



**Conference Proceedings - NYCI Conference on Young
Unemployment**

Wednesday 5th October 2010

Croke Park, Dublin.

This report is intended to document the views expressed during the conference, and does not necessarily reflect the views of the National Youth Council of Ireland.

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Introduction

1.1 The National Youth Council of Ireland is the representative body for national voluntary youth work organisations in Ireland. Is é Comhairle Náisiúnta na nÓg an eagrais ionadaí ochta an óige in Éirinn. It represents and supports the interests of around 50 voluntary youth organisations and uses its collective experience to act on issues that impact on young people. It seeks to ensure that all young people are empowered to develop the skills and confidence to fully participate as active citizens in an inclusive society. NYCI's role is recognised in legislation through the Youth Work Act 2001 and as a Social Partner in the Community and Voluntary Pillar.

1.2 The National Youth Employment conference is part of NYCI's broader strategy to develop a detailed position paper on youth employment. The issue of youth employment is particularly relevant in the current economic crisis. In recent times the onset of an economic recession has been accompanied by high and increasing rates of unemployment throughout the country. Ireland has the second highest youth unemployment in Western Europe with up to 1 in 4 young people between 17-25 years are jobless and 1 in 3 young men unemployed. The aim of the conference is to get the views of those directly affected by the youth unemployment crisis this includes young jobseekers and those working with young people in youth and community organisations along with statutory agencies. In addition the role of the Government and political system is important in devising and implementing strategies therefore representatives from five main political parties have been invited to outline their plans listen to the views of delegates.

1.3 This report provides a summary of the National Youth Employment Conference, which took place on 5th October 2010 at Croke Park, in Dublin. It includes a summary of the main points raised in three different workshops and in roundtable discussions; as well as the papers that were presented by guest speakers, and the questions posed, at the Plenary Sessions and the Panel discussion with representatives from five main political parties.

1.4 NYCI is currently engaged with member organisations and key stakeholders to develop a policy on youth employment. The experiences, views and proposals represented in this report, alongside a youth consultation and research with young jobseekers, will directly inform NYCI's detailed position paper on Youth Employment to be presented to the Government and the opposition.

Opening Presentations and Plenary Session discussion

2.1 The Conference was opened by Mary Cunningham, Director of NYCI, who welcomed delegates to the day's proceedings.

Mary Cunningham introduced Marie Fitzpatrick, Chair of the Policy and Advocacy Committee and Member of the Board of NYCI.

2.2 Marie Fitzpatrick, Chair of the Policy and Advocacy Committee and Member of the Board NYCI.

In welcoming delegates, Marie highlighted, that since NYCI's inception youth unemployment has been a constant theme, with the exception of the last decade. She explained how the last two years have witnessed a considerable shift for young people in terms of employment opportunities. She outlined that the goal of today's conference is to be solution focused and remain positive- providing practical recommendations, which alongside current research, will inform NYCI's policy paper on youth employment. Marie explained that while the government's role is not to create jobs they must create the right conditions for job creation and support jobseekers. In light of the influx of young people heading into the labour market there is a renewed impetus to keep young people active through training and education. Marie outlined how it will be necessary to redeploy resources to

increase the efficiency of the services young people are accessing and added that this alone is not enough – increased investment in proven and effective policies is also required. Marie concluding by calling attention to the groups of young people who find themselves most vulnerable to unemployment in and out of recession and urged that those furthest from the labour market must not be forgotten. Marie closed by saying that today's conference is about encouraging strong partnerships between all stakeholders and encouraged all delegates to actively participate in sharing their experiences, ideas and stories.

2.3 Professor Paul Gregg, Professor of Economics, Centre for Market and Public Organisation at Bristol University

The Irish Recession and Policy Response

Professor Gregg opened by sharing his own personal experience of youth unemployment, in the 1980's, and encouraged us to learn from past mistakes in understanding why young people bear the brunt of the recession.

He set out the current Irish situation and explained that the severity of the Irish situation was due to both the recession and the response that has followed. Professor Gregg outlined the stages of labour reduction and how young people are the most affected group in society. Initial response to recession is the emergency shedding of staff, for survival, but this quickly moves to a reduced expectation of labour needs and usually results in a recruitment freeze. The pressure then falls on those trying to enter the labour market, mostly young people, and the door is shut at the entry point. The norm is that those who are more educated re-enter at a lower level than before until those at the bottom have no-where to go. Wages also reduce and this leads to unstable, temporary, low-quality employment for those at the bottom.

Professor Gregg reflected on the scarring of unemployment on young people – unemployment is largely concentrated on a small percentage of the population who find themselves in a cycle of unstable, low paid employment – which he called the 'low pay, no pay cycle' –they find themselves unable to develop the skills or experience to break the cycle. The result of a lifetime of unemployment is scars on individual's lives that costs them and costs society. Some of these scars include health issues, such as depression, heart attacks and also family breakdown to name a few. He urged us to avoid another lost generation, like those of the 1980's.

Professor Gregg highlighted the macro-economic situation and how the choices for Ireland moving forward are limited- one of our only options is for wages to fall, as a long-term, slow solution. This often, however, becomes unequal and the pressure is felt on specific sectors of society.

He then outlined a micro-economic strategy for youth employment. Firstly he proposed delaying entry into the labour market through education. Professor Gregg also suggested the integration of benefits and employment services to ensure people are kept active in their job search, explaining that often it is too easy for young people to give up faced with constant rejection. Other proposals to help people gain work included a system for the most vulnerable, support for long-term unemployed and work experience that marries skills and training with where the jobs are. He went to explain that work experience should carry the basic tenets of work, i.e. that it's paid for and there is a guaranteed job or interview at the end. This needs to be connected with employers (private sector) and should be an automatic system regardless of the economic situation. He concluded by saying that policy shouldn't wait for the crisis as there are always certain groups of people affected by unemployment in and out of recession and we should always be ready to respond.

2.4 Jim Power, Chief Economist, Friends First

Jim Power outlined the global economic backdrop for Ireland's recession, explaining that we have had three years of unprecedented economic collapse. He added that we are, now, entering a period of greater stability with some gradual growth but the key issues remain high levels of private and public debt and high levels of unemployment with no real consensus on the solution. He proposed that saving not spending is the way forward for Ireland.

Mr Power explained that Ireland experienced the biggest drop in GDP than any developed country over two years and that we have in fact now hit the ground. He highlighted some evidence that indicates an increase in retail sales but still in the context of reduced prices, low consumer confidence, high unemployment, wage cuts and costly bank bail outs. He added that manufacturing is also increasing but largely from the multinational side. Mr Power outlined that indigenous export is the way out of the recession for Ireland. A key challenge to this, he explained, is the lack of credit in the economy – with most banks unable to lend. The urgency is to restore solvency and a capital base. He stated that the existing system is not able to put credit back into the economy for several years and proposed a new bank targeting the SME sector.

He went on to explain how Ireland has experienced dramatic unemployment, across all sectors, but that this too is starting to stabilise. He highlighted that while the construction sector is dead chemical/pharma and IT will be the main drivers into the future. He cautioned, however, that there is a strong risk of high outward migration due to such poor credit conditions and the need for contraction rather than expansion. Ultimately costs need to fall for competitiveness to rise; wage levels need to drop, cheaper housing, insurance, professional fees, local authority charges etc. In order to protect that quality of the labour force training and education are crucial and need further investment. Mr Power also urged for better regulation and the need to restore the world's image of Ireland which is essential for reassuring bond investors.

Mr Power concluded by looking specifically at youth unemployment and the current risk of brain drain. He argued that the government need to act to create the macro-economic environment. He outlined areas for development which included more innovative education and training initiatives, including developing a state funded model of work experience linked with struggling business, e.g. employers who can't afford to employ. He finished by saying that training needs to be much more tuned in to the needs of the unemployed than it currently is.

2.5 Plenary Session Discussion

There were several points raised in discussion including a reminder that one of our greatest assets in this recession is the young people themselves. Questions were asked in relation to the long term impacts of the recession –

- Inequality of outcome
- The dependence on export
- The need for a more efficient, functioning public sector
- The reality of upcoming budget cuts and the impact of this on the government capabilities to create the right conditions for employment.

It was also suggested that the live register is not representative of the reality of youth unemployment – many young, single parents; who are prevented from completing second level education, are unseen in terms of the statistics and are most vulnerable to poverty and yet the system keeps them hard to reach.

2.6 The speakers responded in the following way -

The speakers agreed that a collective response is needed to secure a future for the young people in Ireland – we need to be coming up with solutions to protect their future. Amongst Ireland's other assets are export and we have a highly educated workforce. It was pointed out that jobs requiring high qualifications aren't open to certain sectors of society – often there are no ladders to these jobs. We need to build ladders into sectors that will grow – there needs to be incentives for education and stepping stones that will raise productivity. In terms of exports we were reminded of the need to recognise that construction isn't coming back and concentrate on areas of job potential such as, tourism, agri-food, arts and culture and education.

It was suggested that in order to develop public sector employment we need a sufficient tax base to do so. It was acknowledged that the scale of the banking crisis has muted the government's ability to respond to the real needs of the Irish people. If cuts are focused on education and training we will be limiting opportunities for the future. The greatest danger is if we chose to focus our damage on your our exit strategy. A long-term strategy for employment must be developed that is flexible, has access points for all and pursues a broad approach to skills – focusing on quality of employment to avoid lots of low paid jobs with no benefits.

Workshop 1 – Employment Services and Welfare

3.1 In Round Table discussions with those who shared their table, delegates were asked to address the following questions:

From your own experience or your experience of working with jobseekers;

- Have you or those you work with been affected by the cuts in social welfare to young jobseekers?
- Can you give practical examples of the impact of social welfare cuts? Has it incentivised people to take up alternatives or worsened their circumstances?
- What has been your experience of dealing with personnel in the local social welfare office (Department of Social Protection) was it helpful, respectful and informative?
- What are your views on the employment services provided by FAS? Are they sufficient?
- Do you think there is sufficient information and advice being made available to young job seekers?
- Are young people doing enough to advance their own prospects or are they too reliant on the State others to help them? Are they willing to accept work or training/education offers which are not their first choices?
- Do you think young people should be given a dedicated action plan based on their capabilities and needs?
- What recommendations would you make to improve the public employment service and welfare support?
- Agree on the key points/recommendations re employment supports and welfare.

The main issues raised at the round table discussions are outlined below.

3.2 Summary of points from roundtable discussions

Delegates expressed a strong feeling of disconnect between the Government and the reality on the ground. There was a general consensus that there is no credible national strategy being pursued for youth employment. Many delegates explained the difficulty in accessing information in relation to employment and welfare services, or when information is available, it was more common to receive misinformation or information that was out of date. Many young people found their friends to be better sources of information than welfare services. There was a feeling by some, that there was no cohesion/ communication between employment and welfare services and this increased the challenges for jobseekers to access what they needed. In fact some felt that in some instances there were contradicting policies and overall a disjointed approach. The young people present expressed that they felt no one was taking responsibility and they explained how they get sent from 'pillar to post' with no real results.

It was suggested that young people from certain areas are pigeon-holed into categories and their opportunities are automatically limited. In general the pathway from leaving secondary school to

employment or further education was very much down to the individual rather than any strong support systems available. It was felt that career guidance and planning isn't strong at second level education and there is a need for it to be individually tailored not generic. Very few of the young people had any experience of an individual action plan being worked on with them for their career progression.

The quality of courses provided to job-seekers was questioned by delegates and poor follow-up/ support was raised. It was pointed out that social welfare services offer little support for simple things such as filling out forms, which are often complicated and difficult to understand. It was felt that sometimes the expectation on young people is too high; they need further help and support. Students may not always be confident in approaching services issues of confidence and self esteem among young people was as a real barrier to accessing services. There is a low expectation of life outcome's amongst some young people and this needs early intervention to raise their expectations for their future prospects. It was said that social welfare can dampen motivation particularly when system is not supportive and solution focused.

The current approach, by employment and welfare services, was generally seen as negative rather than encouraging participation. An example of this is the threat of losing social welfare acts as a barrier rather than an incentive. Delegates argued that the culture of monitoring rather than assisting and empowering must change; young people felt that the current services/staff are very unapproachable and at times controlling. Some young people also expressed the feeling that no one in social welfare cares and the staff aren't interested in the needs of the people accessing the services. It was identified that the current services for young people aren't holistic enough and don't take into consideration other challenges facing young people such as mental health issues, teen pregnancy etc.

The sense of frustration, anger, hopelessness and disillusionment was strong from the young people present. They felt that social welfare services offer no optimism or positivity to them and adding to this negative media out there young people feel completely hopeless. It was said that the system is failing them and that young people are invisible to the government. In particular, rural areas find support very poor. Many delegates regarded the current system as a one size fits all approach which isn't working – young people need to feel empowered, to have hope. Some young people felt that even the conference was pointless as no one listens to them anyway. There was a great deal of fear about the future and full of uncertainty.

Additional points were raised in relation to waiting times for payment and to get on courses with both being very long and producing a great deal of frustration with red-tape, forms etc. Others expressed concern that there are young people getting lost in the system; under 18's/ early school leavers are particularly lost – with no real options or opportunities other than youth reach. In addition young single parents feel very isolated and frustrated that having a child holds them back and reduces their opportunities in life. Some delegates also felt that current welfare provision was not adequate.

In general it was felt that a complete re-think of the current system needs to happen, a system which is largely inflexible and creates dependency, passivity and with a distinct lack of positive role-models. Finally it was highlighted that Youth Organisations are well placed to develop young people to a position that they have the confidence to engage properly with the system and must be supported to continue to do so.

3.3 Key Recommendations

- Integrate employment and welfare services – ‘one stop shop.’
- Simplify Benefit system – reduced red-tape.
- Develop a National Youth Employment Strategy – one that prioritises an integrated community approach.
- Integrate Youth Organisations into the support service for unemployed young people as they understand how to work with them and empower them.
- Develop a section in FÁS targeting young people - working in partnership with youth organisations to ensure that it is best placed to meet the real needs of young people.
- Employment and Welfare services have dedicated staff for under 25’s.
- Training for front-line services so that they can communicate effectively with young people - welcoming to young people, motivational and caring for service users.
- Improve access to information on entitlements and opportunities.
- Develop a website targeting young job seekers – to include career guidance, mapping out routes and opportunities. Help young people to not only access but to use the information.
- Improvements in support offered to jobseekers – around forms, understanding entitlements
- Expand the CE Scheme.
- Avoid further cuts in welfare payments/ job seekers allowance.
- Ensure the system provides proper progression – stepping stones and adequate follow-up to help young people stay on track. Should include one-to-one support.
- Create incentives to stay in formal education system as youth reach can sometimes be seen as a soft option.
- Ensure a person centred approach - individually tailored support needed for course allocation, career planning, and job applications. Include proper individual skills audits that are designed around the needs of the young person.
- Develop training for soft skills/confidence needed for job seeking.
- Create job opportunities/work experience – not just social welfare payments and voluntary work.
- Use young people as a resource – as advocates/ on boards of services – e.g. FAS/ colleges etc. – in other words LISTEN to their opinions.
- Create opportunities for young people to be part of the solution – local solutions to local problems – through local think tanks.
- Develop a charter of rights for young unemployed people.
- Co-ordinated sharing of best practice of initiatives – ‘united info providers hub’ to share resources.

Workshop 2 Education and Training

4.1 In Round Table discussions with those who shared their table, delegates were asked to address the following questions:

From your own experience or your experience of working with jobseekers;

- Are participants currently engaged in education/training or involved in delivering same?
- What are your views on the current education and training provision?
- What is positive about what is being provided at present?
- Are you satisfied with what is available, the education and training available and the qualifications being offered?
- Do you think this training/education will assist you in the jobs market?
- What are the barriers to education/training for young jobseekers?
- What are the deficiencies in what is being offered at present and is there enough support provided to assist you to continue?
- What do you think of the idea of a youth guarantee and youth jobs fund in Ireland?
- What recommendations would you make to increase and enhance the education and training opportunities currently being made available?
- Agree on the key points/recommendations re education and training.

The main issues raised at the round table discussions are outlined below.

4.2 Summary of points from roundtable discussions

Delegates felt that the State is disconnected from reality; the current system doesn't connect with young people and there needs to be more joined up thinking between services for a future strategy. It was strongly felt that courses and training available are totally inadequate for the needs of young people, especially under 18's. Delegates viewed courses as completely inflexible and feel that they aren't geared towards employment as a final outcome. The courses available are seen to be irrelevant, with insufficient choice and real challenges in accessing training as demand is so high. As a result young people feel totally disillusioned. Many explained how they end up on courses they aren't interested in or that are totally unsuitable and they lose all motivation. There was a strong sense of the need to focus on individual needs rather than treating young people as a homogenous group.

It was felt that courses are not rounded enough with too much of an emphasis on specific job skills and not on developing 'soft' skills such as confidence building or life skills. The need for mentoring was raised by many delegates and the idea of using young people further on in the system was one suggestion. It was also highlighted that we aren't dealing with people who have recently become unemployed but rather with young people, where the jump from training to employment can be huge, and we need initiatives that adequately prepare them for full-time employment. Another area of discussion was the importance of progression in training/ modular progression. It was discussed

how awards build confidence and self-esteem. Often training opportunities are stand alone and don't relate to each other and there needs to be recognition and carry through of education and training; in other words courses that builds upon previous training and experience not piecemeal.

Barriers to participation were also discussed; concerns were voiced in relation to the idea of shifting to mandatory work for welfare payments without appropriate and strong training structure in place. It was strongly felt that penalising people for participating in training (in terms of lost or reduced payments) needed to change. Child-care came up on many occasions as a real barrier for young girls to participate and other barriers included transport in rural areas.

Youthreach was highlighted as a positive and successful alternative model for young people and one that needs to be protected. Although some considered it to not be particularly progressive it was seen to be better in the short term because of payments for attending. Some delegates, however, raised the issue of limited places/ waiting lists and other felt that you had to be seen to be a 'bad boy' to get on – it was felt that young people who opt out of formal education but who don't get into trouble can often fall through the cracks. Youthreach needs expansion and development in order to meet the growing demand amongst under 18's. In addition recognition was given to the contribution of well-structured CE schemes. It was also expressed that there is a lot of unrecognised work, support, development, information and guidance and training that goes on in the informal youth-work sector, despite funding challenges. Another approach that was praised was the VEC part-time modular system which gives flexibility to young people and focuses on their needs. Several people mentioned qualifax as a good resource of information for young people.

FAS received criticism from both sides; it was seen to be unsuitable/irrelevant to young people/early school leavers and it was also felt to be totally irrelevant to recent graduates and recently unemployed. Delegates highlighted the 23-26 year old age group as a group of people in need of support - who left education in the boom and now find themselves unemployed. FAS programmes were felt to be not user-friendly and conditions for eligibility were seen to be very inflexible (unable to complete because of sickness/ penalties for participation). Many suggested that there is no consistency of service – often it totally depends on who you end up having to deal with and is mostly about luck rather than a strong system. It was also highlighted that FAS is currently split between two government departments and was felt to be completely unacceptable. Other concerns were that trainers are not adequately trained and no national standard was resulting in poor delivery of training. It was also highlighted that there is no real appeals/ grievance mechanism for FAS.

The current inequality in the education system was also addressed and the growing competition for third-level places, as well as, the many barriers that currently exists to participation in formal education. Our current education model was identified as being too linear and not adequate to meet the needs of a diverse group of young learners – it is too formal, academic based and geared towards third level and therefore excludes and limits the potential of many young people who opt out at an early age. The emphasis on third level qualifications excludes many from the labour market and ignores the potential of apprenticeships nor does it provide stepping stones for career progression. It was strongly felt that there needs to be more respect for alternative education to sit alongside third-level formal education. It was also suggested that there is now a decreasing incentive to participate at third level as this is no guarantee of employment either.

Delegates discussed how education needs a broader vision. Young people need to be informed of the areas where potential employment lies and need to be directed towards this. Career guidance in schools, delegates felt, is often an afterthought, not effective and without properly trained teachers. Some questioned why does it have to be a teacher? Why not a business professional? In relation to careers guidance the current education system stops short once you leave school. In fact careers guidance was viewed as virtually non-existent at third-level. There is a need for early intervention to equip young people to make the right choices regarding their future options. Concerns were raised

that young people aren't equipped to understand the consequences of their choices – i.e. some options seen as soft/easier ones but they don't know long-term consequences. For example young people are often guided to do LCA without realising that this does not give the points or access to college course. Others expressed the opinion that LCA and Youthreach can be seen by schools as dumping ground for troublesome young people. The role of parents was also discussed and the importance of parents support for education and training and the need to equip them to encourage their children to stay in education. The importance of literacy from primary level up was also seen to be vital for equipping young people for their future.

There was in general a sense of disillusionment from the young people present who had participated in further training and education and it had led to nothing – no employment opportunities – they feel like it's a waste of time. There has to be additional support beyond gaining a qualification – young people told that completing their leaving certificate was the route to employment and yet there are still no jobs.

4.3 Key Recommendations

- Evaluate all current training opportunities – review of courses available and relevance to current job market
- Criteria and eligibility for courses needs to be reviewed and relevant to the situation in 2010
- Review and evaluate current education system – 2nd and 3rd level
- Develop alternative education models to meet the needs of non-mainstream learners
- Improve provision of information regarding work experience opportunities
- Explore how Community Training Centres need to change the way they work with young people to include more active learning
- Ensure as in Youthreach that tutors in Community Training Centres have degrees and are capable of quality training delivery
- Psychometric testing should be compulsory in centre of further training before specific training needs of young people are identified. They should also be assessed at the middle and end of training so that the effectiveness and suitability of the intervention is also assessed
- A continuum of service provision should be ensured as with primary school to secondary school from secondary to further training/education supported entirely by the system from the career guidance teacher to FAS etc
- Focus training on areas of potential employment / emerging new sectors
- Ensure quality outcomes for training - links to meaningful, sustainable employment opportunities
- Ensure system provides clear steps of progression/ flexibility/ training that relates to each other
- Address barriers to participation – child-care/ transport/ losing rent allowance if training/attitudes to young job-seekers
- Extend the provision of CE Schemes in rural areas so that they can be offered as real on the job training for young people
- Provide incentives to remain in formal education
- Improvements in Career Guidance – better training for teachers, giving greater priority in second-level education (start earlier) and available beyond second level
- Work with parents on the importance of education
- Structured programmes for 16-18 year olds based on a holistic model
- Promote www.qualifax.ie to assist young people
- Use young people further on in the system to act as mentors and advocates

Workshop 3 – Entrepreneurship and Internships

5.1 In Round Table discussions with those who shared their table, delegates were asked to address the following questions:

From your own experience or in your own view:

- What do you think of the idea of internships/work placement programme?
- Do you think it offers young people the opportunity to get valuable work experience, what would you see as the pros and cons?
- What would you see as the barriers for young people taking on these positions, (cost of working without pay, fear of exploitation, others)
- Do you think employers should be able to offer expenses, top up payments to interns?
- Do you think the current Work Placement Programme should be evaluated before being expanded?
- Views on young people volunteering in the community, something that should be encouraged more?
- Do you think more young people should be supported to establish their own businesses?
- Do you have any ideas on how we could better support young people to start up their own businesses either individually or in co-operation with others?
- What recommendations would you make to improve the supports to young people in relation to work experience and business start ups?
- Agree on the key points/recommendations.

The main issues raised at the round table discussions are outlined below.

5.2 Summary of points from roundtable discussions

Internships

Delegates felt a key weakness was a lack of communication between public, private and community sector for opportunities and development in terms of internships and work experience.

Internships were discussed from the participant's perspective and from the employers' perspective –

Participants' perspective – Generally it was felt there is a lack of opportunities for work experience, long waiting times to get on one as well as the need for equal access to placements and not based on who you know. Delegates viewed internships as a great way to get young people job ready (as it was felt the current school system doesn't prepare young people for the workplace). It was highlighted that with internships you have to show up on time, show commitment, abide by rules and regulations etc. Work placements can be a real ground for learning and skills development and often gets people's foot in the door that can lead to employment – but this should be more concrete and long-term.

Once again delegates argued that work experience should be needs based, in other words focused on areas of interest and not just on what happens to be available. It shouldn't be tokenistic but develop real skills with structured learning. Internships must not be just free labour to do meaningless tasks for companies/organisations and there is a strong need to ensure participant's learning is real. Proposals included accreditation/ certificate for placements, clear objectives for the time period involved, and participants need to be mentored in the role. It is also important to bear in mind that some young people will require more time and support than others and not all companies have the resources for this.

It was suggested that internships, where possible, shouldn't be totally free work as this can be exploitative. One idea was that companies could top up social welfare payments or at least travel allowances and expenses should be covered. Delegates felt that at the very least it is necessary to remove barriers to participation – i.e. don't lose welfare payments. It has to be worth the while of the young person participating.

The need for proper guidelines to be put in place for workplace programmes was raised and there must be adequate induction to the role. Many felt that currently there is also no adequate follow-up after an internship ends for next steps. Young people need proper and constructive feedback throughout and at the end of work placements or an interview and this is not always available. There was also concern that there needs to be widespread understanding of the system – that prevents people being seen to be 'working' and 'claiming' illegally – some people are afraid of this. It was also suggested that volunteering should be encouraged in the community and given recognition as a form of work experience. In the broader sense the system should be more flexible to accommodate volunteer opportunities as a valid form of work experience and given adequate recognition by future employers. Several delegates raised the issue of Garda clearance and it was a key area of concern in impeding internships. It was viewed as being far too slow and needing improvement.

From employers' perspective – There is a need to explore why more employers aren't interested in providing internships. Delegates identified the need for incentives for employers to engage in internships (meaningful, quality work placements) as they do require work/resources on the employers' part and needs to be orientated to be a positive experience for both parties. Another issue raised was the need for sensitivity around staff and union issues when using interns, so employers aren't seen to be replacing jobs, it was suggested that unions can act as a significant barrier to work placements. Some delegates felt that employers were reluctant to take on work placements if they have just had redundancies and there is a need to identify areas where businesses are struggling, can't afford additional staff and develop a strategy for work experience that could result in employment.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship, it was generally felt, isn't encouraged amongst young people. There is a complete lack of information available people don't even know where to look. There is a clear opportunity for indigenous growth and must be encouraged amongst young people. It was felt that we need an overall culture of ideas, creativity, positivity – this has to come from the top, from leadership.

It was suggested that IDA and Enterprise Ireland are currently too high level for many small, community based initiatives and there is a need to explore community based micro-finance schemes providing small financial capital at low interest rates. Delegates identified a need for basic training on VAT, tax, employment law etc.

There was a strong consensus that there is a need to stimulate creative thinking and confidence amongst young people at secondary level. There is a need for mentors/ role models in this area to help young people develop ideas and skills and this should start at second level education. Each

stage of education should have elements of entrepreneurship introduced. Business start-ups seem too daunting for young people but at the same time need to be realistic – right guidance and support to avoid young people getting into debt. Other suggestions included specific work placements for young people interested in starting their own business – linked in to relevant businesses to learn and get ideas and make use of people who have retired from business – become mentors for young people. It was also felt that we need to look at creative ways to get young people started – disused buildings – city councils could give for low rent. Must be much clearer channels for information and funding – accessibility is a real issue.

In addition the current social welfare system is highly prohibitive to self-employed people who become unemployed and needs to be reviewed. Welfare entitlements to self employed need to be improved – no incentive to pursue your own business – too risky/insecure. Incentives – complete a start your own business course but still receive social welfare payments, in other words don't make it inhibitive to entrepreneurs.

5.2 Key Recommendations

- Evaluate current work placement schemes
- Develop a national scheme for work placement with formal links between training and employers and role-models (mentoring as well as training)
- Develop clear guidelines to protect both participants learning and experience and the employer
- Develop assessment process on achievement of placement/ set learning objectives/ targets and accreditation for volunteering
- Ensure sufficient follow-up after placements are over
- Create a monitoring and evaluating body to ensure work placements are meeting the needs of participant and employer
- Develop an online tool to match people and placements - more targeted approach
- Look at existing European models for work placement and learn from best practice
- Put in place a limited time-frame for work placements and must result in interview or employment once it goes over this
- Develop a work-experience supplement for all participants
- Increase relevant work experience opportunities
- Co-ordinated work experience linked in with local employers – identify struggling businesses who could benefit from interns
- Garda clearance must become more efficient
- Address issue of internships with Unions
- Explore the role of local councils/authorities/departments to provide work placements
- Develop notion of community hub to bring people together you are interested in developing new business ideas
- Introduce National Buddy System for people starting their own business that connects into system of people with skills who are unemployed i.e. accountants, lawyers etc.
- Review of second level curriculum – introduce entrepreneurship as a subject
- Develop a community micro-finance scheme
- Develop a web-site targeting young entrepreneurs
- Explore creative ways to facilitate young people starting business such as low rent in unused buildings etc.
- Review welfare entitlements for self-employed

6.1 Panel Discussion and Questions

The panel discussion was chaired by Vincent Browne made up of representatives from five main political parties –

- Richard Bruton TD (Fine Gael)
- Roisin Shortall TD (Labour)
- Senator Pearse Doherty (Sinn Fein)
- Senator Mark Dearey (Green Party)
- Senator James Carroll (Fianna Fail)

Each panellist was allowed four minutes to communicate their plan for addressing youth unemployment – a summary of each is given below:

1. Richard Bruton TD

Mr Bruton proposed to refocus public finances from fixing the banks to fixing people's lives in order to create a new future for Ireland. He stated that the challenge of politics was to ensure this was fair and based on genuine enterprise. In the area of job creation, Mr Bruton suggested, we are damaged on all levels but financial shortages does not render us powerless. He also called for investment in infrastructural arteries and domestic enterprise, as well as, addressing bottle necks e.g. travels tax as a barrier to tourism.

Mr Bruton highlighted that with young people unemployment is high and we run the risk of high emigration. It is, therefore, essential to re-skill displaced males. He then spoke of the need to address barriers to entry and encourage indigenous start-up business by providing access to finance. He concluded by saying that the system is failing to help people fulfil their potential.

2. Roisin Shortall TD

Ms Shortall focused on solutions rather than explaining the problem and outlined 7 key areas for reform. She stated that we must tackle unemployment from an employer's perspective as well as meet the needs of job seekers. She argued that cuts must be made in areas that will have the least impact on jobs and called for a strategic investment bank targeting the SME sector with a €2 billion investment into green technology, food, tourism, arts and creativity; areas which we can easily up skill in. Ms Shortall proposed banning upward only rent reviews, called for the introduction of a PRSI exemption scheme, job sharing programmes – for parental leave etc and the introduction of legislation for prompt payment to improve conditions for business.

She called for 46000 additional education and training opportunities and the introduction of a graduate/apprenticeship scheme with an allowance payment in addition to jobseekers payment, as well as, a back to education initiative, expanding VTOS for young job seekers. Finally her proposals included a national literacy initiative, increase in places for vocational training and the integration of support services creating a one-stop shop.

3. Senator Mark Dearey

Sen Dearey highlighted the need to have a bridge between people and the job market. He proposed the integration of the welfare and tax system, where work and welfare would both become taxable; in doing this tax credits could be claimed at the end of the year by those who were unemployed. He also drew attention to the need to accommodate the many construction workers who have been affected by the recession into areas of the green economy. Other areas for attention, he stated, are technology and education and there is a need to encourage the development of the right skill set to

engage with these areas. He added that this requires curriculum reform to cover these subjects more fully. He also felt that FAS shows real opportunity when given the right direction.

4. Senator Pearse Doherty

Sen Doherty began by saying that he believed jobs wouldn't come as a result of further cuts in the budget and called for a stimulus package that would include wealth tax and a third rate of taxation in order to create new wealth and bridge the deficit. He pointed out the budget cuts only hit the most vulnerable. In order to stimulate the economy he proposed the use of the national pensions reserve fund and the creation of a job retention fund that will subsidise employers who are at risk of redundancies. He also called for a job creation fund of €500 million for investment in new business and entrepreneurs to create 20 000 jobs. Senator Doherty said that we need to give confidence and support to entrepreneurs and ensure the co-operative assistance from other areas such as payroll, legal services, accounting etc. He concluded by saying he felt that FAS was not a person-centred organisation and needed review.

5. Senator James Carroll

Sen Carroll outlined that both job creation and protection are priorities of the government. He highlighted the governments renewed commitment for 15 000 jobs in areas of industry, tourism and manufacturing. He identified the smart economy as an important aspect of their plan, which is about efficiency and reducing costs – he suggested all businesses undergoing a green audit to reduce costs. In addition, Sen Carroll drew attention to the labour market intervention scheme which was to provide work experience and pay for child care and training where needed. Senator Carroll called for a new generation of politics to solve the problems. He concluded by proposing PRSI investment, investment in infrastructure, tourism and schools.

6.2 Discussion and Questions

In the discussion which followed, many issues were raised by participants – these included:

- What advice would you give to the graduating class of 2010?

Richard Bruton, responded by stating that it isn't the role of politicians to tell anyone what they should or shouldn't do, however, he felt it should be a priority to keep people at home by giving them real, worthwhile options and to be equipped adequately for this. Policy needs to be designed to get the economy back in the long term but include short term incentives.

- The panel were urged by Eddie Darcy, Chair of NYCI Board, to consult with the youth sector for policy provision. He highlighted how cohorts of young people had not achieved employment even in the boom and they must be consulted to ensure equality of outcome.

Roisin Shortall agreed that funding needs to be ring-fenced for this purpose and acknowledged that there are certain areas that are above the national average for unemployment. She also argued that spending on disadvantaged areas should be maintained to provide for deep intervention. Sen Deary also added that we have failed to create pathways for employment and the failure of work experience to lead to anything concrete.

- The inadequacy in careers guidance at second level education was also raised – the panel responded:

Roisin Shortall acknowledged that in disadvantaged areas time is given to counselling rather than careers guidance and also that the compliment of careers teachers has been reduced resulting in poor service. She also highlighted that low expectations amongst young people, at a young age,

leads to choices such as pass subjects at junior cert. We must raise the ambitions of young people to expect to go on to third level education and improve their prospects.

- The area of training and education was also raised – and it was felt that it was largely focused on the private sector and there was a lack of quality in FAS skills/ training for public sector– several comments were made in response:

Pearse Doherty felt that FAS is not focused enough on the individual and there is no long term planning with people. Mark Deary also questioned how people get into the public sector and suggested this needed a radical reform as well as developing a more person centred skills development programme – adding that the current banking model for education is not working. James Carroll concluded that the role of FAS has changed a lot and with time and space to reflect it would lead to improvements.

6.3 Vincent Brown posed the question to conference delegates what would they propose as a solution to youth unemployment? Several responses were given including the following–

One delegate reflected on the fact that it isn't the job of the youth sector to create jobs but rather to orientate young people towards being job ready. There was a strong sense that work experience needs to lead to something and there needs to be more joined up thinking around this to create relevant on the job training and in the long term create job opportunities. Young people also need incentives for training and education – if they believe there are no job opportunities then what is the point of further training? Further to this it was proposed that we develop an entrepreneurial culture – by teaching in schools, by providing physical space, seed capital and cuts in capital programmes for this to grow and develop.

Another delegate urged that we look with optimism to our young people and highlighted the need for reform of the education system that it be geared to 'learners learning' and not 'teachers teaching.' They also added that the area of further training belongs in the Education Department for proper guidance. The role of women in economic recovery was also raised and it was felt that no one is currently looking at the opportunity young women present. They also criticised the lack of cohesive response to the greatest employment crisis in Europe and hastened that the SMART economy has absolutely no credibility on the ground. It was also felt that the young people in attendance on the day had shown great motivation and determination but at the same time were dealing with such frustration and disillusionment, yet if consulted, and listened to, could contribute greatly to addressing the problem.

6.4 Eddie D'Arcy (President of NYCI) closed the day's proceedings by firstly highlighting that the majority of young people who had attended the conference had left before the panel discussion –he felt that this illustrated how they have lost all confidence in the political system. He said that we are still paying for the unemployment of the 1980's, and communities are still paying too. He urged that youth unemployment be treated by this government, with the highest priority. Mr D'Arcy outlined that currently there are no real initiatives to deal specifically with the problem in fact the only initiative so far has been to reduce welfare payments. He identified those young people, who find themselves at the lower end of the scale, as having no access at all to employment opportunities and who find themselves without the resources to even consider migration. He concluded by asking the politicians present to make this issue high on their agenda.

6.5 Mary Cunningham (Director of NYCI) thanked all those in attendance, for their input and participation, all those who had contributed to the day's proceedings and finally the NYCI staff for their efforts in putting on the conference.