

The Corkman

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

People trapped in Turas Nua - Moynihan

People who want to participate in a community employment scheme, or various other schemes believe they are trapped in JobPath and Turas Nua, Cork North West Deputy Aindrias Moynihan told the Dáil. Speaking during Question Time, he said they are looking for flexibility in order that they can switch back and forth between the most appropriate schemes to allow them to up-skill and move on in their careers and lives without being trapped in Turas Nua.

“There is a constant flow of queries and many Deputies will have had the same experience,” he said. “If a person has a guarantee of a job or an opportunity to participate in a community employment scheme or avail of various other opportunities and is then pulled towards Turas Nua, he or she feels obliged to take that route. People believe they are losing out on the opportunity to participate in community employment schemes or the opportunity to avail of an internship or participate in the vocational training opportunities scheme, VTOS, and that they are being excluded from what would be an opportunity to up-skill in being pulled into a one-size-that-does-not-fit-all scheme such as Turas Nua.”

Deputy Moynihan said the scheme has been in place for a number of years and is due for review. The original contract was for four years. The provision of flexibility to allow people to take the other routes, without having to enter the Turas Nua scheme, as some feel pressured to do, is one of the issues that must be identified.

In reply, Social Protection Minister Regina Doherty said there is no competition between activation programmes. “Tús, the community employment programme, Seetech and Turas Nua are all providing activation programmes which are slightly different for different people, but there is no competition between the community employment programme and JobPath as activation measures,” she said. “They are different streams of processes supported by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to try to get people into work. That is why we choose very carefully who is sent to JobPath, the community employment programme or Tús.”

With respect, she said each of them provides a different level of training or work experience to make sure people are job-ready. “JobPath provides participants with a guaranteed service which includes not only one to one support and training but also a continual counselling and advice service to make sure they will be matched with the jobs available or that they will be retrained in order that they can make themselves available to fill the jobs available. However, there is no competition across the range of employment schemes. Each has been designed to specifically address a particular section of the market.”

Garda workforce to reach 21,000 by 2021 - Stanton

A cornerstone of the Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country is the Government's plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021, comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians, Minister of State David Stanton told the Seanad.

"Revisiting the decision that was taken to close Garda stations at the depths of the recession is also a part of that commitment," he said. "In this context, the former Tánaiste, following the approval of the Government in June 2016, requested the then Garda Commissioner, while fully cognisant of the Commissioner's statutory functions, to identify six stations for reopening on a pilot basis to determine the possible positive impacts that such openings would have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order."

He said the current Garda Commissioner recently submitted his final report on the pilot. The report contains a recommendation that six Garda stations to be included in the pilot scheme, including Ballinspittle, County Cork. "The Minister intends to bring the final report to Government shortly," he said. "In the meantime, the Commissioner has written to the Office of Public Works and instructed it to progress the matter."

"The Minister understands that a timetable for the re-opening of the stations concerned is dependent on a number of factors, including the brief of requirements from An Garda Síochána, the extent of the required refurbishment based on current building regulations, the need to comply with fire regulations and to provide disability access," he added.

Community employment schemes should be extended to pension age

Consideration should be given to extending participation in community employment and other schemes right up to pension age, Cork North West Deputy Michael Moynihan told the Dáil.

Speaking during a debate on the Social Welfare Bill, he said this should be considered across the board, given the enormous benefit everyone has received.

There has been a debate back and forth in the Chamber on PRSI and pension records, said Deputy Moynihan. "There was a huge difficulty, as I know from many negotiations with senior officials in the Department," he said. "Now public representatives can look for records. When people are approaching their 60s and want to look at their records to see if they will be entitled to a pension, they do not know how to interface with the Department. They do not want to set up online accounts and provide all of those details. I am glad that the Department has seen sense and that we will be able to get the records."

The people concerned will also be able to obtain the records themselves; they will not just have to use the offices of public representatives, he added. "They will be able to contact the Department directly. This was about finding a way to obtain private information held by the Department for which people should look. It is very worthwhile and I appreciate it. We put a great deal of effort into trying to have the position changed."