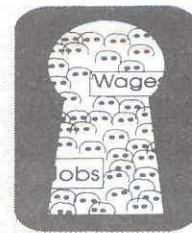


# WORKING NOTES

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FACTS AND ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

## ARE SCHEMES THE ANSWER TO COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT?

Labour Market Programmes for the long-term unemployed have traditionally taken the form of temporary part-time employment in the community, voluntary or public sector. The first such scheme (the Social Employment Scheme (SES)) was established in 1987. In 1991 the Community Employment Development Programme (CEDP) was piloted in twelve Partnership areas. In the 1994 Budget the Minister for Finance announced the establishment of a new scheme called the Community Employment Programme (CE). The CE is intended to replace both the CEDP and the SES and it was anticipated that up to 40,000 places would be made available to the long-term unemployed. Typically all of these schemes take the form of twenty hours work per week or 40 hours per fortnight on alternate weeks over one year. On the CEDP and CE a training budget of £300 per participant is available. In addition participation on the CE can be extended, in some cases, for an additional period of a year.

### Objectives of Schemes

The schemes have sought to fulfil both a social and labour market objective. The labour market objective is aimed at providing the long-term unemployed with access to a period of temporary employment. Such temporary employment is seen as a basis for re-establishing motivation and morale, enabling people to re-acquire the discipline of employment, preserving existing skills as well as assisting the long-term unemployed to learn new skills.

The social objective relates to the type of work undertaken by participants on the schemes. All of the schemes, while funded by FAS, are operationally dependent on sponsors for their implementation. In order to avail of the scheme sponsors must show that the work undertaken will have tangible benefits for the community and the participants. In general community groups or organisations and public bodies to be eligible for sponsorship must meet the following criteria.

- 1) They should be non-profit orientated.
- 2) Projects should be responding to clearly identified community needs.

In practice the schemes are performing a dual role, i.e. as a labour market programme for the long-term unemployed, and as providing financial support for work in the public and community sector. A major difficulty which arises from this dual role is that the purpose of the scheme becomes unclear.

### Schemes and Employment

There are many similarities between the schemes, and employment as generally identified by society. In practice participants are employed by the organisations who sponsors the schemes. When they start their scheme they sign off the Live Register, the sponsor are issued with tax-deduction cards and the participants are treated like other employees in terms of their personal tax situation. Participants also pay 'J' rate social insurance.

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In general participants undertake specific tasks and work for particular hours etc. As in the labour market, vacancies for schemes are advertised, or individuals hear of them through word of mouth, or they are notified by FAS. In addition sponsors often set criteria in terms of skill etc. for the position on the scheme. Thus individuals not only have to be eligible but must also compete with others as in the normal labour market.

Another similarity between the schemes and employment is the social and personal benefits the participants gain from their involvement in work. This is an important part of the experience of employment and is also reflected in the schemes.

But there are differences between the schemes and normal employment. As noted above, the long-term unemployed often have to compete for places on schemes but ultimately eligibility is based not on one's ability to undertake the work but on welfare status.

Work in the form of normal employment is also used as a reference point and as a prerequisite to access credit for the purchase of goods and services. This is a normal part of our social and economic system. Unlike employment, schemes do not fulfil this function. This is a measure of the value of the work undertaken by scheme participants compared to work carried out by those in employment.

Another important difference is the basis on which the income for participants is determined. Unlike wages, the income received by participants is calculated in a similar manner to social welfare payments. Thus, rates of pay reflect the presence or absence of adult as well as child dependants. In this regard payment for work undertaken on the scheme while taxable is not calculated as a wage. In addition, as pointed out above, participants only pay a 'J' rate social insurance as opposed to an 'A' rate for the majority of the employed. This has important implications in terms of future social welfare entitlements.

The above are important points, in terms of the perceived value of the work for both the community sector and the participants. It is also a reflection of the value society as a whole places on work within the community, voluntary and public sectors. As a consequence the type of work carried out reflects many of the elements of employment but is not valued in the same way as employment.

The low mobility rate between schemes and employment (on average the schemes tend to have a placement rate of approximately 20%) would seem to indicate that the choice for many long-term unemployed individuals is to remain on social welfare or compete within a 'scheme labour market' in which the work on offer has a different status to that of the employment labour market.

The relatively low mobility between the schemes and ordinary employment may in part reflect perception, by employers, of work in the community/voluntary sector, particularly with respect to employment in the private sector. This is not to say that the work of the schemes has not got a personal, social and economic value in its own right but that its relevance to private sector employment is not valued.

### **Schemes and Community Employment**

The development of schemes can, in part, be seen to reflect the Scandinavian model of addressing unemployment, (see discussion in K. Kennedy, *Facing the Unemployment Crisis in Ireland*, 1993). This model aims to siphon off the income gain resulting from productivity growth to finance pro-active labour market policies, including employment in useful public service and community activities. A number of questions arise with respect to the operation of the schemes and how they fit into such a model.

First: Are the schemes employment? As highlighted above the schemes have similarities with employment but are also missing other important elements which indicate that the work is not valued as employment.



Until this happens it is difficult to see how one programme can effectively achieve both its social and labour market objectives.

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## **TAKING THE LONGER VIEW**

### **The Workmate Project, Ballymun**

The Workmate Project in Ballymun is an important development in labour market intervention, as it is aimed at a section of the market which is usually neglected in such intervention. The objective of the Project is to assist into employment the most marginalised young job-seekers, those generally excluded from mainstream training.

The Workmate Project was originally set up because of the concern of the Management Committee of the Ballymun Job Centre that the Centre was not able to reach and give effective help to the most marginalised job seekers in Ballymun. There was an awareness that there were many young people of working age who were excluded from the job market. The reason for this exclusion was a combination of factors such as a low level of skills and education, difficult family and personal circumstances. In practice, people without Leaving Certificates are now quite marginalised. Another category of people with special employment problems are those who have social obligations and for whom the lack of adequate support e.g. childcare facilities, make it difficult for them to take up employment. This particularly applies to lone parents, who are predominantly female, and to many young females who are trapped in baby-sitting roles.

The Workmate relationship with the client goes through several stages, though not all clients may follow or complete this precise route:

The aims of the Initial/Exploratory Stage, which lasts one to two months, are to develop a relationship of trust, to explore the client's attitudes and determine their needs, to examine the options open to them, and, in



particular, to assess whether Workmate is an appropriate programme for the client. At the outset clients are offered ongoing counselling, and support.

The Action Plan Stage is aimed at enabling clients to draw up an action plan based on the goals set in the previous stage.

Workmate are anxious that clients would realize their potential wherever possible. Some of the Workmate clients are young people who, because of education and skills deficiencies, have earlier drifted into types of very low-paid employment that they now find unbearable. Realistically, therefore, the participant profile indicates that in many cases the goal of suitable sustainable employment is a long-term option i.e. four to five years, for many of the client group. Because many of the clients are dissatisfied with the kind of work for which they are currently qualified, Workmate staff give active support to clients who wish to further their education, through VTOS, for instance, or training.

type of provision is not available to them from other agencies.



























## STARTING YOUNG - THE LIFESTART INITIATIVE

Whether or not children stay on in school depends to a large extent on home circumstances and environment, according to recent research (see p.6). Many parents of young school leavers think they could have done more to encourage their children, but often feel they are not educated enough to help them. One initiative that has got parents more involved in the education of their children is the Lifestart initiative, which is now running in several areas in Ireland, some urban and some rural.

The Lifestart programme is important for a second reason. Research has shown that children learn a great deal of what they will ever learn in the first five years of their lives. The Lifestart programme focuses on these five years. In disadvantaged families many children often receive insufficient educational stimulation during these early years, and it is towards the needs of these children that Lifestart is particularly directed.

A good deal of organisation goes into setting up a Lifestart programme, but when it is up and running it looks something like this. A group of local people are recruited and trained; these are called family visitors. Parents with babies, ideally newly-born, are identified and are invited to take part in the programme. Each month the family visitor gives the parent(s) a copy of a leaflet called 'Your Growing Child'. The copy given corresponds to the child's age, - there are sixty different copies in all. The leaflet suggests



practical ways in which parents can provide a rich, stimulating and inexpensive environment for the child. Simple explanations are given as to what is happening during different states of the child's growth. It is one of the main functions of the family visitor to encourage and support the parents in using this material and in living out their role as the most important educators of their own children. The family visitor visits the parents once a fortnight by agreement. These visits continue until the child is five years old.

To give a brief flavour of the programme: one of the most popular items is *Talk to Your Baby*. In this parents are reminded that the richer the home environment as regards sounds and especially voices, the better the development of language. Conversely parents are made aware that children raised in institutions are unable to distinguish between sounds, and between the directions that sounds are coming from. When a baby utters a sound parents are encouraged to respond, and parents are to encourage the baby itself to respond to the parent's voice.

The family visitor supports the parent(s) not only by delivering the reading material, but by building up a good relationship with the parent. In this way friendly, informed and frank discussions on parenting and child development can take place on a regular basis. A questionnaire is used to gather information about changes in parental behaviour and attitudes. This information not only helps parents to evaluate their parenting, but contributes to the improvement of the programme on a partnership basis.

The programme can be run in conjunction with activities in a Family Centre which provides opportunities for parents to learn the use of creative art and story telling to help in the child's development. At a later stage meetings can be organised where groups of parents come together at regular intervals in each others homes with the family visitor, to discuss their children's development and The Growing Child Programme.

The Lifestart programme had its genesis in the U.S. in the sixties under the name Operation Head Start, which was a pre-school playgroup programme. However it was soon noted that where the home was not sufficiently supportive the playgroups did not have a lasting effect on the children. A refinement of the programme, called High Scope, was set up in Michigan, and this combined preschool playgroups with a home visitation programme. This programme provided parents with the kind of information and support needed in order to induce better parenting and to improve children's performance in school. Lifestart develops this movement into an informal curriculum for parents, using the 'Growing Child' materials, designed for use in the home.

A lot of work has to go into the adaptation of 'The Growing Child' for local use. It is published in the U.S. by Dunn and Hargitt Inc., Lafayette, Indiana. As it is American the text needs to be adapted to suit local needs and culture. The copyright of the materials has been given to Lifestart.

Even more important than preparing the reading material is the training of the family visitors and other workers connected with the programme. Workers need, for instance, to have a grasp of the theory and practice of child development, and to have the skills to talk seriously to parents about their child's development. They also need to be able to train parents to observe the children and to decide on appropriate stimuli for them.

There are quite a lot of expenses connected with the programme, and finding adequate funding has delayed the programme in Ireland. In some cases the programme has been carried through by volunteers. In other cases a FAS programme has been used.

Lifestart is a pilot scheme and it is still too early to say conclusively what effect it will have on the later development of the child. But preliminary research shows that children who have been through the programme perform better when they start school than those who have not been. Few of the par-

Further information about the programme can be obtained from Fr Sean O'Connor S.J., Caoran Beag, An Cheathru Rua, Co. Galway (Tel.091-95098). More limited information is available from Fr Bill Toner S.J., **Working Notes**, 26 Upr Sherrard Street, Dublin 1. Tel.01-874-0814.

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Overall the number of individuals on the housing list increased from 50,971 in 1989 to 82,886 in 1993. The number of child dependents increased from 18,237 in 1989 to 32,913 in 1993. In March 1993 5,559 households had been on the waiting list for more than three years.

The county and country borough areas with the biggest housing lists are as follows:

At the latest count there are 28,624 households in the Republic assessed as in need of housing (an increase of 47% from 19,367 households in 1989)\*. The breakdown of these by category is as follows:

	<u>Households</u>
Dublin city	5,152
Dublin county	2,738
Cork county	2,128
Donegal	1,495
Tipperary	1,276
Cork city	1,216
Wexford	1,022
Kerry	998
Mayo	988

\*Source: 1994 National Report on Homelessness in the Republic of Ireland to the European Observatory on Homelessness (Streetwise National Coalition).

	<u>Households</u>
Living in overcrowded conditions	7,075
Unable to afford existing accommodation	6,432
Living in unfit/unsuitable accommodation	4,122
Involuntarily sharing accommodation	3,345
Elderly	2,191
Needing accommodation on medical/ compassionate grounds	1,861
Homeless	1,452
Travellers	884
Other	262

Breakdown by household size gives the following figures:

	<u>Households</u>
Family household with one child dependent	10,329
Single person households	7,186
Family household with two child dependents	4,529
Family household with no child dependents	3,121
Family household with three child dependents	1,770
Family household with four child dependents	767
Family household with five child dependents	434
Family household with six+ child dependents	488

## MORE ON SCHOOL DROPOUT - TWO NEW REPORTS

November 1994 saw the publication of two studies\* relevant to the subject of early school leaving.

An interesting point about Scott Boldt's study, Listening and Learning, is the very different perceptions of the causes of early school leaving depending on who one talks to. For instance although community members and principals emphasised peer pressure as an important factor, neither the early school leavers, nor their parents, nor their teachers, thought it was of much significance.



Boldt found that school personnel and community members tend to blame the parents when a pupil drops out of school, because they are seen to place little value on schooling and not encourage and prepare their children adequately. Parents accept some of the blame, but consider other factors to be more important, such as unsuitable subjects, or lack of respect by teachers for children. The early school leavers themselves do not attach much importance to home factors. Most parents expressed the view that when their children reach the age of fifteen, there is little they can do if their children have their minds set on something. On the other hand, many of the children who stayed on at school gave the main reason as the insistence or encouragement of their parents. Thus the influence of parents on children seems to work most through encouraging/not encouraging them to stay rather than actively encouraging them to leave.

There was broad consensus that there are differences in values and expectations between the people of the inner city and those who work in the schools. Most mothers interviewed said that they and their children do not consider the future and do not plan ahead. Opportunities for work, or to participate in courses in which one is paid, play a major part in the decision to quit school.

Difficulties at home, sometimes due to unemployment or financial problems, undoubtedly affect children's behaviour at school. These difficulties, say principals, are 'played out' by pupils in school through misbehaviour and indiscipline.

One of the most interesting and disturbing findings is the extent to which the teacher-pupil relationship was perceived as contributing to the decision to leave school. Almost all the early school leavers 'hated' school and the teachers. Certainly some of the examples given by the children are hard to believe, such as, 'A teacher asked me in front of the whole class if my father was molesting me. It wasn't true, but I almost died of embarrassment and never forgave

that teacher'. Other ex-pupils remember being referred to publicly as 'useless', or 'abnormal', or 'the devil's child'. Some teachers were perceived as too tough and mean, others as too soft and poor on discipline. Ex-pupils spoke of teachers who 'didn't care' and were only concerned with collecting their wages. The children felt they had performed best in subjects taught by teachers they liked and respected, and who respected them. Some community members were of the opinion that because of their background, teachers need more training to work in inner city schools.

A lot of comments were made about the unsuitability and inflexibility of the curriculum. One community member cites the example of children being forced to learn Irish while they had literacy problems in English. Some early school leavers felt it might have made a difference if subjects had been more practical.

The INTO study of ex-pupils of disadvantaged schools shows that only 25% of children from disadvantaged schools sat the Leaving Certificate (compared with 78% for the general population). More than 6% did not attend post primary school at all. Information about some of the ex-pupils could not be obtained in the survey, but ten years after leaving school about 36% of them were definitely in full-time employment in Ireland, and the same percentage were definitely unemployed.

According to the study, measures needed to reduce the gap between disadvantaged children and those better off would include:

- a further 600 schools of be categorised as disadvantaged;

For all disadvantaged schools:

- a maximum class size of 25;
- the upgrading of these schools and their environment;
- increased capitation grants;
- additional concessionary posts;
- free textbooks and materials;
- a specific budget for equipment and computers.

Other suggestions relate to the involvement of parents, pre-school education, teacher training, and psychological services.

*\*Listening and Learning, by Scott Boldt, is a study of early school leavers from Dublin's inner city, published by the Marino Institute of Education. Where Are They Now?, is a follow-up study on pupils who left urban and rural primary schools designated as disadvantaged in June 1982. It is published by the Irish National Teacher's Organisation.*





**A HELPING HAND FOR PEOPLE  
IN DEBT**

The main reason why people get into debt is ill health in the family. Other major reasons are loss of job, separation, or death in the family. These are some of the findings of a survey by COMAC, the Ballyfermot-based money advice centre which is funded by the Department of Social Welfare.

There is a popular misconception that people are in debt due to irresponsibility but this is rarely the case. Anyone who runs a home can get into debt. Many people on low incomes are engaged in the delicate balancing act of managing on a day to day basis. A detrimental change in circumstances can be the trigger that pushes them over the edge into debt, which often escalates out of control. Debt in disadvantaged areas can often be crippling. A study of ten cases by COMAC reveal an average debt per person of £5,587, with an average of six debts per person. The types of debt were as follows:

	%
Rent	15.0
Gas and Electricity	13.3
Banks/Building Societies	11.7
Finance Houses	11.7
Money Lenders	8.3
Telecom	6.7
TV Licence	6.7
VAT/Tax	5.0
Cable TV	3.3
Credit Card	3.3
Credit Union	1.7
Other	13.3
	100.0

It can be seen that illegal money lenders are a relatively minor part of the problem. The basic problem is low income, which makes people unable to meet the expenses of running a home. Action taken by statutory bodies can be just as traumatic as that taken by illegal money lenders. Six of the ten people in the sample were facing court action, two were facing eviction, and four had their fuel supply or phone disconnected.

A money advice centre such as COMAC helps people by going through nine steps with them:

- find out the problem (counselling, gathering facts);
- set priorities (identify emergencies, prioritise);
- maximise income/minimise expenditure (check benefit entitlement, apply to charities);
- draw up a financial statement (to calculate possible offers);
- negotiate with priority creditors;
- negotiate with secondary creditors;
- make appropriate referrals (to 'home maker'\*, counsellor, social worker, credit union);
- monitor progress;
- close case.

\* A Home Maker, or Budget Support Worker, is one of the Money Advice Centre team who visits the home by invitation, and helps families to manage their household budget.

For those who want it, Group Work sessions are provided by the Money Advice Centre to address issues such as nutrition, low budget cookery and money management.

It is rarely possible to deal with debt without looking at underlying problems such as ill health, addiction, relationship difficulties, and family members not contributing their fair share.

Contacting a money advice centre does not guarantee an end to debt problems, but results so far from these pilot projects has been impressive, with a number of people willing to come forward and testify how they have managed to straighten out their affairs with the support of centres such as COMAC.