

JobBridge: Stepping Stone or Dead End?

Speaking Notes for Presentation by James Doorley

February 24th 2015

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- Good morning and thank you for attending this presentation on our report JobBridge: Stepping Stone or Dead End?
- We are publishing two reports today, the full report and a summary report
- Both reports will be available online later today at www.youth.ie/jobbridge

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- We will be tweeting some key information and graphics from the report this morning.
- Our handle is @nycinews and the hashtags we are using are #nycireport #jobbridge
- Feel free to join the conversation

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- As outlined by Mary this report compliments our previous work on youth employment/unemployment since 2009
- While it is positive that youth unemployment is falling it is still very high at 22%
- JobBrige was one of a range of initiatives introduced to address the unemployment crisis
- The lack of work experience was identified in our previous report as a key barrier to entering an already difficult labour market in our work with young people
- Therefore NYCI supported the introduction of a work experience/internship programme to support young people
- However we have not been uncritical of JobBridge and prior to this report raised concerns about many aspects of the scheme

- We therefore decided to undertake this research for a number of reasons;
 - Despite the scheme being the subject of much political debate, public comment and press attention there has been limited research undertaken
 - We also felt it was important that the views, experience and perspective of the participants in the scheme, who in our view are the real experts were heard
 - Also context has changed-when introduced unemployment still growing, now we have some employment growth and important to review and revise programmes to ensure they are supporting employment and not part of the problem

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- Given the limited time you may be glad to hear that I won't be giving you a history of internships and overview of the evolution of such programmes
- There is an excellent book by an author Ross Perlin called "Intern Nation" which I have referenced in the report and if you want more detail I would recommend it
- As he outlines term came from medical profession where trainee doctors were effectively "interned" in a hospital for a number of years as part of their training
- So from being limited to a few professions the concept of an internship has entered and expanded rapidly throughout the broader labour market in the last 3 decades
- Perlin says "Young people can hardly believe in a world before internships"
- While they have grown during the economic crisis-they are part of a trend across western world towards "contingent labour" internships, temporary work, part-time, zero hour contracts etc.
- Expanded rapidly in countries such as Australia which were not impacted by the economic crisis.

- Others have criticised internships as facilitating employers to create an extra step on the jobs ladder and secure unpaid work without any proven benefits for the participants.
- Diverse view- Panel on Fair Access to the Professions describes internships “as an essential part of the career ladder in many professions”
- An essential element of any internship should include general and specific skills development, training and mentoring-one of the reasons why we have had difficulties in Ireland is the lack of understanding/agreement/consensus on what an internship is and should be
- As I heard Dr. Mary Murphy from Maynooth University recently comment “interns are not getting paid so what are they getting instead?”

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- I would now like to present some of the key numbers
- Despite being stated at the launch of the scheme that one of the priorities would be to give “young people the opportunity to gain valuable experience as they move between study and the beginning of their working lives” only 27% of participants are under 25 years of age.
- When you include the under 35sc it comes to 70% but also important to point out 30% of participants are over 35
- Apart from the over 36,000 interns who have participated on the scheme, 15,900 host organisations have taken on interns
- We also learned in our research that 376 host organisations had taken on 10 or more interns with 8 taking on 100 or more
- The five most active organisations in the scheme have taken on a total of 805 interns
- There have been 520 complaints about the scheme and 43 host orgs have been excluded from participation
- One of the recurring issues about JobBridge has concerned the nature of some of the positions advertised
- We found that of the 65,686 internship adverts posted 45% have never been filled

- This indicates that the quality of internship positions offered by host organisations and the level of scrutiny by Department of Social Protection (DSP) of adverts needs to improve.

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- As part of a poll of young people on a range of issues last summer we included some questions on jobbridge
- Only 54% were aware of JobBridge (Higher among 22-25 year olds, ABC1s & those in receipt of jobseekers payments)
- 74% agreed that scheme provides valuable work experience/Only 10% disagreeing.
- 52% agreed that scheme exploits those taking part/30% disagreeing.
- Higher number agreeing scheme exploits higher among 22-25 year olds, C2DE & those in receipt of jobseekers payments

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- I now want to present the results of our survey of JobBridge participants
- The survey consists of 35 questions (full list in appendix 1 in main report)
- Survey was completed by 84 respondents
- The profile of the group and all the findings are set out in full report- starting on page 35
- Want to outline some of the main results
- We asked participants about their main motivation in applying for JobBridge
- Results echo every other report that work experience 40% was primary motivating factor, along with 18% who wanted to work in particular field & 13% in the host organisation
- Participation in the scheme is supposed to be voluntary-however we found in a further question that 13% of respondents felt compelled to participate
- In response to a question on whether the role/work they undertook matched the role which was advertised-we found that less than half matched to a large extent, 35% matched to some extent and 17% did not match the advert at all-matter of concern that so many internships

were misleading. Important issue for interns who take on a role to gain specific experience-but then find out doing different work

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- All host organisations are supposed to appoint a mentor to support the intern
- Our survey found that only 76% of interns stated mentor was appointed
- While 45% met mentor once a week-this would be good practice 25% never met the mentor & a further 13% only met the mentor a few times during the internship
- On a more positive note 60% found meetings with mentors useful
- We also asked interns how they were treated by host organisations
 - 41% felt treated like other members of the team
 - 36% state they were treated like other members sometimes
 - 22% stated not treated like other team members

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- We asked interns if they had concerns/difficulties during placement
- 56% stated they had experienced concerns/difficulties
- The most common issues raised were costs associated with the internship, job displacement, amount of work & type of tasks assigned to them & treatment by host organisation
- 28% stated that DSP had conducted a monitoring visit-consistent with 25% rate (36,000 internships & 9,000 monitoring visits)
- Interestingly we found much higher level of monitoring in private sector 45% compared to 11% in public sector
- Our analysis would suggest that the low level of monitoring in public sector is misguided
- We asked participants if they couldn't resolve issues with their host organisation would they raise with DSP;
 - 31% would
 - 25% not willing
 - 21% not aware could raise with DSP
 - 10% aware but not sure how

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- In response to question about whether they completed full term of internship or finished early 66% stated they completed full term/30% early finishers
- Of early finishers 34% got a job, 17% dissatisfied with internship, 13% host terminated internship, 17% other
- We asked participants to rate their internship
 - 22% very satisfied
 - 36% satisfied
 - 11% neutral
 - 14% dissatisfied
 - 17% very Dissatisfied
- Concern that almost a third were dissatisfied
- In our analysis of satisfaction ratings we found a higher level among early finishers-contrary to conventional wisdom that early finishing is a problem
- We also looked at the cohort who said they felt compelled by DSP to participate & we found a 100% dissatisfaction rating-across all variables they returned much more negative results

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- We then asked if participants would recommend JobBridge to another jobseeker
 - 45% yes
 - 31% no
 - 24% don't know
- The numbers willing to recommend scheme than those who expressed satisfaction-we think that may be people who while they were overall happy with their internship-but do have misgivings about the scheme in general
- We then asked participants if the internship gave them valuable work experience
 - 68% yes
 - 20%no
 - 12% don't know

- We then asked participants if internship was solely used by host organisations for free labour
 - 44% yes
 - 43% no
 - 13% don't know

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- We then asked the respondents about their current status
 - 31% unemployed
 - 27% employed full time
 - 14% employed part time
 - 12% on another education/training course
 - 14% other
 - 2% emigrated

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- To supplement the findings of our online survey we conducted 7 semi-structured interviews with participants
- The profile of the participants is detailed on page 65 of full report/list of questions are in appendix 2
- The interviews covered issues such as motivation for participation, match between advert & role, views on host organisation, role of DSP & monitoring, mentoring, networking, costs associated with the internship, intern rights, employment prospects, overall views.

Positive

- As with survey work experience strong motivating factor-“It was so frustrating to hear the words, you don't have enough experience”
- Helped participants get off welfare and “out of a rut” interviewee who had spent 9 months unemployed stated “for me it was important to have somewhere to go”
- With unemployment high many jobs are filled through informal networks, young people at distinct disadvantage so a number identified networking opportunities/circulating in organisations where potential job openings may arise

Mixed

- Experience in how interns were treated was mixed some were treated very well by host organisations, some instances of bad treatment but also patterns of bad treatment one particular intern was in my view treated very badly by host organisation
- In terms of employment prospects post internship. One interviewee had progressed from JobBridge to job but another said to me that there were no job openings in her sector

Negative

- A number of participants struggled with the costs, travel, food, rent, “Your costs are not met, the other intern is leaving because of the money, if I didn’t live with my parents I couldn’t afford it either”
- Important to remember that given the cuts to social welfare for under 25s some JobBridge interns are on €150 or €194 a week for up to 40 hours work
- One participant had to move from the country to Dublin-subletting borrowing from family and friends to get through the week working 40 hours.
- The extent and standard of mentoring was very poor
- Mentoring ranged in the best case scenarios to some on the job guidance and instruction to in the worst case scenario a brief induction, no direction given, changed roles with no explanation, implied that intern should know stuff led to stress and difficulties
- An investment in mentoring is the only obligation placed on host organisations current level not acceptable for an internship programme
- Views on monitoring were mixed good & bad feedback
- One positive experience of DSP staff dealing with an issue
- Was evidence of abuse of cooling period which would lead directly to job displacement
- There is supposed to be a 6 month cooling off period between one intern finishing and a new intern starting in the same position to prevent situation where intern is filling position continuously

- However two interns told me host organisations bypass this by changing the title of the position so even if the work/role is the same all they have to do is change the title and position and it will be sanctioned
- Again while some host organisations did treat interns well, others didn't and a number felt as if they were in limbo with regard to their rights, one suffered an injury at work. She was told by HR Department "you are not employed here, nothing I can do"
- Other areas such as force majeure leave, expenses etc, lack of clarity about rights of interns
- Major issue re job displacement-many young people start their career in entry level position, if not policed properly danger JobBridge replacing these positions
- One interviewee summed up for me that situation, she had welcomed the opportunity to get work experience but now was struggling to find a job
- "The other problem now is that it has taken over my chosen career, so every time I go onto job searches, I see this great post, great this is going to suit me and then I see the intern will receive and that's it, heartbreaking, so I don't look on JobBridge fondly"

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- The conclusions we draw from both the survey & interviews are as follows;
- There are positives in the scheme; it is filling a work experience gap, providing skills development and greater access to difficult labour market with a majority satisfied with their internship.
- However almost a third are dissatisfied and concern that only 27% securing full time employment & 31% returning to live register after participation
- In our view "a lack of quality" emerged as a major theme throughout the research, that is not to say that there were not high quality internships, hosts who treated interns very well, very good experiences, good outcomes etc

- However perception that quality has been sacrificed to quantity and the one size fits all approach
- We identified the deficiencies as poorly-designed internships, inadequate mentoring, instances of unacceptable treatment of interns, lack of rights and clarity concerning terms and conditions. Other issues included insufficient monitoring and auditing of the scheme to prevent abuse, job displacement and inadequate income support
- In our view because the scheme is being funded by the state, (€85million) because the lack of quality can impact on the progression of the jobseekers and because abuse can lead to job displacement, current situation is not acceptable
- We think now is a good time to reform and review-in light growing economy and recovering employment
- We are putting forward 10 recommendations, don't claim to have all the answers and willing to engage with Government & others to enhance the scheme or a successor of the scheme

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- The findings from the Indecon report that 61% of participants on JobBridge had secured employment within 5 months is often quoted as proof of the success of the scheme
- 1st recommendation review of scheme
- However all that tells us is that 61% of those who participated in the scheme secured employment, it doesn't tell us to what extent JobBridge contributed to their success in securing employment. I'm sure for some it did but the Indecon also found that 72% of participants had previous work experience and almost 2/3^{rds} were graduates. It is quite possible that many of them would have secured employment in the absence of the scheme, did the scheme delay their entry into paid employment? Is the state funding unpaid labour unnecessarily?
- We recommend a comparative study is required to examine the progression rate between a group of jobseekers who have participated in the scheme and a group who haven't
- In this regard we are repeating a recommendation made by Indecon when they published their report two years ago

- 2nd recommendation progression rates
- We recommend that rather than the scheme being open to every employer that it should only be open to those employers and sectors where progression is high.
- As I outlined earlier a large number of host organisations have taken on 10 or more interns, the DSP should be able to undertake an analysis as to the progression rates of these interns.
- Likewise such an analysis should be conducted on a sectoral basis so that rather than adopting a one-size approach the scheme can be targeted at those host organisations and sectors where progression is high
- 3rd recommendation monitoring
- Lot of discussion about monitoring of the scheme-the number of monitoring visits is high and on face value a 97% compliance rate is impressive, however that conflicts with our research which identified a number of deficiencies & 31% dissatisfaction rate
- Our conclusion is that the focus of the monitoring visits needs to change, at present it is largely a checklist exercise to ascertain if the standard agreement has been assigned, has a mentor been appointed, hours of work etc. DSP need to delve much deeper and explore the range of issues we have examined in our research
- 4th recommendation cooling off period
- Our research identified a potential loophole with regard to the cooling off period, with some host organisation circumventing the 6 month rule by changing the title of internship advertised
- We recommend that the DSP should enhance monitoring of compliance with the cooling off period to prevent job displacement
- 5th recommendation top up payment
- The challenge of meeting the extra costs associated with participation on the internship emerged as an issue for a number of the participants
- Clear that without parental/family support some interns could not participate on the scheme
- Particularly an issue for those coming onto the scheme with just €100 a week and who after the existing top up receive €150 a week.

- We propose that the existing top up should be doubled to €100 a week so that at the very minimum young participants on the scheme are getting €200 a week
- 6th recommendation Charter of Rights for Interns
- I detailed earlier how there was a lack of clarity with regard to intern rights concerning issues injury, insurance cover, force majeure leave, expenses, and many others had created difficulties for interns. We are proposing that a Charter of Rights should be developed in consultation with interns and should be put on a statutory basis by means of primary and secondary legislation to give the Charter teeth and enforceability
- 7th recommendation Mandatory Internships
- The evidence from this research demonstrates that “participation without motivation” won’t work. At present JobBridge is supposed to be voluntary where both the host organisation and intern can terminate it with one week’s notice if it doesn’t work out
- We had heard anecdotally that some participants were being directed by DSP to undertake internships, this is confirmed in this research with 13% saying they felt compelled to participate
- Now the DSP are proposing to implement a variant of JobBridge called “First Steps” which it would appear based on the information provided to date to be mandatory for 1,500 young jobseekers
- We are calling on the Government to abandon this proposal or any proposal which compels young people to undertake an internship because it leaves them open to abuse as they won’t have the choice to walk away if they are dissatisfied
- The proposal runs counter to the concept and understanding of what an internship is
- There are other models they Govt could consider but the current proposal is wrong and will be counterproductive in our view
- 8th Recommendation Advertising
- As I outlined earlier 45% of intern adverts are never filled. While some positions will obviously remain unfilled, we believe this is a very high percentage and indicates that the quality of the some positions being offered by host organisation is poor and unattractive

- We recommend that DSP needs to apply greater scrutiny to the adverts proposed and ensure that potential host organisations put more effort and attention into the process
- The instance of intern adverts not matching the actual role the intern was required to fulfil also emerged, while we wouldn't expect the role to match completely in all respects and may evolve we need to recognise that many interns are applying for positions to gain particular skills or experience. If the role/work they are required to undertake varies largely from what they applied for it creates problems and essentially they have been misled
- We recommend that where significant changes are made that this should only be done with the agreement of both intern/host organisation and approved by DSP
- 9th recommendation
- Given the lack and quality of mentoring which emerged from this study we recommend that the DSP should initiate a review of the mentoring process. Some host organisations appear to be unwilling to provide mentoring whereas others despite the best intentions are failing to meet a requirement which is the only obligation placed on the host organisations
- We recommend that the DSP should organise workshops on mentoring and that all designated mentors should be required to attend one of these
- 10th recommendation
- Our research indicates that some interns are very isolated and would benefit from the opportunity particularly early on in the internship to engage with DSP and with other interns
- We recommend that DSP should organise regional or sectoral meetings/group engagements for interns to provide information/guidance and to allow interns to seek advice/support as required
- We believe these meetings/group engagements could also facilitate interns to give their views/feedback which could serve to improve the quality and monitoring of the scheme

- We believe that these recommendations would contribute to improving the quality and addressing the deficiencies in the scheme, would enhance the experience of the interns and would help to eliminate job displacement and aid progression to employment
 - Thank you for your time and attention
 - I am happy to take questions on the report
- Ends