

‘Community Employment, more than just activation’

Supporting the delivery of community services to a range of communities and target groups throughout Ireland



South Dublin Community Platform

May 2016

This paper is for consideration by [Department of Social Protection](#)

Contents

Executive Summary	3	
1. Introduction	4	
1.1 Who we are	4	Page 2
1.2. Our policy objective:	4	
2. Community Employment makes a substantial contribution to services in disadvantaged communities.....	6	
2.1 Social Inclusion implications of changes to Community Employment	6	
3. Including the community and voluntary sector in the management, operation and review of the Community Employment programme	7	
3.1 Programme efficiency; improving recruitment processes	8	
3.2 Addressing blocks and barriers for programme participants.....	9	
3.3 Mechanisms for cooperation between the Department and sponsor organisations....	10	
4. Community and voluntary organisations; best placed to deliver Community Employment programmes.....	10	
5. Conclusion.....	10	

Executive Summary

A review of activation programmes within the Department of Social Protection will take place in 2016. The Community Employment programme will be reviewed during this process. This paper is for consideration as part of the review process. While Community Employment is primarily a labour market initiative that aims to support unemployed people into employment and further training, it is also a key resource to the community and voluntary sector. This paper asserts the substantial social inclusion contribution of the programme, in support of the delivery of community and voluntary services to marginalised groups and individuals. It highlights the necessity to include a Social Inclusion Impact Analysis within the review process. It puts forward the case for a closer working relationship between the Department of Social Protection and the community and voluntary sector organisations delivering the Community Employment Programme. It provides examples of how some current programme issues might be addressed and proposes a pilot project be initiated to establish a new structure to facilitate that closer working relationship between the Department and the sector. Finally it reiterates the expertise of the sector as delivery agents of Community Employment in that it can offer additional supports external to employment supports that equip people distant from the labour market to progress to employment training and education.

1. Introduction

1.1 Who we are

South Dublin Community Platform is a network of 44 social inclusion organisations, operating in South Dublin county since 1994. Our aim is to provide a collective sectoral voice for our members on social inclusion, equality and human rights issues. Our activities include; representation on local government structures, networking for social inclusion organisations, leading initiatives that promote anti-poverty and equality issues and linking national policy to the experience in South Dublin county. Community Employment is an important resource for our member organisations, and makes a valuable contribution to community and voluntary sector service delivery in our county and beyond. It also engages participants that are quite often, recipients of locally based community and voluntary sector services. Many of our members act as sponsor agents for Community Employment projects or have Community Employment participants working in their organisations. The future of Community Employment is an important issue for our members. We want to be involved in shaping the future of Community Employment in our county.

Page | 4

In May 2016, we held a conference for organisations that sponsor Community Employment in South Dublin county. The aim of the conference was to provide organisations with current information in relation to the direction of employment policy, a space to discuss their experience of CE programme delivery and an opportunity to formulate a collective position with the objective of informing this submission.

1.2. Our policy objective:

‘To highlight and protect the substantial social inclusion contribution of Community Employment in the delivery of community services’

This paper is for consideration as part of the review process of Community Employment. Our members, while acknowledging the main labour market focus of Community Employment, assert the valuable contribution of the programme to community and voluntary service delivery and to social inclusion. It outlines our position in relation to the Community Employment programme and makes the case for a closer working relationship between the Department of Social Protection and delivery organisations in the operation, management and ongoing review of the programme. For our sector, the programme is *‘more than just activation’*. We believe that the dual programme objectives of activation and community service delivery, can achieve positive results in terms of progression rates for participants, while maintaining community and voluntary service levels. We acknowledge that the

management of these two separate objectives can often prove difficult. We believe that the inclusion of the community and voluntary sector in the formulation of solutions to operational and procedural issues, and in managing conflicts between the two programme objectives, is imperative. The aim of this paper is:

Page | 5

- to highlight the significant resource Community Employment makes to social inclusion in its support to community and voluntary service delivery
- To propose that any departmental review, factors in the distance from the labour market of many groups who participate in CE, and that progression is captured in terms of people's progression towards the labour market in the case of individuals facing additional blocks and barriers
- to assert the value of the community and voluntary sector's expertise in Community Employment Programme delivery and to outline the case for the Community and voluntary sector's ongoing involvement in the management, operation and review of the programme, commencing with participation in the upcoming Department of Social Protection programme review
- To assert that the community and voluntary sector is best placed to continue to deliver the Community Employment programme

This paper is for consideration by the Department of Social Protection, and by the Minister for State for Communities and National of Drug Strategy with overall responsibility for the Community and voluntary sector.

2. Community Employment makes a substantial contribution to services in disadvantaged communities

There are 11,500 community and voluntary sector organisations in Ireland (O'Connor, 2016) and approximately 900 of those organisations are involved in sponsoring Community Employment. The programme currently contributes in excess of 350 million euro annually in both financial and human resources to the delivery of a range of community services nationally and provides 22,813 participants (Department of Social Protection, 2015). Delivery organisations are in the main, community and voluntary organisations based in communities, delivering frontline services to various communities of interest and disadvantaged communities. These services include addiction services, childcare services, youth services, children and family services, services to people with disabilities and older people and many other community development, sporting and care services particular to specific communities. Community Employment has become integral to the way in which community and voluntary organisations deliver services. Some organisations have evolved

to include Community Employment as a key element of the mechanism for their service delivery.

2.1 Social Inclusion implications of changes to Community Employment

The most recently published, Department of Social Protection, Review of Community Employment in 2012 states:

“It is recognised that, in addition to its objectives for participants, CE has become important over time in its role of supporting the delivery of a range of community, sporting, care and other services. While the changes now being proposed may pose challenges for projects in terms of service delivery over time, if case managers are consistent in referring suitable clients to meet service delivery demand to projects committed to the activation agenda this challenge should be minimised. It is reasonable to think both strands are not mutually exclusive and that a person benefiting from training and work experience and a general positive experience would in turn be associated with providing quality delivery of services.

However, if this were to become a major difficulty it might be addressed by either:-

- re-focusing into two strands (an activation and a service strand) within the scheme itself for individual projects, with the service strand existing outside the Departments suite of activation schemes, or
- (as suggested by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform) a move towards lead core funding of all community projects by the public agency responsible for the relevant kind of service delivery, with CE supporting only part – generally a minority – of staff in any individual organisation/project.”

Possible changes anticipated by the sector include programme amalgamations, changes in delivery mechanisms, a shortening of time spent on Community Employment as well as reduced programme numbers. Any of these changes will impact on the level of programme resources available to the community and voluntary sector and will also threaten the viability of some community and voluntary sector organisations. This proposal asserts that this would not be in the interest of either the organisations in question or prospective participants because there is no possibility of additional funding in a climate that has already seen up to 35% cuts to core funding in the community and voluntary sector (Harvey, 2012).

It cannot be stated strongly enough that the community and voluntary sector is reliant on Community Employment as a key resource in delivering much needed services to local communities. These changes will impact on service delivery levels to marginalised and excluded groups. While the programme is primarily a labour market initiative, the fact that it makes a significant contribution to social inclusion cannot be ignored, and therefore the implication of recent departmental discussion on reducing numbers, as well as indications of the amalgamation of a number of departmental labour market initiatives will have major

social inclusion implications. It should be noted that programme participants, are also users of community and voluntary services. We propose that this process needs to be managed carefully, and that a Social Inclusion Impact Analysis is carried out to inform appropriate strategies to protect front line services.

3. Including the community and voluntary sector in the management, operation and review of the Community Employment programme

Community Employment is a well-established labour market initiative. It originated in 1984 as the 'Social Employment Scheme', a work experience programme for people who were unemployed (Duggan, Carmel, 1999). In the intervening period, it has evolved into a national programme with 22,813 participants at a cost in excess of 350 million euro per annum, with approximately 900 community and voluntary sector organisations involved in programme delivery (Department of Social Protection, 2015). Since its inception, it has become a more sophisticated programme, with participants engaging in a range of quality assured certified training opportunities combined with practical work experience in community and voluntary organisational setting (Department of Social Protection, 2016). Work experience opportunities vary from organisation to organisation, and include amongst others, administration, childcare, social care, caretaking, driving, youth work, and community development. The programme also assists in offering work placement for people undergoing drug rehabilitation.

Organisations have become specialised in delivering Community Employment, and have adapted with the programme over the years to become skilled in meeting both the needs of participants and in developing the competencies required for technical programme administration.

'The community and voluntary sector has delivered Community Employment for over 30 years and has specialised knowledge in programme delivery'

The Department of Social Projection has managed Community Employment since 2012, taking over from FAS the then National Training Agency. While many previous FAS and Departmental programme reviews have taken place over the years, these have missed the opportunity to understand Community Employment from the perspective of the community and voluntary organisations as delivery agents of the programme. Therefore, opportunities for learning have been missed in terms of programme efficiency, in understanding how some of the blocks and barriers preventing participants from progression might be addressed and in terms of improving some of the programme processes as understood by the delivery

organisations. This paper asserts that the inclusion of the sector in the management, operation and review of Community Employment, through the creation of appropriate communication structures and in their inclusion in ongoing programme reviews will offer valuable insights into the operation of the programme, and can offer many solutions to current problems existing within systems. In support of this position, below are some examples of issues with current programme operations and possible solutions to the problems outlined. Page |8

3.1 Programme efficiency; improving recruitment processes

The recruitment process for participants was changed on foot of recommendations from the 2012 programme review. Participants are now centrally processed by local DSP offices/Intreo, which assist with case management of unemployed individuals. However, in practice this has slowed down the recruitment process, leading to an increased period while participant vacancies remain unfilled. This has implications for both activation objectives and service delivery objectives. It also impacts on organisational sustainability, as organisations lose money every week a vacancy remains unfilled. Currently, the local DSP office matches eligible participants to Community Employment vacancies. This process now takes longer than it has done under the previous programme arrangements. During our recent conference, organisations indicated that often DSP officials will forward a list of individuals who must attend interview for the position advertised. Our member organisations report that on average up to 50% of those presenting for interview are not suitable. In some cases this figure can be as high as 100% which means the recruitment process has to begin again. Delivery organisations are currently excluded from selection of participants for interview. Their expertise in matching of vacancies to eligible participants is not being utilised to its full potential. Previously prospective participants applied directly to the organisation where the vacancy existed. Many organisations are accessible to prospective participants and could answer queries in advance of the interview assisting prospective participants to understand the role being advertised and in making an assessment on whether or not the position offered advancement opportunities in their area of interest. To assist in improving the current recruitment process, we propose a change in how recruitment is managed and advocate that organisations work closely with the DSP Employment Services Officers to match eligible participants. This may involve regular meetings, and ensuring organisations are available to prospective participants to answer questions about the position available.

3.2 Addressing blocks and barriers for programme participants

3.21 Activation of those most distant from the labour market

Organisations participating in our recent conference questioned the progression rates contained in the most recent reports. Those present reported higher levels of progression than for example the 30% contained in 2012 review document.

Page | 9

Other points made in relation to progression included:

People eligible for Community Employment include

- Young people who have been in prison
- People in addiction
- People over the age of 55
- Travellers
- People in receipt of disability benefit

Analysis of progression for these groups needs to take into account their distance from the labour market and the blocks and barriers they face in progression to employment.

Community Employment programmes need to be assessed in terms of the composition of their scheme into groupings of participants relative to their distance from the labour market.

We propose that any departmental review factors in the distance from the labour market of many groups who participate in Community Employment, and that progression is captured in terms of people's progression towards the labour market in the case of individuals facing additional blocks and barriers

3.22 Activation of those closer to the labour market

Since 2008, the profile of those becoming eligible for Community Employment has changed. As the numbers of unemployed people rose, so too did the skills and qualifications for those on the live register who became eligible to take up Community Employment. While the majority of those presenting for Community Employment are still starting from a low skills base, there is also a newly profiled group with higher educational achievements and/or with very good employment records and experience of work for long periods. This has presented problems in terms of offering higher skills training/educational opportunities. This group present as having achieved a minimum FETAC Level 6 qualification, and while provision is made for this in the sponsor manual, with at least an AP having to approve level 7 or 8, in practice it is difficult to access this approval. This is a problem for organisations trying to support participant development and offer real progression options. We recommend that the process for accessing approval for this be made easier at the level of HEO, as this would remove barriers for some participants and improve progression outcomes for this cohort.

3.3 Mechanisms for cooperation between the Department and sponsor organisations

Many community and voluntary sector organisations have a long history in sponsoring Community Employment programmes. They have become expert in managing the programme, in adapting to ongoing programme changes and in understanding technical programme administration. To capitalise on using this expertise to better effect we propose the reconstitution of mechanisms to enable closer cooperation between organisations and Department of Social Protection. The Community Employment framework groupings, which operated as part of FAS operated arrangements, was a mechanism whereby programme sponsors, the local development companies and FAS met quarterly to discuss technical programme management issues. It also had a role in better management of Community Employment places at a local level. This structure provided the opportunity for discussing and resolving issues that impacted on programme efficiency, close cooperation between sponsor representatives and departmental officials and opportunities for learning exchange. This case has also been asserted by INOU in its 2014 submission to the Department. We propose that this could be piloted with our members in South Dublin county and DSP representatives from Tallaght and Clondalkin.

In summary, the community and voluntary sector has valuable experience and insight that can greatly contribute to the future improvement of the Community Employment programme. Examples such as recruitment and training have given a flavour of the kinds of issues and solutions that our sector can raise and assist the Department in addressing. This paper proposes the inclusion of the community and voluntary sector in the review of the Community Employment Programme and the instigation of a pilot structure in South Dublin county to enable closer cooperation between the Department and the sector.

4. Community and voluntary organisations; best placed to deliver Community Employment programmes

Community and voluntary services are effective in providing services to communities because they deliver services to people in the context of their own community. This principle also applies to the delivery of Community Employment programmes. The Community Employment programme, while primarily targeting people who are on the live register, also facilitates people parenting alone, young Travellers, young people who have been convicted of a crime, people in rehabilitation from drug addiction and people in receipt of disability payments (Department of Social Protection, 2015). These groups face multiple barriers to employment, including and not exclusively literacy and numeracy difficulties, reduced confidence arising from time away from education and employment, lack of accessible and

affordable childcare and limited opportunities for work experience. Like the INOU in its submission on Community Employment, we also recommend a strong focus on people distant from the labour market. The community and voluntary sector offers a range of supports, and so is best placed to support individual participants in accessing services additional to education and employment services. These services include counselling services, addiction services, advice and information services, Traveller and disability services, support groups for people parenting alone and other relevant local services. Organisations have a knowledge and expertise in terms of accessing additional supports for participants to meet the wider needs of those participating in Community Employment. Page |11

5. Conclusion

The South Dublin Community Platform is a network of organisations working for social justice and equality in South Dublin county. Many of our members act as sponsors of the Community Employment Programme. This paper makes the case for strengthening the role of the community and voluntary sector in the operation, management and review of the Community Employment programme. It also asserts that while Community Employment is primarily an activation measure it also makes a significant contribution to social inclusion through the support of community service delivery. Our position is that Community Employment is more than activation. The paper recommends the following in terms of improving the programme and ensuring that its role in social inclusion is protected.

- The inclusion of the community and voluntary sector in the review process of Community Employment programmes.
- The inclusion of a Social Inclusion Impact Assessment as part of the current Community Employment review process, to inform strategies to protect marginalised groups from the impacts that changes to the current programme might incur.
- A change in the current participant recruitment process to include sponsor organisations.
- The creation of a fund to assist scheme participants who enter the programme having achieved beyond a level 6 qualification.
- The piloting of a new structure in South Dublin county to enable closer cooperation between the Department of Social Protection and the community and voluntary sector organisations delivering the programme.

- The continued delivery of the Community Employment Programme by the community and voluntary sector.
- That any departmental review, factors in the distance from the labour market of many groups who participate in CE, and that progression is measured in terms of people's progression towards the labour market in the case of individuals facing additional blocks and barriers.

References

Department of Social Protection, 2015. *Community Employment Sponsor Engagement Pack*, Dublin

Department of Social Protection, 2016. *Department of Social Protection, Community Employment* . [Online] Available at: <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Community-Employment-Programme-.aspx> [Accessed 26 February 2016].

Page | 13

Department of Social Protection, November 2012. *A Review of the Department of Social Protection Employment Support Schemes* , Dublin : Department of Social Protection.

Duggan, Carmel, 1999. *Work Experience Programmes, Impact and Potential*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

Harvey, B., 2012. *Downsizing the Community Sector, Changes in Employment and Services in the Community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2008-2012*, s.l.: Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Community Sector Committee.

INOUE, 2014. *Submission on the Proposed Reconfiguration of Community Employment* , Dublin

Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, 2001. *A Report on research undertaken by the National Organisation of the Unemployed with its member organisations*, Dublin

O'Connor, N., 2016. *Commissioning for Communities, Valuing the community and voluntary approach to human, social and community services* , Dublin : Clann Credo, The Community Foundation of Ireland and the Wheel.