

**Seetec Opening Statement to Joint Oireachtas Committee on
Employment Affairs and Social Protection**

Tuesday, 8th May, 2018

Good morning Chairman – thank you for the invitation to present to the Committee this morning. My name is Mouna Prenty and I am Chief Executive of Seetec Employment and Skills Ireland. I would like to introduce my colleague, Karl Milne Operations Director for Dublin. We have both worked with the organisation since the beginning of the contract.

Seetec Employment and Skills Ireland delivers JobPath in the top part of the country, including Dublin through a network of 54 locations. Seventeen of these are operated by our subcontractors – five Irish organisations selected for their skills, expertise and ability to work within the community. One of the objectives of JobPath was to build additional capacity in the market and this was one of the reasons we decided to deliver our contract using both direct and subcontracted delivery.

We have made a significant investment in setting up our office infrastructure, IT solutions, outreach services in rural locations, our subcontractors and building our establishment. We employ 246 people ourselves and 80 people through our Sub-Contractors. Our employees come from a wide range of backgrounds, but all share the same purpose, which is to make an impact on the lives of our clients.

As some background, Seetec Employment & Skills was established in the UK in 1984 as a private-public partnership. Since then it has grown into one of the leading providers of high quality skills, employment and justice services to thousands of individuals and businesses every year. Whilst Seetec Employment & Skills is a private company, the work we tender for is built around improving lives and communities; in 2016 we

achieved B-Corp status, joining a worldwide community of private sector businesses that focus on social value and the corporate social responsibility agenda.

Our approach to service delivery is to be extremely client focused and as flexible as possible. Commissioned surveys by DEASP demonstrate that our overall satisfaction rating has increased from a mean score of 4.09 out of 5 in 2016 to 4.26 in 2017. Since the start of the service we have only had 204 complaints – to put this in context – that is one quarter of 1% of the total number of individuals that have started their JobPath journey with us. Whilst we appreciate that not every individual will welcome being referred to JobPath and there are occasions where a client has an issue with the service – we use this feedback to continually improve our delivery and we are very proud of the quality of service that we deliver.

We are exceeding our contractual performance targets and our approach of ‘right job, first time’ ensures that we work with individuals to ensure the right job match resulting in sustainable jobs.

Our clients reflect a wide range of experiences of unemployment from those who have never worked to those who are qualified and highly skilled. More than 40% of our referred client base has been unemployed for between two and five years, but another 24% have been unemployed for between six and ten years. Unsurprisingly our client base is relatively mature, more than a quarter of our clients are over the age of 50 and many come to us with low expectations and poor experience of the labour market. One client from the West of Ireland told us on day one that we had no hope of finding him a job. He’s now working successfully in sales in a car dealership.

These are the kind of success stories that drive our teams. In talking to our clients to date, they aspire to work in a range of sectors from construction and trades, to catering and hospitality, healthcare and retail – but also roles within professional services, tech, IT and the pharma and life sciences sectors. These generally reflect previous working experience and a desire to re-enter the labour market in a similar sector. However, many

say to us that without the intervention and assistance of Seetec Employment & Skills Ireland and JobPath they would not have had the confidence to pursue the role they are now in.

We've delivered or facilitated over 200,000 training interventions for our clients; these includes workshops delivered in our centres, further education or training through the Education and Training Boards across our contract area, other state funded or private training purchased by us linked to clients specific job goals. This ranges from Safe Pass for those wanting to work in construction to more specific training like Java Programming or in one instance a chainsaw refresher course – that are all linked to a particular job opportunity.

Our work would not be possible without partnerships and we have sought to build links with a range of organisations that support and engage with our clients in the communities in which we operate.

One of the most important partnerships is the one with employers. We have placed clients with over 9,000 employers in a wide range of roles in all sectors of the economy including the top consulting firms in the country, pharmaceutical roles, banks, accountancy firms and public service jobs of all types.

However, the majority are small employers across both rural and urban locations that value the service we provide at no cost to them. These small employers have limited time and in some cases expertise in recruiting employees.

Employers tell us that they value the pre-employment training that we organise, that our service is fast and responsive. Many comment on the fact that we are paid by results as something they welcome, they know we want to ensure our clients are a good match for the role and are better prepared for the transition into sustained employment.

This is a sentiment mirrored by the Labour Market Council who have said that ‘We need a labour market activation strategy that is flexible, that is seen to mirror the needs of employers and job seekers and can respond to challenges in periods of economic difficulty as well as exploit opportunities in periods of economic recovery’

Before I conclude, I would like to tell you about two clients that we have worked with.

One of our clients had left school before his Leaving Certificate and when he came to us he had no experience of the workplace. He was smart and loved computers but he was very low on confidence. His Advisor encouraged him and gradually built his confidence, she worked with him on his CV until he was more confident in sending it to employers. Based on his interests and capability she suggested he apply for a Technical Support role with a major international company. With support from our Employer Services team he completed the on-line application process and although he required a Leaving Certificate for the role our intervention secured him his first ever interview. With intensive support in his interview preparation and some financial support to buy new interview clothes he was successful and was offered his first job. He sustained through 12 months employment and was promoted to a supervisory position. He remains in employment with this company today.

A 44 year old client in the midlands had been out of work for 4 years. He told us “I’m mad to work”, but he thought employers wanted a younger man. He had many years Groundwork experience and he had a great attitude but he had no IT skills which impacted on his job search capability. He also lacked self-confidence due to his period of unemployment. We worked with him increasing his confidence and improving his basic IT skills. We carried out mock interviews and supported him in contacting employers.. He was delighted to be offered a position and we provided him with safe pass and manual handling training. We also purchased new work wear for him. The client said he was thankful for the time we spent with him and is currently working as a General Construction Operative.

These two clients are very different – but their experience is very similar; both wanted to work but felt unable to achieve it on their own. Our team empowered and supported them to address their barriers to work and reach their personal goal.

Based on our experience here and in the UK, we feel the DEASP has used learnings from other international models to develop a best in class contract that delivers value for clients, employers and for the taxpayer. Payment by results contracts transfer risk to the private sector, creates flexibility and capacity through the economic cycle, encourages contractors to invest and innovate to deliver results in the most efficient and effective way and most importantly boost the chances of the hardest to help find employment. The JobPath contract is constructed with the client at the centre and in a way in which we, the contractors are accountable for delivering quality performance. We welcome the Econometric review that is in progress.

The employment market has changed significantly since JobPath was first introduced and we are approaching levels of employment that would not have been contemplated a few short years ago. However, this doesn't mean that the need for a range of labour market activation services disappears - beneath the headline figures we see some real gaps and areas of need emerging, and we have a real opportunity with the capacity and expertise that has been built to impact on the lives of more individuals and the communities they live in. These are who Ireland must not leave behind.

We look forward to building on the work we have already done, impacting on some of the most rural communities in Ireland – and making a difference to people's lives by supporting them into quality, sustainable work.

I would like to sincerely thank the Committee for its time this morning and now we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

ENDS