

JOBPATH

EXPOSED



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Foreword by Deputies John Brady and Denise Mitchell

Since our election to the 32nd Dáil in February 2016 JobPath has been central to our work as Sinn Féin's spokespersons for Social Protection. So far, JobPath and concerns around it has formed part of every session of Priority and Oral Questions that we have had with the Minister. Labour Activation is also one of the topics being examined by the Joint Committee on Social Protection with a particular focus on JobPath.

For some, JobPath looks like just another job activation scheme aimed at getting jobseekers back to work which runs alongside others such as the Local Employment Service, Community Employment, Tús, Rural Social Scheme, and Gateway. However, JobPath's set up and the way it operates makes it uniquely different. Of course, any scheme that engages over 105,000 people is one that must be closely monitored. No two jobseekers are the same and therefore, a "one size fits all scheme" such as JobPath is entirely inadequate. Even if we set aside all of the issues experienced by JobPath participants, and the devastating impact that JobPath is having on the sustainability of other schemes, privatisation remains our fundamental concern.



The secrecy, lack of transparency, and the "commercial sensitivity" surrounding JobPath raises two key questions – how much of taxpayers' money is being handed over to these private companies and what type of jobs are being sourced for jobseekers?

This campaign is about exposing the real life experience of JobPath participants and using this as proof as to why JobPath must be abolished. The concerns that have been highlighted by participants are not one off issues; they are recurring issues that have been told to us over and over again. The 'Tell your Story' element of this campaign heard from numerous people throughout the State. These concerns can no longer go ignored by Minister Doherty, her Department and her Government. Job activation should not be about lining the pockets of private companies. Jobseekers and their needs must be central to any job activation programme. JobPath has to go.

Executive Summary

Within the past year, JobPath has become the most talked about job activation scheme for all of the wrong reasons. The fact that JobPath has been contracted out to private companies means that the scheme is beyond repair. This privatisation agenda not only signals a new move for the Department of Social Protection when it comes to job activation but a dangerous one.

Sinn Féin are opposed to any private interference with Departmental schemes where taxpayers' money is used to bolster company profits and where in some cases, vulnerable Jobseekers are involved. It is for that reason that Sinn Féin has been to the fore in highlighting concerns with the JobPath scheme since its introduction. Sinn Féin have consistently raised issues about JobPath on the floor of the Dáil, at Committee meetings, and most recently, in a meeting with the new Minister for Social Protection, Regina Doherty. Yet, calls for action to tackle these issues have gone ignored by Government. It is for that very reason, that this campaign was launched.

JobPath Exposed comprised of two main elements. The first, an online social media campaign where participants had a forum to tell their stories through direct message on Facebook or Twitter. In addition to this, for participants who wished to remain anonymous, they were able to email us. The second element was a State wide postcard campaign with an information leaflet about the scheme. These postcards and leaflets were distributed to Sinn Féin teams in all twenty six counties. The postcards call on the Department of Social Protection to review JobPath immediately with an eye to abolishing it. Once signed, these postcards will be handed in to the Department's Head Office.



As part of the online element to this campaign, we have been contacted by numerous JobPath participants, we have listened to their experiences with the scheme and as a result, we have produced this report. The same issues have been highlighted time and time again by JobPath participants and these can be broken down into six main categories for concern:

1. Referral of Jobseekers to JobPath
2. Threat of loss of Jobseekers payment
3. Training and opportunities for Jobseekers with JobPath
4. Level of training of personal advisors dealing with Jobseekers
5. Transport, travel times and costs to meetings
6. Movement to other schemes

While these may only appear to be six issues, these are issues that have been referred to consistently by numerous participants engaged with JobPath. In fact, the majority of Jobseekers who have contacted us refer to four or more of the above.

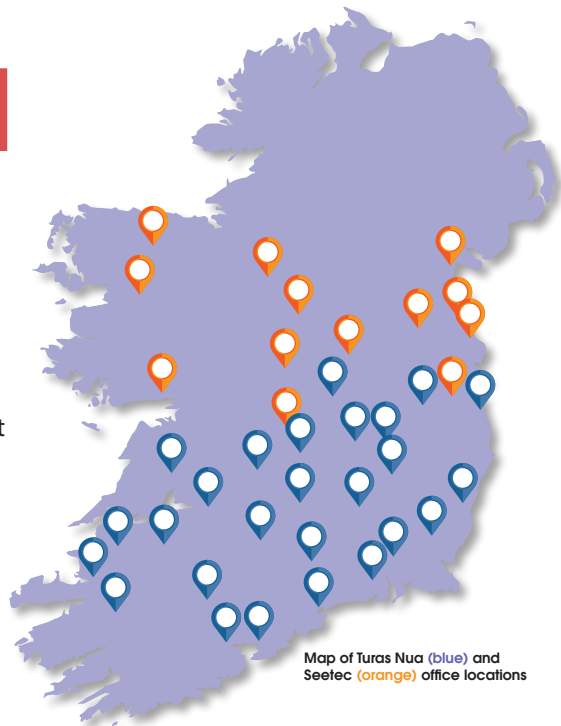
This document exposes JobPath for what it is – a flawed scheme based on the generation of profits rather than the welfare of jobseekers.



John Brady TD raising issues of concern with the JobPath scheme at the Joint Committee on Social Protection

Background

In 2014 JobPath emerged as a result of Government plans to create a new employment programme. According to the Department of Social Protection, JobPath was set up with the aim to “assist an estimated 115,000 long-term unemployed jobseekers return to work over its duration and produce significant expenditure savings.”¹ The Minister for Social Protection at the time, Joan Burton TD insisted that JobPath would help to increase the pace of progress in reducing unemployment which was at 11%² and falling. The scheme was announced as an intensive employment support based on proven methodologies of sourcing and securing sustained employment for jobseekers. The Department were also hasten to insist that the scheme would not replace or act as a substitute to already existing schemes or services rather, it would complement them. The Department went on to announce that the successful bidders who would deliver the JobPath scheme on their behalf were Turas Nua and Seetec. Both of these companies have links to England where their reputations are at best, questionable. Turas Nua is a joint venture between FRS Recruitment and Working Links which is a British-based company. Seetec is a private company delivering employability and skills programmes across both urban and rural areas of England.



The JobPath scheme was officially launched here in July 2015 when initially piloted in Bray, County Wicklow and in Longford. By mid-2016, JobPath was rolled out across the State with Turas Nua providing services for jobseekers in the southern part of the State and Seetec in the northern part of the State (*Appendix 1.1*).

Since then, the Department of Social Protection have prioritised JobPath as the ‘go to’ scheme for Jobseekers above all other readily available schemes. Those involved in other job activation schemes such as Community Employment and the Local Employment Service have described JobPath as the greatest threat to their sustainability. Community Employment is struggling to fill places right across the State as they simply have not got the people to do so. Every Local Employment Service in the State, with one exception (*Appendix 1.2*) has seen a reduction in referrals from the Department of Social Protection in 2016³. Despite both realities, the Minister insists that neither scheme is suffering as a result of the emergence of JobPath.



Denise Mitchell TD speaking to the media about the JobPath campaign

1 Department of Social Protection Press Office: <https://www.welfare.ie/en/pressoffice/Pages/pr131014.aspx>

2 Central Statistics Office Live Register figures: <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lr/liveregisteroctober2014/>

3 Parliamentary Question Ref. No. 27835-16

Findings

The same issues were highlighted by JobPath participants again and again. In the three months that the campaign was ongoing, we did not receive one positive JobPath experience. The issues can be broken down into six main headings:

REFERRALS	LOSS OF JOBSEEKERS PAYMENT	OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOBSEEKERS
STAFF TRAINING	TRANSPORT COSTS	ACCESS TO OTHER SCHEMES

This section details what we have learned about JobPath since this campaign began. All of the information in this section comes directly from those who have real life experience of dealing with JobPath. All of the points made below are based on evidence directly from JobPath participants. We have used the above six issues as our headings to lay out our findings and we have endeavoured to use a number of direct quotes to show as much real-life experience as possible.

REFERRAL OF JOBSEEKERS TO JOBPATH

1. JobPath was set up to assist the long-term unemployed who are typically referred to as “people who have been unemployed for 12 months or more.”⁴ Yet, in some cases, participants who contacted us were only unemployed for a very short length of time and therefore, cannot be defined as long-term unemployed:

“I was made start this a few weeks ago after been only on jobseekers two weeks, I finished college in May”

“Out of work 26 days and put me on it”

“I was unemployed for 2 months”

“I was unemployed one month, I had just lost my job”

“Out of work for 8 weeks and put on Jobpath”

“Just finished 5 years in college in May...less than a week after finishing college I was put on JobPath (Seetec)”

2. Some people requested to engage with JobPath are not unemployed at all, but work part-time or hold down two part-time jobs. A number of people we heard from were mothers who could not afford childcare so part-time work was ideal as they could work around their parenting responsibilities:

“I am currently working part time as an assistant manager in the [REDACTED] shop which I absolutely love”

“I am in my SECURE job...I work 3 or 4 days a week and end up with 30-56 euro from the social, on the casual slips...I’m on a 20hour contract, in my job for 5years now and I have a 2 year old that’s not in childcare...I am a working mother, 5years in my SECURE job.”

⁴ OECD Long term unemployment rate: <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/long-term-unemployment-rate.htm>



3. A number of participants who contacted us were qualified teachers who were subbing. One participant told us that JobPath did not understand the nature of subbing work and she was put under pressure to attend meetings around her working week. In this case, the participant was subbing and holding down another part-time job at the same time.

"Substitute teachers are on call, so there are weeks where you work full time I questioned how I was supposed to hold down two jobs, keep two employers happy and attend jobpath meetings... During the school term I was on call, taking any work I could get and I got calls from jobpath asking me to attend meetings on days where I was called at short notice to sub in school, they have no concept of the nature of subbing work...JobPath is a very flawed system and it helped to push me out of the teaching profession, something I worked long and hard for"

Another teacher told us:

"I only qualified as a teacher last year but was tormented by this scheme...I had to leave my teaching job as a result of this scheme...I was given no opportunity to interview for teaching jobs and my teaching qualification cost 12k and is now wasted."

THREAT OF LOSS OF JOBSEEKERS PAYMENT

1. The majority of participants found the initial "invitation" to engage with JobPath nothing more than a threat – engage or lose your payment. This was a feeling across the board and was mentioned in the majority of correspondence we received.

"I feel that they hold you to ransom over payment been cut or cut off"

"I work part-time as I have two kids...I've always worked around my job.... if I don't turn up to my appointment next Tuesday, my 74 euro will be cut"

"I went down (to my JobPath appointment) as I was scared of having my dole cut or revoked."

"They threaten to cut my claim if I don't attend their meetings so I went"

"I attended a week later, as I could not afford any financial cuts so it's not like I had any choice in the matter"

2. Many people felt that they were being used by private companies to make profits and they were extremely frustrated at this:

"I feel like I am a commodity"

"I left the place in floods of tears when I found out I am just a number"

"They thought of me as an easy pay day for themselves"

"(JobPath) turned me into a source of Revenue for them"

"I just felt like a cash cow for them...get them in... sign up... and out the door."



TRAINING AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOBSEEKERS ON JOBPATH

1. The level of training available for Jobseekers is mediocre and in many cases, poor and of little use, according to participants. We received a number of comments regarding the CV preparation course provided:

"I didn't spend the last 6 years of my life studying for someone to tell me how to prepare for an interview or write up a CV"

"I have attended group tutorials on the use of capital letters on a CV...I have rearranged my CV at their insistence which now reads like a mess"

"The CV my adviser help me construct had to be redone due to very bad grammar and formatting from my adviser."

"Numerous suggestions were made on how to improve my CV but they were all dated and non-standard formatting techniques that my CV looked like something from the 80's."

"I also had to attend a CV workshop and an interview workshop. Both consisted of a PowerPoint presentation with bog standard information given by a disinterested employee."

2. A number of participants told us that their level of training consisted of sitting at a computer and little else:

"I have to attend once a week to sit in front of their computers and search for jobs and do online courses."

"I was shown a blank computer screen and asked to sign on it with the mouse a few times, handed a few sheets of paper with a to-do list"

"6 months of sitting around doing pointless courses online that holds no value at all"

"Then I was shown to a computer to answer questions which were of a level for a primary school child."

"I sit in front of a computer looking at jobs that I can't apply for as I don't have the CPC course"

"I have a friend with dyslexia who also attends and he is just made to sit at a computer and check tru (through) jobs he has looked at at home, no instructions are given to him... so he is left like a lemon to sit on a computer for an hour and then just handed a letter for his next days' time to come again"

"He is left sitting in front of a computer despite the fact that he could not read or write and had told the JobPath Manager that he had never had a computer."

3. Participants highlighted two main concerns with the settings for meetings with their Personal Advisors namely, the group sessions and the nature of the open plan offices:

"When I arrived it was another group session, we were brought into a room, asked our names, jobs we were looking for and how far we are willing to travel. I have no problem discussing this one to one with someone, but in this case I felt intimidated"

"The meeting would be held in an open planned room and you can hear all personal information from other attendees"

"Half of the time I couldn't hear my case worker because another client was about six feet to my right and another one directly behind me... It was an unbelievable set up."

"After a few weeks of going down there, they decide to pile 9 or 10 of us into a room with another personal advisor... I don't like having to sit in a room with a bunch of strangers and talk about my circumstances, what I've been doing all week, what jobs I've put in for and I have no interest in hearing about what the rest are up to either, and the obvious discomfort of everyone else in the room was prevalent too"

"That follow up meeting was by no means private, it took place in an open plan room full of desks which clients were doing CV's etc. on."

"The one-on-one meeting took place in an open office space, cramped, two or three feet from other people also carrying out induction."

LEVEL OF TRAINING OF PERSONAL ADVISORS DEALING WITH JOBSEEKERS

"The adviser stated he could not offer me any worthwhile training as I am at level 9 and have completed so many courses... they are not trained or capable of catering for highly experienced people."

"No, the training and advice given is of such a poor and ill-informed quality that it would work against someone getting a job."

"From the tone and material delivered by the advisers. It was like they were talking to Transition Year students. My adviser was dumbstruck when I told her I had a Masters"

"When I asked for a copy of the personal progression plan they make you sign I was told I couldn't have one because they didn't know how to use the photocopier."

"My Personal advisor has barely any time to chat with me"

"Two weeks ago I was handed a form and told I must apply for at least five jobs a week, I wish there was at least five jobs a week I could apply for in my area [REDACTED]. So I asked am I to magic jobs out of my hat?"

"I told my adviser that I was interested in looking into taking up self-employment in my field. The adviser told me he would help me on how to set up a business and to email him my CV once again. On the next meeting with my adviser totally forgot about assisting me on setting up a business for self-employment and also forgot about my CV which I sent by email as part of my professional progression plan, I was promised that my adviser would email me self-employment information which never happened."

"I had to attend a meeting with a personal advisor who had no knowledge of the requirements for my field"

"She is sending me for jobs that are nothing to do with what I have done in college"



TRANSPORT, TRAVEL TIME AND COST OF MEETINGS

"They only cover petrol and public transport, but if my wife is gone with the car I need a taxi into [REDACTED], they wouldn't pay this and told me to ask around and see if anyone would give me a lift. I told them I wasn't burdening anyone with giving me a lift to [REDACTED] 30 mins away, waiting outside for me, and driving me back every two weeks."

"I live 35 min bus ride away as I don't have a car, and was made to feel like a liar when I said I couldn't get there before 10.30 in the morning he (Personal Advisor) wanted me there for 9.30, the first bus doesn't leave my town until 9.45 he only receded when he checked the bus time table in front of me and then made feel guilty for having to rearrange his schedule"

"I am living in rural [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] and have no access to public transport and I had to pay a neighbour 25 Euro to bring me to Carlow wait over 1 hour for me and bring me back home."

"I live in [REDACTED]. I have no car and the closest bus stop is in [REDACTED] which is an hour and a half walk from my residence...I brought this issue up with my advisor, who then advised me to hitch"

MOVEMENT TO OTHER SCHEMES

"After that meeting I decided to apply for Community Employment scheme in my area which was advertised on local radio and were looking for applicants, so I can get work experience but I was told that Seetec blocked my application for Community Employment and was told I had to complete the JobPath programme"

"I also hoped to get a CE scheme, to gain experience to get me back out there, I had some personal issues and my confidence was affected, so it was a bit harder for me to put myself out there."

"I self-referred to my social welfare office to try get onto a Tús scheme. The position was available but then I was told I couldn't go on scheme because I was already with Turas Nua... a group that's supposed to be helping me get employment is holding me back"

"I came across a job opportunity with a CE scheme with full training provided in health care QQI level 5 qualifications. I was given an eligibility form to get my local social welfare to sign and stamp which they did. Brought it back to CE office they set up an interview with local H.S.E day care centre interview was successful with a start in September. When I went back to Seetec with the good news they said I couldn't take on the scheme once I was attending them."

Other Perspectives on JobPath

JobPath is not only affecting Jobseekers who are engaged in the scheme but also, the sustainability of other job activation schemes already in place. In compiling this report we sought submissions from the Local Employment Service (LES) and Community Employment (CE) to gain an insight into the impact JobPath is having on them.

LOCAL EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

"Local Employment Services were set up around the country to help long term unemployed people find jobs. Local Employment Service staff are people focused, highly trained, and here to provide one to one guidance to a variety of clients including those referred by DSP. We support and motivate clients to take an active role in their own personal development, educational and career development plans & help to identify an individual's need using a variety of tools and techniques.

The provision of a high quality, person centred approach has never been more important, unemployment, repossessions & loss of lifestyle effects all professions, classes, genders and ages. Dealing with people we see the real casualties of unemployment.

As an LES staff member with over ten years plus service, I have seen that the impact of Job path has been huge on the LES's across the country. LES referral figures from DSP have been drastically reduced, almost non-existent in some cases because due to contractual agreements Job path are given priority for referrals. The relationships that the LES's around the country have built up over the years within communities, with community organisations and education providers etc. means that the wealth of knowledge within the LESN cannot be measured. The only measure (as a progression) DSP acknowledge is Job Placement.

While the DSP struggle to maintain their contractual agreement figures with Job Path (they can be fined if they do not) by reducing referral's to the LES's, the LES's in return are being hit with financial cuts to budgets and increasing targets to meet with less clients to meet them. Staff are under huge pressure and in fear of their own jobs while trying to motivate others.

As a Mediator/Guidance Counsellor in the LESN, my concern is that when clients are referred to us after their time with Job path, they will be less motivated, more confused and even further removed from the workforce. In effect they will have wasted a year where they could have been given **one to one support by the people who were and are already in place to provide the support they need.**

Also those who are pressurised to take up unsuitable, ill-fitting jobs through Job Path won't last in those jobs which means a revolving door for the DSP with people returning to sign on. Both a nightmare for employers and those unemployed that now face the whole process again feeling even less motivated and more dejected." - LES worker

COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT

"In our own organisation, we operate three youth projects for under 12 year olds, one senior youth project and a crèche and playschool service. Intreo has placed preference of referrals for those who are long term unemployed on the JobPath program. Community organisations such as us, dependent on CE, cannot get the numbers of referrals to sustain our services to the community. Often we are sent people completely incompatible with working with children for various reasons. From our perspective it appears to be concerted effort by the Government to run down Community Employment, reducing its capacity to provide services to the community and to relegate it to purely rehabilitative work. We suspect this policy will make it easier to bring further cuts to it in the future, as the public will have fewer dealings with Community Employment run services outside of drugs schemes. That will mean the closure of hundreds of community run Crèches and Afterschool Services throughout the State. These services facilitate people who have young families to go to work and provide for themselves, people who may not be able to afford private childcare. Fine Gael will in essence be stopping people "who get up in the morning" from going to work as they have to mind their own children. CE participants receive QQI approved training and are helped out of the culture of long term unemployment by trained supervisors. CE pays and trains long term unemployed to run community crèches and youth projects that facilitate people in low income employment to work. This change in policy makes little sense from any pragmatic perspective and can only be understood as a blind adherence to privatization as a goal in itself." - CE participant - *Counselling, Youth and Child Services*

"The way JobPath has impacted our service is in the lack of referrals from INTREO for our "mainstream" workers- we cannot get cooks/cleaners/reception workers etc. for love or money....We do have experience of suitable clients not being able to access CE from Seetec" - *Co-ordinator of CE run organisation*

"Having completed an honours degree at [REDACTED] in 2012, I presumed that I was on my way to gainful employment but this couldn't have been further from the truth. After months of no replies and apologies, I decided to take things into my own hands. I saw the placement officer at my local Fás office and gave him the details of a CE scheme that I thought would be suitable for my needs at the time. I met with the co-ordinator and CE supervisor at the [REDACTED] and knowing that they were a community organisation I decided to jump in, expose myself and declare my past issues with addiction. They didn't even flinch at the thought of it and signed me up. I was placed with their senior youth service and learned more there than I had learned in university. After a year I was given the opportunity to take over a junior youth service where I became team leader to a group of CE participants. They still had their supervisor but I was their first port of call for any issues that arose. We work in Dublin 8 and due to its high density population we come across issues on a more frequent level than rural communities would. The staff was a mix of refugees/asylum seekers, local long term unemployed and people with medical/mental health problems....

With the support of the organisation it became up to me to become counsellor, confidante and mentor to my co-worker. Over the past few years these people have either become fully employed or entered into adult education programmes to try better themselves. This has to be seen as success.

If they were merely dumped into a JobPath programme that removes them from the unemployment statistics for a limited period of time, without the real opportunity of actual full time employment we are allowing the government to massage figures and create an illusion of employment that bears no relation to reality.

We can try to force people into minimum wage positions but believe me they will find ways to circumvent governmental initiatives quicker than the government can produce them. I must make it clear that I am definitely not in favour of a social welfare for life approach but you cannot bulldoze people into a situation and expect unilateral capitulation. Real people need real support; they need to be encouraged out of the cycle of deprivation that has been created by ineffective governments that ignored them over the past forty years." - *Manager of CE run organisation and former CE participant*

In previous correspondence, in relation to the prioritisation of JobPath above CE and the Local Employment Service (LES) the Minister for Social Protection at the time, Leo Varadkar said:

“Of course the number of referrals to the local employment schemes is down. Unemployment is down by two-thirds and, therefore, referrals are down. The major factor in filling vacancies not only in community employment schemes but also in shops, hotels and across the board throughout the country is the fact that rate of unemployment has gone down so much. It has decreased from 15% in 2012 to 6.4% now. When one factors out short-term unemployment, where people are between jobs, the long-term unemployment rate is now 3.6%. It should not be a surprise, therefore, that not just community employment schemes but businesses all over the country are finding it hard to recruit and fill vacancies.”

While, the Minister is correct in saying that the unemployment figures have reduced, this argument does not hold up when JobPath are getting referrals of up to 105,000 people and CE and the LES are both seeing huge reductions.

Former Turas Nua Personal Advisor's experience with JobPath

During our 'Tell your Story' online campaign, we were delighted to be contacted by a former personal advisor employed by Turas Nua. For the purposes of ease for this section of the report and to ensure absolute anonymity, we will refer to this individual as Mary.*

Mary has experience of working in both public and private sector for over 30 years both in the UK and Ireland however; she resigned from Turas Nua after a few months.

We phoned Mary to speak to her about her time with Turas Nua in her role as a Personal Advisor to Jobseekers. We also received a number of emails from Mary with additional information. The following is what Mary had to say on different aspects around Turas Nua:

ON THE TRAINING PROVIDED TO PERSONAL ADVISORS:

Virtually no initial training was provided to new recruits and staff turnover was exceptionally high.

Total training consisted of a briefing to group of 30 new staff in a hotel for a couple of days, followed by a few days in a JobPath branch.

New staff would sit with a personal adviser for two days to learn the ropes and would then be assigned their own jobseekers.

ON THE REFERRAL OF JOBSEEKERS TO TURAS NUA:

Staff at Turas Nua were led to believe selection for JobPath was random, but instead Mary had reason to believe it is at the discretion of DSP case officers.

Individuals were being referred to JobPath sometimes as punishment because Case Officers do not like them or find them difficult to deal with: *"it's a crock of shit; it is definitely not randomly selected. The referrals are the ones that are pissing [Case officers] off or are a nuisance. It's like putting out the rubbish."*

Mary described the "invitation to attend JobPath" as "more of a threat".

There is no set standard for how failure to engage with JobPath is dealt with. It appears to be left up to individual JobPath Advisers as to when they want to refer someone back to DSP for non-engagement. Some operate a three-strike system, others are happy to let non-engagement continue for prolonged period.

There appears to be no proper screening of individuals being referred. They dealt with cases where teachers who were on benefits during summer were being referred to JobPath. Says DSP case officers are referring people over the age of 62, despite these people being exempt from job activation schemes.

There were cases of individuals who have only been unemployed for very short period of time being referred to JobPath – despite it supposedly only being for long-term unemployed.

Described the DSP as choosing JobPath referrals by "scraping the bottom of the barrel" adding that many referrals were highly inappropriate with clients not having much English, or often had drug and alcohol issues and would have benefitted from other schemes where more support could be provided.

Many applicants are required to travel quite some distances for meetings which only last about 15 minutes. Clients feel they have no choice but to attend due to threats hanging over them – namely that their money will be cut and they will be referred back to the DSP office.

ON THE JOBPATH CONTRACT TO BE SIGNED BY JOBSEEKERS:

Huge emphasis was placed on ensuring clients signed JobPath contract at first meeting: *"we were basically told not to let those people out of building without signing a contract."*

At initial meeting a PowerPoint explaining JobPath is shown. This does mention that participation in JobPath would make them ineligible for Tús or CE schemes. However, accepts that there is little emphasis placed on this point.

In one instance, Mary witnessed a client refuse to sign a contract. That client was called into a private room with a manager who sat with him over an hour until he signed the contract: *"Very, very few left without signing a Personal Progression Plan."*

Mary believes each signed contract is worth approximately €300 to Turas Nua/Seetec.

ON DATA PROTECTION:

After having only spoken to a client in an initial group meeting, clients are then asked to attend a personal meeting with their advisor.

Mary witnessed at least one case where staff were directed to delete emails and files on one particular client. Mary says the client had raised issues with the Department of Social Protection and had written to the then Minister Leo Varadkar over her personal data in possession of Turas Nua. When management in the office was informed of this they had all data referencing this individual removed.

ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE COMPLETED BY JOBSEEKERS AT INITIAL MEETING:

Turas Nua staff were given a list of 90 questions which are very personal and confidential:

"Some of these questions are highly personal, and shouldn't be asked. They dealt with things like mental state, financial situation and general health. If a Garda asked me I wouldn't answer them. From those, they derive a chart that is supposed to tell the person in what areas they are lacking – this could be in confidence or even their appearance. After this meeting however, this chart is put away and never referred to again."

"If a customer had not done 4 Catalysts (90 questions) in their year on JobPath I witnessed PAs faking the Catalyst replies and entering in on the system that the customer had attended on a certain date and completed the Catalyst when in fact this did not occur, but it kept the PA in compliance, which was a big thing with senior management."

ON TRAVELLING TO APPOINTMENTS:

"Travel reimbursement was not always offered to customers, some of whom might have been able to afford their bus or train ticket, but it was supposed to be paid to every customer who attended appointments on submission of their travel ticket for scanning. Only if customers asked for travel expenses would it be paid to them and if they did not ask they would be told on their next visit that they would not be paid for their previous appointments travel costs as Turas Nua could not back pay and they should have asked for it at every appointment."

PRESSURE ON JOBPATH'S PERSONAL ADVISORS:

Pressure on staff is immense and more focus is placed on administration work than dealing with clients. Likened it to working in telesales.

"With all the will in the world, there is not much that can be done in a half-hour appointment – especially one where you are busy taking notes"

Pressure was placed on staff to reach quota of meetings per week of around 100 – 120 clients: *"the emphasis was on notes, keeping the system updated; rather than emphasis on helping the jobseekers. It was definitely a case of quantity over quality"*

Mary believes there was no value in the clients attending the scheme.

In order to reach the quota of clients per week, advisers would often organise to have a group of clients come in and sit at a computer bank applying for jobs: *"the amount of time a service user was getting with their adviser was insulting."*

Some in senior management – who appeared to have no managerial experience or qualifications – were *"deeply insulting"* to staff and jobseekers alike: *"clients weren't treated with any great sense of dignity."*

On more than one occasion Mary witnessed individuals with very poor literacy skills simply being handed leaflets and being told to read it. Older people with no computer skills – and who previously worked manual labour or transport jobs – were put in front of computers with little to no help.

Lack of experience in fellow staff was very noticeable. Some advisers had no experience of even speaking to a group of people – yet they were expected to stand up in front of a group of clients, which was composed of some with masters degrees and others who couldn't read, and explain to them what they needed to do to get a job: *"it was all about bums on seats."*

Turas Nua is constantly recruiting because they cannot retain staff for more than a few months: *"anybody with an ounce of dignity, self-respect or a brain won't stay."*

OVERALL OPINION ON TURAS NUA:

"It could have been the answer to our long-term unemployment problem. However, I have yet to come across a private company who were in it for the good of the service user."

We wish to thank everyone who contributed to this report, particularly all of the JobPath participants who shared their JobPath experience with us. We wish to thank those involved with Community Employment and the Local Employment Service for their valuable input into this report. A special thank you also to the former Personal Advisor at Turas Nua who contacted us to share her experience with us.

Conclusion

On the surface, JobPath is just another job activation scheme introduced by the Department to assist Jobseekers back into employment. However, those engaged with the scheme tell a very different story. The insights that have been gained through this campaign are alarming and set JobPath aside from all other schemes across all Government Departments. The intentions behind JobPath's initial introduction are now even more questionable.

JobPath currently engages over 105,000 jobseekers each with their own skills, backgrounds, circumstances and each with their own hopes and dreams for their future. Therefore a 'one size fits all' approach such as the case with JobPath simply does not and will not work.

Although, we are talking about a scheme involving a large cohort of people, the concerns highlighted to us were repeatedly stated over and over again. This means that not only do the issues exist but they are not one-off or standalone issues. They are rampant throughout the State and they are impacting severely on the lives of men and women, young and old.

While, the Government insist that the level of complaints to the Department regarding JobPath is small (in July 2017 there had been 332 complaints made in total) we believe that the risk of losing the Jobseekers payment is the main deterrent to making a complaint to the Department. This was clearly evident in the correspondence we received with the majority of participants referring to the fear of losing their payment.

The aim of this campaign was to expose JobPath for what it is through the insight of those best placed to show us the reality of the scheme. However, what became apparent to us very quickly was the impact that the scheme is having on participants' mental health. We heard many stories from people who feel extremely distressed, worried and anxious since they began engaging with JobPath which is extremely concerning to us.

We believe that the findings detailed in this report from JobPath participants as well as the impact that JobPath is having on other schemes such as Community Employment is evidence enough to abolish this scheme. The input from participants, the former Personal Advisor, and other schemes is a glaring indictment of the reality of JobPath. It must be abolished.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1.1 - LIST OF TURAS NUA AND SEETEC OFFICE LOCATIONS:

Turas Nua Office Locations	Seetec Office Locations
Athy	Dublin Head Office
Bray	Athlone
Carlow	Balbriggan
Clonmel	Ballina
Cork	Ballyfermot
Dungarvan	Birr
Ennis	Cabra
Enniscorthy	Carrick on Shannon
Gorey	Castlebar
Killarney	Clondalkin
Kilkenny	Drogheda
Limerick	Dublin – Amiens Street
Listowel	Dublin – Aungier Street
Mallow	Dublin – Blanchardstown
Midleton	Dundalk
Naas	Finglas
Nenagh	Galway
New Ross	Longford
Newcastle West	Mullingar
Portlaoise	Navan
Roscrea	Swords
Thurles	Tallaght
Tipperary Town	
Tralee	
Tullamore	
Waterford	
Wexford	
Wicklow	

APPENDIX 1.2 – NUMBER OF LES REFERRALS IN 2015 AND 2016:

2015	Dec-15	Aug-16
Dublin	13,115	10,742
Kildare	952	887
Wicklow	974	315
Monaghan	431	443
Louth	1,728	991
Mayo	1,439	849
Galway	1,077	540
Limerick	2,650	1,298
Cork	1,373	1,028
Kerry	1,233	820
Waterford	2,443	797
Wexford	2,906	1,157
	30,321	19,867

APPENDIX 1.3 – SURVEY QUESTIONS ASKED TO CORRESPONDENTS ON FACEBOOK AND GMAIL:

Interview Questions:

1. How many months were you out of work before you were placed on the JobPath scheme?
2. How many meetings have you attended at JobPath?
3. Did you feel advisers on the programme had your best interests at heart?
4. Do you believe any of the training, skills or advice provided on JobPath will be beneficial in finding employment?
5. What distance are you required to travel to meet with JobPath, and what mode of transport do you use (bus/train/cycle etc.)?
6. In a sentence, could you describe your overall impression of the JobPath programme?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

JOBPATH



EXPOSED



Issued by
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