

**Meeting with the European Court of Auditors on the implementation of the European Youth Guarantee**

**11th February 2016**

**1. Background**

**1.1** The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is the representative body for 50 voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. NYCI functions to represent the interests of youth organisations and act on issues which impact on the lives of young people. NYCI's role is recognised in legislation (Youth Work Act, 2001), we are also members of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). The NYCI aims through its member organisations and its representative role to empower young people to participate in society as fulfilled confident individuals. The work of NYCI is based on principles of equality, social justice and equal participation for all. In achieving these aims the NYCI seeks the emergence of a society in which young people are valued citizens who can make a meaningful contribution to their community.

**2. Role in Youth Guarantee**

* 1. NYCI has contributed to policy in the area of youth employment for many years, even during periods of low youth unemployment as our member organisations have traditionally worked with young people at risk of unemployment and unemployed.
  2. Arising from the economic crisis we intensified our efforts in this area. The first step involved consultation with young jobseekers to ascertain their experience of unemployment and engagement with the public employment service. This report “The Forgotten Generation” was published in February 2011.
  3. Alongside this and informed by the consultation with young people we published a policy document “Creating a New Future for Young Jobseekers” in March 2011. This recommended that the Irish Government explore the development and introduction of a “Youth Guarantee” in Ireland.
  4. We continued to call for a strategy to address youth unemployment including the introduction of a Youth Guarantee through meetings with relevant committees in the Irish Parliament (Oireachtas).
  5. In early 2013 given the growing interest in the proposal we produced a Youth Guarantee Factsheet <http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/NYCI_051_A4_accessible.pdf>
  6. In June 2013 in partnership with the European Youth Forum we held a Roundtable on the Implementation of a Youth Guarantee in Ireland <http://www.youth.ie/vision_to_reality>
  7. In July 2013 we were invited to become members of the National Steering Group of the Ballymun Youth Guarantee Pilot Action and actively participated in the implementation of the project from August 2013 to December 2014 when it concluded.
  8. In October 2013 we participated in a Stakeholders Forum organised by the Department of Social Protection to discuss the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Ireland .
  9. In November 2013 we made a formal written submission to Government outlining our views on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Ireland.
  10. In December 2013 we met with Ms Joan Burton, T.D., Minister for Social Protection to outline our position and proposals in the written submission.
  11. We attended the launch of the National Plan for the Implementation in January 2014, while we welcomed the development of the overall plan we raised concerns about a number of issues including the lack of clarity on the number of new places funded by the both the European Social Funds and the Youth Employment Initiative.
  12. We continue to support the Youth Guarantee but have raised concerns about its implementation in Ireland, most recently in a meeting with the Joint Oireachtas (Parliamentary) Committee on Education and Social Protection on November 4th 2015 last.

**3. Positive Points**

**3.1** The Youth Guarantee provides an opportunity to deliver structural reform so as to support young people from education, training into employment and to prevent a drift into long term unemployment.

**3.2** The Youth Guarantee not only focuses on those who are already unemployed but also through measures designed to support school completion prevents unemployment.

**3.3** The Youth Guarantee plan provides a more coherent policy framework to address youth unemployment, such as recognising the role of outreach, especially of those furthest from the Labour market, engaging with jobseekers within four months of unemployment. Also the development of personal progression plans for participants, so education, training, work experience is demand driven (needs of jobseekers and local labour market) rather than supply driven (filling place on pre-ordained courses), focus on guidance etc.

**3.4** The Irish plan acknowledges the role and potential of both statutory and non-statutory stakeholders in addressing youth unemployment, the experience in the pilot action in Ballymun demonstrated the importance and value of engaging with youth work services, community, employers, etc.

1. **Context**
   1. We welcome reduction in youth unemployment from the peak of 31.6% in February 2012 to 19.1% in January 2016. Likewise we welcome the reduction in the percentage of NEETs from 19.2% in 2010 to 15.4% in 2014
   2. As we stated from the outset we acknowledged that the implementation of the Youth Guarantee as set out in the EU Council recommendation would be a significant challenge.
   3. We also acknowledged that the introduction of such a new policy would be challenging in the midst of the economic and social crisis.
   4. Also we note that Government initiated significant reforms in the delivery of public employment services and further education and training which may have in the short term at least inhibited capacity to deliver fully on the Youth Guarantee.
   5. Finally we note that a policy approach which works in Sweden or Austria may not always work in Ireland and there was a need to develop a Youth Guarantee suitable for Irish conditions.

1. **Perspective and Analysis**    
   1. We are concerned and disappointed with the pace and scale of implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Ireland to date, we are of the view that current levels of youth unemployment would be lower if the youth guarantee was rolled out as promised. For example the implementation of the Youth Guarantee pilot in Ballymun led to a 29% reduction in numbers of young people on the live register compared to an 18.9% decrease nationally between December 2013 and December 2014.
   2. We are concerned that the initial commitment to introduce and deliver a Youth Guarantee in Ireland has dissipated.
   3. The Youth Guarantee approach (as experienced in the Ballymun pilot) would have required significant changes in how young people were engaged with and supported, in how the Department of Social Protection engaged with other stakeholders, the level of information and data provided and evaluation undertaken.
   4. A core element of the Youth Guarantee is the provision of a “quality” education, training and or work experience place. The Irish Government have not defined what is understood as a quality place. This is a real issue, because in the past young people have been offered places which are neither appropriate nor useful in supporting them into employment.
   5. It is not clear to us that Government delivered in relation to a core element of the Youth Guarantee i.e. the commitment with regard to an offer of a place. The implementation plan did proposed that;   
      1. Initially in 2014 and continuing to 2015 those in most need (low PEX score) would receive an offer within 4 months
      2. Jobseekers with medium to high PEX score would receive an offer within 9 months
      3. All long term unemployed jobseekers will be engaged by the PES and will receive an offer within 4 months if still unemployed
   6. We are not aware of any public data on the number of “offers” made. The focus to date has exclusively been on places.
   7. We would have anticipated that the number of young jobseekers who are long term unemployed as a percentage of the overall total would have declined significantly if the Youth Guarantee was implemented as originally designed.
   8. We know from data released to the Irish Parliament that in April 2013 prior to the introduction of the Youth Guarantee, 45% of the total youth cohort were long term unemployed[[1]](#footnote-1), in August 2015 that number was 44.5%[[2]](#footnote-2) or 18,383 young jobseekers.
   9. We had concerns about the number of places detailed in the original national implementation plan. The plan for 2014 anticipated the delivery of 28,350 places under the Youth Guarantee. While we anticipated some of these would be a continuance of existing programmes, we had expected a large increase in provision to meet the commitments and demands as young people were assessed as part of the personal progression plans.
   10. We were surprised that the plan for 2014 did not provide a breakdown of the number of existing and new places to be delivered and how much was being funded by existing state expenditure and how much by the new EU Youth Guarantee funds.
   11. We sought to undertake an analysis of the number of education, training and work experience places available prior to the introduction of the Youth Guarantee. See Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Programme** | **Places 2013\*** | **Proposed 2014\*\*\*** | **Delivered 2014\*\*\*\*** |
| Youthreach/CTC | 3334 | 3300 | 3578 |
| JobBridge | 3160 | 5000 | 3138 |
| TUS | 1064 | 1000 | 1410 |
| Jobsplus | 186 | 1500 | 639 |
| Momentum | 1942 | 2000 | 631 |
| BTEA | 2869/6557\*\* | 3300 | 3545 |
| BTWEA | 266 | 200 | 139 |
| VTOS | 1040 | 500 | 672 |
| FAS/SOLAS | 4627 | 9500 | 8659 |
| Gateway | 0 | 450 | 192 |
| CE | 426 | 500 | 600 |
| CEB Youth Enterprise | 0 | 700 | 0 |
| CEB/MFI micro loans | 0 | 150 | 10 |
| International WE/T | 0 | 250 | 0 |
| **Totals** | **18914/22602** | **28350** | **23213** |

\*This data is based on information secured in response to parliamentary questions. In some instances it is challenging to differentiate between places and persons and as some programmes are multi-annual there may be discrepancies with annual intake.

\*\* We received two different figures from our requests for information-the difference may relate to those who entered the scheme from a Jobseekers payment and those who came through other schemes

\*\*\*National Implementation Plan

\*\*\*\* Dáil Question 68 28th May 2015

* 1. Our analysis of the number of places provided pre-youth guarantee which we acknowledge may not be definitive indicates either 611 or 4,299 additional places were provided under the Youth Guarantee. We would welcome clarification from Government on these pre-Youth Guarantee numbers.
  2. We believe that given the scale of the problem and the core commitment in the Youth Guarantee to provide places even in the best case scenario that the additional provision in 2014 was insufficient.
  3. We are also concerned that it is clear based on the data provided directly by Government that it fell over 5,000 places short of their own target in 2014.
  4. We are concerned that a similar pattern is emerging in 2015. The latest data provided (accept full year returns awaited and this number will increase) indicated that only 14,650 of the 28,350 places for 2015 had been delivered.[[3]](#footnote-3) Unless there is a major increase it is likely that the number of places provided in 2015 will be fewer than in 2014.
  5. One of the core elements of the Ballymun Youth Guarantee pilot was the development of an effective outreach strategy, especially when engaging with young people furthest from the labour market. While the public employment service (PES) may have all young jobseekers “registered” this does not always lead to effective engagement. The experience in Ballymun proved that when the PES works in partnership with local youth services engagement by young people increases and enhances. In Ballymun the PES adopted their approach in response to feedback from young jobseekers.
  6. In addition we are further disappointed that from our perspective very little of the learning from the Ballymun pilot which was successful during the 12 month trial period and was independently evaluated appears to have been taken on board or mainstreamed.
  7. We are disappointed that the Department of Social Protection has not sought to replicate this successful model in the national roll out of the Youth Guarantee.
  8. Another key commitment in the national implementation plan was the development of a Personal Progression Plan (PPP) between the jobseeker and case worker. This is essential in assessing the education, training and/or work experience needs of the young jobseeker and in providing a road map into employment. We are disappointed that between January 2014 and July 2015 only 9,073 young jobseekers under 25 years were supported to develop a PPP.
  9. NYCI is named as a *“national partner”* in the implementation plan which stated that such partners would *“be invited to participate in the delivery and/or review of the Youth Guarantee”*. Since our meeting with the Minister for Social Protection in December 2013, we have had no formal contact or engagement with the Department with regard to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee nationally.
  10. Apart from the lack of engagement with NYCI we believe the failure of the Department of Social Protection to engage strategically with a wide range of key stakeholders on an ongoing basis is an error. As proven in the Ballymun pilot all the various stakeholders such as the employers, education and training providers, community services, guidance professionals, local authorities and youth sector have a role to play alongside the PES.
  11. As outlined above we are concerned with the overall lack of public and accessible data on the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. As a result we are not aware as to whether the Department of Social Protection is tracking individual participants on the various schemes, or undertaking an overall analysis and evaluation of the Youth Guarantee.

1. **Recommendations**
   1. The establishment of a National Steering Group chaired by an independent person comprising all the key stakeholders to ensure partnership and coordination to deliver on the Youth Guarantee
   2. The development of a renewed and revised action plan to deliver the Youth Guarantee in Ireland from 2016-2020 with targets and timelines.
   3. Clarity on priorities with regard to an offer of a quality place, e.g. an offer to all young jobseekers with a low PEX score within 4 months of becoming unemployed.
   4. Development of a clear definition of a “quality” placement.
   5. Development of “outreach strategy” with youth services and other key stakeholders to effectively engage with the hardest to reach.
   6. The publication of annual plans and costings, including commitments with regard to the number of personal progression plans which will be delivered.
   7. The introduction of individual tracking of participants and an ongoing overall evaluation of the programme.

1. Dáil Questions 371/372 May 28th 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dáil Question 44 7th October 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dáil Question 60, 17th December 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)