

REPORT ON DUBLIN CONSULTATION SEMINAR ON NAP/inclusion

The Dublin NAP/inclusion consultation seminar was held on November 9th 2005 and attended by 132 representatives of government departments, state agencies, community and voluntary sector and members of the public. The below is a summary of the main points raised by the seminar attendees.

1. *Facilitating Access to Employment*

Priorities for change

It was seen as critical that active labour market policies and programmes are:

- Integrated and co-ordinated across government departments e.g. review the range of secondary benefits operated by government departments to ensure that the eligibility criteria and limits facilitate the participation of low-income groups in training and employment schemes
- Informed by data analysis and monitoring of labour market trends at both local and sectoral level
- Tailored to respond to the specific needs of vulnerable groups
- Responsive to the continued persistence of unemployment ‘black spots’, the high levels of unemployment amongst specific vulnerable groups and committed to the elimination of long-term unemployment
- Include interventions and measures to build awareness among, and participation by, employers in supporting the participation of vulnerable groups in employment e.g. build greater awareness of atypical forms of employment, education needs of workers with low-level qualifications, needs of migrant workers, encourage greater recruitment amongst vulnerable groups.

What is working?

There was broad support for the range of **targeted active labour market programmes** (ALMPs) and measures for vulnerable and marginalised groups. In particular, the value of the Community Employment Scheme, both to the individual and the broader community, was emphasised. Participants also welcomed the increase in individually tailored measures and employment supports developed through the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP).

What is not working and how should things be done better?

At the policy level, there were calls for **greater integration and co-ordination of policies** across government departments and between existing strategies e.g. enhanced links between the National Employment Action Plan and NAPS, greater integration of ALMPs which cut across the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, strengthening the role of the social partners in developing ALMP, review of secondary benefits to support participation of low income groups in training and employment schemes.

Active labour market policies and programmes should be more closely linked to mainstream educational programmes and private/public sector employment to facilitate the transition of individuals from education/training programmes to mainstream employment. **Progression rates between supported employment programmes** (such as CE) and employment in the private sector must be prioritised. However, it was acknowledged that those who are particularly vulnerable might need a longer period within supported employment programmes before being ready to progress to private sector employment. Active labour market policies and programmes must recognise the continued existence of unemployment in particular, persistent unemployment amongst marginalised groups. Such policies and programmes must be **flexible and responsive to the needs of the individual**. **Key vulnerable groups** identified included Travellers, lone and teenage parents, those experiencing intergenerational unemployment and people with disabilities. Measures proposed to support these groups included a review of the eligibility criteria for Community Employment Schemes to enable the participation of young parents, focus on supports for those who have only recently become unemployed and the widening of access to activation policies. **Employment opportunities for people with disabilities** emerged as a strong theme with responses focusing on the need to ensure that targeted active labour market policies for people with disabilities are flexible and responsive to the individual person's needs (e.g. by operating flexible eligibility criteria for the Supported Employment Programme, the Disability Allowance, etc). A general theme was the need for a **review of the income ceilings** applicable to secondary benefits in order to overcome associated barriers with progression to employment.

The employment and working conditions of **migrant workers** were the focus of much discussion with reference to the importance of: protecting their employment rights; facilitating their access to employment supports and information (with the suggestion that FÁS takes a lead role in this); and the need to explore mechanisms to allow recognition of overseas academic qualifications.

2. *Facilitating Access to Services – Education*

Priorities for change

- Greater connections / integration between programmes / government departments / agencies to tackle poverty and educational disadvantage
- Greater resources for education, especially early education and primary level
- Develop outreach educational strategies and programmes for 'hard to reach' groups
- Focus on policies and measures to tackle early school leaving
- Resource and support community based adult and second-chance education.

What is working?

There was broad support for **specialist intervention programmes** that focus on supporting young peoples continued participation in education e.g. School Completion Programme, Teen Parents Support Programmes, homework clubs. It was also felt that the absence of testing for primary school students was useful as was the general curriculum

followed. Specialist support programmes for **adult learners** (e.g. National Learning Network, adult education schemes) were also felt to be working and be relatively well supported through VEC funding schemes. The introduction of the FETAC system of **qualification accreditation** was welcomed – its certification and acknowledgement of educational and training achievements across a wide range of programmes and measures was felt to be an important step in recognising and valuing the diversity of educational and training experiences.

What is not working and how should things be done better?

A wide ranging set of proposals were advanced in respect of how educational provision and support could be improved - comments focused on:

- Educational supports and provisions for young parents, lone parents, adult learners, people with disabilities and early school leavers
- Additional resources and supports for primary and secondary schools
- Community based life-long and second-chance education
- Increased investment in early childhood care and education programmes
- Policy processes and joined-up policy making.

In respect of **educational supports for vulnerable groups**, participants favoured:

- More educational outreach services for Travellers and children who are homeless
- More support with childcare (provision and grants) for young and lone parents
- Enhanced educational supports for those unable to participate in mainstream education
- Review of educational provision and supports for people with disabilities.

The provision of **community-based adult and life-long education** emerged as a strong theme with calls for:

- Recognition of the role and value of non-formal community based adult learning
- An increase in adult education provision, including specialist adult education and training support programmes (e.g. the National Learning Network) and additional funding resources for providers
- A review of financial support structures for those participating in education e.g. review the eligibility criteria for the Back to Education Allowance to support the participation of lone parents and low-income employees with low level qualifications who wish to engage in part-time education and up-skilling opportunities
- Greater commitment to funding educational programmes for older people (e.g. computer training) and recognition of the value of life-long learning.

At a policy and implementation level, participants called for:

- Sufficient resources to implement the Department of Education and Science's Educational Inclusion Strategy

- Monitoring and data analysis mechanisms to track children's progression between primary and secondary level education and to monitor early school leaving
- Greater co-ordination and integration of government policies e.g. with respect to housing and educational provision for children who are homeless, etc.

There was generally felt to be a number of key challenges that have yet to be addressed within **mainstream primary and secondary education**, namely:

- Over emphasis on examinations within secondary school
- Lack of school supports/interventions for children with learning difficulties and special needs
- Excessive student teacher ratios.

Specific proposals for primary and secondary provision include: improving schools physical infrastructure; more specialist educational services (e.g. psychological services, special needs teachers), especially in rural areas; and changes to the Leaving Certificate Programme, specifically an increase in the range of topics it covers.

3. *Facilitating Access to Services – Health and Care*

Priorities for change

- Adopt a rights-based approach to service delivery.
- More resources to deliver a complete health and care service, moving towards a free universal system of healthcare
- A greater focus on the equity of healthcare outcomes and on preventative solutions to the broad social determinants of health
- Resource and implement the primary care element of the health strategy
- Evaluate the impact of increasing privatisation of health care
- Address issues of risk equalisation and maintaining the principle of community rating in health insurance.
- Facilitate greater involvement by service users in policy design and monitoring.
- Provision of relevant and accessible information on health issues and services
- Improved mental health services and drug and alcohol rehabilitation services
- Financial supports for people with disabilities e.g. Cost of Disability payment
- Review of the eligibility criteria for the medical card
- Adequately resource local community based health providers.

What is working?

Respondents welcomed **new institutional structures** established since the previous NAPS such as the Health Services Executive, the National Disability Authority and the NAPS Health Group. Improvements in addressing **data deficits** were welcomed in particular, as this was seen to facilitate further research on health inequalities. A range of **programme and service improvements** were name checked as useful and supportive

including dental services, health services for the homeless, parenting courses for parents whose children have disabilities or parents with disabilities with non-disabled children, social housing provision for the elderly. It was felt that some progress had been achieved in raising awareness of **carers** and caring issues.

What is not working and how should things be done better?

Respondents identified a raft of suggested improvements and alterations to a number of specific services and provisions. A general theme was the need to **build awareness** amongst both the wider public and those in health services of the needs of vulnerable groups such as carers, people with disabilities, low-income families and lone parents.

A number of specific improvements were suggested:

- *Medical card coverage*: extend medical card coverage to include all children under the age of 18 and review the eligibility criteria for the medical card to extend coverage to low-income families in employment.
- *Children and family services*: enhanced provision of child psychotherapy and psychological services, counselling and information services for vulnerable families, maternity services and crisis pregnancy supports and the development of co-ordinated service delivery for vulnerable families, e.g. families within B&B accommodation.
- *Health services for the homeless*: review how services are accessed
- *Other*: increase provision of mental health and drug rehabilitation services.
- *Consultation and representation of service users* in policy making and service delivery: it was noted that the voice of service users, particularly those from vulnerable groups, must be heard in policy making and service delivery and should be supported to do so.
- *Public vs. Private health care systems and insurance*: concern was expressed regarding the potential for private health services to draw away public resources from public services. It was argued that the principle of Community Rating must not be eroded in private health insurance and if this were to happen measures would have to be taken to ensure that it did not negatively impact on the elderly, etc.
- *Carers*: greater flexibility in the Carers mean-test including allowances for adaptations to building to facilitate care of family members; greater resources for community care programmes, voluntary and community carers associations and representative groups; and increases in respite care.
- *People with disabilities*: introduce a Cost of Disability Payment.
- *Services for the elderly*: increase the amount of the Living Alone Allowance; increased provision of community care and health services to support those who wish to remain living in the community (e.g. Public Health Nurses could play a greater role in supporting the elderly); and better targeting of information for the elderly.
- *Policy processes, monitoring and analysis*: adoption of a rights-based approach to service provision; greater emphasis on preventative solutions to the broad social determinants of health; widening of use of health impact assessments across

public policy areas; implementation of the National Health Strategy; address the data deficits in relation to health needs and experiences of vulnerable groups; develop disaggregated data; and promote greater co-ordination and integration of policies and services across government departments to respond to the health and care needs of vulnerable groups.

- *Primary care services*: additional resources for services in areas of population growth; highlight the role of health promotion, increase in the number of speech and occupational therapists
- *Address difficulties in accessing services* including transport difficulties.

4. *Facilitating Access to Resources – Housing*

Priorities for change

- Establish a right to housing and accommodation and support individual's access to civil legal aid for housing related issues
- Social and affordable housing outputs must meet lifetime adaptability standards and the building and allocation of housing must recognise the needs of diverse groups
- Enforce monitoring of social and housing output targets
- Emphasis the role of housing in building sustainable communities
- Support the development of joined-up and integrated policy making and service delivery
- Develop effective consultation mechanisms to engage the public in decision making and delivery
- Mainstreaming of best practice models e.g. Fatima Mansion Project and Simon Communities 'Settlement First' project.

What is working?

Respondents welcomed the increased focus on the **provision of social and affordable housing** and the development of targets for such housing outputs. Similarly, it was felt that there had been tangible improvements in the **consultation** processes used by government departments and agencies when developing housing legislation and provision.

What is not working and how should things be done better??

The insufficiency of the current **supply of social and affordable housing** was a major theme. It was argued that existing policy mechanisms and provisions have failed to address this deficit in part due to the failure to adequately enforce Part V of the Social Housing Act. More generally, respondents argued called for increasing **monitoring and enforcement of local authorities obligations** in respect of social housing provision and to ensure the **provision of accessible and suitable housing** for vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities. It was suggested that NAPS 2006-2008 should:

- Set performance indicators and concrete targets to measure and monitor progress in achieving social housing build targets
- Consider adopting the NESC (2005) targets for social housing outputs
- Monitor and enforce the implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programmes (e.g. apply penalties to local authorities that are failing to implement the programme)
- Require all new social and affordable housing outputs to meet best practice and standards in respect of accessibility.

The importance of ensuring that diverse policies and programmes contribute to the **development of sustainable communities** was emphasised. Housing policy must support the development of sustainable communities through for example, legislation requiring local authorities and developers to provide social amenities in all developments. The **allocation of social and affordable housing** must proceed through a standardised and transparent system, which is responsive to the needs of vulnerable groups, while the **private rented sector** must be regulated and subject to regular inspections.

Weaknesses were noted in respect of the process by which government departments and agencies consulted with representative groups and members of the general public. Persistent **data deficits** in respect of the needs of vulnerable groups were identified as a key stumbling block to monitoring progress in achieving housing targets for these groups. Finally, **inconsistent homeless service provision** was felt to result from the failure to develop standardised measures for the application of homeless services within housing legislation, leading to noticeable regional variances in the extent and type of provision available. Changes in the composition of the homeless population were also referenced and participants called for homeless services to recognise and respond to this.

5. *Facilitating Access to Resources – Income Supports*

Priorities for change

- *Basic social welfare payments* Link basic social welfare adult payments to gross average industrial earnings.
- *Overcoming benefit and employment traps:* Review the operation and integration of basic social welfare supports and secondary benefits to ensure that these are not acting as a disincentive to participation in employment and/or training.
- *Supports for people with disabilities:* Introduce a Cost of Disability payment.
- *Supports for asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers* Abolish the system of direct provision and the Habitual Residency Condition for asylum seekers.
- *Policy proofing:* Implement poverty and gender-proofing procedures across all aspects of policymaking and service delivery. Reconsider the use of consistent poverty measures.
- Identify lone parents, drug users and the rural poor as vulnerable groups within NAP/inclusion.
- *Supports for the elderly:* Provide a guaranteed basic income for the elderly.

What is working?

Participants in this workshop welcomed the process by which specific groups are identified as vulnerable and targeted for additional supports and measures through NAP/inclusion. Three further groups should be identified as vulnerable in the next NAP/inclusion, namely lone parents, drug users and the rural poor.

What is not working and how should things be done better?

Income supports for low-income families (e.g. Family Income Supplement) were felt to be working ineffectively. This was attributed to the rigidity of such schemes e.g. its failure to recognise atypical forms of employment such as seasonal work) and a lack of awareness of it amongst target groups. Participants called for a new type of income support such as refundable tax credits. More generally, it was suggested that basic adult social welfare payments should be **benchmarked** to Gross Average Industrial Earnings. Participants called for an increase in **child dependent allowances** or the introduction of a second tier of child income supports for low-income families. The need to review the means test for the **Carers Allowance** was also identified with participants suggesting that there should be more flexible qualifying and assessment criteria for means testing of this allowance. The **exclusion of women** who are not on the live register from receiving direct payments in their own right and training and employment programmes was noted and it was argued that NAP/inclusion should contain a commitment to the **individualisation of the social welfare system** to address these difficulties. The limits placed on supplements available through **Rental Allowance** scheme attracted criticism due to the high costs of private rented accommodation in urban areas.

Other suggested improvements to basic income supports included:

- The introduction of a **Cost of Disability** payment
- Changes to the eligibility criteria and income thresholds for medical card qualification, rent allowance and other secondary benefits
- Additional allowances for parents of children with disabilities
- Support with childcare costs
- A basic income for the elderly

The need for exploratory research on the presence of high rates of poverty amongst older women was also identified.

The system of **direct provision** was felt to contribute to poverty amongst asylum seekers and there were calls for its repeal. One suggestion proposed allowing asylum seekers, who are still waiting the processing of their claim, to work after a certain period of time in the country. The **Habitual Residency Condition** also attracted criticism together amid calls for its provisions to be disregarded in respect of EU migrant workers and refugees.

6. Rural and Urban Issues

Priorities for change

- **Resources:** increased funding and security for Community and Voluntary groups.
- **Develop specific, tailored responses to local needs:** consideration must be given to access to local services and the resources necessary to sustain these services
- **Targets:** Develop a cohesive, co-ordinated approach by Government and local organisations to tackling poverty and social inclusion issues. The development and integration of national and local social inclusion targets and of national and local level monitoring and tracking systems will provide the necessary supports for such joined-up policymaking.
- **Best Practice:** Identify and expand models of best practice such as the Rural Transport Initiative.

What is working?

Two specific rural initiatives were identified as working well – the Rural Transport Initiative and the Social Economy Programme, amid calls for a commitment to the expansion of these schemes. There was general agreement that the assigning of targets to NAPS measures and initiatives to assist in tracking their progress had worked well.

What is not working and how could things be improved?

The development of co-ordinated actions by government departments and local and national agencies is lacking, while local organisations were insufficiently resourced to implement new national programmes. There were calls for greater co-ordinated action by government departments and agencies on a local and national basis. Cross-County hinterlands should be recognised for direct action in addition to local structures. In addition, there should be a move towards SMART NAP/inclusion targets, including interim targets for long-term targets. Community and voluntary organisations should be adequately resourced to enable their participation in such national programmes and the commitments within the White Paper on Voluntary Activity should be met. It was also argued that NAP/inclusion should identify and prioritise measures in areas that are currently excluded from access to social cohesion funds.

Basic service provision (such as access to adult education, primary health care services, childcare, waste management) in isolated rural areas is inadequate and the isolation this generates is exacerbated by the lack of rural public transport, which increases individuals' difficulties in accessing the limited services available. The limited availability of **Social Economy** scheme places in rural areas was criticised, as was the practice by which long-term unemployed Social Economy participants are occasionally transferred to inappropriate, short-term employment placements on Community Employment schemes. It was suggested that the development of sustainable employment in rural areas would go some way towards addressing the over subscription of Community Employment and Social Economy schemes as well as offering viable progression routes for participants. Meanwhile, opportunities for flexible employment in rural areas are very low which works against the involvement of those with caring responsibilities (especially women) in the labour force. Measures to address **rural poverty** especially amongst farmers were considered to be insufficient and a number of

deficiencies were identified for e.g., inadequate farm assist thresholds and the ineligibility of low-income farming families for medical cards.

7. Gender as a cross cutting issue

The Office for Social Inclusion's focus on gender as a cross cutting issue for this consultation process was welcomed with recognition that the Plan should consider and respond to the needs of both socially excluded men and women. Participants called for the gender proofing of NAP/inclusion and the gender disaggregation of the Plan's performance indicators. A specific issue identified was that the Plan should consider measures to combat violence against women and the trafficking of women.