

*WRC Social and Economic Consultants*

# Employment Support Services

Measure 15 of the EHRDOP

Implemented by the Department of Social  
and Family Affairs

## WIDER EQUALITY MEASURE STUDY

*Supported by*

**Equality Studies Unit, Measure 33A of the EHRDOP**



THE EQUALITY AUTHORITY  
AN tÚDARÁS COMHIONANNAIS

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# 1. Introduction

In the context of the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme 2000-2006 (EHRDOP), the Equality Authority is implementing Measure 33a: Technical Assistance - Equality Studies Unit (ESU). The ESU is mandated to examine labour market inequalities and their implications for labour market policy. Its focus is exclusion and discrimination in the labour market as covered by equality legislation and for four groups named in the EHRDOP (i.e., older workers, people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups in particular refugees, and, members of the Traveller Community). These four groups are also the reference groups for the Wider Equal Opportunities Principle (WEOP). The WEOP is concerned with understanding, monitoring and supporting the participation of people from the four groups covered by the principle in the measures of the EHRDOP. Following on from the mid-term review of the EHRDOP, 10 measures are now required to identify and report on the actions they are taking to apply the WEOP (see Annex I for a list of measures).

In this capacity the Equality Authority is implementing a rolling programme of Measure Studies. These studies seek to identify and promote changes required in the planning, design and delivery of the measures comprising the EHRDOP to enhance their capacity to accommodate diversity and to promote equality. In order to accomplish this, measure studies are designed to a standard that challenges.

Measure studies draw on the analysis developed in the ESU publication 'Accommodating Diversity in Labour Market Programmes'. Specifically, the programme of measure studies seeks:

- to support new learning on the promotion of equality and the accommodation of diversity in labour market measures. It achieves this by seeking out good practice while also examining gaps, deficiencies and other issues;
- through the manner in which it is implemented, to build the capacity of implementing agencies to identify and engage in actions to effectively promote equality and accommodate diversity; and,
- to agree recommendations for priority actions for promoting equality and accommodating diversity in the measures examined and in the broader work of the implementing agencies.

In seeking to support a process of change the measure studies require the full engagement of those responsible for the design and delivery of the measure concerned. To this end, the measure studies are undertaken in a way that achieves ownership of the process by the relevant implementing agency. The measure studies are, therefore, pursued on the basis of a partnership approach between the Equality Authority and the organisation responsible for the measure. Within the partnership:

- the Equality Authority leads in relation to standards for the study. Terms of reference need to be established and then agreed within the partnership. These must ensure measure studies are challenging, stimulate change and extract learning;

- the Equality Authority leads in relation to quality control for the measure study. In particular, ensuring the terms of reference are applied and convening a meeting of the partnership to discuss the action plan arising out of the measure study;
- the organisation responsible for the measure leads in relation to implementation of the measure study. The final outputs of the study are subject to the decision of the implementing agency. This includes actions to enhance the capacity of the measure to promote equality and accommodate diversity. The study is therefore owned by that organisation.
- the Equality Authority will lead in relation to assessing the progress made in implementing agreed recommendations.
- the Equality Authority will lead in relation to dissemination of learning, in particular through the framework of the EHRDOP. This will require electronic publication of the studies, development of synthesis reports that draw from a number of measure studies, and other activities.

This report presents the findings of the measure study of Employment Support Services (ESS) implemented by the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA). As defined in its revised Programme Complement the aim of ESS is “to assist unemployed people, particularly the long-term unemployed, lone parents, and sickness related social welfare recipients to return to the active labour market either by taking up employment or becoming self-employed” (p. 1). Operationally, ESS primarily consists of two schemes: the Back to Work Allowance Scheme (BTWAS) and the Back to Education Allowance Scheme (BTEAS). Both of these schemes - albeit not in exactly their current format - were introduced in the early 1990s in the context of the development of an activist approach to welfare provision. Supporting the operation of the BTWAS is the Technical Assistance and Training Fund. It was put in place in 1995 to assist persons accessing the BTWAS in a number of ways (e.g., preparation of business plans and undertaking market research in the case of persons entering the self-employment strand of the BTWAS and preparation for interviews and support to access computer training for persons entering the employee strand of the BTWAS). The other element of the measure involves providing funding to projects to assist welfare recipients - and in certain instances members of their family - to access work, education or training. The funding mechanism - that is, the Special Projects Fund - provides funding, co-funding and part-funding for a wide range of projects broadly aimed at promoting social inclusion and developing employability. It aims to stimulate innovative actions to tackle social exclusion and increase employability.

In budgetary terms, ESS is substantial: a budget of €1,526.58 million is indicated for the period 2000-2006 in its Programme Complement. However, it is important to note that the vast majority of this expenditure arises from the provision of payments to participants and their continued eligibility for a range of secondary welfare benefits. Also, and related to the latter point, eligibility to participate in the two main schemes comprising the measure is based on entitlement to various welfare payments and additional conditions related to duration in receipt of payment / duration unemployed, minimum payment entitlements, and age.

ESS is one of 10 measures in the EHRDOP prioritised for greater integration of the WEOP and consequently ESS is now required to identify and report on the actions taken to apply the WEOP. There are a number of ways in which the WEOP is of relevance to the operation of this measure. First, all persons covered by the WEOP are represented among the welfare based eligible population of this measure and, in particular, persons with a disability are cited as among the intended beneficiaries of the measure. Also, the small grants element of the measure

explicitly targets people with disabilities and has included among the projects funded under Measure 15 projects for members of the Traveller community and refugees. Second, the BTEAS element of the measure represents an important means of supporting people from the four groups covered by the WEOP to access mainstream second and third level education as well as education, training and development courses provided by State agencies, Area Partnership Companies, and community and voluntary groups. Given the educational inequality experienced by persons from three of the four groups eligible to participate in the measure and the likely greater concentration of this inequality among persons in receipt of a welfare payment, the measure is particularly relevant to combating the labour market inequality experienced by educationally disadvantaged persons from the four groups.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology for this measure study involved:

- collecting and reviewing documentation on programme design (e.g., eligibility criteria, recruitment processes, supports to participants etc) and implementation procedures (e.g., roles and responsibilities of various personnel);
- collecting and reviewing previous studies / reports on the measure; The reports included evaluations of the BTWAS, the BTEAS, the role of Jobs Facilitators, an expenditure review of the BTEAS, and evaluations of individual projects funded under the Special Projects Fund;
- obtaining and analysing data on programme participants particularly with reference to the four groups covered by the WEOP - older people, people with disabilities, members of minority ethnic groups and members of the Traveller Community;
- reviewing data collection and programme monitoring procedures;
- obtaining and reviewing documentation on policies, practices and initiatives in the area of equality and promoting diversity; and,
- meeting with personnel responsible for programme delivery to discuss and obtain their views on issues related to the WEOP, including a group session with Facilitators and Regional Co-ordinators.



## 3. Implementing Body

### 3.1 Role and Operations

In its Statement of Strategy 2005-2007 the mission of the DSFA is defined as “to promote a caring society through ensuring access to income support and other services, enabling active participation, promoting social inclusion and supporting families” (p. 4). In addition to supporting the Minister for Social and Family Affairs to discharge governmental, parliamentary and departmental duties, the main functions of the DSFA include formulating social protection policies, administering and managing statutory and non-statutory social and family schemes (the BTWAS and BTEAS are among these schemes) and services, and working with other Departments and agencies in the delivery of Government priorities.

Total funding for the services provided by the DSFA amounted to €12.25 billion in 2005, making the DSFA the largest department in terms of public spending. Direct beneficiaries are of the order of 970,000 and this figure rises to over 1.5 million when their dependents are included.

#### Box 3.1: Cross-Departmental Involvement in Equality/Diversity and Traveller Issues

Issue	Lead Department	Other Departments /Agencies	Action by the DSFA
Equality / Diversity	DJELR	All	Through staff training and awareness raising we will ensure that our services are provided in a manner that all of our customers find accessible and culturally appropriate. Participate in the Governments KNOW RACISM campaign and the National Action Plan Against Racism. Continue to work with the Health Service Executive to provide supports and advice to asylum seekers, refugees and other non-nationals granted the right to remain in the State. Work with the Reception and Integration Agency in providing services to asylum seekers and refugees.
Travellers	DJELR	DSFA, Health Service Executive	Work with the DJELR, the DELG, the Health Service Executive and other agencies to ensure that our services are provided in a manner that is appropriate to the needs of Travellers.

The DSFA is also involved on an inter-departmental basis in addressing a range of issues. In relation to a number of these issues, notably the National Anti Poverty Strategy, the DSFA plays a lead / co-ordinating role. The Office for Social Inclusion is located in the DSFA. Among its functions are co-ordination of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/Inclusion), monitoring and evaluating the Action Plan, developing support functions to underpin its implementation, supporting regional and local implementation, and implementing a communication strategy and consultation process in relation to NAP/Inclusion.

Two issues of particular relevance to this study are Equality / Diversity and Travellers. In relation to these issues the DSFA is engaged with the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) and other agencies in pursuing a range of initiatives (see Box 3.1). The DSFA is also represented on a large number of interdepartmental committees, a number of which are relevant to addressing the labour market inequalities experienced by people from the four groups covered by the WEOP (see Box 3.2).

**Box 3.2: Departmental Representation on Interdepartmental Committees / Groups Relevant to Addressing Labour Market Inequalities Experienced by Persons Covered by the WEOP**

Group	Interdepartmental Committee / Group
Older People	National Council for Aging and Older People Interdepartmental Group on the Needs of Older People
People with Disabilities	Working Group on the Cost of Disability Payment FÁS National Advisory Committee on Disability
Members of Minority Ethnic Groups/Refugees	Immigration Policy Advisory Committee Interdepartmental Committee on Asylum and Integration Issues Steering Group Anti-Racism Awareness Campaign Steering Group on National Action Plan Against Racism National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism
Members of the Traveller Community	High Level Group on Traveller Issues Committee to Monitor and Co-ordinate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) is funded by the DSFA. MABS is managed by 52 locally based companies whose board members drawn from the statutory and voluntary sectors. Approximately 70% of MABS clients are recipients of some form of welfare payment. The service deals with approximately 11,000 new clients annually.

There are five statutory agencies /offices under the aegis of the DSFA: Comhairle, the Combat Poverty Agency, the Family Support Agency, the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman, and the Pensions Board.

### 3.2 Organisational Structure

A total of just over 4,700 persons are employed by the DSFA. The DSFA has headquarter offices in six locations (Dublin, Dundalk, Letterkenny, Longford, Sligo and Waterford) and there is a network of 58 Social Welfare Local Offices and 67 Branch Offices.

The services of the DSFA are delivered both centrally and on a regional basis. There are 9 regions: North West, West, North East, South, South East, Mid West, Dublin West, Dublin South, and Dublin North. Each region has a regional manager and management team. They report to the Director of Regions. Of particular relevance to this study are Regional Co-ordinators and their team of Facilitators as it is these personnel who operationally support the implementation of ESS.

Within the DSFA, responsibility for policy development, implementation, and reporting on ESS lies within the Social and Family Support Service (SFSS). In 2004, the functions of Employment Support Services were merged into what is now called the SFSS. The management unit for Measure 15 remains with the Employment Support Services section and this section is now also the policy section for SFSS. Management of the personnel (i.e., Regional Co-ordinators and Facilitators) involved in implementing ESS falls within the Office of the Regional Director.

#### **Box 3.3: Equality and Diversity: Principles and Actions in Customer Action Plan 2004-2007**

##### Equality / Diversity

**Principle:** Ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by the equality legislation (under the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community). Diversity, as a concept, recognises the differences between people and the benefits to be gained from these differences. Accommodating diversity is seen as one of the tools by which equality can be achieved. The principle cuts across all other aspects of service delivery and we are committed to serving our customers in an equitable and non-discriminatory way.

To fully achieve this, we also recognise that it is vital that our staff are supported, through our training programmes and other support methods.

##### **Key Action Points**

Update, in the light of legislative development, the support pack for staff dealing with non-national customers published February 2002, Q3 2004

Continually monitor and review needs in relation to our interpretation facilities. The service is currently available in 12 of our Local and Public Offices – Ongoing

Continue the emphasis on our customer service training on diversity awareness covering aspects of the equality and diversity agenda. At present, our specialised awareness training courses cover modules dealing with non-nationals, disability and Travellers - Ongoing

Continue and develop other staff support initiatives in the area of equality and diversity - Ongoing

- Ongoing

Provide system supports to deal with customers with special needs.

From Customer Action Plan 2004-2007, p. 40

### 3.3 Equality Policies and Practices

One of the themes running through the Statement of Strategy 2005-2007 is the growing diversity of the client population of the DSFA and the consequent challenge to ensure that the services of the DSFA are responsive to the needs and circumstances of its clients. In meeting this challenge particular emphasis is placed on ensuring that the services of the DSFA are delivered in an accessible and appropriate manner to its clients and that Departmental personnel receive the training and support to ensure this. The principles and actions supporting this are laid out in the Department's Customer Action Plan 2004-2007 (see Box 3.3) and its Customer Charter.

As indicated above, there is an emphasis on training and support for Departmental personnel as a means to develop organisational competence to accommodate diversity and promote equality. In line with this a programme of Diversity Awareness Training has been in place since 1998 and an estimated 2,500 personnel who deal with the public have participated in this training. The training programme was designed jointly by the Corporate Development Unit (DSFA), the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, the Travellers Visibility Group in consultation with the Regional Director's Office (DSFA). Course content up to end 2004 has consisted of presentations on racism, immigration and legislation (presented by Irish Centre for Migration Studies), disability awareness (Irish Wheelchair Association), and Traveller Awareness (Pavee Point). In late 2004, at the Department's invitation, the Equality Authority provided an overview to a group of Regional Co-ordinators and ESS staff on the need to create a greater awareness of the application of the WEOP amongst Departmental staff.

A new Diversity Awareness Course was introduced in 2005. This was awarded to an external consultancy company and the course content covers defining diversity, exploring differences, and exploring culture. The course delivery involves an interactive training day including discussion and practical exercises. Following the positive appraisal to the new course, the DSFA has decided to accelerate the rollout of the programme in 2006. Other training initiatives include providing sessions for regional staff on communicating with persons who do not have English as their mother tongue and in May 2006 commencing the delivery of a mental health awareness training programme to selected front-line staff in association with Mental Health Ireland.

In addition to training for personnel, a booklet containing guidelines on meeting and communicating with people with disabilities was produced in 2004. The production of the booklet resulted from an initiative taken by the DSFA in 2003 that culminated in a report on issues affecting staff with disabilities. A monitoring group has been set up by the DSFA to monitor the Department-wide implementation of the report's recommendations.

More generally, under Goal 4<sup>1</sup> of its strategic plan for the period 2005 to 2007 the DSFA is represented on various Quality Customer Service (QCS) Groups including the sub-group on equality/diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> Provide relevant and effective supports to those affected by poverty and social exclusion and co-ordinate the development and implementation of the Government's strategy in this area, in co-operation with other statutory and voluntary agencies.

### **3.4 Other Initiatives Related to Accommodating Diversity Promoting Equality**

#### **Outline Sectoral Plan Under Disability Bill 2004**

As part of the Government's National Disability Strategy the DSFA is one of six departments required to prepare a Sectoral Plan setting out service provision for people with disabilities. The Outline Sectoral Plan prepared by the DSFA identifies the BTWAS and the BTEAS as among the principle supports provided by the DSFA to people with disabilities who wish to access employment and training. It also notes that one of the high level goals identified in its Statement of Strategy 2005-2007 is to facilitate and improve access to education, training and labour market programmes for people with disabilities. To pursue this four tasks are presented in the Outline Sectoral Plan:

- (a) *to identify an appropriate range of options (including schemes already available through other Departments and Agencies) to assist people with disabilities who are in receipt of social welfare payments, to take up employment;*
- (b) *to review the application of rules for continuing entitlement to sickness and disability payments, to ensure that they are appropriate to the needs of customers in a changing labour market;*
- (c) *to pilot specific employment initiatives for people with disabilities, initially people in the 16-25 age group who qualify for long-term disability payments; and,*
- (d) *to review the application of the Back-to-Work Allowance Scheme and related supports to people with disabilities and bring forward proposals for any necessary changes. (pp. 8-9)*

The Outline Sectoral Plan also outlines two specific mechanisms that have been put in place for the purpose of consulting with and seeking the views of people with disabilities who are customers of the Department's services. These are:

**1 Disability Consultative Forum**

This Forum, which was established in 1996, comprises representatives of the principal disability organisations and meets on a quarterly basis.

**2 Customer Panels**

Currently, customer panels for recipients of illness and disability related payments are held in the Department's North East and South East regions.

The Outline Sectoral Plan commits the DSFA to foster consultation through these mechanisms.

In order to meet its statutory obligations arising from the Disability Act 2005, the DSFA has undertaken a systematic audit of each scheme area to accurately assess their current level of service to people with a disability and to help identify gaps in current service provision. The audit covers accessibility of services, physical access, customer service, and ongoing communications with customers with identified special needs.

### **Expenditure Review of Disability and Illness Payment Schemes**

The Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Illness and Disability Schemes published in 2003 considered the employment support objectives of the schemes. It noted that the DSFA aims to encourage people with disabilities and long-term illnesses to identify and take up employment, training, educational and self-development opportunities. From the evidence reviewed as well as sample surveys undertaken as part of the review it concluded that progression to employment was low among persons availing of existing supports. One factor the Report highlighted as a disincentive to taking up employment was the loss of certain secondary benefits (particularly the Medical Card and Mobility Allowance). Among the overall conclusions reached in that regard was that employment supports for people with disabilities need to be more systematic and effective. Twelve specific recommendations were made to strengthen employment support for people with disabilities (see Annex 2).

### **Pilot Integrated Employment Support Approach for People with Disabilities**

This pilot was initiated in January 2005 as a multi agency (i.e., DSFA, FÁS and the Health Service Executive) response to the increasing number of recipients of Disability Allowance, in particular the high number of persons between the ages of 16 and 25 years in receipt of Disability Allowance. The overall increase in the number of recipients of Disability Allowance between 1997 and 2004 was 69%, with the number of recipients in the latter year being 72,976. Of the latter number, 10,269 (i.e., 14.1%) are aged under 25 years. The pilot, which is to be evaluated in the near future, identified a range of issues that need to be addressed if the DSFA is to be able to pursue a policy of activation with people with disabilities. These issues include having access to accurate and up to date information on clients, the validity of awarding a “permanent disability entitlement” to young people without regard to an occupational assessment of their capacity for work or employment aspirations, the need to address gaps in training and employment provision, and the need for greater access to a more extensive psychological and counselling service.

### **Expenditure Review of the Back to Education Allowance Scheme**

The recently concluded Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Back to Education Allowance Scheme (September, 2005) documents the adoption of an integrated proofing template as part of its methodology. The proofing template covered all nine grounds covered by equality legislation. The focus of the exercise was on examining whether the Review “sufficiently recognised the diversity within the BTEA target groups and on how such groups are named and catered for by the existing BTEA scheme and through the future development of the scheme arising from the recommendations of the Review” (p. 14). The views of the Working Group regarding catering for diversity within the BTEAS include extending eligibility to recipients of the Pre-retirement Allowance Scheme (all of whom are in the 55 and over age group) and recognising periods spent in receipt of supplementary welfare allowance for the purpose of calculating the qualifying period for eligibility (this being applicable to asylum seekers who were in receipt of supplementary welfare allowance pending their claim for refugee status). Also, the Working Group concluded that there is a “need to track participation and outcomes for the diversity of people within the target groups by incorporating this into a scheme tracking / monitoring system” (p. 60).

### **Quality Interpretation Services**

During 2004, 12 of the DSFA’s local offices and the Dublin HQ public office have had access to a dedicated telephone system providing a three-way connection between the customer, staff member and a call-centre based contractor providing interpretation services. Access to this interpretation service is also provided to smaller offices where the need arises. The operation of the interpretation facility is the subject of ongoing quality review.

### **3.5 Equality Matters in Data Collection Procedures**

As discussed in more detail below, the eligibility criteria for both the BTWAS and the BTEAS are based on being in receipt of specified welfare payments and additional criteria concerning age and duration in receipt of payment. Data from DSFA's administrative system are used in determining eligibility to participate in the programmes funded under ESS and it contains data on gender, age, family status, disability (in so far as this is defined by receipt of an illness or disability related welfare payment) and in certain instances nationality. Data on membership of minority ethnic groups and the Traveller Community are not collected as part of registration and qualifying procedures and consequently it is not possible to analyse levels of participation on these grounds. As is indicated by the presentation of data on the composition of participants in the BTWAS and the BTEAS later in this report, data are generally available in respect of various grounds on their own but not on the basis of multiple grounds (e.g., a breakdown of gender by age by disability in relation to participants on BTWAS or BTEAS).

There is an awareness on the part of Employment Support Services and the DSFA more generally of the need to develop greater capacity in the area of data capture and data processing in respect of beneficiaries of ESS (i.e., the need for a more comprehensive monitoring / tracking system). This is signalled in the quotation from the Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Back to Education Allowance Scheme cited above and by commitments made in the 2004 report to the Monitoring Committee of the EHRDOP to develop - in relation to the Special Projects Fund - a reporting template to capture data relevant to the social inclusion and wider equality horizontal principles. Currently, the main heading under which data relating to the WEOP is collected in the case of projects funded, co-funded or part-funded by the Special Projects Fund is "Target Group". Examination of the actual entries under this heading showed that they variously relate to labour market status / social inclusion (e.g., very long-term unemployed), group membership (e.g., people with disabilities, members of the Traveller Community, refugees), and to location (e.g., disadvantage rural men). While data on the number of individual participants are collected it is not possible under current procedures to disaggregate these by membership of the groups covered by the WEOP.

More generally, as part of its data and statistics strategy the DSFA has identified four high level objectives. The third of these encompasses data concerning equality: "To ensure that our data sources facilitate national developments in social and equality statistics". The DSFA is currently engaged in a range of actions to meet this and its other strategic objectives in the areas of data collection, management and analysis.

## 4. Measure 15: Employment Support Services

ESS falls within the Employability pillar of the EHRDOP. There are three specific objectives associated with the 22 measures included in this pillar: mobilisation of labour supply, preventive approach to unemployment, and social inclusion. ESS is one of nine measures seeking “to minimise unemployment and prevent the drift into long-term unemployment by strengthening the preventive approach” (EHRDOP, p. 68). ESS is also one of the 10 selected measures in the EHRDOP prioritised for greater integration of the WEOP and consequently ESS is now required to identify and report on the actions taken to apply the WEOP.

### 4.1 Aim of Employment Support Services

The overall aim of ESS is “to assist unemployed people, particularly the long-term unemployed, lone parents, and sickness related welfare recipients to return to the active labour market either by taking up employment or becoming self-employed” (Revised Programme Complement, p. 1).

### 4.2 Description of Employment Support Services

The measure consists of the Back to Work Allowance Scheme (BTWAS)<sup>2</sup> and the Back to Education Allowance Scheme (BTEAS)<sup>3</sup> together with the advice and support services provided to unemployed people, lone parents and people with disabilities in receipt of certain social welfare payments. In the main, these advice and support services are provided by Jobs Facilitators, now called Facilitators. Within the BTWAS there are two strands: one supporting entry into employment and one supporting entry to self-employment. Entrants to both of these strands may also avail of Technical Assistance and Training Grants. The types of support provided from this source include covering the costs of preparing a business plan, undertaking market research, and making financial projections in the case of the self-employed strand and preparing for interviews and obtaining computer training in the case of the employee strand. The BTEAS also contains two strands: one supporting access to second level education (i.e., Second Level Option - SLO) and one supporting access to third level education (Third Level Option - TLO).

Flanking the measure is the Special Projects Fund. It provides grants to projects run by third parties to assist welfare recipients - as well as members of their families - improve their employability through education, training and personal development. The DSFA sees the Fund and the projects it supports as a way of improving employability and increasing social inclusion. It also sees the Fund as a means of supporting innovative responses to increasing employability and tackling social inclusion. Facilitators have access to the Fund and their use of the Fund has focused on assisting people most marginalised in social and economic terms. The Fund is operated in a manner that enables a quick response to any needs identified and is implemented as once-off funding to test and develop responses to the needs identified. The DSFA also highlights the role of this Fund in the context of addressing its responsibilities under the social inclusion horizontal principle.

The BTWAS is a weekly allowance available to qualifying persons taking up employment or becoming self-employed. For people entering the employee strand of the scheme the allowance is paid in addition to the wages they receive. The allowance is paid for a period of three years on a sliding scale: that is, 75% of the welfare payment payable on entry to the scheme for the first year, 50% in the second year, and 25% in the third year. In the case of people becoming self-employed the allowance is paid on a sliding scale for a period of four years: that is 100% in year 1, 75% in year 2, 50% in year 3, and 25% in year 4. Secondary benefits (e.g., rent allowance, Medical Card) may be retained subject to certain conditions.

<sup>2</sup> The BTWAS was introduced in 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Following on from a number of pilot initiatives beginning with the Educational Opportunities Scheme in 1986 and including the introduction of the Third Level Allowance in 1990, the BTEAS was consolidated in its current form in 1998.



The BTEAS is an allowance paid to qualifying persons accessing approved second and third level courses of study. The allowance is set at the maximum standard rate of the social welfare payment qualifying the person to participate in the scheme. Secondary benefits may be retained subject to certain conditions and a single payment of €400 to assist with the costs of participating in education is also provided to participants.

### **4.3 Target Groups and Eligibility Criteria of ESS**

The target groups of ESS are primarily defined by their welfare status (i.e., welfare recipients). Within this the revised Programme Complement lists the following: “long-term unemployed, recipients of One Parent Family Allowance, Disability Assistance, Blind Persons Pension, Invalidity Pension, Disability Benefit, former recipients of Carers Allowance, other Social Welfare recipients, and dependent spouses of these categories” (p. 1).

Eligibility criteria related to duration in receipt of qualifying welfare payments are in operation. Up to March 2006, for persons in receipt of unemployment related payments, the qualifying period for the employee strand of the BTWAS was five years (this was increased from 15 months in January 2003). On 1st March 2006 the qualifying period for the employee strand was decreased to 2 years. In March 2004 the qualifying period for persons accessing the self-employed strand of the BTWAS was reduced from five years to three years. From 1st March 2006 the qualifying duration for the self-employed strand is now also 2 years.

Persons in receipt of Disability Allowance, Blind Persons Pension, and Invalidity Pension also qualify for the BTWAS. In the case of these three payments the qualifying duration for entry to the employee strand of the BTWAS is 15 months or 12 months if the person is over 50 years of age. In the case of these three payments the qualifying period for entry to the self-employment strand of the BTWAS is 12 months. In the case of persons in receipt of Disability Benefit the qualifying period for entry to both strands of the BTWAS is three years.

The qualifying criteria for participation in the BTEAS fall into four categories: persons,

- aged 21 years or over (or 24 years or over for an approved post graduate qualification), and in receipt of one of a number of specified social welfare payments for a least six months for the SLO and 12 months for the TLO;
- aged 18 to 20 years, out of formal education for 2 years, and in receipt of Unemployment Assistance / Benefit or One Parent Family Payment for six months for SLO and 12 months for TLO;
- aged 18 years and over in receipt of Blind Persons Pension, Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension or Unemployability Supplement for six months for SLO and 12 months for TLO;
- in receipt of Disability Benefit for three years or more.

### **4.4 Structures and Personnel Implementing ESS**

The Employment Support Services section of the Social and Family Support Service undertakes central support, policy, and reporting functions in relation to the implementation of the BTWAS and the BTEAS. Its role includes formulating policy, disseminating information, providing guidelines, customer support, reviewing applications and co-ordinating the administration of the schemes. It also prepares the reports on ESS for submission to the Monitoring Committee of the EHRDOP.

Other sections of the DSFA are also involved in administering the schemes comprising ESS. These include Social Welfare Local Offices, the Pensions Service Office (Sligo) and the Social Welfare Service Office (Longford). The role of these sections is mainly in processing applications

from particular groups of social welfare recipients falling within their area of responsibility. For example, the Pensions Service Office (Sligo) deals with applications from recipients of the following payments: One Parent Family Payment, Deserted Wives's Benefit / Allowance, Widow's / Widower's Contributory / Non-Contributory Pensions and Prisoners Wife's Allowance. The Social Welfare Office (Longford) deals with applications from recipients of illness, disability and carer's payments.

As indicated in Section 4.2, ESS comprises the advice and support services provided to unemployed people, lone parents and people with disabilities in receipt of certain social welfare payments. These services are delivered by Facilitators (formerly called Jobs Facilitators). Currently, there are 40 facilitator posts and Table 4.1 shows their regional distribution.

**Table 4.1: Number of Facilitator Posts by Region**

Region	Number of Facilitators
North West	4
West	3
North East	5
South	6
South East	4
Mid West	4
Dublin West	6
Dublin South	3
Dublin North	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>

Facilitators were introduced by the DSFA in 1993 and they were seen as a key element of Employment Support Services which was established to support unemployed people re-establish connections with the labour market and to take up employment. The rationale for establishing the Employment Support Services section in 1993 was outlined by the then Minister for Social Welfare:

*"Passive income support is not enough on its own. We need a strong proactive approach to providing additional support measures which will: increase the number of job outlets and enterprise opportunities available to unemployed people; increase the number of options for training and further education available to unemployed people; and facilitate unemployed people to make the most of the new opportunities available to them to regain a foothold in the jobs market"* - quoted in WRCsec, 1997, p. 2<sup>4</sup>

During the mid 1990s Facilitators played an important role in supporting the implementation of the BTWAS which, at the time, was expanding rapidly. The role of the Facilitators was broadly defined at the time and remains so at present. In summary, the current role of Facilitators is defined as including:

- activation (e.g., identifying and supporting welfare recipients most distant from labour market opportunities to access opportunities and supports to labour market re-entry);
- facilitation (e.g., providing one-to-one support, working with other agencies to improve appropriate referral, assisting agencies access funding from Social and Family Support Services) and monitoring same);

<sup>4</sup> WRC Social and Economic Consultants (1997) *Developing Active Welfare Policy: An Evaluation of the Back to Work Allowance Scheme*. Department of Social and Family Affairs

- aftercare (e.g., supporting persons entering self-employment with assistance from the BTWAS to develop their businesses and developing follow-up options for participants on projects funded by the Social and Family Support Service);
- advocacy (e.g., seeking to address issues related to improving services for recipients of social welfare);
- networking (e.g., participating in local initiatives and developing lines of communication with other agencies); and,
- influencing policy (e.g., identifying gaps in provision and proposing remedies for same).

#### **4.5 Promoting Employment Support Services**

In the early years of the BTWAS, Facilitators played an extensive role in promoting awareness of the scheme and of the other supports for unemployed people (including the forerunners of the BTEAS) provided by the DSFA. Over time, particularly with the establishment of Area Based Partnership Companies and the establishment of the Local Employment Service (LES), a wider set of agencies and personnel are involved in promoting awareness of the schemes now included in ESS.

Currently, in addition to the activities of the Facilitators and of the DSFA more generally (e.g., through its website and information booklets) there are a range of other ways in which information about ESS and supports for persons seeking access to the main schemes under it are provided. These include information provided by FÁS Employment Service Officers to personnel referred under the Employment Action Plan (EAP) process, information and supports provided by personnel working in Area Based Partnership Companies (particularly Enterprise Officers and Education Officers), and information and supports provided by mediators working in the LES. Information is also provided by Comhairle – one of the agencies operating under the aegis of the DSFA – through its network of local Citizens Information Centres and on its website: [www.oasis.ie](http://www.oasis.ie).

In relation to the Special Projects Fund it is important to emphasise that while the beneficiaries of projects supported by it are persons in receipt of welfare payments, most of the projects are delivered by a wide range of community, local development, issue and group based organisations and training and development organisations. A particular feature of the operation of the Fund is that it allows Regional Co-ordinators and Facilitators to respond to local needs, often articulated by local community and voluntary organisations working with and / or on behalf of clients of the DSFA. The availability of resources from the Fund is mainly promoted through the networking activities of Regional Co-ordinators and Facilitators at local level.

## 5. Participation of People Covered by the WEOP in Employment Support Services

The number of participants in the BTWAS increased rapidly following its introduction in 1993, rising from just over 4,800 at the end of 1994 (just one year after its introduction) to a peak of over 39,300 in late 2000. Since then, and reflecting the very changed labour market and employment context within which the scheme operates, the number of participants has been declining. At the end of 2004 the number of participants in the BTWAS was 11,566 (6,855 of whom were in the self-employment strand and 4,711 in the employee strand).

In 1998 previous schemes operated by the DSFA supporting access to education were amalgamated into the BTEAS. There has been a continual increase in the number of participants in the SLO strand since that year, rising from 531 in the 1998 / 99 academic year to 3,023 in the 2004 / 05 academic year. The number of participants on the TLO strand has fluctuated somewhat, 4,503 in the 1998 / 99 academic year, a peak of 5,458 in the 2003 /04 academic year, and 4,280 in the 2004 / 05 academic year.

Based on figures for 2004 a total of 225 projects were funded under the Special Projects Fund at a total cost of €2.68 million.

Based on available data, this section examines the composition of ESS participants looking in particular at the proportion of participants coming from each of the four groups covered by the WEOP. It should be noted that the analysis of the composition of participants in ESS does not attempt to assess the extent to which persons from the four groups are equitably participating in the two schemes comprising the ESS. Also, in the absence of data on the results of participation we are not in a position to assess the differential effects of participation. Finally, both the BTWAS and the BTEAS are in effect demand driven programmes with the overall volume of provision reflecting the level of demand for these schemes among qualifying persons. One important factor in that context is that persons qualifying for ESS also qualify for other schemes operated by the DSFA, particularly the option to work and to retain their welfare payment under on the income disregard schemes targeted toward recipients of illness and disability related payments.

### 5.1 Participation of People Covered by the WEOP in the BTWAS

Data regarding participation in the BTWAS are available by gender, age and type of qualifying welfare payment. Also, data on nationality were provided by the DSFA. The latter, however, are available only for that sub-set of participants qualifying for the BTWAS as a result of being recipients of an unemployment related welfare payment. Detailed cross tabulations of the available data are not possible and consequently Table 5.1 summarises the overall situation in relation to two groups covered by the WEOP, people with disabilities and older people. Data on membership of the Traveller community are not currently collected, though all DSFA personnel interviewed during the course of this study indicated that participation by Travellers is found on all schemes, particularly in the self-employment strand of the BTWAS. However, it is not possible to determine actual numbers, though the observations of the DSFA personnel interviewed for this study indicate that while the absolute number is likely to be low it is high relative to the number of qualifying persons from the Traveller Community.

**Table 5.1: Analysis of Participation by People with Disabilities and Older People in the BTWAS (2004)**

	BTWAS - EE	BTWAS – SE	BTWAS Total
Unemployment	3,019	5,959	8,978
One Parent	867	337	1,204
Disability	755	521	1,276
Other	70	38	108
Total	4,711	6,855	11,566
% PWD	16.0	7.6	11.0
N 50+	1,054	1,704	2,758.0
% 50+	22.4	24.9	23.8

The overall gender breakdown of participants on the BTWAS is 70.5% men and 29.5% women. At 37.1%, the participation of women is higher in the employee strand of the BTWAS than in the self-employment strand of the BTWAS (i.e., 24.2%). People with disabilities account for 11% of all participants on the BTWAS. The proportion of participants who are people with disabilities in the employee strand at 16% is over double that found in relation to the self-employment strand of the BTWAS (i.e., 7.6%). Older people account for almost one in four (23.8%) of BTWAS participants and this proportion is just slightly higher in the self-employed strand (i.e., 24.9%) than in the employee strand (i.e., 22.4%).

**Table 5.2: Analysis of Participation by Non-EU Nationals in the BTWAS (2004)**

	BTWAS - EE	BTWAS – SE	BTWAS Total
Ireland	2,555	4,932	7,487
Other EU	166	535	701
Non-EU	205	366	571
Total	2,926	5,833	8,759
% Non-EU	7.0	6.3	6.5

Data on the nationality of participants provided by the DSFA show a very wide range of nationalities among participants. Taking non-EU<sup>5</sup> nationals as a proxy indicator of participation by members of minority ethnic groups in the BTWAS, in the region of 6% to 7% of participants are from non-EU countries. Among the nationalities occurring with some frequency among these are Bosnians, Romanians, and Nigerians.

<sup>5</sup> EU being defined as inclusive of all 25 Member States.

## 5.2 Participation of People Covered by the WEOP in the BTEAS

The gender breakdown on the BTEAS is 41.9% men and 58.1% women. A gender breakdown for participants in the SLO and TLO strands separately is not available.

**Table 5.3: Analysis of Participation by People with Disabilities and Older People in the BTEAS (2004)**

	BTEAS – SLO	BTEAS – TLO	BTEAS Total
Unemployment	2,018	3,315	5,333
One Parent	794	515	1,309
Disability	204	445	649
Other	7	10	17
Total	3,023	4,285	7,308
% PWD	6.7	10.4	8.9
N 50+		496	496
% 50+		6.8	6.8

People with a disability account for almost 9% of all participants on the BTEAS. At 10.4% the proportion of people with disabilities participating in the TLO strand of the BTEAS is higher than that in the SLO strand (i.e., 6.7%). In contrast to the BTWAS, a small proportion (i.e., 6.8%) of participants on the BTEAS are aged 50 years and over (again figures in relation to SLO and TLO separately are not available).

**Table 5.4: Analysis of Participation by Non-EU Nationals in the BTEAS (2003)**

	BTEAS - SLO	BTWAS - TLO	BTEAS Total
Ireland	1,499	2,992	4,491
Other EU	152	292	444
Non-EU	195	143	338
Total	1,846	3,427	5,273
% Non-EU	10.6	4.2	6.4

The figures in Table 5.4 relate to December 2003. They also relate to participants in the BTEAS TLO and SLO strands who qualified from an unemployment payment. The payment system that deals with other qualifying payments (e.g., Lone Parents, Disability Allowance) does not record the nationality of recipients. However, the figures presented represent approximately 70% of the participants.

The overall level of participation by non-EU nationals in the BTEAS is 6.4%. At 10.6%, the proportion of participations in the SLO strand of the BTEAS is over double that in the TLO strand (i.e., 4.2%).

### 5.3 Analysis of Projects Funded Under Special Projects Fund

During 2004 a total of 225 projects were funded at a total cost of €2.68 million under the Special Projects Fund. With an average budget of approximately €11,900 most of these projects are of a modest scale and most deal with a relatively small number of people. There is, however, substantial variation present with a small number (i.e., 10) of projects exceeding €50,000 and a larger number (i.e., 25) being run on budgets of less than €1,000. Also, there is substantial variation in the nature of the actions funded with basic literacy, personal development, pre-employment, enterprise development, and specific skills training courses in a wide range of areas being funded. The organisations benefiting from the funds include Area Based Partnership Companies, national voluntary organisations, organisations providing computer and other skills training, and local community groups.

**Table 5.5: Projects Funded by the Special Projects Fund Catering for People Covered by the WEOP**

	Number of Projects	Budget	Type of Actions
People with Disabilities	12	299,436	Personal Development Courses, Life Skills Training, Job-Preparation and Pre-employment Training
Members of Traveller Community	13	198,444	Literacy and Personal Development, Health Awareness and Health Care, Skills Training
Refugees	2	17,000	Pre-employment Course, Pre-development Programme
Mixed, but including persons covered by the WEOP	14	272,811	Business and Computing Course, Pre-employment Skills, Adult Education, Enterprise Training and Supports
All	41	787,691	

From the figures presented in Table 5.5 it can be seen that almost one in five (18.2%) of the projects funded under the Special Projects Fund benefited people from three of the four groups covered by the WEOP. It is likely that this figure is actually higher as at least a number of older unemployed people are actually benefiting from many of the projects whose target group is identified as “unemployed” / “long-term unemployed” / “disadvantaged men”.

In terms of the breakdown of projects catering for particular groups covered by the WEOP, it is people with disabilities and members of the Traveller Community who benefit most. Their representation among these projects can, in part, be seen as a reflection of the high level of labour market inequality experienced by people from these two groups and of the use of the Fund to address this. Based on a number of projects for which evaluations are available, Box 5.1 presents brief accounts of projects that worked with people with disabilities and members of the Traveller Community.

The DSFA’s analysis of the Special Projects Fund highlights a number of features of its operation that are of note. First, the Fund enables provision to be made for people experiencing severe difficulties in the labour market and in accessing mainstream programmes. Second, it is a resource to Facilitators to enable them to respond to the particular needs of groups of people and to enable tailored responses to their situations. Third, the availability of resources from the Fund has enabled the DSFA to engage in partnership and joint actions with groups and organisation working with and on behalf of groups of people covered by the WEOP.

### Box 5.1: Illustrations of Projects Supported by the Special Projects Fund

Project Name	Description / Learning
Challenge Programme	<p>The Challenge Programme was designed to cater for recipients of a disability payment who had been inactive for substantial periods of time. The programme involved identifying participants' needs and aspirations and working with them in a planned way to respond to their needs and realise their aspirations. It involved two stages: 1: provision of information, guidance and support plus access to skill based sessions; 2: one-to-one support to assist participants make real progress in their careers. Outcomes documented include positive progression to education, training and employment for 42 of the 68 (i.e., 61.8%) participants. Learning included the importance of formal individual needs assessment, addressing welfare traps, the importance of one-to-one support, and initiatives to increase understanding of the capacities of people with disabilities among employers.</p>
Enabled for Life Programme	<p>The main beneficiaries of this programme were recipients of Disability Assistance or Invalidity Pension. The programme itself was tailored to the needs of participants assessed as being "Training and Employment Ready", "Employment Ready" or "With Special Needs". For each of these groups a sequenced programme was provided covering issues such as "Coping with Change", "Employability and Life Skills" and "Job Hunting and Employability Programmes". Documented outcomes included 44 of 48 (i.e., 91.7%) participants progressing to education, training or employment outcomes. The learning included the importance of building self-confidence, addressing literacy issues, and working with local statutory and voluntary organisations in a multi-disciplinary manner to assist participants achieve positive progressions.</p>
Wexford Interagency Traveller Support Programme	<p>This multi-agency project worked with young and adult Travellers, with total project beneficiaries numbering 116. It undertook a range of activities – outreach, after-school support, developmental group work, employment guidance and referral. Outcomes documented include eight participants progressing to employment, 24 to various courses including arts, crafts and literacy, and 11 taking up skills training. Key recommendations made arising from the project include: the need for core funding for outreach and capacity building initiatives with the Traveller Community; locating responsibility for cross-departmental initiatives for members of the Traveller Community in the Office for Social Inclusion, and ensuring that Traveller accommodation plans are implemented at local level.</p>
Athy Traveller Men's Project	<p>This project catered for 12 Traveller men between the ages of 18 to 60 years. The programme of activities provided by this project included a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, teaching practical skills based on the interests of participants, and building confidence and communication skills. It also included modules on computer skills as well as voter education. The latter resulted in participants becoming registered to vote and participating in the June 2004 local elections. The evaluation of the project noted that it was participant's first experience of being in a learning environment that gave them the confidence and motivation to pursue further education and self-development. One of the key issues arising is the need for continuing support over longer periods of time.</p>



## 5.4 Participation of People Covered by the WEOP in ESS

At the end of 2004 there were 18,874 persons participating in the two main schemes comprising ESS. In addition to this number, there were over 2,000 persons participating in the 225 projects funded under the Special Projects Fund. As actual participant figures are not available, this is a minimum figure. These participant numbers make the ESS one of the major planks of active labour market policy.

**Table 5.6: Analysis of Participation by People with Disabilities and Older People in ESS (2004)**

	Total Employment Support
Unemployment	14,311
One Parent	2,513
Disability	1,925
Other	125
Total	18,874
% PWD	10.2
N 50+	3,257
% 50+	17.3

Allowing for some overlap between the four groups covered by the WEOP, we estimate that between 25% to 30% of participants in ESS are from the four groups covered by the WEOP. The largest group of participants are older people and these are mainly found in the BTWAS, particularly the self-employment strand of this scheme. The second largest group are people with disabilities and these are also mainly found in the BTWAS though, in this instance, in the employee strand of the BTWAS. The total number of persons of non-EU nationality is estimated to be at least 900 with the largest number of these participating in the self-employment strand of the BTWAS. As noted earlier, data on the actual number of members of the Traveller Community participating in ESS are not available. In the absence of data, discussions with Regional Co-ordinators and Facilitators involved in implementing ESS indicate the presence of members of the Traveller Community on the two schemes, though in small numbers.

While it is not possible to calculate actual rates of participation for each of the four groups covered by the WEOP in ESS (due to the absence of data on the qualifying population of welfare clients in each group), it is clear from the available data on the prior welfare status of participants that the vast majority of participants qualify for the two schemes by virtue of being recipients of an unemployment related payment and meeting the qualifying duration criteria. Based on the figures presented Tables 5.1 and 5.3, approximately three quarters of persons participating in the BTWAS and BTEAS qualified by virtue of being recipients of an unemployment related payment: the actual figures are 77.6% and 73.0% respectively. Based on the figures presented in Table 5.6, the overall percentage qualifying in this manner is 75.8%. The corollary of this is that only a minority of participants progress from other welfare payments, particularly people in receipt of illness and disability related payments. With respect to the latter group it should be noted that taking up employment and availing of the income disregard scheme in place for such welfare recipients is potentially more attractive because they can work part-time.

## 6. Issues Identified as Influencing Participation by People Covered by the WOEP in Employment Support Services

As is evident from the data presented in the previous section, people from all of the groups covered by the WEOP participate in the two main schemes comprising ESS and overall they comprise between 25% and 30% of all participants availing of ESS. Taking the upper estimate of 30%, this corresponds to an absolute number of over 5,600. Thus, outside of the targeted measures in the EHRDOP specifically catering for the groups covered by the WEOP (e.g., Measure 11B which includes Senior Traveller Training Centres, Measure 16 which is providing pathways to employment for people with disabilities, and Measure 17 which provides English language tuition for refugees) ESS, because of the scale of its provision, is catering for the largest single number of participants from the four groups covered by the WEOP of all measures in the operational programme. The reasons for this as well as the possible barriers impeding even higher levels of participation were explored at a group meeting with 20 Facilitators and Regional Co-ordinators. It should be noted that this section is based largely on the observations and views of participants in this group meeting.

Before reporting the specific barriers to participation identified by the DSFA personnel attending the group meeting, two general observations were made concerning the overall labour market situation of people from the four groups covered by the WEOP: the first of these observations concerns the supply side and the second the demand side of the labour market.

First, there was a widely held view that a substantial number of people currently in receipt of welfare payments - particularly long-term recipients - experience a combination of personal, family, health and social difficulties that make taking up employment and educational opportunities difficult. The likely effect of the Employment Action Plan process over the past number of years was noted in this regard: that is, people whom the system could support to enter employment and access labour market programmes had been assisted and that, consequently, among current long-term welfare recipients there is a higher proportion of people experiencing severe and often multiple barriers to labour market entry and for whom progression opportunities are very limited. People from the four groups covered by the WEOP are among these long-term welfare recipients. The interventions required to assist this group of people were identified as being more diverse than skill training and more intensive than conventionally undertaken by DSFA personnel or their colleagues in FÁS. This observation led to the piloting of the High Supports Process (HSP) in 2003 and its extension nationwide in 2004. An evaluation of the HSP has been undertaken and its recommendations are currently being considered by FÁS and the DSFA.

Second, participants in the group meeting also noted that compounding the very weak labour market position of many long-term welfare recipients is a reluctance on the part of employers to recruit from among particular groups of people, notably people with disabilities and members of the Traveller community.

Arising from the above, a number of issues were raised as to the capacity of DSFA Facilitators acting on their own to intervene in a manner that would effectively enhance the labour market position of many of their clients including persons covered by the WEOP. In broad terms, three issues were raised. First, and at a general level, there is the issue of the resources and personnel

required to engage more intensively and over extended periods with persons experiencing particular difficulties in relation to accessing employment and labour market programmes. That is, the number of Facilitators in place is small and, as indicated earlier in Section 4.4, they already have wide ranging responsibilities of which direct engagement with clients is but one aspect of their current role. Second, the issue of the specific skills required to engage with particular groups of people, notably people with disabilities, was raised. That is, particular skills are required to assist people with disabilities to identify their employment aspirations, their needs in relation to the supports required for them to access employment or labour market programmes, and to undertake occupational assessment and identify suitable employment. The job description and role of Facilitators does not include the requirement for such skills. The third issue raised is a system related issue: that is, while engagement with people in receipt of unemployment related payments had been possible under the Employment Action Plan process because of the conditionality of unemployment related payments, this is not present in relation to other payments, again notably clients in receipt of illness and disability related payments. It is important to note that this point was not being made in a manner that suggested that such payments be made conditional in the same manner as unemployment related payments. Rather, attention was drawn to the need to develop relevant and effective mechanisms to engage with people with disabilities.

In addition to the points regarding the overall labour market situation of the four groups covered by the WEOP made above, the main specific issues raised by DSFA personnel in relation to these groups are summarised below.

- For **older people** currently in receipt of unemployment related welfare payments, the main difficulty identified in accessing employment (and availing of the BTWAS) was a combination of the absence of employment related skills combined with the presence of other personal, family and social difficulties. However, particular difficulties were identified as affecting unemployed older people in rural areas: that is, the lack of transport and of locally accessible jobs. In general, older people were seen as having low levels of interest in and motivation to participate in the BTEAS.
- For **people with disabilities** the main issue identified was the lack of attention being paid to supporting access to part-time employment and forms of work such as home working. Also, there was a recognition that many people with disabilities wanted to work but the necessary supports are not there to effectively assist them. A system related issue arising in the case of people with disabilities is the absence of assessments of employability and a reliance on medical assessments for the purpose of determining eligibility for welfare payments. (This point is also noted in the DSFA's Expenditure Review of Illness and Disability Related Payments). If people with disabilities are to be assisted into employment there is a need to adopt an approach that examines work capacity (including partial capacity) and identifies employment aspirations.
- The key issue identified in relation to **members of minority ethnic groups** concerned language skills. Where English language competency was not present this raised considerable barriers to participation.

- In relation to **members of the Traveller community** – particularly Traveller men – the key consideration identified was cultural: that is, the presence of self-definitions as being businessmen and hence the low value placed on becoming an employee. A second issue, however, is the view that many members of the Traveller community are not perceived by employers to have the non-technical or “soft- skills” required to become employees. In relation to participation in the BTEAS, the key issue identified as being associated with the low proportion of members of the Traveller community accessing this scheme is the low value placed on educational qualifications. This may, however, be changing among young members of the Traveller community.

Noting the general points made above one of the key points made in relation to assisting people from the four groups covered by the WEOP progress toward employment was the relevance of and the need for more inter-organisational approaches. Pursuing and developing such inter-organisational approaches is currently part of the brief of Regional Co-ordinators and Facilitators and it is also evident in the manner in which projects funded under the Special Projects Fund are identified and resourced.

## 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Three of six high level goals of the DSFA directly identify objectives and corresponding actions that guide and impinge on matters related to accommodating diversity and promoting equality. To illustrate this: under goal two – support to work – specific objectives and actions in relation to people with disabilities and older people are specified; goal four – poverty and social exclusion – explicitly incorporates objectives and actions to ensure that the particular interests of groups affected by or vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion are addressed and identifies among the relevant actions a number of measures to promote equality, specifically the delivery of services and supports in an equitable and non-discriminatory manner; and, goal six – the Department and its staff – incorporates actions designed to underpin capacity to promote equality including customer consultation and training for departmental personnel. Given the DSFA's lead role in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and the inclusion of equality objectives within the strategy, there is a strong organisational imperative on combating social exclusion and identifying actions to tackle inequality of opportunity in access to the labour market. These high level organisational commitments and associated actions frame the operational delivery of all the DSFA's employment supports, including ESS which has been the focus of this measure study.

### 7.1 Overall Conclusions and Recommendations

As noted above, the DSFA places a high priority on putting in place policies and practices to accommodate the diversity found among its clients and it views this as an important aspect of its approach to promoting equality. This is evident in the commitments stated in its Customer Action Plan 2004 - 2007 and in the actions it has and is taking to secure these commitments. Among the factors that can be identified as influencing the priorities and practices of the DSFA in this area are the increased diversity evident in its client base and a strong commitment on the part of the DSFA to delivering quality services that have the capacity to accommodate diversity. Parallel to this is the increasing emphasis placed by the DSFA on moving towards a more activist welfare stance emphasising the provision of supports and services that facilitate access to education, training and employment in addition to providing income support. An important element of the latter is ESS. The motivation for this stance has evolved since the early 1990s when it first emerged and now encompasses not alone a desire to provide and develop services to support clients make transitions from welfare to employment but also to implement programmes and services that make a contribution to meeting high level goals in the areas of securing social inclusion and addressing poverty. This position has recently been underlined in the provisions of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Bill (2006). Speaking at the launch of the Bill the Minister for Social and Family Affairs stated that:

*'The improvements, increases and reforms in this Bill represent a further step in a wide-ranging programme of reforms of social policy. Ireland is now making steady progress in tackling the core issues that lead to poverty and leave people vulnerable and marginalised. Investment in welfare supports and entitlements now accounts for one in every three euro the State will spend this year. But payments alone will not solve or social problems. That is why we must go behind the payments and tackle the causes.'*

Noting the above, and based on the findings of this measure study, one of the challenges arising is establishing specific linkages between policies and practices concerning accommodating diversity in the area of customer services generally and the design and implementation of the two main elements of ESS. On this point, it is clear that while the policies and practices of the DSFA take into account the diversity present in the client base of the organisation, ESS was developed and has evolved primarily as a labour market measure concerned with increasing employability and securing transitions to employment for recipients of a range of qualifying welfare payments. While it is evident from the participation figures presented in this report that members of all four groups covered by the WEOP are participating in both the BTWAS and the BTEAS in significant numbers, the diversity found among participants in these two programmes has arisen largely in the absence of specific actions to support their participation. Having said that, the levels of participation found do reflect the strong commitment to and corresponding efforts to implement the programmes in a non-discriminatory manner.

As ESS is one of the 10 measures of the EHRDOP required to address the wider equality horizontal principle there is a need to make more explicit the policies and practices that are in place to address the issues of accommodating diversity and promoting equality within the design and implementation of the measure. Such policies and practices should continue to be specified in measure documentation such as the Programme Complement for ESS and in reports on the measure. Areas to consider in this regard are identifying specific actions to enhance participation by people with disabilities and members of the Traveller community in BTWAS and BTEAS (e.g., outreach or inter-agency work with members of the Traveller Community with a view to increasing numbers in the employee strand of the BTWAS and, more generally, considering relevant recommendations of the Report of the Working Group on the Review of Illness and Disability Payments). Also, and as noted below, the operation of the Special Projects Fund, could be more explicitly linked to aiding increased participation by the groups covered by the WEOP in both the BTEAS and the BTWAS.

More generally, there is a need to ensure that the current emphasis of the DSFA in developing its approach to the activation of clients (mainly for reasons of social inclusion and contributing to the objectives of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy) is paralleled by an equal emphasis on accommodating diversity and promoting diversity within activation measures such as ESS. With regard to this, consideration should be given to developing the proofing template adopted during the course of the expenditure review of the BTEAS and using it a tool to improve the operations of ESS in the areas of accommodating diversity and promoting equality. Also, while acknowledging the presence of participants from the groups covered by the WEOP among participants in ESS - though noting the low level of participation by members of the Traveller Community - there is a need to respond to barriers to participation identified as arising for people covered by the WEOP by putting in place measures to address these barriers. A further reason for doing this is that ESS represents a substantial component of active labour market policy and its policies, practices and performance in the areas of accommodating diversity and promoting equality can have a substantial effect in terms of addressing the labour market inequality experienced by persons from the four groups covered by the WEOP. One possible mechanism that could assist in this regard is either drawing on existing customer panels or extending the operation of the customer panels currently in place in respect of disability to cover the other three grounds of the WEOP. Consideration of the feasibility and scope of this exercise could be examined specifically in the context of enhancing the capacity of ESS to accommodate diversity and promote equality.

Given current labour market conditions - low unemployment, high employment growth - there is scope within ESS to more explicitly address the labour market inequalities experienced by groups covered by the WEOP. More particularly, given the scale of ESS as well as the nature of the schemes it supports, consideration should be given to ensuring that ESS pays particular attention to engaging with people with disabilities and members of the Traveller Community with a view to addressing the particularly severe labour market inequalities experienced by these groups.

## **7.2 Conclusions and Recommendations Concerning the Special Projects Fund**

The Special Projects Fund is a flexible and useful resource that the DSFA has developed to engage with and make provision for people experiencing severe disadvantage in accessing education, training and employment. The manner in which it operates (i.e., through the provision of co-funding, part-funding, as well as overall funding) permits it to act as a lever of additional funds into services for the target groups of the Fund. It also acts as means of fostering innovation and supporting multi-agency / inter-organisational action in relation to addressing the labour market needs of its target groups.

It is clear from the data on participation in projects supported by the Fund that all groups covered by the WEOP benefit from the services and projects resourced by the Fund. Overall, approximately one in five projects (i.e., 18.2%) were engaging with three of the four groups covered by the WEOP (i.e., members of the Traveller community, people with disabilities, and members of minority ethnic groups) and it is reasonable to assume from the project descriptions provided in the administrative database for the Fund that older welfare recipients are among the beneficiaries of projects that received funding in 2004 (under headings including target groups such as long-term unemployed).

The general issues raised above regarding the need to ensure a clear equality dimension to activation measures also applies to the Special Projects Fund. Our interpretation of the introduction and operation of the Fund is that it has evolved primarily as a means of addressing social inclusion issues and is referred to specifically in that context in the reports on ESS to the EHRDOP Monitoring Committee. In that regard, it is making a contribution to securing the social inclusion objective of the EHRDOP (i.e., to promote social inclusion with particular reference to the re-integration of the socially excluded and long-term unemployed into the labour force, EHRDOP, p. 63).

Given that ESS is one of the ten measures required to specifically address and report on its actions in respect of the wider equality horizontal principle there is a need to bring a clearer equality focus to the operations of the Special Projects Fund. This could be done by:

- developing project selection guidelines to ensure that projects funded by the Fund accommodate diversity on the grounds covered by the WEOP;
- making pro-active efforts to ensure that groups working with and on behalf of the groups covered by the WEOP are aware of the Fund; and,
- developing a capacity to monitor participation by persons from the four groups covered by the WEOP in projects resourced by the Fund.

Currently, the approach to monitoring does not include the capacity to clearly identify participants on the basis of their membership of groups covered by equality legislation. Also, while there are requirements in place for reporting on the outputs of projects resourced by the Fund, such reports can be limited in terms of identifying the outcomes secured by members of the four groups covered by the WEOP.

### **7.3 Conclusions and Recommendations Regarding Data and Reporting on ESS**

For the two main elements of the ESS (i.e., the BTWAS and the BTEAS) data in respect of two grounds covered by the WEOP are available (i.e., age and disability), though in the case of disability this is by default defined by receipt of an illness or disability related welfare payment. No specific data in respect of membership of minority ethnic groups or membership of the Traveller community are currently collected. However, as noted in the body of this report, data on nationality are available in the case of persons qualifying for the schemes by virtue of being recipients of an unemployment related welfare payment.

Effective monitoring of the extent to which ESS is accommodating diversity requires that the profile of participants can be compared to the profile of qualifying persons broken down across all four grounds covered by the WEOP. As part of its Data and Statistics Strategy the DSFA should in collaboration with the EA examine its capacity to obtain such data and to incorporate them in its reporting on the measure. Also, any future evaluations of the schemes and actions supported by ESS should examine participation, outputs and results on the basis of the equality grounds covered by the WEOP. All of the foregoing points are consistent with the emphasis and direction of the DSFA's Data and Statistics Strategy.

### **7.4 Concluding Comments and Observations**

From its overall organisational approach to and in its policies and practices in respect of accommodating diversity and promoting equality it is clear that the DSFA is pursuing a high standard. The key challenge identified arising from the findings of this report is applying this standard to the operation of measures taken under the heading of activation and specifically to the implementation of ESS. The commitment and infrastructure to do this is in place but there is a need to make this more explicit the manner in which issues related to accommodating diversity and promoting equality are addressed are reported upon.



**Annex I:** The 10 Measures of EHRDOP to which the WEOP Specifically Applies

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Implementing Department</b>	<b>Implementing Agency</b>
M3 Active Measure for the LTU and Socially Excluded	DETE	FÁS (with elements contracted to local bodies (e.g., in relation to implementing CE)
M4 Early Education	DES	St. Patrick's and DIT (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education)
M9 Third Level Access	DES	HEA, Institutes of Technology, VECs
M11B Early School Leavers - Youthreach and Travellers	DES	VECs (in respect of out of school centres and Senior Traveller Training Centres)
M12B Sectoral Entry Training - Tourism	DAST	Fáilte Ireland
M13 Skills Training for the Unemployed and Redundant	DETE	FÁS
M15 Employment Support Services	DSFA	DSFA (Employment Support Service Unit with the DSFA)
M21 Lifelong Learning - Back to Education Initiative	DES	VECs, Non-VEC Schools, Community Groups
28B Training of Trainers	DETE	FÁS
32B Training Infrastructure	DETE	FÁS

**Annex 2:** Recommendations to Strengthen Employment Supports for People with Disabilities (from Report of the Working Group on the Review of Illness and Disability Related Payments)

1. In principle there should be a range of employment support options/schemes available to fit the different situations of people with disabilities and people who are ill, e.g. those capable of some work, capable of part-time work, in need of rehabilitation/retraining etc. This would represent a considerable easing of the existing qualification criteria and would pose control problems unless it was possible to ensure that individual clients were on the most appropriate scheme.
2. Statistical information should be systematically recorded on those availing of various employment/training support measures, focussing, in particular, on outcomes and distinguishing between the different supports availed of, e.g. CE, FÁS training etc.
3. The introduction of measures for the active case management of those identified as having employment potential and for targeting more effectively the existing employment supports at particular groups would avoid the need for reliance on inappropriate concepts such as “rehabilitative work or employment”.
4. The imposition of a time limit on exemptions from the Rules of Behaviour in the case of “therapeutic” employment would appear to be inappropriate.
5. For DB recipients who are likely to drift into long-term illness, the possible benefits of early intervention measures should also be explored through the establishment of a pilot project, which would assess the potential of such measures in terms of re-integration back into the workforce.
6. Early intervention measures should also be introduced to cater for the potential difficulties involved in paying DA to young people with disabilities.
7. A “one size fits all” approach, whereby the same range of additional supports, such as Free Schemes etc. are made available to all people with disabilities, regardless of their circumstances may not be the most suitable approach, particularly given the potential employment disincentive effects involved. Any examination of possible mechanisms for overcoming the potential disincentive effects posed by the loss of these additional benefits by people with disabilities on taking up employment should also encompass an examination of the appropriateness of the provision of the free schemes etc. to this group, in the first instance.
8. In the absence of a comprehensive Needs Assessment procedure for people with disabilities, the application process for receipt of illness and disability payments should be adapted so as to better ascertain information on the claimant’s current and future employment potential.
9. Where people with disabilities and long-term illnesses have been assessed as having employment potential, there should be a more active engagement with them through the introduction of a locally-based case management procedure.
10. Ideally such a case management system should involve the various agencies concerned, but in the interim the (DSFA) Job Facilitators are well placed to carry out such a role. However, due to the limited numbers of Job Facilitators currently available, the potential benefits of a case management procedure should be explored through the establishment of a pilot project.

- 11.** Based on the experience of the operation of a case management process, the various employment support measures should be operated in a more targeted way, with existing supports being adapted where necessary and new supports being introduced to meet the needs of particular groups.
- 12.** Subject to the difficulties outlined in paragraphs 9.4.5 and 9.4.8 being satisfactorily resolved, a specific payment should be introduced in order to address the gap in provision for people with disabilities who only have a partial capacity for work. This payment would need to be tied into a suitable assessment procedure and case management structure and should be structured in such a way that it does not act as a disincentive to people in maximising their employment/earnings potential.

## Equality Studies Unit

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