



Local Youth Employment Strategies

Ireland

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report has been written by the Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Programme of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as part of the project on Local Youth Employment Strategies. It has been undertaken in co-operation with the Department of Social Protection, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Department of Education and Skills, and Pobal.

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This project is part of the OECD LEED programme of work under the leadership of Sylvain Giguère. Francesca Froy and Jonathan Barr provided valuable comments on this report through its various draft stages. Thanks also go to Michela Meghnagi and Nikolett Kis for their work on the data analysis, François Iglesias and other colleagues in the OECD LEED Programme for their assistance as well as to Kay Olbison who provided the final editing.

Pobal played a key role in assisting the OECD Secretariat in all aspects of preparing this report, including arranging study visits, providing relevant material, and offering feedback. In particular, thanks go to Denis Leamy, Jerry Murphy, Emma Rorke, Catherine Morris and Richard Deane.

Special thanks are given to the national and local representatives who participated in the project interviews and roundtables, and provided documentation and information critical to the production of this report. Finally, authors are grateful for substantial comments on the draft report provided by the following Departments and Authorities: Department of Social Protection, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Department of Education and Skills, Irish National Training and Employment Authority, and Pobal.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ALMP	Active labour market programmes
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
BTWEA	Back to Work Enterprise Allowance scheme
CTCs	Community Training Centres
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DECLG	Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DJEI	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
DSP	Department of Social Protection
EGFSN	Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
ETB	Education and Training Board
FÁS	National Training and Employment Authority
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
IDA	Industrial Development Authority, Ireland
Intreo	New employment and support service
IRIS	Irish Reporting and Information System
LCDP	Local and Community Development Programme
LDC	Local Development Company
LESN	Local Employment Service Network
NEET	Youth neither in employment nor in education or training
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NFTE	Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship
PES	Public Employment Service
PLC	Post-Leaving Certificate
QQI	Qualifications and Quality Ireland
SCP	Schools Completion Programme
SEC	Socio-Economic Committee
SLMRU	Skills and Labour Market Research Unit
SOLAS	Further Education and Training Authority
STEA	Short-term Enterprise Allowance
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
WIT	Waterford Institute of Technology

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Irish youth have been hit hard by the economic recession with lower skilled youth hit hardest. Before the recession, the youth employment rate in Ireland was one of the EU's highest and the youth unemployment rate one of the lowest. In just a few years this was completely reversed. The youth employment rate fell significantly from 50.4% in 2007 to 29.4% in 2011 (28% in 2012), below the OECD average of 39.7% (same in 2012). From 10.3% in 2007, the youth unemployment rate in Ireland reached around 29.9% in 2011 (further increasing to 33% in 2012), greater than the OECD average of 16.2% (16.3% in 2012)¹. There is particular concern regarding the very high levels of youth long-term unemployment.

A significant proportion of young people have remained in or returned to education during the crisis, choosing to "sit out" the jobs crash by upskilling or reskilling. School completion to upper secondary level has increased and the proportion of early school leavers in Ireland is relatively low, below EU and OECD averages. However, the transition into employment is particularly difficult, and Ireland has one of the highest levels of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) in the EU – 18.7% compared to the EU average of 13.1% in 2012 (growing from similar starting points of 10.7% and 10.9 % respectively for Ireland and the EU in 2007, Eurostat). Moreover, outmigration of young people has been growing faster than inward migration, leading to loss of skills and human capital. The government has taken steps to tackle rising youth joblessness and strategic intent has been outlined in national policy statements and actions.

Ensuring employment success for young people is a policy issue of particular relevance locally. Barriers preventing young people from successful transition into employment are often multifaceted in nature and responses need to come from a wide array of policy areas. It is at the local level that government policies can be integrated and combined with place-based initiatives to provide multidimensional responses to complex problems. Yet, in practice, too often programmes are delivered in isolation from each other, with uneven degrees of coverage and limited capacity to reach out to those most in need. Rigid policy delivery frameworks, insufficient capacities, and a lack of strategic approach at the local level often undermine support for youth.

The *Local Youth Employment Strategies* review undertaken by the OECD Local Economic and Employment Development Programme (LEED) examines the policy delivery frameworks and the capacity of local actors to put in place integrated policy responses to tackle youth unemployment. In Ireland, the Dublin and South East regions were taken as case studies to look at the range of institutions and bodies involved in youth employment.

Ireland has a dense network of institutions at national and local levels whose remit concerns youth education, employment and inclusion. The policy planning and delivery will be largely influenced by on-going large scale reforms including i) the merger of three services: job-matching and job-placement, the administration of benefit, and the design and supervision of active labour market programmes; ii) the reform of the institutional framework for vocational education and training; and iii) the local government reform. The way these services interact at local level and their capacity for joined up action will be

¹ Source: Labour Force Surveys, OECD.Stat; Age: 15-24.

important in addressing the youth unemployment challenge and providing the capacity to introduce the provisions of the planned youth guarantee. However, as identified by the OECD Local Job Creation review of Ireland, there are signs that the limited policy co-ordination, integration and communication between government departments and agencies at the national level and in their local operations continues within the new structures (OECD, 2013a).

This report has found that improved co-ordination is required at the national level, bringing together the action of key government departments. There is a need for a “youth convener” responsible for collaborative policy making within government and better co-ordination at national level. It is also important that the policy delivery frameworks within each department allow for, and favour, policy integration at the local level to support the emergence of place-specific strategies for youth employment with strong involvement from employers. The prerequisite for effective policy integration on the ground is flexibility in the management of policy in terms of programme design, budget management, target group setting, goals and performance management, outsourcing, and mechanisms for collaboration. National policy frameworks can support implementation through partnerships, favour strategic co-ordination at the local level and bring a holistic approach to community resources.

This report has found that there are good individual youth activation programmes operating in Ireland at the local level but these are often isolated and denied the synergies that would arise from a clear, overarching youth employment strategy and stronger local leadership. Problems with data availability and data sharing between different services, and insufficient use of evaluation to support policy design, innovation and learning were also perceived as barriers to a more strategic approach to youth unemployment. The level of employers’ engagement is low and there are signs that it will remain insufficient within the new structures.

Improved joint work among local level agents could create more integrated supports for youth and a continuum of interventions to help alleviate youth unemployment. This involves mapping the options for young people in the educational, employment and training systems and the different pathways they can take at local level, while strengthening the role of existing linkers and brokers. It is important to ensure that community and youth work is more fully integrated into the existing network of employment, education and training so as to assure optimal mutual benefit.

Lack of work experience was perceived by employers in both case study regions as a major difficulty when hiring young people due to a number of factors, one of which being the low emphasis given to work experience during school years. The apprenticeship model is offered in a very limited number of sectors and there is weak vocational provision within the education system which is overly focused on higher education from an early age. The career guidance offered gives little consideration to local career opportunities and places relatively little emphasis on the preparation for vocational pathways or for work. Employers were also vocal about the insufficient responsiveness of local training providers to the skill needs of a local economy and the low capacity within the employment and training sectors to engage with employers on the design and implementation of youth programmes to ensure their effectiveness. Once an unemployed young person commences employment, little is done to support retention, in work progression (particularly of low skilled youth) or better skills utilisation by employers.

Many of these issues are being addressed at national level in the on-going reform process through, for example, the establishment of SOLAS, the ongoing review of the Irish Apprenticeship System, and the development of new targeted, education and training programmes such as Momentum and Springboard. However, it is also necessary to put in place effective mechanisms at the local level to support youth into employment or self-employment and to foster consensus amongst key stakeholders towards creating a system better focused on youth employment. In particular, career ladders and clusters offer a useful way of bringing together employment agencies, career advisors, education and training bodies, and industrial

consortia to construct route-maps to training and employment for youth. They also help to make the local labour market more transparent which facilitates better supply and demand matching by employment services. It is important that employment services and Further Education and Training providers work directly with local employers from the outset. Closer links with employers can help to stimulate labour demand by anticipating employers' hiring needs before a vacancy is created (the experience of the FÁS Training Centre network could be useful in this context). It should be noted, however, that employers tend to have a more short-term vision of their skill needs and it is therefore necessary to ensure that local youth employment strategies balance this priority with the need to equip individuals with a broader set of transferable skills to secure long-term labour force attachment.

There is a need for more fine-grain policies for youth within broader youth activation measures in the PES. Few of the activation processes in the public employment services in Ireland are specific to young people. The Irish government has given priority to the registered unemployed and increasingly to the long-term unemployed, regardless of age, and young people's needs must fight for space within the much larger numbers of unemployed adults who have become the clients of the new bodies (Intreo, ETBs, etc.). Moreover a proportion of young people cannot avail themselves of supports within the PES as they are not eligible to register as unemployed.

The approaches targeted to NEET youth (especially to the most disadvantaged within this category) are mainly outsourced to community and voluntary organisations. It is also important to increase PES outreach capacity to better serve disadvantaged youth.

The employment services could consider providing more targeted job search assistance and guidance for young people. Job search assistance programmes have often been found the most cost-effective way to assist work-ready young people, providing positive returns on both higher earnings and employment. Emphasising skills and competences gained by young people through youth work experience can also be helpful in this process. Tailored support to graduates to enlarge their job search and to identify how their skills can match the needs of local employers, including small businesses, is another useful approach especially if combined with working with employers to better identify their recruitment needs and the way they can use graduates' competences. This can be done as part of a more strategic local approach that integrates employment and business development agenda.

There are low levels of youth entrepreneurship in Ireland compared to the EU average and entrepreneurship is generally not taught in schools. At both national and local levels, more could be done to support youth entrepreneurship such as providing information, advice, coaching and mentoring, facilitating access to financing and offering support infrastructure for business start-up.

Finally, youth work is an active domain in Ireland and it engages with a significant proportion of young people. In particular, youth services work with economically or socially disadvantaged young people and go some way to filling the gaps in service provision. Employers value the skills and competences enhanced by young people's engagement in youth work activities, but often these skills are not recognised by the young people themselves and they do not emphasise them to employers sufficiently in job applications and during interviews. This report has found that youth work is an area which can be built on further. It remains to be fully decided how youth work can be better integrated into the new employment structures.

Summary of recommendations

Strategic approach at the national level

- Establish a coherent national youth employment policy framework with flexible delivery mechanisms to support policy integration at the local level.
- Identify a “youth employment convener” at the national level responsible for collaborative policy making within government and who can facilitate the involvement of non-state actors in the process of policy co-construction.
- Ensure implementation through partnerships. Support strategic co-ordination at the local level and a holistic approach to community resources.

Strategic approach at the local level

- Reduce fragmentation in service delivery by mapping the existing programmes and the different pathways they can take at the local level. Identify and address barriers to joint working, strengthen the role of existing linkers and brokers and agree on leadership of the youth employment agenda at local level.
- Consider ways to facilitate increased access by young people to inter-connected information and guidance services e.g. one-stop information shops.

Strategic approaches relating to evidence based policy making

- Improve data availability and remove barriers to sharing data at the local level. It would also be useful to develop a single shared management information system to track young people’s progress through the school system and beyond.
- Support evidence based innovation by evaluating and quickly sharing learning from successful initiatives, with employer involvement from the design stage onwards. Focus on real outcomes and progression measurement.

Within the public employment service it is important to:

- Provide targeted and fine-grain policies for the most disadvantaged within broader youth activation measures.
- Provide better job search assistance for youth and place more emphasis on the value of non-formal learning and skills acquired by young people through youth work settings. Provide more targeted support to unemployed graduates.
- Increase PES outreach capacity to better serve disadvantaged youth by working more with community organisations and small, locally based providers.
- Establish strong partnerships with employers from the design phase through to impact assessment of programmes.

To support relatively job-ready youth:

- Support youth employment access and progression within key areas of the local economy through strengthening career guidance and building up career ladders and career clusters.
- Establish clearer, simpler and more recognised pathways into vocational education and training at the local level. Simplify entry routes into apprenticeships.
- Support the expansion of youth entrepreneurship.

To support youth at risk of exclusion:

- Identify local youth at risk of early school leaving and put in place joined-up prevention mechanisms.
- Invest in early childhood supports.
- Provide intensive support to youth most at risk through personalised counselling.

INTRODUCTION

Youth employment is an area of critical concern across OECD countries. The youth unemployment rate for OECD countries has risen to its highest level in the past 25 years and is predicted to remain high as the recovery remains too weak to provide sufficient job opportunities to the many young jobseekers. Macro-level policies are being put in place to support youth entering the labour market but they will remain inefficient if not accompanied by strong implementation mechanisms and if not combined with local initiatives. A strategic approach is required at the local level to build effective pathways between education and employment, to ensure that young people have accurate careers guidance as to opportunities in the local economy, and that career ladders are in place to support employment progression. Moreover, co-ordinated responses are needed to support better skills utilisation in the workplace, leading to higher productivity and greater opportunities for youth progressing within firms. Integrated services can allow participants to access a number of different, follow-on programmes, thereby aiding continuous learning and development.

There are three groups of young people which present different features in terms of their entry and attachment to the labour market, and each necessitates targeted programmes to meet their specific characteristics. These are “poorly integrated new entrants”, “good performers”, and young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) – see Box 1. The NEET category in itself is very heterogeneous – a statistical “basket” into which young people fall for many reasons (see Chapter 4 for more on NEET/ “at risk” youth).

Box 27. Three youth groups - Different needs and different policy responses

- The so-called **NEET** (not in employment, education or training) are at high risk of drifting into long-term unemployment and exclusion and are generally socially disadvantaged youth. Early childhood education and support with school-to-work transition can reduce the distance from the mainstream labour market. Adopting a wider approach by tackling multi-generational poverty, improving spatial planning to reduce isolation, strengthening local social capital and bringing economic development and entrepreneurship to deprived areas can bring significant results. Poorly integrated new entrants and good performers can also fall under the NEET definition during times of cyclically high unemployment.
- The **poorly integrated new entrants** are young people often with diplomas but with difficulties finding stable employment. Providing clearer pathways into employment, tackling the demand-side barriers but also working with employers on retention and progression schemes can help to address the specific needs of this group.
- **Good performers** are university graduates who in normal times do not have particular difficulty in finding a job. Young people in this group may not have a job that matches their qualifications (low demand for high skills), or may leave their region to look for better employment possibilities elsewhere (loss of skills through talent flight). Broader skills and economic development strategies should address this demand/supply mismatch and provide opportunities to use the skills of graduates.

In a recent international review, *Local Youth Employment Strategies: Learning from Practice*, the LEED Programme has identified the key instruments of successful local strategies to support youth

employment (OECD, 2013d). They can be grouped into two sets of issues. The first one concerns the governance aspects of local youth employment strategies, including ways to:

- put in place the right incentives and success measurements to support collaboration and target action on critical areas;
- improve data availability and data sharing between different local services;
- promote employer ownership and ensure that firms invest in their future workforce;
- support sectoral approaches to bring together educational institutions, industry organisations, employment agencies and government departments to develop career pathways, articulating skills requirements and connecting youth to the local economy;
- monitor the implementation of programmes and evaluate success.

The second set of issues groups the tools and approaches implemented at the local level and includes:

- Addressing the NEET challenge:
 - investing in the earliest levels of education;
 - preventing school dropout;
 - providing personalised support to help youth progress into employment or training;
 - valuing informal and non-formal learning;
- Improving the employment prospects of poorly integrated new entrants:
 - creating pathways to successful careers;
 - making available work attractive to youth;
- Supporting good performers:
 - supporting young entrepreneurs;
 - placing increasing importance on transversal skills;
 - promoting the benefits of combining training with work experience.

These findings have guided this review.

Project methodology

The review took place in the context of large-scale reforms in Ireland including the establishment of Intreo, the new Further Education and Training Authority – SOLAS – and local government reform. These will have a profound effect on policy planning and delivery, on how various services will interact at local level, and the capacity to stimulate joined-up action for youth employment. The implementation of these reforms will continue into 2014-2015 and the assessment of current provision is made based on the information available at the time of writing. The Dublin and South East regions have been selected as case study regions for this review. The focus in this report is on those within the 15 to 24 age range in keeping with the OECD definition of youth. In parallel to this project, two additional thematic policy reviews have been carried out by the LEED programme in Ireland – *Local Job Creation* and *Delivering Local Development* – see Box 2.

Box 28. Parallel OECD LEED reviews in Ireland

Local Job Creation is an international cross-comparative study which examines the contribution of local labour market policy to boosting quality employment, by applying a standardised methodology in 12 OECD countries. Each country review examines the capacity of employment services and training providers to contribute to a long-term strategy which strengthens the resiliency of the local economy and increases skills levels and job quality. In Ireland, the study has looked at the range of institutions and bodies involved in employment and skills policies.

The *Delivering Local Development* work examines the local conditions and instruments for policy interventions to achieve successful local economic development in participating countries and localities. This review assesses the impact of the proposed local government reforms on local economic and community development in Ireland.

This review included the following stages:

1. A Steering Group was formed by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and Pobal to monitor and assist in the implementation of the review.
2. Institutional mapping and a review of the literature and policy documents were undertaken by the national expert to inform the review field trip, alongside interviews with a number of key policy makers and stakeholders (see Annex I for a list of interviewed organisations).
3. An electronic survey was sent to local managers in PES offices (Local Employment Service Offices under the DSP) and regional managers of the Local Employment Services (operated by Local Development Companies) across Ireland as part of the *Local Job Creation* project. It was developed in co-operation with the Department of Social Protection and Pobal and additional questions were added on youth related provisions. Results have been used to inform this report. (See the *Ireland Local Job Creation* report for further e-survey details).
4. A review field trip was undertaken in December 2012 by the OECD Secretariat. A number of meetings were held in the two case study regions to collect the views of local actors from statutory bodies, non-statutory bodies, employers and employer representative groups. Preliminary findings were presented at the *Local Job Creation* round table – see Annex I for meeting attendance.
5. Follow on interviews and additional desktop research were undertaken by the LEED Secretariat.
6. Detailed comments on the draft report were provided at the end of 2013 by the relevant national departments and authorities: Department of Social Protection, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Department of Education and Skills, Irish National Training and Employment Authority, and Pobal.

CHAPTER 1: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN IRELAND: OVERVIEW AND POLICY SETTING

Labour market challenges facing young people

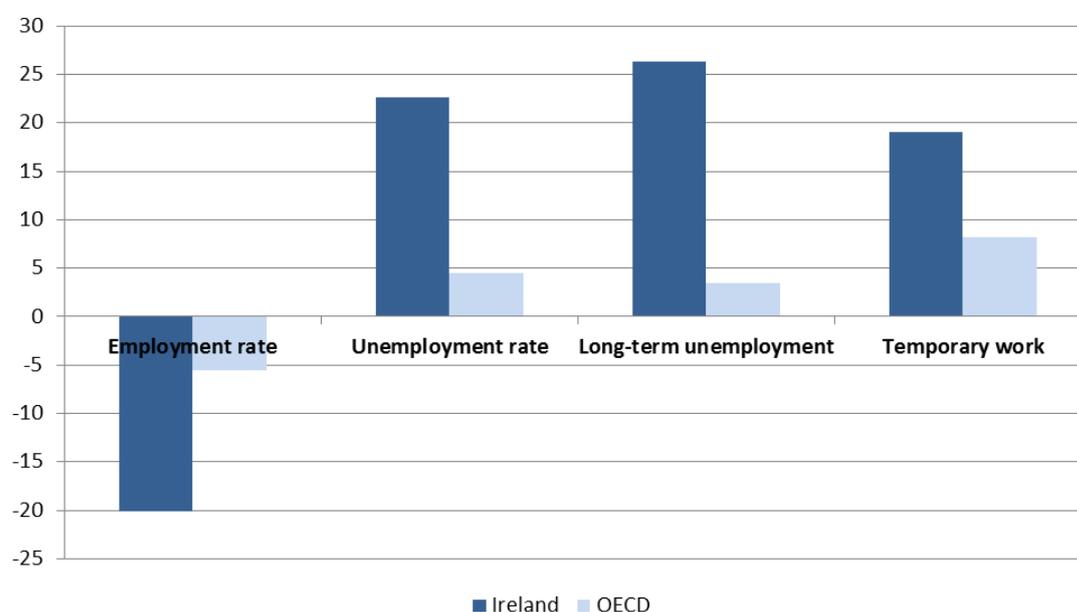
The labour market challenges for young people in Ireland have increased significantly in recent years following the financial crisis. Until 2008, the youth employment rate in Ireland was one of the EU's highest and the youth unemployment rate one of the lowest. In a few years, this was completely reversed. In 2011, the youth employment rate for 16 to 24-year-olds fell significantly to reach 28.1%, below the OECD average. The youth unemployment reached 30.6%, greater than the OECD average. There is particular concern regarding the very high level of youth long-term unemployment, which reached 45.8% in 2011 - double the OECD average. A recent OECD report has found that the rate of transition of youth from unemployment to employment fell dramatically from 2006 to 2011 (Kelly et al., 2013). While it is usual for youth employment to be cyclically sensitive, it is exceptionally so in Ireland (Sweeney, 2013).

This has taken place in the context of a collapse in economic activity which has resulted in overall unemployment rising from 4.4% in 2006 to 14.7% in 2012 (Kelly et al., 2013). During the Great Recession, the employment rate in Ireland decreased from 69% to 63% and there has been a cumulative contraction of 15% in the number of jobs. This was the result of a sharp contraction in economic activity, particularly in the construction sector which alone accounted for almost half of the total jobs lost (OECD, 2013a). Particularly wide differentials in unemployment rates can be seen by gender, age group, nationality and across occupations and skills levels.

Next to the collapse in the youth employment rate, the huge drop in the youth participation rate is the most striking indicator of a profound switch in youth labour market position (the youth unemployment rate applies only to those who remain in the labour force) (Sweeney, 2013). Young people have not participated in the modest growth in overall employment in the most recent period, and the participation rate has dropped. Nonetheless, despite these high rates of unemployment, youth unemployment generally accounts for a relatively modest share of total unemployment: in 2013, youth unemployment accounted for 18% of total unemployment (Kelly et al., 2013). In general, younger people aged 15-19 have much lower participation and employment rates than those aged 20-24.

As Figure 1 shows, the decline of the youth employment rate has been much steeper than the OECD average. Between 2001 and 2011 the percentage change in the youth unemployment rate was over 20%, greater than the OECD average. There was a similar trend in the percentage change of long-term unemployment among those under 25, which has risen by 26.3% compared to the OECD average of 3.4%. The incidence of temporary work has increased and again, the increase has been above the OECD average. Overall, the fall in employment in Ireland has been most heavily concentrated in the 20-24 and 25-34 age groups. Young men are more likely to be unemployed than young women. The proportion of the youth workforce declined in all occupational groups (except sales) and the most pronounced declines were evident in skilled trades, elementary occupations and administrative occupations (SLMRU, 2012).

Figure 6. Trends in main labour market indicators for 15 to 24-year-olds in Ireland and OECD countries, 2001 and 2011, % change



Note: Youth aged 16 to 24 for Iceland, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States; youth aged 15 to 24 for all other countries. Temporary work is for 2002 instead of 2001.

Source: OECD project on Jobs for Youth (www.oecd.org/employment/youth), OECD Employment database, and OECD Education database.

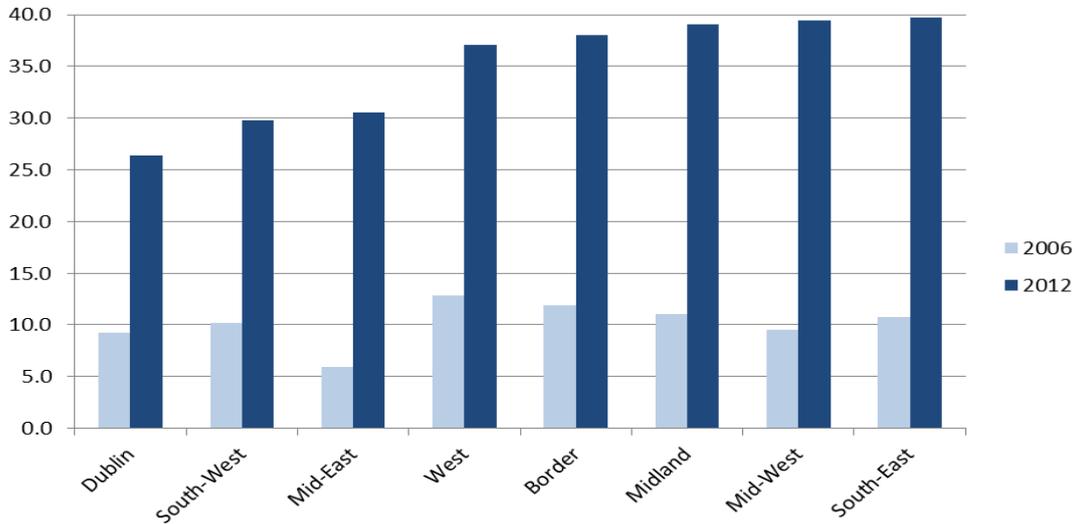
Ireland has one of the highest levels of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) in the EU, despite having a low school dropout rate. The NEET rate in 2012 was 18.7%, compared to an EU 25 rate of 12.9% (Eurostat, 2013), with only Spain, Greece and Italy displaying higher rates. Unemployed NEET stands at approximately 10%, while inactive NEET is at approximately 7% (OECD, 2013b). When broken down by age, Ireland has one of the highest NEET rates among 15 to 19-year-olds².

Within the national drop in youth employment and increase in joblessness, there are variations between Ireland's eight regions. Youth unemployment has risen significantly in each region from 2006 to

² The indicator young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) provides information on young people aged 15 to 24 who meet the following two conditions: (a) they are not employed (i.e. unemployed or inactive according to the International Labour Organisation definition) and (b) they have not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. Data are expressed as a percentage of the total population in the same age group and sex, excluding the respondents who have not answered the question "participation to education and training" and in change over 3 years (in % points). Data come from the European Union Labour Force Survey. It should be noted however that, given how the "not in education" element of the NEET variable is constructed (based on a narrow 4-week window) care should be taken in assuming that all inactive NEETs are in fact remote from engagement. For example, over 60% of inactive teenage NEETs in Ireland self-report as "student" in response to the "main activity" question in the EU Labour Force Survey – suggesting these are young people whose studies are only temporarily interrupted. Some 30% of inactive young NEETs self-report as "unemployed", suggesting they may be temporarily failing to meet some of the availability/search requirements for ILO unemployment, rather than being permanently disengaged. Finally, over 40% of female inactive NEETs aged 20-24 say they have withdrawn from the labour force to care for children.

2012, and the largest disparity is between the two case study regions: the Dublin region reported the lowest jobless rates in 2012 (at 26.4%) and the South East reported the highest (at 39.7%) (see Figure 2).

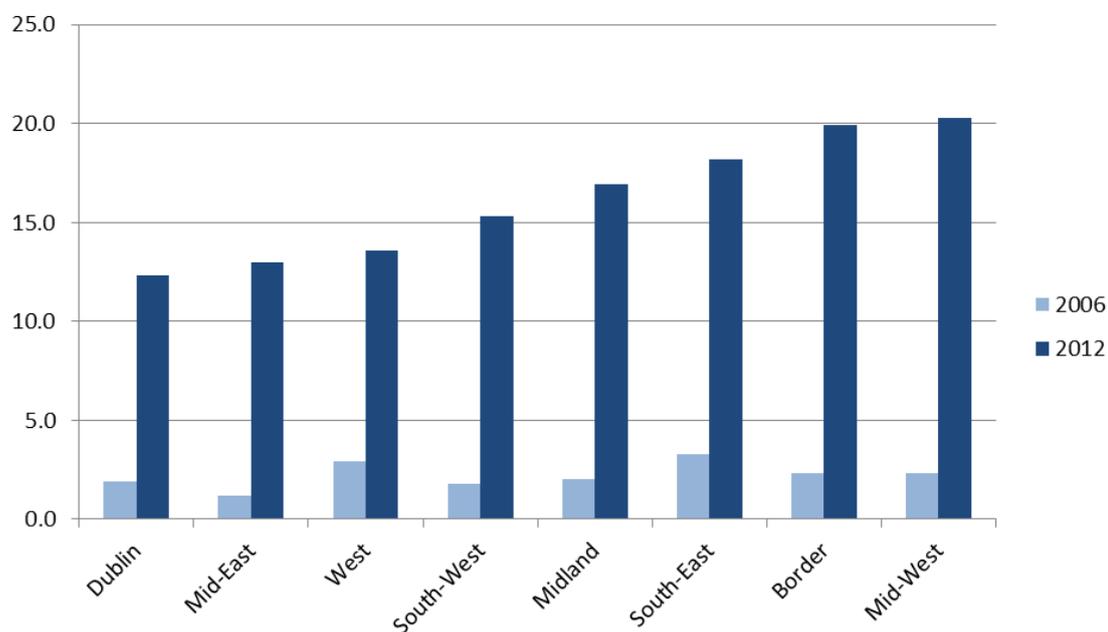
Figure 7. Youth unemployment by region, 2006 and 2012, %



Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office, Ireland

Long-term youth unemployment has also risen in each of the eight regions (see Figure 3). In 2006, the South East region had the highest rate at 3.3%, while the lowest was found in the Mid-East. By 2012 the Mid-West had the highest level at 20.3% and the Dublin region had the lowest rate at just over 12%. Young people are less likely to be out of work for more than 12 months than those aged over 25 which may be due to higher rates of labour force withdrawal following a period of unemployment. This can entail a return to education or emigration (Kelly et al., 2013). Those at higher risk of becoming long-term unemployed are young people who have been previously unemployed, who have numeracy and literacy difficulties, limited formal education or who live in large urban areas (O'Connor, 2010; McGuinness, 2011) and they tend to be males.

Figure 8. Youth long-term unemployment by region, 2006 and 2012, %

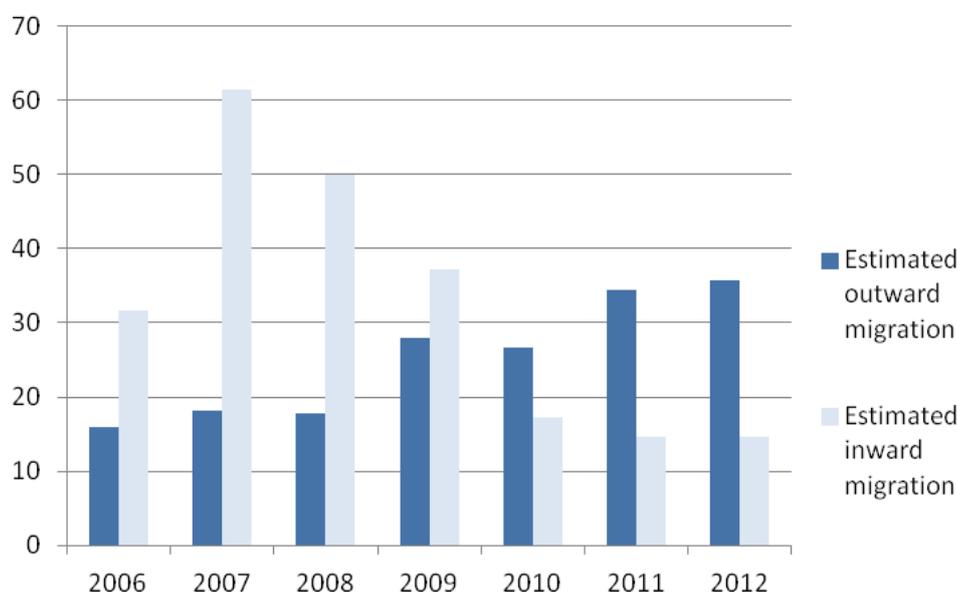


Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, Central Statistics Office, Ireland

Youth unemployment rates in Ireland would be greater still were it not for a fall in labour market participation, a decrease in the size of the youth population, and the fact that not all young people can register as unemployed if they are living at home. Between 2011 and 2012, 83% of the total decline in the labour force is accounted for by emigration and is almost exclusively concentrated in the 20-24 and 25-34 age groups (CSO, 2012b). In 2006, there were 638 000 people in the 15-24 age range and this had fallen to just over 500 000 by 2012. As Figure 4 shows, from 2006 there has been an increase in estimated outward migration among 15 to 24-year-olds (with 2010 being an exception), rising from approximately 15 000 to approximately 35 000 in 2012. Inward migration of young people has fallen from 2007. In 2010, the balance tipped between youth outward and inward migration, with the number of youth leaving Ireland greater than the number entering. However, lower birth rates in the 1980s are described by the CSO as the “primary” reason for a lower youth and young adult population, with migration certainly adding to the trend.³

³ The age profile in Ireland has changed quite considerably from the mid-1980s, similar to demographic shifts in other developed countries. The percentage of the population under the age of 24 has decreased, with a particularly large drop in the 15 to 19-year-old cohort.

Figure 9. Outward and inward migration of 15 to 24-year-olds from 2006 to 2012 (thousands)



Source: CSO, 2012d

Early evidence suggests that young people with higher qualifications are more likely to emigrate than those with lower qualifications (UCC, 2013).⁴ In addition to emigration, there has also been significant mobility internally as young people have moved from struggling regions with fewer job opportunities to larger metropolitan centres such as Dublin, Cork and Galway.

Educational attainment

Young people with a low level of educational attainment are the most likely to be out of work and the young unemployed are more likely to have no formal education (this rose from 17.4% of unemployed youth in 2007 to 48.9% in 2011) (Kelly et al., 2013). The unemployment rate for persons who attained at most a primary education was 33.7%, compared with an unemployment rate of 7.8% for those with a third-level degree or higher (CSO, 2012c). Among those with third-level qualifications, higher unemployment rates were found in specific specialisations e.g. fine arts, audiovisual and media production, and hair and beauty services. A recent study on transition in and out of unemployment among youth in Ireland has found that education had a bigger impact on the probability of a successful transition from unemployment to employment over the course of 2006 to 2011, as did Irish nationality (Kelly et al., 2013).

Irish young people are more highly skilled than ever. A significant proportion of young people have remained in or returned to education and many are choosing to “sit out” the jobs crash by upskilling or reskilling.⁵

⁴ Provisional research from a working abroad expo in March 2013 by the University College Cork supports this finding. The full project findings from EMIGRE: Current Irish Emigration and Return will be available in late 2013. For further information see www.ucc.ie/en/emigre/.

⁵ The overall number of students aged 15 and over increased by 16% between 2006 and 2011 (CSO, 2012).

Box 29. Overview of education provision in Ireland

Education in Ireland is compulsory from the ages of six to 16, or until students have completed three years of second-level education. Second-level education consists of a three year junior cycle followed by a two or three year senior cycle - depending on whether an optional free year Transition Year is taken - after the Junior Certificate examination. During their final two years in the senior cycle, students take one of three programmes, each leading to a state examination at the age of 17 or 18. The Leaving Certificate is the main basis upon which places in universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education are allocated. There is also the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied.

After obtaining the Leaving Certificate students may continue into higher education or access further education and training. Higher education includes general education programmes (ISCED 5A) provided at universities and colleges, and vocational education (ISCED 5B) in institutes of technology. Further education and training refers to education and training after second-level education, but not as part of the third-level system. It includes programmes such as Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses; the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme; programmes in Youthreach for early school-leavers; other literacy and basic education; and, self-funded evening adult programmes in second-level schools, as well as FÁS training programmes i.e. Apprenticeship, Specific Skills Training.

The proportion of early school leavers in Ireland is low in international comparisons. In 2011, it was 10.6% (down from 13% in 2004), below the EU average of 14% (CSO, 2012e) and the OECD average of 20% (OECD, 2013c). School completion rates have increased in recent years in Ireland. 96.4% of students sat the Junior Certificate exams in 2009 or 2010, and 90.2% sat the Leaving Certificate exams in 2011 or 2012 (DES, 2012a).⁶ Retention rates have also gone up in schools with high levels of educational disadvantage (funded under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools programme), increasing from 68.2% for the 2001 cohort to 80.1% for the 2006 cohort (DES, 2012a) but they remain below the national average. Regional and sub-regional differences in the proportion of students who complete upper secondary level are evident. Dublin City is the county with the lowest school retention rate at Leaving Certificate level in Ireland, at 85.7% (among the 2006 cohort) while the highest retention rate is in Kilkenny in the South East region, at 94.2% (DES, 2012a). Females are more likely to stay in education and participate in full-time education than males, however the difference has narrowed in recent years (CSO, 2012c).

The Irish education system places a very strong emphasis on general education and on reaching upper secondary level. The preferred option is to progress to higher education rather than directly taking up employment (due to the lack of openings) or taking a vocational route (Smyth et al., 2011). A very high proportion of students who complete the final school exam continue into higher education. There has been a rise in the number of people entering further education and training (known as FET) and entering universities or institutes of technology (HET).⁷ This increased output in higher education and training means that graduates are forming a high proportion of first-time jobseekers and the young unemployed.

⁶ These figures are percentages of the first time enrolments to the first year of the junior cycle programme in second-level schools in 2006. It is important to note that retention figures do not include educational pathways outside the mandatory education system, such as apprenticeship or traineeship training.

⁷ The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) was the statutory awarding body for further education and training in Ireland and made awards at Levels 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) was the qualifications awarding body for third-level educational and training institutions. FETAC and HETAC were amalgamated into a new, integrated agency - Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) - in November 2012 and the QQI now makes the awards.

The policy context

A period of on-going reforms

Significant institutional reforms are underway in Ireland and, combined, these will have a fundamental impact on policy planning and delivery across a range of domains, including youth employment issues. This ambitious reform agenda confirms the intention of government to seize the opportunity brought by the economic crisis and to build improved structures for better policy delivery. While the impacts of the recession on the labour market and public finances are increasing the incentive to make sure the reforms succeed, applying such broad reforms during crises is not easy. Currently, there are three main sets of reforms happening in Ireland, which will significantly alter the institutional arrangements for employment, vocational education and training, and economic development:

- Since January 2012, three services - job-matching and job-placement, the administration of benefit, and the design and supervision of active labour market programmes – are being rolled into one. The new integrated service, Intreo, is designed so as to be able to adopt a stronger activation approach.
- The institutional framework for vocational education and training is being reformed. The National Training and Employment Authority (FÁS) is being disbanded and replaced by a new body - the Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS). FÁS's national network of training provision (which includes all direct training in FÁS training centres, courses contracted out by FÁS to private training providers, community-based training provision such as Community Training Centres and part of the delivery of national training programmes such as Apprenticeships) and the country's 33 Vocational Education Committees are being amalgamated into 16 Education and Training Boards.
- Local government reform is being considered with local governments acquiring a stronger role in promoting and delivering economic and community development.

It is important to note that these reform efforts are on-going and in some cases decisions on the redrawn structures have yet to be finalised. The way these services interact at local level and their capacity for joined up action is of crucial importance. There are, however, clear signs that silo logic remains within the new settings (see *Local Job Creation* report for detailed assessment of policy flexibility and capacity gaps in the current setting) and thus every opportunity should be used in the on-going reform process to remove barriers for policy integration on the ground.

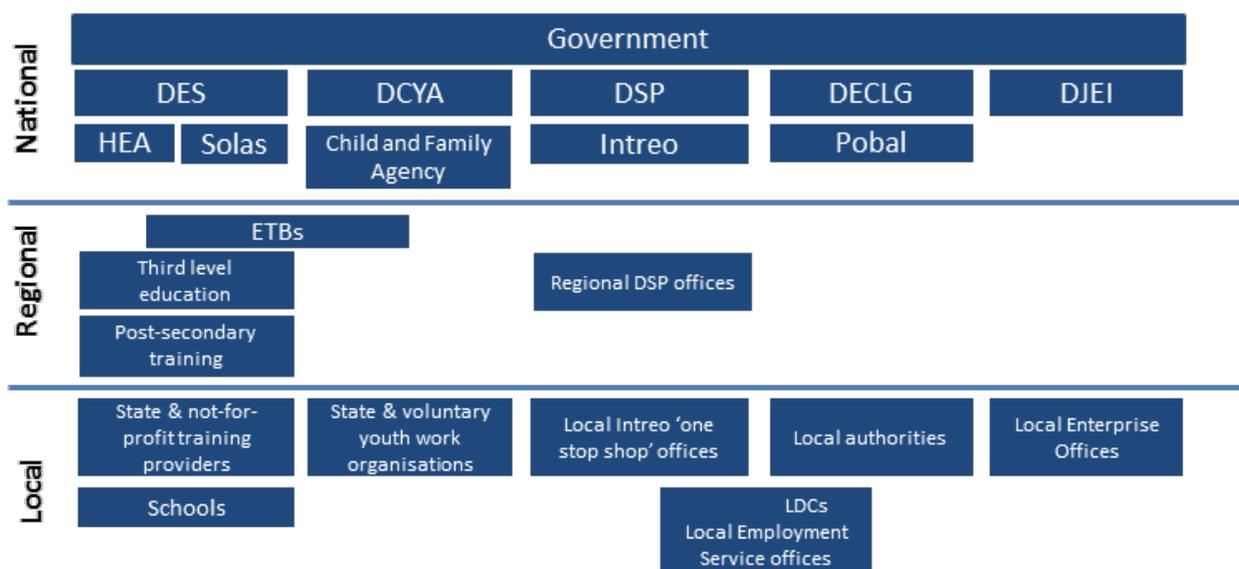
Who oversees Irish youth employment policy at the national level?

Similar to most other OECD countries, no one department at national level has responsibility for youth employment policies. Functions and responsibilities are split across a range of government departments and agencies. Five main government departments have a remit directly in, or significantly impacting on, youth employment policy and actions in Ireland: the Department of Social Protection (DSP), Department of Education and Skills (DES), Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG), Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI) and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA).

Figure 5 shows in broad terms the national state structure and sub-national delivery agents working to support young people into jobs and is based on the post-reform scenario. The weak regional structure in Ireland is evident. Regional Authorities which operate in each of the eight NUTS 3 regions lack a direct electoral mandate, do not have strong statute-based powers or the resources to develop specialised

competences and expertise and are due to be merged into three larger “super regions”. There is a relatively dense institutional network at the local level for young people to access.

Figure 10. Overview of main delivery agencies supporting youth employment at national, regional and local level



Source: OECD LEED

Employment and activation

The Department of Social Protection plays the determining role in active labour market policies and passive supports. Until 2012, Ireland’s Public Employment Service was the responsibility of the National Training and Employment Authority (FÁS) under the DJEI and latterly under the DES. It was wholly independent of the system of benefit administration operated by the DSP. A “second tier” in public employment services was created in the mid-1990s and is operated by not-for-profit bodies, principally Local Development Companies, under contract from DSP – the Local Employment Service Network (LESN). Local Employment Service offices mainly operate in disadvantaged areas with large concentrations of long-term unemployed and they source and provide personal development, training, education or placement services. Prior to the crisis, concerns were being expressed that the welfare system was overly passive and that the receipt of payments needed to be more integrated with active labour market services (OECD, 2013a).

Since January 2012, the national network of Social Welfare Offices is being rebranded as a new service, Intreo, placed under the responsibility of the Department of Social Protection (DSP), and each office is being equipped to operate as a “one-stop shop” where unemployed people can get income support, search for work, be referred to the training they need, or gain access to direct employment or work experience programmes. In step with this ability to provide an integrated and tailored set of services, more pro-active strategies to engage with both claimants and employers are being adopted and implemented. The DSP has also become the contractor of the Local Employment Service Network. These reforms are being carried out as part of the Pathways to Work Programme whose main features include engaging the registered unemployed more intensely as their unemployment spell lengthens, drawing up individually tailored progression plans and “profiling” new entrants to unemployment to identify who should be treated

immediately. Intreo will also develop stronger links with the education and training sector which should help to ensure courses for the unemployed are more relevant to the needs of employers (OECD, 2013a).

Generally, employment and training measures are not specifically designed for, or restricted to, school leavers seeking their first job or for those unemployed under the age of 25. Priority is given to the registered unemployed and “signing on” is the gateway to accessing employment and training programmes. A large proportion of young people is not eligible to register on the Live Register and thus cannot participate in funded training programmes because they live at home.⁸

Ireland’s recent Presidency of the EU included securing political agreement on the proposal led by the European Commission for a Europe-wide approach to a youth guarantee. Youth guarantees are measures designed to reduce the time a young person spends not in employment, education or training. The Irish government is currently considering the possibility of introducing a youth guarantee and a pilot project in Ballymun, a disadvantaged area in Dublin’s north side, has been launched by DSP, the National Youth Council of Ireland and local area groups. This is not a new concept in Ireland; a social guarantee was introduced in the mid 1980s from which Youthreach, CTCs and Post Leaving Certificate courses (PLCs) have developed.

Box 30. What is a youth guarantee and what does it need to work?

Timely support for unemployed youth is essential for a smooth transition into the labour market. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Nordic European countries were the first to introduce measures to reduce the time a young person spends not in employment, education or training. Similar programmes to reduce the inactivity period of youth have been put in place more recently in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland, and more European countries will be introducing similar measures following a Youth Guarantee Recommendation agreed by the EU’s Council of Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in February 2013. The recommendation envisages a scheme consisting of supportive measures geared to national, regional and local circumstances and sets out that all young people under the age of 25 should receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

Countries have different approaches as to whether the schemes represent an entitlement or whether there are obligations on the part of the registered young unemployed. Interventions also vary in terms of eligibility criteria, duration and compensation. In terms of measures, countries opt for different combinations of measures that can be grouped into two broad categories: i) employment services (e.g. job search assistance, employment subsidies) and other active labour market measures (e.g. self-employment and business start-up schemes), and ii) education and training including vocational education and training and labour market training.

Evidence on the impact, especially mid-to-long term, of youth guarantee schemes is rather limited. However, the existing evidence suggests that youth guarantees can be effective in achieving the primary objective of keeping the young person connected to the labour market or education and preventing them from drifting into long-term unemployment. Research shows that the following are key to the success of youth guarantee schemes:

- accurate definition of the target group;
- timely interventions;
- budget flexibility within the PES;
- strong education and training systems including second chance schools, VET and apprenticeship programmes; and
- implementation frameworks that are flexible enough to allow for joined up working on the ground.

Source: OECD, forthcoming a

⁸ Young people living at home can be disqualified from receiving social welfare when parental income is taken into account. The “benefit and privilege” rule deducts 34% of parental income above an assessed threshold.

Education and training

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) oversees the compulsory education systems, VET provision and higher education. The Higher Education Authority is the agency under which the DES guides and funds third-level education and which is responsible for Springboard, “conversion” courses for unemployed graduates and access programmes that seek to increase the participation at third level of young people from working class backgrounds.

The institutional framework for VET is being significantly reformed. In the past there were two principal providers of VET – 33 Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and 16 FÁS Training Centres. VECs operated at city/county level and committees included locally elected councillors. Their remit went significantly beyond vocational education. They managed second-level schools and were involved in the education of disadvantaged youth and other groups, as well as adult education and lifelong learning. Their principal further education programme was the Post-Leaving Certificate programme. FÁS operated a network of 16 main training centres, a national online eCollege, was responsible for the national apprenticeship scheme, and commissioned an extensive programme of external training in communities and enterprises. In 2012, FÁS trained some 75 000 unemployed persons. It contracted out training to private providers and not-for-profit organisations targeting disadvantaged groups.

The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation funded and channelled the proceeds of a national training levy taken from employers into FÁS as well as other organisations. There was a strong contrast between FÁS and VECs. While VECs were regional and local, co-ordinated lightly at the national level, and engaged more in the provision of adult education and lifelong learning, FÁS was a specialist in vocational training across a range of National Framework of Qualification (NFQ) levels and accustomed to engaging with employers and operating under a high level of national direction.

The changes in Ireland’s further education and training system are unprecedented. FÁS is being disbanded. For jobseekers and employers, the Department of Social Protection and its new Intreo offices have taken over responsibility from FÁS for Community Employment and Employment Services including: Advertise a job/Find a job (Jobs Ireland), jobseeking tools, the national internship scheme (JobBridge), CE, Supported Employment, Job Initiative, Jobs Clubs, LES offices, and Employment Services offices (<http://www.fas.ie/en>).

The former Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and regional FÁS operations, including training centres, are being amalgamated under the new Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The phased transfer of FÁS Centres and related training activity to ETBs will be completed during 2014. This will include Contracted Training and funding for Community Training Centres, Local Training Initiatives and Specialist Training Provision (<http://www.fas.ie/en>). Most of the ETBs will have a catchment area of two to three counties. The 16 ETB regions have been chosen primarily on the basis of the scope for achieving operating efficiencies in education and training services within the broad parameters of the existing VEC boundaries. They do not appear to have been influenced by regional labour markets and travel-to-work areas nor by other regional structures in Ireland. Each board will comprise 21 members, within which there will be 12 local authority representatives, two staff representatives, two parent representatives and five community representatives (at least one of whom is an employer). The bulk of the capacity being inherited by the boards will come from VECs and not from FÁS training provision which consists of approximately one third of the total FET capacity. The reforms create potential (if staffing issues are addressed) to end the duplication and competition in the previous twin-track system and to better align training with quality employment prospects. Until the transfer process is complete, SOLAS will manage training on a temporary basis. As the ETBs take over the management of training delivery, SOLAS will focus on planning, funding and driving the development of a learner focused integrated Further Education and Training service. SOLAS can be understood as an agency that will set out to achieve the status and

recognition for further education and training that the HEA has achieved for third level. SOLAS will be responsible for deciding which programmes and courses are provided adapting existing provision, and introducing new provision as necessary. It will allocate all public funding for further education and training. SOLAS will not deliver any education or training programmes but conclude Service Level Agreements with 16 regional Education and Training Boards.

Within the old policy architecture, VECs were responsible for supporting youth work and channelled funding, and providing resources to the sector. A local VEC Youth Officer was in place to provide support and guidance. However, the involvement of VECs in youth work was generally more limited than set out in the legislation (Indecon, 2012a). Additionally, a significant level of inter-regional variation has built up over time as to what youth services are available and the level of funding in different localities. For example, Waterford city has the highest level of per capita funding for youth services, with an average of almost EUR 250 per young person while the lowest is in County Cavan (less than 1 Euro per young person). Responsibility for the provision of education and training in the sector will devolve to the ETBs as part of the reform and it is expected that ETBs will play a more active role.

Youth work

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) is a relatively new department which oversees early years provision, educational welfare, youth justice and youth work. There has been increasing recognition of the fact that non-formal education and youth work⁹ are major contributors to preparing young people for the world of work and increasing their employability. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has statutory responsibility for youth work programmes and services and the department is the main state funder.¹⁰

Youth work is an active domain in Ireland and some NGOs working with youth have large coverage and provide a relatively high standard of activities. Young people in Ireland are more likely to be involved in youth work activities than those in other European countries through activities such as sports clubs, charities, social clubs, and the arts (Indecon, 2012a). It is estimated that 43.3% of the total youth population aged between 10 and 24 (over 300 000 young people) benefit from the various activities and programmes provided by youth organisations throughout Ireland (Indecon, 2012a). This is supported by findings in a recent EU survey on youth participation. Ireland's young people scored highly in all areas of participation in youth groups and are the most likely to be part of an organisation aimed at improving the local community (EC, 2013). In addition to receiving funding from the state, many of the sector's services also receive philanthropic funding and raise their own funds.

The DCYA is currently preparing a Youth Policy Framework to create an overarching strategy encompassing youth work and related areas under its expanded remit. The framework aims to bring greater coherence, connectivity and co-ordination to the sector, and to enhance the development, participation and support of young people aged 10 to 24. Inter alia, the framework will comprehend non-formal education and its contribution to other policy areas including employment, education and training, health, justice and social protection etc. There is a key focus on retaining flexibility in youth policy activities - improving the

⁹ Youth Work is defined in the Youth Work Act 2001 as “a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary involvement, and which is complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations.”

¹⁰. The youth work sector received almost EUR 79 million in public funding in 2011, with the main sources being the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (EUR 61.5 million), the Health Service Executive (EUR 8.3 million) and the Irish Youth Justice Service (EUR 8.8 million).

overall structure and cohesion of services, while ensuring that provision is regulated and of sufficiently high quality.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has recently created a new Child and Family Agency to improve Ireland's children and family services. The establishment of the Agency will bring a dedicated focus to child protection, family support and other key children's services. The Agency will be as broadly based as possible and will include services that (i) may prevent problems arising for a family in the first instance, (ii) identify problems and provide supports at an early stage, and (iii) assist children and families in managing serious problems requiring specialised interventions beyond their own resources (DCYA, 2013b).

Community, local development and local government

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) has taken on responsibility for community and voluntary functions since 2011 and funds local and community development employment programmes. The department has launched a significant reform process in which Ireland's regional and local government structures are being redrawn and the city/country and district level is being strengthened. As outlined in the report *Putting People First*, local government will acquire a stronger role in promoting economic and enterprise development and will assume greater responsibility for Ireland's large voluntary and community sector. At present local authorities have no significant role in the development or implementation of youth employment policies, but the outline of their expanded role suggests that youth employment may be part of their future remit.

Community and voluntary bodies play a role in working with local residents to tackle unemployment and improve job readiness, as well as having more general community development functions. At sub-national level, Local Development Companies (LDCs) are the primary agents through which these functions are delivered. Youth employment is a key issue for many LDCs and they engage as a matter of course with VET providers, youth services and other agencies targeting young people in disadvantaged communities. For example, in 2011 and 2012 Roscommon Integrated Development Company held an Employment Information and Support Seminar for unemployed 18 to 25-year-olds. This seminar brought together jobseekers, employers, and education and training providers and included insights from young people currently on internships.

LDCs operate the Local Community and Development Programme (LCDP) which targets geographical areas of disadvantage. The LCDP engages with young people across two of its goals:

- Goal 2 aims to increase people's access to formal and informal educational, recreational and cultural activities and resources. Its activities support participants (mainly in the under 18s category) through youth work and youth education initiatives.
- Goal 3 aims to increase work readiness and employment prospects. Almost 14% of the LCDP caseload supported in 2012 were in the 18-25 age category.

LDCs are also the principal providers of the Local Employment Service (LES) which are contracted by the Department of Social Protection to provide services to the most disadvantaged in the labour market (24 of the 25 LES are operated by an LDC).

Under the planned local government reform, Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) will be set up in each local authority.¹¹ Their final structure is yet to be confirmed but it is proposed that

¹¹ Ten so-called Front Runner LCDCs are being established during 2013.

there will be 15 representatives on each committee, drawn from the local authority, local and community interests, and state agencies. They will be asked to develop a Local and Community Plan which will prioritise the allocation of funding based on agreed priorities and it is expected that they will provide a new space for co-ordinating local social inclusion policies and improve on the integration achieved by County Development Boards.

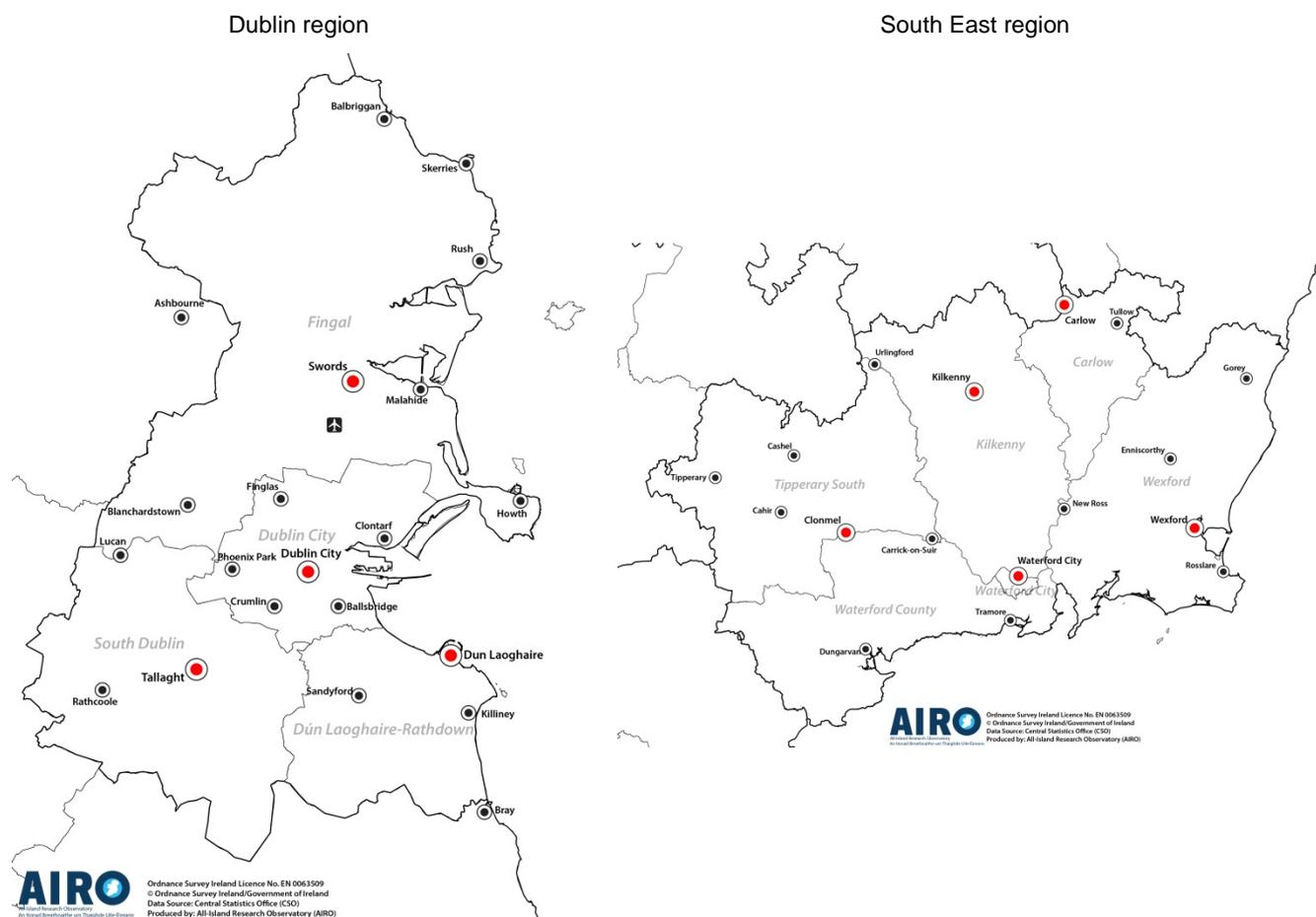
Enterprise and entrepreneurship

The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation is active in setting policy and providing funding for business creation and entrepreneurship, and oversees enterprise supports. It is the driving department behind the cross-cutting *Action Plan for Jobs* and will oversee the Local Enterprise Offices.

Overview of the two case study areas

Overwhelmingly urban, the Dublin region comprises 1.3 million people, is made up of two counties (Dublin City and Dublin County) and contains four local authorities. A large metropolitan area, the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), has developed around the region, with an economic footprint that extends well beyond the administrative boundaries of its local authorities. The region was the powerhouse during the Celtic Tiger period and is the main transport node in the country. The South East region is significantly smaller than its Dublin counterpart, with a population of around 500 000. It is made up of five counties (Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford, and Wexford) and six local authorities. The heart of the region is a triangle formed by Waterford City, Kilkenny City to its north and the almost equidistant Wexford Town to the east. Several labour market catchment areas can be detected within the South East region. Overall, more than 50% of the South East's total population live in villages of less than 1 500 inhabitants or in the open countryside.

Figure 11. Maps of the Dublin and South East regions



Source: AIRO, 2013.

Dublin and the South East have quite different local economies and labour market characteristics. The employment structure in Dublin is skewed towards white collar jobs and is heavily dependent on a wide diversity of services. In the 1980s, there was a substantial shift away from older manufacturing sector jobs towards the development of a service economy with growing numbers of jobs in high value, knowledge-based services and low-skilled retail and domestic services. This gathered pace as the region's economy nearly doubled in size between the early 1990s and 2007. In 2012, almost a quarter of people in employment in the Dublin region were employed in professional occupations with a further 15% employed as associate professionals. In the South East region, skilled trade occupations account for the highest share of employment at 18% (SLMRU, 2012).

The recession has hit both regions hard and the unemployment rate has soared in each, but by much more in the South East than in Dublin. Dublin City presents a chequered image of unemployment rates, with high and low unemployment levels lying side by side. Pockets to the West display higher unemployment rates, with some distressed pockets of unemployment at over 30% around Tallaght, Finglas, and Crumlin. The density of city living makes it possible for contiguous neighbourhoods to have sharply different labour market profiles where communities with high levels of disadvantage border much more affluent communities. Jobless rates in the South East are generally higher on the East coast, with the exception of small pockets of lower unemployment around Wexford. Waterford presents a mixed distribution with areas of relatively low unemployment neighbouring areas with unemployment from 25 to

30%. The critical challenge in the South East region is outmigration and how to retain people in the region with such high unemployment and when the sectors for which they are trained are developing more rapidly elsewhere. An additional factor is the widely dispersed population where a significant proportion of residents live in rural areas, thereby making it more difficult to provide access to activation services.

Employment and training services

Employment services in each region are delivered by the Department of Social Protection. In the Dublin region, the DSP has a network of 17 local offices (grouped into three divisions - Dublin North, Dublin Central, and Dublin South) into which 16 FÁS employment services offices are being amalgamated. In addition, the Department of Social Protection contracts 11 not-for-profit bodies to operate a Local Employment Service in their areas. The single busiest office in mid-2012 had over 12 000 monthly claimants (Tallaght). In the South East region, the Department has a network of 18 offices (six local and 12 branch offices). Local offices are staffed by its own personnel and based in urban centres and large towns, while branch offices are managed by individuals on contracts for services and are based in smaller towns, many within rural areas. Six employment services offices operated by FÁS in the region were absorbed into this network as of January 2012. In addition, there are four not-for-profit bodies under contract to provide employment services. The single busiest office in the region in 2012 (and the busiest in the state) was Waterford City with an average monthly caseload of the order of 12 000 clients.

Both regions have differing endowments of higher education institutions. In 2012, Dublin had over 60 000 students distributed across three universities and four Institutes of Technology. The South East had approximately 10 000 students in two Institutes of Technology but lacks a university – an issue of considerable contention in the region. As regards further education, the Dublin region has two ETBs (formerly three Vocational Education Committees), which operate some 25 to 30 colleges of further education between them, and five FÁS training centres. The South East Region also has two ETBs (amalgamating five Vocational Education Committees) each with colleges of education and outreach centres for course delivery, and two FÁS training centres.

CHAPTER 2: STREAMLINING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS TO PROMOTE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Summary

Youth employment has not been a separate policy priority in Ireland and the Irish government has generally adopted a universal approach to tackling unemployment. There is no national youth employment strategy although there have been many expressions of concern from government regarding rising youth joblessness and strategic intent has been expressed in national policy statements, structures and processes. There are signs that youth employment is coming increasingly to the fore in policy. Ireland's recent Presidency of the EU 2013 included the contribution of youth work to achieving EU 20/20 and getting political agreement on the proposal led by the European Commission for a European-wide approach to a youth guarantee. In May 2013, Ireland committed to the key elements of the OECD Action Plan for Youth and called for OECD support in creating a youth action plan for the country.

A wide range of departments, agencies, and organisations are involved in youth employment issues in Ireland; however, a contributor to weak job activation for young people is the limited policy co-ordination, integration and communication between these departments and agencies at the national level and in their local operations (OECD, 2013a). There was a general feeling among respondents to this review that individual programmes and bodies remain isolated and are denied the synergies that would arise from a clear, overarching strategy and stronger local co-ordination.

Further policy integration is limited by insufficient capacities within the employment and training sector, limited flexibility at the local level in the management of employment programmes and policies, and low levels of employer engagement. Problems with data availability and data sharing between different services, and insufficient use of evaluation to support policy design, innovation and learning were also perceived as barriers to a more strategic approach at the local level.

Assessment of current provision

Issue 1: There is a lack of strategic approach at national level and local provisions are fragmented. There are good examples of linking agents between programmes and projects but these are not universally available.

Youth employment has not been a separate policy priority in Ireland and greatest urgency has been attached to the long-term unemployed (including young people). Nevertheless, as described above, there are signs that youth employment is coming increasingly to the fore in policy.

A wide range of departments, agencies, and organisations are involved in youth employment issues in Ireland but there is limited policy co-ordination, integration and communication between these bodies at the national level and in their local operations and this is contributing to weak activation methods for young people. The way employment and training services interact at local level and their capacity for joined up action is of crucial importance for putting in place effective youth employment strategies. However, local stakeholders reported a perceived lack of understanding by national departments of the complexity of the issues inherent within youth employment at the sub-national level.

There are good examples of linkages between different services and provisions, e.g. VEC (now ETB) Youth Officers, School Completion Programme Workers and HSE providers. Stakeholders favourably mentioned Youthreach Advocates who act as a linking agent between the young person and training course and/or employer. Local community groups are also taking the initiative on the youth employment agenda and seeking to draw together the key stakeholders at county/sub-county level. For example, Wexford Local Development Company are preparing a local youth employment strategy identifying where policy gaps exist, piloting new approaches, and involving young people more in the process (see Box 5). However, there was a general feeling in both case study regions that good individual programmes and bodies remain isolated and are denied the synergies that would arise from a clear, overarching youth employment strategy and stronger local co-ordination. Referral pathways are disjointed and there can be a considerable time lag between someone accessing a first service and being referred to a follow-on agency e.g. an early school leaver joining Youthreach.

Box 31. A community-led, joined-up response to youth employment, County Wexford

Wexford has the third highest rate of youth unemployment in the country at 47% (approximately 3 300 young people aged between 15 and 24). Wexford's Local Development Company drew up a Youth Employment Strategy to lead a partnership approach to youth employment in the county. This seeks to involve young people, service providers and employers in jointly developing actions and approaches at local level to address the education, training and support needs of young people in order to keep them close to the labour market. The core objectives of the strategy are:

- To investigate the experiences of all stakeholders affected by youth unemployment, thereby identifying gaps in information and provision, and barriers and opportunities;
- To pilot new approaches and projects based on those findings;
- To lead a process of co-ordination and networking amongst service providers focused on bringing about more effective service delivery to young unemployed people;
- To facilitate more constructive engagement with local employers in order to better tailor services and supports to the current needs of the local labour market, and;
- To promote the involvement of young people in shaping policy and service delivery through the creation of a new youth network. This network will also explore and pioneer new approaches to spreading information amongst "harder to reach" young people.

The organisation is also seeking to develop a Youth Network to engage young people in critiquing service provision and policy, lobbying for improvements and sharing information about what is available. This network will be linked with the work of the County Wexford Age Equality Network, a network of older people's groups who have participated in policy work and campaigns at local and national levels. In tandem, they will work with employers to expand the Youth Friendly Business initiative across the county and develop a shared action plan to address youth unemployment.

A qualitative research project was conducted with 70 young people, 26 service providers and 21 employers, and a series of meetings were organised to feed back findings and develop practical local actions. Representatives from a wide array of agencies attended, including from the VEC, DSP, FÁS, Enterprise Centre, disability sector, youth work providers, LES, LCDP and Tús representatives. Actions agreed included the formation of a new service provider network to share information and co-ordinate responses to youth unemployment, and an agreement to develop a structured approach to working with local employers.

Source: Wexford Local Development, 2013

Collaboration between the key agents at the local level

Collaboration between employment and training providers

Examples of good practice in information sharing and exchange were found during the study review, for example regular meetings take place between DSP, FÁS and the VECs in the South East region. Protocols are being agreed between Intreo, SOLAS and ETBs to ensure that Intreo offices can refer unemployed people, including those aged under 25, to suitable education and training opportunities. However, a number of obstacles to successful collaboration were identified.

There is no history of structured and systematic interaction or information sharing between social welfare offices and the Vocational Education Committees. Intreo staff do not have access to a database of VEC training opportunities in the way that they have had (and continue to have) for FÁS training centre courses. Much has depended on personal contacts between staff in the two sets of organisations. There is often a clash between scheduling for training programmes run by the VET sector and continued provision through the year is sought by Intreo to better serve the registered unemployed.

The PES and education and training sector have conflicting needs and priorities. While Intreo and DSP personnel identify the long-term unemployed as their priority, a fear was expressed during the interviews that SOLAS and the ETBs would place emphasis on results and placement only.

The expectation is that the employment and training agenda will become more aligned. There is a need for further engagement between local agencies to ensure this takes place regularly and that shared understanding is built on issues such as the meaning of “progression” and the difference between eligibility and entitlement.

Collaboration between local government and training providers

Some local authorities have been pro-active in collaborating with training and economic development providers to provide opportunities for young people. For example, Waterford City Council set up a regeneration scheme in central Waterford and worked closely with the PES and training providers to get young people and the unemployed involved in existing activation programmes (Box 6).

Box 32. Local authority support for young jobseekers, Waterford City Council

Waterford City Council has launched an innovative project to regenerate a large block of derelict commercial property in the heart of Waterford City. Through this it has worked with the Public Employment Service and training providers to get the unemployed and young people into work through tailoring national employment schemes to local needs. The City Council has been able to restore commercial property that was approaching dereliction in a very cost effective manner and this will be used for arts and crafts type activities that will complement the tourism offering in the city and improve the public realm more generally. This project has been delivered by a combination of the Redundant Apprenticeship Scheme and Community Employment Scheme and has up to 30 participants. It has allowed redundant apprentices to complete their on-the-job training in a real and meaningful work environment which they otherwise may not have been able to access, gain full apprenticeship accreditation and improve their chances of finding full-time, stable employment. The Community Employment Scheme engages trades and general operatives who otherwise would have been unemployed. The participants and their work are supervised by an Executive Engineer from the Council.

Source : OECD, forthcoming b.

Involvement of community and youth sector

It is unclear how community and voluntary sector stakeholders in general will be engaged in the new youth policy architecture, in particular how they will engage with Intreo. This is slightly clearer within the training system, and ETB legislation has been amended to include learner representation on the boards, as well as representatives from business and employers. There is a high degree of diversity in the size, funding mechanisms, remit and organisational structure of youth organisations, and their programmes range from the relatively “instrumental” and structured to the more informal, which allows for a high level of flexibility and individualised responses. However, the youth sector has allowed individual initiatives to operate relatively independently and often in competition with each other. The non-formal education sector is contributing to the employment agenda both generally, by strengthening soft skills, and more specifically through running employment and training programmes. There is increasing interest from youth services in providing youth activation and employment measures, and indeed much of this is stimulated by the availability of additional funding for such measures, for example via the European Social Fund. In some cases synergies between youth work and activation already exist and many youth organisations are recognised trainers. For example, under the MOMENTUM programme a national environmental education and youth organisation – ECO UNESCO – is offering a Green Pathways training programme for young people who have been unemployed for more than one year. It provides training and work experience in a firm operating in the green economy, getting young people into paid employment or into further and higher education.

Employers’ engagement

As described in detail in Chapter 3, employers and employers’ associations in both case study regions expressed a strong sense that employment and training services need to be more responsive to their needs and better engage them in programme design and implementation.

Issue 2: Insufficient capacities within the employment and training systems

As identified by the Local Job Creation review, capacity issues are hampering the implementation of reforms in both the public employment service and the further education and training system (2013a). Amalgamating three separate services into a coherent and effective Intreo, and in a context of diminishing resources, is no easy task and the new PES’ effectiveness will come down to the quality of interaction and relationships between frontline staff and clients. It is intended that service focus will change from the passive provision of transaction based services (claims processing and payments) to the active case management of clients. Post-reform, Intreo staff will have to meet with clients three times more often than they did under the National Employment Action Plan.

The introduction of the youth guarantee will place additional responsibilities on personnel in Intreo as they will be the key agents and arbiters for this service. They will be required to negotiate personal plans and refer young people to the requisite services so that every young person will receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. A youth guarantee will also require increased capacity for regular liaison and consultation between the key stakeholders and greater use of shared capacities, particularly with local community groups and youth work organisations. Similarly, reaching out to the NEETs and young people who are not registered as unemployed will require a capacity to work with other voluntary and community partners.

The capacity of the education and training system to respond to the needs of young Intreo clients is an issue, and will also be challenged by the new institutional configurations as staff adapt to their new roles and clients confront a range of new service providers. There has not yet been an analysis of the staff

profiles an ETB might need in order to deliver its objectives in a consistent manner across the country and ETBs have currently inherited uneven provision and skill sets. For example, some ETBs will have no FÁS Training Centres and staff may therefore lack expertise on workforce development matters.

Issue 3: Limited flexibility to adapt national policies to local needs

The *Local Job Creation* review identified relatively limited flexibility at the local level in the management of employment programmes and policies. Local employment offices operate and are supervised in a similar way across the country and their main focus is on complying with nationally set criteria and procedures, with limited input from local stakeholders and limited flexibility to design strategic local measures (OECD, 2013a). This was reflected in responses to the e-survey which indicated that PES offices have little flexibility to respond to local priority groups and create programmes accordingly. Only 21% of PES and 20% of LESN offices indicated that they had moderate to high flexibility when it comes to choosing eligibility criteria.

The supports and measures at the disposal of case officers, designating “at risk” groups, and setting minimum service levels for individuals in these groups are all set nationally. This is evident in the employment programmes with significant levels of youth participation e.g. JobBridge. Several national programmes afford case officers additional discretion to tailor and supplement assistance to individual needs.¹² Thus, while Dublin City and a rural area in the South East have very different contexts within which to provide employment services, this is not reflected in how most programmes are designed. The remodelled public employment service has also assumed responsibility for direct employment programmes which are designed and administered at the national level but “drawn down” by local development groups. There are no regional quotas for these programmes and their level of use therefore largely reflects the health of the local development sector in an area.

The further education and training (FET) system allows for a greater degree of flexibility to adjust training programmes to local needs, and courses and programmes often reflect local circumstances (see *Local Job Creation* report for detailed assessment of policy flexibility in the current setting). There is an element of flexibility in deciding apprenticeships and traineeship specialisations (within the construction sector) to better reflect local demand.

Issue 4: Limited data availability, data sharing and evaluation

In general, data is readily available and of high quality in Ireland. Data gathered by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) is official, timely and internationally comparable. It can be disaggregated to Territorial Level 3 (micro-regions) to provide regional analysis, with the Labour Force Survey and census data as its main sources. The FÁS Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) provides particularly rich data on skill demand, employment trends and patterns.¹³ The employment services have a comprehensive planning and data analysis capacity. It is possible to gather basic data on youth and their progression from school through the Live Register, however data gathering needs to be developed to take

¹² An officer can recommend the use of the Technical Employment Support Grant to purchase training that cannot be sourced in another way, as long as this is approved by the regional manager. The Technical Assistance Training Scheme and the Activation and Family Support Programme also allow officers to supplement assistance to individual needs.

¹³ The SLMRU was established under the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), FÁS. The SLMRU gathers demand side data from multiple sources and synthesises this to develop a detailed picture of skill demand, employment trends and patterns, including for the 15 to 24-year-old cohort. They also gather and synthesise supply side information from the Central Applications Office, FET, HE and private providers as well as immigration statistics.

into account those young people who are neither employed nor on the Live Register. Pobal's Deprivation Index is a method of measuring and visually representing disadvantage of a particular geographical area and has drawn praise for its detail (see Box 7). It shows to what extent organisations are working with people from deprived areas and has become quite an influential tool in the Department of Environment, Communities and Local Government as well as being used across a number of other government departments. It offers the prospect of micro-targeting when setting strategic targets.

Box 33. Pobal Deprivation Index

The Pobal HP (Haase and Pratschke) Deprivation Index is a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area using data compiled from various censuses. A scoring is given to the area based on a national average of zero and ranging from approximately -35 (being the most disadvantaged) to +35 (being the most affluent). In addition to this, percentage data for the area is given under the following categories:

- Population change
- Age dependency ratio
- Lone parent ratio
- Unemployment rate
- Education level
- Proportion living in Local Authority rented housing

The relative index scoring and the above percentage data focuses particularly on the previous two censuses, enabling easy comparison of data between 2006 and 2011. This index is of particular significance given the economic changes that have occurred nationally during this period. The change in the index scoring and in each measured category is also calculated, meaning that the increase or decrease can be easily viewed at a national, regional and local level.

The index can be viewed through Pobal maps (maps.pobal.ie), a free online Geographical Information System map viewer. Pobal maps provide a visual representation of the data which is crucial in terms of highlighting pockets of relative disadvantage, especially to small area level, and is a valuable resource in targeting and tackling disadvantage. The system also allows users to run specific reports to selected areas, as well as visually compare changes between 2006 and 2011.

Source: www.pobal.ie/Pages/New-Measures.aspx

However, the following issues related to data availability have been identified during the review process:

1. There is a need for more locally specific labour market intelligence to supplement national data sets. The data collection system is generally centralised which means data tends to be weak at levels below Territorial Level 3. Data is inconsistently applied across the country. Local labour market intelligence and national data are not always collected in such a way that makes it possible to merge them and local intelligence, in particular, is often thin on the ground. While the SLMRU's collation of data is sophisticated and detailed, the Unit acknowledges the need to ground this knowledge base with local intelligence to sharpen the regional focus. Under the reformed structures the SLMRU will be based in SOLAS and its analyses will be available to support regional and local planning by SOLAS and the ETBs.

2. Data gathering on young people who are neither employed nor registered unemployed is poor. Youthreach experience in this area can be useful as can the experience of the Youth Advocacy Process (Galway City and South Tipperary Partnerships) where a database was put in place to track those at risk of dropping out and those who have dropped out of school.
3. Robust mechanisms for data exchange between different services at the local level are commonly lacking. A large amount of data is generated at local level, for example, through youth and adult guidance services, the health service, the Garda Síochána, and LDCs. Schools, colleges and education/training centres also accrue a significant amount of quantitative information but this often stays in-house or is shared in an ad hoc manner. Thus, while information is circulated and shared locally – local employment services share their data with public employment services and Local Development Companies, for example – this does not always happen in a planned or consistent fashion.
4. Budget cuts have had an impact on data availability relating to skills supply and demand at sub-national level. For example, in terms of skills supply monitoring, an annual School Leavers Survey, conducted on behalf of the DES by a national research group, was ceased in 2009 as a cost cutting measure. The data had examined issues such as school attendance and participation in programmes such as the Leaving Certificate Applied and Transition Year, and also looked at the impact of participation in Post Leaving Certificate courses. It gave crucial depth-of-field to other data on the destinations of school leavers. Its discontinuation means that knowledge of the labour market situation of successive cohorts of young people is based only on aggregate information on the stock of potential labour market participants.
5. Data gathering is often restricted to basic quantitative data rather than deeper progressive indicators of outcomes. There is a tendency to focus on outputs and single steps rather than on how young people progress through the system (further analysis on this is provided in the following section).

Broader evaluation approaches

Evaluation should focus on impact and longer term outcomes and moving service users to the next step in the process, however this is not always easy to do. Taking a superficial view of outcomes (i.e. just placement rates) is especially prevalent where funding is subject to job placement. While, in Ireland, individual data collection occurs and evaluation reports are completed, there is no overall evaluation approach that reveals the progressive outcomes of young people resulting from education and training and labour market interventions. Some programmes, such as the early intervention projects jointly funded by DCYA and Atlantic Philanthropies (a private foundation which provides grants to support health and social projects) have a strong emphasis on evidence and evaluation. A number of rigorous evaluations have been placed online and there are examples of good monitoring systems in place such as IRIS (Irish Reporting and Information System). In many cases individual reports are available for specific projects but these are not shared widely and are not evaluated in a co-ordinated approach that captures the integrated effects of a range of policy interventions. Thus, while individual project and programme evaluations can generate evidence of outputs and gross impacts, without co-ordination to identify how each contributes to outcome delivery there will continue to be the risk that changes are implemented without an on-going and real time evaluation evidence base.

The table below presents a summary of the strengths and challenges of the current approach.

Table 2. Strengths and challenges of Irish approaches to evidence gathering and evaluation

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data is readily available and of high quality, and an extensive range of evaluation activity is undertaken at different levels across the country. • There are a range of partnership agencies which co-ordinate activities, and a shared commitment to improving the evidence base for future policymaking is evident. Teams (such as the SLMRU) and data and performance management systems (such as IRIS) have created platforms for sharing knowledge and managing intelligence. • For specific initiatives there is quite detailed evidence gathering e.g. Skillnets. The national <i>Action Plan for Jobs</i> provides high-level targets to track. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence gathering remains ad hoc and it is frequently not clear for whom or for what purpose it is being collected. • The use of gathered evidence in policy-making in identifying outcomes from employment and training programmes and long-term progression is still underdeveloped. • Travel-to-work areas are not adequately reflected in administrative boundaries but this may change under the new “super regions”. • Testing and piloting new approaches as might be expected in times of crisis is rare. • There is no unifying evaluation framework encompassing youth employment initiatives that cascades involvement from national to local level in evaluation, ex ante and ex post.

What is more, evaluation is about experimenting, learning from different approaches that have been tried, and sharing findings. In times of economic crisis, testing innovations becomes particularly important as new solutions and ways of thinking are required for new problems. However, the current budget situation and job insecurity evident for many within skills supply organisations in Ireland can compound a risk adverse culture and place an onus on delivering in line with the job description rather than a willingness to take risks and trial new activation methods for young people. In the two case study regions there appeared to be little testing of new approaches and experimentation within what is generally a centralised system of government. Changing this mind-set is enormously difficult given the immediate pressures to deliver more with less and with higher numbers of jobseekers using the services.

Recommendations

Strategic approach at the national level

Establish a coherent national youth employment policy framework with flexible delivery mechanisms to support policy integration at the local level.

Improved co-ordination is required at the national level, bringing together the action of key government departments: Department of Social Protection, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, and Department of Education and Skills. The involvement of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government is important in terms of the local development role and the role that local government and the Local Community Development Committees will have in relation to responsibility for the co-ordination, governance, planning and oversight of all publicly funded local development interventions.

Countries differ in terms of their youth policy frameworks; some have fully-fledged youth employment strategies where one department is tasked with implementation or co-ordination, while others put in place looser co-ordination mechanisms. The following principles have been identified as important for successful policy delivery.

Local co-operation has been identified by the OECD as more important to policy integration than national co-operation (Froy and Giguère, 2010). The prerequisite for effective policy integration on the ground is flexibility in policy management in terms of programme design, budget management, target group setting, goals and performance management, outsourcing and mechanisms for collaboration. Local level policy makers and practitioners can deliver better results by being able to take more flexible approaches to resolving labour market issues, while still remaining within the national policy framework and working towards national policy goals (Froy and Giguère, 2010). The reform process underway in Ireland should be seized as an opportunity to give local employment offices greater flexibility to adapt programmes and policies to local labour market conditions, in particular in selecting target groups and inputting into programme design. Thus, in places like Wexford city with very high youth joblessness, additional flexibility could mean partners could identify young people as the priority group and engage with them accordingly, whereas other localities with low numbers of unemployed young people (e.g. rural areas) may target other vulnerable groups. Granting regional/local Intreo offices and ETBs sufficient flexibility would also impact on their capacity to successfully implement the youth guarantee provisions.

Identify a “youth employment convenor” – a lead department or unit at national level responsible for collaborative policy making within government and who can facilitate the involvement of non-state actors in the process of policy co-construction.

Identifying a lead department or unit at national level as the “youth convenor” responsible for collaborative policy making across government could improve co-ordination and collaboration at national level. The convenor needs the capacity to deal with policy bottlenecks and mobilise different departments (e.g. justice, housing, health) and the authority to call for policy action or policy change if required, including by local counterparts. This is a step beyond a ministerial mandate in which a department only consults with other departments rather than taking a leadership or “convening” role. The Irish Government’s Action Plan for Jobs sets a good example of breaking out of the traditional departmental silos by focusing on particular goals in a collaborative way. The cross-cutting implications of the Action Plan for Jobs are particularly apparent in areas such as the reforms, where cross-government participation is a necessary condition in order to deliver them successfully. The convenor would also facilitate the involvement of non-state actors in the process of policy co-construction. Community and social economy organisations can contribute the knowledge necessary for government to develop effective policy and this is particularly useful when programme targets and target groups are being set.

Establishing the new employment and training agencies will require significant work on developing staff in their new roles and creating a unified culture, as well as setting shared goals and clarifying how these are understood. This will prevent the establishment of new services operating as silos with only formal interactions, and also minimise silos building up internally within new agencies. Intreo staff will require initial training to prepare them for their new roles and responsibilities (many have little or no experience of guidance interaction with adults and young people), as well as on-going professional training, supervision and support bearing in mind that they may routinely encounter individuals with difficult circumstances. Staff competency mapping in all new service provider agencies would provide an important aid in the continued redeployment of staff and would also identify where additional expertise and competencies are required and how these can be gathered. It will also demand the development of a corporate ethos of being client-centred and, in certain circumstances, the physical reconfiguration of premises.

Ensure implementation through partnerships. Support strategic co-ordination at the local level and a holistic approach to community resources.

As one of the pioneers in creating area-based partnerships, Ireland has accumulated significant experience in this field. An OECD review of the Irish partnership model highlighted the informal alliances and cross-sector networks which area-based partnerships have brokered, and the platform they have given to disadvantaged communities to have a more direct say in policy making (OECD, 2001). However, there are not many examples of truly strategic approaches to local resources and action that integrates employment, skills and economic development. National government could encourage the formation of broader partnerships in which the main players come together to discuss, set targets on and monitor actions relating to a wide array of activities including the employment agenda, economic growth, education provision and matching skills supply and demand.

Box 8 provides an effective governance model from the United States. Local Workforce Investment Boards create more integrated strategies to address employment and skills, and are led by employers, leading to more strategic actions being taken at the local level.

Box 34. Workforce Investment Boards in the United States

Since 1998, Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) have played a strong role in creating more integrated strategies to address employment and skills within broader economic development strategies in the United States. There are over 600 WIBs across the U.S. at the state and local level, and they are strongly business-led, being both chaired by business and having a majority of business members. Each Local Workforce Investment Area is governed by a Workforce Investment Board, which is responsible for providing employment and training services within a specific geographic area.

The WIBs administer Workforce Investment Act services as designated by the Governor and within the regulations of the federal statute and U.S. Department of Labour guidelines. There are also designated seats for representatives from labour unions and local educational institutions, with economic development officials sitting on the boards in many states. While performance of the boards varies, in some areas they have developed strong integrated strategies which bridge across employment, skills and economic development. WIBs are typically an extension of a local government unit, which in most cases is the county government and can include more than one government entity. They are not agencies of the federal or state governments and staff are not comprised of federal or state employees.

Source: OECD, 2013a

The Netherlands' experience provides a useful example of multi-level governance and flexible policy delivery through partnerships as initiated by national government. In 2009, as a response to the financial crisis the Netherlands launched a national Youth Unemployment Action Plan. To implement the plan, the 30 largest municipalities were tasked to form partnerships to identify policy bottlenecks and agree on regional priorities to be financed.

Box 35. The Netherlands Youth Unemployment Action Plan: flexible delivery through partnerships

Learning from massive youth unemployment during the 1980s, the Dutch Government focused on preventing long-term unemployment from the start of the current recession. Moreover, keeping young people in the labour market or in education was considered vital in order to reduce future labour market shortages expected after the retirement of the baby boom generation. At the end of 2009, following the advice of a Taskforce on Youth Unemployment, the Dutch Government launched a plan of action to fight youth unemployment (*Actieplan Jeugdwerkloosheid*) with a total budget of EUR 250 million allocated for the period 2009-2011. The plan included five main programmes, three of which tackled high school dropout rates.

The implementation framework required the 30 largest municipalities, together with UWV (*Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen*) (PES), to play a co-ordinating function in their “region” (grouping of smaller municipalities) and to work in close connection with schools, entrepreneurs/employers and sectoral bodies. These partnerships served to diagnose problems based on local labour market analysis, identify bottlenecks in programme delivery, and agree on regional priorities that would be funded by the national action plan.

For instance, the Rotterdam-Rijnmond Region action plan had the following actions, based on a study of the regional labour market and an inventory of 70 municipal initiatives:

1. Preventing dropouts (keeping young people at school);
2. Establishing common, regional-based employers-services;
3. Improving the matching process between jobseekers and vacancies;
4. Extending internship opportunities and work-based learning opportunities
5. Giving special attention to vulnerable people and young people at risk of long-term unemployment;
6. Improving the quality and delivery of services by municipalities, jobcentres and other actors through better co-operation and integrated approaches.

Rotterdam and the regional authorities and municipalities had significant freedom in allocating funds from the National Plan (EUR 15 million over two and a half years) to meet regional priorities and targets.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment monitored the implementation of the plan, identifying and mainstreaming practices that work so that regions were able to learn from each other. The national Youth Unemployment Action Plan and corresponding funding ended at the close of 2011, however the regional networks remain in operation using ESF contributions.

Sources: www.eu-employment-observatory.net/resources/reviews/Netherlands-YMRvw2010.pdf

Strategic approach at the local level

Reduce fragmentation in service delivery by mapping the existing programmes and the different pathways they can take at the local level. Identify and address barriers to joint working, strengthen the role of existing linkers and brokers and agree on leadership of the youth employment agenda at local level.

Joint working is needed to ensure that young people are guided as to opportunities in the local economy and to create more integrated services which can allow participants to access a number of different follow-on programmes, thereby aiding continuous learning and development. Joint working can provide for a continuum of interventions that focus resources on critical transition points from early years’ supports to leaving school and making a successful transition into employment. Moreover, co-ordinated responses can also support job retention and progression and better skills utilisation in the workplace,

leading to higher productivity. Such an integrated approach is also required for the success of the eventual youth guarantee.

This requires a shift from supporting individual projects to one where the emphasis is on improving and joining up the entire ecology of available interventions.

As a first stage this involves mapping the options for young people in the educational, employment and training systems and the different pathways they can take at local level. This would be particularly useful for staff in the new PES and FET systems bearing in mind that many may have limited knowledge of options (for example, former community welfare officers being co-opted into Intreo) as well as for existing staff in non-statutory bodies as provision has changed during the reform process. A mapping exercise will help to identify duplication of services, allow for easier tracking of the client journey and make the system more transparent for beneficiaries.

The mapping exercise will also help to identify barriers to joint working which could be related to lack of information, competition, lack of resources for collaboration or incentives that do not reward joint working. The role of existing linkers and brokers (VEC youth officers, Youthreach advocates) could be strengthened and they could be given greater resources to perform their functions on a consistent basis and within a wider community of youth related service providers.

It also includes establishing clear leadership responsibility in an area that has traditionally been seen as a problem for everyone, but for which no one has particular responsibility. This can be done through introducing shared targets, establishing a model to promote information sharing and joint service commissioning, and embedding schools into the partnership model.

In the context of on-going reforms it is difficult to say who is the best placed to lead the youth employment agenda at the local level, but there are opportunities emerging from the new policy landscape for new actors to take more of a leading and defining role:

- New Intreo offices have a strong potential to lead on the youth employment agenda, especially if the plans are realised to equip each office to operate as a “one-stop shop” where unemployed people can get income support, search for work, be referred to the training they need, or gain access to direct employment or work experience programmes. Intreo will also have the responsibility for rolling out the youth guarantee at the local level. For this to be successful, a strong capacity is needed to work in partnership with other local actors to reach out to the NEET population including those not on the Live Register.
- Education and Training Boards can play a key role in developing more coherent networks at the regional level and could provide a platform for collaboration, albeit with a focus on the training agenda. Strong employer participation (much stronger than currently foreseen) is critical. Boards could make use of provisions set out in current legislation to establish committees, whose membership can include non-Board members, to advise them on the performance of their functions.
- While the precise nature of the relationship between SOLAS and ETBs has yet to crystallise, it appears that SOLAS will identify skill needs and demands at national and regional level and that this analysis will inform its commissioning and contractual transactions with providers, including the ETBs. At the national level SOLAS will liaise with a range of actors, in particular the Expert Group on Future Skill Needs, education and training providers, employers and government departments. Inter-agency/cross-departmental protocols can also be useful but these are no substitute for agencies co-operating on the ground at the local level.

- While local authorities have no significant role in the development or implementation of youth employment policies at present, their expanded role suggests that youth employment and education may be part of their remit in the future. Indeed, some local governments have already been active on this front e.g. Waterford City Council (see Box 6). They could be positioned to provide leadership on tackling pockets of high youth unemployment at the county and sub-county level. There will be significant local authority involvement in ETBs, but it remains to be seen how exactly the two bodies will interact. The planned Socio-Economic Committees could also provide a new space for co-ordinating social inclusion policies and create stronger integration.

Local level providers know the level of demand and the local youth cohort and can frequently spot opportunities before the public sector as they are more agile. Better connecting employment and training activities being carried out by the non-statutory sector internally, and linking this into employer and PES networks would create a stronger impact.

Consider ways to facilitate increased access by young people to inter-connected information and guidance services e.g. one-stop information shops.

The mapping of services could lay the foundations for the creation of inter-connected information and guidance services. These are useful as they can provide comprehensive information on various services relating not just to employment, but also on addressing broader developmental needs such as health, justice and rights. They can help guide youth to relevant providers, which is especially helpful for youth further away from the labour market. New Zealand has been experimenting with Youth One-Stop Shops since 1994 – community-based facilities that offer access to a range of health and other services using a holistic model of care (see Box 10). Ireland’s Youth Information Centres could potentially be developed and strengthened to play an equivalent role in Ireland, and Youth Cafes and other youth work services could also play a positive role here. The DCYA could consider initiating a general review of youth employment-related information processes and provision, including Youth Information Centres, web-based services, Intreo offices, adult guidance services and school and college guidance systems, with a view to establishing greater cohesion and youth wrap-around services.

Box 36. Youth One Stop Shops: New Zealand’s experience

A Youth One Stop Shop is a community-based facility that offers access to a range of health and other services using a “wraparound” or holistic model of care. This model is specifically designed to provide youth targeted services. A number of these services have existed in New Zealand since 1994, and while there are many commonalities between them, there are also unique differences. The model of service delivery aims to improve young people’s access to health and social services in a seamless, co-ordinated and appropriate way. Care is provided at little or no cost to the client, is strengths-based and is delivered in a manner that engenders trust, safety and confidentiality. The services may include health, education, employment and social services. Recreational activities are also an optional feature of a youth one stop shop.

Youth One Stop Shops work to reduce the access barriers experienced by young people. Access enhancement strategies include:

- Youth friendly opening hours to accommodate study and work commitments, with service facilities located centrally and close to public transport and other areas of interest to youth.
- Outreach or mobile services and Youth One Stop Shop vehicles that allow services to engage with youth in other settings away from the main facility.
- Culturally appropriate service provision and staff development in cultural competency.
- Youth friendly settings (e.g. provision of couches, pool tables and music).
- Individual needs of young people being identified and services being “wrapped around” or integrated in a

seamless and co-ordinated way.

- Active support to link young people into services they require by youth workers.
- Services being available at little or no cost to the client.
- Services offering a variety of innovative programmes and workshops related to art, music, dance, personal health, esteem building and sexual diversity which attract a diverse range of young people into the service and enable them to be linked into other services they may require.
- Youth friendly staff who are skilled in interactions with their clientele and receptive to their needs e.g. Youth Peer Support Workers and Youth Workers.
- Involvement of youth in service evaluation and decision making processes.

Source: Evaluation of Youth One Stop Shops, Final Report, New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2009

Strategic approaches relating to evidence based policy making

Improve data availability and remove barriers to sharing data at the local level. It would also be useful to develop a single shared management information system to track young people's progress through the school system and beyond.

To address the issues related to data availability it is important to develop protocols for information exchange between Intreo and ETB offices and extend structured engagement with employers at local level to gather and share local labour market intelligence. A more strategic approach could be taken to improving data availability and sharing at the local level to develop a single shared management information system that could be used to track young people's progress through the school system and beyond. As seen in Box 11, Skills Development Scotland was given responsibility to lead work on addressing data building and data sharing issues at both the national and city levels. A more co-ordinated approach to evaluation is required if evidence is to better influence policy making, particularly at the local level.

Box 37. Skills Development Scotland work on closing data gaps

As part of the Glasgow Youth Gateway, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) was given responsibility to lead on addressing data building and data sharing issues at both the national (Scotland) and city levels. This required work on two related fronts. At a technical level, it required the development of a single shared management information system that could be used to track young people's progress through the school system and beyond. On a cultural level, this work required strengthening the relationship within schools to convey the message that improving the supply of intelligence mattered and that schools were central to that process. In particular, there was a concerted effort to reduce the number of unknown destinations post-school as this had been identified as a particular flaw in Glasgow's starting point.

SDS has developed and introduced data hubs across the city, which have led to a marked increase in the quality of data available and partners' ability to share it. As part of this work there has also been a significant improvement in reducing the number of unknown destinations from city schools. The SDS data hub has been central in improving the gathering and sharing of client management information. This has enabled partners to track the progress of young people more effectively and, critically, has tackled the initial challenge around the numbers of "unknowns". As a result, partners have a clearer picture of patterns, as well as a better understanding of who is responsible for different aspects of the client journey.

Source: OECD (2013d)

Support evidence based innovation by evaluating and quickly sharing learning from successful initiatives and with employer involvement from the design stage onwards. Focus on real outcomes and progression measurement rather than counting activities and beneficiaries, and leave space for innovation and risk taking.

The key purpose of evaluation at the local level is to generate evidence on the impacts of local development policy. There are a number of ways to approach evaluation e.g. comparing the observed outcomes with a counterfactual situation and demonstrating that the outcomes can be attributed to the policy intervention - in other words, comparing a “policy-on” scenario with a “policy-off” scenario. However this is far from easy. Evaluation and evidence gathering would be strengthened by explicit buy-in to a vision set around a youth employment strategy which included an evaluation framework to be delivered in the medium-term as well as meeting short-term performance targets. In Wales the Department of Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills developed a range of resources including a guide for monitoring and evaluation which provided a basis for setting standards and assisting evidence gathering (see Box 12 below).

Box 38. Evaluation Framework Model, Wales

Wales has seen a number of changes in institutions and responsibilities for skills policy and evaluation, including in youth employment. From the mid-2000s onwards, evaluation within the Department of Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DELLS) developed a range of resources including a guide for monitoring and evaluation. DELLS was strongly committed to the evaluation of its programmes and projects, both internally and externally. These resources provided a basis for setting standards and assisting evidence gathering, and recognised that monitoring and evaluation are central elements of good project management and intervention in the youth labour market.

An evaluation guide was put together which aimed to give staff the knowledge needed to design and carry out project monitoring and evaluation to meet department requirements. It also demonstrated how evaluation information can be used as a management tool and to help make adjustments.

A range of support materials explained the rationale behind evaluation requirements, and provided examples, templates and methodologies to be applied. Other resources included descriptions of evaluation models, how to conduct evaluations, reporting and follow up, examples of good practices and a glossary of terms.

The evaluation approach in Wales has continued to evolve in recent years and a number of policies and projects have generated evidence to inform decision making on the youth skills and employment agenda. A framework approach was set up, and has been used, for example, in evaluating the Basic Skills Strategy for Wales. The evaluation model comprises a series of indicators to capture evidence of effects. Based on these, the final evaluation framework consists of a comprehensive set of tables detailing all measures, relevant indicators, existing data sources or approaches to data collection and timescales.

The current approach in Ireland appears to leave little room for innovation due to limited resources, and lack of demand and incentives for such behaviour. Evaluation plays a vital role in generating evidence of what works and promoting a culture of learning within the network of agencies, providers and employers. There will be risks from trying new approaches and such risks can bring rewards especially if pilot initiatives are evaluated and learning shared quickly with other areas of the country. This in turn can improve interventions and the functioning of the entire supply side. It can also win much favour with the demand side, especially with representatives of the SME sector where most jobs are created, and provide a boost to encourage more employment. There is also valuable learning to be gained from other programmes in place e.g. employment integration programmes for the disabled.

More evaluation, with employer involvement from the design of the intervention onwards to measure progress of individuals, contributions to the firm and value to the overall labour market would improve the

current situation and develop stronger, mutually productive and successful relationships. This would change the perceptions from the demand side and shift the focus of the supply side onto real outcomes and progression measurements rather than gaining points, counting activities, output targets and completion of courses.

An eco-system approach which takes into account the overall system and involves a range of partners could be an appropriate way forward. This means looking at changes on the supply side as well as more active, earlier engagement with employers to gather evidence on the impact of employment interventions and better align these with identified needs in the economy. Australia has invested considerably in developing capacity to monitor and evaluate youth employment and skills initiatives, and its approach has recognised the need for balanced supply and demand side approaches to successfully deliver a strategy. The importance of employer involvement has been emphasised for many years (longer than in many European countries) and the geographical difference between regions and localities has also been recognised. The National Skill Ecosystem Program, undertaken in the early 2000s, was based on firms in an industry/region working together on skill and workforce issues that they collectively faced.

To counter the risk averse attitude among public sector workers it is important to support the sharing of learning and success stories, for example case studies or reviews from evaluation could build confidence and spark new thinking for more effective delivery. It is important that such reviews incorporate regular structured feedback from participants. It could also be beneficial to allow more space to test and evaluate new approaches and solutions, scaling up the best local initiatives based on formal evaluation evidence. It requires flexible and creative approaches to programme design, giving local stakeholders the room to pilot new initiatives to target employer skills shortages. A longer term, more flexible approach will require a set of appropriate methodological tools to be applied to develop the evaluation framework across regions. Thorough evaluation will then be possible to show how interventions, both in isolation and association with others, are working to better prepare young people for the labour market and in their ability to contribute productively to enterprises.

CHAPTER 3: SUPPORTING YOUTH TRANSITION INTO EMPLOYMENT

Summary

There are cohorts of youth who are relatively “job-ready” and have the skills necessary to access employment. However, they still need support in finding and retaining quality employment with progression possibilities, particularly with decreased demand from employers and increased competition. Findings in the two case study regions have identified several factors that need to be addressed in order to improve the labour market perspectives of job-ready youth.

Career guidance provisions need to be introduced earlier in school and be informed by local labour market needs. Within the emerging public employment system there seems to be a lack of clarity regarding the role of guidance (as opposed to direction) and the prominence which will be given to it. Ireland boasts high levels of school completion and participation in higher education. However, the system is overly focused on higher education from an early age and under-supplies technical and vocational skills. This was evident in the two case study regions where employers reported a low supply of intermediate skills relative to the structure of local employment. According to employers in both case study regions, one of their biggest challenges is that young people are not work ready and do not have sufficient work experience. Current education and training provision is not responsive enough to the skill needs of a local economy and employers are not sufficiently engaged in the design and implementation of youth programmes to ensure they meet their needs.

The Irish apprenticeship model, while highly regarded as producing good quality apprentices, is limited to specific sectors which have been badly affected by the economic crisis. It is seen as too rigid for local employers’ needs and not enough young people consider an apprenticeship a viable pathway into the labour market and for onward career progression. There is insufficient focus on youth job retention, in-work progression and skills utilisation. The levels of youth entrepreneurship are low compared to the EU average and entrepreneurship is generally not taught in schools.

Assessment of current provision

Issue 1: Career guidance comes quite late in the education system, is insufficiently informed by local labour market intelligence, and provision tends to be disjointed at the local level.

There was a strong sense in the two case study regions that the availability and quality of career guidance for young people could be improved and that its contribution to job tenure, productivity, earnings and employer satisfaction is undervalued. Career guidance generally does not have a regional or local labour market emphasis, tending to be based on national career models (OECD, 2013a). There is no national strategy on career guidance and there is a plethora of disjointed provisions with numerous agencies offering career guidance and often little public awareness of these resources. There can also be disparities between localities with regard to the level of provision with some communities having strong clusters of guidance networks while others have relatively few.

In schools career guidance is mainly provided to students nearing the end of their school years, which is relatively late compared to other OECD countries. The function of the school guidance service has mutated over time and it is now principally devoted to preparing Leaving Certificate candidates for choices

in higher education, with relatively little attention paid to preparing students for vocational pathways or work. Career guidance hours in many schools have been reduced as a result of budget cuts in 2012.¹⁴ Even before the reduction in funding, there were strong concerns regarding counsellors' level of labour market knowledge and the limited direct contact schools have with the world of work and employers. In some localities, schools work with community-based organisations to strengthen their career guidance provision. For example, the Northside Partnership in Dublin has a guidance counsellor who goes into local schools to assist students, funded by the DES through the City of Dublin VEC (now ETB), and operates in a relatively disadvantaged part of the city. The programme seeks to keep young people engaged in education and encourage them to apply for places in further and higher education in a locality where few young people stay in education after the Leaving Certificate. Nationally, additional guidance resources are provided for Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS).

Post-second-level school, young people can access career guidance through a number of agencies and organisations, as well as online. Universities, VEC colleges, FÁS courses, Youthreach advocates, Youth Information Centres and youth workers all provide supports for young people, and frequently this goes beyond careers and professional information. In particular, FÁS is implementing a new career-themed approach to training in its course provision and curriculum design and has identified ten career clusters¹⁵ to inform its future training provision based on the labour market intelligence available on current and emerging employers' needs. The new Intreo offices, mediators in Local Employment Service offices, higher education institutions, LDCs, the Adult Guidance Service and Citizen Information Services offer services to all ages. As part of Intreo's new integrated provision, a Personal Progression Plan (PPP) will be drawn up for each individual unemployed for longer than six months, sourcing available further education and training which reflects emerging labour market trends. However, within the emerging public employment system, there is a perceived lack of clarity regarding the role of guidance (as opposed to direction) and the prominence which will be given to it. The Adult Guidance Service in particular was praised during the roundtables as a place where people have the necessary skills assessment and guidance expertise. In addition, Qualifax and Careers Portal databases provide information for learners on courses available.

Issue 2: Ireland boasts high levels of school completion and participation in higher education, however, there is an insufficient focus on vocational education and vocational routes are generally regarded as lower grade options for underachievers. In addition, young people tend to have insufficient work experience and employability skills.

Ireland boasts high levels of school completion and participation in higher education. The OECD *Local Job Creation* report found that post-secondary vocational education and training in Ireland is widely accessible and is generally adaptable to individual needs through the use of online learning, after-hours training, modular and part-time courses. There is also flexibility in the vocational education system to create "bottom up" training initiatives which respond to local needs (OECD, 2013a). However, when the emphasis is on employment outcomes a number of reservations emerge. The system is overly focused on higher education from an early age and under-supplies technical and vocational skills. As discussed earlier, over 90% of young people stay in school until the end of upper secondary education and the preferred option is to progress to higher education. Young people who select a vocational path do so relatively late compared to other OECD countries (e.g. apprenticeships commonly start at 18 years and over). Many young people and their families are confused by the array of vocational options available and

¹⁴ Schools are either maintaining a dedicated counsellor at the expense of teaching hours elsewhere or trying to make it a general responsibility of the teaching staff. In almost one third of secondary schools, career guidance has been chosen to bear the brunt of budget cuts. Institute of Guidance Counsellors, 2012 in OECD, 2013a.

¹⁵ These are Health Care and Social Services, Built Environment and Transportation, Distribution and Logistics, Information Technology, Sales and Marketing, Financial Services, and Business Administration and Management.

the preference is to do the Leaving Certificate and progress to university or an Institute of Technology rather than take vocational training which is seen as lower status. This contributes to a skills mismatch in which employers find it difficult to find the right young people with practical, work-based skills.

This is evident in the two case study regions where employers reported a low supply of intermediate skills relative to the structure of local employment, and university programmes provide a much greater proportion of the skills supply. In the Dublin region, some 170 000 people are employed in the retail, health and hospitality sectors. There were 5 000 Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) course enrolments in these fields in 2011, while three times that number enrolled at undergraduate and post-graduate level in the same fields. In the South-East, there were 1 000 PLC enrolments in the hospitality and retail sectors (which employ 40 000 in the region) and three times as many enrolments at undergraduate level in these subject areas (EGFSN, 2012).

Box 39. Vocational routes available in Ireland at upper and post-secondary level

The overarching framework for upper secondary education in Ireland is the Leaving Certificate, which in addition to serving as the terminal school qualification, is also the basis for matriculation. The standard Leaving Certificate is taken by most students. Two minor vocationally oriented options are included in the Leaving Certificate framework.

- The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is taken by around 7% of the Leaving Certificate cohort and has as its primary objective the preparation of participants for adult and working life through relevant learning experiences. It has been praised for innovative teaching and curricula but criticised for the high proportion of LCA leavers who fail to find a job on leaving (Banks et al, 2010). It is seen as the pathway for under achieving young people and thus does not attract the most talented students. In general, it is not recognised for direct entry to third-level courses which deters potential students but successful Leaving Certificate Applied candidates can access vocational courses.
- The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme concentrates on technical subjects and includes additional modules which have a vocational focus. It allows for direct entry to tertiary education. In addition, students participating in the Transition Year programme (between lower and upper secondary) experience a number of work and enterprise-oriented modules.

The main vocational pathway in Ireland at post-secondary level is the Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme which offers over 1 000 courses in over 60 disciplines and in which some 36 500 people participated in 2012. The PLC programme provides full-time, mainly one year courses for young people who have finished secondary school and adults returning to education who want skills for employment without going to third-level education. The courses deliver the knowledge base for intermediate occupations and combine general education, vocational training and a limited amount of work experience. There is evidence that many employers find PLC graduates poorly prepared for their jobs, and their lack of relevant work experience makes it more difficult for them to fill job vacancies (OECD, 2010). PLC courses had been originally designed to incorporate work experience for a third of curriculum time but this requirement has not been followed through. In addition, the supply of PLC courses is not always well matched to local skill needs.

The apprenticeship system also operates as a post-secondary VET programme, while the Youthreach programme provides second chance entry for education and training.

According to employers in the Dublin and South East regions, one of their biggest challenges is that young people are not work ready and do not have sufficient work experience. Work experience is not generally built into secondary school - although some schools use the Transition Year to allow students to gain workplace experience. During project meetings, stakeholders called for longer periods of work experience to be incorporated into the Transition Year and employers expressed a willingness to go into schools more often and earlier in the education cycle in order to build stronger bridges between enterprise and school.

The fall in employment in traditional youth employment sectors has triggered a shift in government policy from continuing education for young jobseekers to promoting on-the-job experience in training programmes to overcome the “no experience, no job” barrier which prevents many job-ready young people from entering employment. Work-based training is a significant feature of the most effective training courses in Ireland and the benefits of alternating classroom-based training with workplace periods are generally recognised. There are a number of national activation mechanisms which contain a work-based component and seek to align skills more closely to demand which are then ‘drawn down’ by local employment offices. The two main work-based programmes with a youth focus or a relatively high youth participation rate are Job Bridge and the National Traineeship Programme.

JobBridge is a national internship scheme which gives people the chance to gain work experience. It is aimed at those who have been unemployed for at least three months, and within this at young people and young adults (28% of participants have been aged between 15 and 24 and 45% have been aged between 25 and 34). It aims to break the cycle whereby jobseekers are unable to get a job as they do not have sufficient work experience and participants are offered a six to nine month placement with a host organisation which is most commonly in a small to medium sized firm (75%) in the private sector. It is generally a programme for higher skilled university graduates seeking to get a foothold into the labour market and seems to have functioned more as an employer incentive scheme rather than a genuine internship programme (OECD, 2013b). Take up rates by region differ quite significantly.

The National Traineeship Programme is an alternating on- and off-the-job training programme where both the “on” and the “off” the job training components are certified. As with JobBridge, the traineeship programme subsidises employers to take on trainees, although these trainees tend to have lower qualification levels than those in JobBridge. The programme has been criticised for its high costs by international standards and by the fact that it is completely state funded.¹⁶ It has proven problematic to expand the traineeship model and resources allocated to develop new traineeships have been reduced. It has also faced criticism for that fact that its training programme is too reliant on off-the-job training rather than training on employers’ premises, and is not attractive to employers. A number of traineeships need to be changed to meet the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) common award requirements and indeed the link to FETAC certification has restricted the flexibility of traineeships to be able to respond rapidly to skill demand sectors locally.

In addition, other activation measures contain a strong work-based component, however these are not targeted at under-25s but the unemployed/long-term unemployed more generally. For example, TUS provides year-long, part-time work placements in local community settings for those who are long-term unemployed but the number of young participants is low. During project roundtables some stakeholders suggested there is scope for a youth specific version of the programme to be launched.

Issue 3: The Irish apprenticeship model is limited to specific sectors which have been badly affected by the economic crisis. It is seen as too rigid for local employers’ needs and not enough young people consider an apprenticeship a viable pathway into the labour market and for onward career progression.

In its present form the Irish apprenticeship model cannot meet the need for work-based training that responds quickly and flexibly to local skill needs. In 2010, an OECD review of VET in Ireland identified a number of weaknesses, even before the full extent of the impact of the economic crisis on Irish apprenticeship became clear. Firstly, it appeared to be more costly to public funds than apprenticeship provision in other countries which offered similar training.¹⁷ Secondly, the off-the-job training element

¹⁶ The total cost in 2011 was EUR 28.7 million: EUR 11 758 per completed traineeship (FÁS Annual Reports 2011).

¹⁷ Employers pay apprentice wages and the cost of work-based training. Apprentice earnings are set at a percentage of the adult craft rate: 30% in year one, 45% in year two, 65% in year three and 80% in year four (CEDEFOP 2008;

was found to be too specialised and lacked the transferable educational components usually included in apprenticeship programmes. Thirdly, at a local level employer involvement was insufficient. Since the economic recession took hold, there has been a severe drop in the number of new registrants, particularly in construction-related trades, and a substantial number of live apprentices are redundant due to employers experiencing trade difficulties or ceasing to trade entirely. When the construction sector contracted after 2007, apprenticeship in Ireland effectively collapsed. The most pressing issue in the last few years has been to find ways of enabling redundant apprentices to continue their training and either gain the craft certificate or switch to alternative training.¹⁸ Many redundant apprentices have greater difficulty finding employment as they have not gained a Leaving Certificate and consequently they have difficulty in accessing retraining courses which usually require a Level 4 qualification (FÁS Annual Report 2008, 2011).

Box 40. Overview of Ireland's apprenticeship system

Ireland's apprenticeship programme is the recognised vehicle through which to become a certified craftsman. The current model was developed in the 1980s and implemented in the early 1990s as Ireland emerged from a previous recession. In 1993 an Apprenticeship Act underpinned standards-based training for 14 (now 26) craft and technical occupations. It is a modular, standards-based system that comprises alternating phases of classroom-based training and on-the-job work experience. It currently covers recognised technical or craft professions in areas including construction, engineering, electrical, motor, and printing and paper. Formal apprenticeships in Ireland last for a mandatory four years and comprise seven phases regardless of sector/occupation. Three of the phases are off-the-job where apprentices attend a FÁS Training Centre for the first phase and an Institute of Technology for the subsequent two phases over a total period of 40 weeks. The remaining four phases are spent in the workplace. Employers are given a list of activities to be developed on the job and the employer certifies that these have been performed satisfactorily. Off-the-job elements are assessed through modular assessments. Successful completion of all phases leads to a national award at NFQ Level 6 and the curriculum is validated by QQI.

In terms of entry requirements, apprentices must be at least 16 years of age and have a minimum of five grade Ds in the Junior Certificate (or equivalent). Where individuals do not meet the minimum entry requirements they may still be registered as apprentices if they meet other criteria. Employers control their own recruitment process but must notify FÁS when they have hired an apprentice and be FÁS approved. Apprentices registered in 2011 were mixed in terms of age: 31% were 18 or under, 41% were 19-20, while 28% were 21 and over. There are very few adults taking apprenticeships. Most apprentices hold the Leaving Certificate (73%) and it is not generally a programme for early school leavers. Since 1993, 23% of apprentices either did not reach the required standard or left their apprenticeship.

Apprenticeships are limited to a relatively narrow range of designated trades and tend to attract extremely low numbers of female participants. Formal apprenticeship in Ireland is only available in sectors with a strong craft tradition. In 2009, just two sectors – construction and electrical trades – accounted for over 80% of all apprentices. In 2004, of a total of 27 935 apprentices, only 119 were women (Gender in Irish Education, 2006). It is difficult to speak of outcomes as no evaluation has been done for a number of years on where apprentices end up after completion, as in

Steedman 2010). The government meets the full cost of off-the-job training and, unusually, the cost of an allowance paid to apprentices in lieu of wages during off-the-job training, as well as travel and accommodation expenses where appropriate. The average cost of an apprenticeship per year was 11 715 EUR in 2011 - a slight drop from the 2008 cost (DES, 2013b). The total programme cost of the apprenticeship system was EUR 87.8 million in 2011 which was a significant decline from the 2008 cost of EUR 225 million. However, according to sources within FÁS the apprenticeship model is less expensive than other state funded programmes (e.g. traineeship) on a cost per day basis. The cost is shared between employers (who fund 40 weeks per year) and the state, which reduces the public sector cost.

¹⁸ In 2011, some 3 600 redundant apprentices were assisted to complete their apprenticeship. Many redundant apprentices have greater difficulties in finding employment and accessing retraining courses which usually require a Level 4 qualification if they have not gained a Leaving Certificate (FÁS Annual Report 2008, 2011). FÁS has put in place a number of publicly-financed measures to enable redundant apprentices to complete their apprenticeship or switch to training in a different occupation.

the past there was generally 100% employment.

Informal apprenticeships also operate in Ireland in a number of occupations such as accountancy and hairdressing, and are wholly funded by the employer. For example, Peter Mark – a leading Irish hairdressing chain – provides a three year course accessible to school leavers with on- and off-the-job training, based on continuous assessment. Off-the-job training is provided in specialist training centres and trainees are employed on full pay during training. There are also professional apprenticeships, such as for solicitors, accountants etc.

Source : OECD, 2010; DES, 2013b, FÁS, 2013, Peter Mark website

There is an element of flexibility within the current apprenticeship system even within the narrow specialisations it provides. A different mix of apprenticeships can be offered in different locations but the apprenticeship system cannot be differentiated, amended or changed locally. For example, training centres in County Donegal offer a different mix of course types for unemployed adults than Dublin and some training centres have a greater focus on national training needs while others offer more locally specific provision. In some cases there is special training for apprentices in local institutes. ITs, for example, offer special refresher courses for apprentices and pre-apprenticeship programmes are offered in CTCs and Youthreach centres. However, it was apparent in both case study regions that many of these pathways are not clear to the potential apprentice and the local apprenticeship landscape can seem cluttered.

The *Action Plan for Jobs* commits to reviewing the apprenticeship model in Ireland. An Apprenticeship Review Group has recently been set up with the express aim of examining the future of apprenticeship training, looking at ways to ensure a greater focus on work-based learning and a closer alignment to the current needs of the Irish labour market. This is particularly in relation to widening provision to cover non-traditional sectors such as health and IT, thereby increasing the number of apprentices, particularly female apprentices. Education and Training Boards will take on responsibility for apprenticeships at the sub-national level, post-reform. It appears that the Review will largely focus on the existing system and its possibilities for extension and will not, for example, comprehend professional apprenticeships nor internships at higher education (HE) level.

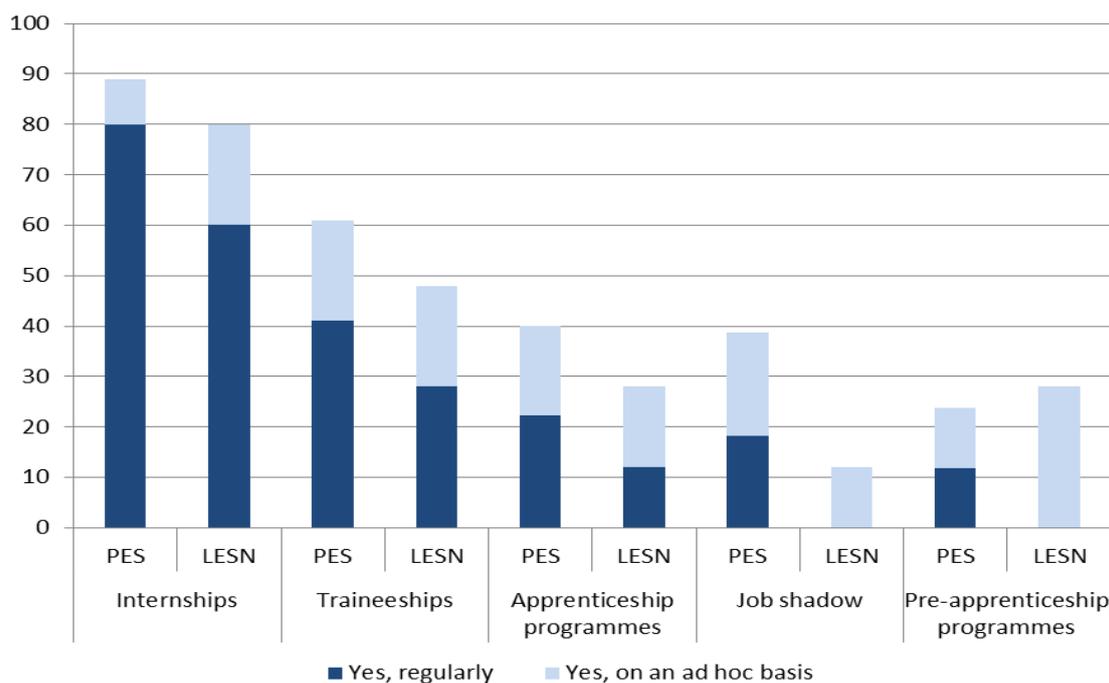
Issue 4: Current education and training provision is not responsive enough to the skill needs of a local economy and employers are not sufficiently engaged in the design and implementation of youth programmes.

Public training curricula offered by VECs and FÁS training are slow to adapt to changing business needs and trainers often do not have up-to-date skills (OECD, 2013a). During stakeholder meetings employers in the two case study regions were critical of the inflexibility of the FET and HET systems and some commented that they are designed to meet the needs of training providers rather than the needs of the local and national economies. In particular, employer representative bodies in the hotel and catering industry (a significant employer of young people) reported that training courses for their industry do not provide training in a flexible manner catering to their business cycle e.g. in winter when business is slack and employees can be spared for training. This is indicative of poor communication, and little consensus setting nationally and locally. Employers called for a changed relationship with training providers (especially at local level) in which they would be engaged as equal partners and for greater trust.

Engagement with employers on youth employment and training provision is poor and there is widespread support for a stronger employer role in helping to design and implement training. In the e-survey PES staff were asked about the extent of their collaboration with local stakeholders e.g. colleges and training centres, social welfare organisations, unions. 24% of employment offices and 36% of LESN offices do not collaborate with employers, a higher rate of non-collaboration than found for other countries

participating in the *Local Job Creation* review. The e-survey probed the extent of engagement with local employers on specific youth programmes (see Figure 7). According to the responses, employment offices are most likely to engage with employers on internships – with 89% of the PES and 80% of LESN offices working with employers on this either regularly or on an ad hoc basis. The second highest engagement is on traineeships. Contact on apprenticeships, job shadow and pre-apprenticeship programmes is lower, ranging from 40% down to 11%.

Figure 12. Working with employers on youth employment programmes



Source: OECD LEED E-Survey, 2012

In working to fill vacancies, the PES formally relied principally on its National Contact Centre rather than on links between local offices and local employers. In practice, a large number of employers used neither the National Contact Centre nor their local employment office when recruiting, even for entry-level jobs, preferring to hire directly or via private jobs agencies.¹⁹ Larger employers rely primarily on in-house training/private trainers to bring new employees (including graduates and people who completed state training) to the required skill levels. In general, employers' interest tends to be more focused on the education system and the supply and quality of higher education level graduates rather than on public employment and training programmes even if these are targeted mainly at young people.²⁰ Nevertheless, as the results above indicate, in programmes with significant work-based training elements there is quite a high level of engagement by employers, particularly on internships (JobBridge) and traineeships (the National Traineeship programme).

¹⁹ A recent business survey on recruitment of non-graduates showed that less than 10% of surveyed employers found the National Contact Centre to be fairly or very effective, while around 35% described it as ineffective. Almost 60% of surveyed employers do not use this as a recruitment source in the first instance. Findings for using the local employment office to source workers are similar (IBEC, 2013).

²⁰ Employers contribute to training via the National Training Fund, administered by the Department of Education and Skills. A small levy (0.7%) is incorporated into employers' basic social insurance contribution.

Employers would like to be more involved in the design and implementation phases of new training programmes so as to ensure the best fit with their requirements. There is scope in the changing education and training architecture to build in more employer involvement. The government has introduced a new Employer Engagement Strategy within Intreo which will be a critical element in creating a more responsive employment service. A person in each local office will be appointed to develop a databank of local employers and actively “market” local jobseekers to them. There will also be private sector business representatives on each of the Education and Training Boards. DSP is appointing employer relations managers in each of its regional divisions and their role will be to promote the take-up of their services among the business community (DSP, 2012). In the past employers tended to intervene at the national level if they wanted to influence employment and training provision, but PES personnel noted that now it is a matter of encouraging employers to build up contacts and networks at a sub-national level.

Some new ways are being piloted to encourage innovation by providers and to create education and training projects which are linked to occupations in sectors with good national employment opportunities e.g. MOMENTUM (see Box 15 below). Private, not-for-profit and public providers were invited to propose programmes that demonstrably link specified types of disadvantaged jobseekers with specified areas of employment, and to assume some of the risk if employment outcomes fall below their expectations. This marks a significant departure from the previous standard process in which training providers’ budgets were adjusted annually regardless of their type of training provision and outcomes. In addition, in both case study regions some not-for-profit bodies are working closely with employers in setting up training programmes, particularly SMEs. The two most successful examples are Skillnets and FIT Ltd which facilitate workplace training and up-skilling (OECD, 2013a).

Box 41. MOMENTUM – more innovative, rapid response to employers’ training needs

A recent government initiative has been launched which will provide free education and training projects for up to 6 500 long-term jobseekers to assist them in gaining in-demand skills and to access work in sectors where there are job opportunities. The programmes include on-the job training in the form of work experience modules as well as the development of the workplace skills required to obtain and retain employment. 36 education and training providers from both the private and public sectors will offer 62 individual MOMENTUM programmes in 87 locations across the country. These projects will be in the expanding employment areas of ICT, digital media, healthcare and social services, the green economy, food processing and sales and marketing. Programmes are based on clusters of occupations in sectors associated with good national employment opportunities.

Specific projects will be available for those aged under 25 to assist them to enter or return to employment including Train To Work Opportunities, Green Pathways and a Graduate Activation Programme.

MOMENTUM is an outcomes-based model of education and training. The payment system to providers is outcomes based with part payment reserved for key stages of the programme, including challenging certification, progression and employment outcomes at the end of the programme. The courses are tailored to both the needs of the long-term jobseeker, and those of employers experiencing skills shortages. MOMENTUM is administered by FÁS and funded by the Department of Education and Skills through the ESF supported Labour Market Education and Training Fund.

Source : www.FÁS.ie/en/About+Us/News/momentumskills.htm.

In addition, the increasing number of jobless or underemployed graduates has prompted several new measures with employers to help graduates acquire work experience, convert their skills or acquire new skills to meet deficits. These included JobBridge, Springboard and the ICT graduate skills conversion programmes. The ICT conversion programmes, which are being provided as part of the joint government–industry ICT Action Plan, are designed and delivered in partnership with industry and lead to an honours degree level award in computer science (36% of the participants on the ICT conversion programmes were

below 30 years of age, Department of Education and Skills data). Springboard is a specific initiative to provide part time higher education courses for unemployed and previously self-employed people in areas of skills needs as identified by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and industry input. As Springboard is targeted at people with a previous history of employment the age profile of participants is higher: 22% of participants on Springboard 2011 programmes and 28% of participants on Springboard 2012 were under 30 (Department of Education and Skills data). In addition, the Institutes of Technology sector has a specific remit in meeting the skill needs of employers in a local or regional context.

The government is also updating its suite of financial incentives aimed at encouraging employers to recruit from the Live Register - particularly those long-term unemployed. The new incentive scheme, known as JobsPlus, is an amalgamation of two previous tools (the Employer Job Incentive Scheme and Revenue Job Assist)²¹ and aims to incentivise employers to take on additional employees from the Live Register via an easily understood and user friendly mechanism. It will be run by DSP and is a universal incentive scheme. It seeks to lower the cost of employment for the employer, thereby potentially increasing demand, and will provide a fixed grant payment to businesses per new employee, payable over two years. While business representatives acknowledge that such incentives are attractive, smaller employers have argued that they better suit larger enterprises and that there is “too much management, too much hassle” (IBEC, 2012). Low levels of uptake and awareness in the past indicate that an information campaign is needed to draw more enterprises into the net.

Issue 5: There is insufficient focus on youth job retention, in-work progression and skills utilisation.

There is relatively little attention given to career pathways within companies, the evolution of people’s earnings over time, or to the scale, causes and consequences of job mobility (OECD, 2013a). According to the e-survey, local employment offices are unlikely to work with local employers on supporting job retention and progression for young people once they are in work e.g. by providing follow-on support, helping to establish career pathways. 16.6% of the employment offices do this while the LESN is more likely to do this (48%) regularly or on an ad hoc basis. In-work progression and job retention for youth were not raised in project roundtables as a priority concern, and the general consensus was that at this time of high unemployment the priority is to assist young people in making the school to work transition rather than assisting them to stay in jobs and progress within firms.

The OECD review of Local Job Creation policies in Ireland found that there is a developed awareness of the importance of organisational structures and human resource policies in shaping the demand for, and the utilisation of, skills in Ireland but actions are generally initiated and led by the private sector. The public sector is reluctant to “lecture” firms on these (OECD, 2013a). Former agencies with a mandate to look at these issues have been wound down and the policy focus is generally on assisting the long-term unemployed rather than those in work.

Issue 6: More can be done to support youth entrepreneurship.

Self-employment rates for the under 24s in Ireland are lower than the EU average (1.5% compared to 4%) (OECD and EC, 2012). Entrepreneurship is generally not taught in schools and during the project meetings the point was made that many teachers do not have the requisite skills to do so. There is increasing government recognition that entrepreneurship can drive job creation and increase wealth and

²¹ Under certain conditions employers using these schemes are exempt from paying employer’s PRSI (Pay Related Social Insurance), a double wage deduction in their accounts if they employ a person who has been unemployed for a year or more. The schemes also offer tax incentives to the employee for a set period. Provisional figures for the Employer Job Incentive Scheme in 2012 indicate that 780 employers had been awarded exemptions in respect of 1 030 employees. 794 employers availed of Revenue Job Assist in 2011.

creativity. In times of high youth joblessness it can also be a viable alternative to traditional forms of employment.

A number of initiatives in schools are seeking to foster a “can do” attitude among young people. There have been moves to update school curricula to place more of an emphasis on entrepreneurship and create stronger school-business links. The Transition Year and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme have been designed to develop an entrepreneurial and creative spirit. County Enterprise Boards (CEBs) play a role in promoting enterprise and entrepreneurial activity in their local area by undertaking various programmes to increase awareness of self-employment and entrepreneurship as a career/employment option. The Supporting Youth Transition into Employment to the Student Enterprise Awards (SEA) Programme offers students the opportunity to take a business from the idea stage, through market research to production, selling, record keeping, management and finally writing a comprehensive report on their activities. Over 12 000 secondary level students have participated nationally in this programme since its introduction in 2002/03 (<http://www.studententerprise.ie>).

Some CEBs and Chambers of Commerce are also jointly engaged in promoting the EU Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs initiative within their local area. This innovative business exchange programme gives new or aspiring entrepreneurs the chance to learn from experienced entrepreneurs running small businesses in other European countries. This helps the new entrepreneur acquire the skills needed to run a small firm while also assisting them to establish a business network throughout Europe. The host benefits from fresh perspectives on his/her business and gets the opportunity to co-operate with foreign partners or learn about new markets. The stay is partially funded by the European Union and can last between one and three months.

The Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) is an entrepreneurship programme which operates in schools and youth settings. It targets young people in disadvantaged areas and its objectives are to build self-confidence and interpersonal skills, utilise life skills as a vehicle for employability and increase career and college aspirations (see Box 16).

Box 42. Strengthening entrepreneurial skills among disadvantaged youth, NFTE

Foróige (“development for youth”) is Ireland’s largest youth organisation. First established in rural Ireland in 1952, it is now present in most regions through an extensive network of youth clubs and a diverse set of youth projects. It relies strongly on volunteers to deliver its youth programmes. More than 5 000 volunteers, supported by a staff of over 300, engage in activities with around 60 000 young people each year. It has developed several youth leadership programmes of its own and adapted others from overseas. In 2004, it affiliated to the non-profit, US-based Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) and introduced the latter’s programme for awakening and strengthening entrepreneurial skills among school pupils living in low-income communities.

The main objectives of NFTE Ireland are to increase school completion and attendance rates, promote self-belief and motivation, build communication skills, and develop interest in business. It aims to impact on the lives of some 8 000 young people aged between 12 and 18 years. In 2012/2013, 1 500 young people participated in the NFTE Programme setting up a total of 750 businesses in ten counties throughout Ireland.

An NFTE University (NFTE U) programme has equipped 70 teachers and youth workers to deliver a 40-hour entrepreneurship curriculum either in school or out of school settings. Students are required to develop a business during the year, to meet local entrepreneurs and partake in wholesale and sales events. A seed capital grant is available and the students become active participants across the network with awards being made to inspire and highlight success.

Participation from the business community is encouraged through NFTE’s Business Volunteer Programme, in which business volunteers from small, medium and large organisations link up with a school/youth centre and commit to mentoring young people. Business volunteers get involved in a range of activities such as guest speaking, workshops, assisting with business plans, hosting site visits, and judging at business plan competitions. Almost 200 business mentors volunteered their time in 2012/2013 from organisations such as Accenture, Citi, SMBC Aviation Capital, Bank of Ireland, Kraft Foods, IKEA, and Johnson & Johnson.

In the North Dublin area in 2012/2013, a total of 408 young people from seven schools and one Youthreach Centre participated in the NFTE programme. Bonnybrook Youthreach, Chanel College, and Colaiste Dhulaigh collectively ran nine NFTE classes with approximately 150 participants and Bonnybrook's participant was awarded Youth Entrepreneur of the Year in 2011.

Source: 2013a

The PES also operates two main entrepreneurship programmes. The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) and Short-Term Enterprise Allowance (STEA) allow participants to keep their social welfare benefits for a certain length of time while developing a business plan. Numbers participating in both programmes in both case study regions have risen significantly during the economic crisis.²² Local area-based partnerships in the regions play a key role in providing these supports. Both are universal and there are no specific entrepreneurship funds aimed at young people. Within public employment and training programmes, courses and modules fostering entrepreneurship are widespread and have been experiencing increasing demand e.g. FÁS training and VEC provision. A complementary support role is played by the Community Enterprise Centres (CECs) which provide space in a supportive environment for budding entrepreneurs and serve to help the development of entrepreneurship in urban and rural locations. Many of these community based enterprise centres were established with the objective of assisting local unemployed people to successfully set up their own businesses and regularly advise young entrepreneurs.

In universities, the extent of entrepreneurship teaching varies according to the discipline e.g. engineering, business studies. Voluntary initiatives are also undertaken by the private sector to drive up self-starters.

As part of the local government reform process, there are a number of changes underway in the area of micro-enterprise and microfinance supports. Under the *Action Plan for Jobs* a new “first-stop-shop” micro-enterprise support structure will be established through the dissolution of the existing CEBs and the creation of a new Micro-Enterprise and Small Business Unit in Enterprise Ireland that will work with Local Authorities to establish a network of Local Enterprise Offices located in each Local Authority. These Local Enterprise Offices will incorporate the functions of the existing CEBs and the existing Business Support Units of the Local Authorities.

Microfinance facilitates self-employment and entrepreneurship among groups such as young people who typically face more difficulties in raising money. Microcredits can be made available to young business persons in the form of loans (up to EUR 25 000) made available in Ireland through Microfinance Ireland. Although only operational since September 2012, Microfinance Ireland has already approved 93 micro credit loans with a total value of EUR 1.4 million and supported 218 jobs. The network of CEBs is the main referral partner and it provides assistance with the initial assessment of applications. Microfinance Ireland is targeted at all age cohorts. To date it has approved loans for five applicants aged below 25 years of age.

²² In the Dublin region in 2010, nearly 8 000 people availed of the BTWEA and 445 of the STEA. In the South East there were 1 000 in receipt of the BTWEA and 148 of the STEA.

Recommendations

Establish clearer, simpler and more recognised pathways into vocational education and training and streamline the governance process. Create a more flexible and broader apprenticeship model with stronger links with employers, and look to set up a new locally managed, work-based training offer.

At the local level schools need to work more closely with the PES and VET system to create clearer, simpler and more recognised pathways into vocational education and training rather than directing young people primarily into universities. This will require increased capacities within schools. The disincentives to forging a career through a vocational route need to be removed by improving the image and raising the take-up rate of the Leaving Certificate Applied, more relevant courses in Post-Leaving Certificate which incorporate work experience and, where possible, work-based training (OECD, 2010).

Career pathway approaches can be used to support young people in moving into more vocationally specific careers and set out how this can be done by articulating the knowledge, skills and competencies to better connect education with work in an occupation. There is scope to better trace career pathways into employment-intensive domestic sectors that have high-growth potential and to establish career clusters. In the *Action Plan for Jobs*, the Irish Government has highlighted a number of sectors which have the potential to support job creation. This is important as there needs to be greater recognition that higher productivity in domestic sectors, such as health and social care, retail, catering and accommodation, plays a vital role in local, regional and national job creation and that adequate training must be put in place to meet skill needs. In the on-going realignment of services, Education and Training Boards would benefit from sufficient freedom to innovate, particularly as regards responses to local trends and demand.

The entry route into apprenticeship is demanding and should be simplified. Rather than being referred by a school the onus is currently on the young person to set up an apprenticeship themselves by approaching an employer. While this has advantages, it also places an additional burden on employers who have to deal with individual requests or who may be willing to take on apprentices but have not been approached. One solution is to offer group training in which a young person approaches a group of employers rather than individual. For example, in Switzerland vocational training associations are groups of firms that share apprentices, thus reducing the financial and administrative burden on each firm (OECD, 2010c). Schools can also play a role by being more involved in promoting apprenticeships. The range of sectors in which apprenticeships operate should be expanded beyond the narrow array of construction activities, links with employers strengthened, and a shorter, more responsive model established. This could operate in conjunction with a reformed traineeship system which could serve as a formalised pre-apprenticeship stage.

It would be useful for the ETBs to map all locally available provision by region in order to simplify entry routes into apprenticeships and progression routes post-apprenticeship. There is a need for a more co-ordinated governance process and the possibility of the apprenticeship programme being delivered outside of a statutory framework should also be considered (DES, 2013a). The new training architecture offers potential for more co-ordinated provision at a sub-national level and the existing flexibility to alter provision locally to the needs of local employers should be retained and strengthened in any new apprenticeship model. SOLAS should focus on providing more education and training programmes based on the dual model of classroom-based instruction and on-the-job training.

A locally managed, work-based training offer for young people, which provides them with the employability skills and basic occupational competences to start their working lives, would be an effective way of taking more youth off the Live Register. Some of these elements can be found in existing work-based programmes e.g. national traineeship and apprenticeship, but they can be strengthened and additional

features added. The following points could be taken into consideration when seeking to design such a programme.

1. There is scope to develop a new work-based training model which is supported by local stakeholders and managed by local ETBs, provided in partnership with employers. Such a model could be targeted at young people and school leavers about to enter the labour market, and would aim to improve employability and allow young people to acquire a first occupational skill. There is a need for a general framework for work-based training at all levels (which includes standards, quality and evaluation), with a particular focus on school leavers at NFQ Level 4. This would ensure it was not just another “scheme” and make it more of a structural development.
2. It is critical that any new training provision is linked into further skills levels and serves as a portal for progression in education and the workplace, rather than as a stand-alone qualification e.g. provides pathways to Level 5 training. The new training offer should form part of a suite of work-based education and training provision and, as well as leading to a job, would form a platform for progression to e.g. a job, apprenticeship or a PLC course. It should be targeted at young people and specifically those leaving school with Level 4 qualifications. There is scope for it to absorb existing programmes such as Linked Work Experience and the Community Youth Training Programme. This reorientation towards more developed work-based training could continue into apprenticeship and be better linked to PLCs.
3. The proposed enhanced role for local government also offers greater opportunities for developing stronger local businesses and stronger co-ordination between local level stakeholders. Employers are the key to work-based training opportunities and are the most important players in the three-way partnership between trainees, employers and government that forms the basis of all apprenticeship/traineeship. The training programme should be launched at local level in the sectors in which employers have indicated demand for trainees and developed workable arrangements for on-the-job training provision. At national level, employer representatives organised on a sector basis could approve a broad template for each occupation to set standards but allow space for local employer groups to adapt the training programme to local needs and circumstances.
4. Training programmes work best when designed in connection with local and national labour market needs. On-the-job training programmes could be provided in the workplace or, as is sometimes the case in other countries, by group training arrangements with shared training facilities between employers. At national level, a task force headed by a successful Irish business person, e.g. an entrepreneur, could promote the initiative to employers and encourage their participation. The costs could be shared by employers, young people and the government.
5. Once the basic framework is in place at national level, the decision to set up such a programme should rest with employers, agencies, and institutions at the local level. Local bodies with links to employers – e.g. Chambers of Commerce, Local Enterprise Offices - would be well placed to convene meetings with employers and establish interest and demand. ETBs could task a representative group from each sector expressing interest in the programme with developing a schedule of training for selected occupations based on the national template and together with employer representatives, they could develop off-the-job provision for trainees. Chambers of Commerce could be funded to canvas employers for offers of training places and pass these to ETBs which would hold a list of vacancies notified to them by employers and make these available to young people who would apply directly to the

employer for a place. ETBs would then broker offers of places and young people wishing to participate.

6. In order to provide evidence on what works best, the first local authority areas to initiate such a programme should be designated as pilot projects and supported and evaluated by SOLAS in order to make available expert guidance where needed and so that other local authorities could learn from the lessons. The launch could be managed jointly by the local ETB and the LEO, and involve presentations to schools and centres for education, and promotional activities at local and community level. Finally, ETBs would be well placed to take responsibility for assessment and certification arrangements and for oversight and inspection at local level.

Provide more job search assistance and place more emphasis on the value of skills acquired by young people through youth work settings.

Young people are less likely to have the contacts to find out about job openings, particularly those advertised informally. Even if they hear about a position, they may not have the confidence or experience to know how to apply (e.g. CV writing, interview skills). Even once a young person has sent in an application and been selected for interview, they are much less likely to be successful in the interview process and a recent UK research report has found that interviews “are probably the one stage in the recruitment process that is most likely to disadvantage young people” (CIPD, 2013). Providing more assistance in the process of searching for a job has often been found the most cost-effective method for assisting young people ready to work (e.g. workshops that focus on how to write a resumé and contact potential employers), providing positive returns on both higher earnings and employment (Quintini and Martin, 2006).

Valuing the skills and experiences acquired through youth work can prove useful. A recent survey commissioned by the European Youth Forum on youth work, youth organisations and employers suggests that there is a good match between the skills demanded by employers and those acquired through youth organisations (University of Bath/GHK, 2012). Five of the six most frequently demanded “soft skills” are among those reported to be developed through youth organisations (communication skills, decision-making skills, team-working, self-confidence and organisational/planning skills - the exception is numeracy). The study found that those young people who report higher levels of involvement in youth organisation activities also report higher levels of skills development, particularly if they participate outside their home country. Involvement in youth organisations can help young people to develop networks and connections which can, in turn, help them to hear about job opportunities, carry out more intense job searches, expand the range of occupations they would consider when looking for work and encourage them to be more mobile (University of Bath/GHK, 2012).

Employers were found to generally consider involvement in youth work as a positive experience, particularly for those with less work experience and those who are less academically strong. But they say that they are not sufficiently aware of “what’s going on” in the youth sector, there can be an element of suspicion, and they believe that young people do not provide enough information in their job applications about the skills and competences gained through youth work, probably because they do not think employers will value their youth work experience. Employers reported that they only discover the value of a young person’s engagement with an outside school activity during an interview. There is a need for the PES system to make young people more aware of the value that employers place on the skills developed in youth organisations and how to present these. Much could be gained by putting in place stronger links between employers, youth organisations, and the PES and this could raise awareness of non-formal education activities, bring greater visibility and reinforce mutual trust.

Provide specialised supports for higher skilled youth.

Higher skilled youth, namely university graduates, who in the past did not have particular difficulty in finding a job are now finding it harder to secure a job that matches their qualifications in light of low demand for certain high skills and greater competition between graduates. Not only is unemployment growing among this cohort but so too is underemployment as young people take jobs for which they are overqualified. While this can often be a starting point and strong performing young people can quickly move up the career ladder into higher skilled positions, it can also result in a waste of their talents and a poor return on the investment if their skills are continually underutilised. In addition, as higher skilled applicants apply for lower skilled jobs to get a foothold into the labour market, this forces those with lower skills further down the skills ladder and can lead to qualification inflation. Higher skilled young people may leave their region to look for better employment possibilities, representing a “flight of talent”. With rising mobility, and in certain countries youth emigration, localities need to be able to offer enough employment to their communities across the skills spectrum to retain their young people (OECD, 2013d). Broader skills and economic development strategies should address the demand/supply mismatch and provide opportunities to use the skills of graduates.

Providing specialised services to highly skilled young people within the spectrum of the Public Employment Service can be a good way to attract this cohort, which traditionally tends not to use the local employment offices. Staff develop a good understanding of the qualifications of graduates, and how qualifications can be translated to fit into growth sectors. Innovative responses can emerge on ways to enlarge the scope of university graduates’ job searches and provide new employment opportunities, particularly within SMEs, as has been the case in the Copenhagen Career Centre for University Graduates which was recently set up within the Copenhagen Job Centre (see Box 17).

Box 43. Copenhagen Career Centre for University Graduates - Targeting Employment in SMEs

In Denmark, university graduates are among the most vulnerable groups, facing up to 60% unemployment in the first year after graduating. This is especially apparent among graduates with a Master of Arts degree, librarians and architects. Graduates seem to lack information on labour market demand, very rarely search employment in areas not directly linked to their diploma and have low geographic mobility.

The Copenhagen Career Centre for University Graduates was created in 2012 within the Copenhagen Job Centre (Public Employment Service) with a dual focus: to translate the skills and competences of university graduates to match the needs of SMEs and to work with SMEs to better identify their recruitment needs. The centre aims to expand university graduates’ job searches and encourage them to re-think where their qualifications and specialisations could lead them, and also to open the door to their employment in SMEs. It is funded from municipal budget and has some 30 employees. Activities include:

- counseling and guidance;
- early activation measures to widen job searches (including geographical mobility) from day one;
- working with SMEs to encourage them to rethink their hiring needs.

This is reinforced by intensive networking activities with unemployment insurance funds, universities and other stakeholders, as well as by close collaboration with Copenhagen Municipality Business Service (which supports business startup and growth). It is part of an overall effort to integrate employment policy and industrial policy in the City of Copenhagen. Social innovation, trust based management, active involvement of employees and continuous development of the skills and competences of counsellors are seen as key ingredients of this initiative.

It is planned that after the current 18-month trial period it will be mainstreamed within the Public Employment Service.

Intreo should seek to establish strong partnerships with employers. This requires giving employers a much bigger say into what, how and when employment and training programmes are run and working more closely with them on matching young jobseekers.

It is important to secure business' engagement from the design phase of employment and training programmes for young people. The good ground up collaboration and employment networks that already exist in Ireland can be built on and Intreo can learn from employer-led organisations which are filling skills gaps in firms, and SMEs in particular e.g. Skillnets and FIT. In Glasgow, the Glasgow Youth Gateway was keen to work directly with employers from the outset. The partnership was clear that without this strong relationship, and without jobs, there would be no chance to defeat the challenge of youth joblessness. Public sector partners were helped by a strong willingness amongst many employers to give young people an opportunity (OECD 2013d). Partners have engaged employers in a number of distinctive ways, such as through the “*Get Into*” programmes. Other notable features relating to employer engagement have been:

- ***Strong, visible leadership:*** Several of the city's most prominent business people have actively campaigned about the importance of supporting young people into work.
- ***Mobilising iconic brands:*** Glasgow partners successfully mobilised the iconic brands of the city's two largest football clubs – Rangers and Celtic – to promote the employability of disadvantaged young people.
- ***Capitalising on the Commonwealth Games:*** Glasgow will host the Commonwealth Games in 2014. This will be a major sports event and a core part of the city's youth employment strategy has been to use the games and its links with employers to create opportunities for young people through apprenticeships in supplier companies.

In Australia, employment service providers often have “reverse marketers” who actively market job seekers to potential employers where vacancies have not been advertised. This can stimulate labour demand by anticipating employers' hiring needs before a vacancy is created (Box 18). Reverse marketers target specific employers with whom the job seeker is likely to be able to find sustainable employment. This means understanding the skills, attributes and desire of the job seeker to work in a specific industry, matching these to local employers who are most likely to need additional labour, and having a strategy to “sell” the job seeker to these employers.

Box 44. Reverse Marketers, Australia

The term “reverse marketing” has been in use for some time to describe a marketer who helps consumers to achieve their goals without trying to sell them anything. It works by making the consumer come to you, not you to them. The term is now commonly used in the Australian employment services industry. It refers to the practice of providers actively marketing job seekers to potential employers where vacancies have not been advertised, and referring and placing job seekers into those jobs. Reverse marketing provides a mechanism to stimulate demand for labour by pre-empting employers' labour needs before they create a vacancy. Effective reverse marketing can play an important role in the wider employment services framework by providing job-ready job seekers with access to vacancies that may not otherwise exist.

It is in the best interests of both providers and job seekers that providers target their reverse marketing activities according to the needs of their local labour market and the skills and aspirations of the individual job seekers on their caseload. One way to avoid the inappropriate use of reverse marketing is to separate the reverse marketer in the office from other roles. For example, the employment consultant (the individual who has direct contact with jobseekers) does not participate in reverse marketing. Instead, this role is allocated to a specialist reverse marketer who is one-step removed from the jobseeker. This reduces the risk that employment consultants push unsuitable jobseekers onto employers. The separation is also justified by the particular attributes required for effective reverse marketing: a strong connection with the local industry that takes a long time to build.

Source: OECD, 2013c.

Northern Ireland has recently introduced an Employer Engagement Plan which seeks to simplify its demand side advisory structure. This entails ensuring employers are able to articulate their skill needs to education and training providers, input into curriculum development, standards and qualifications, and provide feedback on improvements to the delivery system. They will also advise the government on policy in relation to longer term skill needs.

It should be noted that employers tend to have a narrower vision of their skill needs, which is more short-term in nature. It is therefore necessary to ensure that local youth employment strategies balance this priority with the need to equip individuals with a broader set of transferable skills to secure long-term labour force attachment. In many countries trade unions work together with employers on skills policies, particularly on curricula development and the provision of workplace-based training. While employers tend to prioritise short-term and narrow/specific skills, trade unions may pay greater attention to the future of the workforce and therefore be more concerned with broader, transferable skills and long-term developments. They also have incentives to protect the interests of existing workers, ensure that those in work use their skills adequately and have access to good quality training, and see that investments in training are reflected in better-quality jobs and higher salaries.

Support employment access and progression within key areas of the local economy through strengthening career guidance and building up career ladders and career clusters.

OECD LEED Programme research shows that career ladders and career clusters (a grouping of occupations and broad industries based on commonalities) offer a useful way of bringing together employment agencies, career advisors, education and training bodies and industrial consortia to construct route-maps to training and employment for youth and low skilled adults. They also help to make the labour market more transparent which facilitates supply and demand matching (Froy and Giguère, 2010b). A career ladder approach which has been developed in the United States in recent years offers a mechanism to re-create a traditional career ladder externally. The main components of this approach include:

1. defining appropriate training with industrial consortia and colleges;
2. adapting training to the needs of working adults;
3. linking training to career transitions, from entry-level to higher-level workers; and
4. disseminating information through careers advice.

While career ladders can support entry and progression in individual industries and sectors, it is also helpful to build horizontal links across sectors to build “career clusters” at a local level. This approach was promoted in the United States by the Department of Education through a career cluster initiative which has been adopted by many states and regions and customised to their local labour markets. Job profiles are mapped across an entire industry so learners and workers can see how different careers interact and rely on one another. Within each career cluster there are between two to seven career pathways from secondary school to college, graduate schools, and the workplace. They enable low-skilled, low-income learners and workers in particular to make connections to future goals, providing motivation for enrolling in a series of related courses.

Box 45. Maryland career sectors/clusters, US

Maryland started working on career sectors/career clusters in 1995 under the School to Work Opportunities Act. 350 business executives in ten different sectors were brought together to inform education policy makers about their bottom line – how they made money and what they needed to be successful. The original project was funded with USD 25 million of Federal School to Work funds, and the approach was very bottom-up: “we let 1 000 flowers bloom,” identified one state representative. “We looked at large clusters, mapped out what knowledge and skills are required, and developed program[me]s around big chunks of skills.” Within each county there is a Cluster Advisory Board (CAB), focused on different industry clusters.

In Montgomery County, for example, which is home to the third largest biotechnology cluster in the United States, there is a CAB focused on the Biosciences, Health Science and Medicine cluster. Administrators, counsellors and faculty members are using the career cluster system to develop programmes that extend from high school to two- and four-year colleges/universities, graduate schools, apprenticeship programmes and the workplace. Although the cluster framework was originally developed for high schools and young people, it is now being adopted by workforce investment boards and other programmes serving adults.

Moreover, career pathways and clusters are effective in supporting job retention and progression. It is critical that when young people start work follow-up support is provided to ensure they are gradually building basic employability skills, particularly for those poorly integrated into the labour market. This support will help ensure sustainable employment and that young people gain the skills necessary to retain a job and acquire more responsibility, and do not remain trapped in low-skilled, low-income jobs.

Considerations for adoption

Career pathways and clusters are a way for the public education and workforce system to optimise their work and produce workers with the appropriate skills for jobs in the region, but they are resource intensive. The following features have been identified by the LEED Programme review of US clusters and pathways:

- There is a tension between trying to respond to the needs of individual employers who might be key to a region on the one hand, and understanding the larger cluster and the foundational skills that are needed across occupations and industries on the other hand. Any approach will try to balance the legitimate skill needs of particular employers with a broader integration of technical and soft skills into the curriculum.
- Changes are needed in the private sector itself. Training to increase skills in a career pathway may only be effective if employers reward the acquisition of skills through wage increases or other benefits for workers. Pathways need to build in rewards for skills acquisition, including certificates, credentials and degrees.
- There is a need to invest in capacity building and the “intermediary” function to develop pathways, work with employers, design new approaches, build networks of providers and align systems. Such capacity building support is resource intensive.
- Much work on careers clusters and pathways is small scale and episodic. More mainstream system alignment at the national and sub-national levels could really have an impact, although regions and local communities must have the flexibility to develop their own partnerships, design their own cluster strategies and respond to local conditions.

Support the expansion of youth entrepreneurship by developing entrepreneurship skills, providing financial, information, and mentoring support, and building start-up support and business development infrastructure.

There is broad agreement on the need for more entrepreneurship teaching/training in Ireland and for this to begin in primary school and to continue throughout. Better engagement between local entrepreneurs and students could be effective in getting students to consider starting their own business as a career option. The Quebec youth entrepreneurship support programme is an example of how this support can be delivered through the youth employment centres.

Box 46. Youth entrepreneurship support programme, Quebec

The DÉFI (*défi de l'entrepreneuriat jeunesse*) youth entrepreneurship programme represents collaboration between the Quebec youth secretariat and the *Réseau Carrefours Jeunesse Emplois* (network of specialised youth employment centres under local public employment services) to promote an entrepreneurial culture among Quebec's youth. The programme is part of the overall youth strategy 2009-2014. Entrepreneurial activities have taken place through the *Carrefours Jeunesse Emplois* (CJE) for nine years and there has been an evolution and refocusing of activity over that period.

The core feature of DÉFI is the presence of an entrepreneurial youth worker in each youth employment centre (*les agents de sensibilisation à l'entrepreneuriat*). The CJE workers work with high schools and school boards in their area to establish programmes that make young people aware of entrepreneurship and support the development of youth business projects. Beyond activities in the school system workers develop interest in neighbourhood projects and encourage youth residents to further conceive new projects that lead to the continued improvement of quality of life in the area.

The programme can involve one-on-one meetings and group workshops for young adults with a business idea or for those already in business. Two broad styles of workshops are available:

- orientation workshops for youth coming from the community involving inspirational testimonials by entrepreneurs and project development information; and,
- more focused workshops aimed at developing entrepreneurial qualities and providing guidance and identifying resources in developing a personal or group projects.

The RCJE supports the activities of the local CJE workers through an annual conference, building a library of materials that can be used at the local level and by holding knowledge sessions involving practitioners and academics. For the last seven years the RCJE has organised a province-wide entrepreneurship day with a wide variety of activities for teachers and students to boost interest and participation in entrepreneurial activity. In 2013, the RCJE launched a website (www.j'entreprennds.ca) that allows visitors to simulate all aspects of a business start-up. The site has received over 30 000 hits.

The most common model of entrepreneurship is self-employment and this group of businesses is the key driver of employment creation however other business models, such as part-time entrepreneurship and co-operative entrepreneurship, can achieve other goals such as social inclusion. Part-time self-employment can be attractive for young entrepreneurs because it can provide a transition into self-employment while completing their education or working in paid employment. Although youth are less likely to run a part-time business when also working in paid employment, US data indicate that 5.5% of young people in post-secondary education in the US use self-employment to support their education (ACE, 2006). This can be an attractive way to enter self-employment because it requires less capital and the consequences of failure are less severe. Part-time self-employment can also provide a good opportunity to gain valuable hands-on experience of running a business on a small scale (OECD and EC, 2012).

Co-operatives are another particular form of enterprise that may be attractive to young people. In this business model, collective resources are pooled and entrepreneurial activities aim to serve a mutual benefit. Although they can be difficult to manage because of a more complex decision making process, co-operatives can be attractive because members can accomplish more than they could individually by

increasing their financial and human capital and benefiting from economies of scale: this can be ideal for young people who need to overcome a lack of resources and knowledge (OECD and EC, 2012). Box 21 sets out a number of ways in which youth entrepreneurship can be supported.

Box 47. How to support youth entrepreneurship

Develop entrepreneurship skills

Entrepreneurship skills programmes aim to tackle the barriers of lack of entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes and lack of prior work and entrepreneurship experience. They equip young people with skills and competences such as opportunity recognition, business planning and running pilot businesses, including soft skills such as sense of initiative, creativity, autonomy and teamwork. These skills and competences will be beneficial for their own (future) business or for working as an employee, while also helping young people become more aware of self-employment as a career option.

Provide information, advice, coaching and mentoring

Young people looking to start businesses are in need of “soft” support such as information, advice, coaching and mentoring to help them overcome their gaps in knowledge. This is particularly true for young entrepreneurs who not only lack self-employment experience, but also lack experience in the labour market. Supporting businesses with “soft” support during and after start-up is important because it complements what students have learned about entrepreneurship in school and helps fill the gaps that have been left unaddressed by the school system.

Provide financial support

One commonly used policy tool is to support young entrepreneurs by covering their living expenses for a period of time. Alternatively, some government programmes provide investment and working capital financing to young entrepreneurs to help them launch their start-ups. One option is to provide grants. These typically have very strong selection criteria to determine who is eligible for support. A further option is to provide microfinancing, which requires the young entrepreneurs to repay the loan at a lower than market value interest rate. More recently, governments have begun to explore other non-traditional start-up financing programmes including business angels and various forms of risk capital that expand the range of financial options available to young entrepreneurs and tap more strongly into private sources of finance.

Develop infrastructure for entrepreneurship

Governments can also support young entrepreneurs by securing a supportive infrastructure that can help overcome barriers associated with lack of networks, skills, finance for premises and access to associated start-up support. Important measures in this category include supporting young entrepreneur networks and business incubators.

Source: OECD and European Commission, 2012

CHAPTER 4: WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE MOST AT RISK

Summary

Ireland has one of the highest levels of NEET youth in the EU and this has sharply increased in recent years. The provision available within the education and training system to reach out to disadvantaged young people and bring them closer to employment may not be sufficient for vulnerable entrants. Currently in Ireland the priority group in activation programmes is the older unemployed. The traditional “strong performers”, such as university graduates, also have a number of suitable training and activation options such as JobBridge, Momentum, Skillnets etc. There is a danger that vulnerable young people are being squeezed out and left behind in the high numbers of unemployed. There is a need to address the issues below that contribute to and compound the disconnect between vulnerable youth and the labour market.

In Ireland, practically all service-based funding initiatives across a range of government departments are concerned with the same “target audience” of young people. This has resulted in initiatives that were originally designed to be taken up by disadvantaged youth being opened up to all young people, thus failing to adequately address the needs of the specific cohort for whom they were devised. There is a need, within Intreo, for more targeted approaches to NEET youth. At present, most provision originating in the PES is outsourced to community and voluntary organisations and the general approach is universal provision of services. There is no specific youth channel in the employment system. In the past, young people have had negative perceptions of the employment service as inefficient and rigid. All youth should benefit equally from mainstream employment activation measures. Nevertheless, mainstream institutions, such as the PES, are not always well equipped to be able to engage with young people who have experienced serial social risk factors such as low education, living in a deprived neighbourhood, drug use, ethnic minority background, mental illness etc. (OECD, 2010d).

There are various employment and training programmes for disadvantaged youth available at the local level, however provision tends to be disparate and small-scale. Community, social enterprise and youth work are useful for engaging disadvantaged youth but are disjointed. There are low levels of early school leaving, and programmes are in place to identify at risk groups and provide pathways back into education or training, although these are not always adequate. Despite some progress and the introduction of new initiatives in recent years, there is much work to be done in the early years education and care sector in Ireland.

Assessment of current provision

Issue 1: Strengthening early years education and care provision

There is a growing evidence-base that correlates the provision of quality early years services (whether universally applied or targeted, market-led or state sponsored) with longer-term benefits that can potentially improve employability and life opportunities. Access to early childhood education and care provides young children, particularly from low-income and migrant groups, with a better start in life. The provision of quality services encompasses a number of considerations, for example appropriate curricula, professional development of staff, and quality assurance standards. Resourcing this sector is a critical issue and varied practices exist across the OECD, mirroring the divided research views on funding mechanisms.

There is much work to be done in the early years education and care sector in Ireland. A UNICEF report suggests that Ireland lags behind international standards in ensuring high quality across all services and supports (2008). Ireland was placed at the bottom of a league table of 25 OECD countries, meeting only one of the ten standards. In addition, according to a report in 2007 the cost of ECEC in Ireland was among the highest in Europe (OECD). Ireland has no national plan for the development of early childhood services in spite of recommendations from the OECD, the Oireachtas the NESF and the Social Partners (Start Strong, 2010).

Nevertheless, there have been significant recent developments in the sector in Ireland, including the introduction of a free pre-school year in January 2010. This has helped to address access and cost barriers faced by families. Other significant developments include the creation of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, an investment through two national programmes into the capital infrastructure, the introduction of the Siolta quality framework, the Aistear curriculum framework and revised pre-school regulations. The Workforce Development Plan was introduced in 2010 to pave the way for upskilling the ECEC workforce and underpinning high quality services in Ireland. The Child and Family Agency has been recently established. In addition, many disadvantaged families are now supported through a targeted subvention in community-based services under a government scheme (Pobal, 2011).

Issue 2: There are low levels of early school leaving and programmes are in place to identify at risk groups and provide pathways back into education or training but there is room to expand these.

The early school leaving rate in Ireland is relatively low compared to the OECD average. Nevertheless, 3.5% of young people finish school without a Junior Certificate (DES 2012a). Future employment prospects for these young people are very limited, particularly at a time of high competition for jobs and when available jobs require higher skills. Poor school performance and absenteeism are particularly likely among young males in disadvantaged urban areas (DES 2012a). The official response to early school leaving has two broad pillars: prevention (retaining young people in school) and response (providing appropriate options for early school leavers in further education or training).

There are a number of specialised programmes in place in Ireland to keep young people in school. One of these is the School Completion Programme (SCP). The SCP was introduced in 2002 to identify and track potential early school leavers and implement supports to keep them participating. The SCP begins in primary school and continues across the Junior Cycle. Under the programme, school-based Local Management Committees (which incorporate community, statutory and voluntary interests) put together supports that target the needs of local young people and these may be provided in school, after-school or during holiday time. Assistance depends on the needs of the students and includes mentoring, personal development, counselling and homework clubs etc. It works in co-operation with local state agencies, youth services and charities such as Barnardos and St Vincent de Paul. There were 124 local SCP projects nationwide in 2010.

Through the School Completion Programme (SCP) and related actions (e.g. actions funded by the DEIS programme) potential early school leavers are readily identified. However, as Smyth and McCoy (2009) commented, “Schools do not exist in isolation so there is a need for joined-up planning and provision between education, health and welfare services in addressing the holistic development of children”. The recent structural changes in the management of children’s services may improve local cohesion. For example, the SCP is managed by the Educational Welfare Service (formerly the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB)) which was established to implement provisions of the Education Welfare Act. The SCP and a range of other supports were unified under the direction of DCYA in 2009.

The Educational Welfare Service is a constituent of the Child and Family Agency which will have a specific legislative remit to promote educational outcomes through its dedicated education welfare

programmes. This brings its actions into the same operational frame as other services targeting children's welfare and may facilitate local cohesion, especially where Children's Services Committees are operational.

With a view to combatting school absenteeism, further increasing retention rates and generally improving educational outcomes for vulnerable children, a strategic approach to service delivery is put in place through the integrated working of the agency's three service strands: the Education Welfare Service (EWS); Home School Community Liaison Programme (HSCL – 402 school-based co-ordinators); and School Completion Programme (SCP – EUR 26.456 million in funding provided to support 124 school cluster projects and related initiatives). In working to deliver an integrated model of service the Board has committed to the principle of "One Child, One Team, One Plan". It is planned that the new practice model will fit with the needs of schools and aim to respond appropriately to the needs of children and families where issues of school attendance, participation and retention arise. Roll-out and implementation of the model is planned from early 2014.

It is understood that it is not possible to retain all young people in schools, and the system provides for those who have dropped out of education, principally through the Youthreach programme. Youthreach is a national programme for young people who have already dropped out of school and with poor qualifications. Aimed at 15 to 20-year-olds, Youthreach centres give them the opportunity of full-time education and/or training that is tailored to their needs (see Box 22). In addition, the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) and Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) provide second chance education/training courses. BTEI makes available a range of part-time/short course options across the full suite of further education programmes. Target groups include early school leavers as well as adults with disabilities, lone parents, unemployed, Travellers, ex-offenders, and people with literacy difficulties. The VTOS provides second chance education/training courses of up to two years duration for people who are 21 years of age or over, and who have been unemployed for at least six months.

Box 48. Youthreach: Second chance schooling in Ireland

Youthreach is a national programme for young people who have already dropped out of school and with poor qualifications. Aimed at 15 to 20-year-olds, Youthreach centres give them the opportunity of full-time education and/or training that is tailored to their needs. Funded by the Department of Education and Skills, Youthreach is provided in out-of-school settings in VET managed-centres or in FÁS-funded, independently managed Community Training Centres (CTCs). A small number are operated by youth services. Youthreach is designed for learners who have often had poor experiences of school and present high levels of personal and educational needs. It is a nationwide programme with 150 centres in all, located primarily in disadvantaged areas, and each centre has on average 35 to 40 students. Participation is for one to two years. The first centre was established in 1989.

Youthreach generally offers the same curriculum as mainstream schools (and may link with a school which offers specific subjects if they cannot provide these) but with smaller classes, and a greater focus on mentoring and social and personal support. 6 000 places are made available annually. The Youthreach concept was designed around the three disciplines of education, training and youth work. The programme aims to promote:

- personal and social development and increased self-esteem;
- independence, responsibility and active citizenship; and
- a pattern of lifelong learning.

One pillar of Youthreach is enhancing responsiveness to local social, economic and cultural conditions and to individual learner needs. It has four phases which are not specifically time bound and are organised to allow learners at various levels to progress through the programme: Induction/Engagement; Foundation; Progression; and Transition.

Youthreach advocates operate in some centres and assist young people in the school-to-work transition stage. They prepare young people for the responsibilities of work or a training programme, work with employers to set up a position, and usually provide follow-up support. Linkages at the local level between Youthreach centres and local services vary. A young person and their family usually go directly to a centre to get a place, although in some cases

there is co-ordination between their school and a Youthreach centre and the school will transfer the individual before they drop out. A young person may also be referred by another local agency such as a FÁS office, the police service, a care service or charity. There is often good local, informal inter-agency collaboration on directing young people to this support. Nevertheless, the referral pathways can be disjointed and there can be a considerable delay between someone leaving school and attending a Youthreach centre.

The system is highly regarded by mainstream practitioners as the education and training system's "flexible friend" and has performed well in evaluations (e.g. DES, 2008). Reviews of learner outcomes from the model have shown over 75% of participants progressing to the labour market or to further education and training.

Source : DES (2008) *Value for Money Review of Youthreach*, www.education.ie/en/Publications/Value-For-Money-Reviews/vfm_review_youthreach_sttc_programmes.pdf

Changes in the architecture of children's services are unlikely, in the foreseeable future, to focus on post-compulsory education and training nor on young people's transition to the labour market. With regard to the PES, preventing school dropout is not within its remit and there is little engagement between schools and local employment service offices to identify young people who are at risk of dropping out. According to the project e-questionnaire, 80% of PES and 84% of LESN offices reported that they do not work with local schools on preventing early school leaving. Those employment offices which do work with schools offer specialised assistance programmes and supports such as extra classes, counselling, mentoring, advocacy, pathway planning, and referral to other providers. Employment offices are more likely to engage with service providers for those who have already dropped out of school.

According to the survey results, two thirds of PES and LESN offices work with local and regional further education and training providers, local centres for education or training, and youth services on providing support to young people who have dropped out of the education system to help them gain additional qualifications and skills. However, in many cases this is already too late and it is easier to engage with "at risk" young people when they are still in the education system (Froy and Pyne, 2010).

Issue 3: Provision for NEET youth and employment and training programmes for this target group tend to be disparate and small-scale.

Ireland has one of the highest levels of NEET youth in the EU and this has sharply increased in recent years. Of particular concern is that, when broken down by age, Ireland also has one of the highest rates of 15 to 19-year-olds not in employment, education or training. The NEET classification is read as an outcome and a defining characteristic of disadvantage among young people. It can often signal the starting point of escalating troubles for a young person and may lead to a number of negative outcomes such as continued unemployment, withdrawal from the labour market, less secure and poorer quality employment later in life, greater risk of youth offending, mental illness and teenage pregnancy. Each of these has a cost attached and thus a high NEET rate is not just harmful for the individual but for society as a whole.

Three concerns regarding NEET youth in Ireland emerged during the course of this review, which overlap with the issues addressed in previous chapters.

1. There is a lack of strong, structured links between PES and VET systems, and in turn with employers, and therefore provision can be disconnected from local needs.
2. The second is a consequence of the first and it is that Ireland does not have clear embedded vocational or occupational pathways into which young people can be guided. This is not a major hurdle for young people with the knowledge and parental support to navigate a complex system, but it is a major challenge for disadvantaged youth and also for those young

people who have skills that are not in demand and who struggle to find avenues of reinsertion into the labour market.

3. The third concern is that in the absence of clear vocational pathways, good holistic information and guidance is of particular importance for NEET youth. However, as discussed in the previous chapters, in Ireland guidance for unemployed youth is lacking and piecemeal. NEET youth may encounter a succession of services and there is an acute need that the responses are consistent and coherent.

The most common type of employment programme engaging with the disadvantaged is direct employment programmes which provide work experience and skills training through job placement. Nationally designed and administered, they are “drawn down” by public bodies and the community and voluntary sector at the local level (2013a). However, in all regions, programme participants are overwhelmingly the long-term unemployed, lone parents, people with a disability, and the older unemployed. Young people make up a very small proportion of participants.

FÁS training has been a major conduit of public funding to not-for-profit bodies engaged in community-based training. It provides funding for initiatives and organisations which engage with young people and provide “bridging” programmes for early school leavers and disadvantaged youth, including Community Training Centres (CTCs) and Local Training Initiatives (LTIs). These are operated by a wide range of local community organisations for those particularly marginalised for personal, social or geographical reasons and unable to access mainstream training. Community Training Centres are independent, community-based organisations providing Youthreach training for early school leavers. There are 38 centres and FÁS estimates it will provide them with EUR 41.7 million in 2012 (9% of its overall budget) on behalf of some 3 550 young people. Local Training Initiatives (LTIs) are operated by a wide range of local community organisations for those unemployed people who are particularly marginalised and are targeted primarily to people under 35 years of age, with no formal qualifications or incomplete secondary level qualifications.

CTCs run the Linked Work Experience (LWE) programme – a work experience programme for young people with social and personal difficulties. It was originally designed as a progression option for participants in Youthreach and serves as a “bridging” programme which gives participants the opportunity to gain six months work experience. The target group is vulnerable young people including those who have dropped out of school, are single parents, or lack parental support or positive role models. The programme includes additional supports such as counselling and help with substance abuse. The CTC or Youthreach Centre prepares internal development modules and identifies sectors and employers where a relevant work placement could be set up. Each young person is assisted in drawing up a personal plan which is based on their previous education experience, hopes and ambitions and following on from this an individualised learning plan is prepared. Some CTCs are much more engaged in the LWE programme than others and actively promote it to the local population. As a community based facility, CTCs are often well linked informally to other services and young people may be referred by local community and social workers, Gardaí (national police service) and Intreo, and they can also make referrals. In the past, employer links were developed informally but now all CTC managers are required to do this, however the level of employer involvement depends on the sector. CTC linkages with industry are strengthened by the fact that an employer sits on the CTC boards of management, and sometimes acts as chairman.

The Job Sampling Initiative (of a much smaller scale compared to the above programmes) targets unemployed young people between the ages of 18 and 25 years who have left school early. It aims to support participants to progress into employment, education or further training through pre-employment training and job-sampling opportunities. The premise of Job Sampling is to offer young unemployed

people an opportunity to sample work through the support of local employers. The project is supported by a number of agencies including FÁS, DSP, Probation Service and the HSE.

In some regions, particularly more isolated and rural areas (for example, the west coast or the mid-lands) it is difficult to attract sufficient numbers of NEET youth into activation programmes as many have emigrated or relocated to other parts of the country. In this case the targeting element may be relaxed and older people are taken in depending on demand. Indeed, in some cases course leaders have reported that young people benefit more from participating in a mixed programme as they may pick up good habits from older participants and can learn from them.

Issue 4: Community, social enterprise and youth work are useful for engaging disadvantaged youth but are disjointed.

As outlined in the opening section, youth work is an active domain in Ireland. Youth services go some way to filling the gaps in service provision for young people and engage young people in educational, community and recreational activities. Youth work engages with a significant proportion of economically or socially disadvantaged young people – it is estimated that over half of young people participating in youth work organisations are disadvantaged. Youth services provide important settings and services that enhance young people’s social skills and employability and they are an effective portal through which to reach young people who are not in employment, education or training. They also present opportunities for young people to assume responsibilities within their local communities.

A recent assessment of the economic value of youth work in Ireland (Indecon, 2012a) reported that over half of youth organisations in Ireland are engaged in activities focused on welfare and wellbeing, while others are “issue-based activities” such as substance and alcohol misuse, education and training supports, and programmes which seek to divert young people from committing crimes or engaging in anti-social behaviour. Youth work organisations are well positioned to engage with the most disadvantaged young people in Ireland and boundaries between youth work, education and training are relatively permeable. For example, Youthreach was set up to bring together the best from youth services, education and training at the local level and is an example of applied youth work in education.

Youth centres at the local level are actively involved in working with young people, much of this driven by voluntary work. Some youth work organisations are directly engaged in education and training activities, for example running a Youthreach or Community Training Centre. Many have embraced social media to complement their street and centre-based actions. In some instances youth work activity is located in the service frame of, or run by, other organisations, e.g. the Young Community Leaders initiative is run by Dublin’s Northside Partnership. Below are some examples of initiatives and projects directed at disadvantaged youth carried out by youth services:

- Youth Cafés are designed to offer a neutral space to all young people where they can get together in an alcohol, drug free zone. One of the core functions of a Youth Café is that it offers support to young people ranging from practical support to giving them the chance to participate in activities that are of interest. One of the greatest strengths of the Youth Café model is its universality. It can work with youth across all levels of need from the universal young population to those experiencing severe adversity. Additional funding from the DCYA has recently been announced.
- The DCYA provides a grant for Special Projects for Youth to organisations which run out-of-school projects for disadvantaged young people. It is available to projects which work in areas where there is a high youth population or youth unemployment, dependence on social welfare/unemployment assistance, social isolation, drug/substance abuse, homelessness and problems of juvenile crime. Priority is given within this to special youth work initiatives which

work with young homeless people, substance abusers and Travellers. It is commonly used to fund cases where there has been a failure of mainline youth services and low take-up of ordinary educational opportunities.

- Garda Youth Diversion Projects are local community activities which work with children to help them move away from anti-social behaviour. They can help young people develop their sense of community and their social skills through different activities, and offer opportunities for education, employment and training, sport, art and music. Most projects operate outside of school hours in areas with a high proportion of early school-leavers. The projects seek to encourage a better quality of life for everyone in the community and to support good relations between the Gardaí and the community.
- The Family Support Agency funds 107 Family Resource Centres in local communities as part of the Family and Community Services Resource Centre (FRC) programme. The aim of the FRC programme is to combat disadvantage and improve the function of the family unit. The emphasis is on the involvement of local communities in developing approaches to tackle the problems they face and on creating successful partnerships between the voluntary and statutory agencies in each area. Family Resource Centres involve people from marginalised groups and areas of disadvantage at all levels of the project.
- The Community Support Programme (CSP), administered by Pobal and funded by the Department of Social Protection, is designed to address locally identified gaps in the provision of services to communities and to exploit the potential of community assets and resources already in place in support of the delivery of services to improve community well-being. It also provides employment opportunities for people from specific target groups, including people with disabilities, Travellers, recovering drug users, long-term unemployed and lone parents. The programme currently supports some 450 projects and provides a contribution to the salaries of approximately 2 700 persons. Currently, 14 social enterprises are delivered by local development companies under the CSP.
- Social enterprises offer an important mechanism to introduce young jobseekers to a working environment. In Speedpack in Dublin, employees spoke of the importance of having work to go to, and the structure and meaning it gave to their lives. They acknowledged that they were little better off financially than they would be if on the Live Register but still considered it worth doing for the social and personal benefits. They added that the social enterprise work kept their CVs up-to-date. As part of their work they completed a work-based FETAC Level 4 qualification. All agreed that this would be very useful to them when competing for employment in the future.

Issue 5: The entry point for job search and subsequent training supports is through registering as unemployed. There is no specific youth channel in Intreo and in the past young people have had negative perceptions of the public employment service.

Employment and training measures in Ireland are not specifically designed for, or restricted to, school leavers seeking their first job or for those unemployed under the age of 25. Priority is given to the registered unemployed and “signing on” is the gateway to accessing employment and training programmes. For the registered unemployed priority is increasingly being placed on the long-term unemployed, regardless of age. A large proportion of young people is not eligible to register on the Live Register and thus cannot participate in funded training programmes because they live at home.

Young people access the PES in the same way as adults and follow the same processes. Each local employment office is required to interview every person who registers as unemployed and assign them a

PEX score (probability of exit), depending on which additional supports are provided and they may be referred to a national training/employment programme. In the first three months of an unemployment claim an individual may participate in a group engagement session which provides information on services and entitlements - a central part of the current activation process. A small number who have been profiled and assessed as being at particular risk of remaining jobless for a long time will get a one-to-one session. This was slated to be widespread practice by the end of 2013 under the new Intreo activation system.

According to research carried out in *Youth Unemployment in Ireland: The Forgotten Generation* (O'Connor, 2010), young people acknowledged that core support services are over-stretched due to the steep rise in unemployment, but had negative perceptions of, and experiences with, the social welfare service and found it to be poorly linked to the training and activation arm. They did not always know what service, schemes and allowances they were entitled to and young jobseekers themselves had to "encourage" the advisor to provide more direct advice in relation to training, education and work placement opportunities. There was an emphasis on processing claims rather than actively engaging young people, even when having a one-to-one interview. Often the passive claims system was not well linked to activation programmes and there was a clear need for a one-stop shop that could provide a package of supports through a single, well resourced and co-ordinated structure, giving information on unemployment entitlements, career planning, job searches, personal development, training programmes etc. Young clients were dissatisfied with the approach of the Social Welfare office in collecting and recording personal information, and oftentimes detailed personal circumstances and histories were provided but were not available at subsequent meetings so had to be re-explained. The research also found that the PES was not responding effectively to the specific, and at times more specialist, needs of third-level graduates as in the past they have come into contact with a lower skilled cohort.

Job searching, counselling and mentoring are particularly important for youth, as in many cases there are jobs out there but extra support is needed in securing them. Young people have specific requirements and expectations of what a PES should do. The quality and commitment of service personnel is critical to the successful delivery of the employment service. The quality of interaction with the staff, their attitude and approach have a very significant influence on young jobseekers and empathy is a particularly important characteristic. Timely decision-making on applications for welfare benefits is key, as is consistency of service delivery. Young people would like to be assigned a single advisor with whom they can build up a rapport and who can better understand their circumstances, personal interests and career related objectives (O'Connor, 2010). Young jobseekers want their individual circumstances, qualifications, training and career aspirations to be taken into account rather than taking a generic and overly rigid approach.

The expectation is that under the reformed Intreo service, with a stronger emphasis on activation and offering one-stop shops with improved linkages to training programmes, young people will have a more positive experience of the PES and it will serve as a trampoline to "lift" them into jobs. The recent *Pathways to Work 2013* report includes a significant emphasis on reducing youth unemployment in addition to reducing long-term unemployment (Government of Ireland, 2013) and the plans to introduce a Youth Guarantee would suggest that the activation of the young jobless is becoming an increasing national priority.

Recommendations

There is a need for targeted and fine-grain policies in the PES for the most disadvantaged within broader youth activation measures.

There is a case to be made for more targeted activation policies for disadvantaged youth especially at a time of restricted budgets when there is less money to sustain all initiatives. Young people who have

grown up in situations of intergenerational social and economic disadvantage need a more holistic approach if the barriers to labour market success are to be broken down. They have quite specialised needs which are different from “strong performers” or the “poorly integrated”, and often require more intensive job search and activation assistance than more job-ready young people, as outlined in the previous section. Youth most in need should be identified as early as possible during the unemployment experience and provided with specific attention and focused, personalised help (Quintini and Martin, 2006).

Targeted programmes can increase the likelihood of achieving positive outcomes. They can ensure a fine-grained, more individualised approach for young people and can have more chance of reaching those “not on the radar” of mainstream programmes. Targeted programmes can also make up for discriminatory practices elsewhere in the system. Having specific measures and programmes in place for struggling youth, as part of a universal access point, can also increase participation by target groups which tend to under-utilise services. NEET youth are less likely to access the PES – either they are not looking for a job, or if they are they are not eligible for unemployment benefits. There are also dangers with targeted policies. They can lead to claims of bias and preference from the general population, stigmatise users, be politically unpopular and may also reduce the motivation levels of participants if they think they are “special” and worse off in some way (Froy and Pyne, 2011).

It is important to remember that there is huge variance even under the NEET label – young NEETs are not homogeneous. Young people fall under the NEET label for different reasons e.g. those who are short-term unemployed, “discouraged workers” who are disengaged, or those who are voluntarily taking some time out (see Box 23). Thus, even within the NEET category there is room for specifically designed measures.

Box 49. Five distinct groups within the NEET category

NEET youth contains five quite distinct groups.

- **The conventionally unemployed:** This is the largest subgroup, which can be further subdivided into long-term and short-term unemployed.
- **The unavailable:** This includes young carers, young people with family responsibilities and young people who are sick or disabled.
- **The disengaged:** Young people who are not seeking jobs or education and are not constrained from doing so by other obligations or incapacities. This takes in discouraged workers as well as other young people who are pursuing dangerous and anti-social lifestyles.
- **The opportunity-seekers:** Young people who are actively seeking work or training, but are holding out for opportunities that they see as befitting their skills and status.
- **The voluntary NEETs:** Those who are travelling and those constructively engaged in other activities such as art, music and self-directed learning.

Source: Eurofound, 2012

Some OECD countries have created “youth agencies” to help disadvantaged out-of-school youth within the PES. The *Missions Locales* in France are for those aged 16 to 25 with cumulating barriers to employment. The Youth Transition Services in New Zealand works to prevent youth from becoming

NEET, and as described in Box 24 below, Quebec has set up youth employment centres attached to the local job centres.

Box 50. Quebec Youth Action Strategy: a networked approach to flexible local delivery

The Québec Youth Action Strategy is designed to bring coherence to all government policy touching on youth. The youth issues dossier is managed at the highest level, by the Premier of Québec, through the Youth Secretariat (*Secretariat à la jeunesse*) which demonstrates the importance of young people to the government. Employment policy specifically is lead through the Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity but also handled in a unique way in Quebec using a network of *Carrefours Jeunesse Emplois* (CJE) under contracts with the local employment services. In general terms the CJE agencies' objectives include:

- Offering services such as welcoming clients, providing information, evaluation, reference and guidance
- Helping young people to remain in education
- Helping clients develop a realistic and coherent career plan
- Promoting integration into and continuation in employment
- Promoting the development of entrepreneurship

These agencies are brought together under an umbrella organisation (*Réseau des carrefours jeunesse-emploi du Québec - RCJEQ*). Its mission is to regroup, support and represent the various Carrefours Jeunesse-Emploi of Quebec. This is done in the hope of developing, promoting, and defending their member interests with the government and equipping them with tools that facilitate the transfer of expertise and knowledge. A major activity of the umbrella organisation is to provide province-wide training for its member organisations. Centralising the orientation and training functions provides for a base of professionalism in the local organisations and there are likely considerable administrative efficiencies achieved through the RCJEQ representing the interests of the local organisations to the Quebec government.

Increase PES outreach capacity to better serve disadvantaged youth.

Delivering services to young people who have dropped out of formal education and training and who are drifting in and out of unemployment can prove difficult. This can also apply to young people working in the informal sector, traditionally an area to which formal career guidance services have paid little attention (Watts, 2001). Close working links between PES and youth/community services are effective, as these services have good credibility and knowledge of the informal systems within which young people live. Analysis of career guidance practices in 37 countries suggests that successful strategies for this work involve a highly individualised approach which attends to personal and social, as well as educational and vocational guidance needs.

Partnership working between PES and youth workers can adopt a number of different strategies. The non-formal guidance agents can include not only youth/community workers, but also significant adults or peers who have on-going relationships with the target-group of young people or might be able to form such relationships on an informal basis. They can act as referral points into the formal guidance system. An alternative model is to have a single generic first-in-line role, supported by a range of specialists (including career guidance specialists) who can be brought in when their specific help is needed. In this context, the way success is measured is important. Public employment services tend to be targeted towards short-term goals (immediate employment and removal from the benefit system). Setting re-integration into the formal system as a target may be counterproductive. It is argued that the outcome criteria should be framed in terms of "graded steps" which are valuable in relation to achieving viable and socially legitimate lifestyles

outside the formal system, as well as enabling young people to move towards the formal system as and when they wish to do so (Watts & McCarthy, 1998).

Discussions are on-going in Ireland on outsourcing some employment services to private providers and the use of outcome-related funding models. When outsourcing job placement functions, it must be ensured that weaker performing youth do not become lower profile in the desire to hit targets. Additionally, this funding model may discourage providers from referring clients to other more relevant agencies for support. In this process, attention needs to be paid to working with service providers so they do not only support recruitment for those most likely to enter into employment. Local policy makers may have limited power to influence this agenda, however, as financial incentives are usually set at the national level.

Investment should be made in early years education as generic skills are learnt early in life and not all children benefit equally from pre-school and school-age education.

Investment should be made in early years education as generic skills are learnt early in life and not all children benefit equally from pre-school and school-age education. What is more, a growing evidence-base correlates the provision of quality early years services with longer term benefits for children from low-income and migrant groups, those most likely to be later classified as NEETs. Ireland has already made progress on this by introducing the free pre-school year in early childhood care and education.

Early interventions starting from primary school seem to bring positive results especially if they include active involvement of employers, parents and other stakeholders, and opportunities for pupils to engage in experience based learning and active experiences of the world of work through visits, simulation, shadowing or actual work experience. There is valuable learning to be taken from pilot initiatives part funded by Atlantic Philanthropies, however these tend to operate at a higher cost than wholly publically run programmes and it has historically proven difficult to replicate these findings into mainstream initiatives.

Provide personalised support to help youth progress into employment or training.

Both the Glasgow Youth Employment Partnership and the Vancouver BladeRunners programmes provide interesting examples of approaches to support young people with multiple disadvantages, who are too vulnerable to immediately progress beyond school, towards a standard positive destination (in the case of Glasgow) or who are already out of education, employment or training (as in the case of BladeRunners – see Box 25).

In Glasgow, the city model was able to draw upon the national Activity Agreements pilot programme to meet the needs of young people identified in schools as at risk by the Risk Assessment procedure. The Activity Agreements programme provides coaches who work on a one-to-one basis with such young people. In many cases – particularly at the start – it requires a proactive approach where the coach will go to the client's home. This provides an opportunity to gauge the home setting but it also stems from the knowledge that the client's low self-esteem may make them reluctant to attend a formal appointment. Coaches use the initial meeting to establish the relationship and follow up quickly with a second meeting which is used to set out and agree a negotiated Activity Agreement. As part of this, the young person will set goals and establish a programme of participation to move them towards employability. Initially, this might involve small steps, but the aim is to move them into education, employment or training over a 24-week period. The young person draws down an allowance of GBP 30 per week against participation and completion of the agreed steps. The feedback and results of this initiative in Glasgow have been encouraging. The national evaluation of the pilots shows that the city has undertaken more agreements than

any other area and with a higher rate of success – 48% of the city’s 601 participants have achieved hard outcomes as a result.

Box 51. BladeRunners, 24/7 support for youth with multiple barriers to employment

BladeRunners is an employment programme for youth (aged 15 to 30) with multiple barriers to employment to help them build careers in construction throughout the province of British Columbia, Canada. It is run in 32 locations across the province by 19 different local service delivery organisations. First set up in 1994, participants do a three week training course, which includes instruction in both hard and soft skills and then facilitates direct job placement for graduates. The ultimate goal is to develop skills and work experience that foster long-term attachment to the labour force and to support the social and community integration of young people. It is funded by the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation through the Canada-BC Labour Market Agreement, and a diverse group of public and private supporters. Most participants have left home, not completed secondary education and lack the basic skills needed to look for and stay in work. It is estimated that about 70% of all participants are Aboriginal.

All programme participants are paired with a BladeRunners co-ordinator who the individual can choose themselves. Co-ordinators provide support directly or through their network of contacts in community organisations. Most programme co-ordinators have a history in the community and often have gone through some of the same difficulties faced by BladeRunners participants, thereby ensuring a better understanding.

On the first day of work, a BladeRunners co-ordinator brings the participant to the construction site and introduces him or her to the foreman, contractor or tradesperson, and any other BladeRunners working on the site. The co-ordinator will return to the site to ensure that all are satisfied with the placement. Co-ordinators can also refer participants to other social service providers, assist with housing and transport needs and counsel young people on further training and permanent job opportunities. Additional funds are available for housing, transport and food costs because these are deemed essential to ensure employability.

The programme places a heavy emphasis on providing extensive support services 24 hours a day, seven days a week for as long as is needed after placement. BladeRunners participants all have the mobile phone number of their co-ordinator who can be reached at all times. In the past, access to support was offered up to 18 months after placement but in practice co-ordinators have always maintained an open-door policy and continue to engage with any past participants.

Evaluation of outcomes indicates positive results. It has a 77% post-training job placement rate but with variations across centres depending on the severity of the problems faced by the young people in the neighbourhood. 80% of programme finishers remain in construction trades, with 30% of these continuing into journeyman status in the trades. The programme has also been proven to lower homelessness and income assistance, thereby saving the exchequer money. It has expanded considerably since its inception and has been successful in competing for additional funding.

Source : OECD, 2013d

Off-the-job support takes many forms: referrals to health, education and social services; financial support for obtaining stable housing, public transport vouchers and meals; informal counselling about further training and education; and financial support for additional training programme fees. The underlying and fundamental goal of all support is to make sure that participants are able to be placed in jobs and to maintain stable employment and long-term attachment to the labour market. As part of specific measures, residential programmes can have positive results e.g. Job Corp in the United States. This takes young people out of their local area and gives them mentoring, work experience, and remedial education (Quintini and Martin, 2006).

When young excluded people start work, it is important that follow-up support is provided to ensure they are gradually building basic employability skills. Providing in-work ongoing support and training can help them develop the skills and confidence necessary to retain employment and also to aim towards

securing ongoing career progression or applying for other jobs. The development of employability skills through workplace training opportunities is an important component of the BladeRunners programme in Vancouver and youth receive help 24/7 from a co-ordinator to help them adjust to working life and to build self-esteem and confidence.

Recognise and validate skills acquired through non-formal education and learning.

Taking account of the full range of an individual's knowledge, skills and competences can be especially relevant when working with those marginalised in the labour market, especially when it comes to youth. This includes recognising the valuable role of informal and non-formal²³ learning, as opposed to only taking into account learning in formal education and training systems. The validation and recognition mechanisms exist in Ireland but have not been fully mobilised.

Better connecting the activities of youth services with other local service providers, and greater co-ordination by ETBs could strengthen the impact of the sector. Youth work provision should be locked into local youth opportunities, and link up with other suppliers and engage with disconnected young people. It is well placed to do this as it has already built up significant expertise in the area and often local youth groups and organisations have strong local connections and links. Youth services may also be considered a trusted alternative to establishment services. Although additional funding may be required for this, it could reduce public sector spending in the medium and long term by reducing costs associated with troubled and disadvantaged youth, e.g. prison, remedial training, social welfare. The skills developed in non-formal learning should also be better recognised by employers and play a larger role in the job selection process. In addition, organisations involved in youth work could serve as connecting agents, acting as receiving points for young people, building up their skills, confidence and raising aspirations, and directing (and often accompanying them) towards other more mainstream providers.

The City of Antwerp in Flanders, Belgium, has sought to become a laboratory for innovative practices in the validation and recognition of non-formal learning in youth work. Having attained no or a low level of formal skills and lacking recognised qualifications, these young people are often not aware of the competences they have developed in other ways, or cannot convince potential employers of them. JES created a digital portfolio called C-stick to serve as a tool for self, peer and expert key competency assessment. It is a database (on a USB stick) where young people can gather and store information relating to personal development plans, CVs and soft skills acquired through involvement in youth clubs and activities.

Box 52. Value of informal learning, Antwerp

The city of Antwerp in Flanders, Belgium, is seeking to counter the negative long-term consequences for young people who drop out of school by emphasising the value of informal learning. In a city with the largest share of inhabitants with foreign nationality in Flanders, there are high levels of school delay, drop-out and unemployment (based on 2010 data). Since 2004, the city has sought to become a laboratory for innovative practices in the validation and recognition of non-formal learning in youth work.

An organisation called JES vzw and a number of other non-profit organisations, youth groups and social enterprises established three Youth Competence Centres (YCCs) in districts with high migrant populations, to engage with 16 to 25-year-olds in vulnerable situations and provide space for socialising, learning and volunteering. The YCCs work at the interface between free time/leisure, work and competence development. Close co-operation has been established with counsellors from the Flemish Employment Service (VDAB). For example, in Het Kiel (a disadvantaged

²³ Informal learning results from daily activities related to work, family life or leisure. It is not structured and usually does not lead to certification. In most cases, it is unintentional on the part of the learner. (European Commission, 2011). Non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. However, it is intentional on the part of the learner and has structured objectives, times and support (European Commission, 2011).

district of Antwerp) a project was developed to renovate a formal school ballroom to a concert and event venue with the help of the local YCC. During the renovation process young people had the opportunity to gain work experience, training and competency based counselling.

It has not always been easy to engage young people from the local neighbourhood in which the YCCs operate. The organisations have found that youth from other parts of the city make use of the facilities while the local target group is not engaging and as a result there is a focus on continually engaging with the surrounding community.

With rising youth unemployment levels, particularly among youth of foreign origin, Antwerp also established Work- related Acquired Competences (WAC) counsellors in 2009. WAC counsellors serve as the “stepping stone” between the street and the education and labour market system. They meet young people on their own turf in the local community where they socialise, and give them information on and support in applying for jobs, training programmes and return to study.

Source : Froy and Pyne, 2011

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ANNEX I

Interviews and roundtables held for the Local Youth Employment Strategies project, Ireland

Interviews

A series of face-to-face interviews were carried out by the national expert in order to gather information for this report, and took place from June to September 2012. All interviews, which were strictly confidential, covered the thematic areas of the report. The national expert met with representatives of:

- Department of Education and Skills
- Department of Environment, Communities and Local Government
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Department of Social Protection - South East regional office
- FÁS - Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) and South East regional office
- Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) – national office and Dublin regional office
- National Youth Council of Ireland
- Northside Partnership, Dublin region
- Northside Youth Programme, Dublin region
- Pobal
- Waterford Area Partnership, South East region
- Young Community Leaders Programme, Dublin region

Many other organisations and individuals made valued inputs through telephone conversations and e-mails.

Programme of OECD Secretariat visits and roundtables

Visits to Ireland by the OECD Secretariat took place in June and September 2012, and were co-ordinated and hosted by Pobal. In addition, seven working meetings were held in December 2012. Three were held in each of the case study areas (broken into statutory, non-statutory and employer bodies) and a national roundtable was held which also included the *Local Job Creation* project. Staff from the OECD Secretariat were joined by a number of international consultants (acting as independent agents). See below for the participating bodies in each:

4th and 5th December, South East region, Waterford

Employers:

- Suir Clean
- Tower Hotel Waterford
- JHG Analytical Services
- Info TV Ltd
- SMF Engineering
- Kelpex Displays
- Eishtec
- Caulfields Supervalu Supermarkets
- Waterford Crystal
- Dawn Meats
- Wexford Enterprise Centre

Non-statutory bodies:

- Wexford Local Development
- Waterford Youth Service
- Waterford Area Partnership
- Waterford Area Partnership (Job Sampling Initiative)
- Ossory Youth
- Manor St. John Youth Services
- Grouplink
- Foroige

Statutory bodies:

- FÁS, Waterford
- Department of Social Protection
- Kilkenny Community Training Centre

3rd and 4th December, Dublin region, Dublin City

Employers

- Irish Business & Employers Confederation (IBEC)
- Irish Hotels Federation
- Irish Small and Medium Enterprise Association
- Genzyme
- Focus Ireland
- Northside Partnership Ltd/ Skillnets
- Osnovina Ltd (Hot Press Magazine)

Non-statutory bodies

- Clondalkin, Palmerstown, Lucan, Newcastle (CPLN) Area Partnership
- Rathmines/Pembroke Partnership (young person)
- Rathmines/Pembroke Partnership
- Young Ballymun
- Northside Youthreach Programme (Young Entrepreneur Programme)

Statutory bodies

- Trinity College Dublin - Careers Advisory Service
- Department of Social Protection
- City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC)
- Principal of Colaiste Dhulaigh
- Tallaght Institute of Technology
- County Dublin VEC Youthreach (Blanchardstown)
- Whitehall School Completion Programme
- Department of Social Protection
- Ballinteer Community School/Scoil Mhuire (Ballyboden) SCP

Friday 7th December, National roundtable, Dublin

- County and City Manager's Association (CCMA)
- Chambers Ireland
- Congress Centres for the Unemployed
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Department of Environment, Communities and Local Government
- Department of Education and Skills
- Department of Social Protection
- FÁS
- Fastrack to IT (FIT)
- FORFAS
- Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)
- Institutes of Technology Ireland
- Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)
- Irish Rural Link
- Irish Vocational Education Association
- National Traveller Monitoring and Advisory Committee
- Pobal
- Skillnets
- SOLAS/FÁS
- South Dublin City Council