

Social Justice Ireland

Proposal to reduce the numbers on the live register through creating real part-time jobs at low additional cost

Background

This proposal is based on a programme piloted by the current Directors of *Social Justice Ireland*, Seán Healy and Brigid Reynolds from 1994-1998. That programme created 1,000 part-time jobs paying the 'going hourly rate' for the job. The jobs were open to a number of categories of people who were unemployed. They worked the number of hours necessary to earn their social welfare payment. After that they were free to seek further employment and, of course, pay tax on the money they earned in the normal way. The programme was taken on by 162 organisations and was extremely successful. 500 of the original 1,000 employees left during the course of the programme – almost all of these took up full-time employment. These were all replaced by others who fitted the criteria for participants. The programme was piloted in six very different pilot areas i.e. County Laois, Waterford city, Finglas, North Kerry, four towns in South Tipperary and the islands off the coast. There was huge demand for the programme and there was always a waiting list of eligible candidates. The programme was mainstreamed by Government in 1997. The positions 'melted away' once market-based jobs emerged during the following years.

Proposal

Social Justice Ireland proposes that Government create a programme to create part-time jobs in the public sector and in the community and voluntary sector following the model piloted in the 1994-98 period.

Outline of the programme

This programme would enable unemployed people to be employed on a part time basis:

- By local authorities, the HSE, education authorities, voluntary and community organisations or groups
- Voluntarily
- Doing work of public or social value which is not being done or is only partly being done at present.
- At the hourly 'going rate for the job'
- For as many hours as would give them a net income equivalent to what they were receiving from jobseekers allowance plus an additional €20 a week. (They would work for a minimum of 8 hours and a maximum of 19.5 hours.)
- The person taking up the new position would lose none of his/her other social welfare entitlements
- Once the required number of hours had been worked, the person would be free to do whatever she/he wished for the remainder of the week.
- The money paid to the person filling the new position would be reallocated to the employing organisation by the Department for Social Protection
- The employer would be encouraged to give extra hours to the worker who would be taxed accordingly.

- If the person received further income from another job, this income would be assessed for tax purposes in the normal way.
- To protect against a 'deadweight effect' no position could be created if a person had been employed to do this particular work at any point during the previous two years.

Eligibility

The Programme would be available to all those in receipt of a job-seekers payment for more than a year.

Voluntary nature of the programme

The voluntary nature of the programme is considered very important from the point of view of the worker and the employer. It must not have any of the characteristics of 'workfare'.

- From the viewpoint of the worker, he/she must freely choose to come on the programme, and must be free to leave if he/she chooses, subject only to normal requirements with regard to notice to the employer.
- From the point of view of the employer, there must be free choice in selecting workers from among those eligible for the programme. The employer should also be free to select the number of workers required. This ensures that the work offered is real. The pilot programme showed that there would be more demand for these jobs than there were positions to accommodate them.

To protect the voluntary nature of the programme and to ensure that the work is real the following would be expected:

- Positions should be advertised publicly by the employing body, through local media, or any other method used in the local area.
- A job description would be provided.
- Workers should be interviewed for the positions.
- Written job contracts should be provided.
- Employers would not be pressurised to take more workers than they need.
- Leaving a particular job would not prejudice a worker seeking to participate in another project or training programme.
- Employers could replace workers immediately they left the programme.

'Going rate for the job'

The 'going rate for the job' is an important concept in valuing the work done. It is the value which is placed on work in the market economy.

In the pilot programme the programme's manager liaised with trade unions, professional organisations, employment agencies and personnel departments in an effort to arrive at a reasonable hourly rate for the various jobs created. In order to reflect incremental scales in many areas of employment, most rates were set at two levels, a lower and a higher level, within which employers were free to negotiate the actual rate.

Cost

The programme would be financed by using the welfare payments to which people are already entitled and adding a top-up payment of €20 a week per person.