

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN IRELAND

THE FORGOTTEN GENERATION

The experience of young jobseekers &
their interaction & engagement with
key State support services



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A Qualitative Research Study conducted on behalf of the
National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
Hugh O'Connor, OCS Consulting
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FOREWORD

Ireland has the second highest youth unemployment rate in Western Europe with up to 1 in 4 young people between 17-25 years jobless and 1 in 3 young men unemployed. It is against this backdrop that NYCI commissioned research to consult with young unemployed people on a number of key issues affecting their lives and related to their status as ‘unemployed.’



The research engaged in consultation with young people aged 18 – 25 currently unemployed to ascertain their experiences, views and perspectives on state interventions. Given such a diverse base, the study specifically interviewed and consulted with unemployed early school leavers, unemployed young people with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications and unemployed young graduates.

I welcome the publication of this research on youth unemployment which I believe provides an invaluable insight into the experiences of young jobseekers currently living in Ireland. It poignantly and sensitively captures the difficult experiences of a number of young people who are currently unemployed and illustrates the problems they have encountered in their engagement with the social welfare system, and in seeking to secure employment.

It is very evident that Government needs to do more to address youth unemployment. To date their response has been unimaginative and ineffective. Too much of the response has been haphazard, ad hoc and motivated by a desire to cut public spending rather than supporting unemployed people to re-enter the labour market.

There is little doubt that youth unemployment is one of the single biggest challenges facing Ireland in 2011. The statistics are stark and if adequate measures are not implemented immediately the situation will deteriorate rapidly. The implications of unemployment for the individual and for wider society will be devastating, leaving repercussions for generations to come. The time has come for real action in a co-ordinated and coherent manner. We need the State to show real vision and commitment to this generation and to the future of this country.

Orlaith McBride

President

National Youth Council of Ireland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As recent as 2007 guaranteed employment, with competitive and often attractive salaries and wages, was the norm for young people in Ireland. Youth unemployment, having trebled since 2008, is now however one of, if not *the* single greatest challenge facing Ireland in 2010. Ireland now has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in Europe – 24.2 percent among 15 to 24 year-olds compared with an average rate of unemployment of 19.9 percent for the 27 European Union member states in 2009. The scale of the problem is also masked by a very significant increase in the number of young people re-entering or remaining in education and a very considerable increase in the number of young people emigrating.

Little if any qualitative research on the lived experience of the young unemployed has been conducted in an Irish context. It is with this in mind that the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) commissioned research support to develop a clearer and more detailed understanding of youth unemployment in Ireland and in particular the experience of young jobseekers and their interaction and engagement with key State support services operating in this area. For this research study the population of interest was defined as young, active jobseekers between the ages of 18 and 25. A series of nine in-depth focus group interviews with young jobseekers (representing almost twenty hours of research) and a parallel series of 90 short structured ‘intercept interviews’ conducted with jobseekers both before and after their meetings with Jobs Facilitators at local Social Welfare Offices (representing a further 30 hours of research) was undertaken.

This research would suggest that there has been no co-ordinated, coherent or focused policy approach developed in response to the pressing needs of young jobseekers in Ireland – particularly those who have yet to gain experience in the labour market. These young jobseekers are vulnerable individuals, many of whom are most concerned that their long term futures will be damaged – possibly irreparably – by a period of sustained unemployment. The experience of unemployment has left many of the young jobseekers feeling ‘scarred’ and ‘damaged’. Research participants, in the main, described their experience of unemployment as one which is accompanied by a number of negative feelings such as low self esteem and low morale, feelings of hopelessness, despair and lack of choice, and in some cases admissions of instances of depression and stress. Financial shortage was highlighted frequently and which can contribute to the young jobseekers sense of isolation and their experience of frustration and hardship.

The young unemployed are thought to be particularly vulnerable as they only have their experience of education to fall back on, rather than experience in the work force. The lack of confidence this absence of workplace experience introduces would appear to be very real for the young jobseeker. This research would suggest that there are, potentially, very severe consequences for young people if this issue of high, and rising levels of youth unemployment is not dealt with quickly and effectively:

- Of the 90 young jobseekers that were interviewed on a one to one basis *all*, or 100% of respondents, agreed that the ‘*prospects for securing rewarding employment in Ireland are not very good.*’
- Of those 90 young interviewees 70% agreed that it is more likely – rather than less likely – that they will emigrate within the next 12 months in response to their status of being unemployed here in Ireland.
- Among the 90 interviewees 90% were in agreement that ‘*being unemployed has had a negative effect on my sense of well being.*’
- Of the 90 young jobseekers interviewed following their meeting with a Social Welfare Jobs Facilitator only a somewhat disappointing 32% awarded a satisfaction rating above the ‘mid point’ on a 10 point satisfaction scale – where 1 equals ‘very dissatisfied’ and 10 equals ‘very satisfied.’

Experts interviewed as part of the research study indicated that periods of unemployment while young can create permanent ‘scars.’ There was also very significant concern among the young jobseekers themselves that a prolonged period of job searching would make it very difficult for the young person to integrate themselves into the workforce when the economy does eventually ‘pick up.’ Indeed many were fearful that they would be ‘left behind’ when employment opportunities become more available due to the lengthy period of inactivity and their lack of workplace experience. There was also concern with the long term societal impacts that may result from having a very significant proportion of young people that may be unemployed for a very lengthy period of time. Wider societal impacts will, it was suggested, ultimately have to be addressed – long term dependency on social welfare and other benefits, a rise in mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, and an increase in criminal behavior among young people. Other key research findings identified include the following:

- Most of the young jobseekers that had been unemployed for a year or more had started their job search with a degree of relative optimism that the ‘search process’ would be both ‘short’ and ‘successful.’ This optimism often quickly gives way, however, to self-doubt, and feelings of stress, anxiety and depression.
- Although the young jobseekers identified a number of reasons as to *why* they may be unemployed ‘lack of workplace experience’ was consistently identified as *the* most significant barrier to entry for young people to the jobs market in Ireland in 2010. There was considerable interest in internship programmes as these were thought to offer the young jobseeker an opportunity to improve the quality of their CV, increase their general attractiveness to potential employers and keep their skills current.
- There was particular concern with the current cap on provision of education and training places for the many thousands of young unemployed people with low qualifications. It was stressed that there is a real risk that many of these young

jobseekers will become unemployable in the long term unless they acquire skills in the short to medium term that are relevant to the future workplace.

- For the majority of the young jobseekers the 'real time' experience of job searching is one of repeated rejection where there are no partial victories, only rejections or job offers. The negative subjective feelings experienced by the young jobseeker are clearly intensified by the demanding daily practice associated with job hunting. Jobseekers also highlighted the sense of isolation they experience as a result of being unemployed and the lack of mutual support networks available to them.
- The absence of any form of certainty as to what their future may look like has caused many young jobseekers to postpone, indefinitely, very significant planned 'milestone events' such as marriage, parenthood, or the purchase of a house or car.
- One of the most challenging aspects involved in job searching is the requirement to have a level of 'emotional dexterity' to present a positive front to potential employers while experiencing stress and internal turmoil.
- Job seeking requires a significant variety of skills many of which have to be self-taught and learnt through experience or 'trial and error.' It was emphasised that jobseekers would benefit greatly if there were assistance provided in building the often very simple yet necessary skill sets required for job seeking – such as how to write an effective Curriculum Vitae (CV).
- Young early school leavers and those that had completed an apprenticeship appeared to be most interested in taking up places in further education in response to their current jobless status. Third level graduates were however notably less enthusiastic about engaging in further 'higher level' education.
- Job seeking is clearly performed against the backdrop of financial anxiety and uncertainty. Many of the young jobseekers – including those over 21 years of age – continue to depend on the goodwill and support of their parents as they wait for often very lengthy periods for a social welfare application to be processed. A considerable majority indicated however that they are now completely and solely dependent on social welfare support. In parallel to a very modest or no income at all, many are also carrying a debt burden generated over a number of years – either as a college student or while in employment. There was a call therefore for this pressure to be recognised by policy makers and for support to be provided for young unemployed people who are trying to service large debt levels.

The local Social Welfare Office network and FÁS – Core support requirements for a young jobseeker. Young jobseekers acknowledged that these services are now 'over-stretched' having to respond to the impact of the recession and the rapid growth in joblessness. Seven key themes emerged from the research in respect of the young jobseekers engagement with the Social Welfare Local and Branch Offices *and* the FÁS Local Employment Services.

1. **The importance of customer service and those who underpin it.** The quality and commitment of service personnel is critical to the successful delivery of these two key services. As a very substantial part of the interaction is with a person, the attitude and approach of that person will have a very significant influence on the jobseekers experience of the service. Empathy is therefore an important characteristic of good service as young jobseekers are particularly anxious to be 'actively listened to.' Customer service is most important not only in practical terms but also in 'emotional' terms – young jobseekers, understandably, want to feel that they 'matter.'

Emphasis was placed on the importance of speed of decision making on applications for welfare benefits and the desire for Social Welfare to keep the applicant informed on the status of the application throughout the decision making process. Pleasingly only a very small minority of research participants indicated that they experienced any sense that they were either 'disregarded' or 'disrespected' when dealing with the two services. It was suggested that it would be easier to develop a rapport with the service personnel if the client were to meet with the same member of staff on each visit. This however rarely if ever happens – a key criticism of the two services. Privacy in discussions with the Social Welfare Local Office service personnel was also identified as an important service dimension which the young jobseekers thought was missing completely from the service experience.

2. **Consistency of service delivery – Same high standard of delivery to be experienced on each service encounter.** Young jobseekers want consistency in the standard of service delivery offered. It is seldom, however, simply a case of good or bad service. Overall the two services were thought to be 'inconsistent' in their standard of service delivery. In particular the length of appointments and quality or depth of discussion was thought to vary considerably from day to day. The vast majority did not see the same service representative on consecutive appointments. It was suggested that the 'assignment' of a single advisor would allow that advisor to develop a better rapport and understanding of the clients' circumstances, personal interests and career related objectives. This would allow the services to co-ordinate their approaches more effectively and provide a more tailored and personalised service for each individual jobseeker.
3. **Ease of understanding as to what to expect from the two services and the setting of a realistic length of time that it will take to process a social welfare application.** The lack of understanding as to what jobseekers could expect from the two services was very clear. Many young jobseekers were largely unaware of *what* they were entitled to and *when* they were entitled to it. There was lack of understanding of the different schemes and allowances that may be available and many suggested they were at a real disadvantage as they could not make 'best use' of the services if they do not know what services, schemes and entitlements are actually available. The current lack of certainty and open ended nature of the application process was also a real point of concern and frustration for many of the research participants – '*Will my application ever be approved?*'

4. **An efficient method of data collection, retention and provision.** Young jobseekers were very dissatisfied with the approach of Social Welfare in collecting and recording personal information. Indeed the Social Welfare service was often characterised as having a complete ‘absence of institutional memory’. Instances were highlighted where detailed personal circumstances and ‘histories’ were provided but were not then available at subsequent interviews which often meant the client had to re-explain their circumstances in the same level of detail.
5. **Smooth process of referral from one key service to the other.** Social Welfare is clearly the first ‘port of call’ for the majority of young jobseekers. There is considerable uncertainty, however, as to *how* FÁS can help them. Indeed many are unaware of the wide range of training and employment related programmes and services that FÁS can offer. There was also much confusion as to *who* FÁS is focused on providing support for. Most importantly there was a clear sense of frustration with the absence of a single ‘one stop shop’ that would provide a rounded package of supports – social welfare benefits, career planning, job searching skills, personal development skills, training and education – through a single, well organised, sufficiently resourced, and co-ordinated structure.
6. **Tailoring of the service offering to match individual client requirements.** Young jobseekers want their individual circumstances, qualifications, training and career aspirations to be taken into account. The majority, however, felt the two services adopted a somewhat generic and overly rigid approach in dealing with the young unemployed. It was suggested that there is little if any acknowledgement of personal circumstances or training and educational history. Jobseekers stressed that age is not *the* single, most important defining category. Instead it was emphasised that it is *not* appropriate for the two services to treat young jobseekers as a single homogenous group – as is currently happening. Instead educational attainment and personal aspirations should influence the nature of service provision. Both services were thought to be particularly ‘challenged’ in responding effectively to the specific, and possibly more specialist, support needs of third level graduates.
7. **Provision of unrestrictive and high quality job information.** The young jobseekers were somewhat critical of both services in terms of their proactive offer of advice. Jobseekers often had to ‘encourage’ the advisor to provide more direct advice or guidance particularly in relation to training, education and work placement opportunities. The current heavy workload experienced by both services was largely blamed for the present emphasis on this ‘functional processing’ rather than the ‘active engagement’ desired by so many. It was for these reasons that such a significant proportion of the young jobseekers interviewed on a one to one basis rated the service experience ‘poorly.’ Of the 90 young jobseekers interviewed following their meeting with a Jobs Facilitator only 5% rated the quality of the information/support or ‘counselling’ provided above the mid-point on a ten point scale.

In conclusion, addressing the very significant issue of youth unemployment in Ireland must be prioritised by Government and policy makers. The research shows that unemployed young people experience many types of social and economic exclusion. These young jobseekers are far from proud to be unemployed and emphasised that they would like to be in work as soon as possible. There is an understandable call therefore for the development of relevant policies which enhance the skills and workplace capabilities of young jobseekers and which assist them to join the labour market as quickly as possible.

Both FÁS and the Social Welfare Local and Branch Offices have a key role to play in supporting young people as they bid to secure employment. These services are now however ‘over-stretched’ in having to respond to the impact of the recession and the rapid growth in joblessness. Some very good examples of excellent customer service were however put forward. Encouragingly, it was therefore suggested, a high standard of customer service is an attainable aim for these key training, employment and income support services. Some service realignment and other practical recommendations could usefully be considered by policy makers in this area. A set of largely practical conclusions and recommendations have been put forward in Section 6 of the main document in a bid to respond to the needs of the young unemployed in Ireland in 2010. In not dealing with the problem of high youth unemployment both young people and wider society will suffer potentially severe consequences for many years to come. Effective policy responses must therefore be delivered now or else we run the risk of permanently losing a generation.



1 | INTRODUCTION

Only a few short years ago guaranteed employment and highly rewarding jobs were the norm for young third level graduates. Attractive entry level jobs and apprenticeship schemes with competitive salaries and wages were also available, in plentiful supply, to young people who did not participate in third level education. That position has changed most dramatically in very recent years. Youth unemployment, having trebled since 2008, is now one of, if not *the* single greatest challenge facing Ireland in 2010.

Young people are now twice as likely to be unemployed as older workers. Indeed Ireland now has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in Europe. According to figures from the statistical office Eurostat the unemployment rate, in 2008, among 15-24-year-olds in Ireland was 12.7 percent, a figure that rose to 24.2 percent in 2009. This compared with an average rate of unemployment for under-25's for the 27 European Union member states of 19.9 percent in 2009.

Young people in Ireland, faced with a very significantly shrunk jobs market and increased competition for the opportunities that are available, are struggling to obtain relevant and secure jobs. A very significant 1 in 3 young men under 25 years of age are now out of work. The scale of the problem is masked by a very significant increase in numbers re-entering or remaining in education. The very significant number of young people emigrating also further masks the full extent of the issue. Indeed the numbers of young people under 25 emigrating increased from 15,600 in 2004 to 30,000 in 2009.

Securing employment in an extended downturn is extremely difficult. This is particularly true in the case of young people who have yet to develop a level of significant experience in the workforce. The State provided training, employment support and social welfare/ income support services have a key role to play in supporting young people as they bid to secure employment. Little if any qualitative research on the lived experience of the young unemployed has been conducted in an Irish context. Both unemployment and the role of job searching have a unique set of dynamics. It is in this context that the National Youth Council of Ireland commissioned research support to develop a clearer and more detailed understanding of youth unemployment in Ireland and in particular the experience of the young unemployed and their interaction and engagement with key State support services operating in this area.

For this research study the population of interest was defined as young, active jobseekers between the ages of 18 and 25 years of age. A series of nine in-depth focus group interviews with young jobseekers (representing almost twenty hours of research) and a parallel series of 90 short structured 'intercept interviews' conducted with jobseekers both before and after their meetings with Jobs Facilitators at local Social Welfare Offices (representing a further 30 hours of research) was undertaken.

This research explores the experiences, practices and discourses of unemployment and job searching for young people in the new economy and aims to provide informed insights and understanding of the experience of youth unemployment in Ireland. As part of the study the researchers met and spoke with young people who have been seeking work for months, during one of if not the worst economic environments the country has known for decades, and in areas that have seen particularly high unemployment. The findings from the research and the recommendations proposed are to input into NYCI's planning and policy development in this area.

2 | OBJECTIVES

The following key objective was developed to guide this research study:

“To provide the NYCI with an evidence base of the experiences, views and attitudes of key segments of the young unemployed on their engagement and interaction with the key State employment, training, and income support services with a view to informing planning and policy development in this area.”

In pursuing this key objective the following underlying objectives were also pursued:

- To profile the current experiences, attitudes, expectations, and behaviours of the young unemployed towards key State provided employment, training and welfare/income support services.
- To provide feedback on the strengths/weaknesses of key State service offerings from the point of view of key young jobseeker segments.
- To identify gaps in existing service offerings and practical ways in which unfulfilled needs can be met more effectively.
- To provide research findings which will further enhance NYCI’s own understanding of this key issue and the organisations ability to develop effective, evidence based responses, policy decisions and recommendations.

3 | METHODOLOGY
– QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

As the NYCI was particularly interested in developing a more thorough understanding of the experiences, behaviours and attitudes of key segments of the young unemployed on their engagement and interaction with the key State provided income, employment and training support services (in particular FÁS and the nationwide network of local Social Welfare Offices) a research approach that was primarily qualitative in nature was designed. In total a series of nine in-depth focus group interviews with young jobseekers (representing almost twenty hours of research) and a parallel series of 90 short structured ‘intercept interviews’ conducted with young jobseekers, before and after their meetings with Jobs Facilitators at the local Social Welfare Offices, (representing a further 30 hours of research) was undertaken.

The age parameters set for the research was between 18 and 25 years of age. The other key condition or pre-requisite for participation in the research was the ability to speak, with ‘first hand’ experience, of the services provided by key agencies such as FÁS and the network of local Social Welfare Offices. Therefore *all* of the young jobseekers that participated in the research (either by participating in a focus group discussion or by completing an ‘intercept interview’) were aged between 18 and 25 and had engaged with FÁS and/or the nationwide network of local Social Welfare Offices for a minimum of 3 months.

The NYCI was very conscious that the ‘young unemployed’ are not a single, homogenous group – the members of which *all* have very similar experiences, expectations and support needs. Instead the NYCI advised that the research should explore the research question from the perspective of *three* key young jobseekers segments namely:

1. Young ‘job seeking’ third level graduates.
2. Young ‘jobseekers’ with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications.
3. Young ‘job seeking’ early school leavers.

As set out in tabular form on page 18, three focus groups were facilitated in each of these three young jobseekers segments – nine focus groups in total. Although general views on the experience of ‘unemployment’ and ‘job seeking’ tended to be shared by participants across the three segments described above, the research participants ‘age’, ‘educational qualifications’ and ‘extent of workplace experience’ did introduce *some* ‘segment specific’ research findings.

The focus groups were exploratory in nature and facilitated considerable open and creative discussion. Group members tended to be very forthcoming when reflecting on their individual experiences and in describing the often very personal feelings, attitudes and behaviours which they associated with their experience of unemployment and job seeking. Collectively, the nine groups also tended to be both ‘creative’ and ‘insightful’ when putting forward often very practical suggestions and recommendations as to how young jobseekers could be supported more effectively at this time of high unemployment. The conduct of each focus group was governed by a discussion guide, a copy of which is included in Appendix Two.

Focus group participants were recruited across a number of different ‘venues,’ using a number of different approaches – ‘on street’ recruitment, ‘snowball’, peer and ‘word of mouth’ recruiting tended to generate the highest proportion of suitable research participants. On at least three occasions the scheduled focus group did not proceed as had originally been

planned as the desired quorum (a minimum of 7 participants) did not present at the location at the time that they had been invited to attend. On these occasions the focus groups were rescheduled for another time and date and alternative participants were recruited to satisfy the targeted number of group members. A recruitment questionnaire which detailed specific, desired participant characteristics governed the recruitment process. A copy of this recruitment questionnaire is included in Appendix One.

In summary, the nine focus groups were conducted on regional basis. Each group consisted of between 7 and 9 participants with an even gender balance in each of the nine groups. Eight of the nine groups were facilitated in third party, hired meeting rooms while the ninth was hosted at a city centre based training and education centre. The profiles of the nine focus groups are provided below. (Further profiles of the nine focus groups are featured in Appendix One.)

Table 1: Nine Focus Groups – Headline Profile

Group Number	Headline profile	Location	Key characteristics
1	Young unemployed third level graduates	Urban; Dublin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Active job seeking graduates of third level programmes of more than two years in duration• Aged between 18 and 25• Gender mix• Unemployed for 3 months or more• No longer in full-time education• Have engaged with training and/or employment/income support services for a minimum of 3 months
2	Young unemployed third level graduates	Semi-Urban; Cork County	
3	Young unemployed third level graduates	Rural; Kildare	
4	Young unemployed with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications	Urban; Cork	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Active jobseekers who have completed the Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications• No further third level qualifications• Aged between 18 and 25• Gender mix• Unemployed for 3 months or more• No longer in full time employment or full-time education• Have engaged with training and/or employment/income support services for a minimum of 3 months
5	Young unemployed with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications	Semi-Urban; Limerick County	
6	Young unemployed with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications	Rural; South East	
7	Young unemployed early school leavers	Urban; Dublin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Young jobseekers who have not completed the Leaving Certificate or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications• Aged between 18 and 25• Gender mix• Unemployed for 3 months or more• Have engaged with training and/or employment/income support services for a minimum of 3 months
8	Young unemployed early school leavers	Semi-Urban; South East	
9	Young unemployed early school leavers	Rural; Midlands	

To support and complement the focus group research the researchers also undertook a series of 90 face to face interviews with young jobseekers both prior to *and* following completion of their meetings with the local Social Welfare Office based Jobs Facilitator. *Each* of these interviews included a short conversation (approximately 10 minutes) with the young jobseeker in advance of their meeting with the local Social Welfare Office based Jobs Facilitator *and* then a further short conversation (approximately 10 minutes) with the same jobseekers following their meetings with the Jobs Facilitator (i.e. approx. 20 minutes duration in total with each interviewee.) These interviews facilitated the development of a clearer understanding of the expectations that young jobseekers have as they approach these meetings and the extent to which these expectations were and were not realised. The 90 face to face ‘on-street’ intercept interviews with young jobseekers were conducted across 9 different urban and rural locations across the country. Each of the 90 interviewees was aged between 18 and 25 years of age and had engaged with the nationwide network of local Social Welfare Offices for a minimum of 3 months. These interviewees were recruited ‘on street’ as they approached the local Social Welfare Offices. Once having satisfied the research recruitment requirements the interview was conducted ‘there and then.’ Although the findings generated through this additional strand of research added very considerably to the body of data collected – particularly in respect of the identification of some key quantitative benchmark data – the recruitment process for the intercept interviews proved to be challenging – particularly from a timing and resources perspective. The conduct of these intercept interviews was governed by an interview questionnaire, a copy of which is included in Appendix Two.

To further inform the research process a short series of in-depth interviews with four key experts in the area of youth unemployment and training provision were conducted. These interviews not only assisted in the framing of relevant discussion guides for the primary research involving members of the targeted population of interest, but also contributed to and further informed the development of some key conclusions and recommendations on the subject of youth unemployment in Ireland in 2010. All of the various interviews and focus groups were conducted across September and October 2010. A range of ethical and safety considerations were built into the study design to ensure that a high quality and sensitive approach was used.

4 | ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The views expressed in this report are those of the author and the many research participants and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the sponsor.

5 | RESEARCH FINDINGS

This document explores the views of the young jobseekers on their experience with unemployment in general and their engagement and interaction with the key State employment, training and income support services in particular. These views are examined in some details across a series of separate sub-sections of this document as follows:

5.1 Feelings amongst young people on being unemployed in Ireland in 2010

- 5.1.1 The negative impact of unemployment on the young person’s sense of well being
- 5.1.2 High levels of youth unemployment and the wider societal impact
- 5.1.3 Future prospects thought to lack promise

5.2 Key concern – Lack of workplace experience

- 5.2.1 Shortage of training and education places – Real risk for young people with low qualifications

5.3 Job seeking – A demanding job in itself

- 5.3.1 Job seeking – missing skill sets
- 5.3.2 Job seeking – postponement of planned ‘milestone events’
- 5.3.3 Job seeking – challenge in presenting a positive front to prospective employers

5.4 Structural challenges facing young jobseekers

- 5.4.1 Lacking in professional experience – Few opportunities to ‘build experience’ or to advance skill sets and CV based ‘offering’
- 5.4.2 An isolating experience that offers few learning opportunities and which can contribute to a sense of personal failure and guilt
- 5.4.3 Financial hardship

5.5 Experience with the State provided employment, training and welfare/income support services

- 5.5.1 Core support requirements for a young jobseeker

5.1 | FEELINGS AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE ON BEING UNEMPLOYED IN IRELAND IN 2010

5.1.1 The negative impact of unemployment on the young person’s sense of well being

Research participants, in the main, described their experience of unemployment as one which is accompanied by a number of negative feelings such as low self esteem and low morale, feelings of hopelessness, despair and lack of choice, and in some cases admissions of instances of depression and stress. Financial shortage was also highlighted frequently and in many cases was thought to contribute to the young jobseekers sense of isolation and their experience of frustration and hardship. There was little to separate the three youth segments – early school leavers, those with a Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship qualifications, and third level graduates – in terms of their feelings towards being unemployed. Of the 150 or more young people that participated in the research *all* were very clearly frustrated with their experience of unemployment and demonstrated a real interest and desire in joining the workforce. A most significant proportion of the young people consulted as part of the research, were clearly unhappy with and far from proud to be unemployed and ‘signing on.’ All of the research participants stressed that they would ideally like to be in work as soon as possible.

“I knew for my last year or two in college that it could be very difficult to find a job and so I had kind of braced myself for it mentally...but after a few months you do feel down, you get more and more out of the loop, you probably go out less and less and become more insular...” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)**

“You can’t help but feel low....I try to stay positive as much as I can but you are anxious about the future, wondering what best to do, what lies in store for me...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)**

“...I hate it (being unemployed). It looks like you are doing nothing but after a year of it (unemployment) I actually felt more tired now than I ever did after a weeks work on the (construction) site. It just seems to get in on you....It’s very wearing...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Urban)**

“....When you are working things are so much easier....Sure you would get a bit hassled now and again but it’s nothing like the stress of not having a job...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“Just sitting at home and depressed, it is horrible. I started to feel bad after being unemployed for about 3 months.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

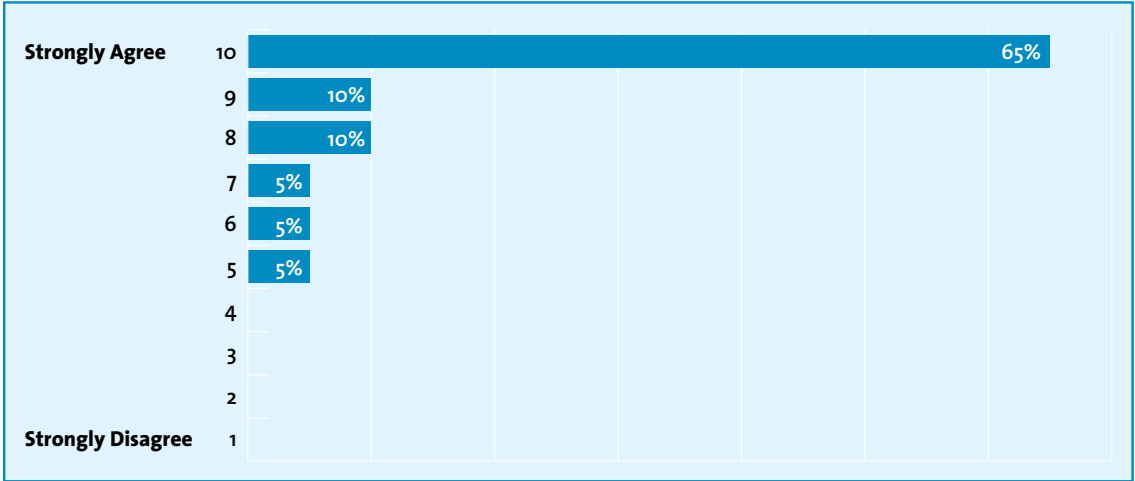
“When you are working or in college you are meeting people all the time....but when you are unemployed you might go a couple of days without having a conversation with someone...That’s depressing when you think about it.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

According to a number of key informants interviewed as part of the research process depression and feeling of hopelessness can be common amongst the young unemployed. It was also put forward that these “negative feelings can often lead to decreased self-esteem; a loss of self-confidence and general sense of unhappiness with their own life.” Indeed one expert interviewed suggested that a period of unemployment has the potential to have a most significant, detrimental effect on the life of a young person as they can lose “their sense of self confidence so easily...within 3 or 4 months even...feelings of depression and anxiety caused by

lack of certainty about their future can creep in.” Young people were thought to be particularly vulnerable as “the period of being inactive affects young people psychologically. As they just have their experience of education to fall back on, rather than experience in the work force, they have yet to prove to themselves that they are capable of functioning and coping successfully in the adult world. That fear and lack of confidence can be very real and very destabilising for a young person.”

Of the 90 young jobseekers that were interviewed on a one to one basis as part of this research process, a very considerable and worrying, 65% ‘very strongly’ agreed that being unemployed has had a negative effect on their sense of well being. Indeed there was little if any disagreement among the circa 150 young research participants that one’s sense of well being is negatively affected as a result of unemployment.

‘Being unemployed has had a negative effect on my sense of well being’



5.1.2 High levels of youth unemployment and the wider societal impact

Both the young people we spoke with and the experts interviewed were also most concerned with the medium to long term effects of an extended period of unemployment. There was very significant concern that a prolonged period of job searching would make it very difficult for a young person to integrate themselves into the workforce when the economy does ‘pick up’ in a number of years time. Indeed many of the young research participants were fearful that they would be ‘left behind’ when employment opportunities become more available in years to come due to the lengthy period of inactivity and their lack of workplace experience.

“If I knew it (period of unemployment) was just going to last for a year or two that would be fine...It’s the lack of any certainty and the fear about the future that gets to me the most....They (Government spokespeople, analysts, media commentators) say there is going to be some pick up (growth in employment in another two or three years) but how will an employer judge me if I having been sitting on the dole for the last two years.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)**

“It is hard dealing with the ‘now’ but its the long term you are most worried about...how to explain that huge gap in your CV....It would be much easier (for a prospective employer) to pick somebody with real experience or even a fresh graduate who would have more up to date skills and training...” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

*“It is **** trying to get by on a small amount of money each week but if you knew you were going to get a job in twelve months or even in two years that would be ok. It’s the lack of any certainty that is hard to take....Even if all these new jobs do come into the economy in another few years they are going to want people with (workplace) experience rather than fella’s that have been hanging around on the dole...” Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi–Urban)*

“I would be very concerned with the long term societal impact....huge numbers of young people unemployed...not occupied in a meaningful way...Of course its going to have an (detrimental) effect...”

“Young people’s lives can’t simply be put in cold storage.... the task of integrating these young people into work and mainstream society at the end of this period of economic turmoil is going to present a huge challenge....the costs of meeting that challenge will be very serious indeed.....Something meaningful has to be done now to address the situation, to give young people hope, to give them the skills and a real chance to cope when then economy does pick up again....Otherwise we (Irish society) are storing up a huge problem for ourselves...the social and economic effects could be very significant.”

“It is not simply a matter of taking these young people out of the moth balls and dusting them down in a few years time when there are jobs available....If that is the strategy response these young people really will become the lost generation...We have to be realistic...this (period of high unemployment) is going to take at least three to five years to correct...That (three to five year period) is too long for a young person to be inactive...the employer will simply move down to the next set of graduates and school leavers...they won’t want anyone who has that huge gap on their CV...This cohort (of young unemployed) will simply be bypassed (when employment opportunities become available again in years to come.)”

”It will be much harder for them (young person) to get a job if the young person has been jobless for a longer period than six months....the employer will look for the person with some work place experience on their CV.”

“The lost generation tag has become somewhat of an overused headline in recent times but it is a very real risk with this present batch of young (unemployed) people. Appropriate policy responses are needed now not in two or three years time....We (Irish society) have a real responsibility (to this cohort of young people)....Emigration can’t be the only policy response....We have to look after these young people who seem to have been unfortunate to have been born between 1987 and 1993...”

Experts interviewed as part of the process were also concerned with the long term societal impacts that may result from having a very significant proportion of young people that may be unemployed for a very lengthy period of time.

“Clearly, something must be done urgently or we risk losing a generation forever. Unless there is real engagement with these young people, in the form of training and meaningful connection to the world of work, there are real grounds for fearing that many will lose their way.”

“We (Irish society) are storing up huge problems for ourselves.....Apart from the damage done at the individual level...psychological, emotional, limiting the young persons scope for future advancement....other impacts will have to be addressed...long term dependency on social welfare and other benefits, a rise in mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, criminal behavior....From

a purely economic perspective....as that’s all that seems to really register with Government, policy makers and media commentators at the moment....this will have huge cost implications for the nation for years to come...We must address this issue (of youth unemployment now) or else the consequences will be far more significant in years to come...”

“All you have to do is examine the international literature (on unemployment).... Increased health care costs (resulting from a rise in unemployment) have been well documented. There is evidence that unemployment is a risk indicator for increasing alcohol consumption and drug abuse particularly in young men. Other health...mental and physical risks...are associated with unemployment....”

“When one lapses into a period of long term unemployment it is also possible to develop negative attitudes towards work...as you can lose confidence in your own abilities....”

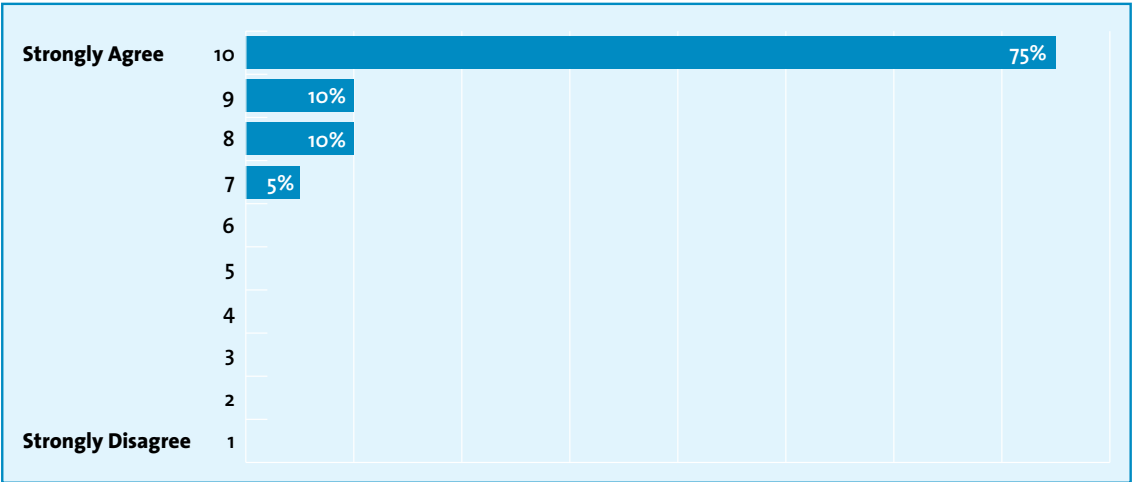
Recent literature¹ in the area of youth unemployment would strongly support these expert views and confirms how unemployment has a negative impact on both mental and physical health. In particular the literature points to how unemployment is associated with high levels of stress, causing unhappiness, loss of self-esteem and depression. The psychological impacts of unemployment are understood to persist over time, while unemployment that is longer in duration is more likely to produce harmful effects. This literature also recognises that the longer a person is unemployed, the greater the disadvantage they face in trying to find work and the greater the impact it has on morale and self-esteem. The Bell and Blanchflower research stressed that unemployment while young, particularly long-term unemployment, “causes permanent scars rather than temporary blemishes”. These authors went on to suggest that the impact of a period of unemployment is not limited to the present, “it raises the probability of being unemployed in later years and has a wage penalty. These effects are much larger than for older people.”

¹ Bell, D.N.F & Blanchflower, D.G. (2009) *What Should Be Done About Rising Unemployment in the OECD?* Bonn: IZA. Discussion Paper No. 4455

5.1.3
Future prospects thought to lack promise

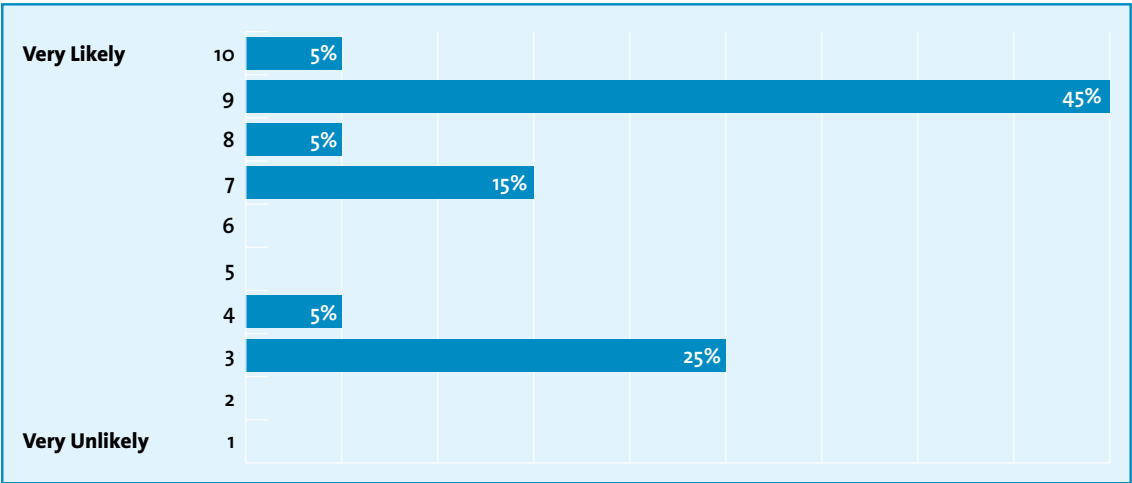
Of the 90 young jobseekers that were interviewed on a one to one basis a very significant 75% ‘very strongly’ agreed that the ‘prospects for securing rewarding employment in Ireland are not very good’. None of the research participants disagreed with this proposition.

‘Prospects for securing rewarding employment in Ireland are not very good’



Of those 90 interviewees 70% agreed that it is more likely – rather than less likely – that they will emigrate within the next 12 months in response to their status of being unemployed here in Ireland.

‘As a result of being unemployed here in Ireland how likely is it that you will emigrate within the next 12 months?’



“After four years in university, with a first class honors degree under my belt it is disappointing that the only realistic option available to me is emigration.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)**

“They (Government) are relying on large amounts of us (young unemployed) emigrating over the next few years....” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

“It (emigration) seems to be the only policy response that they have.... Government are completely reliant on it (emigration) as a way to respond to the huge numbers of young people unemployed in Ireland.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)**

“.....Talk to any young person at the moment and emigration is on their mind...There just aren’t enough opportunities here (in Ireland)” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Urban)**

“....Definitely...I am going to go (emigrate)...I don’t want to be sitting on the dole here (in Ireland) for another three or four years...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“I am sure it (large scale emigration) is built into the economic projections for the next five years because there doesn’t seem to be any meaningful policies being developed to help young unemployed people.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“You wonder do they (Government/policy makers) really want us (young unemployed) to stay (in Ireland)...We (social welfare recipients) are a drain...we are costing them (the exchequer) money...so they would probably be glad to see the back of us for a few years...That’s the way you feel anyway.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

“You (the young unemployed) certainly don’t feel encouraged to stay at the moment...Nobody is telling us there is light at the end of the tunnel...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“...It (emigration) is a handy way for them ((Government /policy makers) to export the problem and to cut the costs (burden of social welfare payments on the national exchequer)...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“It (emigration) probably isn’t written down or talked of (as a policy) but it certainly wouldn’t do the country any harm at the moment (if a large proportion of young jobseekers were to emigrate).” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

5.2 | KEY CONCERN – LACK OF WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE

The downturn in the economy since early 2008 was naturally identified as *the* single biggest factor in obstructing the young jobseekers in their efforts to secure a job. Although the research participants identified a number of reasons as to why a young person may be unemployed – such as poor or limited education, undeveloped skills, intense job competition, low motivation for finding a job, limited commitment to the job search – ‘lack of workplace experience’ was consistently identified as *the* most significant barrier to entry to the jobs market. Indeed more so than academic experience and qualifications young people thought that job experience was the main factor or ‘lever’ involved in securing a job in 2010.

“First and foremost there are very few jobs available but setting that aside we (young people with limited or no professional experience) or at the bottom of the list in terms of our attractiveness to an employer...They (employers) have the pick of the crop....While I have a First Class honours degree and a Masters they (employers) are going to pick the person (job candidate) who has the work experience on their CV...” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“We (young people with limited or no professional experience) are at the bottom of the ladder.... Everyone (all job candidates) has a qualification, a good degree, a post grad maybe but when you don’t have professional experience you are snookered (not attractive to an employer).” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

“With so many people losing their job there are so many candidates (for the employer) to choose from....Why would they pick somebody with no experience in the job when they can pick somebody with loads of experience....It’s a buyers market (favouring the employer) and when you have no experience you will lose out.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban)**

“There are loads of people looking for jobs which means they are going for jobs that they are way over qualified for...It means a graduate is competing for an entry level job with somebody who might have five years experience under their belt....You can’t compete against that.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)**

“Experience is the thing I really want to pick up now....I would have no problem in working for free or working for the equivalent of a dole cheque at the moment...It will help me to develop the experience I need and would avoid me having a big glaring gap in my CV...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“It is very hard to find a job if you have no experience. Experience is now more important than education. After the jobs shortage, lacking experience is the main problem (facing the young unemployed).” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

5.2.1
Shortage of training and education places
– Real risk for young people with low qualifications

A number of experts drew particular attention to the distinction between the ‘structural’ issue of youth unemployment – that is the incidence of youth unemployment that occurs regardless of the economic conditions prevailing at any one time – and this current ‘cyclical’ issue of youth unemployment. From a policy perspective, this poses some important issues. In particular, there is a risk in expecting that the existing ‘structural programmes’ such as schools and the further education centres have the ability to also contend with this current ‘cyclical’ issue of youth unemployment *within their existing resources*. Indeed it was suggested that the most likely outcome of this would be that the ‘most needy’ are edged out by the more ‘work-ready.’ It will therefore be important, for those involved in policy development, not to lose sight of the structural issues, to maintain structural provision and to retain focus on the structural problem it was originally intended to address.

According to a recent survey conducted by the Teachers’ Union of Ireland² the number of people looking for a place on courses run by Further Education Colleges rose very dramatically for the second year running. The Union estimated that for the 2010/2011 academic years there were three applicants for every Post Leaving Certificate place available. This compares with an estimated two applicants for every place in 2009. The proposal for establishing additional temporary provision in the form of a national traineeship programme to address the current ‘cyclical’ problem of unprecedented levels of unemployment among our low-skilled youth was therefore re-enforced by a number of the experts consulted as part of this research.

“Across the vocational education and training system there is hugely increased demand for places. This is brought about by two factors....(1) as a result of the loss of employment opportunities for those leaving the education system and (2) the increase in numbers of those have been made unemployed in the last two years. For a decade....from about 1996 to 2006, there were ample employment opportunities in Ireland even for those with poor qualifications, especially but not entirely in construction and retail. That (direct route from school to employment) is not available now. There is now a second very significant group...those that have enjoyed employment, often pretty well paid, but who have no or few skills with which to compete in the new economy.”

“Early school leaving and long-term youth unemployment is a structural issue...that is, it has always existed to some extent and it is very hard to lower beyond a particular base level which had been stable for more than a decade. Vocational training programmes for early school leavers are principally a response to this structural, ongoing issue. For the last decade near full employment has meant that these structural training and education programmes have been contending almost exclusively with the structural issue of early school leaving and long-term youth unemployment. But now as labour market demand is non-existent, these training and education programmes are encountering a second flow....those who would have been entering work directly but now can’t. Their numbers are quite significant and the demands they present are different.”

“With some effective joined-up-thinking and collaboration between the relevant bodies, cost effective responses can be found. For example, the IOT’s (Institutes of Technology) VECs, FÁS could, probably at short notice, collaboratively establish a new form of apprenticeship/traineeship programme to meet the needs of these low skilled unemployed young people.

2 Survey of colleges offering Post Leaving Certificate programmes, Teachers’ Union of Ireland, 2010

“It should be possible to put some kind of traineeships in place that would involve a balanced mix of work-experience and education and training, with those completing these ‘traineeships’ receiving FETAC qualifications at levels 5 and 6.”

“Additional provision (for apprenticeship/traineeship programmes) must be put in place or else these young people simply will be at real risk of ongoing, long term unemployment.”

“...There simply aren’t enough places.....The system needs additional places to cope any way effectively with the demand that it is currently experiencing...”

“The current lack of provision means that young people are being denied the opportunity to further their education and many will now have no option but to claim unemployment benefit.”

Experts interviewed as part of the process were particularly concerned with the future prospects available to young unemployed people that are defined as having ‘low skills.’ This ‘segment’ would commonly include early school leavers and those that have not engaged in any further training – either third level education, vocational or apprenticeship training – following their exit from school. Particular concern was expressed with the current cap on provision of education and training places for the many thousands of young unemployed people with low qualifications. Experts recognised that although there are some very appropriate training and education programmes already in place – the Youthreach programme was highlighted frequently as a good case example – the current scale of unemployment among our low skilled youth is currently so great that the needs of many are now going unmet. It was emphasised that there is a real risk that many of these young people will become unemployable in the long term unless they acquire skills relevant to the future workplace.

Although the numbers of young people in third level education have increased significantly in very recent years, the numbers involved in ‘further education’ – which traditionally caters to the lower skilled and least advantaged are effectively capped. The demand for further education programmes – apprenticeships, traineeships, Post Leaving Certificate Programmes (PLC’s), and basic adult education programmes – that could assist the low skilled is now, according to the experts interviewed as part of this research study, understood to far outweigh supply.

“These young people with relatively low skills and no real experience of the world of work are effectively unemployable in a knowledge economy. If we desert them at this point, they are liable to drift indefinitely on the unemployment scrap-heap. It is absolutely critical that education, training and the world of work connects with these young people now.....In five years time it will be too late for many of these young people.”

“We (policy makers) rightly encourage our young unemployed to undertake training or education but now as provision is capped – many are left in no man’s land. When the economy eventually does pick up there will only be jobs for those with appropriate skills....”

“Normally 10,000 to 11,000 young people go directly from school to employment. That avenue (post second level employment) just isn’t available to them anymore. If we are going to go any way towards providing an education and training platform for those young people with relatively low basic skills and little prospect of employment in the near future then there is a need for an extra 10,000 to 15,000 PLC places, not the 1,500 extra places that have been recently allocated.”

“International evidence found that the Youthreach model is entirely consistent with international best practice in meeting the training and education needs of young people with relatively low basic

skills but at the moment the system can only provide approximately 6,000 places overall.....very small numbers in the context of the present youth unemployment scenario.”

“I am sure it sounds dramatic but we are effectively consigning these (low skilled) young people to the scrap heap unless we get them into some meaningful training and education scheme that preferably provides some form of work placed training...We need to demonstrate that there is a future for them in the workplace, to show employers that they are employable and to provide them with skills that they need when the job opportunities do arise.”



5.3 | JOB SEEKING – A DEMANDING JOB IN ITSELF

Having spoken with approximately 150 young jobseekers it became quickly apparent that job seeking is clearly very hard work, which can involve frequent experience of personal failure and rejection. While unemployment, as a concept, may invoke images of idle passivity, job seeking tends to be a very onerous and demanding process which can involve a series of activities that require intense and demanding emotional effort. For the majority of the young jobseekers that participated in the research the ‘real time’ experience of job searching is one of repeated rejection. The process typically involves the development and circulation of large numbers of CV’s while not receiving any response from targeted employers. The prevalence of depression which is well documented in the literature and which was reinforced by the young people that participated in this research – and which is documented earlier in this report – is not simply the result of the absence of a ‘work identity’ but is also actively reinforced by the ‘lived experience’ of the ongoing rejection associated with job searching in Ireland in 2010.

“It’s difficult to say this and feel you will be taken seriously but it (job searching) is really hard work.... If you are serious about it you could spend five, six, seven, eight hours a day on it. Now that (level of time commitment) might taper off after a few months because it really is (emotionally) draining. You just can’t give it the same effort every day....” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban)**

“.....From searching the recruitment web-sites, developing a CV which takes a lot of work, checking the listings posted in the job centres, researching roles and jobs that might suit, checking out training and post-grad opportunities, writing cover letters, printing and posting everything, preparing for interviews....It’s a full time job....but one with very little satisfaction....At the moment you are getting nothing in return for all the effort you put in....” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

“....I try to devote a certain number of hours to it each day....At the start I was probably spending all day every day at it (job searching) but I don’t think you can do that indefinitely you just get worn out....” **Young job seeking early school leavers (Semi-Urban)**

“It is very demoralising....there is no wage pack at the end of the day, no one to tell you ‘good job’ just a never ending stream of PFO’s (letters of rejection) telling you that you ‘haven’t been successful on this occasion’....that is of course if you are lucky enough to get the letter (of rejection).” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

“You can’t help but build yourself up for each and every job you apply for...More than a little part of you thinks ‘Yeah I have a shot with this one’ so each time you open up your email or a letter of rejection your heart sinks....” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“For the first six or nine months (of active job seeking) I was spending a minimum of six or eight hours a day working on something (associated with the job search process)...research, working on the CV, applying for jobs....but when you don’t get anywhere with them (various applications) it gets more than a little trying.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)**

*“PFO (letter of rejection) after PFO....it really ***** you off after a while. Of course, it (ongoing rejection by targeted employers) could become depressing....”* **Young job seeking early school leaver (Urban)**

“If you are serious about it I am sure you would invest as much, if not way more, energy in it (the job search process) than you would in any job...that’s the way I feel about it anyway.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban)**

“...I am sure people who are working think most unemployed people are doing nothing but if you are serious about it (job searching) you could be working really hard....and all for little or no return....” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

Most of the young research participants that had been unemployed for a year or more had started their job search with a degree of relative optimism that the ‘search process’ would be short and result in securing some placement. These initial experiences of plentiful opportunities often quickly give way to self-doubt, and feelings of stress, anxiety and depression. While ‘loss of identity’ is certainly a significant cause of the negative subjective feeling experienced by the young jobseeker it is clearly intensified by the demanding daily practice associated with job hunting.

“...When I first started looking...for the first few months even I was pretty upbeat...There were a lot of (job) listings on the (recruitment) websites...You are under the impression ‘ah there is something out there for me’...It’s only after a few months you start to think ‘there is nothing going on here’...I am not even getting any interviews for the huge number of jobs that I apply for...then it becomes disheartening.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)**

*“...I worked my **** off for the first few months...I still am trying really hard....It’s a real slog applying for every job that you think you might have a shot at...then bundle this (the effort of the job search process) in with having no money, no social outlet and nothing but a series of ‘no thank you’ letters form potential employers...You can’t but feel down.”* **Young job seeking early school leaver (Urban)**

“Of course I knew the economy was in trouble and that jobs were harder to come by but I thought ‘I have a good degree, I’m reasonably intelligent...I don’t have wild expectations (as to the position that might be secured)’....that I should be able to tie something (a job) down within six or nine months....It was six months before I even got called for an aptitude test not to mind an interview. That’s hard to take.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“It’s (the job search process) a real grind....each day checking websites, looking for leads, going down to check the job listings posted in FÁS” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Urban)**

For those research participants who had started the job search more recently it would appear that this is no longer the case. There was a clear expectation amongst these jobseekers that the process would take some significant amount of time – possibly one to two years – before they would secure employment.

5.3.1
Job seeking – missing skill sets

The young research participants often characterised their experience of job seeking as an ‘invisible’ yet often demanding and arduous activity which requires a significant variety of skills many of which have to be self-taught and learnt through experience or ‘trial and error.’ Among the skills highlighted were the following:

- How to research leads and opportunities across industries, professions and individual companies
- How to write a memorable CV
- How to develop and tailor cover letters that make an impact
- How to improve general interview performance
- How to prepare for an interview involving a specific role
- How to develop a succinct ‘elevator pitch’
- How to network with potential job leads

It was described in various terms as ‘unfortunate’, ‘frustrating’ and in some cases ‘neglectful’ that young jobseekers are not actively trained, as a matter of course, in these key facets of job searching.

“Nobody tells you anything...what to do, how to look for a job. You just figure it out yourself....and try to learn from experience...Having said that I still haven’t got a job so I am not sure if I am really learning anything useful (about the job search process).” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi–Urban)**

“You do feel as if you are completely on your own....Nobody’s there to show you how to write up a CV or a cover letter....how to search properly for jobs in your area....It’s all just very ‘hit and miss’....real trial and error...Your friends tell you where they are looking and you try there as well....but I am sure there are some techniques that you should know about...I know I have improved my own CV over time but that’s only one small ingredient....there should be some course you could go on....on job-hunting...how to write a CV, cover letter, how to research jobs, how to prepare for interviews, how to do a good interview...that kind of thing....Otherwise you are just learning from your own, unsuccessful, experiences...” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“....I know there are very few jobs out there but I do feel like I could present myself better, I could approach it (job searching) in a more effective way but I wouldn’t know who to ask for help in this area.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“It’s a battle to get on a course as everything is over-subscribed...the least they (State services) should be doing for you is providing some coaching or guidance on key things like CV and interview preparation...When you think about it its staggering that nothing like this has been offered to us (young jobseekers).” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

The young jobseekers also suggested that it can be very easy to spend much of their time looking for job advertisements on the many recruitment websites. The ‘relatively’ lengthy lists of jobs posted on the online recruitment sites can create the mistaken impression that there are a lot of jobs out there. This according to many of the participants can lead to an obsessive checking of new advertisements.

“You do become obsessed...there are about three recruitment websites that I check every single day....but then you become so anxious that you can go back later on in the day to check the website again for new postings or your email for new alerts (about job postings).” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)**

“I could see how easy it is to become obsessive....the penny just dropped with me last week that I had checked the same website three times in the same day for new postings....You get anxious and you want to be doing something...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi–Urban)**

5.3.2
Job seeking – postponement of planned ‘milestone events’

The absence of any form of certainty as to what their short to medium, let alone their long term, future may look like, whether ‘it’ – securing a job or a work placement – may happen in six months or in two years has caused many to postpone very significant planned ‘milestone events.’ For the research participants actively engaged in job searching there are, at present, no partial victories, only rejections or job offers.

“I am always thinking about the future now....My own (plan) has been knocked down now (as a result of unemployment). We were to get married this year....We had put a deposit down on a house...but now that’s all on hold until I get a job (postponed indefinitely).....It (unemployment) means that we (partner and newborn child) can’t all live together...We simply can’t afford to...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Urban)**

“Everything is on hold now.....Simple luxuries like buying a car are out of the question but the really important things like whether or not to have kids or get married...It will be years before you can even contemplate that kind of decision...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“You (the young unemployed person) are in a kind of suspended animation...It’s like limbo...All the things you would have like to have done or were just about to do...like getting married, having a baby, buying a house...have shot out the window (become unattainable or deferred indefinitely.)” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“....Everything (life related decisions) is now on the long finger (postponed indefinitely)....I would be confident the only one decision that most of us (young jobseekers) are thinking of now is whether to emigrate this year or next....that’s it really...If we choose to stay we will have to put off doing anything significant for another five years...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

5.3.3.
Job seeking – challenge in presenting a positive front to prospective employers

Many of the research participants suggested that one of the most challenging aspects involved in job searching is the requirement to have a level of ‘emotional dexterity’ to present a positive front to potential employers and job leads while experiencing internal turmoil.

“....I have only had a few interviews at this stage....but even though you are desperate to get them (the job associated with the interview) you do find that you have to ‘lift yourself’ out of the kind of malaise that you are in on a day to day basis...An employer doesn’t want to detect anyone who is down beat...” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

“...I had one interview last month for a job I would have loved but I found I had to give myself a bit of a slap before I went in (to the interview)...You get quite down, lethargic even when you are job hunting.... You don’t want to project that during an interview...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“....The books (on interview preparation) tell you that you should appear confident...but that’s quite hard to do when you know they could be interviewing 30 or 50 other people for this one job...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“It is challenging to portray utter confidence (in an interview situation) when you really feel quite depressed.....” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)**

“...It (the job search) does take its toll on you so it’s hard to lift your game when you do eventually get an interview...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)**

5.4 | STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES FACING YOUNG JOBSEEKERS

5.4.1
Lacking in professional experience – Few opportunities to ‘build experience’ or to advance skill sets and CV based ‘offering’

Many of the young research participants indicated that they felt ‘insecure’ about the quality and particularly the ‘depth’ of their CV. The absence of any significant professional workplace experience was thought to represent a very significant gap or weakness in their ‘offering’ to potential employers.

“The academic side of the CV looks good but I have no professional experience to showcase...That’s a real weakness for me...” Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)

“Without blowing my own trumpet too much I have a lot of good things...academic prizes, good results to feature on my CV but I have very little workplace stuff to show (a prospective employer)... That’s why I am targeting some companies for an internship...I need to build up that side of my CV...” Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)

“....That’s why (absence of meaningful workplace experience) I am not getting the jobs....It’s a real catch 22...You can’t get the job without the experience while you can’t get the experience without the job.” Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)

“....You know you are competing with people who have lost their jobs but who are a few years older than you and who have professional experience.....It’s hard to stack up against that...” Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)

The jobs market in Ireland in 2010 was described in various less than positive terms; ‘very competitive’, ‘non-existent’ and a ‘buyer’ or ‘employers market’ were the terms most frequently used by the young research participants. The young jobseekers frequently suggested that the employer has the ‘pick of the bunch’ and could therefore afford to set a very high basic standard or set of requirement for each advertised post. Of the circa 150 young people that participated in the research few had successfully advanced to the interview stage with a prospective employer. The requirement for advanced qualifications – often at a post graduate level – and professional experience – for a minimum of one or two years in duration – appeared to preclude most of the research participants from progressing successfully to the interview stage of the recruitment process.

“....I have applied for over fifty jobs and haven’t got one interview.....Some of them I wouldn’t have thought I would be applying for.....but they (employers) are able to set the standard so high that you don’t get a look in....An interview is out of the question...” Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)

“....Every time I look at a new job spec I scroll straight down to the essential criteria....If it’s two years or more experience....I just move on to the next job....It (the setting of standards for ‘essential criteria’ for candidates) really does narrow down the field (of available jobs)...” Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)

“....Each job advert usually lists ‘Masters’ and a years professional experience as a pre-requisite....It of-

ten means there is no point applying as you (the recent graduate) don’t have that years experience.” Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)

“....It’s no surprise that I haven’t got an interview yet as all the jobs (advertisements) say you need a year or two years experience...I apply anyway with a groveling letter....A lot of the time I don’t even get a reply...” Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)

There was commonly held agreement amongst the research participants that it is considerably easier for a candidate to secure a new job in instances when that candidate already has a job or has a ‘bank’ of professional experience to showcase to a prospective employer. Therefore many of the participants had recently made a conscious decision to apply for as many basic ‘entry level positions’ as possible – many of which they would normally be over qualified for – in a bid to secure ‘something’ and thereby to attain the much needed workplace experience which would allow them to progress in the jobs market. Many of the jobseekers expressed a desire to engage in an internship programme or some meaningful non-paid work in a bid to improve the quality of their CV, increase their general attractiveness to potential employers and keep their skills current.

“You simply have to have experience....Without it you can kiss your chances goodbye....A friend of my dad’s, as a favour to him, has offered me a placement for six maybe twelve months...I am really pleased...Ok I will be basically working for pocket money but at least I can develop my CV and hopefully then in another year I can tick an important box...’Yes I do have experience...” Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)

“I have started to look around and search out opportunities to do an internship in the area I am interested in....Even these (positions) if they are advertised are seriously competitive....but from what I can see if you don’t have experience you won’t get a job...” Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)

“It’s all about getting some experience....a year or preferably two...I am to hear next week if I have been accepted onto a Masters Programme but to be honest if I got the offer of an internship I would take that first.” Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)

“It’s the only way you can get your foot on the ladder.....If you want to stay in Ireland you (the young jobseeker) will either have to go back to college, sign on (social welfare) or else do a non paid internship...If it’s a decent organisation the internship is probably the best way to go....It will give you the best chance of securing something salaried down the road (in the future)...” Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)

“I am going to look at doing some pro-bono stuff to try and keep the CV ticking over and to keep my skills up to date.” Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban)

““I have contacted a couple of charities to see if I can do some work experience. It will help to build up the CV a little bit.” Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)

Engaging in further or higher education tended to be the next most desired ‘strategy’ to combat this period of joblessness. Young early school leavers and those jobseekers that had previously completed an apprenticeship appeared, in the main, to be extremely open to and

interested in taking up a place in further education. Third level graduates were however notably less enthusiastic about engaging in further ‘higher level’ education. Awareness of the Back to Education Allowance and Back to Work Enterprise Allowance and their availability, appeared to be significantly higher amongst early school leavers and those who had gone through apprenticeship and/or vocational training previously. Interestingly third level graduates highlighted cost as a significant barrier which may discourage them from pursuing any further higher level education in the short to medium term. Several of the third level graduates were also skeptical of the ability of a further period of higher education to heighten the attractiveness of the graduate to the work place employer.

“I would definitely do another apprenticeship....I just came out of the last one (in plumbing) at the wrong time as the (construction) industry began to crash...but if I could find something that would give me a good chance of getting a good job at the end that would be great...I would like to do something in IT...There is a lot of talk about the knowledge economy so that would seem like a wise move.... Doing the training would also provide me some income....You should qualify for an allowance.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban)**

“Having seen the construction industry just die you do realise that you need new skills....I would be happy to do some other type of traineeship if they (course providers) could show me that there are going to be jobs at the end of it.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“I don’t know about (skeptical) doing a Masters or some other Post Grad...first of all they are really expensive.... €5,000 or €10,000 and then you have to keep yourself...You wouldn’t get any social welfare or would you? The other thing that might put me off would be the lack of ‘value’ that employers place on ‘pure education’. From what I am seeing you have to have work place experience....So if an internship or some work placement programme came up I would prioritise that (over higher education).” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“It’s (post graduate education) too expensive and also you have to wonder would it bring you any closer to getting a job....I think if you were to do one you should do it in something very practical and oriented at the few professions that are hiring...some specialist type of Masters in Finance maybe... that might provide you with a route to a job.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

5.4.2
An isolating experience that offers few learning opportunities and which can contribute to a sense of personal failure and guilt

Job searching is conducted in isolation, with little, if any, social interaction to provide a break. The process offers little if any feedback that may provide the young jobseeker an opportunity to learn about where they are doing well and areas in which they could improve. In particular research participants spoke of the lack of mutual support networks for young jobseekers to talk about the feelings of rejection associated with job hunting. Networking was also thought to provide a much needed opportunity to present employers with something more than the candidates CV. However it was suggested that there are very few meaningful opportunities available to network with peers or indeed with potential employers.

“You are on your own a lot throughout the (job seeking) process....As your money is very tight you can’t go out to socialise much...so there is little opportunity to talk things through with people who are going through the same experience...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

“Even though unemployment figures are at a record high and it (unemployment) has been normalized to an extent there is still a certain stigma associated with it.....There doesn’t seem to be any opportunity to get together with other people who are in the same position...to swap stories, share advice....that kind of thing....” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“Some of the professional bodies do careers talks but they are limited enough...and anyway you have to be a paid up member to attend....As we (young people with limited workplace experience) aren’t making it through to the interview stage we aren’t really getting to hear what the employer is looking for...or to hear what advice they might have for a prospective candidate....” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“It would be good if some of the larger companies got their HR people to give free careers seminars... even if they aren’t hiring...to show what they do look for during a recruitment process....to case study some good and bad practice interview examples...that kind of thing would be really helpful.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

When commenting on their interaction with the key State support services operating in this area – FÁS and the Social Welfare Office – the young participants suggested that much of the limited advice offered emphasises a dominant ‘self help’ discourse which encourages the young person to mistakenly believe that finding a job is entirely in their control. While this discourse and ‘positioning’ of the job search process that awaits the young jobseekers is initially motivational it can, over time, intensify the young persons’ sense of personal failure. The message often promoted that if you have the right attitude and tenacity ‘you can get whatever job you want’ was thought to be misguided. It was suggested that such a message may be inspiring to someone who has recently lost their job. But to someone looking in vain for six months or a year it was suggested that the hidden message is that if you have not gotten a job it is your fault, you must have a bad attitude or something else is wrong with you.

“When you go in first (to FÁS or the Social Welfare Office) they do try and suggest that there are opportunities out there...I know they have to give you a sense of hope....but it really is creating an unrealistic level of expectation.....Nine months of trying and I haven’t even got an interview...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

“....When I went to FÁS for an interview I left thinking that if I applied myself really diligently to job hunting I would definitely get a job....that they (jobs) were out there for the taking....but a year later I know that simply isn't true there are no jobs to speak of...But you end up blaming yourself for a while...that you aren't working hard enough....” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

It was in this context that many of the young people suggested that “*at least the harsh realities of the current labour market have been emphasised by various political and media commentators and so you are less likely to see unemployment as a personal failure.*”

It was also suggested that the job search process can taint hobby or leisure activities with a feeling of ‘guilt’. As more than one research participant suggested “*you feel you have to cover up any involvement in leisure activities as you don't feel you should be participating in anything that's too much fun.*”



5.4.3 Financial hardship

The work of job searching is clearly performed against the backdrop of utter financial anxiety and uncertainty. Many of the young people that participated in the research continue to depend on the goodwill and support of their parents as they wait for lengthy periods – very often three to four months at a time – for a social welfare application to be processed.

“Apart from having nothing meaningful to keep you occupied or anything to ‘test’ you apart from the near impossible task of securing a job...You are completely broke as well....Talk about cruel and unusual punishment...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban)**

“You have no money to do anything....I finished college in June and nearly five months later am still waiting for my social welfare to come through (application to be approved)....At the moment I am living on my old college overdraft but that is nearly maxed out...” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“....Being completely broke as a student is ok....You can cope with that....but being totally broke when you have graduated and then having to move back in with your parents after four years away is just disheartening...then having to ask your mother for bus fair at age twenty four...It's embarrassing.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)**

“Three months after applying for welfare I don't even know if I am going to get it...That uncertainty kind of forces your hand....I have to borrow money to be able to print copies of my CV and post it off... If it (the time lag in approving social welfare) is a strategy to prompt emigration it will probably work with me as I simply won't be able to last here (in Ireland) for much longer.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)**

All of the research participants stressed the obvious importance of the financial support made available through social welfare. A large majority of the young jobseekers indicated that they are now completely and solely dependent on social welfare support. The income provided through social welfare assistance is central to providing these young jobseekers with the very basic requirements of food and shelter. Those that have yet to have their application for social welfare processed and those that have been unsuccessful in securing social welfare support – often the case for young jobseekers who have returned to the family home and after means testing do not qualify for assistance – tend to depend on a high degree of family support usually in the form of food and lodgings.

“Without social welfare I guess I would have to emigrate...I just wouldn't be able to buy food and pay for the electricity and rent...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“....I dread to think where I would be without the family support I receive....I hate having to be still dependent on them but it's just a fact of life..... I have to live and eat....” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“I'm twenty four and I still get pocket money from my mum....I have no job so it's (unemployment) like a return to childhood....I can't even buy my own socks...” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

Although the majority of those research participants that had been unsuccessful in their

application for social welfare were aware of the existence of an appeals mechanism, none had actively challenged the decision not to award social welfare.

Discussion on the cuts to social welfare was introduced to all nine of the focus groups. Although the young jobseekers were clearly disappointed that social welfare would be targeted for cost savings the main priority for the vast majority is, or has been until very recently, the challenge in getting their application for social welfare benefits approved.

*“It took so long...probably four months in all to get my social welfare approved....I am just happy that something (income) is coming in now (regardless of any cuts that may have been made).”***Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

*“Well at the moment I am operating on nothing (no income at all) so the prospect of receiving any social welfare is very attractive at the moment....It’s (my application) been about five weeks now so I am really keen to get a payment...”***Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)**

*“The economy is so screwed at the moment you knew they had to cut social welfare....Having said that it’s a very modest amount to be living on each week.”***Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

*“...I think it’s really unfair that they are targeting the most vulnerable...people that have lost their jobs and cutting the small social welfare benefits that they receive....Having said that my main crib is the length of time it takes to get an application processed...”***Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

*“....Social welfare keep asking me for new pieces of information to support my application....they are wondering as I am originally from Northern Ireland do I qualify for ROI social welfare? Do I satisfy the habitual residence condition? I know for a fact I do....but their lack of certainty is delaying my application significantly...It’s about twelve weeks now...I would have agreed to take a voluntary cut in my social welfare in return for a speedier approval.”***Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)**

It was also suggested that the current system of support appears to exclude discussion of the financial crisis that many young jobseekers are facing. Many of the young research participants indicated that, in parallel to a very modest or no income at all, they are carrying a debt burden generated over a number of years – either as a college student or while they were employed in the workforce. There was a call for this pressure to be discussed by policy makers and media commentators and for support to be provided for young unemployed people who are trying to service debt.

*“Of course I would have huge sympathy for middle aged people who have lost their jobs and are experiencing difficulty in paying their mortgages but at least this is being discussed in the media.... Policy makers are doing something about it (mortgage debt) through the introduction of agreed codes of practice but there is nothing said about the graduate who is out of college for a year or two, hasn’t got their social welfare approved yet is struggling to keep on top of a student loan they needed to put them through college. So I am broke now, my career prospects don’t look good and my credit rating is going to be wrecked as well....”***Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

*“....My student loan repayments are to kick in in another month....I am living on a loan from my parents at the moment while I am waiting for the social welfare to come through...It’s kind of stressful...”***Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

*“...I was working in a good job in the building (trade)...Like everyone else I ran up a bit of debt while I was working.....car loan, credit card that kind of thing but now I don’t have a chance of paying it back on the social welfare.....”***Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban)**

*“....I wish you could get some financial advice...I knew how to live on a tight budget when I was a student but now I have to live on a very tight budget while paying off a hefty student loan.”***Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

*“It would be great to talk to a financial consultant or someone who could give advice on managing during this period and particularly how to deal with credit card companies, and how to delay payments on loans...”***Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban)**

5.5 | EXPERIENCE WITH THE STATE PROVIDED EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND WELFARE/INCOME SUPPORT SERVICES

When commenting on the State provided employment, training and welfare/income support services young jobseekers most frequently identified with and were most comfortable in discussing the service offerings provided by the Social Welfare Local Offices and FÁS. The discussions at the nine focus group meetings, and indeed during the go on-street intercept interviews, therefore focused primarily on the service experience associated with these two key service providers. The findings put forward in this particular section relate directly to the young research participants experiences with and perceptions of these two service providers.

It is important to note than many of the comments and views put forward by the young jobseekers were prefaced by an acknowledgement that these services are possibly over-stretched themselves having to respond to the impact of the recession and the rapid growth in joblessness. At all nine of the focus groups there was an amount of unprompted discussion which demonstrated a real recognition that these two services are responding to a most significant surge in demand over the last three years.

Interestingly, although the researchers heard stories of frustration and disappointment at the difficulties facing young jobseekers and their experience in dealing with these two services, there was also a measure of sympathy with the challenges facing the Social Welfare Office and FÁS service personnel.

“....As much as I would give out about them I am sure its not the easiest job....The sheer numbers they have to meet with and assess is staggering...You only really get a true sense for it when you go to sign on....The queues go out the building and down the street all the way to the traffic lights...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

*“....You would have some sympathy for them (the Social Welfare office personnel)....Anytime you go into the office the place is mobbed.....they have had to cope with a huge increase in numbers....”***Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

*“They (Social Welfare and FÁS) are the two State services that are having to cope with the brunt of the recession....You would wonder with all the talk of freezes on public sector recruitment did they (the two services) get any additional resources...They probably didn’t and are having to respond to the huge increase in numbers with a limited set of resources...”***Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

*“....their numbers (of clients served) have probably gone through the roof (increased dramatically) in the last two or three years....There is now no way they can provide the level of one to one service that is required with the huge numbers they are serving....Sure the queues are out the door...”***Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“...they (service personnel at both Social Welfare and FÁS) have it tough enough....We (jobseekers), I’m sure are a demanding lot....Most of us our stressed out...easy enough to aggravate....they would want to have good ‘soft skills’ to deal with that (continual flow of unemployed cases) on a day in day out basis...Its probably quite wearing for them...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban)**

*“.....We (Ireland) have gone from boom to bust and a period of near full employment to record levels of unemployment in such a short period of time....Of course the system (and these two key service providers) is going to have difficulty in responding effectively.”***Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

*“.....They (Social Welfare and FÁS) wouldn’t have been dealing with a fraction of the numbers they have to deal with now....It’s got to be challenging...”***Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**



5.5.1
Core support requirements for a young jobseeker

Seven key themes emerged from the research in respect of the young jobseekers engagement with the Social Welfare Local and Branch Offices *and* the FÁS Local Employment Services. Each of these seven themes – or core support requirements for a young jobseeker – is explored in some detail in the section of the report that follows this summary list:

1. The importance of customer service – and those who underpin it. The quality and commitment of service personnel was identified as being critical to the successful delivery of these two key services.
2. Consistency of service delivery – same high standard of delivery to be experienced on each service encounter.
3. Ease of understanding as to what to expect from the two services and the setting of a realistic length of time that it will take to process a social welfare application.
4. An efficient and effective method of data collection, retention and provision.
5. Smooth process of referral from one key service to the other.
6. Tailoring of the service offering to match individual client requirements.
7. Provision of un-restrictive and high quality job information.

1. Customer service – The quality & commitment of service personnel

As a very substantial part of the interaction with either a Social Welfare Local or Branch Office or a FÁS Local Employment Service is with a person, the attitude and approach of that person will have a very significant influence on the jobseekers experience of the service. Customer service therefore has a vital role to play in supporting young jobseekers. In particular the quality and commitment of service personnel was identified as being critical to the successful delivery of these two key services. It was suggested that customer service is most important not only in practical terms – in processing applications for social welfare and in the process of finding work through the FÁS Local Employment Services – but also in emotional terms – that is being dealt with in a professional, efficient and reassuring manner.

“Ultimately you judge the services on the key issues; In the case of Social Welfare it’s the speed with which they process your benefit payment and with FÁS it’s the quality of their career advice and recommendations around training....but those desired outcomes usually require a few visits...So you build up your perception of the service through your interaction with the service personnel....it’s a service business so the quality of customer service is a key element (of the service offering).” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“The speed with which your application is processed, the way they engage with you...It all has an impact (on the jobseeker) and so you judge them on how they deal with you, how professional they are, how they engage with you...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/ vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban)**

“If they deal with you in a professional way with some empathy it does leave you feeling more confident about the situation...that it will be resolved...that you will get some support through the experience (of unemployment).” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/ vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“If they are ‘off hand’ with you you can get quiet sensitive...It’s not the nicest of experiences (applying for social welfare) so they should try to make it as painless as possible...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

Closely related to speed of decision making on applications for welfare benefits was the desire for Social Welfare to keep the applicant informed on the status of the application throughout the decision making process.

“It does seem like it is up to you all the time to chase them (Social Welfare) for updates on the status of your application...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“They don’t really provide you with any assurances as to when the application may be decided upon.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

Pleasingly only a very small minority of focus group research participants indicated that they experienced any sense that they were either ‘disregarded’ or ‘disrespected’ when dealing with the two services. While the majority of jobseekers met service personnel – at both the local Social Welfare Office *and* the FÁS Local Employment Service – who clearly did care and who were knowledgeable and committed, examples were put forward of experiences where advisors were described as being ‘overly functional’ and ‘very process oriented’ at best and apathetic at worst.

“They (the Social Welfare service personnel) are really ‘on the ball’....They know you don’t want to be there...they know you don’t have a clue about how it all works...so she explained as much as she could to me and talked me through the key options...I found it very helpful...It helped to take the sense of mystery out of it...” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“She (Social Welfare staff member) clearly cared about her work and about you as a customer...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

“It did seem to be all about filling out the forms....I left the first meeting with Social Welfare none the wiser as to what I might be entitled to, when I might receive a payment, what other support services were available to me.....Instead the entire focus was on the paperwork...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“It felt very functional....quite robotic....I felt like I was being processed through a factory rather than anything personal.....I would have liked to hear more about how it all worked....what the key schemes were...I didn’t have a clue about the difference between JA (Jobseekers allowance) and JB (Jobseekers benefit).....and all the other allowances....It felt like you needed to know what to ask for.....rather than been told what you might be entitled to...” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

Many of the young jobseekers suggested that it is important to develop a rapport with the service personnel at both the Social Welfare local office *and* the FÁS Local Employment Service, as in instances where a rapport is developed service personnel were thought to be more inclined to assist the client. It was frequently suggested that it would be easier to develop a rapport with the service personnel if the client were to meet with the same member of staff on each visit. It was suggested that this rarely if ever happens – a key criticism of the two services.

“You do feel you need to put in an effort...to get them (service personnel) onside....to get them to consider your situation more favorably....You do get the sense that the people in Social Welfare have a good deal of autonomy so it’s in your interests to get a rapport going with them...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)**

“If there is some positive rapport they (service personnel) will be more inclined to help you out...to spend that little bit longer with you....” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban)**

“I would much prefer if you could meet with same person each time...Apart from saving time on going through all your personal details again and again they could get to know you better and could see what you are interested in and good at....You would then have a better chance of getting advice or a steer (towards training or a job) that fits your requirements.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“I have never met the same person more than once....A new face each time so you waste time going through the same questions that you answered before...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

“I know they are stretched but I would like to meet with the same staff member each time...that way you could develop a better relationship.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

The young jobseekers also suggested that a positive experience with the service personnel would also encourage the jobseeker to be more confident in themselves, and more optimistic

about their ongoing job search. Many examples of good practice were put forward and the positive impact that good customer service can have on the motivation and job seeking efforts of the young unemployed person were discussed, extensively.

“When you see they are trying to get the application fast tracked and when they offer you advice on who to see next and where else to go it does give you a lift....It does make you think that it’s not quite as depressing as you had thought....That can spur you on to work a little harder yourself...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“It (job searching) is a bit of a battle....You get worn out from it....so if they (service personnel) deal with you with a bit of empathy and understanding it does provide you with a bit of a boost (increased motivation).” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

Negative experiences, which were often characterised as meetings where there was no clear outcome tended to de-motivate the young jobseeker and introduce a degree of cynicism in their approach to finding work. In instances where young jobseekers were dissatisfied with the service experience it was often supported by a view that service personnel were either ‘disinterested’ or ‘not actively engaged in providing meaningful support.’

“There are times you think ‘well that meeting was a waste of time...I didn’t really get anything at all from it’....that can be annoying...You go into each meeting with a Jobs Facilitator or whoever with a sense of hope that you will leave with a nugget or two that will help you...a referral to a training programme, a tip off about a job application....but when you leave (the meeting) with nothing that can be demoralizing...” **Young job seeking third level graduates (Rural)**

“....I went in there to the meeting (with the Jobs Facilitator) and I didn’t get much out of it...they (Jobs Facilitator) just asked me for updates on how many jobs I had applied for in the last month...there was no real advice offered....They just seemed quite disinterested.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“Sometimes you can get someone who isn’t overly interested in your case....who doesn’t even put up a pretence that there might be a job out there for you in the next year...at those kinds of meetings you are just going through the motions and ticking whatever boxes they require.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

The young jobseekers that access the Social Welfare local office *or* the FÁS Local Employment Service obviously face challenging circumstances. Whether they record a positive or negative service experience is to a significant extent a function of the way they are dealt with while they are accessing the service. Empathy was therefore thought to be an important characteristic of good service. The young jobseekers demonstrated, in particular, a desire to be ‘actively listened to.’

“You want them to try to connect with you or at least show that they are listening to you rather than just processing you through the system....and to be fair for the most part they do that.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

“....You do feel like you are carrying a burden so it’s nice to get a bit of it off your chest when you do meet with them at Social Welfare...She did listen to me and gave me a few bits of helpful advice.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

Privacy in discussions with the Social Welfare local office service personnel was an important service dimension which the young jobseekers thought was missing completely from the service experience. There was an understandable desire for some level of privacy in discussions. This was partly reflected by the often-personal nature of discussions with the Social Welfare service personnel, but also a sense of wanting insulation from the often busy atmosphere of the local Social Welfare Office. Many of the young jobseekers indicated that they had felt uncomfortable talking about personal financial details in such an open environment.

“You end up having to sometimes shout out your whole life history to all of the city...Everyone in the foyer can hear you and what you are saying...It’s quite private stuff (personal history) but you get used to it (releasing personal details while other service users are waiting nearby) after a while...”
Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)

“You wouldn’t want to be too sensitive or too private....If you had a mind to you could earwig (over hear) almost everything that’s discussed at those tables....and it can be quite personal ...like how much you earned last year...that kind of thing...”
Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi–Urban)

2. Consistency of service delivery–Same high standard of delivery to be experienced on each service encounter

The young jobseekers wanted consistency in the standard of service delivery offered by the two services. It was seldom, however, simply a case of good or bad service. On some occasions the service experience was thought to be very good while on other return visits the same jobseeker judged the service experience to have been very poor. While this variation in service standards is, to an extent, to be expected from any organisation with such a large number of frontline employees it clearly affected the young jobseekers in terms of how they viewed and assessed the two services. Overall the two services were thought to be ‘inconsistent’ in their standard of service delivery.

“They (both FAS and the local Social Welfare office) can be very hit and miss....Sometimes you think ‘wow’ this is great....Other times you think ‘why do I bother.’ It really depends on who you meet, what kind of mood they are in and how busy they are...”
Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)

“I have had a couple of really good experiences where they gave me loads of really interesting information and then a couple of visits where I felt ‘that was a waste of time.’ It all depends on who you are lucky enough to meet on a given day.”
Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)

“You do go in to Social Welfare, or indeed FÁS, wondering who will I meet with today...Sometimes they can be brilliant and other times you are in and out in the space of a few minutes because they are so busy and need to get to the next person on the list.”
Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)

Some very positive case examples were put forward of Social Welfare Jobs Facilitators and FÁS Local Employment Service personnel who had far exceeded expectations and were thought to have ‘gone above and beyond the call of duty’ in assisting the young jobseekers and in helping them to find suitable work.

“He (the FÁS representative) was excellent. He took time looking at my CV and offered some good advice on how it could be improved...We talked about where the job opportunities are arising and what I need to do to up-skill to put myself in the way of those jobs...He advised on training programmes I could sign up for....all in all I thought he was brilliant....”
Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)

“...I thought the advice she gave me was really very good....I knew where to look to next, what I might be eligible for...She cut through a lot (of the uncertainty) for me”
Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)

However the discussion groups’ and one to one interviews also included examples where jobseekers felt the service had fallen considerably short of what was expected. There were even some instances highlighted of both processes and personal encounters associated with the two services which were thought to have actually hampered the young jobseeker in their efforts at securing a job.

“Some of the advice they offered was useless....like doing a CAD course when I have done a degree in programming...”
Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)

“I have done a three year degree in mechanical engineering and he (the FÁS representative) asked would I be interested in doing a metal fabrication course...” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

“You could see they (the FÁS representative) were under a bit of pressure to fill some courses because in the space of half an hour he offered me about ten different training programmes all of them completely different and all of them completely unrelated to what I wanted to do.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

The time involved in waiting to see service personnel also varied considerably from visit to visit. Similarly the perceived quality of information provided and the level of rapport or engagement was thought to vary from visit to visit and was thought to be dependent on the interest of the service provider on that given day. The majority were thought to be ‘interested.’ Some were described as being ‘extremely interested and helpful’ while a minority suggested the service personnel were ‘disinterested.’ The length of appointments and quality or depth of discussion was thought to vary considerably from day to day. It was frequently suggested that the meeting length and the depth and quality of discussion with a Social Welfare Jobs Facilitator would depend heavily on the number of clients that the facilitator had to see on a given day. If the Jobs Facilitator had a busy day and a lot of clients to see the meeting was likely to be brief and the level of engagement and depth of discussion would be minimal. Conversely if the facilitator was less busy they would be more inclined to give greater time and attention to the jobseeker in front of them.

“It depends on their workload on a given day...If they are really busy and have a load of clients to see then you will be out in less than 15 minutes...If they have more time to spare you can ask lots of questions and get some decent advice.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

“If they are busy the meeting will probably be very functional...they will be focused on getting you out and moving onto the next client but if they have a bit of time they will spend it with you and you can end up having a really useful meeting.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

The vast majority of research participants did not see the same service representative – either in the local Social Welfare Office or the FÁS Local Employment Service – on consecutive appointments. There was however an expectation – and certainly a desire – that the jobseeker would be provided with one consistent advisor each time they used the social welfare or FÁS services. It was suggested that such an approach would allow the advisor to develop a better rapport and understanding with the client and a better understanding of the clients’ circumstances, personal interests and career related objectives. It was felt this would allow the service to co-ordinate their approaches more effectively and provide a more tailored and personalised service for each individual jobseeker. It was suggested that there is currently no, or certainly very limited, opportunity to develop a rapport with the service provider personnel at either the local Social Welfare Office or the FÁS Local Employment Service.

“It would be much better if you met with one or maybe two people each and every time...That way you could develop some sort of working relationship...You wouldn’t have to be re-explaining yourself time and time again....You could really put a decent plan together that would be tailored around your needs rather than some generic set of advice that could apply to any 20 year old...to any 30 year old for that matter.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“Although you run the risk of being stuck with somebody who isn’t really interested it would be much better if you were to be assigned to a single representative...They would know what you want to do and you could work out a plan (over the series of a number of meetings) as to how to get there.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**



3. Ease of understanding as to what to expect from the two services

The lack of understanding as to what jobseekers could expect from the two services was very clear and was particularly notable in the case of young jobseekers and their knowledge of the FÁS Local Employment Service. The discussions with the young jobseekers revealed that many of those attending either the local Social Welfare Office or the FÁS Local Employment Service were largely unaware of *what* they were entitled to and *when* they were entitled to it. Many felt very unclear about the different schemes and allowances that may be available to them through the local Social Welfare Offices. Interestingly those jobseekers that had accessed the Citizens Information Board services appeared to be significantly better informed as to what they may or may not be eligible for. The confusion or lack of certainty as to the role of and the services provided by the FÁS Local Employment Service was more noticeable than was the case with the Social Welfare provided services.

“I didn’t have a clue as to what JA or JB was, what schemes I could apply for and what weren’t suitable for me...Reading the literature only confused me more.....It was only when I went to the Citizens Information Board that I was able to get a handle on the various schemes.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“It’s completely new territory for someone who is coming to it for the first time....I didn’t know what to expect and I was really none the wiser after my first visit (to the Social Welfare Office).” **Young job-seeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)**

“At least with Social Welfare you know the services are all related to benefits and payments but with FÁS you don’t know what they can and can’t do for you. They should have an information day really where they talk you through it all...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)**

“It is quite daunting really trying to figure out who to go to for what...Luckily someone suggested I should go the Citizen Information Board and they helped me to navigate my way through it all..... They were really very helpful.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

All of the young jobseekers suggested that each client attending the local Social Welfare Office should be told up front, ideally at the first face-to-face meeting, what support is available and when this support would become available. It was also suggested that the local Social Welfare Office, as it is the more usual first point of contact for a newly unemployed young person, has a responsibility to describe and promote the range of employment and training services that are available through FÁS. Instead the first meeting with Social Welfare was frequently described as a fact and data gathering mission which involved the jobseeker providing information, rather than the Social Welfare office providing any form of support or advice.

“The first place that most young people go to is Social Welfare...I thought they were the kind of gate-keepers of it all....but they don’t really tell you much on your first visit...Instead you are just giving them all your data and life history...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

“All the young unemployed people I knew went to Social Welfare first... they should give you a little map or a description of where else you can go for support and advice. I was lucky my guy in Social Welfare told me that I should check out FÁS...I never would have thought of it myself as I thought it was just for people doing apprenticeships, but they have financial management jobs / banking jobs

on their search engines with some really big salaries.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

Many of the young jobseekers suggested they were at a real disadvantage as they could not make ‘best use’ of the services if they do not know what services, schemes and entitlements are actually available.

“You lose so much time when you are trying to work your way around the system...It’s very confusing at first....You don’t know who to ask for what....It (the provision of income and training support) should be more co-ordinated rather than provided by two quite separate institutions.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“After a while you learn how it all works but at the start you don’t know the right questions to ask, the right people to see or the services to attend....You just learn about it through experience.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

It was stressed that the first meeting with the Social Welfare Office should offer the young jobseeker a ‘commitment’ or at least some realistic indication as to the length of time that it will take to process the social welfare application. The current lack of certainty and open ended nature of the application process was a real point of concern and frustration for many of the research participants.

“You are constantly anxious...Will it come through this month? Do I have to survive for another month without social welfare? Its bad enough having to work from a really tight budget but not to know when that little bit of money is to come through really makes it hard to cope...” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)**

“When you apply first you think ok this should be straight forward enough but then time goes by and you are asked for more bits and pieces of information.....a passport and birth cert to satisfy the habitual residence condition even though I am from Belfast originally, more up to date bank statements..... You start to wonder when will it be approved...” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)**

“All the while in the background, while you are waiting for your benefits to be approved your debts are climbing...They should give you a commitment that your application will be resolved within a certain period of time. That would at least allow you to plan more effectively.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)**

“It’s bad enough having to deal with the uncertainty on whether or not you will get a job this year... When you add in the uncertainty associated with the waiting for your benefit to be approved it gets stressful...They need to give you a firmer indication as to how long the application process is likely to take.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban)**

4 An efficient method of data collection, retention and provision

The research found that young jobseekers were very dissatisfied with the approach of Social Welfare in collecting and recording personal information. Indeed many of the research participants characterised the service as having a complete ‘absence of institutional memory’. A very significant proportion of the circa 150 research participants highlighted instances where detailed personal circumstances and ‘histories’ were provided – and apparently entered onto the Social Welfare system – but were not then available at subsequent interviews which often meant the client had to re-explain their circumstances in the same level of detail. This was thought to be very frustrating and even insensitive to the needs of the young jobseeker.

“You spend at least half of each meeting providing information that you provided at the last meeting...It’s a complete waste of time and it’s more than a little insensitive.....” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“...You are trying to advance your case...trying to get closer to a job so when you spend a chunk of time re-hashing details that you gave the last time you were there it really gets frustrating...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“It’s like they sometimes delete everything and then just start again from scratch at the next meeting.....asking for the same details that you would have provided at the last meeting.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

Young jobseekers also suggested that they should be given a complete ‘inventory of requirements’ – in terms of personal history and records required by the service – at the clients’ first meeting with Social Welfare. It was suggested that this would help to speed up the process and reduce the instances where jobseekers are asked for additional pieces of information at subsequent meeting that are required to assess their benefit eligibility.

“They should tell you up front exactly what pieces of information they are looking for....that would help to speed up the application process, ensure you bring everything that is necessary to the next meeting and eliminate the requirement for further information to be provided on the drip as they ponder over your application.....” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

There were also a small number of instances noted of jobseekers feeling mistakes had been made with the data recorded.

“They got my address wrong...They also put in the wrong figure for my earnings last year...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“They got the number of stamps I had wrong...It was only when I checked it that it was corrected.....” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“They got my date of birth wrong by a year which as I had just turned 17 meant I mightn’t qualify for the allowance...Lucky I asked them to check it...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

Importance of providing background literature that is clear and easy to understand

The research also found that both services – the local Social Welfare Office Network *and* the FÁS Local Employment Services – are not clearly promoting the availability and eligibility of the various services and schemes that they do have to offer. In particular written documentation on the various schemes and allowances made available by Social Welfare was thought to be difficult to read and understand and had caused much confusion amongst the research participants. Conversely the Citizens Information Board provided literature on the same schemes and allowances was described in far more positive terms. In respect of the FÁS Local Employment Services the key criticism was directed at the lack of active promotion as to what services are available and how they can be accessed.

“The booklets (produced by Social Welfare) are more confusing than anything...Luckily I knew about the INOU and their guide for newly un-employed people...that takes you through everything you need to know...” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“The Citizens Information Board leaflets are much easier to understand than the Social Welfare one’s....” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

“I didn’t know anything about FÁS services...You never see any promotional literature...They don’t seem to advertise anywhere...so it was a surprise when the Social Welfare suggested that I should visit the local FÁS office.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

5. Smooth process of referral from one key service to the other

As *all* of the circa 150 research participants had engaged directly with the local Social Welfare Offices it was interesting to note the significant proportion of these young jobseekers that had *not* yet engaged with FÁS. At best, one quarter of the participants had set up a meeting with a FÁS service representative. Social Welfare was clearly the first ‘port of call’ for the majority of research participants – driven primarily by the need to secure financial support to sustain them in this period of joblessness. The majority however were uncertain as to how FÁS could help them and were unaware of the wide range of training and employment related programmes and services that they could offer. There was also much confusion as to who FÁS was focused on providing support for. This was particularly notable amongst the third level graduates that participated in the research – many of whom felt that FÁS only provided services for early school leavers or those involved in apprenticeships or vocational training. The key criticism was the absence of a formal process of referral whereby a Social Welfare representative would refer the jobseeker on to FÁS in instances where Social Welfare was the young jobseekers first point of contact.

*“It was only after about six or eight months of being unemployed that somebody suggested FÁS but sure I thought FÁS was for people who left school early or for those who did trades and apprenticeships....It was only when I was corrected on that that I decided to visit them and I am glad I did....I found them very useful...”***Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

*“Social Welfare really should take responsibility for referring young people into FÁS...Otherwise they just wouldn’t think of going....”***Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

*“Social Welfare is the first service, and for many the only service that they link in with....They should be briefing young jobseekers on what’s available and what FÁS can do for them.”***Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

Most importantly there was a clear sense of frustration, amongst the majority of young jobseekers, with the absence of a single ‘one stop shop’ that would provide a rounded package of supports – social welfare benefits, career planning, job searching skills, personal development skills, training and education – through a single, well organised, sufficiently resourced, and co-ordinated structure.

*“Why have a FÁS and a Social Welfare service operating in parallel to each other....You would be able to provide a much more rounded package of support if the core client facing functions were merged...the client would certainly benefit....They (the client) would know what services are available.....the service could track the clients progress on an ongoing basis....they (service personnel) could develop a clearer understanding of the clients support needs and would therefore be in a position to develop a tailored package of support...As it would be more economical to run such a service it could be resourced appropriately which would allow for the provision of a more consistent level of quality service ”***Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

*“...It (the idea of a one stop shop) makes perfect sense....Why go to two or three services when you should just attend one...It would be far more effective.”***Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

*“It’s a no brainer for me. I can’t really understand why it hasn’t been done before.”***Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

6. Tailoring of the service offering to match individual client requirements

Jobseekers wanted their individual circumstances, qualifications, training and career aspirations to be taken into account – particularly by the Social Welfare Jobs Facilitators and FÁS service personnel. The majority of participants, however, felt the two services adopted a somewhat generic and overly rigid approach in dealing with the young unemployed. It was suggested that there is little if any acknowledgement of personal circumstances or training and educational history. Jobseekers stressed that age is not *the* single, most important defining category. Instead it was emphasised that it is *not* appropriate for the two services to treat young jobseekers as a single homogenous group – as is currently happening. Instead educational attainment and personal aspirations should influence the nature of service provision.

*“When I went into the local FÁS office I wondered to myself what I am doing here....They were offering me advice and training that would have been more appropriate to someone who has just left school....I know I am only 21 but I have done a three year degree in UCC.”***Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

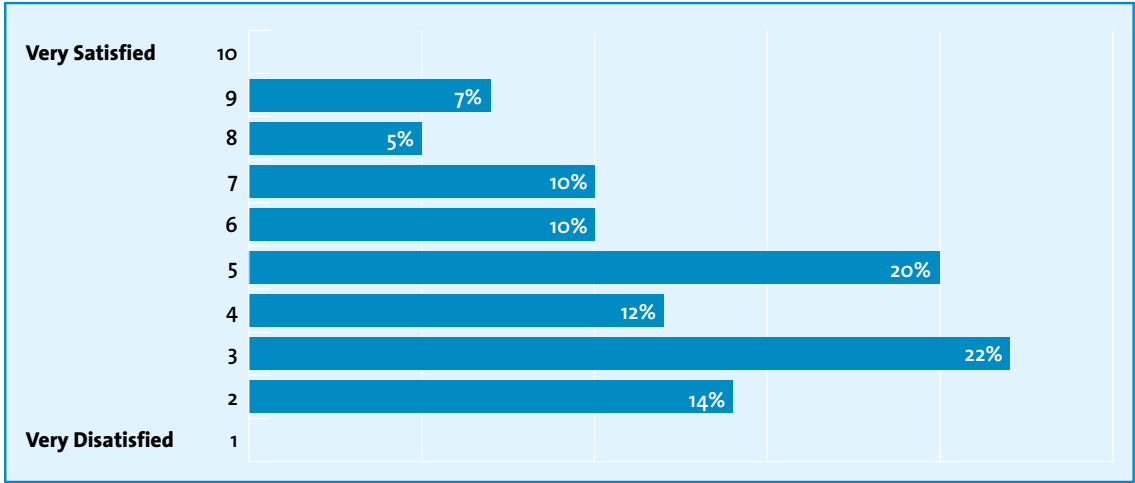
*“We (young people) need to be treated differently...different responses will be appropriate to different young people...depending on their educational background, the level of workplace experience that we have...We aren’t all the same simply because we are young....”***Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban)**

Third level graduates will have very different requirements and support needs to an early school leaver who in turn will have different requirements to a young jobseeker who has completed an apprenticeship and has some work place training. It was suggested that both services ought to be more sensitive to this and have greater awareness of the jobseekers background qualifications and career ambitions which would in turn allow the service to provide a more tailored and appropriate set of supports.

*“What’s really needed is for both parties (jobseeker and job advisor) to sit down together and develop a plan....that would involve looking at where you came from...what skills and experience you have, what qualifications you have, what your ambitions are, what opportunities exist in that area and identifying an approach to bridge the gaps to where you want to get to.....”***Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

*“The services should be more tuned into your background...your skills, experience and qualifications and trying to match that against your career related goals in the context of the opportunities currently available.”***Young job seeking third level graduate (Semi-Urban)**

Level of Satisfaction with today’s meeting with the Jobs Facilitator



Of the 90 young jobseekers interviewed following their meeting with a Social Welfare Jobs Facilitator only 32% awarded a satisfaction rating above the ‘mid point’ on a 10 point satisfaction scale – where 1 equals ‘very dissatisfied’ and 10 equals ‘very satisfied.’ Both services – the local Social Welfare Office Network *and* the FÁS Local Employment Services – were thought to be particularly ‘challenged’ in responding effectively to the specific, and possibly more specialist, support needs of third level graduates.

“It’s the first time in ten or maybe even 15 years that the services have had to deal with such a large influx of unemployed graduates...their focus has been on meeting the needs of young people with low skills...getting them back into training and education so young people with primary and masters degrees are a relatively new proposition which they are not yet equipped to deal with.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“I got the sense that they (FÁS) weren’t really ready to talk to someone who had done a Masters and was considering a PhD programme as an alternative to a lengthy period of unemployment.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

Appropriate job matching and adequate and relevant employability training

The research found there was an amount of dissatisfaction amongst young jobseekers with the success of both the local Social Welfare office network *and* the FÁS Local Employment Services in ‘accurately listening’ to their needs, in providing effective ‘job matching’ information, and in responding with a personalised service and relevant and appropriate employability training.

In particular the guidance, job matching and recommendation of relevant training was less likely to meet the needs of graduate jobseekers more so than any other segment of the young unemployed. Many of the graduates were particularly disappointed with the recommendations they received for further training opportunities.

“I thought he (FÁS representative) was having me on when he suggested I think about a warehouse management post....I had just finished a four year Chemistry degree....” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“FÁS does seem to have lots of training places available in trade and apprenticeship schemes but I have just finished my H Dip in teaching.....I accept I won’t get a teaching job in Ireland but rather than doing a ECDL course as was suggested I would prefer to do a TEFL programme as there are real job opportunities available there (in teaching English as a foreign language).” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Urban)**

“...I think providing support to graduates is just beyond them at the moment....It’s like we (unemployed graduates) are a new species and they haven’t figured out yet what to do with us.....It was only after me digging around for while that I suggested they refer me on to Teagasc.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“The whole (FÁS) system seems to be geared towards meeting the needs of early school leavers and people involved in apprenticeship training...Maybe I haven’t given them (FÁS) a fair chance yet but everything on their website suggests that they are focused on these audiences (rather than third level graduates).” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“....Getting a bad steer towards training that is inappropriate is worse than getting no advice at all... You lose confidence in the service and don’t return...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“It shouldn’t be about filling places on a training roster it should be about providing appropriate training at the right time to address skill gaps facing individual jobseekers.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

7. Provision of unrestrictive and high quality job information

The young jobseekers were somewhat critical of both services in terms of their proactive offer of advice. It was frequently suggested that the jobseeker often had to ‘encourage’ the advisor to provide more direct advice or guidance particularly in relation to training, education and work placement opportunities. The current heavy workload experienced by both services was largely blamed for the present emphasis on this ‘functional processing’ rather than the ‘active engagement’ desired by so many of the young research participants.

“They simply don’t have the time to engage with you for any significant period of time. Everything is focused on getting the form filled out or the application submitted rather than in discussing what alternatives exist, what approaches might work well....discussions around career planning that I had hoped would happen.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi–Urban)**

“In the couple of meetings I have had with FÁS and Social Welfare I don’t think in the relatively short time available, and mindful of all the data they need to collect, that any member of staff has ever really given much thought to what else I could do to further advance my skills and education and to make me a more attractive candidate...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

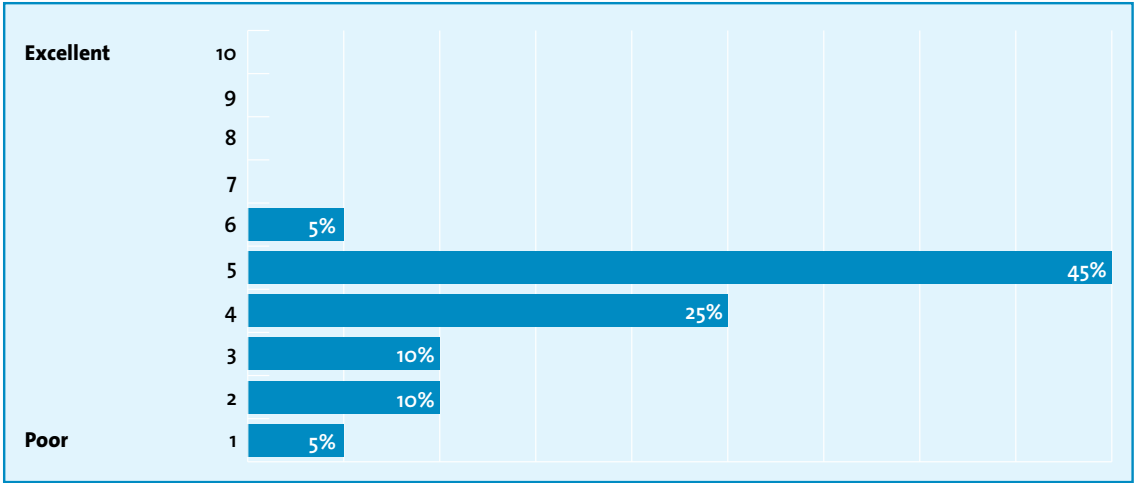
“The time available (at the meetings) is tight...they also need to do all their checks and balances on whether you have been fulfilling the eligibility criteria for benefits...that means there isn’t much time for anymore meaningful discussion or career planning.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

“The advice they (FÁS and Social Welfare service personnel) give you is very good but it’s just too rushed...Your case isn’t explored in enough depth...Some more one to one counseling and mentoring is what’s really required...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“They are just too stretched...the people (FÁS and Social Welfare service personnel) are clearly good enough (have the right skills and expertise to deliver a good service) they just have to see too many clients.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Semi-Urban)**

It was for these reasons that such a significant proportion of the young jobseekers interviewed on a one to one basis rated the service experience ‘poorly’.

Rating the quality of the information/support or ‘counselling’ received at today’s meeting



Jobseekers also articulated a desire for the two services to realign their focus and attach greater emphasis to the proactive provision of informing them about *all* the services that the local Social Welfare Office Network *and* the FÁS Local Employment Services can help with or support, rather than the client having to continually ask or be ‘drip-fed’ information. There was often considerable surprise when the researchers posted up some of the key areas that the FÁS Local Employment Services could help with such as the provision of labour market information, career counseling, the identification of suitable vacancies and potential training needs; along with the referral to job vacancies.

“.....You often feel like you are the one having to ask all the right questions.....Am I not eligible for this scheme or that allowance?...Why can’t I apply for this or that training programme?” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

“You do tend to come away with a little bit more information each time you visit Social Welfare but if they organised some collective seminar or talk for newly unemployed people each month then you could ask all the silly questions you want and get a really good understanding of what you are and aren’t entitled to.” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“It does feel like you are on somewhat of a drip feed...never having the full picture....sometimes being afraid to ask or sometimes not knowing what questions to ask....” **Young job seeking third level graduate (Rural)**

“I didn’t know they (FÁS) offered all those services...career counseling....that is something I would love to do...It would be great to get some new ideas and a fresh perspective...” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi–Urban)**

“I can’t believe FÁS do all that...I would really like to get some help on my CV, on planning my career for the long term...helping me to identify relevant opportunities...that sort of expertise would be really helpful.” **Young jobseeker with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural)**

“Well that’s useful to know...I am definitely going to arrange an appointment with FÁS...They are the areas I really would benefit from some help in.” **Young job seeking early school leaver (Rural)**

6 | CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth unemployment, having trebled since 2008, is now one of, if not *the* single greatest challenge facing Ireland in 2010. The research shows that unemployed young people experience many types of social and economic exclusion. Central amongst these were exclusion from the labour market due to a lack of job experience or the mismatching of job qualifications with current job opportunities *and* economic exclusion due to a lack of basic income that allows them to participate in the same types of activities as other young people with jobs. Young jobseekers associated their experience of unemployment with a number of negative feelings such as low self esteem and low morale, feelings of hopelessness, despair and lack of choice, and in some cases admissions of instances of depression, stress and a sense of isolation.

This research conducted on behalf of the NYCI would suggest that there has been no co-ordinated, coherent or focused policy approach developed in response to the pressing needs of young jobseekers in Ireland in 2010 – particularly those who have yet to gain experience in the labour market. These young jobseekers are vulnerable individuals, many of whom are most concerned that their long term futures will be damaged – possibly irreparably – by a period of sustained unemployment. The experience of unemployment has left many feeling ‘scarred’ and ‘damaged’. There is much concern that a prolonged period of job searching will make it very difficult for a young person to integrate themselves into the workforce when the economy does ‘pick up’ in a number of years time.

Experts interviewed as part of the process were particularly concerned with the future prospects available to young unemployed people that are defined as having ‘low skills.’ This ‘segment’ would commonly include early school leavers and those that have not engaged in any further training following their exit from school. These young people with relatively low skills and no real experience of the world of work are effectively unemployable in the new knowledge economy. If society deserts these young people now they are liable to drift indefinitely on the unemployment scrap-heap. It is therefore most important that education, training and the workplace connects with these young people. In five years time it will be too late for many of these young people. Education, training and skills are recognised as being key to securing the long term future of young jobseekers. Workplace experience was most commonly cited as *the* key ingredient missing in the CV of the young jobseeker. The NYCI and other interested parties operating in this space could usefully consider the following recommendations:

- **Advocate for the development of a more personalised, client focused, ‘one stop shop’ for training, employment and income support services for young jobseekers** – whereby a personal adviser would be assigned to each young jobseeker. Such an approach would help to provide a more tailored, client focused approach and would help to move ‘claimants’ closer to the labour market than the process-led, ‘tick the box’ approach currently available.

A single ‘one stop shop’ – based on an amalgamation of existing FÁS and local Social Welfare services – that would provide a rounded package of supports – social welfare benefits, career planning, job searching skills, personal development skills, training and education through a single, well organised, sufficiently resourced, and co-ordinated structure was frequently called for.
- **Campaign for the ‘assignment’ of a single advisor to each new client.** Such an approach would allow that advisor to develop a better rapport and understanding of the clients’ circumstances, personal interests and career related objectives and would allow the services to co-ordinate their approaches more effectively and to provide a more tailored and personalised service for each individual jobseeker.
- **Campaign for the introduction of an appropriate ‘client charter’ for young jobseekers** to provide greater clarity and understanding on the range and nature of support services that are currently available. Such a charter would describe and set out clearly:
 - the range of State provided support services that are available to young jobseekers.
 - the objectives of these various services and the desired service outcomes.
 - the levels of service that clients can expect in addition to information on what the services expect of clients.
 - information on how clients can hold the services ‘to account’ in the event that they are dissatisfied with the service provided/and decisions made.
 - that the **client is at the heart of the service**. The service(s) ought to be underpinned by a stated commitment to excellent customer service. Some very good examples of excellent customer service were put forward by research participants. Encouragingly, it was therefore suggested, a high standard of customer service is an attainable aim for the training, employment and income support services.

- **Encourage a greater focus on and commitment to high quality customer service.**

The research helped to identify a number of key elements of customer service that the training, employment and income support services ought to deliver on a consistent basis, for the benefit of young jobseekers:

- Call to set realistic expectation as to how long social welfare applications will take to process. Where possible the nationwide network of local Social Welfare Offices ought to be encouraged to reallocate available staff resources to address the current back-log and accelerate the decision making process involved in vetting social welfare applications.

The current heavy workload, and lengthy back-log in applications, experienced by both services was largely blamed for the present emphasis on ‘functional processing’ rather than the ‘active engagement’ desired by young jobseekers. Additional client facing, experienced staff are clearly required at both FÁS and the local Social Welfare Offices in order to be able to deal effectively with the current high volume of young jobseekers.

Call for the two services to invest in additional one to one counselling and mentoring. The advice offered by both FÁS and Social Welfare service personnel was generally thought to be ‘good’ and in some cases ‘very good’ but all too often it is too rushed. The client cases could usefully be explored in greater depth. Additional, experienced staff will, however, be required to deliver this specialist advice.

- Encourage Social Welfare to offer new clients a commitment that their application will be resolved within a certain period of time. Such a ‘promise’ would allow jobseekers to allocate and plan their hard pressed finances more effectively.
- Young jobseekers could usefully be offered a complete ‘inventory of requirements’ – in terms of personal history and records required by the service – at the clients’ first meeting with Social Welfare or indeed in advance of that meeting. Such an approach would help to speed up the data collection process and reduce the instances where jobseekers are asked, at subsequent meetings, for additional pieces of information in order to assess benefit eligibility.
- Encourage effective and efficient retention and use of client information gathered in order to reduce the amount of time spent by the services in re-recording details previously collected, by the same service, at earlier meetings.
- Encourage Social Welfare to invest in appropriate systems and approaches to keep the applicant informed on the status of their welfare application, and the likely timeline, throughout the decision making process.

- Address the lack of understanding as to what jobseekers can expect from the two key services.
- Encourage the two services to inform jobseekers on *what* they are entitled to and *when* they are entitled to it.
- Encourage the development of information, promotional material and documentation that is easy to read and understand. The complexity of some Social Welfare documentation came in for particular criticism. Conversely those research participants that had accessed the Citizens Information Board (CIB) website and literature spoke very positively of the ease with which this information could be read and understood. The availability of this existing resource could be usefully promoted.
- Promote FÁS employment support services more actively and prominently. The confusion or lack of certainty as to the role of, and the services provided by the FÁS Local Employment Service was very noticeable. It may be relevant to encourage a formal process of referral whereby a Social Welfare representative would refer the jobseeker on to FÁS in instances where Social Welfare was the first point of contact.
- Privacy and confidentiality – Privacy in discussions with the Social Welfare local office service personnel ought to be facilitated more effectively. A clear code of confidentiality should also be explained to jobseekers at the outset.

- **Develop additional, practical measures to reduce early school drop-out figures.**

Ideally no youth should leave the post primary education system without a recognised qualification.

- Early school leavers ought to receive additional attention and emphasis from the education authorities to ensure they remain engaged in, or re-connected with education through the completion of a post Junior Certificate programme. Such a programme would preferably include a series of work placement programmes. The Youthreach programme – Ireland’s education and training programme for early school leavers (funded by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment with the assistance of the European Social Fund) – would appear to provide an appropriate model for such a programme. The numbers of places currently available through the Youthreach scheme are however not in any way sufficient to address the demand caused by the current jobs crisis.

The value in establishing additional temporary provision in the form of a national traineeship programme to address the current ‘cyclical’ problem of unprecedented levels of unemployment among our low-skilled youth was emphasised by a number of the experts consulted as part of this research.

- There is a need to strengthen access to second chance education and professional certification in other innovative ways and in particular through the validation of work place experience.
- Consider the introduction of a formal ‘individual education plan’ which each Junior Certificate and/or transition year student would develop in collaboration with their parents, school and external guidance officer.

- **Advocate for the development of programmes that combine appropriate work experience, study and job placement programmes for young jobseekers:**
 - Promote the combination of study and work placement programmes. The lack of job place experience – either paid or unpaid – was identified as being of most pressing concern. The proposal to combine work and study through apprenticeships and internships would facilitate labour-market entry in the short to medium term and help to reduce the risk of prolonged unemployment in the long term.
 - Existing second and third level education programmes could also be ‘professionalised’ through the introduction of work placement programmes and internships. Employers could also be motivated and encouraged to take on young active jobseekers for trial periods. The potential for developing policies for the introduction of ‘golden hello’ payments for employers for every young jobseeker recruited for a six month placement could, in particular, be usefully investigated.
- **Campaign for further training and mentoring to be provided in building the necessary skill sets required by the young unemployed for successful job searching** – in such areas as:
 - How to research leads and opportunities across industries, professions and individual companies
 - How to write a memorable CV
 - How to develop and tailor cover letters that make an impact
 - How to improve general interview performance
 - How to prepare for an interview involving a specific role
 - How to develop a succinct ‘elevator pitch’
 - How to network with potential job leads
- **Encourage investment in mental health awareness training.**

Given the high percentage of jobseekers that may have mental health or stress related conditions, client facing personnel would benefit from undergoing basic mental health awareness training.
- **Facilitate the development of mutual support networks** for young jobseekers to allow them to talk about the feelings of rejection associated with job hunting.
- **Encourage greater debate and focus on the significant debt burdens carried by young unemployed jobseekers** and consider the development of appropriate advisory supports for young unemployed people who are trying to service large debts.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE: NINE FOCUS GROUP PROFILES & RECRUITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

- **(1) Young unemployed third level graduates; (Urban Centre)** To include those graduates of third level programmes of more than two years in duration, Aged between 21 and 25, Gender mix, Unemployed for 3 months or more, No longer in full time education, Will have engaged with training and employment support services within the last three to six months.
- **(2) Young unemployed third level graduates; (Semi-Urban)** To include those graduates of third level programmes of more than two years in duration, Aged between 21 and 25, Gender mix, Unemployed for 3 months or more, No longer in full time education, Will have engaged with training and employment support services within the last three to six months.
- **(3) Young unemployed third level graduates; (Rural region)** To include those graduates of third level programmes of more than two years in duration, Aged between 21 and 25, Gender mix, Unemployed for 3 months or more, No longer in full time education, Will have engaged with training and employment support services within the last three to six months.
- **(4) Young unemployed with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Urban Centre),** To include active jobseekers who have completed the Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications, No further third level qualifications, Aged between 18 and 25, Gender mix, Unemployed for 3 months or more, No longer in full time employment or full time education, Will have engaged with training and employment support services within the last three to six months.
- **(5) Young unemployed with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Semi-Urban),** To include active jobseekers who have completed the Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications, No further third level qualifications, Aged between 18 and 25, Gender mix, Unemployed for 3 months or more, No longer in full time employment or full time education, Will have engaged with training and employment support services within the last three to six months.
- **(6) Young unemployed with Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications (Rural Region),** To include active jobseekers who have completed the Leaving Certificate and/or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications, No further third level qualifications, Aged between 18 and 25, Gender mix, Unemployed for 3 months or more, No longer in full time employment or full time education, Will have engaged with training and employment support services within the last three to six months.
- **(7) Young unemployed early school leavers (Urban Centre),** To include active jobseekers who have not completed the Leaving Certificate or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications, Age mix between 18 and 25 although likely will be in young age group, Gender mix, Unemployed for 3 months or more, No longer in full time employment or full time education, Will have engaged with training and employment support services within the last three to six months.
- **(8) Young unemployed early school leavers (Semi-Urban),** To include active jobseekers who have not completed the Leaving Certificate or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications, Age

mix between 18 and 25 although likely will be in young age group, Gender mix, Unemployed for 3 months or more, No longer in full time employment or full time education, Will have engaged with training and employment support services within the last three to six months.

- o (9) **Young unemployed early school leavers (Rural Region)**, To include active jobseekers who have not completed the Leaving Certificate or apprenticeship/vocational training qualifications, Age mix between 18 and 25 although likely will be in young age group, Gender mix, Unemployed for 3 months or more, No longer in full time employment or full time education, Will have engaged with training and employment support services within the last three to six months.

How long have you been engaging with the State provided social welfare/training and education/income support services?		
3 months or longer		Continue
Less than 3 months		Close interview
Are you currently involved in full time employment?		
No		Continue
Yes		Close interview
Are you currently involved in full time education?		
No		Continue
Yes		Close interview
What is your most 'advanced' educational/training qualification?		
Junior Certificate or 'lower'		Candidate for Groups 7, 8 or 9
Leaving Certificate		Candidate for Groups 4, 5 or 6
Apprenticeship/Vocational training/qualification		Candidate for Groups 4, 5 or 6
Third level qualification of two years or more in duration		Candidate for Groups 1, 2 or 3
Gender Male: Yes Female: Yes	Age Under 18	No
	18 – 20	Yes
	21- 25	Yes
	Over 25	No
Place of Residence Urban Centre Semi-Urban Rural Region		Candidate for Groups 1, 4 or 7 Candidate for Groups 2, 5 or 8 Candidate for Groups 3, 6 or 9

APPENDIX TWO:
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

- Brief outline 'reminder' of NYCI/OCS research process
 - o Assurances of confidentiality/anonymity, how data will be recorded, process for focus group discussion
- Roundtable; Can you tell me a little bit about yourselves (Very brief background to kick start discussion)?
 - o Age, background (work/career experience, academic achievement, length of time unemployed), Very brief outline of short to medium term plans/ambitions
- What is your general experience of unemployment to date?
 - o What challenges and difficulties have you experienced in this time?
 - o What steps have you taken to seek employment? What obstacles/challenges have you encountered along the way?
 - o Who/what (services), if any, have you turned to for support or advice? Who/what services have you found to be most (and least) helpful? Why?
 - o Have you been affected by the social welfare cuts? Can you tell me a little about this?
 - o Are there certain things that have acted as barriers or obstacles for you in securing a job? How could you be helped to overcome those obstacles?
 - o What 'first up' recommendations would you offer to a friend/relative (at a similar stage in life as yourselves) who has recently become unemployed?
KEY focus of discussion; Have you approached/are you currently accessing any of the State provided services (training, employment support, social welfare/income support) since you became unemployed? What State provided services are you currently accessing? (FÁS, Social Welfare, VEC's, other? Initially 'separate out' discussion on a service by service basis i.e. FÁS, Social Welfare, VEC's etc) It will be important to make sure the service which research participants are referring to is clear.
 - o How would you describe your experience with these various services? How has your experience with these services been useful?
 - o How did you hear about each service? How did you know who to approach/where to go? Talk me through the 'process' involved in accessing these services. How do you find out about what is 'available' to you (services, advice, training, income supports etc)? Where do you go? Who do you meet with? Where/who are you referred on to? Is it easy to get an appointment?
 - o *Expectations in accessing the services;* What type of service/support did you feel you needed at the time and why? What did you hope to 'get' from accessing the services? How did you think the services could help you? How did you think the services could assist you in securing appropriate training/employment? What did/do you 'get' from each encounter? Were you 'satisfied'/happy with each service encounter? Why/Why not? (Expected/Actual outcomes)
 - o How did you find your first contact (& subsequent contacts) with the service? Was it helpful for you? Did you feel that it was this type of service you needed at the time or was it some other type of support that you needed?
 - o Where is your key 'focus' at present; on returning to education/on returning to (or accessing for the first time) employment? Were/are specific supports such as the 'Back to Education Allowance Scheme' and/or the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance spoken about/explained to you when accessing the services? How relevant/attractive are

- schemes such as these?
- o How would you rate the quality of the information/support/training you received from the service?
- o What particular training/education support services have you used/plan to use while being unemployed? How have you found these particular services? Were they helpful to you? In what way? How could they be improved?
- o What were the positive aspects/good points involved in accessing the services/ meeting with the service representatives? How did they assist you in enhancing your ‘employability’/in equipping you to (re)enter the labour market?
 - What piece(s) of advice / item(s) of support did you value most? Overall quality of ‘the contact’?
 - How would you describe the knowledge, expertise and general ‘attitude’ of the service personnel that you met with?
 - Quality of training / advice /support and or ‘counselling’ offered? Plan of ‘progression’ developed? Tailoring of support to meet your specific needs?
 - How would you describe the ‘process’ involved in accessing that particular service? (‘smooth’/efficient – awkward/bureaucratic)
 - Did you leave feeling ‘better equipped’, more knowledgeable, a step closer to a job following this engagement with the service.....Why? Why not? Did you know ‘where to go to next’?
- o What were the negative or frustrating points involved in accessing the service(s)? In what areas did the service(s) not meet your expectations? How could the service(s) have supported you more effectively?
 - Explore ‘people,’ ‘process’ and ‘outcome’ related dimensions.
 - Barriers experienced, poor recommendations / referrals?
- Were you/Are you aware of the the appeal mechanisms in place following a Deciding Officers decision on entitlement to a scheme or payment? Were you told of this mechanism?
- Are there other services you would like/would have liked that aren’t provided at present?
- Would you consider work placement programmes as being worthwhile/appropriate initiatives? Why/Why not? Probe around how such programmes might be useful/might work
- What do you think about the proposed ‘work for your dole’ programme being considered by the Minister for Social Protection?
- At a more general level do these services that we are talking about work effectively together as a ‘package’ of services? Are they designed effectively to support the needs of the young unemployed person/jobseeker? Why? Why not? Whats ‘missing’ from the services as they are currently set up? How would you like to see these services improved? How could the State services work more effectively in supporting and assisting you at this point in your life?
 - Focus of advice/support /training offered?
 - Quality of contact/expertise offered?
 - Process involved in accessing service/Need to be reconfigured?
- What would you say to another young person who has recently become unemployed that would help them to have a good experience in accessing the services?
- How do you feel about the future?

APPENDIX THREE
INTERCEPT INTERVIEW – QUESTIONNAIRE

- Brief background to the research – rationale and research sponsor. Assurances of confidentiality/anonymity, how data will be recorded
- ‘Screen’ to ensure ‘fit’ with required demographic. Invite to participate (10 minute ‘conversation’ prior to meeting with Jobs Facilitator (JF) at local Social Welfare Office & 10 minute ‘conversation’ following meeting with JF))

Prior to Meeting with Jobs Facilitator (10 Minutes – Approx)

- How long have you been accessing this service?
- How would you describe your experience(s) with this service? (positives & negatives) How has your experience with this service been useful?
- What do you hope to ‘get’ from your meeting (1) today and (2) in general? In what way do you expect the service will assist you (1) today and (2) in general (in securing appropriate training/employment), Do you have a specific outcome(s) in mind for todays meeting?
- Are there other support services you would like that aren’t provided at present?

Following Meeting with Jobs Facilitator (10 Minutes – Approx)

- Were you ‘satisfied’/happy with your meeting today? Why/Why not?

Very Dissatisfied									Very Satisfied
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- Was this the type of service/support you needed at this time or was there some other type of service/support that would have been of more benefit?
- What were the positive aspects/good points involved in accessing the service today?
- How would you rate the quality of the information/support/‘counselling’ you received from the service today?

Poor									Excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- What were the negative or frustrating points involved in accessing the service today?
- How could this and other State provided training and support services work more effectively in supporting and assisting the young unemployed person/jobseeker?
- As a result of being unemployed here in Ireland how likely is it that you will emigrate within the next 12 months?

Very Unlikely									Very Likely
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- Can you tell us to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:
Being unemployed has had a negative effect on my sense of well being

Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- *My prospects for securing rewarding employment here in Ireland are not very good*

Strongly Disagree									Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



APPENDIX FOUR:
INFORMATION SHEET – RESEARCH ON YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) functions to represent the interests of young people and youth organisations. NYCI’s role is recognised in legislation (Youth Work Act) and as a social partner. The NYCI aims through its member organisations and its representative role to empower young people to participate in society as fulfilled confident individuals. The work of the NYCI is based on principles of equality, social justice and equal participation for all. In achieving these aims the NYCI seeks the emergence of a society in which young people are valued citizens who can make a meaningful contribution to their community.

The issue of youth unemployment is a policy priority for NYCI. To inform the policy and advocacy work the Youth Council is now undertaking research with young unemployed people on a number of key issues affecting their lives and related to their status as ‘unemployed.’ With this in mind NYCI has appointed independent research company, OCS Consulting to conduct a research study involving young jobseekers.

Very little is known of the experiences and opinions of young unemployed jobseekers as there is a lack of specific research and younger jobseekers are often underrepresented in other studies. The aim of this research is therefore to develop a better understanding of the needs and experiences of young people (aged between 18 and 25) who are currently unemployed. A key aim of the research is to capture the experience of young people currently unemployed and to illustrate any problems they may have encountered in their engagement with the social welfare system, and in seeking to secure employment. Those targeted are being asked to participate to ensure that policy recommendations are based on the genuine needs of people aged between 18 and 25. The research report will be also be used to inform NYCI’s policy and campaign work on youth unemployment.

You can help by taking part in this research; You can give a real understanding of your experience as a jobseeker and the support that is needed by young people in similar circumstances.

Taking part in the research would involve participating in a focus group discussion for about 90 minutes. The focus group experience would be just like a conversation – telling the researcher of your experience as a jobseeker and your interaction with the State provided support services operating in this area.

Your conversation with the OCS researcher will be kept **strictly confidential**. No-one from the social welfare or state training services will know that you are participating or indeed what you say. In the research report, all the information jobseekers give will be grouped together so that no one jobseeker can be identified. All records of the focus group meeting will be deleted 6 months after the study is completed. There is no obligation to participate. If there is a question(s) that focus group participants do not want to answer they will not have to. There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers. We simply want to hear of your own personal experiences.

The focus group is taking place at **x (location) on x (date) at x (time)** and will run for 90 minutes until approximately **x (time)**. Approximately 9 people will participate in each focus group.

If you have any questions about this research study at any time please feel free to contact;

Hugh O’Connor at

OCS Consulting, 26/27 Upper Pembroke Street, Dublin 2,

Tel: 01 637 3928

Or

Marie-Claire McAleer

National Youth Council of Ireland, 3, Montague Street, Dublin 2

Tel: 01 478 4122

Your Consent

I have received an explanation of the research and I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary

Name _____ Date _____

Many thanks for your assistance with this important research and we look forward to meeting with you again at the focus group meeting.





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Comhionannais agus Gaeltachta
Department of Community, Equality
and Gaeltacht Affairs*

