

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM OIDEACHAS AGUS COIMIRCE SHÓISIALACH

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Dé Céadaoin, 4 Samhain 2015

Wednesday, 4 November 2015

The Joint Committee met at 1 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Ray Butler,	Senator Gerard P. Craughwell,
Deputy Catherine Byrne,	Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell.
Deputy Ciarán Cannon,	
Deputy Michael Conaghan,	
Deputy Jim Daly,	
Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh,	
Deputy Willie O'Dea,	
Deputy Brendan Ryan,	

In attendance: Senator Diarmuid Wilson.

DEPUTY JOANNA TUFFY IN THE CHAIR.

The joint committee met in private session until 1. 25 p.m.

JobBridge and the Youth Guarantee: National Youth Council, Ballymun Jobs Centre and Department of Social Protection

Chairman: I welcome our guests and will now advise them on privilege.

I draw their attention to the fact that by virtue of section 17(2)(I) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

The opening statements submitted to this committee will be published on the committee website after this meeting. Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. I would like to inform our guests and the people in the Gallery that the broadcasting and recording services have asked them to ensure their mobile phones are turned off completely or switched to airplane, safe or flight mode, depending on their devices, for the duration of the meeting.

Today, we are looking at the operation and impact of the JobBridge and Youth Guarantee initiatives. The joint committee has discussed approaches to labour market activation, including the Pathways to Work strategies, the latest of which was adopted earlier this year, on many occasions. Today, we have an opportunity to get an update on JobBridge and the Youth Guarantee, which are two important measures in this regard. I am pleased to welcome the officials who are present to assist the committee: Mr. James Doorley and Mr. Ian Power of the National Youth Council of Ireland, Ms Nuala Whelan and Mr. Mick Creedon of the Ballymun Jobs Centre and Mr. Terry Corcoran and Mr. Paul Carroll of the Department of Social Protection. I invite Mr. Power to commence our discussion by making a presentation on behalf of the National Youth Council of Ireland.

Mr. Ian Power: On behalf of the National Youth Council of Ireland, I welcome this opportunity to address the joint committee today about JobBridge and the Youth Guarantee. We have engaged with a number of members of the committee on these issues previously. I can tell those who are not familiar with our work that we are the representative body for 49 voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. Our member organisations work with approximately 380,000 young people between the ages of 10 and 24 years with the support of approximately 40,000 volunteers and 1,400 staff.

In light of the limited time available for this presentation, I will make a few short comments on JobBridge before focusing primarily on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. We have circulated a copy of our report, JobBridge -Stepping Stone or Dead End?, to members of the committee. The report, which was launched last February, is based on survey responses and face-to-face interviews with young people who have participated in JobBridge. The find-

ings in our report are mixed. Most of those surveyed and interviewed were satisfied after they had participated in JobBridge. Many of them indicated to us that JobBridge facilitated them in acquiring work experience, helped them to get active and provided contacts and networking opportunities to them. Our research identified a number of deficiencies with JobBridge, including poorly designed internships, inadequate mentoring, instances of unacceptable treatment of interns and a lack of clarity regarding the rights of participants. Other issues which emerged include insufficient monitoring, inadequate income support and evidence of abuse of the cooling-off period leading to job displacement. We are concerned that, based on the limited sample in our study, just 27% of people secure full-time employment following participation in the JobBridge scheme.

We have made ten recommendations to enhance and improve the quality and impact of the JobBridge scheme. We believe these recommendations would enhance the experience of interns, aid progression to employment and ensure public funds to support employment are put to good use. Following the publication of our report, we had a constructive meeting with the Minister of State with responsibility for this area at which we discussed our recommendations. We welcome the decision of the Department of Social Protection to conduct an evaluation of the suitability, effectiveness and relevance of JobBridge. We hope, based on our study, that this evaluation will involve consultation and discussion with actual participants and is more than a desk research exercise. Our involvement in this area has taught us that there is a great deal of value to be gained from talking to participants in JobBridge. Such interactions provide contextual flavour for what they are experiencing. At a time of public concern about low pay, precarious employment and poor working conditions, we must ensure the integrity of internships as a meaningful way for young people to develop skills through experiential learning. We must safeguard against exploitation by employers and ensure internships are mutually beneficial to employers and employees. It must be stressed that internships should not be defined as having no remuneration attached to them. They should pay the living wage where possible. Employers who pay the living wage should be recognised as only doing what is right.

Our concern about quality opportunities for young people is not limited to the JobBridge scheme. In 2011, the National Youth Council of Ireland was among the first organisations in Ireland to call for the introduction of the European Youth Guarantee to tackle the youth unemployment crisis. We believe in the premise of the Youth Guarantee, which is that young job-seekers should be provided with a guaranteed offer of a good-quality employment, education, training and-or work experience within four months of becoming unemployed. It is an effective way to support young people into work. Obviously, the incentive to implement the European Youth Guarantee scheme was assisted by the potential for the drawdown of significant EU funds from the youth employment initiative and the European Social Fund. We understand that the amount of money in question is approximately €130 million per annum. Our view that the full implementation of the Youth Guarantee could make a positive difference was reinforced by our involvement with the Ballymun Youth Guarantee pilot scheme. We will hear from some of those involved in that scheme in a moment. In the Ballymun example, the number of young people on the live register fell by 29% as a result of a co-ordinated effort by the statutory and non-statutory agencies involved.

While we have always understood that the implementation of the Youth Guarantee would take time and create challenges for all involved, we have a number of significant concerns. First, we are concerned about the pace, scale and level of investment in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. According to the national implementation plan, some 28,350 education, training or work experience places were to be provided in 2014, which was the first year of

Youth Guarantee implementation. Data provided by the Department indicates that just 23,213 education, training or work experience places were delivered in 2014, which is more than 5,000 fewer than promised. We estimate that prior to the introduction of the Youth Guarantee in 2013, approximately 20,000 places were provided. Our view, therefore, is that the extent of additional provision is inadequate. We hope the number of places delivered has increased this year. We would certainly welcome information from the Department of Social Protection at the end of the year.

Our second concern is that education and training is not solely an issue of quantity; it is also an issue of quality. Our experience has shown that the forms of education and training provided must be appropriate to the jobseeker and relevant to the labour market. Too often in the past, jobseekers were sent on training courses solely to meet the need of providers to fill places. A key feature of the Youth Guarantee is the development of personal progression plans between young jobseekers and caseworkers in Intreo offices to meet the particular needs of the young people in question. The most recent data available, which covers the period from January 2014 to July 2015, indicates that 9,073 young jobseekers completed personal progression plans. We believe the Department of Social Protection should invest more time, resources and staff in the development of personal progression plans for all young jobseekers who have been on the live register for four months or more. I refer particularly to the 18,500 young people who have been on the live register for longer than 12 months.

Our third concern is that the structures and partnerships required to deliver the Youth Guarantee are not in place. We have always stated and acknowledged that the Department of Social Protection cannot deliver the Youth Guarantee on its own and that all statutory, voluntary and private sector stakeholders have a role to play. This was evident in the case of the Ballymun pilot scheme, which clearly would not have succeeded without the partnership that was formed. The National Youth Council of Ireland has not been consulted or engaged with regarding the Youth Guarantee since December 2013 even though the national implementation plan states that as a national partner, the council should be invited to participate in the delivery and-or review of the Youth Guarantee. The members of the National Youth Council of Ireland who are working at local level have a clear insight and a role to play in informing what should happen next. While the national implementation plan gave detailed commitments and figures for 2014, it did not look beyond that period. There are no published projections or commitments for 2015 and beyond. If we are to improve the Youth Guarantee, we need to be able to measure its success. If we are to analyse the impact and effectiveness of the Youth Guarantee, we need more data and information and an evaluation of implementation of the strategy over its first two years.

We welcome the fact that youth unemployment has declined from an all-time high of 31.6% in February 2012 to 19.7% in the most recent figures, which relate to October 2015. However, the rate of youth unemployment is still more than twice the pre-crisis rate of between 8% and 9%. We are particularly concerned about the 18,500 people under the age of 25 who have been in receipt of jobseekers' payments for more than one year. In our view, it is simply not good enough to accept as a fact that the youth unemployment rate will always be double the national average rate of unemployment. We think it would be wrong to assume that the recovering economy will solve this problem. The reality is some young people will not be able to access the jobs which will become available without the education, training and other supports promised under the Youth Guarantee. We are all familiar with the social and financial cost and impact of unemployment. I refer particularly to the impact of long periods of joblessness on individuals, families, communities and society as a whole. The scarring effects of long-term

youth unemployment are especially damaging. As we emerge from the crisis, as our economy recovers and as more jobs come on stream, investment in the Youth Guarantee makes sense and should be prioritised. All the evidence demonstrates that it is socially just and economically prudent to do so.

Chairman: I ask Ms Whelan to make a presentation on behalf of the Ballymun Jobs Centre.

Ms Nuala Whelan: I thank the Chairman and the members of the joint committee for inviting us to make a presentation on the operation and impact of the JobBridge and Youth Guarantee schemes.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I cannot hear a word Ms Whelan is saying. I am not prepared to put up with this.

Ms Nuala Whelan: The Ballymun Job Centre has daily experience of working with and supporting jobseekers to identify and secure labour market opportunities. We, therefore, continually assess the barriers which prevent access to the labour market, the quality of activation programmes and their relevance in supporting jobseekers in moving towards sustainable employment.

An overview of the Ballymun Job Centre was provided in the documentation distributed prior to the meeting. According to Pathways to Work - implementation of the European Council's recommendation for a youth guarantee - the Youth Guarantee "will involve a mix of initial assessment, career guidance and planning, education and training or work experience, aimed at increasing the capacity of young people to access employment". There is also a reference to "partnership between the public service agencies and local businesses and community groups" and other stakeholders. In many ways this reflects the Ballymun Youth Guarantee pilot scheme, which sought to design and implement a quality driven client-centred approach to supporting young people in their journey towards the labour market. The objective was to enable sustainable access rather than short-term outcomes.

The Ballymun Youth Guarantee pilot scheme ran from November 2013 to December 2014. During that time 739 young people were invited to participate. Some 679 young people aged from 18 to 24 years engaged and were in receipt of a jobseeker's payment. The process involved activation by the Department of Social Protection through the Intreo office and attendance at a group information session. The clients were then referred to the Ballymun Job Centre, to the guidance team which consisted of five guidance officers and a team leader. They worked on a one to one basis with each client for a four month period, after which time a quality offer was made. This was underpinned by an inter-agency network. There were, therefore, national and local implementation groups, made up of key stakeholders. This ensured the process was flexible and able to respond effectively to the needs of jobseekers.

Before the young people were referred to the Ballymun Job Centre, they were profiled in three target groups. Group one comprised clients who had received an education up to or less than junior certificate level, no work experience and numerous barriers to education and employment. Group two had completed their leaving certificate and some work experience. Group three had completed their leaving certificate or above and had some good work experience. This influenced the level of guidance provided for the jobseeker. The job centre's key role was to pilot the delivery of an in-depth career guidance service. It consisted of a four-step process which included an initial assessment of the client's individual needs in respect of education, training, skills and personal circumstances and a tailored career guidance process

which identified latent skills, abilities, preferred behavioural style in the workplace and so on. A range of evidence-based methodologies and tools were used to help in this assessment which informed the development of a career plan which included a career objective and some short-term career goals. Implementation of this plan was the fourth stage which was carried out in a very positive and supportive way.

We used this approach to achieve outcomes such as increased self-awareness, improved self-esteem, building career self-efficacy and helping the client to become more resilient in the labour market. This enabled sustainable access to the labour market rather than short-term career outcomes. Through the inter-agency approach a range of quality offers was developed, including further education and training programmes, supported employment such as community employment, Gateway, JobBridge, blended learning interventions and private sector employment. Target group one received 180 offers; group two, 283, while 99 offers were made to group three clients. For clients deemed not to be ready for employment services, a pre-offer was available which could, for example, include addiction counselling. Participants felt the Youth Guarantee was very beneficial, that it helped them to gain soft skills and experience in the labour market.

The national Youth Guarantee should be based on the objective of investing in young people in order to increase their employability and labour market sustainability in the long term. Some lessons from the pilot scheme include, at an organisational level, the adoption of a guidance policy by the Department of Social Protection and the definition of a quality guidance model in terms of the systems and structures that should be implemented. At a practitioner level, the skills and approach of the guidance practitioner are key to ensuring the client has a good quality journey to the labour market. At client level, a non-intimidating setting is paramount where trust and a good rapport can be established with the guidance practitioner.

Many jobseekers engaging with our services progressed to JobBridge. This was also the case with the Youth Guarantee pilot scheme and, in most cases, it has been a very positive experience. Mr. Maurice Devlin, in his evaluation of the Youth Guarantee pilot scheme, stated, "Providing young people with Work Experience is key: Skills can be taught but this is not the same as experience". This is what most young people involved in the pilot scheme felt they needed to access the labour market. JobBridge, when seen as a quality offer and identified as an intervention that will assist the jobseeker in overcoming some of his or her labour market barriers or meeting a particular need, can be very positive. Feedback from jobseekers is that they need experience for their CV, curriculum vitae. It helps them to build self-esteem, their social capital and motivation. JobBridge can be a positive intervention when used in the right way, when the jobseeker has identified a need which it will fulfil when the internship has been identified as part of a career plan and when the employer has identified the experience on offer. Some evaluation reports are available on www.welfare.ie. They were conducted around the Youth Guarantee pilot scheme.

Chairman: For the benefit of the committee and others present, the Ballymun Job Centre is not part of the Department of Social Protection. It is a voluntary community group and has a board of management formed from the local community. Is that correct?

Ms Nuala Whelan: Yes.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Was it not set up under the Youth Guarantee?

Chairman: No. It has been in place since the 1980s.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: It was a pilot programme.

Mr. Mick Creedon: The Youth Guarantee was a pilot project funded through the European Union, with the Department of Social Protection as a lead partner. The job centre is a non-governmental organisation, NGO. It is a co-operative which was established in 1986. It has a board of management and primarily generates its income through contracts to deliver services in the area; for example, we have a contract with the Department of Social Protection to deliver the local employment service network within the area. The staff from the local employment service were involved in the pilot scheme. We also have a contract to deliver a jobs club in the area through the Department. We have other income from private trust funds and European projects.

Chairman: I invite Mr. Carroll to make the presentation on behalf of the Department of Social Protection.

Mr. Paul Carroll: I thank the Chairman and committee members for the invitation to meet them to discuss the Department's JobBridge and Youth Guarantee initiatives. I am a principal officer in the Department with responsibility, among other things, for the JobBridge scheme. I am joined by my colleague Mr. Terry Corcoran, principal officer with responsibility for activation policy. I will outline the current position on JobBridge, while Mr. Corcoran will address the Youth Guarantee.

JobBridge was introduced in July 2011 in response to the unprecedented collapse of the economy, particularly the sharp rise in unemployment. The primary aim of the scheme is to give unemployed people the opportunity to secure work experience and prove their competence to prospective employers, in other words, to break the cycle where they cannot find a job without experience but cannot gain experience without a job. Prior to the introduction of JobBridge, any unemployed person who wished to avail of an internship opportunity to gain work experience risked losing his or her jobseeker's payment as he or she was no longer considered to be genuinely available for and seeking work. JobBridge addressed this anomaly and provided an additional top-up payment of €50 per week as a contribution to the costs incurred by job seekers in participating in an internship. It is important to note that participation in JobBridge is wholly voluntary. There is no obligation on job seekers to look for, or take up, a JobBridge internship and job seeker payments are not conditional on participation in JobBridge.

It is also worth noting that many firms, particularly small and medium sized firms, which constitute the vast majority of JobBridge host organisations, were able to grow their workforce during a period when access to working capital was very constrained. In this way, firms could seek to sustain or increase output and revenues and if successful, prove the business case to retain the interns as paid employees at the conclusion of the internship.

To date, JobBridge has attracted the voluntary participation of over 43,500 jobseekers and has encouraged over 17,800 host organisations to offer a wide range of work experience opportunities. There are currently approximately 4,770 people engaged in internships with approximately 1,650 further internship positions advertised on the Department's website.

As previously advised to this committee, the Department commissioned an independent evaluation of JobBridge by Indecon. Given its scale and scope, the Indecon evaluation is, by a considerable margin, the most authoritative review completed to date. In addition to reviewing administrative data, its findings are based upon a survey group of over 4,400 interns with a response rate of over 53% and a survey group of over 3,000 host organisations with a response

rate of over 49%. The results of this evaluation indicate that about 61% of interns progress into paid employment within a period of five months of completing their internship, with about 36% securing employment immediately on completion of the internship, of whom over 50% enter employment with the host organisation. These progression outcomes are the highest of any general employment or training programme offered by the State and compare very favourably with similar programmes in other countries. The outcomes are also reflected in the high levels of satisfaction reported by interns and host organisations. A total of 89% of interns surveyed felt that JobBridge had given them new skills, 73% said that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the nature of the work experience and 66% said they would recommend the experience to other job seekers. Employer and host organisations reported satisfaction levels of approximately 90%.

This is not to say that JobBridge host organisations will always provide a good experience or that interns will always find the experience worthwhile. However, in order to try to ensure that JobBridge provides a good basis for successful outcomes, the Department applies a number of conditions. The first condition is the implementation of the standard agreement, which is signed and agreed to by both the intern and the host organisation at the outset of the placement. This agreement clearly states the terms of the internship, including the expected working hours and the specific learning outcomes the intern will gain over the course of his or her internship.

Second, host organisations must agree to the basic terms and conditions of the scheme at the outset and before an application can be validated. These terms and conditions include the submission of a monthly monitoring and compliance reports. Third, host organisations must certify that the internship does not displace an existing employee and the host organisation must have no vacancies in the area of activity where the internship is offered. Fourth, there is a cooling-off period of six months between the end of one internship and the beginning of another. Fifth, limits related to the size of the host organisation are placed on the number of internships that it can offer. In addition, the Department provides a toolkit for host organisations including a guide to good mentoring and the elements of a good internship. The Department also conducts both random on-site inspections and inspections in response to complaints received. Over 11,800 monitoring visits have been conducted since the scheme's inception, with over 4,600 last year alone. Reports indicate that 98% of these have been satisfactory. Remedial action is always taken in cases of non-compliance.

The economic environment today is very different to that of four years ago. There has been a significant and sustained increase in employment and the rate of unemployment continues to fall and is now at a new low of 9.4%. Therefore, the Department is commissioning a second independent evaluation of the scheme. The closing date for receipt of tenders was 19 October 2015 and the assessment process is ongoing. It is expected that the evaluation will be completed and a final report published in early 2016. The results of this review will provide an evidential basis upon which to consider if and how the scheme might best be improved.

Mr. Terry Corcoran: I will deal with remaining issues. More broadly on youth employment policies, as opposed to JobBridge on its own, the primary Government strategy to tackle youth unemployment is through policies to create the environment for a strong economic recovery by promoting competitiveness and productivity, primarily through the Action Plan for Jobs. However, the Government recognises that as the recovery takes hold, there is a need for additional measures to ensure that as many as possible of the jobs created are taken up by unemployed job seekers and, in accordance with the EU Council recommendation for a Youth Guarantee, by young job seekers in particular. This is the rationale behind the Government's

Pathways to Work strategy and the treatment of young people within that strategy.

The Youth Guarantee sets a medium-term objective of ensuring that young people receive an offer of employment, education or training within four months of becoming unemployed. With services such as Intreo, Youthreach, VTOS, PLC programmes and JobBridge, Ireland already had many of the component parts of a Youth Guarantee as suggested by the European Commission. The main plank of the guarantee in Ireland is to prioritise access to these programmes for young people who become unemployed, with the objective of ensuring that they have an opportunity for employment, further education or work experience within the recommended period of four months of becoming unemployed, as per the EU Council recommendation.

A comprehensive account of the approach to the roll-out of the Youth Guarantee is set out in the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan published in January 2014. As outlined in the plan, the first intervention is to provide case officer support to help newly unemployed young people find and secure sustainable jobs. Accordingly, operating processes have been refined in each of our regions to prioritise the early engagement of young people through Intreo to ensure that all young people receive expert advice and have access to progression options. That advice may be delivered by the Local Employment Service, LES, where one exists, as is the case in Ballymun, for example. The LES is not universally available across the country but there is substantial coverage. In areas where there is no LES, advice will be delivered by the Department's own staff. In addition, as part of our commitment to engage with 100,000 long-term unemployed people through the Intreo and JobPath processes during 2015, we are prioritising engagement with the approximately 13,000 young people who are already long-term unemployed. In implementing these processes, the Department is applying learning from the Ballymun Youth Guarantee Pilot Project and making extensive use of the services of the LES and Job Clubs, as was the case in Ballymun. The description the members heard of the use of inter-agency approaches to developing additional mentoring and programme places is also being applied in a number of other areas in the country, involving youth service organisations, in particular, in the delivery of a programme which I will refer to later. It is a development from JobBridge.

For those who do not find employment through the process just described, additional offers are provided for. Most such offers - over 70% - are in existing further education or training programmes. Others are in existing community based employment programmes such as CE, Gateway and Tús. In some cases under the guarantee, access to these programmes has been liberalised for young people. In the past, such access was much more concentrated on older, long-term unemployed people.

In addition we have recently introduced two new programmes specifically for young people. The first of these is JobsPlus youth, an employment subsidy for unemployed people under 25 years of age which is payable after four months of unemployment. The subsidy can be up to €416 per month for two years for an employer who takes on a qualified young person. The duration for access to that programme for older unemployed people is one year. The second programme is the developmental internships programme First Steps which aims to offer young people who are particularly distant from the labour market a work experience opportunity with sponsor employers. The witnesses from Ballymun put such people in the "Group One" category.

Some of the initiatives that were planned under the Youth Guarantee required primary legislation to allow positive discrimination on age grounds in the provision of employment services and supports. That legislation was passed late last year.

The launch of the First Steps developmental internship programme and the JobsPlus variant for young people required the passage of that legislation. The legislation also permitted the introduction of earlier and more intensive engagement by Intreo with the young unemployed as compared with older unemployed people.

Under a related initiative, the EURES unit of the Department, which is part of the European employment service network, is currently implementing the Experience Your Europe, EYE, programme. It operates in parallel with a broader “Your First EURES Job” initiative at European level to offer young unemployed people support in taking up employment, work experience and training in other EU countries. Under the scheme, EURES Ireland can fund some of the training, travel, re-location costs and-or living costs incurred by jobseekers undertaking up to 12 months of training and work experience abroad. The total budget for the scheme this year is €2.3 million. Under the co-sponsored placement programme element, young jobseekers between the ages of 18 to 24 are sponsored by an Irish-based company and placed in a partner company in another European country for up to 12 months to gain experience, for example, language skills. Two pilot projects of this programme commenced in May 2015 resulting in placements in the Netherlands and Germany, with further placements planned in Denmark and Poland in the coming weeks. The numbers on these are still small but further development and extension of these EYE projects will be informed by the outcome of a review due to take place before the end of this year.

Overall, taking new and existing measures into account, expenditure on programmes providing employment, training and further education opportunities for young people is estimated to be in excess of €500 million in each of the years 2014 and 2015. We have provided a table setting out the final participation figures for these programmes in 2014. It is appended to the statement. As noted earlier, the uptake on programmes was more than 23,000 as compared with the 28,000 overall intended provision. The lower numbers are partly as a result of the fact that the programmes are demand led. As my colleague mentioned, participation on programmes such as JobBridge is entirely voluntary and is therefore led by demand from young people and employers. The lower numbers are also partly due to delays due to the legislative requirement I mentioned earlier.

With regard to funding, of the €500 million expected to be spent in each of those two years, the European Social Fund and the European youth initiative are expected to contribute approximately €60 million a year of the €500 million, which is slightly over 10% of expenditure.

Chairman: It has been a long presentation.

Mr. Terry Corcoran: I am sorry. I did not realise it was so long.

Finally, as has already been mentioned, youth unemployment has fallen substantially from its peak and under current policy we expect it to fall sustainably below 20% in the near future.

Chairman: Thank you. We will now take questions. I call Deputy Ó Snodaigh.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I am due to be in the Dáil shortly so if I am not here for them I will read the answers in the record. I will put my questions in the order of the presentations.

The National Youth Council produced a report earlier this year on JobBridge. It was quite critical but also highlighted the need for a further analysis, so it is good to hear that the analysis is about to take place. Has the witness seen anything since the publication of that report that allays the fears that were raised in it? Has the witness any view on the First Steps programme,

which is the equivalent of JobBridge for young people but with a compulsion element as far as I recall? The report stated that there was a range of poorly designed internships, inadequate mentoring, instances of unacceptable treatment of interns and lack of rights clarity concerning terms and conditions. Other issues identified included insufficient monitoring and auditing of the scheme to prevent job abuse, job displacement and inadequate income support.

The programme undertaken by the Ballymun group under the Youth Guarantee was comprehensive. It is a model that could be followed, but I am dubious that it will be, particularly given that the Government at the same time as it was encouraging the Ballymun group was developing the JobPath scheme which would take away many of those who could benefit from the intensive work the group was outlining. Is the group concerned about the development and roll-out of JobPath, which involves private companies taking on some of the role the group would have had previously? There is an incentive for the company to locate them.

With regard to the Department's representatives, I have highlighted my views of JobBridge so I will not elaborate on them in detail but I will offer a quick calculation. My view is that JobBridge is a subsidy for private industry equivalent to over €400 million in the years since it was established. I supported the Minister when she announced JobsPlus. If the same subsidy had been put into JobsPlus there would have been more sustainable work. On the Indecon report, and thankfully there will be a new report, with 43,500 people having participated in JobBridge if one looks at the figures in that report the survey is only based on 5% of the total number of interns. It was carried out a few years ago so at this stage it is not reflective of the experience and in some ways has been discredited. It would serve everybody well if we did not use it as a tool. It was carried out very shortly after JobBridge was launched and probably prior to many of the headline JobBridge cases of abuse or wrong internships being created. There was one last week where a veterinarian was being sought under JobBridge. I doubt that was ever the intention of those who designed it, but it has been abused in that way.

Finally, how many companies have been blacklisted as a result of the monitoring the witness outlined in the presentation? Why do we not name and shame the companies that have been involved in abuse of the scheme or abuse of the interns on the scheme?

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I thank the witnesses for their interesting presentations. Is Mr. Power aghast at what he is hearing from the Department? It is not so much that there is a contradiction but there are huge gaps which Mr. Power outlined in his summary report. However, according to the summary report there is 22% for very satisfactory, 36% for satisfactory and 11% either way. That is 69% which would be veering on satisfactory, which lines up with much of what the Department says. I might be wrong about that but that is the impression. If there were three things Mr. Power could do tomorrow, what would be the three priorities? It appears to be working, but there are gaps. Could Mr. Power tell us what those gaps are? Also, I note that nearly 1,000 were aged over 55 years. I do not see any of their reactions in the report. Perhaps he would comment on that.

Turning to the Department's representatives, I recall hearing about, and being fond of, the concept of Gateway. I do not know if other members remember it, but it was going to be creative, imaginative and implemented through the county councils. The Youth Guarantee uptake in 2014 was only 192. Can the Department give an update on Gateway and how it is working? Also, should there be more in the vocational training opportunities scheme? The numbers are quite low there.

They are quite general questions. Even as an independent, I consider this to have been an

incredible train to get out of a station, and it is working very well. Many people, including those sitting in front of me, put a great deal of effort into it. The witnesses are right, and as for the two new training programmes that now are to be brought on board, namely, the First Steps and JobsPlus Youth programmes, it will be interesting to see how they fare and what has been learned from the reports and what to avoid. I ask Mr. Power and the representatives from the Department to respond to these general questions.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I thank the witnesses for their attendance. My questions are addressed in the main to Mr. Carroll and Mr. Corcoran. I had some serious difficulties with the JobBridge scheme. The plan itself was good and offered potential to people to experience work for which they may have just upskilled or whatever. However, in some cases at least, I believe it was grossly abused. I am referring to the public sector in particular in this regard and I seek the departmental representatives' comments on that. For example, where was the plan in respect of providing JobBridge places for teachers or school caretakers?. Who sanctioned those jobs in the first instance? Either one has a vacancy for a teacher or one does not. Similarly, either one has a vacancy for a special needs assistant in a school, or a porter in a school or a hospital or wherever else, or one does not. While I have not seen a JobBridge placement for a nurse, I am sure that had I looked hard enough I would have found that somebody somewhere was looking for a nurse on JobBridge. Consequently, I had some serious problems in this regard. Mr. Carroll referred to specific learning outcomes, SLOs, that should be related to the job. As no two jobs are exactly the same, was a *pro forma* SLO prepared for each industry or was there an SLO per job offer - that is, was there a process whereby someone from the Department of Social Protection agreed on the SLOs with the prospective organisation that was bringing in the person? I have spoken to a number of people who participated in the JobBridge scheme and this is the first time I have heard about the SLOs. I cannot recall any people telling me these were the specific learning outcomes that they were obliged to tick off at the end of their period, these were the ones they managed to cover and these were the ones they did not.

This brings me to a question on displacement. If people were being placed into jobs as teachers, porters, nurses or whatever, surely real jobs must have been displaced somewhere along the line. Moreover, if this was happening in the public sector, it certainly must have been exploited terribly in the private sector. Consequently, I do not accept that there was no displacement. As for on-site inspections, when were these inspections carried out and by whom? Was it by someone from the Department of Social Protection? I am directing these questions specifically to Mr. Carroll at present and I note he is busy writing away. I refer to the six-month exception whereby, having finished with one person on the JobBridge scheme, an employer must wait six months before taking on another person. I may be wrong in this regard and someone else may wish to join in, but I believe that if one redefines the terms of the JobBridge placement, one can set up a second one immediately. Therefore, one could have a stream of people going through one's organisation constantly on JobBridge. There is no doubt but that what started out as a good thing for people who were unemployed was absolutely horsed and abused by employers in both the private and public sectors.

I will move on to Mr. Corcoran and the Youth Guarantee. Some great work has been done in the Youthreach programme. I have visited many Youthreach centres in my time, and some excellent work has also been done in Traveller training centres. In respect of the back to education allowance, BTEA, scheme and the vocational training and opportunities scheme, VTOS, I have a problem in that a person who is on a BTEA scheme is at a terrible disadvantage when compared with a person who is on VTOS, and I believe the Department has been paring back the latter scheme over the years. Again, perhaps some of those directly involved will be able to

explain this better. I also have serious problems concerning people who, let us say, were plasterers, mechanics or whatever and who decided to embark on the back to education allowance programme. I taught information technology myself for a number of years and we were at the top end of the IT industry, if one likes, in the area of networking and maintenance. The cost of the course could run to €1,000 and that was just for one's textbooks and the supporting material required. Thereafter, the cost of one's examinations, which are required for one to become professionally accredited, could run to another €100 or €200. It was the type of course that attracted mainly men, and I met many men who started off with the best of intentions. However, I remember one man once telling me he did not have enough money to buy a cup of coffee at the coffee break each day. This was because his back to education allowance, although I am open to correction, was a once-off payment of €600, and - I will conclude shortly - by the time he had paid his voluntary contribution of €350 or €400 to the college giving the course, he then was obliged to buy textbooks, to prepare for all the rest and to take buses in and out. Consequently, to a certain degree, the back to education allowance is not meeting the requirement and there is not enough of the VTOS. While I could go on, I will not, but I agree with Deputy Ó Snodaigh that naming and shaming is good.

Chairman: The Senator can come back in later if necessary.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: The Senator has stated that JobBridge was totally and absolutely abused. If something is totally abused, the abuse rate is 90% or 95%. Can the Senator give members, at this committee, examples of the 95% of abuse?

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: With all due respect to the Senator, I mentioned the education sector, in which people were employed as teachers, special needs assistants and porters.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: What is Senator Craughwell actually talking about? Is he talking about a totality of abuse or instances?

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: In fairness-----

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: There are instances.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: -----there is no point in the Senator and I arguing about it. Mr. Carroll knows exactly what I am talking about.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Yes, well, the Senator should not be making up generalisations.

Chairman: We also have the surveys that were carried out, which contain more nuance than that.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Yes, but making up generalisations is extremely dangerous when people are trying to do great work.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: As we go through this each time I come here - it is good of Senator O'Donnell to be here today - we should hear from Mr. Carroll.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I am here most days. Moreover, I have been here for four years, whereas the Senator has been in the Seanad for about six months.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: It now has been a year.

Chairman: As I am aware that Deputy Ó Snodaigh must leave shortly, will I get the answers first, or does Deputy Brendan Ryan wish to speak now?

Deputy Brendan Ryan: I will be brief. First, I welcome the presentations by the three groups, which have been useful in informing the joint committee. I welcome the review announced by the Department. It had been called for by the National Youth Council and it is good to learn it is being delivered. Does the Department have a view at this point as to whether there might be a continuing need for JobBridge at a time when unemployment is decreasing at its present rate of improvement? As for the two surveys to which reference was made, I note that were members only to hear the results therefrom one at a time, they would walk away with a different sense of people's experience in this regard. The National Youth Council survey found that 27% of participants gained full-time employment, whereas the Indecon survey referred to 61% obtaining paid employment. Does that definition account for the difference in this regard or is there something beyond that? On the survey conducted by the National Youth Council, can its representatives clarify whether its survey covers only the 84 people who participated in the sample?

Mr. Carroll emphasised that JobBridge is completely voluntary. I note that certain political parties have made much hay out of references to "ScamBridge" and so on, as though people were forced to do it. Is there an element of force at ground level in respect of activation? Are people who do not go down this road looked at differently?

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I will not take up much time. First, this is a really good document. I have read it a few times and I am really interested in the figures it contains. I thank Mr. Ian Power, as well as Ms Nuala Whelan and Mr. Mick Creedon of the Ballymun Jobs Centre, for their attendance and the presentation. On reading through the documents and on hearing the response from the Department, I note the fact that 43,000 people participated in JobBridge and 61% of people progressed into paid jobs. One element that stuck out about the presentation was the person - I do not know whether it was a young man or a young woman - who said that the first meeting he or she had in Ballymun about the Youth Guarantee scheme might well have turned out to be the most productive and in many ways the most important meeting he or she had ever had. That is a huge statement for anybody to make - to refer to it as the most important meeting in one's life. I am sure these people are very young; I do not know how old they were. Any person that gets any job has his or her whole life turned around and becomes a completely different person. It leads the person into being able to get up in the morning with something to go to. It gives the person self-esteem. Most importantly, it gives a person a few bob in his or her pocket that belongs to him or her. That makes people very independent.

All of this is very interesting. I am tired of listening to the idea that people were marched into taking up JobBridge and coasted into working for €50 extra and were exploited. We have heard stories told at senior level in the last couple of weeks and days. I could sit here and tell five stories of young people I know personally who were in JobBridge and have all ended up in full-time jobs. Of those five, three had never worked before while two had worked in what I would call very mediocre jobs. For two of those people, their lives have been turned around completely. They have gone back to education at night supported by the companies that are now fully employing them. Whether it is 61% or 1%, if one person in every hundred gets a job, it is thousands of people. If that one person changes his or her life, who he or she is and where he or she has come from, it is a success. If anybody is exploiting JobBridge, it is the people themselves as the survey has said who could not agree or disagree whether it was a good experience. The 43% of people who could not agree or disagree were not marched in to do the

JobBridge course. They went voluntarily. Like anybody who takes up a job, one either likes it or one does not. That is my base. One either likes one's job or one does not. If one does not like it, one clears out of it and does something else.

I emphasise that the point being missed is as follows. I hear the idea that this is not a real job all the time on the doorstep and from different parties in the Dáil and Seanad and I am taken aback. If that one person was in my family and his or her life was changed to lead him or her in a different direction, I would consider it all to have been worthwhile. We can fish with numbers, do everything we like and disagree or agree, but when one person gets a job, his or her life changes completely. That is the positive thing that has happened with JobBridge and I know many of the participants including people in my own family. It changes people forever and, as such, we should not sit here and criticise whether it was 4%, 5% or 10%. A person's life changes when he or she gets a job.

I thank the witnesses for the presentation. I would like to ask in more depth about the National Youth Council's funding, how it gets it and who it gets it from, but we do not have time.

Deputy Michael Conaghan: There have been some very intemperate remarks in response to what speakers have said and some very negative criticism, which was unfair to the people here who have worked on this. I can imagine what has been involved as I have some experience of the local employment service having been involved in establishing one in Ballyfermot 15 or 20 years ago, which is now the local employment service in itself. Of course, local employment services will have some failures and there will be people who feel they did not get out of it what they anticipated. By and large, however, I could bring people up and down my road in Ballyfermot to talk to people who are now working. The beginning of the process for them involved schemes along the lines of those we are hearing about today. We should refer to the positive things that come out of these initiatives in the great majority of cases and leave aside the criticisms for the pub or somewhere else. This forum is for constructive criticism not throwaway remarks bordering on very negative criticism.

Chairman: When does Deputy Ó Snodaigh have to leave?

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: When the Dáil is on Topical Issue No. 4.

Chairman: I ask the witnesses to concentrate on Deputy Ó Snodaigh's questions and I will take the rest after that.

Mr. Ian Power: I will ask James Doorley, who was the author of the study, to talk about it more widely in a moment but first I will address some of the points. In terms of the study, it was qualitative and looked at the experiences not just the numbers, to respond to what Deputy Byrne was saying. Of those surveyed, two thirds were generally satisfied while one third was dissatisfied. We are trying to be constructive in terms of what can be improved and the Deputy asked about three aspects. With JobBridge, it should be the case that one cannot do the job when one starts it. One should have to learn the skills over the duration of the period in order for it to have been a meaningful experience. What we found from talking to young people was that they were not adequately mentored. The space and time was not provided by supervisors, which is the big area of concern. They were not getting the learning outcomes and were having those issues. There was some concern about displacement. That is not in the majority, it is the minority, and I understand that there are a lot of people who have benefited. However, we want that experience for everyone who participates, not just a certain number. I take that point as it is very important.

I turn briefly to the Youth Guarantee. A huge level of support is required for some young people who may have been at a distance from the labour market for some time, which is why the Youth Guarantee is so useful. It breaks it down into different groups and addresses the needs of those young people personally because not everybody is homogenous. Everybody is different in terms of background and where they would like to go. We have a concern in regard to the provision of the places - the 23 versus the 28 - that are planned and we do not have any visibility of the strategy for 2015 and 2016. It is a positive thing and we have learned how well it works from Ballymun. We want to see it happening in every community in Ireland, which is why we say we need a strategy and a plan and the money.

When the Youth Guarantee was initially being discussed, there was talk of approximately €130 million per annum in funding from Europe. We have confirmation now that it is approximately €60 million. Why is that difference there? We would like to know about it. While there is not necessarily a need for a huge amount of money, there is a need for somebody in each community like the Ballymun jobs centre to co-ordinate, get everyone around the table and knock heads together. It is someone to say that there are employers who can offer X amount of work experience, ask who is interested in it and join the dots. That is what is important from our perspective. I pass over to James Doorley to address some of the concerns about the report.

Mr. James Doorley: As Ian Power said, when we were starting out, we found a lot of young people saying that experience was a huge issue for them. As such, we obviously support the JobBridge scheme. Our report was primarily qualitative. We wanted to get the experience of young people. The Indecon report is extensive. However, while there is a great deal of good data in it and there were certain questions it asked, there were questions from our perspective which it did not ask. There were things it did not look at. As such, we welcome the fact that a new report is being prepared. It is important that it is not just based on the data and that we must engage with the participants. We found that there were many things of which we were not aware until we spoke to young people who had participated in the scheme. One of the things we would like to see in the second report is something Indecon recommended itself. It said we need a control group and to compare JobBridge with people who did not participate in it. Saying it is either 61% or 27% is not possible until we have that control group. That would be useful, as we would then learn what the added value of JobBridge was. There is a question as to whether some of those people would have got jobs without the intervention of a scheme. I acknowledge that the Department has done that in a range of other schemes and it is useful for it to know whether the schemes are adding value or blocking people.

On the First Steps internship scheme, we have concerns about any internship scheme. As Paul Carroll said earlier, JobBridge is voluntary. It may be that it has changed but the initial design of First Steps indicated that young people would be selected and told that they were now participating in the scheme. We are very clear that we support young people getting work experience, which many of them want. However, there is something about the concept of internships. Ross Perlin wrote a very good book about internships and their history. The whole idea of an internship or apprenticeship is about the exchange of skills and progression. The idea is that one does an internship on the basis that while one is now working in some respects for no remuneration, one is gaining skills. One can then say that when one finishes the internship, one is going somewhere, will get a job and will progress. In our report, that motivation came out very clearly. When I spoke to young people, the key thing was to get experience and get on the jobs ladder. If young people are told they must participate in First Steps without that support and the sense that they are going somewhere, we think it would be detrimental. We think it needs a lot of work to work out how it will be achieved.

In response to Senator O'Donnell, in the report we found that about one third were dissatisfied. We want it to be better for more people. I spoke to young people who had very good experiences and those who had experiences that were not as good where bad things happened during internships. Sometimes it was as a result of their own understanding of what they were engaging in. The Senator is right in that some of them were in the workforce for the first time. From our point of view, it is about how we can improve what is there. JobBridge has certainly delivered for some people but given that we are spending roughly about €80 million per annum and the State is running the internship scheme, we need to deliver more.

In respect of some other points-----

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: What about the 900 people over 50?

Chairman: I must just move on if Mr. Doorley does not mind and the Senator can come back later.

Mr. James Doorley: No problem.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: To be fair, there are nearly 1,000 people in the scheme who are aged over 55. There was no comment from them. Did Mr. Doorley have anything to add to that because that would be a different cohort and would be very interesting.

Mr. James Doorley: We wanted to provide some information on the scheme because some people think it is just for young people but the Department has always been very clear that it is for everybody. We spoke with young people as the National Youth Council of Ireland.

Chairman: Does Ms Whelan or Mr. Creedon wish to answer any questions?

Mr. Mick Creedon: I will pick up the point that was raised about JobPath. I hope they are not there today. I would be confident that the quality of our service and staff in the job centres speaks for itself. It remains to be seen whether the organisations involved in the JobPath programme can achieve that standard. That would be the first thing I would say and I would certainly hope it is complementary.

I understand the idea of JobPath started because there was a need to increase the number of case officers or guidance practitioners that would be available to assist unemployed people given the large increase in the numbers. In that sense, we hope that JobPath is complementary to ourselves because there is not enough capacity within the service to provide a good-quality service to unemployed people. This has been acknowledged in the Pathways to Work document. It raises the issue of the ratio of guidance practitioners to unemployed persons. That ratio in the Youth Guarantee was at international norms, at about 150 to one. This made a significant contribution to the success of the pilot. In addition, all of the guidance staff had a background and a qualification in guidance. I remember how at the beginning of the pilot, we had to send in a list of their qualifications to the national steering committee. Since the end of the pilot, we have stopped the intensive support that was there during the pilot because of our other commitments and gone back to our normal work. Our ratio has gone up and is about 250 to one. Whether it is a coincidence or not, we slowly phased out the pilot from the end of December 2014 to April 2015. Since the end of the intensive support that was available in the pilot, the number of people under the age of 25 signing on in Ballymun has gone up. While it came down by 29% during the pilot, it has gone up by 10% since then because we do not have the proper ratio of guidance practitioners to unemployed persons. There is a lesson there for us. I certainly hope JobPath is not there to take our jobs.

Chairman: Would Mr. Carroll or Mr. Corcoran like to come in?

Mr. Paul Carroll: I will respond to a number of questions because they are of a similar nature. The first relates to survey results and what they tell us. It is very clear that there are a variety of views relating to JobBridge, its effectiveness and whether it is a worthwhile experience for people. It is critically important that we listen to the views of participants. We welcome the publication of the National Youth Council of Ireland survey. The Minister of State and I met with Mr. Doorley and his team to discuss it and there is much in it that we will take on board in reviewing the effectiveness of the scheme. It is very important to note that it was based on the responses from 84 self-selecting respondents, seven of whom subsequently took part in one-to-one interviews. This compares with the Indecon report involving 2,364 interns and over 1,500 host organisations. That may go some way towards explaining the difference between the results. That report was wholly independent.

Mr. Power raised the issue of his hope or expectation that the evaluation we will commence very shortly will have those one-to-one interviews to get in-depth comment from people. I can assure him that they will and that, similarly, it will have a number of important elements. It will have an econometric review that will look at and address the issue raised by Mr. Power, which is hugely important, namely, what would have happened in any event. It will certainly look at a control group to give us some indication as to how these people would have fared if the scheme was not there. It will involve the surveying of all participants in the scheme and case studies with people that will get into some of those issues in depth. I hope this provides some assurance in that regard.

In respect of Deputy Ó Snodaigh's comments on First Steps and the report, there is a degree of misunderstanding relating to First Steps and the degree to which compulsion is seen as being an issue. With First Steps, we are talking about young people who are extremely marginalised and disadvantaged and who even during the Celtic tiger era had no prospect of gaining employment. It is a hugely resource-intensive programme. We are asking host organisations to give these young people a chance. The Department is also significantly committing in terms of providing ongoing support to those individuals. What is being asked of the individual is that the level of commitment on the part of a host organisation or the Department is reciprocated. Clearly, there is no point in dragging people kicking and screaming into a scheme. Due to misunderstandings about it and having listened to what has been said in respect of the report, I am reviewing the First Steps scheme to see whether those misconceptions can be better addressed to ensure we get better outcomes for the participants.

It is very important to emphasise and re-emphasise that JobBridge is wholly voluntary. The Department acts as a facilitator. What we are asking employers to do is to advertise a job if they have one. This is what they should be doing. If there is no job but the employer wants to provide a worthwhile work experience opportunity for somebody, it can do so. In doing so, it should set out what it considers to be the intended learning outcomes for the participant. The Deputy asked where these SLOs come in. I presume SLO is an abbreviation for specific learning. It is the host organisation which says, "This is what we are offering and this is what we think you will learn". Jobseekers look at that and decide whether they are attracted to that. If they are not attracted, that is fine. If they think that it is for them and apply and for whatever reason, it does not work out for them, they can give a week's notice and leave.

I am concerned about the language that is used relating to abuse or exploitation. There is no element of compulsion, there is no fallout from it and there are no questions asked other than how it went for the participant and given that it clearly did not work out, the reason why

it did not work out so that we can provide support, advice and guidance in respect of what the participant should do next. That is the issue. Again, there is a misconception. Why did we get almost 18,000 host organisations to provide opportunities for 43,500 people? It is because job-seekers are not homogenous and have very different needs. The Deputy has referred to people who come from disadvantaged, marginalised backgrounds and jobless households. What they want is to get a leg on the ladder for the first time. We are talking about people with low levels of educational attainment who want to enter into low level jobs. Let us not be snobbish about this. There is nothing wrong with wanting to work in a shop, be a caretaker or a cleaner, if that is the person's choice. However, they cannot find a job as a cleaner or a retail sales assistant because they have never worked and do not know anybody who does. They want a chance and Ms Whelan has clearly articulated and acknowledged the value of the JobBridge scheme to the young people of Ballymun.

On the other extreme, we receive job offers, including as a veterinary assistant, and it is assumed that is an abuse of the scheme. Why is it considered to be an abuse of the scheme? Is it because a person has received a third level education and a qualification? He or she does, but he or she lacks practical experience. That is what is being provided for through JobBridge. It is said there is no added value or learning opportunity, but JobBridge does what it says on the tin: it provides people with an opportunity to gain work experience. Therefore, to answer the point made by Mr. Power, the job placement offer should be such that the person would not have been able to do it otherwise. Is that the lesson? Let us say, for example, that the person knows how to do it but has been unable to find a job. What people want is to be able to put on their CV that they have worked with someone.

The learning outcomes will be different. The person who has graduated from college, where he or she may well have learned to do certain things, wants practical experience. Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh indicated that the Indecon report had, in some way, been "discredited". That is an inappropriate word to use. Nothing has been said or done to indicate that the Indecon report was discredited. It is wholly independent and valuable. Undoubtedly, given the variety of views and perspectives that can be taken on JobBridge, the Indecon report is by far the most authoritative and independent source of data. It reviews administrative data and significant numbers of participants were engaged with, but it was of its day. Undoubtedly, the economic climate has changed in the past four years and it is because of this that the Department wants to carry out a new review. It will take on board the comments made about the scope of the evaluation.

The Deputy asked why the Department was reluctant to name the organisations that had been suspended from participation in the JobBridge scheme. In that context, it is important to acknowledge that participation by the host organisation is wholly voluntary. We must be careful not to put people off. Organisations can be suspended from participation in JobBridge for a variety of reasons. For example, there is a requirement that a host organisation ensure compliance with a standard agreement. In regard to monitoring visits, Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell asked about who, why and when. The visits are conducted by departmental staff, case officers who interview the intern and host organisation at the place where the work experience is being gained. Visits have been conducted from the outset of the scheme and will continue. To date, approximately 25% of all internships have been reviewed, of which 98% have been fully compliant.

It is important to have a proper perspective of the scheme. I may have one view, while others may have a different one on the value of the scheme, but let us talk to those who are using it to

hear what they have to say. What they are saying is, “This is good for us.” There are certainly issues; we need to look at how we can enhance the experience in order that everybody will benefit from it. They are not necessarily abuses of the scheme. Some organisations have engaged in minor breaches of it. In these circumstances, we consider it appropriate, for example, that they be suspended from participation in the scheme for a period of six months. If we were to name these organisations or if organisations felt they might be named - we have seen the unfair, unwarranted and negative publicity associated with the scheme which is not supported by the facts - it would, undoubtedly, put them off participating. I consider a six-month suspension to be an appropriate response to a minor misdemeanour and that to publish or disclose the names would be punitive and not proportionate to the offence committed.

While the Department is fully aware of its obligations under freedom of information legislation and how the public interest might best be served by disclosing the names, it is also aware of the provision in section 36(1)(b) of the Act that we should not engage in activity that would result in a company suffering a financial loss. We have seen instances where organisations have threatened to picket host organisations simply for advertising on JobBridge. The likely effect of this might be to cause customers of the organisation or shop in question not to enter. We have an obligation to protect organisations, which is why the names are not being published, not that we are doing things behind closed doors. We recognise there is a public interest to be served, but there are serious concerns in that regard.

Chairman: I will stop Mr. Carroll there in order that we can take supplementary questions from members, including me. We will come back to the delegates, including Mr. Power.

Senator Marie-Louise O’Donnell: Is there any progress with regard to the figures for Gateway and the vocational training opportunity scheme? I may not be asking the right question, but in regard to Gateway, there seems to be a low participation rate in scheme that received a lot of support in 2012 and 2013 from councils. Is it taking off, or are we just not seeing examples? It is a localised scheme, but it connects with what Mr. Power spoke about in creating the same template that the Ballymun Job Centre was able to create. It is similar and I am wondering how it has worked.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I accept fully what Mr. Carroll has said and reiterate a great job has been done in some places under JobBridge. There is little or no doubt that in parts of the public service the moratorium on recruitment meant that job vacancies went unfilled. Some of them were filled through the JobBridge scheme. I accept that people took these jobs voluntarily, but there were no prospects when they took them that at the end of the six months there would be a job for them as there was no sanction. That is where the word “exploitation” comes in. It arises in the specific cases where it was known at the time the jobs were advertised, that there would be no jobs available at the end of the six months. Mr. Carroll has said that if an organisation has a job to offer, it should advertise it and fill the post. However, we have a situation where a moratorium is preventing an organisation from employing a caretaker. It will bring in a caretaker under the JobBridge scheme, but there will be no job on offer at the end of the six months. Also, there is no mentor in place to assist in achieving specific learning outcomes and no training will take place. Essentially, what happens is the person in question is handed the keys as caretaker and told to work for six months. He or she receives an extra €50 a week and everybody is happy. I do not believe Mr. Carroll, as the official in charge of the JobBridge scheme, or the Department ever wanted the scheme to be used in that way. Will he address that issue for me?

Chairman: We had a recession. As result of the reduced business being done, jobs were

not being created, as they would be in a period of growth. The public service contracted, but in other countries staff were just fired. Here there were voluntary redundancies and a recruitment embargo, to which the various stakeholders signed up, albeit reluctantly. There are contradictions in what people say. On the one hand, they do not like JobBridge because it involves private employers and it is felt the scheme should just involve the State or community sector. On the other hand, there is criticism, from people like Senator Gerard P. Craughwell, because the public sector has taken people on. I worked on a community employment scheme and it definitely helped me. I had an English and history degree and I could not get a job, there just was not one there for me. I had no experience. I had no typing skills and I used to handwrite my essays in college. The scheme helped me to get a job in the public sector eventually, when it started recruiting again. I was a clerical officer and I needed to be able to type and use a computer. There is such contradiction; one cannot be a vet because it is too high class and one cannot be a cleaner because it is too low, so what is in between?

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: The Chairman is taking up my point incorrectly.

Chairman: I am not talking about the Senator necessarily but this is the discourse.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I owe the further education system my entire career. I am one of those who has come through it and was supported well by it. I have no difficulty whatsoever with the back to education allowance and the vocational training opportunities scheme, VTOS. They are tremendous schemes and I have no doubt about it.

Chairman: What about community employment, Tús, Gateway and JobBridge?

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: My point is if a caretaker is required a community employment scheme is there to bring one in if one cannot be got some other way.

Chairman: What is the difference?

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I do not believe JobBridge was designed for this type of work. It was designed to assist people to get experience.

Chairman: I have to say I disagree. I do not agree that a vet cannot get experience because he or she is too qualified but it is okay for an arts graduate or that one cannot be a cleaner or a waitress in a restaurant. We used to have work experience, but it was *ad hoc*, non-transparent and, perhaps, based on whom one knew. It might have problems, but JobBridge is transparent. It is a State system and, in a way-----

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: Organisations have had to withdraw jobs advertised on JobBridge because the Department stated they were not JobBridge jobs. Is this correct?

Chairman: Yes, I know, but they are a minority. We have quite a small apprenticeship system. An apprentice could be someone working in a bookshop, cleaning or anything as the system covers a raft of things. We have 200 different apprenticeships. It can also cover someone who is a doctor. I was an apprentice solicitor, which I thought was a great idea.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: Do not tell me you want apprentice doctors working on JobBridge.

Chairman: Why not? I do not care. I do not have a problem with it. Why are some things above it? I just do not agree with the Senator. In case anyone puts a headline on it, I am not saying there should be apprentices, but I do not have this principled stance against it because I

do not see why one job is above it and another is not. When one comes out of college one trains and gets experience.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: The Chairman is taking up my point wrong.

Chairman: I know, but at the same time I did not interrupt the Senator.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: This is different from my personal row with Senator Craughwell, which is not personal, as he knows - it is an academic row. I mean that. One tends to make generalisations. I know people use examples - I use examples myself - to show that the scheme is rampantly not working or that there is rampant abuse. I certainly would not like to leave the room having had a row with another committee member.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I am not having a row over it.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I mean that. I do not think there is. I worked in Ballymun for 23 years, and I saw what community activation and a university could do there. Students leave universities with honours degrees but no jobs and are skilling up from the word go. There is a generalisation around the fact it is not working but it is working, perhaps with a long way to go and a learning process with regard to the two new aspects. I do not want to have bad feeling about it.

Chairman: Obviously the need for these schemes will reduce, but in general they are good. In other countries employers feel they have a social responsibility. Many employers did this because they thought it was a good thing to do. They wanted to do some good and give people a chance and we must recognise this. This includes people within the public sector. Anything one does stands to one at the end of the day.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: With all due respect, part of my role here is to point out some of what I see that is wrong.

Chairman: I know.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: We need to dig down into the 43% who had some difficulty with their experience and find out where it is going wrong. I actually believe the Department does a fantastic job in supporting people, but I can go to the principal of a local national or secondary school who sees a chance to fill a hole in the staff by using JobBridge. Unfortunately, the fact some organisations had to withdraw the jobs they offered has given JobBridge a bad name.

Chairman: I marked all of the schemes with low take-up, and Gateway stood out as did the back to work enterprise allowance. There is a big push on MOMENTUM and JobsPlus Youth. Why is there a slow take-up of these?

Deputy Brendan Ryan: Concerns have been raised about JobBridge being used in the public sector. From my understanding and knowledge of public sector trade unions, they know their work well and I would never see a situation developing whereby those unions would allow JobBridge to be used to bypass a moratorium on recruitment.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I thank Mr. Carroll for coming before the committee to share his in-depth knowledge. The area I represent is an inner-city working class or non-working class area. I grew up in an area with manufacturing with Lambs jam, Rowntree Mackintosh and the Fleetwood brush factory. One could leave school at 14 and have a job the next day without

any qualifications. Times have changed for many people, but a certain group comes through the school system with a very poor standard of education and JobBridge is very suited to them because it gives them an opportunity. The Chairman said it very well with regard to companies feeling a moral responsibility in communities and I see it in my area. They are very glad to take on young people who do not have huge qualifications or a good leaving certificate which, perhaps, they barely passed. These employers are willing to give them an opportunity and this is where JobBridge is very important.

I heard what the representatives of Ballymun Jobs Centre said with regard to the increase in the numbers of young people since the pilot project was phased out. It is important for us as public representatives to know this. We are supposed to be the eyes and ears of every community but we are not capable of doing so. I am not God, let us face it, and I cannot see everything and anything that goes on without organisations such as Ballymun Jobs Centre feeding me information. Meetings such as this are about getting information, bringing it to a higher level in the political party which is in government and insisting projects such as these have an opportunity to continue their work because they are very valued. Whoever is in government has a responsibility to look after the people in this middle bracket who have not gone to college and do not have good leaving certificate results and get them experience for jobs. These schemes have criteria and if companies are taking on people without giving them an opportunity to learn, understand and progress it is a huge problem and it must be addressed.

I know a man who went into a job which did not require the qualifications he had. He told me he did so because he no longer wanted to lie in bed in the mornings and did not want to be seen as somebody who just did not want to work and receive a payment every week. After a short time, not even nine months, he got a very good job. We cannot forget about these people, who are in their 40s and 50s. In general I have no problem with people saying negative or inspiring things during this debate. All of those contributions are important. However, if we return to the case of the individual who gets a job and how much it means to him, if we can give more individuals jobs, we will have provided a huge opportunity, be it through JobBridge or Pathways to Work.

Chairman: I know Mr. Power wanted to come back in on that point, so I will start with him and move down the line.

Mr. Ian Power: My comments were not mutually exclusive with those of Mr. Carroll. A person needs to not be able to do the job at the start, which includes needing to get the experience of doing it. Just because someone knows the theory does not mean he or she can do the job.

It is not fair to say that there is no compulsion involved in the JobBridge programme. There is not explicit compulsion. However, for a young person whose rate is €100 a week with an additional €50 a week if he or she participates in JobBridge, because of the lack of provision in other schemes, JobBridge is the only show in town. It was the only show in town for young people during the recession. We want to see an increased breadth of provision for the 18,500 young people who are long-term unemployed.

The cut to under-26s is entirely unfair and inequitable. Young people are expected to survive on sums that we do not expect people aged 27 to survive on. It is not the case that every young person lives at home with his or her parents and is supported by them. Some young people took the view that, being on €144 a week, they would go on JobBridge and get some extra money, but some of them were forced into opportunities with which they were not par-

ticularly enamoured. This affects the effectiveness of the scheme. The programme is of value to the majority of participants but we are trying to improve the experience of everyone.

I am concerned about the Youth Guarantee. We probably have not spoken about it in terms of its success and how to roll it out nationally as much as we should have today. It has not been rolled out nationally and I am interested to hear from the delegates from the Department of Social Protection on the plan or strategy for a wider roll-out. I agree with the concept of internships but we should not be considering them as the only option. Internships used to be paid. Perhaps we will be able to return to a situation in which those internships are paid, which would be the ideal situation, but this is part of a suite of things we should be pursuing. What is the strategy? We need to find out the strategy today.

Chairman: I will return to Mr. Doorley shortly, but perhaps Ms Whelan would like to speak at this stage.

Ms Nuala Whelan: I will address the promotion of JobBridge to clients through the guidance process. If we find clients have a need or deficit in terms of experience or particular skills they need in order to get a particular job, we ask them to think about how they would design their internship. What would it look like? What kind of employer would they want? What kind of work environment would they like? That way they get a sense of what they need to get from JobBridge, as opposed to what the employer can get from them. The young person has something to go on and can decide whether an internship is right for him or her.

Chairman: I will come back to Mr. Creedon. I will call on Mr. Corcoran from the Department first.

Mr. Terry Corcoran: Given that the question was asked three times, I will address the take-up of programmes. The figure hoped for last year in the Gateway scheme was 500, but what was achieved was somewhat lower than that. Gateway is not solely for young people. It was a temporary employment programme through local authorities with a target of approximately 2,000 participants. It was slow in taking off but it achieved its targets by the beginning of this year. This year we expect the youth element of it to be at the higher level planned rather than the low level achieved last year.

Chairman: Will the Department forward up-to-date figures to the clerk to the committee?

Mr. Terry Corcoran: Yes.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Perhaps I am being very ignorant in asking this question, but has there been any report on it? Who is doing what around the country? Which county councils took on more than others? Which were facilitated more than others? What worked? This links in with what Mr. Ian Power was saying about the Youth Guarantee, although it is not just about young people.

Mr. Terry Corcoran: The questions of where the activity in Gateway is taking place and whether the targets are being achieved have been answered in replies to a number of parliamentary questions tabled in the recent past.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Who is doing what?

Mr. Terry Corcoran: I will identify that.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: It would be very interesting to know.

Mr. Terry Corcoran: The Chairman asked about the back to work enterprise allowance, which is a demand-led scheme. It supports an unemployed person who wishes to commence in self-employment. We do not set targets for the programme. The number of young people applying for it was lower last year than had been hoped, but it is a demand-led scheme.

A question was asked about the back to education allowance and the vocational training and opportunities scheme, VTOS. Elements of the support provided for in the back to education allowance were cut severely during the period of austerity. For some individuals at the margins, those cuts make a difference. None the less, it is true that 60,000 people have taken up opportunities under the back to education allowance since 2009. Members may have seen in today's newspapers that a review was recently carried out of the back to education allowance. There are some questions over its success in the short-term in achieving employment outcomes. We think the long-term outcomes for parts of the programme will be significantly better. The evidence is pointing that way. None the less, it is being examined consistently. The comparison between it and VTOS is an issue that has been raised. VTOS is run by the Department of Education and Skills, whereas the back to education allowance, although people are attending educational programmes, is managed by our Department. There may be issues to be dealt with in co-ordinating the two.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I will interrupt Mr. Corcoran very briefly. I thank him for his contribution. He has a fairly good idea of where I am coming from on this issue. The big thing that causes me a problem with the back to education allowance, which runs across the PLC and further education sector - guidance counsellors in Ballymun will be aware of this issue - is that some of the courses young people are doing can cost up to €2,000 a year after equipment for the course has been bought and the cost of examinations with external bodies is paid. This no fault of the Departments; it is just the way things are. We should be trying to open up those pathways. The back to education allowance was cut hard during the period of austerity and we can understand why that happened. I have wrecked my own brains trying to figure out how we could tailor the system better. A student on some of the technology courses cannot even retain the books to pass them on the following year because technology has moved on in the 12-month period. Books on technology that cost €100, €200 or €250 are scrap at the end of a two- or three-year cycle. Is there a way around this? I do not know if there is, but we have to look at VTOS and the back to education allowance and find a middle ground.

Chairman: Was the back to education allowance cut in recent years?

Mr. Terry Corcoran: The scheme was not cut or capped in any way but some of the supports, such as the cost of education allowance and the rates of payment, were adjusted as part of the austerity measures.

Chairman: Mr. Corcoran refers to the payment rates, but the participants get a social welfare payment. Social welfare payments have not been cut since 2010.

Mr. Terry Corcoran: Changes were made to the back to education allowance. Prior to 2009 or 2010, even if someone was on a much reduced rate of payment due to his or her means, the back to education allowance was paid at the maximum amount. There were changes.

Chairman: There have been no changes since this Government came into office. That is the point I am making.

Mr. Terry Corcoran: I would have to check the exact timing of the changes.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: One of the starkest things to come out of today's meeting is what Mr. Creedon said about the 10% rise due to the ceasing of the pilot scheme. What does he believe that we as representatives, conduits or whatever can do as spokespersons for his expertise? What should we tell the Department and the Minister? It is an important-----

Chairman: I am sorry, but Senator Craughwell is leaving shortly.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I apologise to Senator O'Donnell.

Mr. Paul Carroll: I will answer Senator Craughwell before he leaves, as he asked a question three times about the public sector. If an employer has a job available, what should be offered is the job. The Department provides a range of supports to assist that employer in recruiting from the live register. If an employer does not have a job available, he or she can consider offering an internship. In the public sector example that was mentioned, it was stated that if there was no prospect of a job, an internship should not be allowed. The percentage of JobBridge vacancies that are in the public sector is low, but why are they there if there is no prospect of a job?

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I can see the reason for taking a place for training purposes.

Mr. Paul Carroll: People do it to get experience that they can present elsewhere in the public sector to get a job or in the hope or expectation of the moratorium being lifted, providing the prospect of future employment. There is no element of compulsion.

The Senator cited the example of a school caretaker. We see this at both extremes. We should not allow the veterinary surgeon on the one hand or the caretaker on the other. I hope that I am explaining this well.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I never said that the Department should not allow it but, to return to Mr. Power's point, there should be specific targets that the person must meet.

Mr. Paul Carroll: Correct. In that regard, there has been an increased allocation of special needs assistants, SNAs, and teachers for schools this year. A small number of those positions have been advertised. The Senator is right to say that unions will ensure there is no displacement, as will the Department. If a school has a job for a teacher or SNA, it should advertise for that job and recruit a teacher or an SNA. In the Senator's example, the school did not have the money and had reached its allocation. Is there an opportunity for someone to do something in the school that represents a valuable contribution to school life or pupils as well as a valuable work experience opportunity for that person? This is what is happening. A school advertised for a caretaker or a cleaner and someone, for reasons best known to himself or herself, found it to be a worthwhile opportunity. I find it difficult to see what is wrong with that. The person has not displaced a cleaner because, in such instances, we contact the school, ask whether it had a caretaker last year and, if so, ensure that it advertises for and recruits a caretaker this year.

Schemes of this nature run two risks, the first of which is displacement - namely, that there is a job but the body will not offer it and will instead offer an internship. The second is dead weight - that is, if the scheme did not exist, the person would none the less have progressed on to something. In my opening address, I tried to explain the kinds of activity that we are engaged in to minimise these risks. Indecon, which carried out the survey, found the level of displacement to be 3%. We are considering the way in which Indecon calculated that figure. During the course of the survey last year, it asked employers what they would otherwise have done. As part of the forthcoming survey, there will be a detailed analysis of this figure and a comparison

with what is happening in the sector generally. We hope to have a more robust indication.

It is also fair to say that, when the scheme was introduced, the country was in bad shape. The live register was at 460,000 people and the thinking at the time was that it would hit 500,000. The country has turned itself around and there has been a dramatic improvement in recent years. In other countries, there is usually a lag after a recession and it takes a number of years of economic growth before there is an increase in employment. Remarkably, this has not been the case in Ireland. Our economy has been jobs-led. I contend that schemes such as JobBridge and JobsPlus have made a contribution to that. No jobs were being offered and the country was on its knees. Either we decide not to do anything about that, remain idle and wait for the economy to turn around, or we determine whether we can do anything to help businesses that are struggling and do not have the capital to recruit and whether we can provide opportunities to keep people attached to the labour market, be they new entrants, new university graduates who need experience or people who have left school. Are they to sit idly for four years and wait for the economy to pick up?

The Senator gave an example of someone who wanted to change jobs. JobBridge is a successful vehicle in that regard. Having worked as a construction worker, someone might realise that the times are a-changing and he or she cannot get another job in that space, so JobBridge is an opportunity to get experience doing something else. It is also an incentive for employers to recruit that person. This is what the scheme is about.

As the economy improves, the risk of displacement will undoubtedly increase. Some employers have more money in their pockets, but the numbers on JobBridge are already decreasing. During the course of the evaluation, we will examine why that is happening. I hate anecdote and criticise others for using it, which is why we have commissioned an external evaluation, but some of the anecdotal information that I am receiving is that companies are having to offer jobs in order to get or keep people. A company might have invested in an intern for four months, but if a job is available elsewhere, he or she might go for it.

Regarding mentoring, the reality of a scheme of this nature is that there must be no displacement, even in the public sector. One must not be advertising in that space. People claim that there has been wholesale abuse of the scheme and there are rolling internships. One cannot advertise the same role again; what one advertises must be different. If committee members or members of the public have concerns in this respect, they should notify me. There is a “Contact Us” facility on www.jobsireland.ie. If there is an allegation of abuse of the scheme or a participant, I would love to hear of it and investigate.

Mentoring will relate to the experience of the intern and the position that is available. Depending on the nature of the work experience opportunity and the skill set of the intern, some jobs may require a great deal of mentoring while others may not. In the latter, it might be a case of Mr. Corcoran, for example, being shown what to do and, if he has a problem thereafter, someone is there to help. Honestly, that-----

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I do not want to interrupt Mr. Carroll, but Mr. Power’s point, which he put much better than I ever could have, was that the job must offer something new to the person. He or she must pick up a skill and there must be specific learning outcomes.

Mr. Paul Carroll: Yes.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: If I am a trained teacher, I am a trained teacher, and that

is it. Someone cannot bring me in on JobBridge.

Mr. Paul Carroll: With respect, what that person gets is some work experience in a classroom as part of his or her programme. We could all hypothesise why people do this. I could do it for a variety of reasons. For example, let us imagine that I want to work as a teacher. A number of teaching posts have been advertised and I have not been successful in obtaining one, but another school is offering experience that I want on my CV so that, when schools advertise next year, I will be able to compete better. I may have already proven my competence to the school in question. It may be happy with my work and, if a vacancy arises next year, it may decide to give me that job. If it does not have a vacancy, the school down the road might have one. I have gone to college, have my degree and acquired a year's experience working in X, Y and Z national schools. If Mr. Corcoran, who is my competitor and also graduated from college, applies for the same job, which of us is likely to get it?

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: That is a race to the bottom. There must be specific learning outcomes. I must pick up a skill from the school.

Chairman: Would Senator Craughwell not learn from work experience?

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: No.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Senator Craughwell should go and talk to the universities. There may be many skills taught in the education and training boards, ETBs, and some of the vocational schools but I have seen many people walk out of big universities, all living in their heads, who were capable enough. I hope that is not on the record.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I could argue this point all day but I thank Mr. Carroll for his answer.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: In terms of that idea, skills are got by life.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I do have some concerns and I will be looking into the SLO side of this on which I might come back to him.

Chairman: Mr. Doorley has been waiting for a while so I call him now.

Mr. James Doorley: On Senator O'Donnell's point, we have spoken a good deal on JobBridge but regarding the positive outcomes of the Youth Guarantee pilot in Ballymun and the 29% drop, the most startling statistic is that in an era when youth unemployment generally is reducing, to have a rise in youth unemployment shows that without that concerted effort there are young people today who could be in training or in work experience.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: A continued concerted effort.

Mr. James Doorley: Yes.

I will make a few points in response to the comments made. With regard to our study, which Deputy Ryan mentioned as well, as a youth council the issue of JobBridge had arisen frequently and as Mr. Carroll said, there is a lot of anecdotal evidence but that is of little use. We wanted to do a study but we had limited resources. We could have approached the Department for funding but, first, it might not have given it to us and, second, it might be perceived as not being independent.

It is important to state that while 84 young people responded, seven of whom I met in a structured one-to-one interview, and the details of the methodology is contained in the full report, the issue was to try to get a snapshot because we wanted to get some evidence to bring to Mr. Carroll, his colleagues and others who are working in the area. Mr. Carroll put it correctly. The Indecon report is an excellent report. I have no queries about it but was it of its time? Indecon also mentions in its report that 72% of the people who were on JobBridge at that time and who participated in its survey had previous work experience. These were people who were primarily victims of the recession. That probably reflects the fact that young people have found it more difficult because many young people were coming out of education and training without work experience.

I would also make the point that self-selection might be part of the reason for the difference, as Deputy Ryan said. Some questions were raised about our study being self-selecting but, in fairness, the study Indecon did regarding their much larger numbers was also self-selecting because people were asked to participate and some people responded. Some did not, however, and it is important to put on the record that we accept that our report is small-scale. We just did not have the resources to do a big one.

I met with young people who had very good experiences but there were problems. Many young people were willing to put up with things for the six to nine months because they knew if they complained they may not get the reference to move on. That is the reality. Many people keep their heads down.

The cooling off period was mentioned by Senator Craughwell. As Mr. Carroll said, one is not allowed to recruit a new person to the same position for six months. Some of the people I met were very clear that there was abuse of that because some host organisations were changing the title of a position and were able to get around the six month period. It was not widespread but it was happening. I just wanted to make those final comments.

Mr. Mick Creedon: I must state that I have no absolute evidence that the increase in the numbers signing on in Ballymun in terms of the under 25s is a direct cause of the end of the pilot, but all I would say is that it is a fact.

On the pilot, we reorganised the local employment services, LES. We were asked to do that by the Department as part of the implementation of the pilot. We allocated five guidance officers to work on the Youth Guarantee. That reduced the ratio of unemployed person to guidance officer. That enabled them to spend more time with the unemployed person to work out the plan and then support him or her to implement that plan.

At the end of the pilot we reorganised the service again and, again, the numbers overall coming into the service increased as part of the contract. The ratio went up. We would like to try to reduce that ratio further. That would allow us to spend more time working with the client to make sure they are embedded in their career plan and that they are supported to progress.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: What does Mr. Creedon need to do that? Is it money?

Mr. Mick Creedon: Not necessarily. What we would need to do is reduce the ratio. That means we might not be able to deal with as many clients in a particular year as we would have previously. Currently, 60 new clients a week are being referred by the Department. If that was reduced to, say, 40, we could spend more time with that 40.

Chairman: What about more staff? Would that be the way to do it?

Mr. Mick Creedon: I think we could manage it without more staff because not everybody requires the same degree of intensity.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Has the reorganisation that took place since the pilot finished not allowed Mr. Creedon to do that?

Mr. Mick Creedon: Exactly, yes. We would have fewer guidance people working directly with the young people now.

Chairman: Is the centre a victim of its own success?

Mr. Mick Creedon: Maybe, but it is not just that ratio issue. It was because other things were done during the pilot. For example, they changed the eligibility for the community employment, CE, schemes purely for people coming through the pilot. They reduced the age to 20, I believe, and that was hugely successful because it enabled young people to access CE schemes that they were denied previously. That has ended again, so that option is not available. They did the same with the Tús programme.

Through the pilot there was also a flexible fund which allowed us to support people to access PLC programmes. Before we took any of the intake into the pilot the agencies worked together to come up with a local plan as to how it would all work, and it was not a case of one size fits all. We did an analysis of the young people in the area in terms of their education levels, experiences and the barriers they faced. We then tried to offer specific options to those three target groups. It is a combination of all of those, namely, the inter-agency working, the links we had developed and built with the youth services, the education and training services and the employers and our capacity to try out new things . All of that combined-----

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Would Mr. Creedon come back to that but not call it a pilot?

Mr. Mick Creedon: Yes. If we could do that-----

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Why can he not do it?

Mr. Mick Creedon: It is not up to me to answer that.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Is that not a case that could be well made?

Mr. Mick Creedon: Indeed. The valuation reports make that case very well.

Chairman: Who decides?

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Who decides?

Mr. Mick Creedon: The Department or whoever; I do not know. We have a contract to implement the LES in the area so we just implement whatever the contract asks us to do.

Chairman: We should conclude soon.

Mr. Mick Creedon: Can I make some other suggestions?

Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Mick Creedon: We have made that suggestion in our submission. In a European context we are often very good at running pilots but we are not very good at translating the lessons

of the pilots into the mainstream.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: It is a question of translating them into actuality in the long term.

Mr. Mick Creedon: However, I imagine that is on the basis of implementing the pilot elsewhere in exactly the way it was run. First, there is no need to do that. Second, I imagine we would need to run it in another area or run it in several areas. In other words, we could upscale the work done on the pilot to another area to see how it would work there, for example, in a bigger area or whatever. These are simple steps which could be taken.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Has the Ballymun Job Centre had an answer to these suggestions and evaluations on the part of the Department? Did Mr. Creedon present them?

Mr. Mick Creedon: They were all presented at the final conference.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Has Mr. Creedon had an answer to what he has presented?

Mr. Mick Creedon: No.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I think that is important.

Chairman: We can raise that. Do you have any information, Mr. Corcoran?

Mr. Terry Corcoran: I will make a general point about the Youth Guarantee and whether there is a strategy and so on. The policies being followed aim towards the most important objective, which is to get people back into jobs. That is the largest single element of the Government's policies in this area. Obviously, there is a good deal of evidence, with falling unemployment and rising employment, that this part of the plan is working.

The other element of the guarantee implementation plan was the issue of substantial engagement with the newly-unemployed young jobseekers. The resources for that are being delivered in part by the use of local employment services. Increasingly, they are being delivered by the movement to JobPath, which is releasing resources inside the Department to undertake more detailed engagement with young jobseekers at the beginning of their unemployment spell. That was done in this case as well.

What happened in terms of unemployment in Ballymun? It is important to note that it is unlike the overall process planned for the Youth Guarantee relating to engaging with newly-unemployed young people. Given the scale of the resources deployed in Ballymun, every young person on the live register, regardless of duration, was approached during a brief period. This was done comprehensively in a way that could not be done nationally - the resources simply would not be available. That was part of the impact.

While unemployment may have risen a little during this year for young people in Ballymun, there are seasonal elements at play. Unemployment is still down year on year in Ballymun. It is down by 9% on the same period last year. It is not down by as much as it was at the turn of the year, but, in part at least, that is to do with the fact that we had a major engagement with all young people on the live register and a significant programme provision was made. Those people cannot stay on programmes forever. We cannot go on repeating those processes with the same people over and over. The return of people to the register from those programmes is part of the reason it has not been declining as rapidly as before compared to the rest of the country.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: It is also partly that, as people point out to us all the time, we are not really operating the Nordic model. Mr. Creedon has a very good point. Pilots are very good. It is a very good and wonderful use of resources. Creativity, action, outreach and tangents were put into it. Now it has come to an end. Did Mr. Creedon not make a good point? We need to take those tangents and all the learning and bring them somewhere else. We need to bring them throughout the country as well as all the other things we are doing. When we stop these initiatives there is a reversion to type. I take the points Mr. Corcoran has made. However, if we are seeing a rise again, even with the economy turning around, then perhaps we should be more definite about how we implement what Mr. Creedon is suggesting. I saw him look aghast at one of the things Mr. Corcoran said. He was not looking aghast at Mr. Corcoran as such; he looked off into the distance.

Mr. Mick Creedon: I am keen to make some points. Not every area needs that sort of intensity of support.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: That is true.

Mr. Mick Creedon: Not every individual would need it either. Within the labour market there tends to be a relationship between housing policy, where we house people and labour market outcomes and chances. We end up with concentrations of unemployment, disadvantage and poverty within areas. There is certainly a strong argument to the effect that the type of intervention we need in those areas is different from the type of intervention we would need elsewhere. The pilot proved that. It was operated within a very disadvantaged area where there were significant concentrations of unemployment and disadvantage as well as various combinations of barriers to the labour market. It is not a question of rolling out that intensive support everywhere.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: We can pick targets.

Mr. Mick Creedon: We can target it and, therefore, there is not as much pressure on resources. It is a question of thinking about it differently. I can remember - I was around at the time - when they had the task force on long-term unemployment which set up the local employment services. The local employment services were deliberately set up in particular areas of disadvantage to bring all the actors together. They have developed that expertise. They are generally located in specific areas of disadvantage. We do not need to have it as a national scheme. We have to consider what we need in a given area. For example, we would have to run something very different from the pilot in Ballymun in a rural area. It is about looking at enabling national programmes to have some local flexibility. That is a key lesson for me.

Chairman: We have to be out of the room by 3.40 p.m. so we only have four minutes. Is there anything outstanding? Does anyone have anything else to say?

Mr. Ian Power: In general, we must have interventions to create a different type of intervention. Certainly, while it should not be the same everywhere, we need the roll-out of these guarantee schemes nationally, with a focus on particular areas that need it. We certainly need it to be rolled out nationally because it is not happening at the moment.

Chairman: I think we have had a very good discussion, probably one of the best debates we have ever had on the topic. I am going to call the meeting to a close. I thank all our guests from the National Youth Council of Ireland, Ballymun Job Centre and the Department of Social Protection. Obviously, we will revisit the issue. Senator O'Donnell and Deputy Ryan have

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done a good deal of work on this issue, as have other members of the committee. I expect this is only one of many meetings we will have on the matter.

The joint committee adjourned at 3.40 p.m. until 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 18 November 2015.