

# Mapping the journey for unemployed people



## Report on Phase Three of the Employment Services Research Project



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## Foreword

I am pleased to present this report on the third phase of the INOU's work on researching unemployed people's experience of the State's Employment Services. This phase of our research project focused on unemployed people's experience of the JobPath Service being delivered by Turas Nua and Seetec.

The first phase of the overall research project focused on the experience of unemployed people who were accessing the Intreo Service. This work is outlined in the INOU's publication – Mapping the Journey for People who are Short-term Unemployed – Report on Phase 1 of the Intreo Project. The second phase of our research had a focus on people who were both long-term and shorter-term unemployed and who were accessing the Local Employment Service. This work is outlined in our publication - Mapping the Journey for Unemployed People – Report on Phase 2 of the Employment Services Research Project. Copies of all the reports relating to this work are available on our website [www.inou.ie](http://www.inou.ie)

The JobPath service plays an important role in assisting people who are unemployed, particularly the long-term unemployed, to find employment. Our research has enabled us to hear directly from unemployed people about their experiences of using the JobPath service. We set out to establish what unemployed people viewed as working well in the service and what changes they would recommend to improve the overall service being delivered.

I would like to thank the JobPath Managers and their staff in the areas where we conducted this research for their time, engagement and courtesy during the course of our work. I would also like to thank the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection for supporting the organisation to undertake this work and also the officials for their assistance in ensuring the smooth running of the project. This research was undertaken by INOU staff who spent many days visiting the JobPath offices where the Joint Information Sessions were being conducted to meet with unemployed people, and I would like to acknowledge the effort that the staff made in this regard. Finally, I would like to thank all the unemployed people who took the time to talk to us in the areas where we conducted our research and talked to us so openly about their experiences and who contributed so fully at our Focus Group meetings.



**John Stewart**  
Co-ordinator

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# 1. Introduction

## Introduction to the INOU

*The INOU is a federation of unemployed people, unemployed centres, unemployed groups, community organisations and Trade Unions. The INOU represents and defends the rights and interests of those who want decent employment and cannot obtain it. We promote and campaign for policies to achieve full employment for all. We also campaign for an acceptable standard of living for unemployed people and their dependents. The INOU is an anti-sectarian, anti-racist, non-party political organisation which promotes equality of opportunity within society. (Mission Statement)*

**T**he INOU was formed in 1987 against a backdrop of high unemployment, low participation rates, long-term unemployment and mass emigration. At the time, the scale of the unemployment crisis was such that collective action was needed both to bring forward potential solutions and to ensure that unemployed people had access to programmes and services, and whilst unemployed reasonable social welfare payments.

From its fledgling roots, the organisation has developed over the last 31 years and now has over 200 member groups including community based resource centres, Citizens Information Services, Money Advice and Budgetary Services, national and local NGOs and trade unions, in addition to our unemployed members.

The INOU provides services to and engages with six key groups:

- Unemployed people and other people of working age,
- Local organisations which support unemployed people,
- National organisations which work on a range of equality, social inclusion and anti-poverty issues,
- Employers,
- Policy makers / key Government Departments,
- The media.

The work of the INOU in relation to all these groups is central to sustaining our role and relevance as the national representative organisation of the unemployed. The INOU has long recognised that

the most effective route out of poverty and social exclusion for unemployed people, and others reliant on working age social welfare payments, is access to decent and sustainable employment coupled with the knowledge, capacity and ability of the individual to take up such employment opportunities.

## **Introduction to the JobPath Service**

Ireland's deep recession that started in 2008 resulted in a tsunami of job losses over a relatively short period of time. The scale of the job losses, in the period 2008-2009 were unparalleled not only in Ireland's recent history, but on a European scale. In 2008 Ireland's unemployment rates compared favourably to the EU average, but by the following year we were experiencing the fifth highest unemployment rate in the EU 27. Male unemployment, for example, went from 6.8% in Quarter 2 2008 to 15.6% in Quarter 2 2009.

The crisis also very significantly altered the ratio of unemployed people to staff working in the employment services at the time. It was clear during the crisis that greater resources and increased numbers of employment support officers were required. The question for the State was how was this going to be achieved. The State had, largely, two choices - the first to significantly develop and further resource the Intreo Service and the Local Employment Service and the second to develop/procure an additional service. The State decided on the second option and a tender to deliver this new service, which was to be called JobPath, was advertised in 2014. It was noted at the time that the ratio of case workers to jobseekers was over 500:1 compared to OECD norms of less than 200:1. It was estimated that, in addition to existing case worker levels, JobPath would almost double the number of case workers.

JobPath is a payment by results model for delivering employment services. An initial payment is made to the contractor when they complete a Personal Progression Plan for each client. If the unemployed person takes-up a job for at least 30 hours per week, the JobPath provider receives another payment if the person remains in employment for 13 weeks. Further 'job sustainment' payments may be made when the person remains in employment after 26 weeks, 39 weeks and a final payment after 52 weeks.

The successful bidders under the JobPath tendering process were Turas Nua and Seetec.

## Turas Nua and Seetec

Turas Nua ([www.turasnua.ie](http://www.turasnua.ie)) represents a joint venture between FRS Recruitment (a co-operative recruitment company based in Roscrea) and Working Links, a UK based provider of employment services to long-term unemployed people. Turas Nua operates in the southern half of the country including towns and cities such as Cork, Limerick, Bray and Waterford.

Seetec ([www.seetec.ie](http://www.seetec.ie)) is a private company delivering a range of employability and skills programmes in the UK. Seetec Ireland operates in the northern half of the country including towns and cities such as Dublin, Galway, Sligo and Dundalk.

Both Turas Nua and Seetec have established a network of JobPath offices across the country. In an answer to a Dáil question in early 2018, Regina Doherty, TD, Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection advised that Seetec and Turas Nua operate 56 full-time and 33 part-time/outreach offices (or delivery locations). Seetec and Turas Nua collectively employ in the region of 630 staff. Turas Nua directly manage and operate all of their offices (or delivery locations). Seetec directly manage and operate most, though not all of their offices (and delivery locations) as Seetec has supply chain agreements in place with a small number of local providers.

## How the JobPath model works

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) refer people to the local JobPath provider who are:

- Aged 61 or under who are long-term unemployed;
- People who become long-term unemployed; and,
- People who are unemployed for a shorter-term, but who are identified as most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed.

The contract between the DEASP and the JobPath providers includes an agreed minimum level of service and support that the JobPath provider must provide to the people referred to them by the Department.

The unemployed person is initially invited to a Joint Information Session delivered by the DEASP and the JobPath provider. The unemployed person will subsequently be invited to a 'one-to-one'

meeting with a staff member within 20 days of being referred by the Department. In Turas Nua, the staff members assisting unemployed people to access work are called Personal Advisers and in Seetec, they are known as Employment Advisers. For convenience, we have used the term JobPath Advisers throughout the document. The JobPath Advisers fulfil a broadly similar role to the Intreo Case Officers and LES Mediators.

At the first 'one-to-one' meeting the JobPath Adviser works with the unemployed person to agree a 'Personal Progression Plan'. The Plan may be agreed at the meeting, but is required to be agreed within 20 days of this meeting.

The Plan identifies the fields of work appropriate for the unemployed person; the barriers to employment facing the unemployed person and the agreed actions to overcome such barriers; the unemployed person's job/employment goals; an agreed set of skills training, education and development goals and actions; and, an agreed set of potential employment related experience interventions.

If the unemployed person has been unsuccessful in obtaining work, they will meet with their JobPath Adviser for 'Review Meetings' at least every four weeks or so. The JobPath provider is scheduled to work with the unemployed person for 12 months if they are unsuccessful in obtaining full-time work.

If the unemployed person obtains work, the JobPath Provider will provide 'in – employment support' for at least a 13 week period, but this could be for longer periods. The JobPath Provider will be required to contact the person within five days of starting work and within every four weeks or so thereafter for at least the first 13 weeks.

Supports provided by the JobPath Services include:

- Looking for work;
- Developing a CV;
- Developing job interview skills;
- Learning from unsuccessful job application and interview outcomes;
- Getting places on agreed shorter term training and education courses;
- Accessing computers, the internet and other facilities to aid the person in their search for employment and support on how to best use these;



- Developing key skills to sustain employment, and in employment support, when the person obtains work;
- Providing initial in-work supports.

The tender initially provided for Turas Nua and Seetec to implement the JobPath employment service for six years. Intreo/DEASP refer unemployed people in the first four years. There are no referrals in the final two years with the JobPath service continuing to those already referred. Both Seetec and Turas Nua opened offices on a phased basis over the course of a year or thereabouts from mid-2015. To address this, the DEASP and JobPath providers agreed that rather than having four years for referrals for each office from when the referrals commenced, that a four and a half year time frame (plus a two year continuance) would be used for all from the commencement of the JobPath service.

## **Background to Research**

This is the third phase of extensive work carried out by the INOU with unemployed people collating their direct experiences of the State's re-designed Employment Services. The first phase of this work 'Mapping the journey for unemployed people' focussed on the delivery of the Employment Service in two Intreo Centres to people who were shorter-term unemployed. The second phase of the work focussed on the experiences of people (both short-term and longer-term unemployed) who were referred to the Local Employment Service.

Originally, it was intended that the second phase of the work would focus on the delivery of the Employment Service in Intreo Centres to people who are long-term unemployed. However, after selecting two locations for this work, the majority of long-term unemployed people in those areas were clients of the Local Employment Service (LES) who are under contract to deliver an Intreo-type Service. The service is also available to some people who were short-term unemployed. We therefore modified the second phase of the work to focus on the experiences of people (both short-term and longer-term unemployed) who were referred to the Local Employment Service.

Tenders for the new Employment Service, JobPath were agreed in 2014 and Seetec and Turas Nua rolled out the JobPath service to unemployed people from 2015.

The agreed INOU Work plan submitted to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection included a commitment

to develop structured engagement with unemployed people around the implementation of the Intreo Employment service and the rollout of the Intreo model through the Local Employment Service and JobPath services.

## **Methodology and Structure**

### **Mapping the Journey**

This phase of the project focusses on the direct experiences of unemployed people who have been clients of the JobPath Service, one in a Seetec office and one in a Turas Nua office. We have set out to map their journey – in a similar way to the first two phases of the project – through:

- Pre and initial engagement with JobPath;
- Joint Information Sessions;
- Meeting JobPath Advisers;
- Review and subsequent meetings and engagement;
- Accessing education and training courses;
- Finding employment.

### **Agreed Process**

Following a meeting with senior DEASP officials and senior JobPath representatives, it was agreed to undertake this phase of the project on a similar basis to the two previous stages. Subsequent contact with both Turas Nua and Seetec identified one delivery location within each service for the INOU to undertake this work. One of the locations was an office in a county town and the other an office in a large urban suburb. The distance some people travelled to their local JobPath office was significant in both locations but particularly in the town.

We met with the Managers of the designated JobPath Offices to discuss our proposed work. With the agreement of the Managers, we adopted a similar approach to contacting unemployed people that we used in the previous phases of the research project. This involved regular visits to the two offices where unemployed people were attending Joint Information Sessions. People who expressed an interest in attending the Focus Group meetings gave us their contact details and we took the opportunity to widely distribute our key publication, *Working for Work*. We subsequently emailed people

with information on the Focus Group meetings. We phoned people in the days leading up to the meeting to check if they were able to attend. We also followed up with people who were unable to attend the Focus Group meetings with a view to getting their feedback on the process to date, focusing in particular on their meeting(s) with their JobPath Adviser.

We ran seven Focus Group meetings in total. These included two separate meetings in each Seetec and Turas Nua locality, plus a follow-up Focus Group meeting in each area. We also organised a National Focus Group comprising of INOU Individual Members – people who are unemployed.

We have structured the research to follow the chronological journey of unemployed people from when they lost their job or signed-on, through to when they accessed either employment, education or training or remained as a client of JobPath. The report sets out their experiences.

Similar to the second phase of the research, there is significantly less of a focus on the Signing-On / Losing your Job aspect in this phase of the work. This reflects the fact that the majority of people who we met and who participated in the Focus Group meetings and telephone interviews were long-term unemployed.

### **Change to JobPath**

One potentially significant change to JobPath was announced with effect from June 2018. JobPath clients may, subject to agreement, transfer to a TÚS or Community Employment programme. Interestingly, the need for such a change was raised during this research.

### **Next Steps**

This research, combined with the two earlier phases, concludes our work on mapping unemployed people's experience of these three employment services.

We envisage that the next part of this work will involve drawing on the experiences of employment services staff. We also hope to undertake work on employers' experiences of the employment services and recruiting unemployed people.



## 2. Key Conclusions and Recommendations

### JobPath

- A lack of clarity and communication at any stage of the JobPath process and journey can lead to misunderstandings and the potential to undermine the development of good working relationships from the start of the process. The INOU recommends that JobPath staff and Advisers provide clear explanations at every stage of the JobPath process in order to minimise any potential misunderstandings.
- That JobPath Staff should, from the first point of contact, provide information to the person on how JobPath would be able to assist the person with their jobseeking.
- Where JobPath providers and the unemployed person work to an agreed approach, as instanced in some very useful examples in the Report, the proactive job-searching supports provided by JobPath Advisers has a very positive impact. The INOU recommends that this approach is further developed across all JobPath offices and all Employment Services.
- That information on a full range of potential options including employment programmes and training and education courses is made available to people exiting JobPath.

### DEASP

- That a significant information campaign is rolled-out to highlight the available Welfare to Work and in-work incentives and supports and to increase awareness about these incentives.
- That the Department develop a post JobPath options service for people exiting JobPath which would include

information on Programmes such as Community Employment (CE) and TÚS and also relevant training and education programmes and courses.

- That the DEASP provide more targeted information for people who are working part-time and signing-on the Live Register. This information, including the letter of invitation should advise that the DEASP have extended its own and contracted employment services to provide assistance to part-time workers and to outline how the JobPath (or other) Services may be able to assist people already working part-time.
- The INOU welcomes the DEASP approach that places a key emphasis on obtaining work. It is important that, for all Employment Services, this is in the context of sustainable jobs that reflect the person's interests and aptitudes. However, access to appropriate high quality training and education also has a key role to play in making this happen.
- That reimbursing people's travelling expenses be extended to other Employment Services.

### **Employment Services**

- It is essential, for all Employment Services that unemployed people are not set-aside, ignored or left unsupported. It is also vital that employment services are flexible, supportive, pro-active and centred on the individual.
- That for those who wish to avail of it, follow-up support to unemployed people (and their employers) who secure work would be extended to all Employment Services.



# 3. Pre-and Initial JobPath engagement

The majority of focus group participants were in receipt of a Jobseeker's payment for more than twelve months. As a result, we have taken as the start of this phase of the project, the arrival of the letter from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) to invite people in receipt of a Jobseeker's payment to a meeting.

There is one aspect that we would like to highlight. A small number of people at the Focus Group meetings advised that they had been unemployed previously for a number of years without having had any correspondence regarding job-seeking or training. A number of people in the previous phases of this research highlighted a similar lack of active engagement from Employment Services. The INOU acknowledges that, currently the DEASP and Employment Services provide a significantly more pro-active service. It is essential that unemployed people are not set aside, ignored or left unsupported. It is also vital that employment services are flexible, supportive, pro-active and centred on the individual.

## Letter of 'invite'

Readers of the reports from the previous two phases of this work will be familiar with the very strong negative impact that the wording of the invitation letter had on some recipients. The reaction to the wording of the letter in this phase of the project was similarly negative and evident across all the Focus Groups. The letter includes information inviting people to attend their local JobPath office at a scheduled time and date. The aspect of the letter that causes concern is the text in bold that advises the recipient that failure to attend the meeting may result in a reduction in a person's Jobseeker's payment. 'I was worried about being cut-off [my payment]' one of the Focus Group members advised.

We have found through our research that the threat of a person's payment being reduced sets a tone that immediately establishes the

wrong dynamic between the Employment Service and the unemployed person. As one of the Focus Group participant's noted when they received the letter, 'What's going on? Will I be prosecuted if I don't attend? This letter is threatening me'.

We acknowledge this is an issue principally for the DEASP, but the letter of invite has the potential, if worded appropriately, to create a more positive starting point at the initial point of engagement between JobPath and the unemployed person. The failure to highlight what the employment service can do to assist people represents a missed opportunity for the DEASP (and consequently, JobPath).

Focus Group attendees outlined what a letter and any additional information should include. They recommended that a greater emphasis on available welfare to work supports and incentives, in addition to information on how the JobPath service would be able to assist them to find work, would be very useful.

The INOU recommends that one practical way to give effect to this is to include a list of bullet points on key available welfare to work and in-work supports and incentives on the back of the invitation letter.

While some people attending the JobPath office were worried about their meeting, one useful aspect (this was also a feature of the Local Employment Service phase of this work) was that most people's experience of the initial meeting and of JobPath staff eased these fears. Some Focus Group attendees for example noted that they were very worried on the basis of the letter, but were pleased that their experience was different. One of the attendees said 'I was worried with the letter [but the] tone in JobPath was different and support[ive].'

## **Information about JobPath**

JobPath Call Centre staff contact people who receive the invitation letter from the DEASP through texts and phone calls. This is useful as it gives JobPath staff an opportunity to confirm details of the meeting, including information about the office's location etc.

Some Focus Group attendees recalled receiving texts about their first appointment, but others advised they did not receive texts. A small minority of Focus Group members received phone calls, but others did not recall receiving any calls. We know, from talking to the JobPath providers that it is not possible to contact everyone, as

some people will not answer phonecalls from phone numbers they do not recognise, for others contact details may have changed and some people may not always listen to voicemails.

One of the Focus Group members advised that '[I] thought I would have received more information [before the meeting]' and another proposed an information leaflet might be included with the letter. Some Focus Group members advised that they did not know, in advance of the first meeting, that they were being referred to the JobPath Service for 52 weeks.

One suggestion from a Focus Group meeting was that JobPath staff contacting an individual by phone could usefully outline what JobPath is, what to expect and the ways that they are able to assist people. We believe that this should be communicated from the outset. One of the Focus Group members asked 'what am I here for?' as 'there was no explanation.' On a related but wider point one of the people contacted by phone advised that the JobPath service 'should be better known.'

## **Clear Communication**

The need for clearer communication throughout the different stages of the process has been a recurring issue, both in this phase and in previous phases of the research. As we have outlined, we recommend that information is provided in advance of the unemployed person's engagement with the JobPath service to ensure greater awareness of the process.

We are aware that sometimes issues arise as a result of a lack of explanation or communication. A Focus Group member gave an example of being asked to complete on-line questions that appeared to determine literacy and numeracy requirements. They advised that 'this was demeaning' and 'like being back at school'. The purpose of completing the questions was not explained nor how it related to the employment service and securing employment.

A lack of clarity and communication at any stage of the JobPath process and journey can lead to misunderstandings and the potential to undermine the development of good working relationships from the start of the process. The INOU recommends that JobPath staff and Advisers provide clear explanations at every stage of the JobPath process in order to minimise any potential misunderstandings.



## **First Experiences and Contacts**

Feedback on the “front of house” service was, generally, positive. The feedback on the JobPath staff was that, in the main they were courteous.

One aspect, highlighted in both this and earlier phases of the research, was that some people felt that the employment service they were referred to was unaware of their previous engagement with other employment services; or their participation on employment, education and training programmes. Some reported that from the JobPath service provider’s perspective it felt like this was the person’s very first engagement with an employment service.

While it is important for the JobPath providers to emphasise how their service can specifically support people, it is also necessary to acknowledge what the unemployed person has done previously. This could, for example, be in relation to previous participation on employment, education or training programmes or attending other employment services. Some Focus Group attendees and telephone interviewees have advised that they expected the JobPath services would have access to their information about previous job seeking activity or previous participation in training/programmes. As one person noted, ‘I went through it before and it’s the same process again’. One of the difficulties for JobPath providers is that they do not have access to detailed information about the unemployed person’s previous engagement with other services.

## **Processing Payments**

There was an opportunity at the Focus Group meetings to ask whether people’s applications for Jobseeker’s payments and receipt of the payments themselves were processed satisfactorily. Similar to both other phases of this work, Focus Group members advised that there had been no undue delays and reported on their satisfactory engagement with Intreo/DEASP in this regard. The INOU would like to acknowledge the DEASP’s work in ensuring the efficient processing of Jobseeker’s payments.

## **Transport**

Transport issues were highlighted at a number of the Focus Group meetings and by a number of telephone interviewees. Transport difficulties for people who are dependent on public transport or lifts was mentioned in both locations, but was particularly highlighted in one of the locations.

There was a recognition that the JobPath providers are aware of these difficulties and, generally are flexible with accommodating changes of meetings etc. As one person noted, their Adviser 'is very understanding of my situation [as] there is no transport in and out of town.' Another advised that it is 'difficult to get to [the JobPath office]', but they noted that their Adviser 'was flexible [in organising and rescheduling appointments]'

A number of people suggested at one of the Focus Groups that it would be useful if an additional JobPath office was sited in a different town as it would be easier for some people to attend. There was also a suggestion that longer, less frequent meetings with JobPath Advisers would be useful for people who have particular transport difficulties.

## **Expenses**

One of the positive aspects for unemployed people referred to a JobPath service is that they are able to receive travelling expenses. The INOU acknowledges the role of the DEASP in ensuring that travelling expenses were included as a component of the JobPath tender. The INOU recommends that reimbursing people's travelling expenses be extended to other Employment Services.

Most people at the Focus Group meetings knew about the travelling expenses. At the first Focus Group meeting in one of the locations a couple of people did not know about expenses, but that did not arise as an issue at the second focus group meeting.

At the Focus Group meetings, a number of people who were aware that they were eligible to claim travelling expenses had opted not to claim the expenses. One of the Focus Group members had received expenses on one occasion but had not subsequently, as they did not want to ask for expenses each week. The INOU recommends that the JobPath providers, including Advisers are as explicit as possible in relation to travelling expenses being available. Notices to this effect would also be very useful.

On a separate note, a Focus Group member recalled that a budget for suits/ clothes for interviews was also mentioned.

## **Sanctions**

Some people's perceptions at the Focus Groups were that the JobPath services would be able to impose sanctions, including reducing or stopping a person's Jobseeker's payment. We were able

to clarify that the JobPath service does not have the authority to reduce or stop a person's Jobseeker's payment. There was an opportunity to explain that the JobPath services report to the DEASP on the person's level of engagement. We were also able to clarify that the DEASP does have the power to apply sanctions and that an appeals process also exists if an unemployed person believes they were treated unfairly.

One issue that has arisen over the different phases of this work is that people are not aware that their payment has been reduced or stopped until they visit their local Post Office to collect them. As one Focus Group member noted 'If my payment is cut I could end up homeless'.

### **Knowledge about Social Welfare/Information Deficits**

At each of the Focus Group meetings, we asked attendees about their knowledge and awareness of the range of available back-to-work and in-work incentives and supports. These incentives and supports include: the Working Family Payment (previously known as the Family Income Supplement); Back to Work Family Dividend; JobsPlus; Payment pending wages; Back to Work Enterprise Allowance; Part-time Job Incentive Scheme, retention of secondary benefits and FastTrack. Consistent with feedback from the earlier phases of the project, most Focus Group members were unaware of most or all of these supports. One of the Focus Group members noted that 'In-work benefits were not mentioned.' Another advised that they 'never knew about the Part-time Job Incentive Scheme' prior to talking to the INOU Senior Welfare Rights Information Officer and were in the process of applying for a job as a result.

In the instances where Focus Group members knew about a back to work/in-work support, their knowledge of the incentive was incomplete. One of the Focus Group members, in outlining their own knowledge of these supports, could have been speaking on behalf of most people present when they said, 'I didn't have a clue about entitlements.'

One other important consideration for unemployed people in taking-up work are concerns over the retention of secondary benefits. Some Focus Group members advised that they were very worried about losing money and secondary benefits if they took-up work. They were not aware of the useful back-to-work and in-work incentives, further underlining the importance of having key information to make informed decisions. A Focus Group member advised that '[I]

did not know that I could keep my medical card [for three years] if I took up work.'

One of the Focus Group members gave an example whereby their JobPath Adviser had provided important information about accessing the Working Family Payment (then Family Income Supplement). The person was erroneously advised in Intreo that they were not eligible, but after seeking clarification they were able to access the payment.

A proposal from one of the Focus Group members was for every JobPath office to develop expertise to support the JobPath Advisers to progress any welfare-to-work questions or issues.

In order to address these information deficits, we provided key welfare to work information at the beginning of the Focus Group meetings. In addition to highlighting a number of potentially very useful incentives that support people to take-up work we also outlined the criteria and rules underpinning Jobseeker payments to ensure those who attended were fully aware of the 'Genuinely Seeking Work' criteria. The welfare to work information provided by the INOU's Senior Welfare Rights Information Officer was very much welcomed and there was also very positive feedback on the INOU publication, Working for Work.

A number of Focus Group members said that having an opportunity to hear about relevant targeted information in a group setting was very useful. One of the Focus Group members said that 'this information should be made [more generally] available'.

Generally, whereas most Focus Group members were unaware of the welfare to work supports and in-work incentives, two members advised that they had received information on welfare queries and welfare to work. One person noted they got information at a local Job Club and another at a local Centre for the Unemployed.

The INOU believes that a significant information campaign highlighting the available welfare to work and in-work incentives and supports would be very useful in increasing awareness about these incentives.

### **Unemployed people's concerns**

One fear that some people at Focus Group meetings and telephone interviews expressed, particularly at or near the beginning of their JobPath engagement, was a concern about being compelled to take-up any type of work regardless of the person's suitability for the

work. The JobPath service – while it is generally similar to the other employment services in delivering an Intreo model – is different in so far as it operates on a payment by results basis with the majority of potential income deriving from an unemployed person getting a job and remaining in that job. JobPath providers have consistently assured the INOU and others that it is not in the JobPath providers' interest to compel people towards work they do not want or is not suitable, as this would be counter-productive.

The INOU believes that it is important that JobPath providers address people's fears through being as clear as possible that it is not in the JobPath providers' interest to expect that people should take-up work that they are not interested in or suitable for. If the JobPath Services continue to highlight this important aspect and the unemployed person's JobPath Adviser can consistently demonstrate this through their work with the individual, this will assist in helping to address people's concerns. One of the JobPath offices where we conducted this research, provided, for a time, a more detailed Joint Information Session that covered some of these issues and this was very useful.

### **Part-time working**

As the numbers of people signing-on the Live Register decreased significantly, the DEASP have extended their activation process to people who were signing-on the Live Register and working up to three days a week. Previously, people who were working and signing-on the Live Register were not referred to JobPath (or other Employment Services).

One difficulty from the outset was that people who were already working part-time received the same letter as people who are unemployed. There was no recognition in the letter that a person has been working and signing-on the Live Register. This led to some people thinking they have received the letter in error. A number of people we contacted by phone asked us why was this necessary. 'I thought when I got the letter that it was a mistake', advised one and another asked 'Why am I with [JobPath] as I'm working part-time.'

The INOU would like to acknowledge the Department's change in the wording of the letter of invite which advises that people receiving the letter, may be working and signing-on the Live Register. There is, the INOU believes a clear need for the DEASP to provide more targeted information for this group; to advise that the DEASP have extended its own and contracted employment services

to provide assistance to part-time workers and to outline how the JobPath (or other) Services may be able to assist people already working part-time.

The DEASP have advised that, administratively it would be very difficult to specifically target a letter of invitation to people who are working part-time and signing-on. The INOU acknowledges that while targeting the invitation may not be straightforward, its introduction would be hugely beneficial for the individual. The INOU contends that this would also be very useful for the DEASP and the other employment services as getting the initial contact right would ensure as one person told us ‘[the engagement would] get started in the right way’.

The INOU also believes that the JobPath providers could ensure that people who are working part-time are contacted prior to the first meeting with an acknowledgement that they are already working part-time. It would be very useful if the person was advised that they received the letter because they are working part-time and in receipt of a Jobseeker’s payment (for the days they are not working). It would also be very useful for JobPath Staff to advise the person of how JobPath would be able to assist.

### **Access to Employment Programmes**

One issue that was highlighted at Focus Group meetings and in telephone feedback was that it was not possible – at that stage – for people to access employment programmes after the person was assigned to the JobPath provider. At the Focus Groups, one person for whom the JobPath service was not benefiting them advised that ‘CE or Tús would be a much better option now.’

There were a number of examples where Focus Group members advised that they lacked work experience and either an employment programme or specific work experience would be very useful. A Focus Group member noted that he ‘need[s] references, work experience.’ The person added that they would ‘work for free but it’s very difficult in this area [childcare]’. Another Focus Group member advised that they had very good qualifications, but had not been able to access paid employment because of a lack of work experience. They would have benefited from a Community Employment, Tús or work experience programme. A telephone interviewee advised that access to work experience in retail would be useful for him, but that this was not possible with the JobPath provider. The INOU welcomes the June 2018 announcement to allow unemployed

people who are referred to JobPath to access Community Employment and TÚS programmes.

### **JobPath Office Layout**

The JobPath office layout is open plan. JobPath offices have an open plan central area with a number of adjoining offices / workspaces. The open plan area contains a large number of computer monitors where unemployed people initially input their data and meet with their JobPath Adviser. At subsequent meetings the person accesses the computer and usually meets their Adviser. Similar to the previous phase of the project, the lack of glass dividers is welcome.

Most of the feedback we received was positive or relatively positive about this open plan set-up. A couple of Focus Group members said that the set-up where both the person and JobPath Adviser see the screen together is useful and leads to a better engagement. One of the Focus Group attendees noted that this is 'more comfortable and relaxed.' Another said that the set-up is 'Friendly and open... [It's] Less formal and less stress'. Another Focus Group member also noted that 'it's a good idea.'

However, a smaller number of people were less positive about the JobPath offices layout and a lack of privacy was the primary concern. One person advised that they could 'hear [another] person's story' though they noted they were advised that they could use one of the rooms if they would like privacy. Another Focus Group member said that they 'would prefer a cubicle as everyone can hear'.

## **Recommendations:**

### **Pre-JobPath and Initial JobPath engagement**

- **It is essential, for all Employment Services that unemployed people are not set aside, ignored or left unsupported and that employment services are flexible, supportive, pro-active and centred around the individual.**
- **The INOU believes that a significant campaign highlighting the available Welfare to Work and in-work incentives and supports would be very useful in increasing awareness about these incentives.**
- **A greater emphasis on available welfare to work supports and incentives, in addition to an outline of how the JobPath service would be able to assist those referred to find work would be very useful in initial communications from the DEASP. One practical way to give effect to this is to include a list of bullet points on key available welfare to work and in-work supports and incentives on the back of the invitation letter.**
- **The INOU recommends that information be provided in advance of the unemployed person's engagement with the JobPath providers to ensure that the person has a greater awareness of the process. JobPath staff contacting an individual by phone could usefully outline what JobPath is, what to expect and the ways that they are able to assist people.**
- **The INOU recommends that JobPath staff and Advisers provide clear explanations at every stage of the JobPath process in order to minimise any potential misunderstandings.**
- **The INOU recommends that the JobPath providers, including Advisers are as explicit as possible in relation to travelling expenses being available. Notices to this effect would also be very useful.**
- **The INOU recommends that reimbursing unemployed people's travel expenses be extended to other Employment Services.**



- **The INOU recommends that it would be very useful for every JobPath office to develop expertise to support the JobPath Advisers to progress any welfare-to-work questions or issues.**
- **There is, the INOU believes a clear need for the DEASP to provide more targeted information for people who are working part-time and signing-on the Live Register. This information, including the letter of invitation should advise that the DEASP have extended its own and contracted employment services to provide assistance to part-time workers and outline how JobPath and other services may be able to assist people already working part-time. The INOU acknowledges that targeting the invitation may not be straightforward but its introduction would be hugely beneficial.**
- **The INOU also believes that, similarly the JobPath service could ensure that people who are working part-time are contacted prior to the first meeting with an acknowledgement that they are already working part-time. It would be very useful if the person was advised that they received the letter because they are working part-time and in receipt of a Jobseeker's payment (for the days they are not working). It would also be very useful for JobPath Staff to advise the person of how JobPath would be able to assist.**



## 4. Joint Information Sessions (JIS)

In the previous phases of the project, the invitation letter that an unemployed person received was to attend a Group Information Session (GIS) in Intreo or the Local Employment Service. In the GIS, from our experience 12-25 unemployed people usually received a PowerPoint presentation containing information about a range of potential employment or education/training supports and an introduction to Intreo or the Local Employment Service. The Sessions lasted from 10 to 35 minutes.

In the context of JobPath, an unemployed person receives a letter of invitation to attend a Joint Information Session (JIS). The Joint Information Session is different from the Group Information Session as the JIS normally includes a PowerPoint presentation containing slides from both Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and JobPath officials (or at least DEASP slides if the DEASP official is not present). The JIS is where the DEASP completes the formal 'hand over' of the unemployed person to the JobPath provider.

The Joint Information Sessions were delivered using different approaches in the two JobPath offices. In one of the offices, typically, three JISs were scheduled one day a week, consecutively at fifteen minute intervals. The number of people attending varied from 10 to 20 for the time period INOU staff were attending the office, and the Session was held in an office separate to the central area.

In the other office, typically two JISs were scheduled at one and a half hour intervals one day a week (with one JIS on another day for people who were not able to attend). The numbers of people attending varied from 12 to 26.

### **Presentation**

The presentations differed in the two JobPath locations. The presentation was also changed in one of the JobPath locations during this research.

Feedback on the Joint Information Sessions varied between the JobPath offices. The feedback was, generally, more positive where

more time was allocated to the JIS and where the presentation was less rushed. Interestingly, the feedback was more positive from the first Focus Group in this JobPath office than it had been for the second Focus Group following the changed presentation. From discussion with JobPath officials, it appears that the JobPath provider ceased delivering their initial presentation in order to deliver the prescribed DEASP JIS presentation. This may reflect why the second Focus Group attendees were less positive in their JIS feedback. A greater emphasis on the Intreo aspect of the JIS in the prescribed presentation may have contributed to the less positive feedback. Focus Group members noted that the DEASP official was more focussed on what happens if the person fails to engage with the JobPath service rather than the potential benefits of the service.

The INOU believes that there is a usefulness in the DEASP/Intreo advising of programmes and supports that may be available to the unemployed people in attendance (subject to agreement by a Case Officer and a JobPath Adviser). However, the INOU recommends that the DEASP/Intreo aspect of the presentation is reduced.

Feedback from people attending the Focus Groups who found the Joint Information Sessions particularly useful indicate that they are most useful when: relevant information is presented clearly; there is an opportunity for clarification; and information is provided on how the JobPath service will work and support the person. As one Focus Group member advised what was needed was 'clear information, easy to follow and relevant'.

This creates a good initial point of contact with the individual that not only can offset some of the potential damage that the invitation letter may have created, but ensures a good 'lead-in' to the one-to-one meetings.

In the JobPath office where the Joint Information Sessions were scheduled every fifteen minutes, the very quick turnover time ensured shorter Information Sessions. This resulted in people exiting the JIS waiting for their one-to-one meetings and the next group of people waiting for the upcoming JIS. This led to some people reporting that they were being rushed for the next Joint Information Session. One Focus Group member noted that the JIS 'gets you out of the door quick, [for the] next group'. Another advised that as the information was on the screen for a short time there was 'very little time to take in [the] information'.

One of the Focus Group members advised that they preferred the shorter Joint Information Session.

A Focus Group member recalled that the projector was not working at the Joint Information Session they attended. The Focus Group member recalled that the Presenter was 'reading [the presentation] off [the] lap-top [and others in the room] couldn't see it'. This was resolved subsequently.

The manager of the JobPath office acknowledged that the JIS's were compressed. The manager added that the Intreo officials who presented the DEASP's slides in the Joint Information Sessions, attended on a rotation basis from a number of towns in the County and allocating compressed JISs was useful for the DEASP officials and the organisation of the JISs.

There is an opportunity currently being lost by the JobPath providers at the Joint Information Sessions. JobPath offices are providing a service which has and is supporting some unemployed people to access jobs. However, this is not being clearly communicated to unemployed people attending the Joint Information Session. Though the JobPath service will be new for the person, the service has assisted unemployed people to find work and it is, we believe, important to let those attending the JIS know how this has been achieved. Listing specific examples of how JobPath Advisers and the JobPath service have assisted unemployed people would help in this regard.

### **INOUE at Joint Information Sessions**

One aspect of this phase of the research that differed from the previous two phases was the opportunity for an INOU staff member to present information at the Joint Information Sessions in both JobPath offices. There was an opportunity to provide very brief information about the INOU and the reason for our presence at the Joint Information Sessions. We also advised that we had copies of our publication, Working for Work available for everyone attending and to highlight upcoming Focus Group meetings.

Being able to provide this short input at the Joint Information Sessions was extremely valuable from our perspective and we would like to thank Seetec, Turas Nua and the DEASP officials for their agreement and support for our proposal.

### **Post JIS**

In both JobPath offices, the Joint Information Sessions were followed by a one-to-one meeting with a JobPath Adviser. Prior to meeting

an assigned Adviser, both JobPath providers require people to complete an on-line questionnaire in the central area.

Some Focus Group members were unhappy with the questionnaire. One noted that they believed a 'lot of questions were irrelevant or [too] personal'. One person advised that they did not like questions, which they considered of a personal nature, on whether a person was married and had children. This is an example where better explanation and communication is very important. One concern, which a couple of people highlighted at a Focus Group meeting, related to information sought on a person's previous work when they no longer wished to apply for similar work opportunities.

Two of the Focus Group members at one feedback meeting highlighted a question on the on-line questionnaire which asked for salary expectations. They were both very wary about completing this question as they were concerned that they may pitch their response at either too low or too high a salary rate. In both instances, neither answered the question.

The majority of people at one of the Focus Group meetings advised that there was insufficient time allocated for the first meeting, as it involved inputting data onto a computer application. Most felt more time would be useful.

The INOU recommends that JobPath providers would clearly explain the purpose of the questions on the questionnaire, and how the answers will be of assistance to JobPath, and ultimately the person. It would also be very useful for the JobPath provider to encourage, to a greater extent, people to call on an Adviser if they have a query about any aspect of the on-line questionnaire.

## **Recommendations:**

### **Joint Information Session**

- **People attending the Focus Groups who found the Joint Information Sessions particularly useful indicate that they are most useful when:**
  - **relevant information is presented clearly;**
  - **there is an opportunity for clarification; and,**
  - **information is provided on how the JobPath service will work effectively and support the person.**
  
- **The INOU recommends that JobPath providers would clearly explain the purpose of the questions on the questionnaire and any subsequent client support diagnostic tools/software. The INOU recommends that JobPath providers should explain how the answers will be of assistance to JobPath and ultimately to the person. It would also be very useful for the JobPath provider to encourage, to a greater extent, people to call on an Adviser if they have a query about any aspect of the on-line questionnaire or related support resources.**
  
- **Though the JobPath service will be new for the person, the service has assisted unemployed people to find work and it is, we believe, important to let those attending the JIS know how this has been achieved. Listing specific examples of how JobPath Advisers and the JobPath service have assisted unemployed people would help in this regard.**



## 5. JobPath Advisers

As outlined in an earlier chapter, the JobPath staff who work on a one-to-one basis with unemployed people are called Personal Advisers in Turas Nua and Employment Advisers in Seetec. The generic term JobPath Adviser is used throughout the report.

The majority of Focus Group members and those we interviewed by phone were either positive or fairly positive about their JobPath Advisers. A smaller number of Focus Group members and those interviewed by phone had less positive interactions.

One of the Focus Group attendees advised that their JobPath Adviser 'has a genuine interest in helping me back to work. They got to know me as a person'. Another noted that they are 'very happy [with their Adviser]. They're professional and supportive'. Others referred to their Adviser as 'nice', 'helpful', 'well organised' 'determined to support me' and 'providing a friendly down to business service'.

One of the people contacted by phone noted that they suffer from depression and had a meeting with their JobPath Adviser prior to Christmas, but had not been well. They mentioned that their Adviser has been supportive and understanding. Another person contacted by phone also advised that they suffer from depression and had experienced a situation a number of years previously which had had a very detrimental effect on their well-being. They also noted that their JobPath Adviser was understanding of their situation.

A person contacted by phone noted that their JobPath Adviser was empathetic to their child-minding responsibilities and took this into account when scheduling meetings. As outlined earlier, a number of Focus Group members and people interviewed by phone who had difficulties attending meetings as a result of not having access to their own transport, advised that they contacted their JobPath Adviser or office and their appointment times were successfully changed. A person interviewed by phone for example noted that their Adviser was very understanding of the transport difficulties they face in attending meetings.

In other instances, the feedback was less positive. A Focus Group member noted that he had significant disagreements with his JobPath Adviser who he believed was not supporting him in the way that he envisaged. Another of the Focus Group members reported that his JobPath Adviser was reminding him that there are 'lots of jobs' available. He advised that as he was struggling to obtain work, this wasn't helpful.

One person who was interviewed by phone advised that JobPath is 'not useful'. They added that a staff member is not always pleasant when people are working on computers. The person advised that the JobPath office is 'not a nice place to go'. They also advised that they were asked to look for work online 'for the Adviser's benefit'.

While the flexibility around rescheduling meetings when appointment times are not suitable was welcomed, some people had had their appointments cancelled, but were not informed in time of the cancellation. One Focus Group member advised that they 'had an appointment but [their] Adviser [was] on holiday for 3 weeks' and they were not informed. Another Focus Group member advised that they arrived for a scheduled meeting with their JobPath Adviser, but the Adviser was absent. They were told the Adviser was working a half-day. The person added that this was 'not good enough.' A telephone interviewee advised that they 'missed an appointment.' They were sent an invite very significantly in advance of the appointment, but had forgotten the appointment. They mentioned that 'a reminder would have been handy.' One person at the Focus Group advised that they 'were ten minutes late and were [subsequently] given a revised appointment for much later in the day.'

Staffing issues may arise for JobPath providers from time to time that may make it difficult to contact those who are attending appointments. However, it is very important to ensure that people who are attending appointments with their JobPath Advisers are provided with as much notice as possible about cancellations or other changes to their appointments.

A number of Focus Group members - who were assigned a different JobPath Adviser from their initial Adviser - advised that they had a marked preference for either the first or second Adviser. One Focus Group member, for example compared his second JobPath Adviser very unfavourably to his first, noting that the first Adviser 'worked with you'. The person had worked for a number of months and was subsequently assigned to a different Adviser when he went back to JobPath.



We recognise that this is not straightforward for the JobPath providers and can happen across all services, but feedback from the Focus Group meetings indicate that a significant feature of the differences in the quality of the service relates to the skills, competencies and suitability of the JobPath Adviser. There is no doubt that the 'luck of the draw' with which a person is assigned a JobPath Adviser is an important factor. The INOU recommends that there is an increased emphasis on continuous professional development.

Some Focus Group members advised, that in one of the JobPath locations there was a significant gap (2 hours, 3 hours etc.) between the initial inputting of information and their meeting with a JobPath Adviser. They advised that it would be useful, if possible to meet their JobPath Adviser for the initial one-to-one meeting as soon as possible after the Joint Information Session / data inputting. Some Focus Group members had immediate appointments with their JobPath Advisers and it appears that the delays in scheduling appointments reflects the larger number of people attending the Joint Information Sessions. The INOU recommends that one possible resolution would be to schedule three Joint Information Sessions rather than two JISs.

### **Initial Meeting**

The duration of the initial meetings varied. While a number of people advised that the meeting took in the region of 30 minutes or thereabouts, for others it was up to an hour and others recalled it lasted 15 minutes approximately.

### **Personal Progression Plan (PPP)**

Focus Group members advised that they agreed a Personal Progression Plan (PPP) at the initial meeting with their JobPath Adviser. In the main, Focus Group members agreed a Personal Progression Plan that reflected previous work and the types of work that they were interested in obtaining.

At a Focus Group, one person advised that their Personal Progression Plan was unsatisfactory. One of the goals listed in the person's PPP was a goal that they did not want listed. When they queried this, they were told it 'didn't matter'. However, it is very important that the Progression Plan accurately reflects what a person wants.

It was suggested at one of the Focus Groups that it would be better if the PPP was agreed at the second meeting as those attending would have more time to reflect on their Plan. Another proposal was for the Personal Progression Plan to be flagged in advance of the meeting in order for a person to have an opportunity to give some thought to their proposed Plan. Feedback from the Focus Group meetings indicated that everyone received a copy of their PPP.

### **Follow-up meetings**

Following the initial meeting, the frequency of meetings varied for unemployed people – some people reported that their follow-up meetings were taking place every three weeks or so, others noted that the meetings occurred approximately every four weeks and some others advised that they attended meetings every two weeks approximately. Two people reported that their meetings were more frequent. One Focus group member advised that for a period of time they attended scheduled appointments approximately three times each month and another that they had met their JobPath Adviser three times in the past two weeks. In one instance a person advised that they had no follow-up appointment since their initial meeting.

The contract between JobPath contractors and the DEASP stipulates a number of actions that the JobPath providers agree. These include a requirement that JobPath Advisers meet with unemployed people using their services at least every 21 days.

Most Focus Group members advised that the follow-up meetings principally involved people looking for work on computers in the open plan central area of the JobPath office. JobPath Advisers were generally in attendance and would normally meet for a short time. One of the Focus Group members reported that they would prefer more one-to-one meetings, they 'normally just [stuck] on [the] computer when coming in'. They added that they would prefer more time for 'talking and working through it [job searching]'. A Focus Group member advised that they would prefer a greater one-to-one aspect to the follow-up meetings to receive information. Another Focus Group member advised that it is 'sometimes [a] one-to-one meeting and then on [to a] computer'. A person interviewed by phone advised that the follow-up meetings 'involve working on a computer' and another telephone interviewee reported that their follow-up meetings were 'not useful', they did not like the emphasis on on-line jobsearch as they lacked computer skills.

Focus Group members recommended that, optimally, the timing and frequency of meetings should relate to a person's needs. The timing and frequency of meetings, generally advised by the Focus Group members were broadly similar to the majority of people's experiences, i.e. these should be scheduled for once or twice a month and should generally be rostered up to a maximum of one hour. We would encourage JobPath Providers to provide for Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) and other technological solutions, where possible to assist where people have transport or other difficulties in attending meetings.

At the follow-up Focus Group meetings, a number of members noted that they were meeting less frequently than for their initial meetings: in the majority of instances every three weeks or so rather than two weeks. In one instance a person interviewed by phone advised that their JobPath Adviser was changed. They had been meeting very regularly – every week or so – but had not met in four weeks. Another telephone interviewee relayed that they met once a week initially with their JobPath Adviser, and now meet every two weeks. Another advised that, at first their meetings were scheduled twice a week and now they meet with their Adviser every two weeks.

### **Use of premises**

Focus Group members advised that they did not visit JobPath offices outside of their appointment times. Some noted that they were advised that they could use the facilities outside of their appointment times and one Focus Group member recommended that greater and more flexible access to the JobPath facilities would be useful.

A person interviewed by phone said that 'I never felt that this was a service I could walk in and ask questions and get proper advice.'

## **Recommendations: JobPath Advisers**

- **It is very important to ensure that people who are attending appointments with their JobPath Advisers are provided with as much notice as possible about cancellations or other changes to their appointments.**
- **It was suggested at one of the Focus Groups that it would be better if the Personal Progression Plan was agreed at the second meeting as those attending would have more time to reflect on their Plan.**
- **It is recommended that, optimally, the timing and frequency of meetings should relate to a person's needs.**
- **The INOU recommends that JobPath Providers provide for Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) and other technological solutions, where possible, to assist people who have transport or other difficulties in attending meetings.**
- **The INOU recommends that there is an on-going emphasis, across all Employment Services, on continuous professional development for all front-line staff.**



# 6. Progression Outcomes

## **Jobseeking, Jobsearch Referral and Work Supports**

The contract between the DEASP and JobPath providers outlines a range of supports, including job searching supports that JobPath services will provide for unemployed people who are referred. Included among these supports are assistance with jobsearch, development of Curricula Vitae (CV) and job interview skills.

One person at the Focus Group advised of very extensive engagement from their JobPath provider from the start. Their JobPath Adviser applied for a number of jobs helping them to secure three interviews in the first two weeks. Following an interview, the person was offered a different job and has been working at that job subsequently.

Another person interviewed by phone advised that their JobPath Adviser had been instrumental in supporting them to secure work. The person advised 'that you hear of supports to help people get back to work, but don't think it will happen to you.' The person also highlighted the importance for them of having work mentioning 'that feeling that you're important, of coming home from work in the evening.'

Another person brought their CV to their JobPath Adviser who advised that there were a couple of potentially suitable jobs available. They submitted their CV for these positions and the person advised that they were offered a job. This occurred within two to three weeks of joining JobPath. The person added that their JobPath Adviser 'reached out to [them].' A person who was interviewed by phone advised that they had obtained work in conjunction with their JobPath provider. They gave permission to their JobPath Adviser to forward a CV for a job vacancy. The person was called for interview and was successful in obtaining work.

A person interviewed by phone obtained seasonal work. They secured this work without specific support from their JobPath provider as they had worked with the same business previously. They advised that once their seasonal work ended, their JobPath

Adviser contacted them about a job that would be suitable. The person added that this was very useful as they had not seen the vacancy. The person advised that a greater emphasis on this proactive aspect of the service would be very beneficial.

One of the people that obtained full-time work advised that they had secured the job through their CV and interview. They added that they 'found [their] Adviser good and the consultation helpful.'

A person who was interviewed by phone relayed that they had discussed with their JobPath Adviser their preferred job types. The JobPath Adviser contacted the person in relation to a job vacancy. The person had not seen the vacancy and was very glad to have their CV submitted. Subsequently, they completed an interview and were awaiting a reply. Another Focus Group member advised that their JobPath Adviser was 'following up on their preference and what they're suitable for'. Some other Focus Group members were also positive about the job searching support they received.

Others who secured work advised that they had secured the job through their own work. For example, one person contacted by phone is working full-time. They saw and applied for the job on a trial basis for a few days. This worked out satisfactorily and they are now working full-time.

Some other Focus Group members were less positive. One Focus Group member advised that they were told it was necessary that they apply for three jobs a day. They added that, as a result they were 'applying for jobs that don't suit'. Another Focus Group member noted that they received 'no steer... apply for whatever'. The JobPath Adviser is 'not proactive and it would be useful [if they were]'. One Focus Group member advised that they attended the initial meeting ready to look for jobs, but found that their JobPath Adviser was working at a slower pace and this was unhelpful.

The INOU welcomes the work of the JobPath Advisers who were pro-actively informing people about suitable work opportunities. It is important to state that the Focus Group members and people interviewed by telephone who discussed this readily acknowledged the importance of their own job searching. It is clear that when JobPath providers and the unemployed person work to an agreed approach, the proactive job-searching supports provided by JobPath Advisers has a very positive impact. The INOU recommends that this approach is further developed across all JobPath offices and Advisers.

There was some positive feedback on developing CVs at the Focus Group meetings and on the phone where people had received suggestions and information to improve their CVs. One Focus Group member advised that they had received 'useful assistance with [their] CVs'. Another noted that their Adviser was 'very helpful' in creating CVs. A person interviewed by phone advised that their engagement with JobPath is 'going well' and noted that their JobPath Adviser has made some small, but useful changes to their CV. A Focus Group member outlined that their JobPath Adviser focusses on the 'kind of job [they are] interested in'. The person added that the Adviser gave their contact details advising that they can be contacted anytime.

A number of Focus Group members advised that their JobPath Adviser had been sending their CVs out to companies. One noted that their Adviser was 'getting their CV out to businesses'. Another advised that their JobPath Adviser will get their CV to businesses when they give their permission. Another Focus Group member advised that their Adviser had 'sent off CVs from the first day.'

The vast majority of Focus Group members and people interviewed by phone (with a couple of exceptions) reported that they did not feel pressured to take-up work.

There were also instances where the feedback was less positive. Some people were unsure why their CV was being changed. Again, it would be very useful if this could be clearly communicated by the JobPath Adviser to the individual. A Focus Group member advised that they required a CV and that while the JobPath Adviser had some useful inputs, the process was very slow and after two meetings, their CV was still not completed.

One Focus Group member advised that his CV was sent for a minimum wage job without his knowledge, but it was a considerable distance from where the person lived and travel was the main issue. When the person said that it would not be possible for them to attend an interview as the job was too far away they reported that their Adviser was 'not one bit nice about it'. Other people questioned their CV being forwarded to specific vacancies (or employers) for which they did not wish to apply. The INOU acknowledges that, from this work, it is generally the situation that the unemployed person was satisfied with the jobs for which their JobPath Advisers had applied. The INOU recommends that, in all cases the JobPath Advisers are clear that the jobs they are applying for on behalf of the unemployed person are ones that the person wishes to obtain.

JobPath offices include notice boards with job vacancies. A Focus Group member advised that the vacancies on the jobs noticeboards in their local JobPath office related to general operative type positions. They advised that the JobPath office should include a broader range of jobs which would clearly demonstrate that they could assist all unemployed people who were referred.

A number of people who were very positive in relation to the support of their JobPath Adviser in assisting them to obtain full-time work also had no difficulties with the JobPath Service following up with them when they were in work, and were positive that their Adviser 'remains in touch.'

### **Training and Education**

The original tender outlines the training and education options available under JobPath. JobPath participants are able to avail of training or education options if these options are agreed by their JobPath Adviser and Intreo/DEASP. If the courses are shorter-term, up to a maximum of six months, the JobPath participant's involvement in JobPath is paused for the duration of the training or education course. Courses available include those under the Education, Training and Development Option and the Part-time Education Option. When the training/education course finishes, the person remains with JobPath. This will total 12 months (if the person does not find full-time work), comprising both the time period prior to and after the course.

A JobPath participant may also be referred to a longer-term education or training programme, if this is approved by the JobPath Adviser and Intreo/DEASP. In the event, that the person takes up an education course under the Back to Education Allowance, (BTEA), it is possible that they may withdraw from JobPath.

One issue that arose in the two previous phases of this research is that of people who are going back to college in the autumn and who are referred to an employment service, having signed-on the Live Register during the summer. There was one example where a person interviewed by phone queried why they received an invitation to the JobPath provider as they are going back to college. They added that their experience of the JobPath service was good. The INOU would like to acknowledge the role of the DEASP in minimising these invites – this situation was much more prevalent, for example, when we researched the experiences of unemployed people with the Intreo Service in the initial stage of this work.



A person interviewed by phone advised that their JobPath Adviser was helpful and was searching for suitable childcare courses. The person had a very strong possibility of work in childcare following the course. One of the Focus Group members advised that they were working for two to three weeks in the job when they were asked whether they had completed a manual handling course. They added that their JobPath Adviser had arranged for them to attend a manual handling course the following morning.

A person interviewed by phone advised that they completed three of the short internal courses organised by the JobPath provider in their offices. One of the people interviewed by phone was offered a Safepass course, but they advised their JobPath Adviser that they were waiting on a security related certificate. Another person interviewed by phone was being encouraged to undertake a confidence building course. The person was focusing on a course about rights at work and supports at work.

Unusually, one of the Focus Group members attended a Job Club, when they were on JobPath. They had accessed the Job Club themselves. The person advised that the Job Club was interesting. They added that the more intensive Job Club programme was 'more useful'.

The experiences of others were less positive. A Focus Group member advised that they were offered very different courses to the ones that reflected their experience and interests, whereas another person at the same Focus Group meeting advised that the courses outlined would have been ideal for them, but they were not notified of them.

A person interviewed by phone noted that they sought to get a license to drive a Truck and were advised that the JobPath provider would be able to assist. When the person achieved the theory and enquired about financial assistance for the test, they were advised that the JobPath service would not assist financially, but would assist with the paperwork. The person relayed that it would be useful if the JobPath Services could provide greater financial assistance for training courses. A Focus Group member stated that the JobPath service advised that they would not be in a position to fund a Forklift course.

A person interviewed by phone who, in other respects has had a positive JobPath experience, advised that one of the courses they attended through their JobPath provider was a short computer course. They advised that whereas they had experience of working

with computers, a number of others on the course were not able to turn on computers and the course was not useful for them.

A Focus Group member completed two one-day courses, one in Retail and the other on Confidence building. The person advised that the courses were 'a waste of time'. Another Focus Group member advised that they were looking at taking-up a training course, but were finding it difficult to access one.

There was some uncertainty about funding being provided for necessary certification on building sites and whether this might be funded by the JobPath provider. The issue arose where a Focus Group member advised that they had received no definite offer of employment, but were concerned that if an employer required employees urgently they would not have the accreditation (Safepass in this instance). There was an acknowledgement at the Focus Group meeting that if there was a definite job offer, it should be possible to get the necessary certification quickly.

The INOU welcomes the DEASP approach that places a key emphasis on obtaining work. It is important that this approach is in the context of sustainable jobs that reflect the person's interests and aptitudes. However, access to appropriate high quality training and education has a key role to play in making this happen.

## **Self-Employment**

It is recognised in the tender and contracts between JobPath and the DEASP that self-employment could be a potential outcome for some people who are referred. JobPath providers receive a payment for the completion of the Personal Progression Plan for people who pursue self-employment. The JobPath Providers assist people who are assessing self-employment possibilities through referral, primarily to their Local Enterprise Office.

There were some examples from the feedback by phone where JobPath Advisers assisted people who were looking to become self-employed. One person interviewed by phone was referred to their Local Enterprise Office. They noted that the Enterprise Office had provided assistance, including through business start-up courses. Another person advised that they are in the process of becoming self-employed. They appreciated the Adviser's offer that they could contact them if they had any questions or needed information when they were in the process of setting-up their business. Another person advised that they were linking in with their Local Enterprise Office. One person currently on the Back to Work Enterprise

Allowance advised that the INOU Welfare to Work Officer had been very helpful in providing relevant information.

One person interviewed by phone advised that they were considering self-employment as an option and questioned whether JobPath was the most appropriate service to be referred to.

A Focus Group member advised that they were self-employed and accessed the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, but were finding it difficult to have a particular query answered by the Local Enterprise Office or Intreo. A person interviewed by phone stated that they had previously attempted to access the BTWEA, but were refused on the basis of being self-employed previously.

### **Comparative experiences**

One of the Focus Group members had experience of an employment service provider in the UK. They compared their experiences of the JobPath service very favourably with the UK provider, advising that 'the pressure was something else' with the UK employment service.

A couple of Focus Group members compared their experiences of the JobPath service favourably with Intreo/DEASP.

## **Recommendations:**

### **Progression Outcomes**

- **Where JobPath providers and the unemployed person work to an agreed approach, as instanced in some very useful examples in the Report, the proactive job-searching supports provided by JobPath Advisers has a very positive impact. The INOU recommends that this approach is further developed across all JobPath offices and all Employment Services.**
- **While acknowledging that this occurs in the majority of instances, the INOU recommends that, in all cases the JobPath Advisers are clear that the job they are applying for on behalf of the unemployed person are ones that the person wishes to obtain.**
- **The INOU welcomes the DEASP approach that places a key emphasis on obtaining work. It is important, for all Employment Services that this is in the context of sustainable jobs that reflect the person's interests and aptitudes. However, appropriate high quality training and education has a key role in making this happen.**
- **The INOU recommends that follow-up support to unemployed people (and their employers) who secure work would, where people wish to avail of it, be extended to all Employment Services.**



# 7. National Focus Groups

## **Introduction**

Similar to the first two phases of the project a separate national Focus Group meeting was organised whereby INOU Individual Members, who were in receipt of Jobseekers payments, were invited to discuss their experiences of the employment service they were receiving.

The INOU members who attended were linked to the JobPath Service, Intreo, a Job Club, waiting to start the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance and one member was experiencing difficulties accessing any supports.

## **Education and Training Options/Matching**

One member advised that the frontline staff they had met were not fully informed about the different education and training programmes that are available. It is important, they added that frontline staff should be informed about a full range of available training and education options and develop their capacity to match people with the most relevant options.

The lack of employment outcomes, arising from people engaging in courses that failed to meet the job specifications of potential employers, were also highlighted. This was a particular issue regarding some information technology courses. One member also highlighted a lack of consistency in the delivery of the training programmes and stated the importance of having knowledgeable instructors who can impart information effectively.

## **Signing-on times**

In general, members who were with JobPath or on education programmes were not signing-on in their local Intreo office. One member who was not contacted by any employment service, enquired if this was because of his age – he is over 60 years of age.

One person discussed the soul destroying nature of being unemployed including queuing in the Post Office for their Jobseeker's payment. When the employment services are not supportive, the member added, this affects a person's ability to look for and secure a job.

## **Case Officers/JobPath Advisers**

A member advised that their Case Officer in Intreo was 'doing a good job'. A couple of members had less positive experiences with their local Intreo office. One member advised that when they discussed the possibility of self-employment this was dismissed and another member referred to a lack of necessary expertise and specialisation. They advised that the Case Officers 'don't know what you can do'.

One of the members advised that they did not want the JobPath Adviser to send out their CV to companies without their approval. Another member who was also referred to JobPath advised that they preferred the one-to-one meeting to the group session.

One of the members stated that there was useful general information about JobPath at the Joint Information Session and the assistance they received 'tweaking the CV was helpful'. One member noted that the lay-out of the JobPath office was not conducive to privacy. They added that they were referred for job searching to the JobPath office on a very regular basis initially, but agreed with their JobPath Adviser that they would jobsearch at home. They meet with their Adviser every three weeks.

## **Other Services**

One member reported that he completed a course with the National Learning Network which was a useful course, but the person did not get work subsequently. There was positive feedback from members on their experiences with Job Clubs. A member advised that they completed a 'good' three week Job Club and another who attended the Job Club 'found it a very good initiative' and it was very useful for CVs and interview skills.

A person said that being separated by glass dividers was dispiriting, and exacerbated a division between the Social Welfare official and the unemployed person through the years, as they memorably put it 'I kept coming to barriers'.

## **Communication**

Similar to other aspects of the research, participants raised a number of concerns about communication. In one instance, a letter for a member's appointment arrived too late for the person to make their appointment.

In some cases where members were seeking information, this led to more constructive engagement with the officials, though one of

the members noted that identifying the 'right' person took persistence. In other cases, people felt they were not given a supportive or empathic hearing, and they were not supported in their wish to pursue a different career.

A member who was not referred to any of the employment services was engaging with a range of different people and found it difficult to get assistance. Another member also expressed concerns about the contracting out of Employment services.

One of the members recommended the introduction of Jobs Networks. They added that it is important to move beyond an entitlements focus to a 'what can I do' one.



## 8. Other Key Issues

- 8.1** In one of the locations where our research was based, a DEASP official, who is responsible for Community Employment (CE) locally, meets with those exiting JobPath who had not secured employment. At this meeting the DEASP official provides information about available CE opportunities. The INOU recommends that the DEASP would not only mainstream this initiative, but would also provide a full range of potential options including other employment, training and education programmes. It would be very useful, for example to have representatives from training and education courses in addition to CE and TUS sponsors available to provide information to those exiting JobPath.
- 8.2** Unemployed people who exit JobPath may be re-referred. Technically a person may be re-referred to JobPath within two months, though in practice a person is more likely to be referred six months after exiting the service. The INOU recommends that the DEASP devises a system to ensure that the people who are re-referred are those who may secure a more positive outcome on the second occasion. This will require Intreo re-engaging with the person and ascertaining what would be the best option for them.
- 8.3** The INOU believes that greater access to employment, education and training programmes for people exiting JobPath (as outlined above in 8.1) could be useful in giving people other choices. The potentially negative impact of re-referral on an unemployed person who could struggle to establish how the journey would be better this time around must be taken into account.
- 8.4** Issues relating to unemployed people volunteering and genuinely seeking work legislation were not a feature of the project work, but have arisen with queries to our Welfare Rights section. Unemployed people are often unaware that it is necessary to formally notify the DEASP of their intention to volunteer and to receive authorisation from the Department.
- While the INOU recognises that officials may be eager to prioritise work opportunities for unemployed people, the



INOUE contends that doing work on a voluntary basis can have very significant benefits for the individual (and the organisation). These include the social and work benefits of meeting people; creating routine in a work environment and carrying out socially useful work. We also know that the benefits in improving a person's self-esteem can be considerable. Volunteering can also assist an unemployed person to gain employment either directly with the organisation or indirectly through another employer valuing a person's voluntary work. The INOUE recommend that the potential benefits of volunteering are positively valued by the DEASP and Employment Services.

- 8.5** The research highlighted challenges facing some Focus Group participants in accessing employment such as the cost of transport and the financial difficulties of taking-up work if the person had to commute any distance. To that end, the INOUE recommends further promotion and take-up of the Living Wage concept.
- 8.6** The INOUE notes that ageism is a significant barrier for many unemployed people in returning to work. The INOUE recommends that the employment services seek to address ageism in the labour market, and work with older unemployed people to constructively address this issue.
- 8.7** At one of the Focus Group meetings we asked members for their opinion on whether a payments service and an employment service should be separated or combined and the general sense was that the payments and employment services should be separate.
- 8.8** One recurring issue, from across the previous stages of the project and also illustrated in this phase, was that many employers do not contact people who apply for jobs. As one Focus Group member noted, 'They [Employers] are not getting back to me'.



## 9. Project in Numbers

**Numbers of unemployed people who we talked to:**  
450 approx.

**Numbers of unemployed people who gave contact details:**  
298

**Number of visits to Local Offices:**  
16

**Number of Unemployed Focus Groups:**  
Local Focus Groups: 6  
National Focus Groups: 1

**Number of Focus Group members attendees:**  
Total: 58

**Number of Telephone Interviews:**  
47

**Numbers of Working for Work distributed:**  
610

**Number of people receiving information on welfare to work queries:**  
100 approx.

# Mapping the journey for unemployed people



An INOU Research Project and Report

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