**Questionnaire ‘The right to work’**

**Response of Ireland**

**September 2018**

**1. Detailed information on challenges and good practices in relation to the right to work and the enjoyment of all human rights by young people, with an emphasis on their empowerment.**

The main employment rights legislation dealing with young people is the *Protection of Young People in Employment Act 1996*. Policy responsibility for this legislation remains with the Minister for Business Enterprise and Innovation:

<http://revisedacts.lawreform.ie/eli/1996/act/16/revised/en/pdf?annotations=true>

**2. Detailed information on the legislative and policy measures adopted by your country to ensure that young people have equal opportunities for productive and gainful employment in the open labour market.**

The education system in Ireland operates on an inclusive basis in keeping with our obligations under the Constitution, national and international law.  Legislation relevant to the education sector such as the Education Act 1998 and the Education Welfare Act, 2000 as well as significant policy instruments in the areas of special educational needs and social inclusion, clearly set out principles of equality. Specifically, the Employment Equality Acts (1998 -2015) aim to prevent discrimination on the grounds of age in employment and access to employment.

**Further Education**

The Further Education and Training sector (FET) has undergone transformational reform in recent years. The objective of this reform was to bring cohesion to the sector, bringing together further education and training as a single sector. 16 Education and Education and Training Boards were established as part of this reform. The FET sector offers a wide variety of life-long education options to anyone over the age of 16. FET includes apprenticeships, traineeships, Post Leaving Cert (PLC) courses, community and adult education as well as core literacy and numeracy services. FET courses and programmes are provided through the Education and Training Board network throughout the country as well as through other local providers including online through SOLAS’ eCollege.

In May 2014, the first Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014-2019 was published setting out a vision to transform the sector, and providing a focus for the annual funding and investment priorities, to deliver a world-class integrated system of further education and training that will support economic development, increase social inclusion and to meet the needs of all who engage with FET.

**Draft legislation- Regulation of precarious work**

In response to a Programme for Government commitment, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection is currently bringing legislation through the Irish parliament to strengthen regulation of precarious work. As young people are disproportionately represented in precarious employment this legislation, if enacted, will benefit that age cohort.

The draft proposals aim to address key issues which have been identified as being areas where current employment rights legislation can be strengthened to the benefit of employees, particularly low-paid, more vulnerable workers, without imposing unnecessarily onerous burdens on employers and businesses. The proposals address the following**:**

1. Ensuring that workers are better informed about the nature of their employment arrangements and in particular their core terms at an early stage of their employment.

Currently 15 terms of employment are required to be given by employers to employees within two months.

It is proposed that employers must inform employees in writing, within 5 days of commencement of employment, of the following 5 core terms of employment:

(a) The full name of the employer and employee.

(b) The address of the employer.

(c) The expected duration of the contract (where the contract is temporary or fixed-term).

(d) The rate or method of calculating pay and

(e) What the employer reasonably expects the normal length of the employee’s working day and week will be.

Other required terms of employment should be provided within the current 2 month period.

The Bill also provides for the creation of a new offence where an employer does not provide the proposed statement of the five core terms of employment within one month of commencement of employment. Strengthening the sanction for non-compliance will help to promote better work practices and provide greater clarity around the essential elements of the employment relationship for both the employer and the employee.

1. Strengthening the provisions around minimum payments to low-paid, vulnerable workers who may be called in to work for a period but not provided with that work.
2. Prohibiting zero hours contracts, except in cases of genuine casual work or emergency cover or short-term relief work for that employer.

This proposal is to avoid the contagion of an increase in zero hours practices in this jurisdiction.

1. Ensuring that workers on low hour contracts who consistently work more hours each week than provided for in their contracts of employment, are entitled to be placed in a band of hours that reflects the reality of the hours they have worked over an extended period.

The proposals provide for the creation of a new right for an employee, whose contract of employment does not reflect the reality of the hours worked on a consistent basis over a reference period of 12 months, to be placed in a band of hours that better reflects the actual hours worked over that reference period. This will provide greater certainty and a truer reflection of their hours of work and level of earnings, thereby addressing, in particular, difficulties employees may have accessing financial credit, including mortgages.

1. Strengthen the anti-victimisation provisions for employees who try to invoke a right under these proposals.

It is intended to provide against an employer penalising or threatening to penalise an employee for exercising any right under the proposed legislation.

When the EU Youth Guarantee Recommendation was adopted in 2013, Ireland already had in place many of the elements to meet the Recommendation’s objective of ensuring that young people receive an offer of employment, education or training within four months of becoming unemployed. The implementation of the [Irish Youth Guarantee](https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Youth-Guarantee-Ireland.aspx) focuses on enhancing processes and policies for assisting young unemployed people to secure sustainable jobs. Under the Youth Guarantee process case officers engage with unemployed young people, on a monthly basis, to prepare and implement personal progression plans for employment. Where young people do not find work quickly, additional supports are offered through places on employment and training schemes, which are closely aligned to the needs of the labour market.

The Government’s primary strategy to tackle youth unemployment is to create the environment for a strong economic recovery by promoting competitiveness and productivity. The economy is recovering strongly and will underpin employment growth and the availability of productive work for young people. The [*Action Plan for Jobs*](https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Action-Plan-for-Jobs-2018.pdf)sets out Ireland’s policies in support of enterprise and employment growth. The most recent [*Pathways to Work* strategy](https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/PathwaysToWork2016-2020.pdf) for the period 2016-2020, continues to focus on addressing youth unemployment, building on reforms introduced in the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan and by introducing new measures to ensure that the young unemployed take up a substantial share of the jobs being created by economic recovery.

The strategy includes some additional actions, which are ongoing or have been completed, in relation to addressing youth unemployment:

* Increase the relative share of workplace-based interventions for youth unemployed.
* Ensure the frequency of engagement with all young unemployed people is a minimum of one case officer meeting per month.
* Implement the Defence Forces Skills for life employment support programme.

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/workplace based interventions such as CE, Gateway and Tús and First Steps; or in subsidies to employers, through JobsPlus Youth. Long-term unemployed jobseekers under-25 are also referred to JobPath, a contracted, payment-by-results employment services that provides additional resources and supports to the long-term unemployed.

**Youth Guarantee Programme Descriptions:**

Youthreach:

* The Youthreach programme provides two years integrated education, training and work experience for unemployed early school leavers without any qualifications or vocational training who are between 15 and 20 years of age with the aim of helping young people to make the transition from school to work.
* The programme usually provides two years integrated education, training and work experience to prepare participants for progression on to further study, further training or working life. Basic skills training, practical work training and general education are features of the programme, and the application of new technology is integrated into all aspects of its content. There is a strong emphasis on the core skills or literacy/numeracy, communications and IT, along with a choice of vocational options and a work experience programme.
* It generally operates on a full-time, year-round basis although part-time courses can be arranged. It includes a considerable amount of personal development and exploration where participants needs, interests and capacities are fully taken into account. The programme offers participants the opportunity to identify and pursue viable options within adult life, and provides them with opportunities to acquire certification.
* The Department of Education and Science delivers Youthreach through Centres for Education managed by Vocational Education Committees.

Community Training Centres (CTC):

* Provides training, educational and employment related services for young people in a friendly and informal manner. Each CTC is owned and managed by a local community group and has a professional, highly skilled staff and modern, up-to-date facilities. CTCs are funded and supported by Solas and learners may qualify for a training allowance.

Momentum:

* A Government initiative under Pathways to Work which provided free education and training projects for up to 6,500 for individuals, unemployed for 12 months or longer. The programmes included on-the job training in the form of work experience modules as well as the development of the workplace skills required to obtain and retain employment.

A specific number of places were ring-fenced for those under 25 to assist them to enter or return to employment.

MOMENTUM builds on the experience of the first Labour Market Activation Programme with an emphasis on strong labour market opportunities including significant work placement as an integrated part of courses.

MOMENTUM was administered by SOLAS on behalf of the Department of Education & Skills who fund it through the Labour Market Education & Training Fund (LMETF).Access to Momentum courses is through DEASP Intreo Centers[[1]](#footnote-1), Employment Services offices or Local Employment Services offices only.

Momentum was delivered through two programme iterations. The first (Momentum 1) ran over the period 2013-2014, and the second (Momentum 2) commenced in 2014 and concluded in 2017.

**3. Information on the affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures, if any, that your country has developed to promote employment opportunities for young people, including measures to increase employment opportunities for young people belonging to vulnerable groups (for example young persons with disabilities, young person’s belonging to a specific minority group).**

Inclusive education is a fundamental principle of the Irish education and training system. It is vital that all learners have the opportunity to benefit from education in order to help them fulfil their potential in life. A key goal of the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 is to improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs. The Department of Education and Skills DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School) Programme is Ireland’s main policy initiative aimed at tackling educational disadvantage. DEIS Plan 2017 includes the goals of improving the path of educational opportunity for those who come to education at a disadvantage and of strengthening the capacity of education and training to break cycles in communities with high concentrations of disadvantage. A range of additional supports are provided to schools participating in the DEIS Programme.

**Further Education**

**Apprenticeship/ Traineeship**

The Action Plan for Education contains a commitment to enrol 50,000 people on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes in the period 2016-2020. This represents more than a doubling of apprenticeship activity by 2020.

The Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020, sets out a series of detailed actions and annual targets to enable the Action Plan for Education commitments to be met. The Plan sets out a clear 10 step path for the development of new apprenticeships and also sets an overall development timeline for a new apprenticeship of 12-15 months. An overall development timeline of 8-12months, for a new traineeship, is set out in the Plan.

As set out in the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland, SOLAS is currently reviewing pathways to participation in apprenticeships, for underrepresented groups, which includes females, young people and people with disabilities.

The review will identify any barriers that may exist to participation in an apprenticeship programme for these groups and for people more generally. The purpose of the review is to ensure that our national apprenticeship system is more reflective of the range and diversity of our population, more inclusive of diverse backgrounds and abilities and that apprenticeship opportunities are more readily accessible to all. The review will result in the publication of actions in this area in the coming weeks, along with the background research.

**Disability Employment Supports**

Under the auspices of the[*Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024*](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Comprehensive%20Employment%20Strategy%20for%20People%20with%20Disabilities%20-%20FINAL.pdf/Files/Comprehensive%20Employment%20Strategy%20for%20People%20with%20Disabilities%20-%20FINAL.pdf) a wide range of income and work-related supports for people with disabilities are in place. These play an important role in supporting their increased participation in the labour force including;

* the Wage Subsidy Scheme;
* the EmployAbility service;
* the Ability Programme; and
* the Reasonable Accommodation Fund.

The [Wage Subsidy Scheme](http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Wage-Subsidy-Scheme_holder_3176.aspx) is an employment support to the private sector for the employment of people with disabilities. The purpose of this demand-led programme is to increase the numbers of people with disabilities participating in the open labour market and to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities. The scheme offers a financial subsidy to employers to encourage them to employ people with disabilities.

The [EmployAbility](https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/EmployAbility-Service.aspx) service is a national employment service dedicated to improving employment outcomes for jobseekers with a disability that includes a recruitment advice service for the business community. It is based on the ethos that participation in employment can be achieved by people with disabilities when they are able to avail of individualised supports that are based on their choices and preferences. The service currently comprises 23 limited companies, each with a specific geographical remit and each fully publicly funded.

The [Ability programme](http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Ability-Programme.aspx), launched in 2018, is a pre-activation programme for young people with disabilities (aged 15-29) designed to assist them in their transition from school to further education and employment. This is being undertaken using person-centred, case management approaches that support participants to identify and follow progression pathways based on both their needs and their potential.

The [Reasonable Accommodation Fund](http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Reasonable-Accommodation-Fund_holder.aspx) assists employers to take appropriate measures to enable a person with a disability/impairment to have access to employment by providing a range of grants. These grants and supports include;

* The Employee Retention Grant: The purpose of this grant is to assist employers to retain employees who acquire an illness, condition or impairment which impacts on their ability to carry out their job;
* Workplace Equipment/Adaptation Grant: Where a person with a disability has been offered employment or is in employment and requires a more accessible workplace or adapted equipment to do the job, s/he or the employer may be able to get a grant towards the costs of adapting premises or equipment;
* Personal Reader Grant: If a person is blind or visually-impaired and needs assistance with job-related reading, s/he may be entitled to a grant allowing him/her to recruit a Personal Reader;
* Job Interview Interpreter Grant: A jobseeker who has hearing difficulties or speech impairment and is attending job interviews may apply for funding to have a sign language interpreter or other interpreter to attend the interview with him/her. Funding can also be provided to cover the costs of an interpreter during an induction period when starting work.

The [Fund for Students with Disabilities](http://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/funding/student-finance/fund-for-students-with-disabilities/) allocates funding to further and higher education colleges for the provision of services and supports to full-time students with disabilities. The Fund aims to ensure that students can participate fully in their academic programmes and are not disadvantaged by reason of a disability. A review of the FSD was finalised late last year and the recommendations from the Review are being considered. In 2017, €10,022,489 was allocated through the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) supporting the participation of almost 12,000 students with disabilities.

The Disability Access Route to Education **(DARE)** is a third-level admissions scheme for students with a disability offering places on reduced point’s basis to school leavers with disabilities who are under 23. The Higher Education Access Route **(HEAR)** is a college and university admissions scheme offering places on reduced points and extra college support to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantages backgrounds. Both the DARE and the HEAR schemes are operated by a number of higher education institutions and are regulated by the institutions themselves. The operational management of DARE and HEAR is carried out by the CAO on behalf of the participating institutions ([www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie/)).

The [New Directions](https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/disability/newdirections/) service is a health-centred policy focussed on personal support services for adults with disabilities. It includes support for accessing education and formal learning, for maximising independence and for accessing vocational training and work opportunities.

A person-centred plan is formulated for each individual and, within that context if a person has ambition to progress to employment, a plan is developed to support him/her to achieve this target. One of the key supports for people who express a desire to progress to employment is assistance in accessing vocational training and work opportunities. This support will include work experience placements which can act as a transition for people into employment.

The Rehabilitative Training Programme, which is within the framework of New Directions, acts as a foundation programme for people with disabilities. Work related social skills are a key focus of this programme together with work experience placements and trialling of Vocational Training Programmes.

As part of €9 million awarded in grants to support the reform of the mental health service, a specific mental health employment initiative has recently been implemented. The [Individual Placement and Support](http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-Publications/Key-Learning-on-Employment-of-People-with-Disabilities/Strategic-approaches-to-employing-people-with-mental-health-issues/Individual-Placement-with-Support-model/) (IPS) approach aims to develop opportunities for people with mental health difficulties to remain in, or to access, work in mainstream settings and to support employers in addressing recruitment and retention issues.

**Childcare**

[*Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (2014-2020)*](https://www.dcya.gov.ie/documents/cypp_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureReport.pdf)is the national policy framework for children and young people. It commits to increasing investment in high-quality early years care and education for all children, prioritising families on low incomes. Government investment aims to support quality, affordability and access to early years care and education. This helps parents in their transition towards participation in the labour market, while advancing child development and early learning for all children. A national early years strategy is scheduled for publication in autumn 2018.

**LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy**

The LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy (2018 -2020) seeks to ensure a cross-governmental approach to put additional measures in place to further enhance the lives of LGBTI+ young people, and address some of the key challenges they may face as part of their day-to-day lives. The Strategy sets out the goals and objectives for serving the needs of LGBTI+ people aged 10–24. Goal 1 of the Strategy is to "Create a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people". The objectives and actions associated with this goal will work towards the continued improvement of safe, supportive and inclusive spaces for LGBTI+ young people in all walks of life so that LGBTI+ young people are widely supported and have the confidence to be themselves and actively participate in all aspects of society without fear of harassment and discrimination.

Goal 1 Objective 4 of the Strategy seeks to: Ensure equal employment opportunity and an inclusive work environment for LGBTI+ young people. There are three actions under this objective:

4(a) Provide information and guidelines to employers to:

• Remind them of their obligations with regards to equality and antidiscrimination laws.

• Advise on ways of providing a safe and supportive working environment for LGBTI+ people, particularly in relation to transgender people.

4(b) Develop guidance information for transgender young people to support their continued participation in the workplace, particularly during their time of transitioning.

4(c) Develop and distribute Further Education & Training information aimed at LGBTI+ young people who may have left school early to ensure they can avail of opportunities that facilitate them reintegrating back into school, progressing within Further Education & Training and/or into and within the workplace.

**4. Information on measures your country has introduced to enable young people to access to educational, Technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training.**

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills with the responsibility to inform the policy of the department in the area of guidance. NCGE provides supports for guidance counsellors in schools and the Further Education and Training sector to provide quality guidance services. Guidance is provided in post-primary schools in accordance with the Department of Education and Skills allocation of teachers, as the guidance counsellor must be a qualified teacher with an additional post graduate qualification in guidance.

The NCGE published guidelines in 2017 to support schools to develop, co-ordinate and deliver a whole school guidance programme. The *NCGE Whole School Guidance Framework* proposes a model of guidance delivery which addresses the guidance needs of all students in the school and identifies three areas of learning to facilitate students’ development in eight areas of competence. The areas of learning include: learning relating to oneself (personal/social development), educational opportunities (educational development) and career decision making (career development). At post primary level, the Transition Year programme provides the opportunity for all students to consider career options and to avail of work experience opportunities.

Further Education and Training courses offer a wide variety of life-long education options to anyone over the age of 16, including options such as apprenticeships, traineeships, Post Leaving Cert (PLC) courses, community and adult education, Youthreach as well as core literacy and numeracy services. One of the 5 strategic goals set out in the Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 is Active Inclusion. It means enabling every citizen including those experiencing barriers to the labour market (e.g. people with a disability, early school leavers, or those with lower levels of skills) to fully participate in society; to access a range of quality services including education and training; and to have a job. The FET sector in Ireland is seeking to increase levels of active inclusion through the provision of high quality, more accessible and flexible education and training programmes and supports suited to the identified needs of individuals.

**Back to Education:**

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is a scheme for unemployed people, lone parents and people with disabilities who are getting certain payments from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The allowance can be paid to people who wish to pursue approved second or third level courses of education. BTEA is not an unemployment payment. The Allowance is paid instead of the Social Welfare Payment that gave entitlement to participation in the BTEA scheme.

**VTOS:**

The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) is an educational opportunities scheme for unemployed persons, over the age of 21 years, who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments for at least 6 months. The scheme is funded by the Department of Education and Science with assistance from the European Social Fund. The Scheme is operated through the Vocational Education Committees and provides a special range of courses designed to meet the education and training needs of unemployed people.

**SOLAS:**

Established in 2013 under the Further Education and Training (FET) Act​​​, SOLAS is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills and governed by a Board. SOLAS has been tasked with building the identity and values of a world-class, integrated FET sector that is responsive to the needs of learners and the requirements of a changed and changing economy. SOLAS also manages the National Apprenticeship system, EGF[[2]](#footnote-2), eCollege, Safepass and the Construction Skills Certification Scheme.​​​​​ Through ETBs, SOLAS provides a range of training programmes for unemployed people; a significant number of young people participate in these programmes.

**JobBridge:**

JobBridge was introduced in July 2011 in response to the sharp and dramatic increase in unemployment. A robust external evaluation of the scheme conducted by Indecon Economic Consultants in 2016 found that it is one of the most effective labour market programmes – increasing participants’ employment outcomes by 32%. The Minister announced the closure of JobBridge to new applications from 27th October 2016 and intends to replace it later this year with a new work experience programme Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS), which is better suited to the much-improved labour market situation and addresses criticisms of the JobBridge scheme.

**First-Steps:**

First Steps, a youth developmental variation of JobBridge (the National Internship Scheme) was launched in February 2015. It targeted 18 to 24 year olds identified as facing significant barriers to gaining employment, such as low levels of educational attainment, long periods of unemployment and other social barriers to employment. The programme aimed to bring these young people closer to the labour market by providing them with a quality work placement experience, where they would gain the opportunity to learn and develop basic work and social skills in organisations in the private, public, voluntary and community sectors. Restructuring of the programme is currently underway – operational details for a new work placement scheme (YESS) are currently being finalised.

**Tús:**

Tús, launched in December 2010, is one of a range of supports to cater for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market. It provides part-time temporary work in local communities, as a stepping-stone back to employment. It is important to note that these placements are not full-time sustainable jobs and are designed to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness, thereby improving a person’s opportunities of returning to the labour market or getting a job for the first time.

**Gateway:**

Gateway is a Local Authority Labour Activation Scheme announced in Budget 2013. It is a County and City Council work placement scheme designed to provide short-term working opportunities for unemployed people. The scheme is intended to assist the personal and social development of participants by providing short-term work opportunities with the objective of bridging the gap between unemployment and re-entering the workforce. No new applicants are currently being recruited.

**Community Employment:**

The Community Employment (CE) programme is designed to help people who are long-term unemployed (or otherwise disadvantaged) to get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities. Participants can take up other part-time work during their placement. After the placement, participants are encouraged to seek permanent jobs elsewhere, based on the experience and new skills they have gained while on a Community Employment scheme.

**BTWEA (self-employment):**

The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) scheme encourages people getting certain social welfare payments to become self-employed. If you take part in the BTWEA scheme you can keep a percentage of your social welfare payment for up to two years. BTWEA is a payment made by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) to people aged under 66.

**Incentives to promote employment opportunities for young people**

**JobsPlus Youth**

JobsPlus is an employer incentive which encourages and rewards employers who employ jobseekers on the Live Register. It is designed to encourage employers and businesses to employ people who have been out of work for long periods. JobsPlus was introduced in 2013. DEASP pays the incentive to the employer monthly in arrears over a 2-year period. It provides 2 levels of regular cash payments €7,500 and €10,000.

Jobseekers over 25 years of age and under 50 years of age who are on the live register and have been at least 12 months (312 days) unemployed in the previous 18 months. However, jobseekers under 25 years have a reduced qualifying period and are only required to be on the live register for at least 4 months (104 days) in the previous 6 months. This element of the incentive is co-funded by the European Social Fund. The employment offered must be for at least 30 hours per week and must be over at least 4 days per week.

The European Commission is providing co-funding to JobsPlus for participants under 25 years. JobsPlus is jointly backed by the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and the European Social Fund (ESF) and Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection on an equal funding basis.

**Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS)**

The proposed Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) was announced as part of Budget 2018. It is a new work experience programme targeted exclusively at young jobseekers who are either long-term unemployed or who face significant barriers to gaining employment. The programme aims to provide them with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement with a view to increasing their employment prospects. Operational details are currently being finalised.

The standard duration of a placement will be 3 months, with an option to extend this to 6 months following a formal review of progress by a case officer at 2 months and where the case officer considers that this is in the best interest of the participant. Participants will receive payment equivalent to minimum wage.

To qualify for participation candidates must:

* be aged between 18 and 24 years, and
* have been out of work and in receipt of a qualifying payment for at least 12 months or, if unemployed for less than 12 months, be considered by a DEASP case officer to face a significant barrier to work.

**Back to Education Initiative**

**The Back To Education Initiative** provides part-time courses for young adults over 16 who have been out of formal education for two years and are aimed principally at those who have not completed Leaving Certificate (or equivalent) qualification. It gives individuals the opportunity to combine a return to learning with family, work and other responsibilities. Anyone who has left full-time education can take part in a course, but priority will be given to those with less than upper second level education.

**E-College**

Managed by SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, eCollege is the National Online Learning service delivering training to approximately 10,000 beneficiaries each year. It is a leading learning institution that delivers online and distance training courses in business, project management, SQL, Cisco, graphic design, web design, digital marketing, software development and basic computer literacy.  More recently, new eCollege offerings include a Certified Accountancy Technician course; Print and Digital Design Media Publication using Adobe InDesign; Graphic Design and Illustration using Adobe Illustrator and a Professional Diploma in Digital Marketing.

SOLAS eCollege courses can accommodate the pace at which individuals wish to progress. As courses are offered on a continuous intake basis learners can start whenever they wish. This flexibility makes eCollege courses ideal for anyone wishing to balance study with work. Jobseekers, wishing to enhance their CVs, can take eCollege courses for free if they are in receipt of social welfare payments. eCollege courses are also an excellent way for businesses to upskill staff, and an attractive rate is offered to employers who register their employees on eCollege courses.

**Guidance Services**

Each Education and Training Board (ETB) has an Adult Guidance and Information Service that is available to all adults. The Service assists adults, both young and old in exploring their further education / training options and to develop their personal work/career progression plan. In addition to these guidance services, there is an online facility [www.fetchcourses.ie](http://www.fetchcourses.ie) which provides information on over 6,000 FET courses that are available nationwide. It allows learners to access information about further education and training opportunities delivered by a network of further education and training providers across 26 counties, and online through SOLAS eCollege. It also outlines information about adult education and guidance services in different regions within Ireland.

**Barriers to Participation**

In 2017, SOLAS commissioned a national research project to examine the extrinsic and intrinsic barriers to participation in FET, with particular reference to a range of diverse groups. This project identified the barriers to the participation of specific groups who are experiencing socio-economic exclusion and distance from education and/or the labour market. One of the groups specifically referenced in the research were young people under the age of 25. As part of the annual Further Education and Training process, ETBs in their funding applications to SOLAS are required to provide details on existing and new initiatives to address barriers to FET. This report and further research in this area can be found at http://www.solas.ie.

**Higher Education Equity of Access**

Equity of access to higher education is a fundamental principle of Irish education policy, and one that has been endorsed by successive governments in policy statements and commitments over the past thirty years as a national priority. Most recently, equity of access is identified as a core national objective for the higher education system in the Department of Education and Skills’ Higher Education System Performance Framework (SPF) 2018-2020.

The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, which sets out the strategic direction and goals of the Department of Education and Skills for the education and training system has a key objective of improving the learning experience and learning outcomes for learners impacted by disadvantage

The third ***National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015 – 2019)*** was launched in December 2015. The vision of the National Access Plan (NAP) is to ensure that the student body entering into, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population.

The Plan identifies the target groups that are currently being under-represented in Higher Education, which includes entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education, Irish Travellers, Students with disabilities, First time, mature student entrants, Part-time/flexible learners and further education award holders. Lone Parents are also included in this grouping.

**New initiatives announced since publication of the Report**

Subsequent to the launch of the National Access Plan, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) established the *Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund*. This Fund comprises dedicated funding to support access to higher education, which is allocated on a competitive basis to higher education institutions (HEIs) to support particular priority measures as determined by the Department of Education and Skills. €16.2m has been made available to the PATH fund for new initiatives to widen access to higher education, with a strong focus on helping lone parents to access higher level education.

***PATH 1*** (€2.7 million) supports the objective in the National Access Plan to increase access to **initial teacher education** for students from the target groups identified in the National Access Plan such as Lone Parents and Travellers and students with a disability.

**PATH 2** provides €6m to be invested in “**The 1916 Bursaries Fund**” over three years for the **most socio economically disadvantaged students from under-represented target groups**. Lone Parents and ethnic minorities including Travellers will also be a target group for this fund. Bursaries will be awarded to 600 students in the 3 academic years who have been identified by their HEI as being the most socio-economically disadvantaged students in the target groups. ***At least 20% of the 1916 bursaries are reserved for lone parents.***

These Bursaries are targeted at non-traditional entry and can support undergraduate study on either a full or part-time basis. Each bursary will be in the amount of €5,000 per academic year (and could be on top of a SUSI grant if the person qualifies for a SUSI grant).  Funding has been provided to regional clusters of HEIs for the award of the first 1916 bursaries to 200 students in the academic year 2017/2018, and allocations have been announced for 2018/19. Awardees will be funded for the duration of their studies in each academic year.

***PATH 3*** will provide €7.5m over three years to a **Higher Education Access Fund** whichis intended to support regional clusters of higher education institutions to attract 2,000 additional students from groups currently under-represented in higher education, including Lone Parents and Travellers. The Higher Education Access Fund is being allocated on a competitive basis to the regional clusters of Higher Education Institutions with the purpose of attracting up to 2,000 new undergraduate students (full-time or part-time) from the target groups identified in the National Access Plan, into higher education by the end of Year 3, and to ensure that those students are supported to complete their programme of study. Initiatives within clusters are expected to target the sub groups mentioned in the National Access Plan: namely, lone parents and ethnic minorities (including recently arrived programme refugees).

**Student grants**

The statutory based student grant scheme Student Universal Support Scheme (SUSI) is the main source of support available for full-time students attending Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), undergraduate and post graduate courses. The Student Grant Scheme supported in excess of 77,000 students in the academic year 2017/18 at a cost of circa €371 million. The grant ranges in value from €1,500 up to €12,185 affording particularly priority to those on the lowest incomes and social welfare dependent.

**Extension of Student Assistance Fund to part-time study**

The Student Assistance Fund (SAF) provides financial assistance to students experiencing financial difficulties while attending third level. Students can be assisted towards the rent, childcare costs, transport costs and books/class materials. An additional €1m was added to the Fund in 2017 which is specifically ring-fenced for part-time students who are lone-parents or members of the other access target groups. Prior to that the fund supported full-time students only. The current SAF allocation for the 2017/18 academic year is €9.1 million.

**Other Initiatives and Funding to Support Equity of Access**

The Department also provides a suite of supports that are intended to assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds and other under-represented groups, to overcome financial barriers to accessing and completing Further and Higher Education. These supports are available to all students who meet the qualifying conditions.

**5. Please provide recent statistical data on the number of young people employed in the public and private sector, disaggregated based on age and sex.**

* Places on most Youth Guarantee programmes are demand led and have fallen since the Youth Guarantee was first introduced, reflecting the drop in demand due to falling youth unemployment.
* Youth unemployment now stands at 11.7% (estimated by CSO for July 2018), well below the EU average of 19.1%. At its peak in June 2012, Irish youth unemployment was over 30%. The long-term unemployment rate for young people has fallen from over 15% at peak to below 4%.
* Youth unemployment is already below the 12% target level set for 2020 and figures can be expected to fall further this year in line with the continuing forecast fall in overall unemployment.
* Eurostat figures indicate that the number of young people in employment has grown from 190,000 in early-2012 to 224,000 in early 2018.

The core delivery of services to young unemployed people covered by the guarantee is through regular (at least monthly) contact with an Intreo case officer, based around an agreed progression plan with a focus on securing employment. Where young people do not find work quickly, additional supports are offered through places on employment and training schemes, which are closely aligned to the needs of the labour market.

Long-term unemployed jobseekers (under 25) are also referred to JobPath, a contracted, payment by results employment services that provides additional resources and supports to the long-term unemployed. Partnerships with employers continue to develop at national and local level through Intreo’s overall employer engagement strategy.

**6. Detailed information on international cooperation programmes related to the promotion of work and employment opportunities for young people. Please describe the ways the programmes are inclusive of and accessible to young people.**

**European Recruitment Service- Co-sponsored Placement Programme**

The European Recruitment Service EURES[[3]](#footnote-3) “Co-Sponsored Placement Programme”, set up in 2015 by the DEASP under the EU’s Youth Guarantee, offers jobseekers an opportunity to upskill and gain experience through a work placement in another European country and supports Irish based companies with connections in Europe who are having difficulty recruiting workers with specific skills. Under “Co-Sponsored Placement Programme” unemployed jobseekers aged 18- 30 can take up a work placement in Europe for up to 12 months. During this time the jobseeker is Co-Sponsored by EURES Ireland and the Employer offering the work placement.

As part of the programme EURES Ireland will source, select and support suitable candidates to match the needs of the company. Upon sourcing a suitable work placement EURES Ireland will pay a Jobseeker relocation allowance, a weekly allowance (approximately equivalent to Jobseekers benefit rate) for the duration of placement, a language training allowance (If required) and a payment towards flight costs. On completion of the placement the jobseeker will be upskilled and meet the requirements to take up employment with the company in Ireland. Participation on these programmes greatly enhances the development and skills of those taking part and assists them in realising their full potential.

**European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships**

The Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships was adopted by the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) in March 2018.

The Recommendation will contribute to the EU's priority on jobs, growth and investment and follows on from the 2016 New Skills Agenda for Europe and its ambition to improve the quality and relevance of skills formation and the 2016 Communication on Investing in Europe’s Youth for a renewed effort to support young people acquire the knowledge, skills and experiences that will prepare them for their first job, pursue a successful professional career and become active citizens.

The Recommendation’s objective is to increase the employability and personal development of apprentices and to contribute to the development of a highly skilled and qualified workforce, responsive to labour market needs. The Recommendation aims to provide a coherent framework for apprenticeships based on a common understanding of what defines quality and effectiveness, taking into account the diversity of vocational education and training (VET) systems in Member States.

The Irish Apprenticeship system is in broad compliance with the adopted Recommendation. In Ireland all apprentices have employment contracts and are protected by legislation under the *Industrial Training Act 1967*. Furthermore, all employers of apprentices in Ireland are statutorily approved and monitored and all apprenticeship programmes are quality assured and lead to an award on the National Framework of Qualifications.

**Erasmus +**

Erasmus+ is the EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport for 2014-2020. It aims to boost skills and employability along with providing measures to support the modernisation of the education, training and youth systems.

As is the case with all countries that participate in the Erasmus+ programme, it is possible for students in the fields of Vocational Education and Higher Education in Ireland to partake in different traineeship periods/work placements abroad. These traineeship periods/work placements are of varying lengths of duration. More detail can be found in the [Erasmus Regulation](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32013R1288&from=EN) and the [Programme Guide](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/files/resources/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf) .

**Euroguidance**

The National Council for Guidance in Education hosts Euroguidancewhich is funded by the EU Commission to promote and provide information on learning opportunities across the EU. As part of the role of Euroguidance, NCGE liaises with EURES (in the Department of Employment and Social Protection) and EURODESK (in Léargas) to ensure cross referrals as appropriate.

1. Intreo is a single point of contact for all employment and income supports [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. European Globalisation Adjustment Fund [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. EURES is co-funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the European Social Fund as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)