9: Process completed | Code 14: On Non-FÁS training/education |
| | | | Code 15: Second/third FÁS interview pending |

4.2.4 Cooperation between DSCFA and FÁS

Cooperation occurs at operational and at management levels.

Operational Level

The operational aspect of the EAP clearly demands considerable communication and cooperation between DSCFA and FÁS. From the initial handover from the former to the latter with the scheduling of the first interview, through to the various points at which a client may be referred back, sharing of information is critical to the outcome.

As a recording system, it appears to work well. Since all files are centrally updated every week, comprehensive, current, statistics are available nationally and regionally, and these data are supplied to EAP staff on a weekly basis by the regional management. At the operational level, the comparative aspect of these comprises a motivational factor for operational staff, and some degree of informal competition arises between different areas.

But the NEAP tracking system is important not only as a facilitating tool but because, in setting it up, it forces a codification of each and every client situation, as well as of the nature and extent of communication between the two organisations. This obliges the two organisations to set up a common 'definitional' interface, which has continued to be refined through their cooperation.

In the early days of the EAP, communication was also improved by the location of the first FÁS EAP Placement Officer within the local Social Welfare office. Proximity assisted in resolving teething problems and allowed for practical learning in the use of the system. The officer involved continues to meet clients there, although the three additional officers subsequently appointed for the additional phases as they came on stream are located in the FÁS office.

Management Level

Regional and local level management of the EAP has been kept very simple.

At regional level, no new formal committee or structures were introduced for the EAP. Instead, existing ones were adapted, in an *ad hoc* but (according to management) effective manner.

The most important is the standing FÁS/DSCFA committees, which pre-existed the EAP. This has about eight members, with others attending as required, and deals on a three monthly basis with matters arising. It has no specific formal role in deciding any questions relating to clients, unless cases point to general questions that must be resolved. It simply tackles (often anticipating) problems as they emerge. A recent example concerned a perception that some

clients living near the boundary with another region were signing off the Live Register in one and enrolling in the other. The concern was that this would be used as a means to, in effect, remain outside the EAP system, for a further six month period, and the Committee decided to look into it further.

FÁS also has regular meetings, or liaison committees, with other key organisations such as the Vocational Educational Committees (VECs) with whom it would regular communicate with regarding cooperation in placement or training activities. Matters relating to EAP are dealt with here as a matter of course, and EAP staff can be invited as required.

Internally, FÁS anticipated a major impact as a result of the NEAP, but elected to integrate the EAP into each of its existing four areas of activity, rather than to create anything new. These are Information Service, Registration of job seekers, Recruitment onto courses, Vacancy and Job Placement. Some staff members were allocated exclusively to EAP, but in areas outside the city, FÁS placement officers took on the EAP activities alongside the existing placement services. The FÁS Regional Manager is directly responsible for the EAP.

There is relatively little communication required between the regional level and the national level Coordinating Group. The tracking system yields a regular and predictable flow of data, which is sufficient for most management purposes. The comparative data, broken down by all codes, are carefully scrutinised by FÁS and DSCFA management locally for rising and falling trends and any anomalies. Action has been taken on a number of occasions based on such analysis.

Issues Arising from the Cooperation within EAP

Operational Aspects

In principle, at the operational level the EAP Tracking System transfers all the information required to implement the system. In practice, there are a few areas in which further information is communicated between the two. Some are usual means to simplify procedures. For instance, the names of those scheduled or rescheduled each Monday are physically passed from DSCFA to FÁS, in order to make it easier to distinguish new from old when the official notification of interviews scheduled arrives via the tracking system.

At a deeper level, there may also be some unofficial communication between FÁS and DSCFA regarding the rationale for certain codes. In particular, the allocation of *Code 10: Declined Intervention* by FÁS poses difficulties when the case is reviewed by the DSCFA, since no information other than the code itself is passed from one organisation to another. (This may be for several reasons, but one is that any such information would have to be made available under the Data Protection Act or under the Freedom of Information Act.) The Desk

Officer in DSCFA has, in effect, to review the case entirely from the start, in order to determine the reasons for refusal of the FÁS intervention and thus to take a decision on the appropriate course of action. In order to ease the investigation, FÁS may informally pass some information regarding the client over to the DSCFA.

Such informal exchanges, if they do occur, are probably seen by staff as a practical way around what is regarded as an administrative and bureaucratic obstacle. From the client perspective, they could be seen as a breach of confidentiality (although confidentiality is not guaranteed), and an arbitrary second-hand use of use of opinions and perceptions regarding which they do not themselves have ready access.

From the point of view of the cooperation, they indicate a line of tension between the full cooperation of two independent organisations, and the rights of clients.

There were also operational issues arising from down the line in each organisation. For instance, FÁS Training Centres, which are geographically separate from the Regional Offices that administers the EAP were taking in relatively large numbers of EAP placements, but had received little specific preparation. The motivation factor for many EAP clients, as well as possibly their skill levels, was different from those in the past, and their drop-out rate was considered higher than average. Yet instructors were given no specific training, and indeed the impact on other trainees and on the learning environment as a whole is only now being considered.

Management Aspects

Management on both sides claimed that cooperation is close and effective. This, it was acknowledged, is not always achieved between independent organisations, where mutual suspicion and an absence of shared objectives can result mere formal cooperation and in 'passing the buck' with difficult issues.

Yet in this region, both organisations are working hard to achieve what are regarded as mutually beneficial outcomes and any problems arising are openly discussed and resolved. Questions were put to senior management as to what they attribute this apparent success. A number of suggestions were made.

- The groundwork had been laid at national level. The Memorandum of Agreement between FÁS and DSCFA was useful, but the Joint Committee at national level worked effectively to launch it in the right direction.

- The objectives of the EAP – to reduce the Live Register and to increase place employment and placement - are mutually compatible to both organisations and success brought benefits in equal measure to both. In effect, they became shared objectives.
- The EAP tracking system regularised and routinised communication between the organisations, reducing what would otherwise have been a major administrative and management headache.
- The organisations already had good relations, including an established Liaison Committee, and this was retained and adapted to EAP use;
- The economic climate of employment creation obviated the political and community opposition to the compulsory aspects of the EAP i.e. such an approach would be unacceptable in the absence of a very buoyant labor market.

Cooperation was best among a relatively small number of employees in the two organisations administering the system. In more peripheral activities and locations (such as in rural Social Welfare offices and in the FÁS Training Centres), far more effort was required to ensure their full support.

The competitive motivation provided by the data from the EAP tracking system was also probably a factor for those who were in a position to directly influence the outcomes.

Mention was also made of the fact that there is no single designated person within the DSCFA regionally responsible for the EAP. On occasion, it was felt at operational level that such a single person might be useful, though FÁS management had no problems with this. Whilst there was no individual person responsible, on specific issues as they arose there was clarity on both sides as to which should be contacted.

4.2.5 The Outcomes

The following comprises a summary analysis of the outcomes, as generated by the EAP tracking system. It covers the period from the start in September 1998 until the end of April 2000.

Table 4.2.1: Summary of Outcomes: Cork Office September 1998 to April 2000.

Categories	Code allocated	No. Clients	As percentage of Total Referrals
Referred from DSCFA	Code 1	2,501	100%
Did not attend 1 st Interview	Code 6	986	39.5%
Interview still Pending	Code 12	187	7.5%
Interviewed		1,328	53%
Placed in FÁS training/employment	Code 2 less Code 14	173	6.9%
Placed in other training/education	Code 14	92	3.8%
Placed in other employment	Code 3	346	13.8%
Total Placements		611	24.4%
Not progression Ready	Code 13	49	1.9%
No Further Progression	Codes 4, 7, 9, 10	448	17.9%
Currently Active	Code 1	220	8.8%

As a percentage of total referrals, the total placement of 24.4% is not so impressive. However, when compared against the total interviewed, the figure is about 46% placed in employment or training. Those not attending a first interview, and whose interview is still pending, are no longer on the Live Register.

Those not ready for progression comprise just 3.8% of the total interviewed.

The EAP Tracking System allows for considerably more sophisticated analysis, for instance of the numbers choosing voluntarily to sign off at different stages of the process; their reasons for doing so (though reservations have been expressed about the reliability of this data), the numbers in FÁS training as distinct from other training, the numbers referred to LES, and so forth.

However, these quantitative figures are limited in the end, and allow only minimal interpretation beyond the codes.

4.2.6 Conclusions

The figures tell us little concerning the final outcome, in terms of an improvement in their circumstances, of the EAP on those who are placed in a job or training; or on those who voluntary sign off the Live Register or are removed from it. They cannot tell the full story, from the client's perspective, of the impact of the EAP process. A full assessment would take very considerably more qualitative analysis. The limited research here can do no more than suggest some topics for further investigation.

The focus of the EAP is on reducing the numbers on the Live Register and increase participation in the workforce. It offers clients opportunities for employment (including employment schemes), vocational training and further education.

At the same time the process of the EAP is non-discriminatory – it is applied to everyone on the Live Register irrespective of their individual circumstances. As such, the EAP brings to light quite a large number of cases whose situations cannot easily or satisfactorily be dealt with using the available means i.e. employment placement, training or schemes.

Reportedly the groups most difficult to integrate within the EAP structure, i.e. are most difficult to place in appropriate employment or training yet, it is felt, should not have their payments discontinued, are the following (in no particular order):

- Early school-leavers often with illiteracy problems and lacking motivation;
- Travellers, facing prejudice in the workplace but also illiteracy and poor education;
- Drug users, alcoholics or others with social problems, who cannot be classified as eligible for e.g. Disability Benefit;
- Those with health problems, including psychiatric problems.
- Women seeking work but with few if any child minding options.

In many cases, it is extremely difficult to develop an action plan that can realistically result in placement, because of the challenges these groups face and the clients' own uncertainty regarding a desired outcome.

In terms of the code applied in the EAP System, these are primarily included in:

- *Code 13: Not Progression Ready*, and as such, this indicates to DSCFA that they have an issue with which FÁS cannot deal, but that they are cooperating with the Placement Officer, who will continue to offer appropriate advice with regard to career planning;
- Clients who remain *Active* over a greatly extended period beyond the initial six week deadline.

However, the problem may extend beyond simply the numbers actually identified in the EAP tracking system. A large proportion of clients depart voluntarily from the Live Register at or shortly after contact with the EAP. Many of these people, according to a number of those interviewed in the course of the research, just 'disappear'. They do not reappear on the Live Register. Some have emigrated. Others will have found employment or training outside the EAP Process. Others still were probably fraudulently claiming Benefit or Assistance in the first place, and chose to depart for fear of explicit exposure as such. However, it is impossible to know how many of those who depart are actually entitled to social supports, but are fearful about engaging with a process that is perceived by some to offer little choice of outcome or support around individual needs and circumstances.

The issue in all these cases refers to cooperation, as the question raised is **whether all necessary partners are integrated sufficiently into the EAP**, and specifically those partners who are specifically suited to supporting these more vulnerable and marginalised groups.

At an operational level, the absence of the right partners may be expressed as a limited capacity to refer people to others who are better able to attend to the problems of clients. Referral outside of the two partners, to for instance community services, appears to be on an *ad hoc* basis, and is not regarded as an effective closure of the file. Extensive referrals to community or social services that deal with multi-faceted, social, psychological or other issues, and the acceptance of this as justification for continuation on the Live Register, might lead, it is feared, to a major loophole in the control aspect of the NEAP.

Bringing other organisations into close cooperation, in a manner that might allay such fears, is not necessarily easy, because of the different ethos involved. The Local Employment Service (LES) illustrates the difficulties that the EAP has in extending cooperation more widely, at least at the level that exists between the two existing partners. In particular:

- Referral to the LES is not frequent. There have been something less than one hundred cases in the Cork area since the beginning of the Plan, but the numbers are likely to increase since the LES deals mainly with older age groups that have only more recently been brought into the EAP. They are referred, in general, because they are perceived to require special assistance in progression, that is not available in FÁS, due to their personal circumstances. However, the LES is a confidential and voluntary service, and indeed these features are regarded by the LES as essential to an effective response to their clients. As such, the LES will not send information on progression back to FÁS (though DSCFA and FÁS will obviously maintain their files, as appropriate). As a result, FÁS cannot continue to monitor progression. According to FÁS, they send these client files to the LES, deleting their own copies, to avoid duplication of client files. This would appear to be an informal arrangement, and no formal protocol is available on these referrals.
- Apart from the most vulnerable groups discussed above, the LES points to a second issue. The Cork LES is currently running a programme, working closely with employers, that is aimed at getting women into more skilled and remunerative employment. It aims to build capacities and confidence especially of women who may be returning to the workforce and whose self image and skill profiles is pushing them towards low skill, low paid, low prospects employment such as office cleaning. Instead, through gaining real experience and shop floor training, they *are* being supported to move up the career ladder, to a point where their wages, job satisfaction and prospects are considerably improved.

Under the EAP, such a community based, specialised and empowering outcome is not likely to be readily available.¹⁹ Also important however, is that the EAP tracking system does not allow for the documentation of the more positive labor market outcomes for women of such a programme. In other words, a person is simply assessed as ‘training/education referral regardless of the labor market skills that can be derived or as ‘job placed’ irrespective of pay and conditions attached to the job obtained.

4.3 Employment Action Plan Cobh, County Cork

4.3.1 Methodology and Approach to the Case Study

The Case Study focuses on the Employment Action Programme in a rural area of County Cork, and considers also relevant aspects of the cooperation and relations between the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) and FÁS.

The case study is based on a series of interviews held with:

- Members of staff in the local office of the DSCFA in Cobh;
- Members of staff in the FAS regional office with responsibility for the implementation of the NEAP in the Cobh area.
- Members of staff in the East Cork Partnership Company.

This is the second case study focusing on the EAP. The operational procedures of the EAP are described in the Cork City case study and are not repeated here. All the issues raised there are also relevant here. However, as a rural area, Cobh raises some additional matters described below.

4.3.2 Background to Cobh and Institutional Context

The Cobh, or Great Island area covers Cobh Town (population 6,468) and the electoral district of Cobh Rural (population 3,589). Both are located in the East Cork County area. The population of Cobh town, a port town on the Coast, has grown since 1991, but at a lower rate than that for East Cork. The population of the Cobh Rural area however has fallen since 1991. Cobh Town has a higher proportion of lone parents than the national average and that for East Cork. The Cobh area as a whole has also been characterised by higher rates of unemployment than East Cork.

¹⁹ This does not mean that DSCFA, FÁS and community based organisations such as LES do not regularly cooperate outside the EAP. In Cork the LES and DSCFA is, for instance, currently jointly developing a special training program of personal development for people between 35 and 45 who have been on the Live Register for at least a year.

As in other areas, the key institutional players with respect to active labor market measures are FÁS and the DSCFA.

The EAP is administered in Cobh jointly by the Regional FÁS Office, which is based in Cork City, and by the Local Social Welfare office of the DSCFA.

4.3.3 Establishment and Implementation of the EAP

The EAP was launched in Cobh in September 1998, and as elsewhere is gradually gathering pace and progressively extended to new groups. Cobh currently has about 450 people on the Live Register (i.e. in receipt of Unemployment Benefit or Assistance), and over 130 have been registered with the EAP system.

At first sight the EAP as administered in Cobh differs little from the manner in which it is implemented in Cork City.

The list of new EAP clients arrives electronically in the local Social Welfare from the DSCFA in Dublin. They are each written to and notified of a FÁS interview. The interview details, which are scheduled on fixed available days, are entered into the information system and relayed electronically to the FÁS officer, who downloads them off the system.

From the point of the interview, FÁS takes over. The same options are open to the client, in terms of training, employment or, depending on the circumstances, referral back to the local office. As before, the FÁS officer enters certain codes into the EAP information system as the client progresses, which are picked up by the Local Office as appropriate.

However, deeper scrutiny reveals some differences in the circumstances of EAP implementation, that have a significant impact on the outcome and on the relationship, in practice, between FÁS and the DSCFA.

FÁS Resources in Cobh

The FÁS officer for Cobh is based in Cork, not Cobh. Furthermore he or she (the officer for Cobh is a job share between a man and a woman – but for simplicity we will refer to them as one staff position) is not, as in the case of the four Cork EAP officers, working exclusively on the EAP. The EAP activity was added on to an existing schedule of work. In Cobh, the officer already had responsibilities in the regional office as an Training Placement Officer, and was anyhow spending two days a month in Cobh registering and interviewing people for the standard FÁS placement service. The EAP was added on as an additional requirement in relation to Cobh.

Thus the FÁS officer travels to Cobh two days every month – the second and third Monday – and conducts interviews for those voluntarily registering with the FÁS service, as well as

those called for EAP interview. The office used is in the parish hall, some distance from the Welfare Office itself. In practice, a maximum of about 10 EAP interviews can be scheduled each month.

The fact that staff are not dedicated to the EAP, and have only very limited time to deal with these clients, has some very significant consequences.

- First, since only two days are available each month for interviews, there are sometimes long delays in scheduling,. It is not unusual for a four to six week gap between the letter being sent and the date for the interview. This has a number of consequences. One is that the client is more likely to inadvertently forget the date; another is that the client is denied the service for that much longer .
- The limited time available and the fact that the EAP is an additional burden of work in practice mean that the EAP client is treated the same as any other client registering for FÁS services. They are asked about their experience, interests, and so forth, and are pointed, if possible, in the direction of an appropriate employment or training opportunity. Unlike in Cork City, limited additional time is spent on finding suitable employment or training. If a further meeting is required, which would be considered the norm in Cork City, it might not be possible to schedule it n for three or more weeks.

Thus, according to one of the FA staff persons interviewed, it is not possible to provide EAP clients with the same level of service that can be provided an urban setting such as Cork City.

Further Placement Obstacles in Cobh

There are further obstacles to a satisfactory outcome for EAP clients in Cobh. Since Cobh is considered within commuting distance of Cork, and has a train line, it has no training facilities of its own. In reality, however, the journey to Cork City, and especially to the FÁS training centre on the far side of the city, is a considerable disincentive to several NEAP client groups. At £44, the cost of a monthly Cobh to Cork travel ticket, valid also for Cork city bus routes, is covered by the FÁS Travel allowance of £13.80 a week for trainees living between 10 and 20 miles from the centre. However, it is considerably more expensive where the client lacks the funds for advance purchase of the monthly ticket and so must pay each day.

Much more of a disadvantage is the travel time. The limited number of trains from Cobh (in general, one an hour); the walk from the train station to the bus stop (there is no public transport from the train station in Cork); and the additional bus journey through the city all mean that commuting time per day for a Cork EAP client may be as much as three hours. This poses particular problems for those with responsibility for school-going children, where

the extra time at either end can give rise to additional child-minding needs. This issue was raised in discussion with both the DSCFA Local Welfare Office and FÁS staff as possibly in practice disqualifying many people from attending FÁS training. It was also felt that it was a barrier to taking up certain kinds of employment in Cork city itself, particularly low-paid employment.

Thus the EAP service in Cork is squeezed from both ends. On the one side, FÁS support cannot be delivered with the same intensity or timeliness. On the other, additional obstacles are placed in the way of taking up training and employment opportunities.

A further factor may also contribute to a reduction of options for Cobh EAP clients. Unlike Cork City, the option of referring an EAP client to a Local Employment Service is not available in Cobh since none exists there. The community sector in Cobh is less developed than is the case in Cork City. There is an active Citizen's Information Centre and more recently a Family Support Project. But there is no umbrella group or forum at which the various community and statutory services can coordinate their services.

As a result of these factors, some EAP clients continue for many months on waiting lists for training programmes or job search support.

It also means in practice that the control element of the EAP is brought more to the fore than the support element. A key control element, which as argued elsewhere may have negative consequences for more vulnerable groups, is the compulsory FÁS interview. Failure to attend this can have very serious consequences when it is relayed (as it must be, using Code 6) by the FÁS officer to the Local Social Welfare Office. Indeed, it may be argued that the only difference in service provided to an EAP Client, as compared to any other client approaching FÁS, is the compulsory first meeting and a priority position for FÁS training courses.

4.3.4 Outcomes

The above conclusion is generally supported by the EAP figures for Cobh, compared below with the Cork City average.

Table 4.3.1: Summary of Outcomes: Cork Office September 1998 to April 2000.

Categories	Code allocated	As percentage of all Referrals	
		Cork (Total 2,501)	City Cobh (Total 133)
Total Referrals			
Did not attend 1 st Interview	Code 6	39.5%	37.6%
Interview still Pending	Code 12	7.5%	9.0%
Interviewed		53%	53.4%
Placed in FÁS training/employment	Code 2 less Code 14	6.9%	13.5%
Placed in other training/education	Code 14	3.8%	6.8%
Placed in other employment	Code 3	13.8%	3.0%
Total Placements		24.4%	23.3%
Not progression Ready	Code 13	1.9%	0%
No Further Progression	Codes 4, 7, 9, 10	17.9%	9.0%
Currently Active	Code 1	8.8%	21.1%

A number of notable contrasts emerge.

The numbers who succeed in getting a non-FÁS job (i.e. not placed on a Community Employment scheme) is much lower in Cobh, at 3% compared to 13.8% in Cork City. Furthermore the numbers for whom no further progression is possible (which includes those ‘declining intervention’) is about half in Cobh what it is in Cork city; while the numbers currently active and still being dealt with by the FÁS officer is well over double that in Cork city.

It would be reasonable to conclude the following:

- Employment opportunities are in practice less available in Cobh, and/or the FÁS officer has less time to devote to seeking employment for clients;
- Client codes that generally require more time and effort to establish, such as ‘not progression ready’ and ‘declined intervention’, are used with less frequency in Cobh, since FÁS officers have less time to spend with clients.
- FÁS Officers are reluctant, due to the limited level of service they can offer and the additional obstacles they face, to take strong action regarding clients who may be less than enthusiastic about seeking a placement;
- The higher number of active clients in Cobh would strongly suggest that they are involved in the EAP process for a period in excess of the target of five to six weeks within which

an offer should be made to them. A limited random check on a number of client files tended to confirm this.

A review of some client files also suggested that they are not updated as often as the NEAP files in Cork city, again due to the insufficient time allocated to the FÁS Officer for NEAP activities. This may also account for some of the contrasts between the two areas.

4.3.5 Implications for Relationship between FÁS and DSCFA

The interaction between FÁS and the DSCFA at EAP operational level in Cobh is limited. In practice, the main communication is when the FÁS officers enters Code 6 for those who do not show up for interviews. The EAP is reduced to a control mechanism because of limited support and placements aspects.

This has the effect of increasing the disadvantages faced by unemployed people in Cobh in their search for suitable employment or training as compared to their counterparts in Cork city.

In the end, it leads to a loosening of the operation of the EAP, a lowering of the quality standards it sets for itself, and a poorer service for clients.

Discussions with a community work and FÁS staff members active in other rural parts of Cork County suggest that a similar situation may pertain there, though with variations. Towns such as Youghal and Middleton in East Cork also have very limited training facilities available, and the public transport to Cork City is poor and expensive. Although employment is available, especially in Middleton, it is often basic repetitive factory work, involving shift work and with limited advancement prospects. The shift work may exclude many EAP clients with family commitments, even where they are available and seeking full-time employment. Furthermore, the nature of factory work and the absence of progression opportunities is a disincentive to many who are genuinely seeking long-term career path.

Thus the quality of the service, and effective level of cooperation between the DSCFA and FÁS, is probably lower in rural areas than in the larger urban centres.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Levels of Co-ordination and Actors Involved

Considerable progress has been made in Ireland over the past ten years in providing a basis for greater co-ordination in the design and delivery of public services. This has been facilitated by a number of important developments including the further and more consolidated development of social partnership structures at local and national level. Also important has been the introduction of key government initiatives such as the Strategic Management Initiative, a key theme of which has been improving co-ordination among policy makers and service providers, between central government agencies and between central and local levels.

These developments, as noted in this study, have also had an impact on active welfare and employment policies, programmes and services targeted at minimum income recipients. In particular:

- Increasingly formalised horizontal co-ordination structures can be observed at national level including the Strategy Group on Employment and Unemployment and various structures in the context of social partnership arrangements, such as the Standing Committee on the Labor Market. These structures have provided a new and important basis for co-ordination on policy in this area at national level.
- At a local level, the Local Area Partnerships and the Local Employment Service (LES) in particular, have provided a basis for inter-agency co-operation at local level in partnership with an increasingly vibrant community sector representing service end users.

The implementation of Guidelines 1 and 2 of the National Employment Action Plan has also provided the impetus for more formalised co-operation at national and local levels between the two central actors in the areas of active welfare and employment policies: FAS (The National Training and Employment Authority) and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA).

While recognising the considerable progress made, a number of important constraints can be observed in terms of the overall effectiveness of these mechanisms for co-ordination. In particular:

- There has been a lack of appropriate vertical mechanisms to link co-ordinated actions at local level to the policy-making structures at national level. National policy can, in this context, appear to be unresponsive to local conditions and slow to mainstream best

practice co-ordinated initiatives developed and tested on the ground. This issue has consistently been raised in relation to the LES, where national level structures to link local practice to national policy making were found to be under-utilised (NESF, 2000).

- The limited provision for linking local and national co-ordinating structures is especially critical given that key active welfare and employment support schemes directed at minimum income recipients are highly centralised and delivered by FAS and DSCFA within a national framework. As a result, key areas of policy or programme design cannot be changed at local level, thus restricting the capacity of local co-ordination mechanisms, such as the LES, to respond to local conditions.

Other issues emerging from the study is that many people face a range of barriers in accessing training and employment support services which are not necessarily within the remit of the main co-ordinating actors (such as FAS and DSCFA) to address. Issues identified in this respect include literacy problems, substance abuse, health problems, transport needs and the effects of prejudice and discrimination against groups such as ethnic minorities (including Travellers). These problems have become more transparent with the rapid growth in employment rates in Ireland, with many of those remaining on the Live Register being some distance from the labor market due to the various reasons cited. Meeting these needs, it has been suggested, requires a broader set of policy and service tools. This in turn has implications for the range of actors which should be involved in co-ordinated actions to promote access to work. Actors identified in this respect include health authorities, drug rehabilitation services, the Equality Authority (recently set up to implement new anti-discrimination legislation) and disability organisations.

5.2 The Practice of Co-ordination

5.2.1 Developing a Supportive Culture

Changing the culture of organisations and individuals so that they can support the management of co-ordinated initiatives rather than promote territorial protection can be a significant challenge. This challenge can be significant enough when it includes different government departments and state agencies, but can be even greater when stakeholders include a wider set of social partners, such as employers, trade unions and the community/voluntary sector.

A number of developments identified in the course of this study can be seen to have been important in meeting this challenge in the context of active welfare and employment policies. In particular:

- The development of partnership structures and decision making processes, particularly at local level, has provided an important basis for developing common ground between a range of statutory and social partners stakeholders. The LES was able to build on the work already undertaken by the Local Area Partnerships in building what might be described as a new culture of inter-agency and inter-sectoral collaboration and joint action. However, as noted by the NESF (2000) the extent to which various agencies engage with the LES or Partnership structures more widely has often depended on local personalities rather than organisational protocol.

The involvement of community sector representatives, especially representatives of the most socially excluded themselves, has also been a particularly important feature of partnership and LES structures. However, such groups or individuals are often unfamiliar with more formal management structures and operational technicalities arising and can be nervous about contributing their views in this context. This highlights the need, according to various sources interviewed, for appropriate management training and other supports to ensure their participation on an equal footing with other sectoral actors.

Individual LES's and the Local Area Based Partnership Companies have also reported limited success in involving local employers as stakeholders in the local development process or in joint actions to promote the progression of socially excluded groups towards employment. The rapid rate of employment growth, and the emergence of labor shortages is changing this situation. In Blanchardstown for example, there is some evidence that local employers may now see their own role in a common vision around addressing disadvantage as the supply of labor dwindles.

- The Memorandum of Understanding between FAS and the DSCFA can be seen as a useful model for promoting co-operation between organisations with different goals and corporate cultures, but with areas of overlapping schemes and services that have given rise to some tension in the past. The Memorandum explicitly outlines the mission and respective goals, objectives and services provided by both organisations. The common business aims and objectives of both are then noted and given expression in a joint programme of action involving a set of protocols covering areas of action and methods for co-operation. These include the sharing of data bases and the development of co-ordinating structures at national and local level.

The areas of co-operation in which most progress has been made has been the implementation by the two bodies of Guidelines 1 and 2 of the Employment Action Plan (EAP). Although the EAP has not yet been the subject of an overall evaluation, evidence from the case study on Cork City suggest that in this case at least, co-operation between both organisations has been close and effective. The Memorandum of Understanding is considered to have played a useful part in this respect.

5.2.2 Implementation Mechanisms

The Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (Combat Poverty Agency, 2000) highlighted the importance of developing cross departmental units, drawn from but independent of line departments, with the operational capacity (and institutional status) to support co-ordinated initiatives that cut across the functions of different departments and agencies. The lack of sufficient operational supports along these lines has been noted in relation to high level national co-ordination structures for active welfare and employment policies, such as the Strategy Group on Employment and Unemployment.

The importance of such operational support can be demonstrated at local level. Each LES for example, has a co-ordinator who, in addition to managing the service, provides follow-up support to local agencies in developing and implementing co-ordinated measures at local level.

Other supportive mechanisms for the implementation of co-ordinated initiatives identified in this study include effective inter-agency communications systems. The Tracking system for the implementation of the EAP for example, sits on top of the existing information systems of DSCFA and FAS and designated staff in both have access to it. As outlined in the case study on Cork City, the Tracking System is considered to have regularised and routinised communications between the organisations, reducing what would otherwise have been a major administrative and management headache.

5.2.3 Links between the Co-ordinated Initiatives

The limited linkages between the EAP and LES highlight the difficulties of co-ordinating programmes which appear to have similar goals, but in practice have a very different ethos. The LES has an ethos of voluntary participation and is also designed to complement the work of the Local Area Partnerships in tackling disadvantage. The EAP, as noted by the NESF, is perceived to some extent as having a particular policy emphasis on tackling social welfare fraud. This, and the non-voluntary aspect of participation in the EAP process, has led to some concern among LES managers that involvement with the EAP would destroy the distinct ethos of the LES and undermine the voluntary and confidential nature of the service it provides.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment are now implementing a national protocol, designed by the NESF, to address these difficulties. Under the protocol the LES is required to accept appropriate referrals from the EAP. However, in the case where the LES mediation process reaches an end without the client having progressed, or where the mediator consider the client has not seriously engaged with the process, the clients file will be marked

'process complete' and returned to FAS minus any confidential notes. At the beginning of the mediation process the client referred to the LES through the EAP will be informed of this reporting requirement, but that otherwise the service is confidential.

Developing effective links between both programs in this way could provide a basis for building on the strengths of both to provide a more effective service for the unemployed and other minimum income recipients. In particular, the EAP has the advantage of being a systematic process of contact with those on the Live Register. However, it does not provide the same level of in-depth guidance that is available through the LES. Nor is it linked, as the LES is, to local co-ordination mechanisms such as the Local Area Partnerships, which provide a basis for meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged in labor market terms and judged 'not progression ready' by the EAP.

It should be noted however, that the LES has limited geographic coverage. This raises the issue as to what is to be done for those judged 'not progression ready' through the EAP process outside of LES areas. This has been raised in the case study undertaken in Cobh, which illustrated the difficulties in implementing the process in more remote rural areas with limited training and employment progression opportunities.

5.3 The Impact on Minimum Income Recipients

At present, the impact of both the LES and the EAP on clients is judged by the main outcome 'codings' set up on the FAS Central Database. The main indicators of progress in this respect include job placement or placement in relevant training/education programmes.

The NESF note that the LES has engaged with a total of 36,971 clients up to January 2000. Of these (as noted in Chapter 2) 40% had been placed in job and a total of 14% had been referred to training (including CE). The lowest job placement rates were recorded for key minimum recipient groups including the long-term unemployed, lone parents and dependent spouses of the long-term unemployed (2000:21).

Under the EAP, the DSCFA had referred more than 25,000 people to FAS up to December 1999. Sixty one per cent of these attended the FAS interview. The job placement rate was highest for the younger shorter-term unemployed (under 25 and less than six months on the Live Register) and lowest for the third target group (aged 25-34 and 12 months on the Live Register), 28% and 20% respectively. While no cumulative figures were available for those who did not attend FAS interview, figures for the single month of December 1999 showed that 36% not attending had found employment and 6% were moved on to other benefits.

Twelve per cent of those not attending FAS interviews in this month were judged not to be entitled to the benefit they were receiving.

A number of issues have been raised as to the implications of these outcomes in terms of judging the effectiveness of each initiative. In particular;

- While both programs have made considerable progress in placing people in employment, this has been achieved in the context of rapid growth in employment levels and emerging labor shortages in a whole range of sectors. Evaluation tools, it has been suggested, will need to consider the possible 'dead weight' effects if the true value of the initiatives is to be effectively assessed and applied in less favorable labor market conditions.
- The information available from both initiatives does not allow for any assessment of the security and sustainability of employment obtained. This has particular implications for the LES, which has an important overall objective of addressing poverty and disadvantage. In Blanchardstown for example, concern was expressed as to the numbers of young people leaving training or education to take-up low paid employment with poor opportunities for advancement. With no formal qualification and low skill levels, these young people could be stuck at low pay levels and are at risk of unemployment in the event of an economic downturn. A high rate of job placement among such young people therefore, could be a negative rather than a positive indication of progress if factors such as pay levels and prospects for advancement are not taken into account in assessing the effectiveness of the service.

Similar concerns can be expressed in relation to the EAP, if job placement only, rather than any assessment of the nature of employment obtained, is used to evaluate the final impact of the plan. While no comprehensive evaluation has yet been undertaken of the EAP, it has been suggested that evaluation indicators in this respect be developed and applied with reference to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. This would require some consideration of the likely poverty effects of all outcomes.

- A related issue emerging from the LES in particular, has been the significant numbers of people for whom immediate take-up of training and employment options is not a realistic possibility. As outlined above, a range of barriers can be identified in this respect, many of which are not within the remit of the main co-ordinated actors to address. However, no systematic information collection has yet taken place on the extent of these problems and their significance in terms of those not progressing through either the LES or EAP process.

This will be important if the necessary service responses are to be put in place to address the various barriers highlighted to date.

- A related issue to the above concerns those minimum income recipients for whom mainstream training and employment may never be a feasible option. Particular concern in this respect was expressed about people in this category who might be currently on unemployment assistance but would actually be entitled to other benefits, for example, disability benefits due to reasons such as mental health problems. Due to lack of knowledge on entitlements there is the potential (as raised in the Cork City case study) for these people to simply go off the Live Register and give up their welfare entitlements rather than be referred to employment or training options to which they are unsuited.
- Lack of knowledge on entitlements has been identified as a significant issue in the LES in Blanchardstown. In particular, fear about the effect on net income as a result of taking up particular employment or training options was found to be an important constraint to progression. In this instance, the secondment of a DSCFA official to advise LES clients on entitlements in a more informal setting was considered a very important impact of the co-ordination process.

5.4 The Impact on Public Expenses and Efficiency

Judging the precise impact of the EAP and LES on public expenses and efficiency in the long-run will depend on the methods of evaluation and associated indicators adopted. As referred to above, the numbers leaving the Live Register (and hence no longer in receipt of social welfare benefits) would suggest that the EAP and the LES have led to considerable savings on the part of the State's social security bill. Important considerations in this respect however, are:

- What might have happened in any event in the absence of the initiatives when employment rates have increased so markedly;
- The longer-term effects for those who may be taking up low skilled insecure work options in the event of an economic downturn. In other words, if the initiatives do not address the underlying causes of unemployment on the supply side (for example, low skills, flexibility to take up new forms of employment, etc.) the longer-term savings of public finances may be negligible.

The latter issue presents an important co-ordinating challenge according to a range of sources interviewed. How, in other words, can active welfare and employment support policies be co-ordinated in a way that allows for minimum income recipients to avail of not just employment opportunities presented by the favourable economic climate, but to do so in a way that addresses the disadvantage they face and thus reduce the risk of unemployment in the long-term.

5.5 Ways Forward

While acknowledging the considerable progress made, this study has identified a number of areas where co-ordination in active welfare and employment policy has been weak. Particularly important in this respect has been limited devolution of decision making powers to local level, and the lack of sufficient vertical linkages to connect local practice to co-ordinating policy making mechanisms at national level. A number of opportunities now exist for addressing these barriers. In particular:

- The establishment of the dual stranded National Employment Service incorporating FAS Employment Services and the LES. The arrangements for this new service allows for the LES's to maintain their links to the Local Area based Partnerships and their voluntary ethos. This is an important development given the role the partnership structure has played in co-ordinating services to meet different client needs. As noted above however, the NESF Review of the LES found that participation by various agencies in the LES structures tended to be based on local personalities rather than organisational protocol. This suggests the need for more formal protocols to be developed outlining the precise role and contribution to be made by agencies participating in the LES/Partnership process.
- The establishment of a National Advisory Committee to advise FAS on the planning and operation of new dual stranded service provides an important opportunity to ensure that the lessons learned from local practice (especially in terms of best practice) are translated into policy and mainstreamed nationally. However, the Advisory Committee will need to address the concerns raised about the LES Policy Advisory Committee, which is acknowledged to have been underutilised. Suggestions made in this respect have included:
 - Representation of key agencies (especially DSCFA given the strong links between benefits entitlements and access to employment and training) , social partners and the community/voluntary sector (including adequate representation of local level interests);

- Clear terms of reference outlining the role and functions of the Committee and working methods;
 - Adequate independent resources to support research and other actions necessary to support the policy advisory function.
- Even where vertical linkages are in place, it is still important that local level co-ordination mechanisms are equipped to respond to local conditions on an on-going basis. As outlined, the range of policy instruments in terms of active welfare and employment available to local levels actors are very limited- the main schemes continue to be part of national frameworks. Changes in local government structures, including the establishment of the County Development Boards provide an important opportunity to devolve greater powers to local actors in this area. In fact, it has been suggested that without influence on welfare and employment policies, the role of the County Development Boards in developing effective local development initiatives will be limited.
 - It is important that any evaluation of co-ordinated outcomes be judged in the context of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). The Poverty Proofing Guidelines issued by NAPS and being applied by Government Departments should inform the evaluation processes of the EAP and the LES given their central importance in addressing poverty and disadvantage. These require each government department and state agency to consider the poverty effects of key policies and programmes. In relation to the EAP and the LES this should be used to assess the effect of all outcomes to ensure that potentially negative effects of what might appear to be positive outcomes (for example, young people leaving education early to take up employment) are fully explored and addressed.

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Appendix 1: Methods

The principal methods employed in undertaking this study are as follows.

Identification and Analysis of Main Co-ordination Mechanisms at National Level

Setting the national context, including the review of activation measures and the identification and analysis of key co-ordination mechanisms is based on:

- A review of relevant policy, research and evaluative literature in the key areas under review;
- Interview/Discussions held with policy makers and relevant experts at national level.

Those interviewed at national level in this respect included the following:

- Gerard Cribben, Department of the Taoiseach;
- Catherine McSharry, Labor Market Unit, Department of Social Community Family Affairs;
- Margaret Malone, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment;
- Frank Doherty, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment;
- Brendan O’Leary, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment;
- Victor Galvin, Department of Social Community and Family Affairs (Integrated Social Services System);
- Sean Halpin, Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, Co-ordinator of Job Facilitators service;
- Anna Lee, Manager of Tallaght Local Area Partnership Company, Chairperson of the Combat Poverty Agency and member of LES Policy Advisory Committee;
- Philip O’Connor, Manager, Dublin Employment Pact,
- Breda Kennedy, Area Development Management;
- Eithne Fitzgerald, Lecturer in Social Policy (University College Dublin) and former Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach;
- Gerald Walker, FAS Planning and Development;
- Ann Eustace, Evaluator of the Local Employment Service (1997).

Analysis of Main Co-ordination Mechanisms at Local Level

Three case studies were undertaken to explore operation of the principal co-ordination mechanisms - the Local Employment Service (LES) and the National Employment Action Plan (EAP)- at local level. These were:

- Blanchardstown Local Employment Service;
- The operation of the Employment Action Plan in Cork City; and
- The operation of the Employment Action Plan in Cobh, County Cork.

The case studies are not intended to be representative but to allow for an examination of processes and causal relationships at local level through which useful lessons can be obtained on the operation of these programmes on the ground. The purpose of this more detailed case study analysis therefore was to:

- Obtain a fuller picture of how the main co-ordination initiatives are translated into local implementation structures;
- Assess how they ultimately impact on minimum income recipients within their own communities.

The selection of case studies on both co-ordination measures was very much determined by nature and extent of analytical work already undertaken. In particular:

- No substantial evaluation had yet been undertaken on the operation of the Employment Action Plan (nationally or locally). Because of this, it was felt that two case studies was a minimum requirement in order to gain an insight into the operation and impact of this relatively new co-ordination mechanism within the local context. In order for differences in operational environments to be taken onto account, one rural and one urban area were selected for analysis.
- On the other hand, a series of detailed evaluations and reviews have been undertaken on the operation of the Local Employment Service (locally and nationally). Furthermore, a comprehensive evaluation process was ongoing in the particular area selected for this case study (Blanchardstown). All this allowed for a more detailed elaboration around many of the issues already raised

The methods used in undertaking the case studies are as follows:

- The case study on Blanchardstown LES was undertaken as part of an overall evaluation of the service undertaken by the researchers in May 2000. The evaluation exercise was being undertaken to review achievements and gaps in the service; with the ultimate intention of informing a Strategic Plan for the next phase of its development. The process involved detailed consultations with a wide range of stakeholders – both internal and external to the service. These included:

- Staff;
- Management committee members (including key statutory agencies);
- Voluntary and community sector groups and organisations;
- Long term unemployed people and representative groups and organisations;
- Employers

To feed into this case study, additional information on the service's institutional context, management and coordination procedures was collected and analysed.

- The case study on the operation of the Employment Action Plan (EAP) in Cork City is based on a series of interviews held with:
 - Management and staff involved in the implementation of the EAP in FAS South West regional office (covering the counties of Cork and Kerry);

- Members of staff in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) regional office;
 - Members of staff in the DSCFA local office in Cork City directly involved in the implementation of the NEAP;
 - Representatives of community and partnership sector including the Manager of Cork City Local Employment Service.
- The case study on Cobh is based on a series of interviews held with:
 - Members of staff in the local office of the DSCFA in Cobh;
 - Members of staff in the FAS regional office with responsibility for the implementation of the NEAP in the Cobh area.
 - Members of staff in the East Cork Partnership Company.

Appendix 2: Employment Trends

PES Unemployed Not Counted As ILO Unemployed: Marginally Attached or Inactive, ILO

Year	PES Unemp. '000s	Marg.Attached '000s	Inactive '000s	MA Inactive '000s	Ma Inactive as % PES Unemp.
1990	152.1	11.4	26.3	37.7	24.7%
1991	173.0	11.3	29.0	40.3	23.3%
1992	190.0	15.7	31.0	46.7	24.5%
1993	195.3	16.6	31.0	47.6	24.4%
1994	184.4	14.7	31.3	46.0	25.0%
1995	159.7	14.6	32.9	47.5	29.7%
1996	157.3	9.2	32.3	41.5	26.4%
1997	148.2	11.9	34.1	46.0	31.0%
1998	1153.4	10.5	39.3	49.8	32.5%
1999	123.5	9.1	36.6	45.7	37.0%
2000	117.0	8.9	39.7	48.6	41.5%

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