

**Presentation to the Joint Committee on Employment
Affairs and Social Protection, Labour Market Activation:**

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to present to this committee and best wishes for your work. We draw from recent commissioned and PhD research and are happy to make available more detailed information on any aspect of this short presentation. We focus on four key issues: male breadwinner activation and issues of gender equality in activation policy and practice, issues concerning procurement of employment services and integrated delivery of social services, impact of PTW on well-being and adult guidance, and policy concerning conditionality and sanctions.

More broadly we signal serious issues of capacity, competence and culture in the Intreo and PTW implementation. We note the absence of a more general public employment service and variable issues of capacity in the availability of services to ‘voluntary engagers’/‘walk-in’ clients, including immigrants, or those not on the Live Register, but wishing to avail of employment and activation services. We also signal concern about how a low-road and work-first activation regime works alongside weak employment regulation can pressure unemployed workers into a low paid and precarious employment regime.

1 Male breadwinner activation: gender equality in activation policy and practice

Activation policy rests on an underlying male breadwinner regime. Issues relating to gender and activation include its focus on full time employment, recent changes for lone parents, access to employment for qualified adults, childcare, and more general access to a public employment supports model in which activation policy rests.

Male breadwinner

The male bread winner regime refers to a tax and welfare system that was built on gendered assumptions that men work full time and women care full time. One clear legacy of this regime is Ireland's still underdeveloped childcare infrastructure, with ongoing need to increase access to quality and affordable childcare for parents in employment. While acknowledging increases to existing childcare subsidies introduced in September 2017, we stress the need for the transition to the new Affordable Childcare Scheme to take place at the earliest possible date and for the need for new investment in afterschool, holiday and relief care infrastructure.

The male breadwinner scheme means rules embedded in the social welfare system require that claimants be available for full time work in order to be eligible for job seekers payments and related employment supports. While the male breadwinner regime no longer reflects economic and social reality the welfare system has never been adapted to new gendered patterns of employment and care, at the same time eligibility to job seekers payments is the primary gateway to rationed employment services. There are two primary consequences.

- a) Some women with care obligations (for example lone parents whose youngest child is over 13, and all qualified adults) are, regardless of those care obligations, if they need to register as unemployed, are required to declare availability for full time employment. There are considerable consequences for women, children and society when policy forces people into work, parenting and life decisions that are both inconsistent and impractical but also disregard deeply held values and gendered moral rationalities about the primary role as lone parents. Rather society requires such mothers 'to work like a man, but to care like a woman' (see Millar and Crosse 2017 for a fuller discussion).
- b) At the same time partnered unemployed women with care obligations (spouses and cohabitants) are in practice unable to pass full time availability criteria, to qualify for job seekers payments and consequently to be eligible for activation supports under

the PTW 2016-20. The linking of AMLP eligibility to the live register embeds a gendered pattern where men are three times more likely to access ALMPs – there are also gendered patterns in which ALMP's men and women access, with consequent impacts on employment outcomes.

Analysis of gendered numbers accessing ALMPs

ALMP	Male	Female	Total
Community Employment	13063	9750	22813
RSS	2030	502	2532
TUS	5355	2463	7818
Gateway	1980	286	2266
BTWENT	8889	2992	11881
BTWed	10555	7324	17879
Partial capacity	599	1013	1612
Job bridge	2190	2017	4027
ST enterprise	236	149	385
Work placement graduate and open	21	10	31
Total	44918	26506	71424
Percentage	73.06%	26.94%	100

Source DEASP Statistical Report 2015 Excel Sheet No D

This is not historical, a gendered analysis of otherwise welcome investment in ALMPs in Budget 2018 shows on average women will only access one quarter of this investment, with investment in apprenticeships still showing extreme gendered patterns.

Gendered analysis of Budget 2018 Investment in AMLP

Budget 2018 Active Labour Market Programme	Eligibility	% participating Women	% Participating Men
Youth development	YGS- JSA/JB/	50	50
Rural Social Scheme	JSA/JB	20	80
Jobs Plus	JSA/JB	33	67
Springboard	Wide	31	69
Apprenticeship	Wide	1	99
Average	Restrictions	27	73

Lone parents

PTW included a commitment to review the Jobseeker Transition Payment (JST) model used to bring lone parents whose youngest child is between 7-13 years of age into the activation regime. This review was completed and published in October 2017, while the review found reforms have been 'successful' in increasing employment and reducing welfare dependency, the review also acknowledged that, on balance, changes impacted negatively on risk of poverty. This is consistent with international evidence that while activation might enable or force lone parents into employment this will not of itself alleviate poverty. It is clear that further efforts are needed in terms of enhanced anti-poverty policies for lone parents.

Consequent to the review Budget 2018 increased OFP and JST income disregard by €20pw for OFP and JST recipients, leaving a restoration shortfall of €16.50pw for these lone parents¹. However in 2016, as a consequence of 2012 policy changes restricting eligibility to One Parent Family payment, 9,928 prior OFP recipients relied on Job Seekers Allowance while 5,695 other prior OFP recipients now rely on other payments (including carers allowances or disability allowances). None of these benefit from partial income disregard restoration, the increases only benefit those on OFP/JST. 15,000 women, have not benefited from restoration and experience losses of up to €86.50pw in income disregards.

Recipients of budget 2018 income disregard increases

OFP	JST	WFP	JSA	CA/DA
39,539 (2017)	14,627 (2017)	25,000 (5,197 on OFP)	9,928 (2016)	5,695 (2016)
↑	↑	↑	-	-

¹ Budget 2012 structural reforms changed the eligibility criteria for OFP with access to relevant payments now dependant on the age thresholds of the youngest child. In addition, a number of changes were made to the income disregards for the OFP. Budget 2012 reduced OFP scheme earnings disregards over five years, and implemented the first cut reducing the rate from €146.50 per week to €130 per week for new and existing recipients. The intention was then to further decrease the rate to €110 per week in 2013, to €90 per week in 2014, to €75 per week in 2015, and to €60 per week in 2016. However, the planned reductions were not fully implemented, and income disregards were €110 per week entering Budget 2018.

The *Indecon (DEASP 2017b)* report also highlights some key inadequacies of the reform indicating that approximately 20% of those who lost entitlement to OFP had been offered activation supports and only 3.3 percentage of total who lost OFP had accessed training. Given the average age of the 46.6% of OFP recipients who lost entitlement over the 2013-2016 period is 40.5 years it is likely training and reskilling will be an important strategy for employability.

Qualified adults

Following a greater awareness of higher risks of child and adult poverty in low work intensity families and various reports concerning jobless families there has been a recent focus on activation and qualified adults. PTW 2016-20 commits to developing a pro-active engagement approach to support qualified adult dependants of job-seeker claimants, secure employment. One measure, promoting the registration of qualified spouses/partners as jobseekers in their own right had a Q2 2017 target which is now delayed. A second measure, 5 pilots with Jobless households announced in Budget 2018, the latest PtW report for Q3 2017 states these are to commence but it is not clear what (if any) training case workers have received to work on a family basis. A third measure to incorporate, as appropriate, time spent as an adult recipient when assessing eligibility for access to employment supports was actioned in Q2 2016. A fourth option, to consider options to allow recipients of Carer's Allowance to access activation services as they cease their caring role was actioned in Q2 2017 so that the Intreo service is now available for former carers.

While all these measures are welcome they are also minor and piecemeal reforms and relatively slow to progress. A more comprehensive reform might be to review the potential of the JST as a voluntary mechanism for qualified adults to individualise entitlement. Indeed in the context of renewed skills and possible labour shortages (and the degree to which the housing supply deficit requires us to focus on domestic labour supply responses) it may well be cost effective to abolish the limitation rule and move towards a fully individualised modernised social protection system.

Procurement of employment services and integrated delivery of social services

The DEASP and DEHELG have been reviewing use of commissioning, procurement and tendering processes for SICAP and LES/Job Clubs and related governance issues. It is presently policy to consider the extension of 'payment by outcomes' approaches as used, or similar to those used, in Momentum and JobPath to other programmes (e.g. Local Employment Service/Job-Clubs). DEASP have completed draft reports of reviews of LES and Job Clubs performance and governance and completed reports expected within the next three to four weeks. To date these decisions to effectively privatise public employment services have largely happened below the radar with little public debate or public scrutiny. Academic research suggests procurement has caused a restriction in capacity and flexibility to pursue social inclusion related community based processes with negative impacts on both individual and community outcomes (Murphy and Deane 2016, Meade 2017).

In particular it is not clear that policy and practice is fully maximising the application of a social clause subject to EU and national guidelines, in public procurement. We are aware that DPER are revising Policy Guidelines on Social Clauses, this should be considered more fully by this committee. Further a study of integrated delivery of social services notes serious issues of horizontal and vertical integration and coordination of employment supports across Intreo, Job path, SICAP and LES/Job Clubs. While PTW anticipates that Intreo clients access the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme sponsored by the Department of Environment Community and Local government and the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning, we note considerable barriers to interagency referral and co-operation at local levels (Creedon 2017).

Impact of PTW activation model on well-being and adult guidance

Recent research evaluating the effectiveness and implementation of new employment enhancement programmes points to the importance of focusing on well-being and employability issues in activation and active labour market policy. Recent research critically examined the implementation and perceived effectiveness of PTW in Ireland; evaluated, through a randomised control trial, the effectiveness of a high support guidance intervention (when compared to LES services as usual,) in terms of their impact on psychological well-being and related psychosocial factors which influence employability and

explored the implementation aspects and mechanisms of PTW services. The study identified three overarching themes relevant to the effectiveness of PTW including: (1) 'the reform agenda'; (2) 'depersonalisation': and, (3) the missing 'how to' of implementation. The study found high levels of psychological distress amongst LTU at baseline. Findings suggest that both the guidance intervention and LES services as usual had led to improvements over time in well-being and employability, albeit with a number of more positive effects observed amongst the men who took part in the intervention. A subsequent process evaluation revealed three important themes with regard to implementation aspects of the guidance intervention including the important role of: (1) the practitioner-client relationship; (2) the service setting; and (3) the skill sets of practitioners. This study is the first to examine PTW with regard to psychological well-being and employability outcomes for the LTU. It provides support for detailing the 'how to' of implementation, emphasising the potential added value of well-designed interventions both in terms of mental health and well-being outcomes, and career progression. The findings suggest that practitioners, employment services, policy makers and other stakeholders, should recognise the important role of careful, appropriate, and quality-focused ALMP interventions in terms of promoting increased and sustainable employability, positive mental-health, and improved quality of life for our most vulnerable and disadvantaged job seekers.

While PTW identifies clear goals to be achieved by employment services, there are deficiencies in the 'how to' of implementation, and in particular with regard to career guidance support. There is limited investigation of the processes which occur, and whether they support or hinder, the short and long-term career progression of the unemployed. Participants in the aforementioned research, alluded to outcomes (from the guidance intervention), such as increased confidence and motivation, the achievement of career goals, greater career clarity, goal setting, and increased hope for the future (Whelan, 2017). Similarly qualitative findings from the RCT also indicated that levels of psychological distress fell over time, while measures of employability, for example, hopefulness and career-efficacy, increased. These findings can perhaps be best understood in the context of career guidance theories which, in general propose, increased understanding of the self (particularly with regard to likes and dislikes, preferred behavioural style, and specific aptitudes), a greater understanding the world of work and occupational choice, and

supported and informed decision making (Holland, 1997; Parsons, 1909; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). However, this requires quality and consistent engagement with job seekers, as recommended by the Labour Market Council (O'Connell, 2016; Sweeney, 2017). Given what is known about the career readiness and well-being of the LTU - both in Ireland and elsewhere - it would seem logical and appropriate that approaches, incorporating lessons from career guidance and career counselling, would be used in job assistance programmes designed to support the unemployed.

Policy concerning conditionality and sanctions

Conditionality and sanctions are a controversial aspect of activation policy, elsewhere we have pointed to the relationship between work-first activation and low pay sectors in the political economy however we do not have time to pursue this here. Rather we focus on the practice of conditionality. PTW 2016 -2020 aims to 'improve the application of the principle of rights and responsibilities in all engagements with jobseekers' including 'improving communication of rights and responsibilities in activation documents and Group Information sessions' and 'application of a requirement for Jobseekers to register their CVs (anonymised if desired) to Jobs Ireland when requested by their Case Officers'.

While in relative terms Ireland continues to implement a low level of sanctions this is no reason for complacency. In fact in regimes where claimants are fearful of sanctions we might expect high levels of compliance and low levels of sanctions. Qualitative data does suggest that the threat of sanction negatively impacts both claimants' well-being and their relationship to caseworkers and agencies (Boland and Griffin 2015; Finn forthcoming). International evidence highlights while claimants are aware that sanctions exist within the system there is a lack of understanding among claimants of when, how and why they are implemented or reversed (Griggs and Evans 2010; Oakley 2014); current on-going qualitative research here suggests that Ireland is mirroring this trend (Finn forthcoming). Therefore, it may be the case that claimants are sanctioned for a lack of understanding rather than a deliberate choice to avoid conditions (Goodin 2008; Griggs and Evans 2010). While we do not have space or time here to debate the merits or otherwise of conditionality we do observe that qualitative research suggests variable practice with some services and regions gaining reputations for applying more severe conditionality regimes than others.

We point to the lack of transparency in this regard, including a lack of information regarding practice of conditionality in the two JobPath services Turas Nua and Seetec. Transparency requires publication of sanctions across Intreo and Job Path, including reasons for sanctions, gender and age disaggregation and regional analysis, quarterly reports to be included with PTW quarterly monitoring report. Policy learning and evaluation requires high quality qualitative follow up of sanctioned clients to understand the impact of conditionality and sanctions on clients lives, employment prospects, risk of poverty and risk of homelessness. Indeed on-going qualitative research suggests that claimants are critical of work-related conditionality which is often perceived as failing to take account of their interests (e.g. returning to education) or personal issues, such as mental or physical health, financial concerns and/or housing situation (Finn forthcoming). As a priority policy and practice need to accommodate unemployed claimants who are experiencing and are required to meet requirements of other conditional regimes for example methadone maintenance programmes. Current exploratory research highlights a lack of appreciation of how separate conditional regimes intersect in the lives of individuals, such as unemployed drug service users, and impose competing demands on them (Finn and Healy forthcoming). This issue is all the more pressing since international evidence suggests that vulnerable claimants have a particularly poor understanding of sanctioning systems (Oakley 2014).

Conclusion

While welcoming reduced unemployment and recognising significant levels of institutional reform and improvements in service delivery and significant investment in ALMPs we have stressed some underlying concerns with the fundamental logic underlying PTW. We also stress that considerable issues of capacity, competence and culture remain to be addressed. While we have other concerns, including the relationship between low pay and precarious work and activation policy, for the purposes of this meeting we urge recommendations on four key issues. Redressing male breadwinner activation and issues of gender equality in activation policy and practice, addressing issues concerning procurement of employment services and integrated delivery of social services, advancing well-being and adult guidance within PTW and transparent reporting concerning conditionality and sanctions policy and practice. We thank you for your time and stress we are happy to follow upon any issue raised in this brief submission. 25-1-2018