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Investing in your Future
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Mid Term
Evaluation

Final Report

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List of Abbreviations

AIP	Activity Implementation Plan
AIR	Annual Implementation Report
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
BTWEA	Back to Work Enterprise Allowance
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CE	Community Employment
CT	Career Traineeship
CTC	Community Training Centre
DCCAE	Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment
DEASP	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DFESS	Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme
DJE	Department of Justice and Equality
DoD	Department of Defence
ECO	European Coordination Office
EEA	European Economic Area
ESF	European Social Fund
ESG	Enterprise Support Grant
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
EU	European Union
EURES	EUropean Employment Service
EYE	Experience Your Europe
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FET	Further Education and Training
FSD	Fund for Students with Disabilities
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRETB	Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board
GYDP	Garda Youth Diversion Project
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HCIOP	Human Capital Investment Operational Programme
IACTO	Irish Association of Community Training Organisations
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDA	Industrial Development Authority
IHREC	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
ILN	Integrated Literacy and Numeracy
IYJS	Irish Youth Justice Service
JLO	Juvenile Liaison Officer
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LTU	Long-Term Unemployed
MA	Managing Authority
MTE	Mid Term Evaluation
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NCO	National Co-ordination Office
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NEPS	National Educational Psychology Service
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NTF	National Training Fund

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OP	Operational Programme
PEIL	Programme for Employability, Innovation and Learning
PI	Programme Implementers
PLSS	Programme and Learner Support System
PMC	Programme Monitoring Committee
PRSI	Pay-Related Social Insurance
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAF	Student Assistance Fund
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (Further Education and Training Authority)
TCN	Third Country National
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WBL	Work-Based Learning
YEI	Youth Employment Initiative
YFEJ	Your First European Job
YPP	Young Persons Probation

Executive Summary

Introduction

For the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) period, European Social Fund (ESF) funding in Ireland is being delivered via the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL), a single national Operational Programme that was approved in February 2015. The PEIL Programme is the single framework through which ESF funding is channelled in Ireland over the period, and it also incorporates Ireland's programme for delivering the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).

In July 2018 Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants were appointed by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to undertake the mid-term evaluation (MTE) of the Programme. This is the final MTE report.

The detailed Terms of Reference for the MTE are that it must:

- review external developments;
- assess Programme progress to date;
- evaluate Programme indicators;
- assess horizontal principles; and
- present conclusions and recommendations.

The evaluation methodology included:

- a documentary review of existing literature, reports and other documentation including official Programme documents (the OP, Activity Implementation Plans), previous evaluations, Monitoring Committee minutes and progress reports, annual implementation reports, wider relevant EU and national policy documents and other relevant material;
- analysis of quantitative monitoring data available under the OP, including expenditure, indicators and targets, socio-economic, labour market and other data concerning the evolving context in which the OP has been delivered;
- structured consultations with the Managing Authority, Steering Group Members, Intermediate Bodies, and wider stakeholders including beneficiaries and Monitoring Committee members;
- assessment of all Programme Activities, incorporating a desk-based review of relevant documents and data, including activity implementation plans, activity progress reports, expenditure data, indicators, and other thematic or activity reports submitted to the Managing Authority, interviews with key stakeholders at intermediary body and beneficiary organisation level with direct responsibilities for activity management and delivery, and in a number of cases further case studies and consultations to provide deeper and wider evidence of the scope of interventions, their progress, their accomplishments and the outlook for the remainder of the Programme;
- summary assessment and synthesis of the MTE findings and evidence, and the formulation of conclusions and recommendations.

PEIL Programme 2014-2020

Within the Union-wide regulatory framework for European Structural and Investment Funding (ESIF), and specifically the European Social Fund (ESF) and Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), the PEIL Operational Programme (OP) in Ireland was established as the single national Programme that would channel ESF and YEI support in the areas of the labour market, youth employment, educational participation, poverty and social inclusion, equality and equal opportunities, and social innovation.

The Programme focuses on three of the four thematic objectives across which ESF support would be provided in all Member States, with a further six investment priorities adopted under these thematic objectives. Four Priority Axes were selected to give effect to this approach, three of which relate to the selected thematic objectives, and

one of which was selected as a standalone Axis under Thematic Objective 8, but providing exclusively for the Youth Employment Initiative. The priority axes are:

1. Promoting the attainment of sustainable and quality employment through relevant upskilling measures and supporting labour mobility;
2. Promoting Social Inclusion and combating discrimination in the labour market;
3. Investing in Education, Training and Life Long Learning with a view to upskilling and re-skilling the labour force; and
4. Youth Employment Initiative.

The funding allocated under Axes 1, 2, 3 involve ESF and national contributions of equal amounts, while under Axis 4, the ESF and the YEI provide one third of the total funding each, with the national contribution the final third. As such, the total funding contributions are:

- ESF: €544.5m;
- YEI: 68.1m; and
- National: €544.5m.

The funding allocated to each Priority was as follows

- Priority 1: €325.6m;
- Priority 2: €387.6m;
- Priority 3: €215.4m; and
- Priority 4: €204.4m.

The Programme supports a range of Activities (Schemes and Initiatives) under each Priority Axis, and there is a delivery structure in place involving the DES as Managing Authority, six Intermediate Bodies, a Certifying Authority and an Audit Authority. A Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) is also in place in keeping with the Regulations.

The Programme is also subject to a Performance Framework, which comprises a set of milestones (interim targets) for end-2018, and final (2023) targets which will be assessed by the Commission following the closure of the Programme. Both milestones and targets are at the level of overall Priority.

Review of External Developments

While formally approved in February 2015, programme planning and design took place in late 2013 and the first half of 2014, a period in which Ireland was only showing the very early stages of emergence from a deep economic and labour market shock that began in 2008. Economic, labour market and social inclusion challenges remained substantial and budgetary resources severely restricted. Reflecting national policy priorities, ESIF, ESF and YEI funding frameworks, and national obligations under the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Programme that emerged was one that at a strategic level put broadly similar levels of emphasis on three core concerns:

1. support for continued employment growth and for the widening accessibility and quality of jobs as a critical ongoing response to the labour market shock from which the country was emerging (and, as part of this strategy, addressing specific challenges in the youth labour market);
2. promoting equality of opportunities, social inclusion and active participation amongst all groups and particular groups experiencing exclusion in respect of labour market participation and employment; and
3. addressing educational imbalances, including low levels of participation among some young groups, barriers to participation at higher education, and addressing key challenges in areas such as life-long learning and adult literacy.

The period 2013-2017 was one of strong and sustained recovery in Irish economy, combined with much improved labour market conditions in general and with slow but stable recovery in the public finances. Key socio-economic trends and developments over the period included:

- significant growth in real GDP and across most sectors of economic activity;
- strong growth in total employment (going on to exceed its pre-crisis absolute level in early 2018), with growth in most age categories and for both genders;

- substantial growth in youth employment;
- a marked reduction in unemployment rates, overall, for both genders, and across all age groups;
- youth unemployment rates that while having fallen, remain significantly above those for all age groups;
- the maintenance of high rates of participation in higher education, and falling levels of early school leaving;
- less dramatic improvements in poverty and social inclusion indicators (although these generally are not available any more recently than 2016).

Key national policies have remained quite consistent over the first years of PEIL implementation, while adapting to changed circumstances and needs. The Action Plan for Jobs, a recurring annual initiative first introduced in 2012, has become focused on embedding the progress made since 2012, positioning the economy to take up new opportunities, but also building the resilience of enterprises in the face of significant challenges (e.g. Brexit). While still targeting substantial growth in new jobs, the plan has objectives that relate to enterprise competitiveness, regional balance in employment growth, and labour market skills and incentives.

The Pathways to Work Strategy, also introduced in 2012, focused on trying to make sure that as many new jobs as possible were filled by people on the Live Register. Given the strong levels of economic growth, large gains in employment and a subsequent substantial fall in the rate of unemployment and the number of people on the Live Register, a new Pathways to Work Strategy has been adopted for the 2016-2020 period, which reflects a shift from “(labour market) activation in a time of recession” to “(labour market) activation in a time of recovery and growth”, with two key objectives:

- consolidating progress to date, and ensuring that the long-term and youth unemployed cohorts continue to be prioritised and adequately supported in the provision of activation services; and
- addressing potential labour supply constraints by extending activation to others who, although not classified as unemployed jobseekers, have the potential and desire to play a more active role in the labour force, e.g. part-time workers, homemakers, people with disabilities, students, carers.

The key features on education policy have not altered in any way that affects PEIL delivery or strategy. Reforms and developments continue in higher and further education, and access to education and addressing early school leaving and educational disadvantage remain national priorities. A new National Skills Strategy seeks to support the development of a well-educated, well-skilled and adaptable labour force.

Programme Progress

There had been no programme expenditure certified up to 2017, nor any financial claim submitted to the EU Commission as of October 2018. However significant amounts have since had claims submitted which should ensure no threat to ESF and YEI allocations to Ireland for the years 2014-2017. Irrespective of its certified and/or claimed status, significant financial progress has been made with exchequer funding against which future claims will be made.

A detailed review of financial and participation progress across all 23 individual Activities operating under the Programme’s 4 Priority Axes, as well as findings as regards their effectiveness, efficiency and impact, are set out in the main report. Aggregate financial and participation progress at the level of Priority Axes, is shown below.

SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL AND NON-FINANCIAL PROGRESS TO END-2017

	Revised Milestone to end-2018	Revised Target to end-2023	Total estimated to end-2017*	Total to end-2017 as % 2018 Milestone	Total to end-2017 as % 2023 Target
Expenditure (€m)					
Priority 1	97.0	419.7	209.34	216%	50%
Priority 2	14.4	297.6	46.24	321%	16%
Priority 3	48.4	215.4	168.06	347%	78%
Priority 4	134.3	204.4	182.2	136%	89%
Total	294.1	1,137.1	605.84	206%	53%
Participants					
Priority 1	72,716	104,316	56,916	78%	55%
Priority 2	43,494	78,197	9,590	22%	12%
Priority 3					
Sub-Priority 1	52,000	52,000	43,000	83%	83%
Sub-Priority 2	163,486	200,986	136,986	84%	68%
Priority 4	16,300	22,330	14,042	86%	63%
Total	347,996	457,829	260,534	75%	57%

* Estimated expenditure figures based on reported exchequer funding. Actual claims against this funding may differ.

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

Following a review and revision by the Managing Authority that has taken place regarding the number of unique participants under each Activity, the cost per unique participant across Activities, and the Activities being supported under each Priority and the timing of that support, the present position suggests:

- reported exchequer expenditure to end-2017 had reached more than double that anticipated by 2018, and 53% of that anticipated by 2023. However, actual claims against this expenditure have not yet been made in most cases and may differ from these amounts;
- in respect of participants, the equivalent figures were 75% and 57%;
- only one Priority (Priority 2) records significantly lower levels of progress, but this is explained by the front-loading of Youthreach Activity within Priority 4. Its support under Priority 2 for the remainder of the Programme, as well as the commencement of SICAP funding under Priority 2 also, will likely see progress under that Priority catch up with others over the remaining years.

Programme Indicators and Horizontal Principles

The Programme defines indicators at a number of levels that are required to be collected and reported for all “participants” (i.e. persons directly benefiting from an intervention) and where appropriate “projects”:

- ESF common or programme-specific output indicators;
- ESF common result indicators (comprising immediate and longer-term indicators); and
- YEI common result indicators (comprising immediate and longer-term indicators).

Formal “targets” are established and adopted in respect of a number of programme-specific output and result indicators.

Up to end-2017 the reporting of indicators had involved:

- reporting on all required indicators as gathered and held by the MA in Annual Implementation Reports; and
- the incorporation of participant and output numbers and volumes into Activity-level progress reports to the MA.

A computerised system to collect and report on indicators was only operational in March 2018, and there have numerous challenges in bringing prior activity into compliance with indicators reporting requirements. These have included:

- underdeveloped data collection systems at the level of beneficiaries and between beneficiaries and delivery agencies and institutions;
- incorrect categorisations of unique participants versus participant “places” on schemes and measures;
- problems associated with the treatment of participants recorded more than once, whether due to legitimate involvement in more than one instance of support or for reasons to do with data registering;
- issues involved in reconciling data captured and reported for academic versus calendar years;
- issues concerning the ability to isolate new starters from ongoing participants within data systems;
- issues arising from capturing appropriate data from historical datasets and systems not designed to enable it;
- issues concerning the designation of actions under specific Activities in different regions as between the present and predecessor OP and the appropriate capture of data that distinguishes between them.

Systems and reporting have not yet reached the stage of systematic and comprehensive capture, reporting and monitoring of output and result indicators, and their progress against suitable, valid, agreed interim and final targets understood and accepted by the MA, IBs and relevant beneficiaries.

The MA has also proposed a revision to the Performance Framework and many of the Activity-level participant targets of which it is an aggregation. The final proposals were approved at the May 2018 PMC meeting for submission to the Commission.

The Programme incorporates three Horizontal Principles (HPs):

1. sustainable development;
2. equality between men and women; and
3. equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

No specific commitments were set out for this OP in respect of the Sustainable Development HP, however a range of commitments were made in respect of the other two HPs.

Observations made by officials and bodies given monitoring roles with respect to HP compliance note improvements in the quality of reporting that have taken place across Intermediate Bodies and beneficiaries, greater understanding of responsibilities with respect to HPs, evidence of improved targeting, and more supportive data collection.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Since its inception the PEIL Programme has undergone changes in its scope and coverage, extensive change and reform in its implementing bodies, delays in establishing necessary data and reporting systems, and very recent commencement of some strands of activity. No financial claims have been submitted to the EU Commission to date. The Programme at its mid-term stage is nevertheless progressing well and contributing significantly to a range of important education, labour market, and social inclusion policy goals and objectives as Ireland’s economic recovery continues its path.

Much effort and time has gone into refining its architecture and scope in the face of a changing socio-economic context, extensive institutional reorganisation in the FET sector, operationalising the necessary accountability and reporting systems, integrating ESF and YEI involvement and requirements into a wide range of pre-existing and ongoing schemes and interventions, and specifying its role, planned contribution and appropriate monitoring framework within each strand of activity it supports. While all of this work was necessary, it was nonetheless prolonged. With the IT reporting and monitoring system necessary to comply with the regulations in operation from early 2018, a proposed revision to the Programme’s performance framework currently awaiting approval, and the first financial claims to the Commission due to be submitted before end-2018, the Programme now has the prospect of transitioning from an establishment to a smoother operational and delivery phase extending up to 2023 in line with the N+3 rule.

While such processes have been taking place, a range of important Activities have been delivered or commenced with ESF and YEI support under the Programme, including labour market activation measures, upskilling and reskilling programmes, programmes addressing the needs of specific groups experiencing social exclusion, and programmes actively supporting and promoting educational participation. Furthermore, in the years to date the programme has delivered substantial support to young people and their education, training and socio-economic progression and development.

As the financial certification, claim and recoupment process progresses, and with continued active Programme monitoring and review, the likelihood is that the Programme will accomplish its goals and fully utilise Ireland's ESF and YEI allocations in ways that meet all regulatory requirements while aligned appropriately with Ireland's EU and national policy goals, objectives and commitments.

The evaluation has also found that:

- at the mid-term stage, the Programme has and is likely to continue to meet its objectives quite directly and commendably;
- while it is operating within a socio-economic context that has changed significantly from that in which it was designed and formulated, the Programme remains a framework of interventions and initiatives that in most respects is responsive to what are evidently ongoing labour market, social and educational challenges and policy priorities, and it is maintaining its strategic relevance;
- all Priorities and Activities have progressed well or in the few cases where only beginning, appear likely to;
- the programme has embraced its two key HPs commendably;
- structures and arrangements for programme management and delivery to be generally appropriate and working reasonably well, although it has taken a lot of focused work on the part of the MA, IBs and beneficiaries to reach this point.

YEI support channelled through the Programme has been effectively deployed through targeted schemes activating young people in long-term unemployment, addressing early school leaving, and addressing their personal and employment skills shortages into positive and sustained labour market transitions. While not the only programmes that have sought to, the Programme and the YEI have made central contributions to effecting the positive trends that have occurred in youth employment, unemployment and labour market inactivity since the financial and economic crisis.

While the Programme has adapted therefore in the changing socio-economic context, it must continually do so in the face of changes in socio-economic needs, wider policy developments, and on-the-ground implementation experience. Target groups may need to be re-considered and re-articulated, financial allocations altered where the pool of candidate participants may be falling or less likely to engage, and deadweight guarded against (e.g. where programme resources are used to incentivise or facilitate participation, employment or training outcomes that would likely occur in its absence in a much more positive labour market). A small number of Activities, but with significant resources allocated to them, are the important candidates to keep objectives, target groups, and underlying demand and uptake under ongoing review.

There is also a degree to which legal, regulatory, financial, technical and audit-related obligations and processes associated with ESF programming have come to dominate the overall Programme "management" task, with the consequent lower status and role of policy-oriented perspectives and considerations. In this respect the policy-role of all EU funded programmes and hence the policy role in their management and monitoring, could usefully be reconsidered and perhaps strengthened before or during the next funding round.

The long delays in submitting financial claims was unfortunate, and successfully drawing down EU funds is an important milestone to reach in smooth programme delivery. A lesson from the current programme, similar to previous ones, is that planning and preparation for the design, management and delivery of the next ESF and wider structural funding round can and should begin as early as possible, to minimise delays when it commences and mitigate its risks.

Programme-Wide Recommendations

1. The programme continues to allocate substantial resources to interventions that directly or indirectly target the unemployed. Given the substantial reduction in the numbers of unemployed over the years since the Programme began, the MA should request IBs and beneficiaries of Activities addressing unemployment to re-assess their objectives, target groups and numbers of anticipated and planned unemployed participants, with a view to avoiding competition for participants and potentially re-redirecting any surplus resources from such actions.
2. The DEASP has initiated a process to update the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion for the period 2018-2021. When published, the MA should assess any potential role for the PEIL Programme in supporting a renewed national focus on addressing social inclusion and poverty objectives, in light of the further progress required to meet Ireland's targets in this area under the Europe 2020 Strategy.
3. The MA should complete the process of operationalising, validating, gathering and reporting all output and result indicators, along with final agreed milestones and targets across all Priorities and Activities as soon as possible, and a paper detailing all aspects of what is then to be the overall data and reporting system presented to the PMC.
4. The MA should revise the Evaluation Plan setting out in more specific detail (a) evaluations that will take place over the course of the remainder of the programme (b) their intended timetable and sequence, and (c) revised output and result indicators and data that will then be available to inform such evaluations.
5. A number of specific Activities are priority candidates for independent evaluations or reviews, including ETB Training for the Unemployed (or components of it), GYPD, YPP, BTEI, Adult Literacy, while evaluation lessons from others would be beneficial after sufficient implementation progress has been made (including Integration and Employment of Migrants, Gender Equality, SICAP and YESS). In addition consideration should be given to evaluating "clusters" of initiatives targeting the same or similar participants in distinct settings (e.g. BTEI, Adult Literacy). This latter might be approached at individual ETB level.
6. The MA should decide how best to use TNC resources within the Programme and commence planning them.
7. The input and involvement in Programme management and monitoring of officials with policy and programming responsibilities, as well as those with financial management and control, should be maintained across the spectrum of Programme interventions.

Post-2020 Planning

8. There may be merit in Ireland re-defining and articulating its policy objectives and goals for all EU structural and investment funding ahead of the next round, which considers issues such as
 - a. the optimal strategic role, alignment and relationships between EU-supported and exchequer only-funded investment in the key policy arenas;
 - b. the appropriate focus of EU supports on long-established national programmes or more recent or new interventions;
 - c. the costs, risks and administrative ease of EU funding compliance and absorption;
 - d. the non-resource role of EU funding (e.g. where and in what ways does EU funding add value and how can that be maximised);
 - e. the role of ESF, ESIF and other funds, and of Ireland's interface with these, in wider post-Brexit policy regarding our increasingly important relationship with the EU and its institutions.
9. Planning for the 2020-2027 round of ESF programming in Ireland should begin as early as possible. As well as ensuring systems are in place early to avoid delays and risks associated with financial management, control and claim processes, the remaining implementation period of the current OP may offer opportunities for to explore innovative approaches, carry-out new research, and develop pilot initiatives appropriate for emerging shared EU and national priorities, needs and challenges.

A number of Activity-specific recommendations are also made in the main report.

1. Introduction

For the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) period, European Social Fund (ESF) funding in Ireland is being delivered via the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL), a single national Operational Programme that was approved in February 2015. The PEIL Programme is the single framework through which ESF funding is channelled in Ireland over the period, and it also incorporates Ireland's programme for delivering the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).

In July 2018 Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants were appointed by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to undertake the mid-term evaluation (MTE) of the Programme. This is the final MTE report, which is structured as follows:

- Section 2 sets out the MTE Terms of Reference, and describes its scope and methodology;
- Section 3 presents a profile of the PEIL Programme;
- Section 4 assesses the Programme's external environment, and changes within it since the Programme began;
- Section 5 presents the assessment of progress in Programme delivery and implementation;
- Section 6 assesses Programme indicators and horizontal principles; and
- Section 7 presents conclusions and recommendations.

2. Terms of Reference, Scope and Methodology

2.1 Overall Objectives

The core objective of the MTE is “to provide an independent analysis of progress under the PEIL and developments in the programme environment to date, and to make appropriate recommendations for programme adjustments on the basis of this analysis”.

2.2 Terms of Reference

The detailed Terms of Reference for the MTE are that it must address:

Review of External Developments

1. A brief review of the implications for the Operational Programme of relevant external developments in the programme environment since it was agreed. This should include analysis of relevant socio-economic data such as labour force and employment.
2. A succinct review of the implications of any relevant policy and legislative developments at both national and EU level. The developments reviewed shall fall under two distinct headings, namely:
 - a. Overarching issues affecting the programme as a whole or a range of priorities; and
 - b. Priority-specific issues
3. An assessment of the continued validity of the priorities and objectives of the programme.

Progress of Operational Programme to Date

4. A review of financial progress and forecasts at Activity, Priority and Operational Programme level up to date.
5. An assessment of the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of each Activity to date. In assessing the extent to which the Activities in the Operational Programme are meeting the target indicators, the successful tenderer will be required to provide detailed Activity-specific analyses of the reasons why any particular indicators/targets are not being met and will also be required to propose detailed Activity-specific action plans to enable Intermediate Bodies/Beneficiaries to bring the Activity in line with initial projections, where feasible. The analysis should incorporate an assessment of the softer / non-absolute outcomes of selected Activities.
6. An assessment of how support from the ESF (and YEI including for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, where relevant) has contributed to the objectives of each Priority Axis.
7. Identification of any constraints (internal or external to the programme) which have affected the progress of programme implementation to date. These may include, but not be limited to, operational issues, regulatory changes, global trends etc.

Indicators

8. A review of the indicators at priority level against the following criteria:
 - a. Comprehensiveness in terms of capturing programme outputs and benefits;
 - b. The relevance, reliability and timeliness of the indicators including the quality of the data used;
 - c. Were the targets set down achievable;

Horizontal Principles

9. An assessment of how the Horizontal Principles, as set out in the Operational Programme, are being dealt with by activities and how they're being mainstreamed into Activity delivery.

Conclusions and Recommendations

10. The evaluator will be expected to draw appropriate conclusions in relation to each of the analytical tasks set out above. However, there are a number of key issues on which overall conclusions should be formulated as follows:
 - a. A view as to whether Operational Programme and priority objectives are likely to be achieved;
 - b. The continuing validity of the ex-ante analysis at programme and priority level as appropriate and the continuing relevance of the programme/priority objectives and strategy in this light;
 - c. The efficiency, effectiveness and impact of each Activity to date, including the YEI and the implementation of the Youth Guarantee;
 - d. The extent to which the Horizontal Principles have informed and influenced the management and delivery of the programme; and
 - e. The structures and arrangements for programme management and delivery, including where there are gaps in necessary data.
11. The evaluator will be expected to make appropriate recommendations for possible programme modifications.
 - a. In terms of recommendations, it is open to the successful tenderer to make recommendations on any issue arising from the conclusions drawn. Where the evaluator proposes adjustments to the allocation of resources within the programme, these must be made within the envelope of remaining resources in the Operational Programme budget.
 - b. The evaluation report shall state recommendations clearly and these shall be numbered and stratified in order of priority.

2.3 MTE Scope and Methodology

2.3.1 Evaluation Scope

The scope of the evaluation mirrors that of the Programme, and therefore covers each of its five Priority Axes and the constituent activities and measures within them. Activities originally intended for inclusion but not subsequently included among those within Priority Axes (e.g. Social Inclusion of Prisoners/Ex-Offenders, the TÚS scheme, Equality Mainstreaming, JobBridge) are not within the evaluation scope. Finally it was agreed with the Evaluation Steering Group that progress should be evaluated up to end-2017.

2.3.2 *Overview of Methodology*

The methodology has comprised:

- a documentary review of existing literature, reports and other documentation including official Programme documents (the OP, Activity Implementation Plans), previous evaluations, Monitoring Committee minutes and progress reports, annual implementation reports, wider relevant EU and national policy documents and other relevant material;
- analysis of quantitative monitoring data available under the OP, including expenditure, indicators and targets, socio-economic, labour market and other data concerning the evolving context in which the OP has been delivered;
- structured consultations with the Managing Authority, Steering Group Members, Intermediate Bodies, and wider stakeholders including beneficiaries and Monitoring Committee members;
- assessment of all Programme Activities, incorporating a desk-based review of relevant documents and data, including activity implementation plans, activity progress reports, expenditure data, indicators, and other thematic or activity reports submitted to the Managing Authority, interviews with key stakeholders at intermediary body and beneficiary organisation level with direct responsibilities for activity management and delivery, and in a number of cases further case studies and consultations to provide deeper and wider evidence of the scope of interventions, their progress, their accomplishments and the outlook for the remainder of the Programme;
- summary assessment and synthesis of the MTE findings and evidence, and the formulation of conclusions and recommendations.

3. Programme Profile

3.1 Introduction

This Section presents an overview of the PEIL Programme. Section 3.2 summarises the EU funding context in which it was originally formulated, while Section 3.3 describes the Programme structure and original rationale, its financial provision, its delivery framework, performance framework and horizontal principles.

3.2 EU Funding Context

3.2.1 Europe 2020 Strategy

The EU-wide approach to structural funds for the period 2014-20 is framed very closely within the Europe 2020 Strategy for "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth", and its framework of EU-wide priorities, targets and flagship initiatives, all overseen by a shared system of economic governance. The Union's Europe 2020 targets are transposed into targets for individual Member States, of which Ireland's are as follows:

- employment Rate: 69-71%;
- R&D as % GDP: approx. 2% (2.5% GNP);
- CO2 Emission Reduction Target: -20%;
- renewable Energy: 16%;
- energy efficiency - reduction of energy consumption in Mtoe: 2.75;
- early school leaving in %: 8%;
- tertiary education in %: 60%;
- reduce by a minimum of 200,000 the population in 'combined poverty' (i.e. at-risk-of-poverty or basic deprivation).

Actions and policies undertaken in pursuit of the national targets under the Europe 2020 Strategy are the subject of the National Reform Programme under the European Semester process, the cycle of formal economic and fiscal policy co-ordination across EU member states.

3.2.2 ESF Regulatory Framework

The EU legislative package for ESIF activity in the period incorporates:

- an overarching regulation (the Common Provisions Regulation) which established rules governing the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF); and
- three specific regulations for the ERDF, ESF and Cohesion Fund.

The Common Provisions Regulation incorporates a wide range of important requirements for ESIF programmes in the 2014-2020 period, including around the principles of Union support, the strategic approach and range of thematic objectives, national partnership agreements, programming, financial instruments, monitoring and evaluation, technical assistance, eligibility, management and control, and delegations of power.

The ESF Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013) was approved in December 2013, and establishes additional requirements and provisions applying to it, including general provisions, specific provisions (e.g. with respect to gender equality, equal opportunities, social innovation and other fund-specific provisions), provisions for ESF financial management, and the main regulatory provisions concerning the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). The Regulation also sets out common output and result indicators for ESF investments, and result indicators for the YEI.

The high-level mission of the ESF, as set out in the Regulation, is as follows:

“The ESF shall promote high levels of employment and job quality, improve access to the labour market, support the geographical and occupational mobility of workers and facilitate their adaptation to industrial change and to changes in production systems needed for sustainable developments, encourage a high level of education and training for all and support the transition between education and employment for young people, combat poverty, enhance social inclusion, and promote gender equality, non-discrimination and equal opportunities, thereby contributing to the priorities of the Union as regards strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion” (Article 2).

The core aim of the YEI meanwhile is defined as follows:

“The YEI shall support the fight against youth unemployment in eligible regions of the Union.... It shall target all young persons under the age of 25 not in employment, education or training, residing in eligible regions, who are inactive or unemployed including the long- term unemployed, and whether or not registered as seeking work” (Article 16).

The ESF Regulation provides that, in accordance with its missions, the ESF would support a range of Investment Priorities across four of the eleven thematic objectives for ESIF, namely:

- promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility (Thematic Objective 8);
- promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination (Thematic Objective 9);
- investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning (Thematic Objective 10); and
- enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration (Thematic Objective 11).

3.2.3 Youth Employment Initiative and Youth Guarantee

EU Member States established the Youth Guarantee in April 2013, under which national Governments would “ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving

formal education”¹. The YEI was agreed by the EU Council in February 2013, as a means of financially supporting Members States to meet their commitments under the Youth Guarantee, specifically to support young people living in regions where youth unemployment was higher than 25% in 2012.

The YEI targets “all young persons under the age of 25 not in employment, education or training, residing in eligible regions, who are inactive or unemployed including the long-term unemployed, and whether or not registered as seeking work”.²

A first evaluation of Ireland’s YEI was undertaken in 2015.

3.3 Programme Overview

3.3.1 Programme Structure and Rationale

The PEIL Operational Programme (OP) sought to respond to national needs in policy areas that included the labour market, youth employment, educational participation, poverty and social inclusion, equality and equal opportunities, and social innovation. The programme structure is shown in Figure 3.1.

¹ Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee, Article 1

² ESF Regulation, Article 16 on the YEI

FIGURE 3.1 PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Specific Objective	Expected Results	Priority Axis	Activities
8. Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility	Access to employment for job seekers and inactive people, including the long term unemployed and people far from the labour market, also through local employment initiatives and support for labour mobility	To raise the level and market-relevance of job-seekers' skills, in particular for LTU and young, through further/higher education and training opportunities, and by facilitating their labour mobility	Unemployed persons or other job-seekers, including long-term and young unemployed persons, obtain employment or progress to education or training	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ETB Training for the Unemployed Springboard ICT Skills Conversion Courses Momentum Intra Eu Mobility
	Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people (YEI), in particular those not in employment, education or training, including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities, including through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee	To Raise the skills and education levels of people eligible for support under YEI, by providing education, training, work experience and/or work opportunities, including support for self-employment	More young people, in particular those who are not in employment, education or training, aged under 25 progress to education, training or employment.	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme JobsPlus Incentive Scheme Youthreach Momentum Community Training Centre Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme Youth Employment Support Scheme
9. Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	Active inclusion, including with a view to promoting equal opportunities and active participation, and improving employability	To engage unemployed and/or inactive persons, including young people, from disadvantaged groups and in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion in a process of learning and development in order to ultimately increase their employability	Persons from marginalised groups, including young people at risk, persons with disabilities and offenders, participate in social inclusion, re-integration or employability programmes.	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme Youthreach Garda Youth Diversion Projects Young Persons Probation Projects People with Disabilities Project
	Combating all forms of discrimination and promoting equal opportunities	To engage with the most disadvantaged groups, including those distant from the labour market, with a view of raising their skills, ultimately increasing their future employment prospects	Persons from marginalised groups, including migrants and women, participate in social inclusion, re-integration or employability programmes.	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender Equality Integration and Employment of Migrants Tus Nua Project

FIGURE 3.1 PROGRAMME STRUCTURE (CONT.)					
Thematic Objective	Investment Priority	Specific Objective	Expected Results	Priority Axis	Activities
10. Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning	Improving the quality and efficiency of, and access to, tertiary and equivalent education with a view to increasing participation and attainment levels, especially for disadvantaged groups	To enable disadvantaged and disabled persons/students to access and continue/remain in higher education	Disadvantaged and disabled persons/students' access and continue/remain in tertiary education.	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third Level Access
	Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups in formal, non-formal and informal settings, upgrading the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce, and promoting flexible learning pathways including through career guidance and validation of acquired competences	Upgrade the skills and education levels of low skilled adults and/or early school leavers, by providing second chance education and training courses, including literacy, numeracy and language tuition.	<p>Persons outside the labour force undertake second-chance education and training opportunities</p> <p>More adults access literacy, numeracy and language tuition programmes.</p>	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back to Education Initiative • Adult Literacy

The Programme focuses on three of the four thematic objectives across which ESF support would be provided in all Member States, with a further six investment priorities adopted under these thematic objectives. Four Priority Axes were selected to give effect to this approach, three of which relate to the selected thematic objectives, and one of which was selected as a standalone Axis under Thematic Objective 8, but providing exclusively for the Youth Employment Initiative.

While the activities shown were indicatively included as potential initiatives and operations that would be included under each Priority, the Managing Authority has had autonomy with regard to specific Activities, with the programme provisions that apply at Priority level the binding commitments.

3.3.2 Financial Allocations

The financial allocations, as were agreed prior to a moderate increase in Programme funding in 2017, are shown below.

TABLE 3.1 PROGRAMME INITIAL FINANCIAL ALLOCATIONS					
Priority Axis	Sub-Priority	Activity	€m	% of total	
1		ETB Training for the Unemployed	245.7	21.7%	
		Springboard	41.6	3.7%	
		ICT Skills Conversion Course	8.4	0.7%	
		Momentum	26.7	2.4%	
		Intra EU mobility	2.7	0.2%	
		Transnational	0.5	0.0%	
2	1	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)	30.0	2.6%	
		Youthreach	238.6	21.1%	
		Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs)	75.1	6.6%	
		Young Persons Probation (YPP) projects	11.6	1.0%	
		Disability Project	10.0	0.9%	
		Transnational	0.5	0.0%	
	Sub-total	365.9	32.3%		
	2		Integration and employment of Migrants	3.3	0.3%
			Tus Nua project	2.4	0.2%
			Gender Equality	11.0	1.0%
			Equality mainstreaming	5.0	0.4%
Sub-total			21.7	1.9%	
3	1	Third Level Access	22.4	2.0%	
		BTEI	100.9	8.9%	
	2		Adult Literacy	91.6	8.1%
			Transnational	0.5	0.0%
			Sub-total	193.0	17.0%
4		Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) Scheme	4.6	0.4%	
		JobsPlus Incentive Scheme	8.0	0.7%	
		Tus	35.3	3.1%	
		JobBridge, the National Internship Scheme	57.2	5.1%	
		Youthreach	79.9	7.0%	
		Momentum	13.3	1.2%	
		Social Inclusion and Activation Programme (SICAP)	6.0	0.5%	
OP Total (excluding Technical Assistance)			1,133.02	100.0%	
Source: Managing Authority					

The funding allocated to each Priority was therefore:

- Priority 1: €325.6m;
- Priority 2: €387.6m;
- Priority 3: €215.4m; and
- Priority 4: €204.4m

A fifth Priority Axis provides for an additional €20m in technical assistance funding.

The funding allocated under Axes 1, 2, 3, and 5 involve ESF and national contributions of equal amounts, while under Axis 4, the ESF and the YEI provide one third of the total funding each, with the national contribution the final third. As such, the total funding contributions are:

- ESF: €544.5m;
- YEI: 68.1m; and
- National: €544.5m.

As provided for in the relevant EU Regulations, the programme is adopting Simplified Cost Options (SCOs). A list of these being adopted across all Activities is presented in Annex 1.

3.3.3 Strategy and Rationale

The strategy and rationale for the structure and funding balance originally incorporated into the programme had reflected numerous considerations and contextual circumstances.

In the period 2013/2014, Ireland's emergence from the most severe effects of the economic crisis that began in 2008, was just beginning to take firm hold. Employment had started to increase, and there was evidence that job growth was occurring across numerous sectors and for many socio-economic groups. However the positive trends were only recent, and the expectations about their continuation were uncertain. The labour market challenges meanwhile were still substantial, with employment rates still significantly below targets, unemployment still at extremely high levels (12.1% in Q3 2013), substantial numbers in long-term unemployment, and specific groups experiencing worse labour market conditions (e.g. males, young people, and those with low skills and education qualifications). A twin-track approach of encouraging enterprise and job creation as well as labour market activation, skills enhancement and job uptake, were the national policy priorities at the time of ESF planning and programming for the 2014-2020 period.

Educational participation, as in the past, also remained a national priority and a policy goal central to addressing objectives in the areas of unemployment, social exclusion and enterprise and economic growth. Widening such participation to groups where it was low, and intensifying it beyond second level, continued to feature as national priorities. The development of specific skill sets, for example in pharmachem, engineering, healthcare, finance and customer services, were becoming evidently needed, while ICT skills in various forms were in clear deficit.

The recessionary years had also impacted levels of poverty and social exclusion very severely, with consistent poverty at a rate of 7.7%³, and combined poverty having seen dramatic increases. Active labour market participation was held as the central policy response appropriate to address such exclusion.

The strategic response to the ESF funding and support menu framed at EU level therefore was one that put broadly similar levels of emphasis on three core policy concerns:

1. support for continued employment growth and for the widening accessibility and quality of jobs as a critical ongoing response to the labour market shock from which the country was emerging (and, as part of this strategy, addressing specific challenges in the youth labour market);
2. promoting equality of opportunities, social inclusion and active participation amongst all groups and particular groups experiencing exclusion in respect of labour market participation and employment; and
3. addressing educational imbalances, including low levels of participation among some young groups, barriers to participation at higher education, and addressing key challenges in areas such as life-long learning and adult literacy.

3.3.4 Programme Delivery Structures

The Department of Education and Skills ESF Policy and Operations Unit is the Programme Managing Authority. There are a number of Intermediate Bodies:

- the Department of Education and Skills;
- SOLAS;
- the Higher Education Authority (HEA);
- the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP);
- the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE); and
- the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).

The Certifying Authority is also designated to the ESF Policy and Operations Unit of the DES, while the Department's Internal Audit Unit is the Programme Independent Audit Body.

There is a Programme Monitoring Committee in place, which met on 6 occasions up to mid-2018, the most recent of which was in May 2018. The Committee has broad membership, extending to the EU Commission, the Managing, Certifying and Audit Authorities, all Intermediate Bodies, a number of Beneficiary Bodies, and a range of wider stakeholders Governmental and non-Governmental stakeholders and organisations.

3.3.5 Performance Framework

Article 21 of the CPR provides for the establishment of Performance Frameworks within OPs, and the PEIL Performance Framework was incorporated into the Programme as originally approved. The Framework comprises a set of milestones (interim targets) for end-2018, and final (2023) targets which will be assessed by the

³ The rate reported in the OP document, corresponding to the 2012 rate according to the CSO SILC Survey 2012, although revised for that year since.

Commission following the closure of the Programme. Both milestones and targets are at the level of overall Priority.

FIGURE 3.2 PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK			
Priority	Indicator	2018 Milestone	2023 Target
Priority 1: Promoting the attainment of sustainable and quality employment through relevant upskilling measures and supporting labour mobility.	Expenditure Certified (€)	97,033,740	322,369,568
	The number of participants on training and upskilling programmes for the unemployed and jobseekers	98,354	134,511
Priority 2: Promoting Social Inclusion and combating discrimination in the labour market.	Expenditure Certified (€)	14,368,000	364,072,600
	The number of participants from disadvantaged groups on social inclusion employability programmes, including personal development towards employability programmes	43,494	72,590
Priority 3: Investing in Education, Training and Life Long Learning with a view to upskilling and re-skilling the labour force.	Expenditure Certified (€)	48,368,580	214,897,149
	The number of participants with low education levels on further education/training programmes	358,600	526,600
	Number of disadvantaged and/or disabled persons assisted in accessing and continuing/remaining in third level education	132,354	185,296
Priority 4: Youth Employment Initiative	Expenditure Certified (€)	185,941,048	185,941,048
	The number of YEI eligible participants on training/upskilling/personal development towards employability and work environment (including supports for self-employed) programmes/projects.	26,330	26,330

Source: Managing Authority, ('Programme_2014IE05M9OP001 2.0 Sent 27-06-17')

3.3.6 Horizontal Principles

As required under the Common Provisions Regulation, the Programme adopts and enshrines three horizontal principles:

1. Promotion of equality between men and women;
2. Promotion of equal opportunities and non- discrimination; and

3. Sustainable Development.

All beneficiary bodies are obliged to report to the Managing Authority with regard to their compliance with each of the Horizontal Principles.

3.4 Revisions to Programme

A technical revision to the Programme arose in 2017 whereby additional funding of some €2.08m was allocated to the Programme on foot of the Mid-Term Review of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework in 2016. The additional funding was allocated to Priority 1 (Springboard).

There have also been a number of further changes to the component Activities intended under the different Priorities, including:

- decisions not to include a number of Activities in the Programme initially included, including
 - social inclusion of prisoners/ex-offenders;
 - equality mainstreaming;
 - Tus;
 - JobBridge;
- decisions to include a number of Activities in the Programme not initially included, as follows:
 - Defence Forces Employee Support Scheme;
 - Community Training Centres;
 - Youth Employment Support Scheme
- a further adjustment whereby SICAP was not deemed suitable for inclusion under Priority 4, and was re-allocated to Priority 2 in full.

Finally, a revision to the Performance Framework has been proposed to the EU Commission, but this has not been approved at the time of writing.

4. Review of External Developments

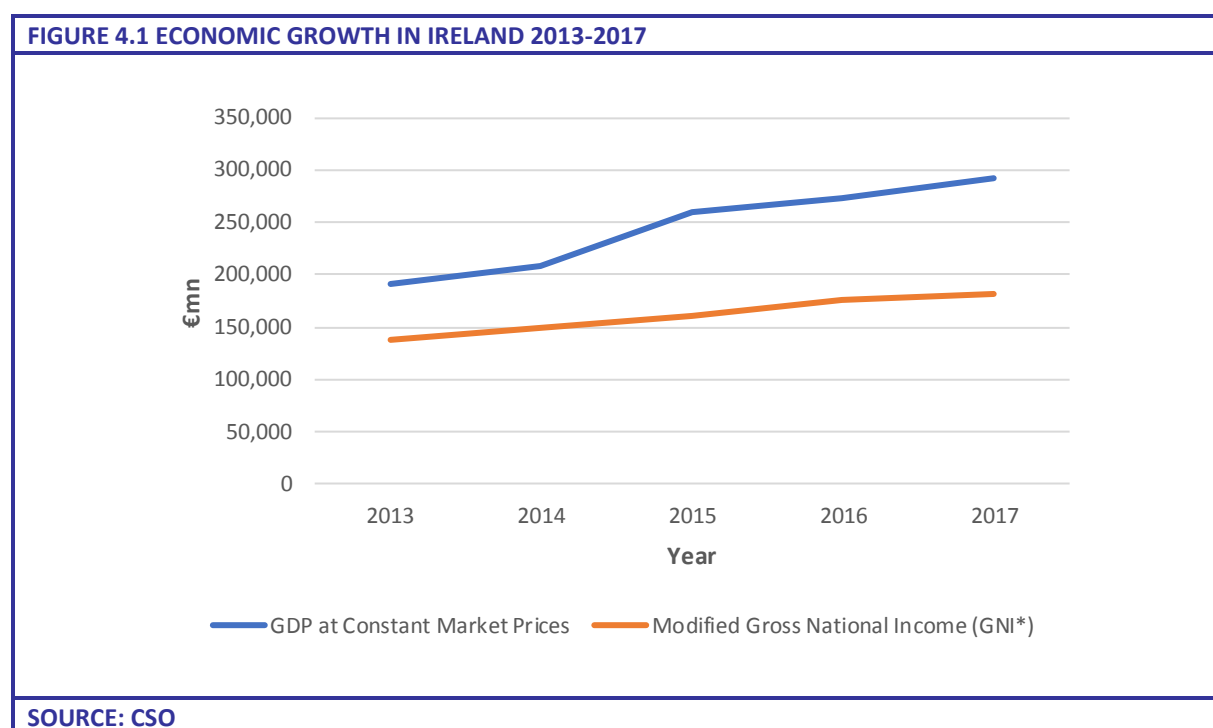
4.1 Introduction

This Section presents the assessment of external developments since the PEIL programme was first initiated. Section 4.2 addresses socio-economic developments, examining general trends in the macro-economy, in employment and unemployment, and other key trends related to migration, education and social inclusion. It also reviews available forecasts on the short- to medium-term socio-economic outlook for Ireland. Section 4.3 then considers policy and wider developments of relevance to Programme implementation and performance.

4.2 Socio-Economic Developments

4.2.1 Macro-Economy

Figure 4.1 shows growth in economic output in Ireland between 2013 and 2017. The economic recovery that had commenced at the start of the PEIL 2014-20 has continued at a strong pace, with GDP (in constant prices) growing by more than 50% over the period, from €191 bn to €293 bn.



However, the traditional GDP measurement of the size of the Irish economy has become somewhat distorted because of the globalisation effects of foreign investment in Ireland. In particular, a year-on-year GDP growth of 25% between 2014 and 2015 has stimulated efforts to identify alternative measures of Irish economic output, which exclude items such as repatriated profits of large multinationals, or the effects of depreciation of assets in

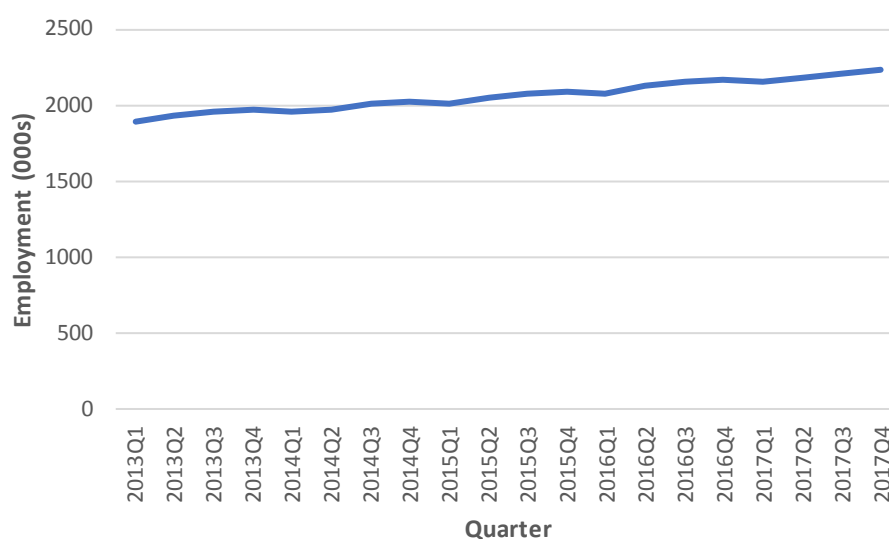
the aircraft leasing sector. Modified gross national income (denoted “GNI*” by the CSO), therefore, which adjusts for a range of distorting effects still indicates that economic output grew by more than 30% (in current prices) between 2013 and 2017, from €137 bn to €181 bn.

Growth in economic output has also returned to all of the key components of output, i.e. personal consumption of goods and services, current expenditure by central and local government, gross fixed capital formation and external trade. Moreover, economic output is also evident across most broad economic sectors.

4.2.2 Employment

Between 2013 and 2017, total employment in Ireland rose from 1,937,800 up to 2,194,200, a growth in jobs of more than 256,000, or more than 13% over the period (Figure 4.2). On a year-on-year basis over the period, jobs growth has typically reached between 2.5% and 3.5% per annum, or between 50,000 and 75,000 jobs per year.

FIGURE 4.2 TOTAL EMPLOYMENT IN IRELAND – Q1 2013-Q4 2017

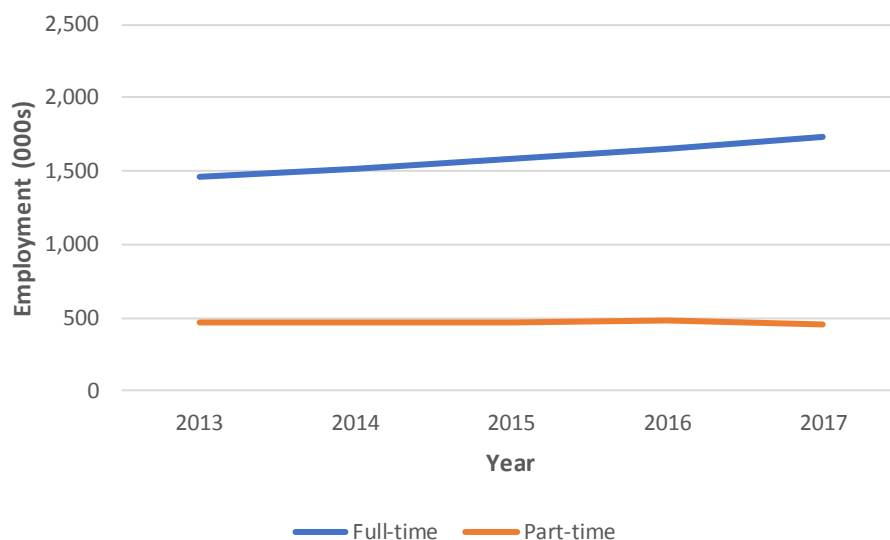


SOURCE: CSO

Total employment in Ireland in early 2018 has reached its 2008 peak level, and is estimated to have totalled 2,256,500 in the second quarter (on a seasonally-adjusted basis). Eurostat data indicates that the employment rate among 20-64 year olds was 73% in 2017, i.e. higher than the Europe 2020 strategy target for Ireland of between 69% and 71%.

Jobs growth between 2013 and 2017 was also very much driven by the creation of full-time jobs (see Figure 4.3). Full-time employment increased by more than 273,000 jobs, whereas part-time jobs in the period declined from 471,400 down to 454,300, a fall of about 17,000 jobs. The number of part-time workers classified as under-employed, meanwhile, declined by more than 45,000, from over 151,000 down to less than 106,000.

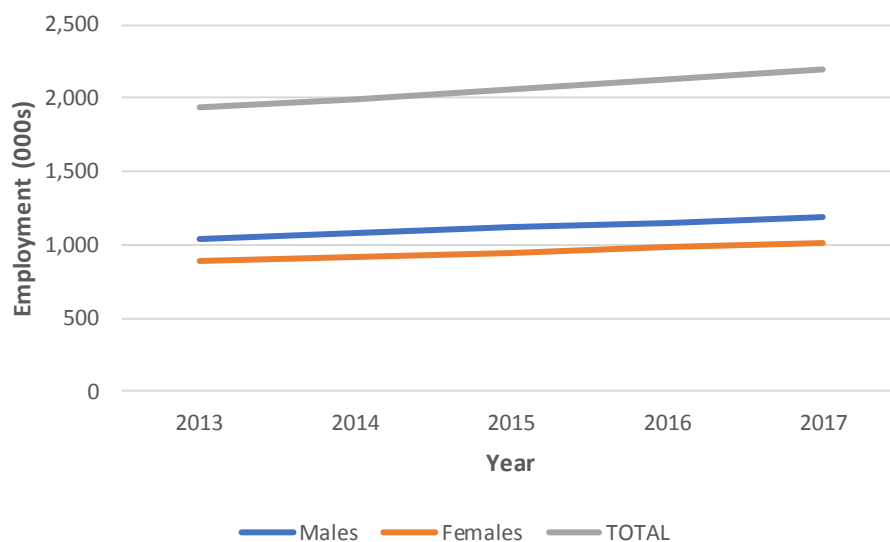
FIGURE 4.3 GROWTH IN EMPLOYMENT IN IRELAND – FULL-TIME V PART-TIME – 2013-2017



SOURCE: DERIVED FROM CSO

Both male and female employment increased significantly between 2013 and 2017 (Figure 4.4).

FIGURE 4.4 GROWTH IN EMPLOYMENT IN IRELAND BY GENDER 2013-2017



SOURCE: DERIVED FROM CSO

Male employment during the period increased by nearly 142,000, from 1,044,600 up to 1,186,500, while female employment grew by over 114,000, from 893,200 up to 1,007,600. The cumulative rate of growth was 13.6% and 12.8% for males and females respectively.

For both genders full-time employment has driven growth. The numbers of males in full-time employment increased by 158,000 over the period, while those in part-time employment declined by about 16,000. The equivalent figures among females were an increase of 116,000 in full-time numbers and a decrease of 1,500 in part-time. The numbers of under-employed workers⁴ across both genders also declined (by approximately 22,000 males and 24,000 females).

Employment growth also occurred within all age groups between 2013 and 2017 except for the 25-34 age group, which experienced an employment drop of about 3,000 over the period (Figure 4.5). Factors such as emigration or a return to education, however, may have placed a brake on employment growth in this age group over the period, as unemployment for the age group also fell.

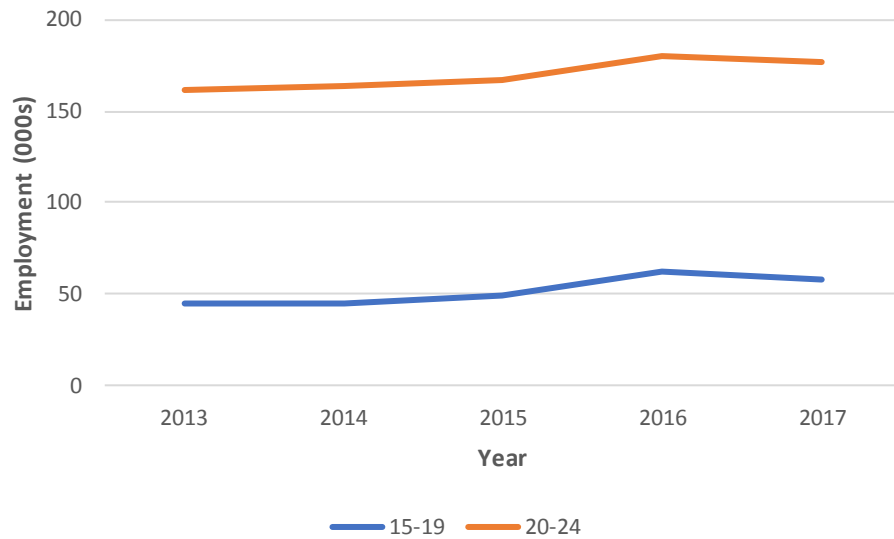


In relative terms it is also notable that employment growth in older age groups, i.e. those aged 55 or older, has been particularly strong. In 2017 there were 20% more people aged 55-59 at work than in 2013, while the equivalent figure for those aged 60 or over was more than 30%.

Youth employment, measured as employment among those aged 15-24 years, has also experienced significant growth (Figure 4.6). As of 2017, there were some 235,000 persons in this age group at work, an increase of some 29,000 since 2013. Among 15-19 year olds, the growth was approximately 13,000 (up to nearly 59,000), while among 20-24 year olds it had grown by about 16,000 (up to more than 176,000).

⁴ Those working part-time but willing and available to work additional hours

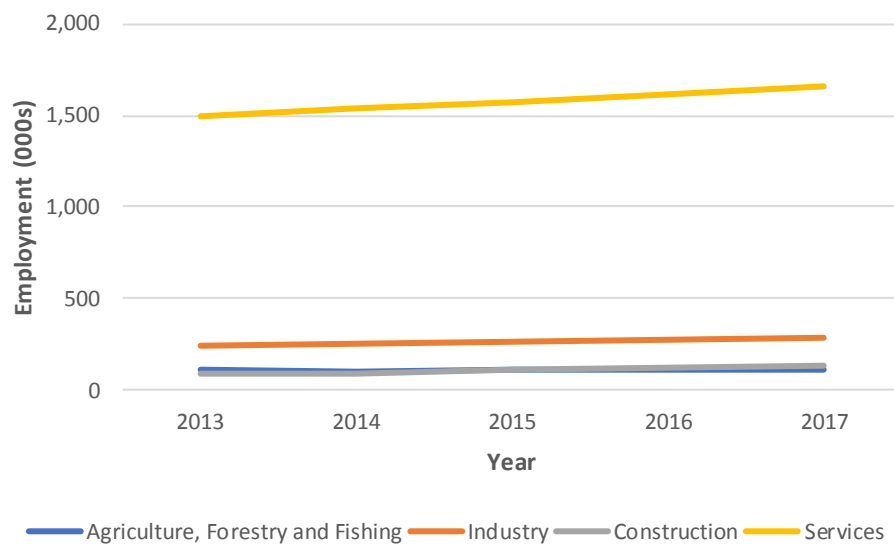
FIGURE 4.6 GROWTH IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN IRELAND 2013-2017



SOURCE: DERIVED FROM CSO

Two thirds of the total increase in employment has been in the services sector, with all of its main sub-sectors seeing growth in employment over the period (Figure 4.6), with accommodation and food services, information and communications, administrative and support services, education services, public administration and defence, and professional and technical activities, all experiencing significant growth.

FIGURE 4.7 EMPLOYMENT IN IRELAND BY SECTOR 2013-2017



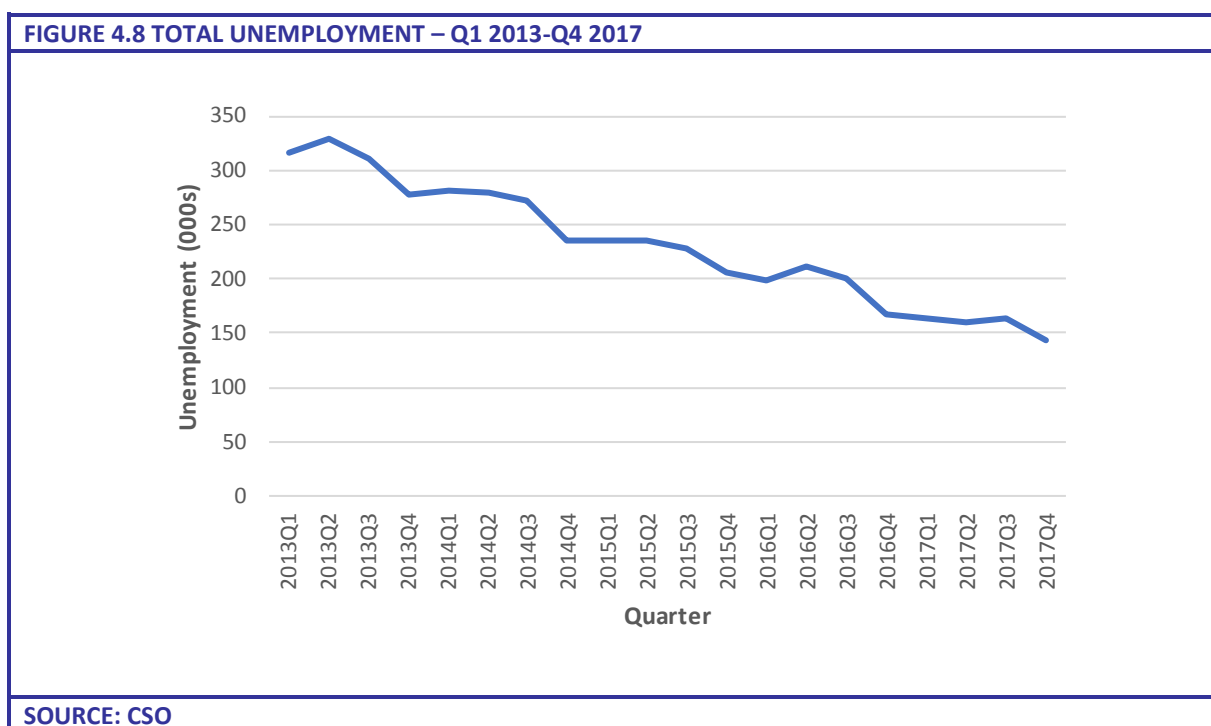
SOURCE: DERIVED FROM CSO

Employment in industry grew by more than 35,000, from 247,000 up to 283,000, while in construction the numbers employed grew by almost 50%, from 86,000 in 2013 up to 129,000 in 2017. The agriculture, forestry and fishing sector saw a marginal decline over the period.

Finally, employment growth has occurred in all regions, although to slightly different degrees. About 136,000 jobs were added in the Greater Dublin Area, i.e. the Dublin and Mid-East regions, or about 53% of all employment added over the period. In percentage terms it experienced the greatest growth between 2013 and 2017 (16%), followed by the South-East (15%), the Border and Midland regions (both 14%), the Mid-West (11%) and the West and South-West (both 8%).

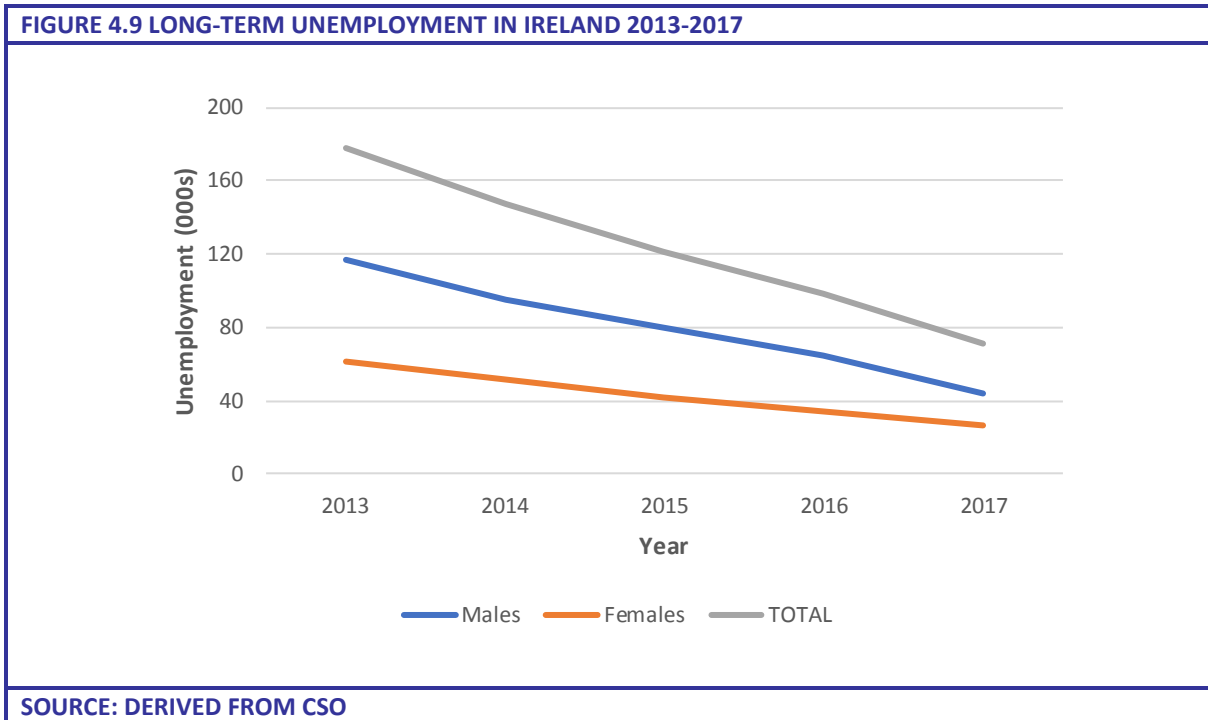
4.2.3 Unemployment

Between 2013 and 2017 total unemployment in Ireland declined from 308,500 to 157,900, a fall of over 150,000, or close to 50% (see Figure 4.8). The unemployment rate fell from 13.7% to 6.7% over the period, with the seasonally-adjusted rate falling further to 5.8% in the second quarter of 2018, the lowest quarterly unemployment rate recorded since the first quarter of 2008.

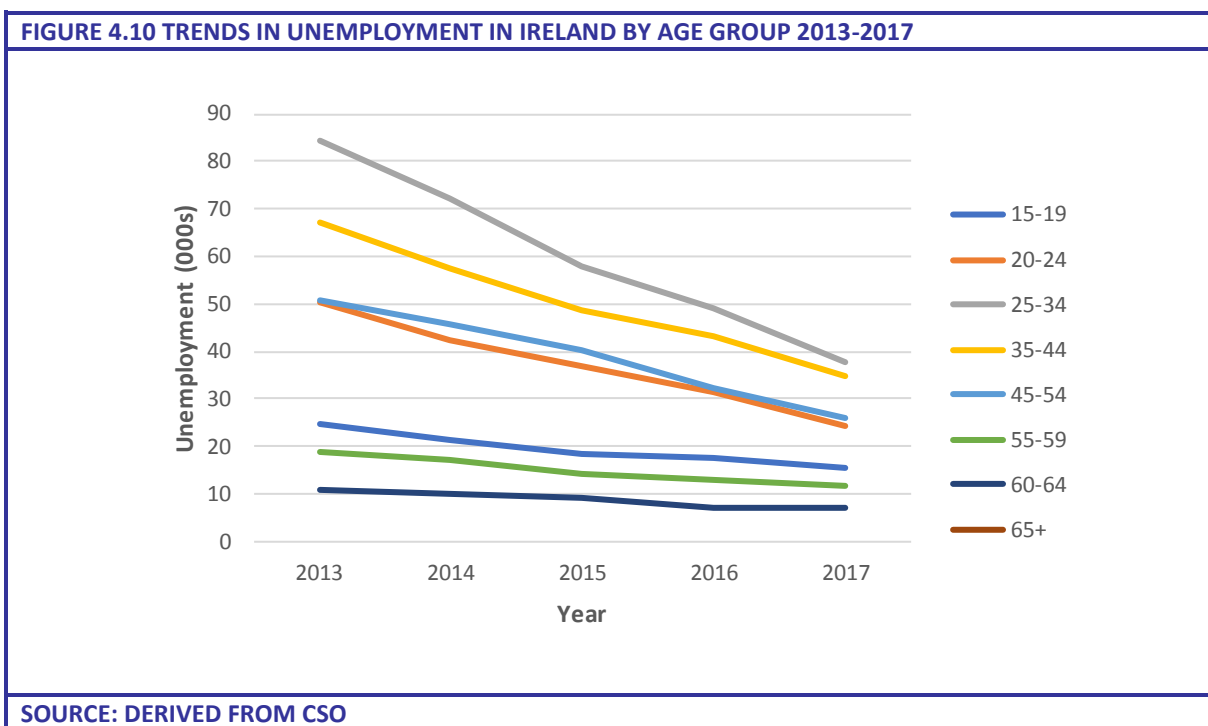


The unemployment rate for males fell from 14.8% to 7.1% between 2013 and 2017, while for females it fell from 12.4% to 6.3%.

Long-term unemployment (i.e. the numbers unemployed for 12 months or more), also declined sharply between 2013 and 2017 (Figure 4.9), from over 178,009 persons to 78,100, a fall of more than 60%.



Reductions in unemployment have been evident across all age groups (Figure 4.10).



The declines in the numbers unemployed has ranged from 37% (for 55-64 year olds) up to 55% (for 25-34 year olds).

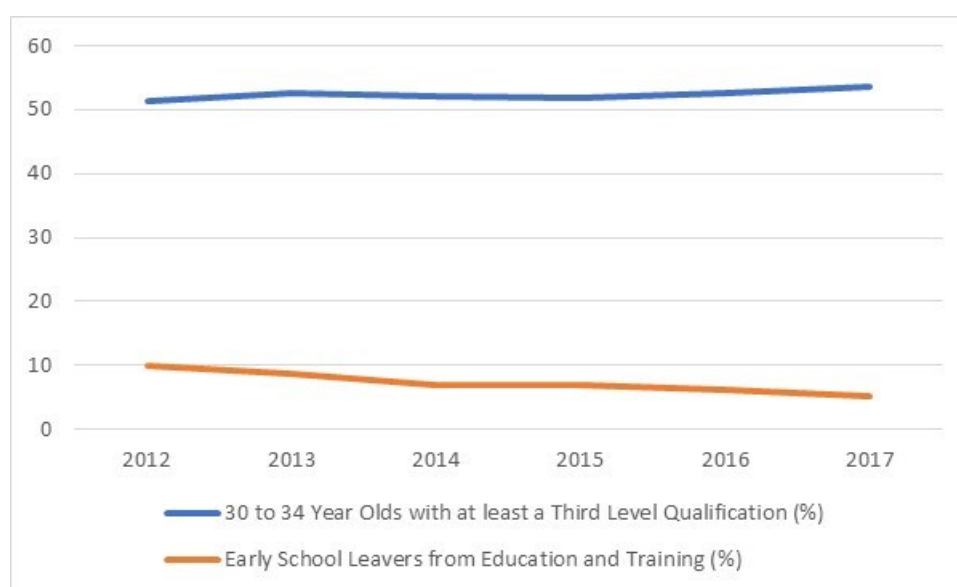
Youth unemployment has also markedly improved. Between 2013 and 2017, unemployment among 15-24 year olds fell from 75,300 down to 39,600, a drop of nearly 36,000 (or 47%). The youth unemployment rate declined from 26.7% in 2013 to 14.4% in 2017. By earlier comparison, youth unemployment in Ireland stood at 13.5% in 2008 and ranged between 8% and 9% from 2005 to 2007.

As with employment growth, falling unemployment has been quite evenly balanced across regions, where the rates in 2017 range between 6.1% and 9.1%. Regions with unemployment rates above the national rate in 2017 (6.7%) included the West region (6.9%), the South-East region (7.6%), the Mid-West region (7.9%) and the Midlands region (9.1%).

4.2.4 Participation in Education

In relation to Ireland's Europe 2020 targets in the area of education participation, the achievements are mixed. The early school leaving rate (i.e. the percentage of early school leavers among 18-24 year olds) has fallen steadily to reach a level of 5% in Q2 2017. This is substantially below the Europe 2020 target of 8%.

FIGURE 4.11 PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION, 2013-2017



SOURCE: DERIVED FROM CSO

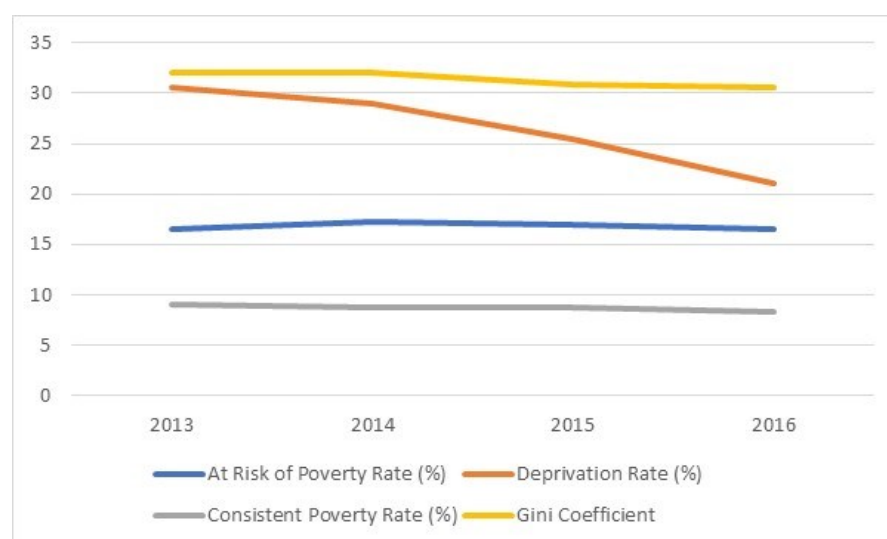
Third level participation in Ireland remain high compared to other EU countries, however it has not grown significantly, increasing from 52% in Q2 2014 to 53% in Q2 2017 for persons aged 30-34. It thus remains significantly below the EU 2020 target of 60%.

4.2.5 Poverty and Social Exclusion

The deprivation rate⁵ in Ireland fell from 30.5% to 21.0% over the period 2013-2016 (the most recent year for which data is available). Trends in poverty indicators showed less dramatic change however (Figure 4.12). The percentage of the population regarded as being “at risk of poverty”⁶ remained unchanged (at 16.5%), although the percentage of the population in “consistent poverty” fell from 9.1% to 8.3%. However, under the Europe 2020 framework, the 2010 baseline figure was 6.3% with an interim target of 4% for 2016 and 2% or less by 2020.

The Gini Coefficient, a recognised indicator of income inequality, fell from 32% to 30.6% over the period. It should be noted however that the poverty and social inclusion indicators are only available up to 2016, and as such don’t reflect increases in social welfare payments brought in during 2017 and 2018.

FIGURE 4.12 POVERTY AND INCLUSION INDICATORS, 2013-2016



SOURCE: DERIVED FROM CSO

Poverty rates vary by region. The Border region had the highest rate of consistent poverty in 2016, at over 13%, although this has fallen substantially from its 2013 level of more than 20%. The consistent poverty rate in the South-West and Midland regions, at 10%, was also above the national average. However, in both these regions, the rate had increased since 2013 – in the South West region, it has increased from 7.6%, while in the Midland region, it has increased from 8.7%.

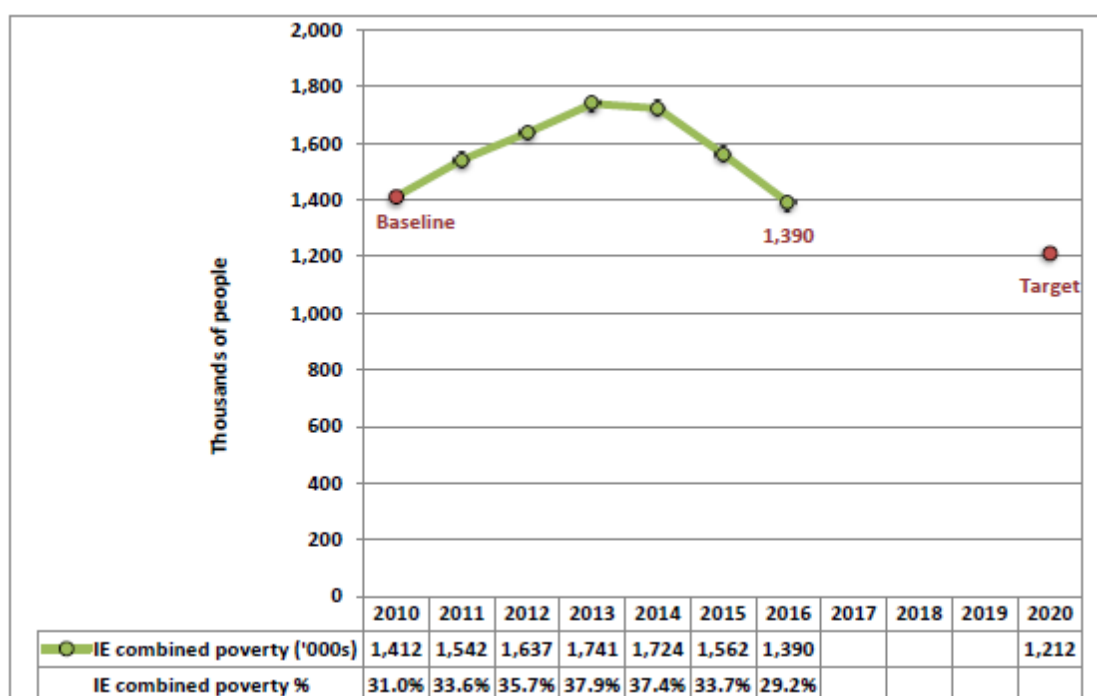
All other regions had rates of consistent poverty that were below the national average in 2016. These regions also witnessed a reduction in the poverty rate between 2013 and 2016, with the exception of Dublin, where the rate increased from 5.6% to 7.8%.

⁵ The proportion of the population that is living in a household that is deprived of two or more of 11 basic deprivation indicators

⁶ The share of persons with an equivalised income below a given percentage (usually 60%) of the national median income

The percentage of the population that is regarded as being in “combined poverty”⁷ fell from 37.9% to 29.2% between 2013 and 2016, following three years of annual increases. Ireland’s contribution to the Europe 2020 target is for a reduction of 200,000 by 2020 on the baseline figure of 1,412,000 in 2010 (Figure 4.13).

FIGURE 4.13 COMBINED POVERTY, 2010-2016



SOURCE: DEASP Social Inclusion Monitor 2016

Given the upward trend in numbers between 2010 and 2013, a further reduction of 178,000 from the 2016 level is necessary to meet Ireland’s Europe 2020 target number of 1,212,000.

4.2.6 Economic and Labour Outlook

The short and medium-term outlook for the economy in Ireland remains positive (Table 4.1).

⁷ Measures a combination of three indicators – consistent poverty or at-risk-of-poverty or basic deprivation

TABLE 4.1 FORECASTS FOR GDP GROWTH IN IRELAND 2018-2021 (CONSTANT PRICES)

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Department of Finance	5.6%	4.0%	3.4%	2.8%
Central Bank	4.8%	4.2%	-	-
ESRI	8.9%	4.5%	-	-

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE – STABILITY PROGRAMME UPDATE 2018; CENTRAL BANK QUARTERLY BULLETIN Q2 2018; ESRI QUARTERLY ECONOMIC COMMENTARY AUTUMN 2018

The Department of Finance and the Central Bank have forecast real output growth of between 5.6% and 4.8% for 2018, while the Economic and Social Research Institute has recently and dramatically increased its forecast to 8.9%⁸. Robust albeit decelerating growth is also expected in 2019.

Total employment is expected to grow by between 2.4% and 2.9% in 2018, followed by growth of between 2% and 2.5% in 2019 (Table 4.2).

TABLE 4.2 FORECASTS FOR EMPLOYMENT GROWTH IN IRELAND 2018-2021

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Department of Finance	2.7%	2.3%	1.9%	1.7%
Central Bank	2.4%	2.0%	-	-
ESRI	2.9%	2.5%	-	-

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE – STABILITY PROGRAMME UPDATE 2018; CENTRAL BANK QUARTERLY BULLETIN Q2 2018; ESRI QUARTERLY ECONOMIC COMMENTARY AUTUMN 2018

Finally, the unemployment rate is forecast to be between 5.6% and 5.8% in 2018, further falling to between 4.8% and 5.3% in 2019 (Table 4.3).

TABLE 4.3 FORECAST UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN IRELAND 2018-2021

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Department of Finance	5.8%	5.3%	5.3%	5.4%
Central Bank	5.6%	4.8%	-	-
ESRI	5.7%	5.1%	-	-

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE – STABILITY PROGRAMME UPDATE 2018; CENTRAL BANK QUARTERLY BULLETIN Q2 2018; ESRI QUARTERLY ECONOMIC COMMENTARY AUTUMN 2018

⁸ The reasons given for the sharp upward revision include that domestic consumption and modified investment grew faster during the first half of 2018 than previously expected, and that imports registered negative growth over the same period, mainly due to a sizeable reduction in imports of research and technology related services amongst certain multinational firms.

4.3 Key Policy and Wider Developments

4.3.1 Action Plan for Jobs

The Government's annual Action Plan for Jobs was first introduced in 2012, as a joined-up Government approach to maximise employment across Ireland, whereby all Government departments would play a role in creating the best environment for enterprise and job creation. The first plan was introduced at a time when Ireland was experiencing a severe unemployment crisis, with the average unemployment rate in 2012 being about 15.5%, and the strategic goals of the Action Plan process were to:

- create 200,000 additional jobs in Ireland by 2020, including 135,000 outside Dublin;
- grow the country's trade and investment in existing markets and diversify into new markets;
- deliver strong competitive Irish regions to drive regional employment;
- develop and attract high quality talent;
- make Ireland a global innovation leader to grow and diversify the composition of our exports;
- drive productivity across all sectors of the Irish economy;
- achieve a Top 5 competitiveness ranking for Ireland in global indices.

The context for more recent plans, however, has changed significantly since the introduction of the first plan in 2012, most notably the significant growth in employment and falling levels of unemployment.

The Action Plan for Jobs 2018, therefore, is focused on embedding the progress made since 2012, positioning the economy to take up new opportunities, but also building the resilience of enterprises in the face of significant challenges (e.g. Brexit). It targets the creation of another 50,000 jobs in 2018, with the four key immediate aims of the plan being that:

- Ireland's enterprise base remains successful amid the uncertainty created by Brexit;
- all parts of the country achieve their potential in terms of job creation;
- those entering, re-entering, or in the workforce have the incentives and skills needed to prosper;
- Ireland's enterprise base remains successful by focusing relentlessly on competitiveness, productivity, and innovation.

In the area of employment and skills, key priorities highlighted by the Action Plan for Jobs 2018 include growing the talent pool available to the economy and responding to skills needs for enterprise. The plan therefore echoes several other policy initiatives that have been introduced in recent years, such as the Enterprise 2025 and Innovation 2020 strategies, and the National Skills Strategy 2025.

An important extra dimension that has also been introduced, however, has been the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. These plans, which were launched over 2015 and 2016, seek to address regional disparities in economic growth and jobs recovery so that the rate of unemployment in each region will not be more than one percentage point above the national average by 2020. To do this, the plans seek to adopt a collaborative and bottom-up approach, engaging regional economic development partners from the public and private sectors, to develop and implement focused initiatives aimed at supporting enterprise growth and job creation in their region, building on regional strengths and assets and exploiting new opportunities.

4.3.2 Pathways to Work

The Pathways to Work Strategy was, like the Action Plan for Jobs, first introduced in 2012, as part of a two-pronged approach to tackling the jobs crisis in Ireland. Whereas the Action Plan for Jobs focuses on stimulating employment growth, for example, the Pathways to Work Strategy has focused on trying to make sure that as many new jobs as possible are filled by people on the Live Register. In its initial form, therefore, it provided for the establishment of an integrated employment and income support service, with an intensified work activation focus that was built around five key strands:

- more ongoing and intensive engagement with those who are unemployed;
- greater targeting of activation places and opportunities for those on the Live Register;
- removing disincentives for unemployed people to take up employment and other opportunities;
- incentivising employers to provide more jobs for those who are unemployed;
- reforming institutions to deliver better services.

Taken together, the actions delivered under these strands have sought to reform welfare services for the unemployed through the public employment service and interaction with other public services, most notably in the area of training and vocational education.

As in the case of the Action Plan for Jobs, however, the context surrounding Pathways to Work has changed significantly, given recent strong levels of economic growth, large gains in employment and a subsequent substantial fall in the rate of unemployment and the number of people on the Live Register. Added to this, moreover, is the noticeable progress made in tackling both long-term unemployment and youth unemployment.

As a result, a new Pathways to Work Strategy has been adopted for the 2016-2020 period, which reflects a shift from “(labour market) activation in a time of recession” to “(labour market) activation in a time of recovery and growth”, with two key objectives:

- consolidating progress to date, and ensuring that the long-term and youth unemployed cohorts continue to be prioritised and adequately supported in the provision of activation services;
- addressing potential labour supply constraints by extending activation to others who, although not classified as unemployed jobseekers, have the potential and desire to play a more active role in the labour force, e.g. part-time workers, homemakers, people with disabilities, students, carers.

Action Plan for Jobless Households under the Pathways to Work process has also been developed, which extends activation services to people who are not working, but who are not defined as unemployed on the traditional measures.

Actions being implemented under Pathways to Work 2016-2020, meanwhile, are still organised under broadly similar strands of activity to those used in the 2012-2015 period.

4.3.3 Education and Skills Policy

The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, which incorporates the Department of Education and Skills strategy statement for the period, aspires to make the Irish education and training system a leader in Europe within the next 10 years. To do this, it sets out five high level goals, which are to:

- improve the learning experience and the success of learners;

- improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs;
- help those delivering education services to continuously improve;
- build stronger bridges between education and wider community;
- improve national planning and support services.

By its nature, the plan applies to the whole education system, and not just those parts of the system that are relevant to the OP. Within its high-level goals, however, it identifies several broad objectives, which are consistent with the objectives and activities supported in the OP. For example, some of the objectives highlighted by the plan include:

- improving the learning experience and learning outcomes for learners impacted by disadvantage;
- promoting high quality learning experiences in the further education (FET) and higher education (HE) sectors;
- enhancing wider capacity to meet national and regional skills needs;
- creating a greater diversity of learning opportunities beyond first- and second-level education.

The new National Skills Strategy 2025, meanwhile, aims to underpin Ireland's growth as an economy and as a society at a time of economic recovery. In this regard, therefore, it mirrors the Action Plan for Jobs and Pathways to Work processes in moving from a “recession” mode to a “recovery” mode. It seeks to support the development of a well-educated, well-skilled and adaptable labour force, with a vision whereby Ireland will be “renowned at home and abroad as a place where the talent of our people thrives through:

- the quality and relevance of its education and training base, which is responsive to the changing and diverse needs of people, society and the economy;
- the strength of relationships and transfer of knowledge between employers, education and training providers, and all sections of society, and the resulting impact on how people are prepared for life and work;
- the quality of its workforce – a nation of people armed with relevant knowledge, entrepreneurial agility and analytical skills;
- the effective use of skills to support economic and social prosperity, and to enhance the well-being of the country;
- the effective use of technology to support talent and skills provision, to grow enterprise, and to enhance the lives of all within society”.

In order to achieve this vision, the National Skills Strategy 2025 has set out six key objectives or priorities, each of which also consists of several key actions. Again, several of these objectives and actions remain consistent with objectives and activities within the OP, while taking account of the recent changed economic and labour market context. The key objectives include:

- a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy. Actions here include providing the right mix of both subject knowledge and “transferable” skills (e.g. creativity, problem solving, communication skills), increasing participation in

- education related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)⁹, and provision of better integration, partnership and synergy between the HE and FET sectors;
- active participation by employers in the development of skills and the effective use of skills in their organisations to improve productivity and competitiveness. Actions here include increased collaboration between employers and education/training providers, development of management capability within SMEs, improved workforce planning in the public sector, improved research and innovation activities, and better promotion of employee retention and communication of career pathways;
 - enhanced quality of teaching and learning at all stages of education. Actions here include quality improvements in the delivery of early years services, improvements to the quality of teacher education and evaluation, and provision of high-quality learning experiences in the HE and FET sectors;
 - increased engagement in lifelong learning. Actions here include promotion and communication of the benefits of lifelong learning, improved opportunities for employees to engage in continuing education and training, improved recognition of workplace learning, and strengthened career guidance with the aid of employer engagement;
 - specific focus on active inclusion to support participation in education and training and the labour market. Actions here include continued support for disadvantaged groups to participate in education and training, continued support for jobseekers in finding the best possible job, encouraging older workers to remain active in the labour market, and encouraging economically inactive or under-represented groups to increase labour market participation;
 - increase in the supply of skills to the labour market. Actions here include attracting international migrants with in-demand skills, encouraging emigrants to return to Ireland to meet skills demands, and improving the mobility of higher education researchers into industry.

The National Skills Strategy also prioritises the establishment of a National Skills Council (NSC) and Regional Skills Fora in Ireland. The NSC, which was established in 2017, comprises representation from enterprises/employers, the HE and FET sectors, enterprise agencies and relevant Government departments. Its role is to oversee research and to advise on the prioritisation of identified skills needs and how to secure delivery of these identified needs. Regional Skills Fora, on the other hand, have been introduced at a regional level to improve co-operation between education/training providers and enterprise, and between the different education and training providers themselves, with the involvement of other Government departments/agencies. Regional Skills Fora are therefore also intended to provide a local link with the implementation of other strategies, such as the Regional Action Plan for Jobs and Pathways to Work processes.

⁹ As a follow-up to this, a STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026 has also been published

5. Programme Progress

5.1 Introduction

This Section assesses progress in the delivery of the PEIL Programme, and considers the evidence regarding its effectiveness, efficiency and impact thus far. Section 5.2 considers financial progress and forecasts, while Section 5.3 deals in turn with progress under the Priority Axis, presenting findings regarding specific Programme activities in respect of each.

5.2 Financial Progress and Forecasts

5.2.1 *Certified and Claimed Expenditure*

There had been no programme expenditure certified up to 2017. The Irish ESF Managing and Certifying Authorities have been designated for the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020 with effect from 13 November 2018. The first payment application totalling €220.6m in respect of the PEIL, which included €112m in respect of YEI activities, was submitted in November 2018. The total ESF/YEI contribution exceeded the 2018 de-commitment requirement.

5.2.2 *Exchequer Expenditure*

Irrespective of its certified and/or claimed status, significant financial progress has been made with exchequer funding against which future claims will be made. While, in most cases, actual claims have not yet been made against this expenditure and future claims may differ from these amounts, the expenditure does provide an indicator of financial progress to date. Section 5.3 considers both financial and non-financial progress across all Priorities and Activities, and then summarises financial and non-financial progress and forecasts at the overall Programme level.

5.3 Efficiency, Effectiveness and Impact

5.3.1 *Priority 1: Promoting the attainment of sustainable and quality employment through relevant upskilling measures and supporting labour mobility*

ETB Training for the Unemployed

This Activity involves provision of PEIL co-financing to this long-standing element of Irish FET strategy, what was previously FÁS training for the unemployed. Its objective is to provide employment for job-seekers and inactive people, including the long-term unemployed and people far from the labour market, also through local labour market initiatives and support for labour mobility. It provides a range of vocational training courses to meet the needs of unemployed persons or other jobseekers, with some courses focusing on generic, foundation skills whilst others provide skills specific to a particular occupation or set of tasks e.g.: computer applications and software development; financial services; caring; driving; machine operation; electronics; and retails.

Three sub-components of ETB training are funded under the OP:

- specific skills training;
- traineeships; and
- bridging/foundation training.

For OP purposes these are reported on in the aggregate.

The rationale at the time of OP agreement lay in the primacy attached at that time to reducing Ireland’s then very high unemployment, however as has been shown the unemployment context has transformed in the early years of PEIL implementation. Consequently, both the rationale for and the focus of the Activity has shifted to a wider category of jobseekers and those outside the workforce. Ireland’s continued relatively low level of labour force participation adds impetus to this.

Reported financial and non-financial progress is shown in Table 5.1.

TABLE 5.1 ACTIVITY AND EXPENDITURE – ETB TRAINING OF THE UNEMPLOYED¹⁰									
	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	37	246	-	48	57	50	50	37	336
Participants	74,145	108,861	-	10,500	11,200	11,666	10,000	43,366	63,366
Expenditure per Participant	499	2,257	-	4,571	5,089	4,286	5,000	4,727	5,298

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

Annual numbers of individual participants have ranged between 10,000 and 11,700 each year, with spending and participation, as well as the unit costs per participant, expected to remain quite stable until 2023.

There have not been specific evaluations of the three training streams to which PEIL funding is devoted. An in-depth evaluation of specific skills training is underway, while an evaluation of a pilot initiative in innovative traineeship delivery was undertaken in 2017/2018. In 2016 the Government published an “Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland between 2016-2020”¹¹. This plan pointed towards a number of features of the traineeship model in Ireland, and noted that “38 individual traineeships were developed between 1999-2009 in partnership with employer groups. Skills areas include aircraft maintenance; supply chain logistics; legal administration; healthcare and IT support. Employment outcomes from traineeships are strong, a 2013 follow-up survey of 2012 graduates indicates that 60% of learners on traineeship programmes obtained employment within 12 months of exiting their programme”.

Innovation in Work-Based Learning

¹⁰ In this and later tables showing activity and expenditure, figures may not add due to rounding

¹¹ Available at <http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/ActionPlanDec16.pdf>

The European Commission and others have emphasised the benefits of work-based learning (WBL) as a way of simultaneously addressing learner and employer needs. Consistent with this, The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-19 emphasises the important role of apprenticeships and traineeships among labour market intervention with WBL at their core, as does the more recent Action Plan for Apprenticeships in Ireland 2016-20.

Traineeships provide occupation-specific training including both formal training and workplace coaching and work experience. Unlike apprenticeships, they are not governed by specific legislation. There are currently a range of traineeships available nationally in sectors such as engineering, ICT, hospitality, care, construction, logistics, retail, finance, sports and leisure.

As an input to exploring various approaches to traineeships, SOLAS-supported ETBs in partnership with local employers to pilot various types of “Career Traineeships” (CT) in 2016/17¹². These were built around four core pillars: needs identification, employer partnership, collaborative programme development, and integration of work-based learning. A review carried out for SOLAS examined the initial experience of a sample of four programmes completed by autumn 2017, out of 32 in total.

The review found that the CT model of training programme delivery has proven both effective and efficient in the design, development and delivery of training targeted at identified labour market skills needs. Key findings include: the 51 trainees who had completed the CTs highlighted in the evaluation had high completion and qualification rates (70%) and; high levels of employment since completing the programme (98%), of which most were with employers that had hosted the trainees and 28% were with other employers.

Employers consulted remarked positively on the commitment, skills and job readiness of the trainees on completion and a number also commented on the cost savings this represented, the lack of any learning curve, their immediate productivity and the fact that core competencies are in place prior to employment. Of the 164 trainees who had completed CTs overall, 94% were employed after the programme finished.

Looking ahead the review concluded that all of the structures, processes, procedures, guidelines and supports developed as part of the pilots favourably position ETBs to further enhance their provision of training in response to identified labour market skill needs.

The Action Plan also noted that “a review of labour market programmes which was published by Forfás in 2010, concluded that, along with Specific Skills Training, traineeships had the best employment outcomes of the eleven programmes that were reviewed. The Forfás review concluded that traineeship provided a good alternative option to apprenticeship in having on-the-job learning for specialist skills but over a shorter period of time. The review noted the cost-effectiveness of traineeship for both the State and for enterprise”.

¹² “Developing Best Practice in Work Based Learning – An Evaluation of the Career Traineeship Pilot”, SOLAS, March 2018

In terms of training progression, SOLAS data shows over 90% retention of starters on the three types of training co-financed. Levels of completion (in 2017) vary from 90% in specific skills to 76% in Traineeships. However, some cases may exceed a year in duration. Levels of accreditation vary. They are highest in traineeships (65%) and much lower in specific skills and bridging/foundation training.

	Starters Retained %	Retained/ Scheduled to Complete	Accreditation Rate for Completers
Specific Skills	92.5	90.4	32.9
Traineeships	93.4	75.6	64.8
Bridging/Foundation	90.7	81.6	37.7

Source: SOLAS 2017 FET Services Plan

While the three elements of Training for the Unemployed funded by PEIL have not been the subject of recent dedicated evaluations, a series of wider reviews and evaluations have reported positively on them and on such training as a whole.

The 2017 Review of the National Training Fund (NTF), SOLAS (and other) acknowledged that many NTF¹³ funded programmes had not been fully evaluated in detail. However, it commented that where they had been these generally indicated that effectiveness measured by progression to further education or employment was evident. However, it also pointed out that full evaluation of efficiency “requires econometric counterfactual modelling to identify the net impact of the programmes”.

An earlier review of a suite of Labour Market Programmes carried out by Forfás¹⁴ (during the previous ESF programming period) looked at 10 different programmes including specific skills training, traineeships, and bridging/foundation training as then operated. It found that the most effective programmes of training for the unemployed were “those closest to the labour market and with employer involvement”, and included Specific Skills and Traineeship programmes.

The most recent SOLAS follow-up survey of FET participants relates to 2016¹⁵. This hitherto annual survey focused on programme participants who exited training in the period Jan-March 2016. The aim is to establish what happens to FET participants after they leave training, and to assess numbers of job placements arising from the programmes. These placement levels are of course driven by other factors also, not least the state of the labour market. The survey also obtains feedback from participants regarding their training experience. The survey includes participants in the three training for the unemployed areas covered under the PEIL, but they are not always reported on separately. Regarding progression to employment, some 41% of all FET trainees surveyed were in employment as against 13% prior to commencing the FET course.

¹³ Review of National Training Fund, Report for SOLAS, 2017

¹⁴ Forfás, Review of Labour Market Programmes, Report to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Summary Report, 2010.

¹⁵ 2016 Follow-Up Survey of FET Programme Participants, SOLAS, Oct 2017.

Taking a wider definition of progression as including “progress to employment, education or a scheme” the survey found this % highest in regard to traineeships (65%), followed by specific skills training (61-2%), and lowest in bridging/foundation courses (46%). These compare to an equivalent figure of 55% for all FET trainees in the survey. These progression levels reflect in a part of the nature of the course and trainee, but they point to substantial progression levels in the PEIL-funded training for the unemployed.

Also informative are trainees’ perceptions of how different types of FET contributed to their gaining their current (or most recent) job. In this case responses are grouped by course type:

- “progression courses” include both traineeships and specific skills;
- “social inclusion courses” include bridging/foundation courses (and also specialist training, community training centres, and local training initiatives).

The results indicate that respondents are very clear about the level of linkage between training and employment. It also shows that traineeship and specific skills training have a stronger link to employment. However, more social inclusion type courses including foundation/bridging, also have a perceived link for 80% of respondents. This latter shows the importance of “transversal” skills such as literacy, numeracy and confidence alongside more directly progression-related skills in the FET suite.

Springboard

The rationale for Springboard is to provide individuals with the opportunity to upskill or re-skill in areas where there are national or regional skill shortages. Funding is provided for places on courses at Levels 6-9 of the NQF and are provided by both public and private higher education providers throughout Ireland. For 2014-2016 Springboard programmes were targeted at unemployed persons, but in light of the decline in unemployment combined with ongoing skill gaps in specific sectors, eligibility has been extended to employed persons (including the self-employed), self-employed and returners to the labour market (former homemakers) from 2017 onwards. The 2018 Call for Proposals from HEIs for Springboard+ programmes indicates that all sectors of the economy with a demonstrated skills shortage are included, and that all course are open to people irrespective of their employment status¹⁶.

Key skills areas in which Springboard programmes are provided by HEIs include:

- manufacturing (biopharma/medtech sector);
- entrepreneurship; and
- hospitality and financial services.

The 2017 AIR indicates that 40 HEIs provided a total of 155 Springboard Courses for almost 4,900 participants. Courses include degree, higher diploma and masters level qualifications. The 2017 list of Springboard Programmes indicates that Institutes of Technology are the main HEI providers, with participation also by Universities and Private providers.

¹⁶ Call for Proposals Springboard+ January 2018, HEA

Since 2014, the Springboard and ICT Skills Conversion programmes have been managed by the HEA under the brand Springboard+.

Springboard was originally launched in 2011 as part of the Government’s response to tackling rising levels of unemployment. Specifically, it was to provide free up-skilling and re-skilling opportunities for those who had lost their jobs in the recession. Its dual objectives were to help unemployed people to remain close to the labour market through accessing part-time flexible higher-education opportunities, and also to enhance collaboration and engagement between the enterprise and higher education sectors in the design and delivery of programmes.

Financial and non-financial progress is shown in Table 5.3.

	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	28	42	0	8	9	9	9	28	55
Participants	17,810	17,810	0	5,517	5,077	4,130	4,200	18,924	27,324
Expenditure per Participant	1,555	2,336	-	1,373	1,791	2,202	2,165	1,842	2,002

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

An additional €13m was allocated to the Springboard Programme at the end of 2017, and the total financial allocation is intended to be €55m, with the additional funding a re-allocation from the Momentum programme which was discontinued.

The average annual Springboard expenditure from 2015-2018 is indicated as €9m, with an estimated total up to end 2018 of €34.8m. Annual expenditure is estimated to remain the same for 2019 and 2020 - €9m yearly. Annual funding, participant numbers, and costs per participant, have and are expected to remain quite stable.

Improvements in the economy and reduced unemployment gave rise to some suggestions that the Government might cease funding for this programme from end-2016. However identified skill gaps and skill shortages led to continued demand and continuation of financial support for the programme from 2017.

The eligibility criteria was expanded to allow for participation by Returners to the labour market (from home/caring duties) and persons in employment.

The Programme was evaluated in 2016 and found to have positive academic output and employment outcomes for participants¹⁷. For example, of some 22,531 participants for which data was available between 2011 and 2014, 63% had achieved, and a further 9% were awaiting, academic outcomes when surveyed., while a further 53% of reported outcomes indicated graduates were in employment 3-6 months following graduation, 19% were in further study, and 20% were seeking employment. Furthermore relatively high proportions of those in

¹⁷ Developing Talent, Changing Lives: An Evaluation of Springboard+, 2011-16, HEA November 2016

employment had not previously been employed in the same sector (32% had and 68% had not across those in employment and having participated between 2011 and 2014).

Springboard has continued to be a part of Governments policy response to meeting employment and skill needs.

ICT Skills Conversion Courses

The ICT Skills Conversion programme aims to increase the number of high-level skills graduates by providing places on specialised graduate conversion programmes targeted for non-ICT graduates. The Programme was launched in 2012 in response to identified existing and future ICT skills gaps. Programme funding is dispersed on an annual basis to course providers following a competitive call for proposals.

The programme is targeted at persons who already hold a Level 8 or equivalent qualification and have the capacity and aptitude to undergo an intensive full-time or part-time programme of study and work-experience, to acquire honours degree level ICT programming skills. From 2018, persons in employment are required to pay 10% of the course fee. Participants not in employment continue to be eligible for full-fee support.

Financial and non-financial progress is shown in Table 5.4.

TABLE 5.4 ACTIVITY AND EXPENDITURE – ICT SKILLS CONVERSION									
	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	6	8	2	4	4	4	4	6	12
Participants	0	1,950	708	982	1,358	1,545	1,600	6,193	9,393
Expenditure per Participant	-	4,311	3,333	4,466	2,591	2,278	2,199	2,794	1,320

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

Expenditure has exceeded that originally anticipated due largely to a substantial increase in the number of course places offered in 2015/2016 in response to the Government's ICT Skills Action Plan to address identified skill shortages.

Participant numbers have increased somewhat since 2014, and expenditure per participant has somewhat fallen, but both are anticipated to stabilise over the remainder of the Programme.

For marketing and administration purposes ICT Skills Conversion Courses are now run by the HEA as a joint initiative with Springboard Courses under the brand Springboard+. However it is treated separately for ESF reporting and accounting purposes.

An early evaluation of the programme in 2014 identified that it was successfully providing ICT up-skilling for emerging employment opportunities at higher education level for job-seekers¹⁸. Some 2,400 people had

¹⁸ An evaluation of information and communications technology (ICT) educational provision via the ICT Skills Conversion and Springboard Programmes 2011-2013, HEA, March 2014

graduated from the programme by 2014, with overall high levels of satisfaction from participants and positive feedback from employers on the quality of graduates reported. However the evaluation also identified relatively high levels of withdrawal from the programme; in some instances to take up employment but also for personal and academic reasons. In response from 2016 two-year part-time programmes were also offered.

Following from the evaluation, in 2016 two-year part-time programmes were offered in addition to the one-year full-time conversion course.

Momentum

The Momentum programme commenced in 2013 and was incorporated into PEIL at the outset of the OP under both Priorities 1 and 4. Momentum was discontinued in 2016 OP funding for it also then ceased.

It targeted the long term unemployed and those under 25 years of age, and funded upskilling programmes delivering qualifications up to Level 6 or equivalent on the NFQ, and re-skilling programmes providing qualifications also up to Level 6 or equivalent. The rationale behind the initiative was two-fold. Firstly it was to provide a further education-based route guide to the labour market for newly long-term unemployed people. Secondly, it was to be an innovative initiative with a focus on outcomes and shared risk, whereby the programme provided a system of clear financial incentives for training providers to deliver results, particularly for participants demonstrably furthest from the labour market.

Momentum sought to enhance collaboration and engagement between employers and enterprise with education and training providers in the design and delivery of relevant projects for long term unemployed individuals, and “provide solutions to the needs of both unemployed individuals and employers within themes supporting occupational clusters where demand and vacancies exist within Labour Market sectors”¹⁹.

Financial and non-financial details are shown in Table 5.5.

TABLE 5.5 ACTIVITY AND EXPENDITURE – MOMENTUM (Priority 1)									
	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	27	27	14	0	0	0	0	27	14
Participants	8,000	8,000	1,418	2,516	299	0	0	4,233	4,233
Expenditure per Participant	3,333	3,333	9,661	0	0	-	-	3,236	3,236

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

Momentum has been subject to two waves of evaluation. These evaluations were generally rigorous and positive while pointing out various learnings and areas for improvement.

¹⁹ Momentum Activity Implementation Plan, December 2017

Reported outcomes were good. In the second wave a total of 34% of participants had obtained full-time employment (at the time of the evaluation), higher than would have been likely at the time in the absence of the intervention. The evaluation found that “Momentum 2 has shown the capacity of the state to develop and implement a verifiable, outcomes-based labour-market activation intervention. Delivering more than 12,000 places within a shared-risk model of state funding has implications for the general training and employment supports sector, and may have even wider application across other national funding streams”²⁰. However, it also noted that “Momentum 2 was delivered in an economic environment that was very different from that which prevailed at the time of Momentum 1. Increased employment and decreasing unemployment and long-term unemployment had a significant impact on the general profile of the programme participants. The participant profile in Momentum 2 had reverted to the more typical LTU characteristics, as evidenced by people presenting with lower skills levels and relatively longer duration of unemployment”

This, combined with a general fall-off in the LTU level, led to a decision to halt the programme in 2017. This was based on the view that capacity to address the needs of the traditional LTU existed elsewhere in the FET system, including other Activities under PEIL.

Intra EU Mobility

The Intra-EU Mobility Activity has the objective of assisting employers to source suitably skilled workers and to assist job seekers and job-changers to find employment in the wider European market and to improve the employment prospects of young people. Under this Activity the PEIL programme supports Ireland’s implementation of the cross-community EURES (EUROpean Employment Services) initiative.

EURES is a Co-operation network facilitating free movement of workers within the EU 28 countries but also including Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. The network is composed of European Coordination Office (ECO), National Coordination Offices (NCO’s), EURES Partners and Associated EURES Partners. The National Co-ordination Office in Ireland is located within the DEASP with a core staff of six. In pursuing it’s brief, the Irish NCO works informally with a range of partners within Ireland (e.g. IBEC, the German-Irish Chamber of Commerce), and there are regional advisors spread throughout Ireland – the number of whom varies but tends to be in the range of 14 to 16.

The EURES portal links the databases of European Public Employment Services and facilitates employers who have difficulty recruiting staff in Ireland or wish to broaden their skills base to get access to workers in the other 31 associated countries (there are around 1,000 specialist EURES advisors spread across these countries). The service is free of charge to both employers and job seekers.

EURES has been in existence since 1993, while under the PEIL Programme its promotion as a recruitment platform and organisation has stepped up considerably through projects which highlight the service it provides to jobseekers and employers and through much greater visibility on social media.

²⁰ Momentum 2 Evaluation 2015-2016, Exodea/SOLAS, December 2016, available at <http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/645-Momentum%202016%20Report%20r19.pdf>

The rationale for EURES is well-articulated. Freedom of mobility is one of the four key freedoms which underpin integration of the EU. Higher factor mobility, particularly labour mobility, benefits the efficient allocation of resources and a genuine Europe wide labour market, thereby contributing towards future growth and prosperity, reducing unemployment levels and helping to plug skills gaps. In the context of BREXIT, Ireland needs to pivot more towards Europe and activities which promote a Europe-wide jobs market are ever more important. Skills bottlenecks – both in Ireland and in EURES partner economies - arising from a strengthening European economy also increases the role of EURES activities in promoting job mobility.

The core function of EURES is as a European Employment Service and its principal functions in this regard include:

- promoting mobility within the European labour market;
- providing a Europe-wide matching and placement service for employers;
- facilitating employers with information on all aspects of European recruitment; and
- providing jobseekers and job-changers with placement opportunities in Europe including pre-departure and on-arrival advice and counselling on working abroad.

Work funded under this Activity since 2015 covers a broad spectrum of inter-linked areas, including:

- EYE (Experience Your Europe) aiming to remove borders for young job seekers and incorporates three different activity programmes: a co-sponsored placement programme; Your First European Job (YFEJ); and Reactivate;
- DIALOG, an initiative that concentrates on exchanging good practice and finding solutions to issues relating to integration and mobility for EEA migrants to Ireland;
- promotion and information that includes events such as jobs fairs, information days and on-line promotion through both events and social media;
- EURES portal management incorporating both the enhancement of the portal's capabilities and the maintenance as a channel for transfer of job vacancies, job applications and CVs;
- job placement, including tailored campaigns for Irish companies experiencing skills shortages has been of increasing importance in the Irish economy in recent years; and
- relationship management – networking, developing and managing relationships with a variety of different stakeholders including employers in Ireland and in the EEA, cultural and business organisations, recruitment agencies, INTREO and EURES Members and Partners elsewhere in the EU.

Table 5.6 presents an overview of Activity progress. It can be seen that expenditure is occurring steadily each year although over the full course of the Programme it may not reach the level originally anticipated. Participant numbers are not meanwhile a relevant indicator of activity given the nature of work funded, and not reported.

TABLE 5.6 ACTIVITY AND EXPENDITURE – INTRA-EU MOBILITY									
	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	0	2.7	0	0.31	0.37	0.43	0.43	0	2.7
Participants	0	250	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Expenditure per Participant	-	10,800	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

There has been no overall evaluation of EURES activity to date. However a detailed description of some of the core strands of PEIL-supported activity is presented below.

EYE (Experience Your Europe)

EYE aims to help young jobseekers remove barriers in finding work or training opportunities in Europe. One of the three initiatives within EYE is an employer Co-sponsored Placement Programme for those aged 18-30. Applicants must be living in Ireland and either unemployed or in casual employment where they earned less than €9,776 in the twelve months prior to applying. The number of placements in this initiative is used as one of two activity indicators under the PEIL Programme. Sponsored by an Irish company, the young workers are placed in a partner company in another European country for up to 12 months. The Programme allows jobseekers to gain work experience in Europe, up-skill in their chosen profession and in most cases become proficient in another European language. Placements to date have been in Poland, Norway, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark.

DIALOG

Non-nationals in Ireland account for over 15% of the workforce and this share is increasing. DIALOG (unDerstand dIrect Advise heLp infOrm inteGrate) was launched in 2010 and is an initiative to develop a greater understanding of the issues facing EU migrant workers in Ireland. DIALOG was designed by the Irish NCO, has been recognized as “best practice’ by the European Commission and is being adopted elsewhere in the EU. It helps with migrant integration and develops solutions to problems that arise. EU migrants are entitled to the same benefits and access to activation measures and other supports (housing benefits, fuel allowances etc) as Irish workers but may be unaware of their entitlements or have poor access to relevant information. Migrant workers also often find themselves working in jobs below their skill level.

Promotion

Promoting mobility in the European labour market is EURES principal function. In recent years social media has become increasingly important in this regard. Key to this EURES developed its own website – EURES Ireland (www.euresireland.ie) – in 2016, located within the much bigger Departmental website. This was a significant project funded by PEIL that was nine months in development and launched in November 2016. At present, EURES Ireland does not have a direct job matching facility and re-directs inquiries of this nature to the EURES Portal or to JobsIreland. It is planned that the technical difficulties, including GDPR issues, delaying this interface between Ireland and the upgraded EURES Portal will be addressed before the end of 2019.

Related to promotional activities EURES representatives provide information for workers interested in moving to Ireland at recruitment fairs in other Member States. Similarly, EURES advisors from elsewhere in the EEA give presentations and information on living and working conditions in their respective countries at Irish events. Information for people moving abroad to work is also provided in nineteen languages on the EURES Ireland site.

Even though there has been considerable emphasis over the last three years in promoting EURES services facilitating labour mobility its services are still not well known, They are being used more extensively but are still under-utilised, a fact noted by the National Competitiveness Council who recommended in the 2018 submission to the Action Plan for Jobs that action be taken to further raise awareness of EURES services.

Job Placement

Direct job placement is an increasing feature of EURES activity. It involves both helping Irish companies to fill skill gaps that have arisen and responding to requests from EURES Partners in the EEA to fill their skills gaps. EURES have worked on a one-to-one basis to provide a tailored recruitment campaign for Irish companies in sectors with skill shortages (and those seeking workers with European language skills), while also linking with EURES NCOs in other Member States to help solve their skills shortages. Companies in the Irish agri-processing, horticultural, hospitality, health and ICT sectors have already (and continue to) benefit from this service.

EURES Ireland regularly networks with representatives in other Member States and has SLAs (Service Level Agreements) in place with Germany, France, Italy and Sweden. These agreements with individual countries are a more focused way of doing business and help address the shortages in Ireland. They also provide Irish jobseekers/job changers with real opportunities abroad. The SLA with Italy to recruit nurses for Irish nursing homes and hospitals indicated how working in this targeted manner yields results. At end-August 2018, 68 nurses had been recruited on the Italian Project.

5.3.2 Priority 2: Promoting Social Inclusion and combating discrimination in the labour market

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion through community-led and collaborative approaches, using local engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies. It is the second such programme, following SICAP 2015-2017, which had an overall budget of €100m and supported over 110,000 individuals on a one-to-one basis, plus over 5,000 community groups²¹.

²¹ Originally, some activities under the 2015-2017 programme, which were targeted at young unemployed people, were due to be part-funded under Priority 4 of the PEIL 2014-2020 (up to a total budget of €6m). However, this activity was subsequently withdrawn because difficulties arose in providing evidence of YEI eligibility for the activities.

The rationale or need for the intervention is grounded in the evidence to suggest that poverty and social exclusion continues to persist in pockets of Irish society, despite strong economic and labour market growth, but particularly in “hard to reach” target groups that are less likely to access mainstream employment and education/training support services. For example, the share of the population that is at risk of poverty or social exclusion remains high, as described in the analysis of the PEIL’s socio-economic context earlier, while deprivation indices show that pockets of severe deprivation continue to persist in both urban and rural areas. Furthermore, evidence from the 2015-2017 programme suggests that the needs within these marginalised target groups can be multi-faceted and complex, with the result that very intensive, resource heavy engagement can be required with individuals to address their needs²².

SICAP therefore seeks to address high and persistent levels of deprivation through targeted, locally-led approaches. It especially aims to support those who are at a higher risk of social exclusion so as to improve work readiness and access to employment and educational supports, with a focus on those from disadvantaged communities and from target groups that have been prioritised as experiencing higher risk of social exclusion. Target groups that SICAP supports include unemployed people, people living in deprived areas, people with disabilities, single parent families, people on low incomes, members of the Traveller and Roma communities, and other disadvantaged groups. There are two key goals underlying the 2018-2022 programme, which are:

- supporting communities – to support communities and target groups to engage with relevant stakeholders in identifying and addressing social exclusion and equality issues, developing the capacity of local community groups, and creating more sustainable communities;
- supporting individuals – to support disadvantaged individuals to improve the quality of their lives through the provision of lifelong learning and labour market supports.

The 2018-2022 programme is managed at a local level by 33 Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), with support from local authorities, and actions are delivered by Programme Implementers (PIs) across 51 different local areas or “lots”. It also seeks to provide a service that complements other existing service provision by public agency providers such as Intreo, the Education and Training Boards, Family Resource Centres, HSE funded programmes etc. It provides tailored supports to participants in respect of individually identified education, training and employability needs as well as broader holistic measures, and the type of supports that it provides include:

- one-to-one supports including job coaching, career guidance, mentoring and employment skills;
- workshops on personal development, career planning, CV preparation and interview skills;
- accredited and non-accredited education courses, largely on vocational topics (e.g. Safe Pass, manual handling, computers, Start Your Own Business etc);
- assisting with access to work placement programmes such as Community Employment (CE) or Tús;
- outreach and information sessions with education providers and other external agencies.

The 2018-2022 programme places a strengthened focus on assisting the most marginalised and hard to reach target groups, when compared to the 2015-2017 programme. There are more target groups for the 2018-2022

²² See Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP): End of Programme Report 2015-2017, Pobal, September 2018.

programme, including “disadvantaged women”, “people disengaged from the labour market” or “emerging needs” groups that can be identified and prioritised at the local level. The new programme also seeks to allow for more intensive engagement with individuals and community groups, and for greater flexibility and autonomy at a local level to determine local needs and priorities. Such changes appear to be consistent with the findings of an ESRI assessment of 2015-2017 programme²³.

Table 5.7 presents an overview of financial and non-financial plans. The Programme allocation to SICAP is €60m. As the Activity was only allocated to Priority 2 quite recently, no Programme expenditure took place prior to 2018.

	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
	Expenditure (Euro M)	0	30	0	0	0	0	20	0
Participants	10,500	21,500	0	0	0	0	25,000	25,654	50,000
Expenditure per Participant	0	1,395	-	-	-	-	800	800	1,200

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

Youthreach

Youthreach is an education, training and work experience programme for early school leavers. As part of the PEIL OP, it contributes to Priorities 2 and 4. Youthreach offers young people the opportunity to identify options for adult life, and provides a route to acquiring certification. It operates on a full-time year-round basis with continuous intake, and is delivered at some 110 dedicated Youthreach centres. Its aim, set out in the AIP, is as follows:

..to address the personal and social development needs of unemployed young school leavers aged between 15 and 20. The need to improve self-esteem, promote independence and personal autonomy are common among programme entrants. The programme seeks to instil a pattern of lifelong learning and integrate participants into further education and training opportunities and the labour market. Certification is available relative to the ability and career options of the individual participant. The programme also seeks to address the issue of social inclusion on a broader scale.

The rationale is to address the issue of early school leaving on the multiple grounds of equity, of personal development and prevention of later social exclusion. In doing so intervention can also obviate high costs later in life to the individual and to society as a preventative measure. Alongside a range of other activities, it was constituted part of the YEI in Ireland.

Youthreach also funds parallel provision in the ETBI Community Training Centres (see Section 5.3.4).

²³ Darmody, M and Smyth, E, The Goals and Governance of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2015-2017: A Mixed Methods Study, Economic and Social Research Institute, July 2018.

Ireland's rate of early school leaving (see Section 4.2) has been in decline for a variety of reasons. It is currently about 5%, well below the EU-wide target (10%) and actual rate (10.6%). Nevertheless, the case for continued support to those who are early school leavers remains, even if numbers are lower.

As shown below, PEIL support for Youthreach under Priority 2 is only commencing in 2018. The increase in expenditure per participant under the revised target for 2023 from the 2018 level reflects all participants being counted in the first year but only new participants in later years.

	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	0	239	0	0	0	0	46	0	118
Participants	9,850	17,050	0	0	0	0	4,000	4,000	7,400
Expenditure per Participant	0	13,996	-	-	-	-	11,418	11,418	15,216

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

The Youthreach Programme as a whole was evaluated in 2016 as part of an evaluation of the YEI. This found the Programme to be strong in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and impact. It was effective in contributing to the sustainable integration of young people into the labour market, that it has made optimum use of existing operational partnerships in so far as they were already in place and established (and hence avoided unnecessary additional costs), and that there was evidence of effective interagency working particularly involving the mainstream education sector in supporting the managed transfer of students from mainstream second level education to work towards accreditation at Junior or Leaving Certificate level in Youthreach.

SOLAS data on educational progression show that Youthreach learners have a very high level of retention on the programme and completing their courses. The 2017 Further Education and Training Services Plan²⁴ for examples shows over 96% of starters being retained.

The YEI review also noted that the Programme's capacity to deliver both second and third level education equivalents across its target age range "providing a smooth transition at a very difficult point in the VET journey for those who have exited mainstream provision."²⁵

Other data also support these conclusions. An in-depth profiling of learners at one Youthreach Centre was carried out by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and published in 2017²⁶. The study involved psychometric testing of learners, detailed structural interviews, and use of additional information.

²⁴ SOLAS, The 2017 Further Education and Training Services Plan, Final Report, Sept. 2017

²⁵ Evaluation of the operation of the YEI Element of the European Social Fund Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-20, 2016.

²⁶ A Profile of Learners in Youthreach: Research Study Report, National Educational Psychological Service, February 2017

This study presents evidence of the existence of a significant level of difficulty and risk among the young people attending the particular Youthreach Centre examined. The authors state that there is no reason to see this sample as unusual or unrepresentative of the general body of Youthreach learners across the country and so it is reasonable to consider the findings to be generally applicable. The study outcomes also accord with the international research evidence on early school leavers.

A very significant finding of the study was the number of learners who had experienced multiple adverse events while growing up. Psychological explanations of the effects of traumatic experiences gives an insight into the reasons why many of these young people may be having the kinds of difficulties that they reported and that were confirmed by the staff.

“Evidence from psychological and neurological research along with the sociology of education literature on the subject of early school leaving offer clear and highly compatible recommendations on educational approaches that can alleviate some of the negative effects of trauma in childhood and retain vulnerable, disadvantaged students within education.”

The NEPS study concludes that the Youthreach programme is very well placed to provide the setting and context for the implementation of many of the best practice recommendations. “It was notable that Centre X had not only successfully attracted and retained the kind of young person who would otherwise have exited education, their attendance had led to a significant reduction in difficulties and risk-taking behaviours and, for many, the achievement of accreditation equivalent to, or on the way to, an upper secondary level qualification.” The research therefore affirms the effectiveness of Youthreach both in attracting the correct target group and in being able to address their needs.

Priory Youthreach Centre – Case Study

Priory Youthreach Centre is one of two Centres in the Tallaght area, out of 11 such centres in the Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB area. It provides programmes for early school leavers aged 16-20, involving a one- or two-year full-time curriculum of core and elective modules. These lead to a ‘General Learning’ certification at QQI levels 3 and 4. The curriculum is oriented towards basic work and life skills including maths, communications, IT, nutrition, health and a range of culinary/cooking skills.

The Centre operates in Tallaght village, in a small former primary school premises, and has a reputation for being a well-run, progressive, dynamic and caring environment dedicated to progression of its inevitably challenged young clientele. It has capacity for 25 learners, and a staff complement of five teaching staff plus a manager and an administrative assistant. Not all staff are full-time.

Reflecting its positive profile, most learners come from the Tallaght area, via word-of-mouth from a diverse range of sources such as concerned parents or relatives, local representatives, and DEASP. However, acceptance is based on rigorous assessment of suitability. There is a strong emphasis on parental interaction given that young peoples’ challenges often reflect wider family difficulties, on counselling where needed, on

soft personal and interpersonal skills, on the discipline needed to prepare for the world of work, and on certification as a pre-condition for entry to and success in the wider workplace.

The aim is therefore to be a transformative experience for its learners, and move them from a position of challenging family backgrounds, negative perceptions of school and officialdom generally, and low self-esteem to one of having the learning, the life skills, the certification and the confidence to progress forward to PLC or other education provisions and ultimately a fulfilling life away from crime, drugs and other negativities to which disadvantaged young people are vulnerable. The Centres success in this role is evidenced in high levels of retention, progression and certification, in high levels of referrals and in positive learner feedback via surveys.

Looking ahead, the centre management feels areas for improvement include a narrower age range for Youthreach, access to better counselling service, more one-on-one time, and an improved image for 'Youthreach' in general and with ETBs, and of course more resources per head.

Benefits and value-for-money for society as a whole, and for the public expenditure, involve avoidance of potential costs later in learners' life cycle including on healthcare, crime and social services.

A comprehensive and in-depth evaluation is now close to completion that includes longitudinal analysis of outcomes. Preliminary findings from this review, already in the public domain are presented in the text box below. This will be very beneficial in future decisions about whether this evident need is best met within the current Youthreach model or whether there may be other approaches to meeting early leavers' needs.

Some Preliminary Findings from National Youthreach Evaluation²⁷

SOLAS has commissioned a major in-depth evaluation of Youthreach. The evaluation is intended to:

- be a comprehensive analysis of Youthreach provision through both Youthreach Centres and Community Training Centres;
- incorporate multiple perspectives (participants/learners, teachers/instructors and co-ordinators/managers);
- capture the voice of young people who have disengaged from school; inform policy and practice regarding provision for early school leavers.

The study involves a mix of desk-research, a national survey of Youthreach managers, analysis of existing data on school leavers, case studies and consultative workshops. The results are not yet available, but preliminary findings have been presented to stakeholders.

Based on the survey data, Youthreach participants are typically in the 16-19 age bracket, they mostly have a primary and junior cert, over 40% live in jobless households, and a similar number have emotional, psychological or health difficulties.

²⁷ Based on ESRI Presentation given in May 2018 to Irish Association of Community Training Organisations, and published on IACTO website at <http://www.iactto.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Evaluation-of-the-National-Youthreach-Programme.pdf>

Areas where benefits are perceived for participants include positive learning experiences and social/life skills (over 80%), and significantly improved life chances, qualifications, literacy, numeracy, learner retention (all over 60%).

As assessed by managers, nearly 30% of participants progress into employment, nearly a quarter to post-leaving certificate studies and a similar number to other education, training.

According to Senior Managers, the programme as a whole:

- provides a distinctive programme, which
 - is learner-centred and responsive to needs
 - appropriately provides for “small group” learning settings
 - provides a range of supports with an emphasis on life-skills and personal development
- is served well by being a national programme with local flexibility to address learners’ needs.
- is strong on building transversal skills – confidence, decision making, and personal and inter-personal skills.

Co-ordinators and managers consider the most important successful outcomes as progression to further education, training and employment, development of soft skills, certification, and having a positive experience of education.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs)

The age of criminal responsibility in Ireland is 12 years (or 10/11 for some serious offences), while the Children Act 2001 defines a child as somebody under the age of 18 years. Crime and anti-social behaviour of young people within this age cohort has been the subject of a range of programmes and policies in Ireland that all come under the banner of “youth justice”.

The GYDPs aim to help children and young people by diverting them from behaviour likely to bring them into the criminal justice system, through a programme offering opportunities for education, employment, training, and a range of wider activities which together address anti-social behaviour motivations while providing positive opportunities for social integration and personal development and progression. They have been described as follows:

“(GYDP) Projects are community based, multi-agency youth crime prevention initiatives which primarily seek to divert young people who have been involved in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour. They do this by challenging their behaviour through providing targeted interventions to facilitate personal development, promote civic responsibility and improve long-term employability prospects. The projects may also work with young people who are significantly at risk of becoming involved in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour. By doing so, the projects contribute to improving the quality of life within communities and enhancing Garda/community relations. The role of the community and other locally based agencies as partners is vital in the implementation and delivery of the GYDPs. The projects provide an important support to An Garda Síochána and Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs) in particular, in the

implementation of the Statutory Diversion Programme as set out in Part 4 of the Children Act, 2001(as amended)”²⁸.

The first two GYDPs were established in 1991, and the programme has grown incrementally in the period since to reach 105 projects today. Projects are contracted to community-based organisations by the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS), part of the DJE, to deliver multi-annual programmes in specific localities, typically in areas of high or severe social disadvantage and marginalisation.

Young people having offended, or those at risk of engaging in criminal and anti-social behaviour, are referred to the projects by Garda JLOs, where they are risk-assessed with respect to issues such as offending history, family circumstances, peer relations, substance use, education, personality, attitudes and disposition. Following this they begin a tailored programme of interventions which attempt to reduce risks, address the causes of inappropriate and anti-social behaviour, provide progression paths, and encourage responsibility and self-development. Projects typically work from a “centre” where participants regularly attend which are staffed by appropriately qualified and trained youth workers, and different participants may be enrolled over varying durations depending on their needs and progress.

GYDPs are fully-funded by the IYJS, and have benefited from ESF support over successive programmes. A newly-articulated policy statement – “Tackling Youth Crime in Ireland” – was issued by the IYJS in 2014, which re-iterated the Government’s commitment to the GYDPs and their place in the youth justice system and in influencing youth conduct and behaviour so as to avoid the negative consequences of criminal justice sanction and processes on them and wider society. From such an approach it anticipated a range of positive outcomes, including:

- a downward trend in crime and reduced recidivism;
- a downward trend in detention;
- strategies and interventions to combat crime based on sound data and evidence of what has been found to work well;
- young people at serious risk of offending being identified at the earliest opportunity and their risks and needs adequately assessed;
- greater provision and support of evidence-based interventions for young people and young people at risk; and
- positive change and learning outcomes for young people.

Table 5.9 shows PEIL progress to date and overall plans under the GYDP Activity. From 2016, the second year of PEIL expenditure, annual funding, participants and expenditure per participant have been stable and are expected to remain so.

²⁸ Progress Report on Garda Youth Diversion Programme Development 2009-2011, Irish Youth Justice Service, 2014

TABLE 5.9 ACTIVITY AND EXPENDITURE - GYDPs									
	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	12	73	0	11	13	13	14	12	75
Participants	18,000	27,000	0	4,393	1,526	1,469	1,450	8,838	11,738
Expenditure per Participant	639	2,696	-	2,570	8,547	9,047	9,414	5,801	6,398

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

The GYDPs in aggregate have approximately 4,000 - 4,500 participants each year (the Table above shows actual participants in 2015 and new starters only for subsequent years). While there hasn't been a comprehensive evaluation to date, in consultations the IYJS has indicated the intention to commission an evaluation of the initiative in 2019.

There is evidence in Ireland and internationally of declining rates of youth crime, although the factors causing it are uncertain, with some opinion pointing towards the effectiveness of diversionary programmes and policies, other views pointing towards education and schooling, and wider views suggesting rates are not so much declining as normalising following a period of abnormally-high incidence.

The GYDPs are however more likely to expand than decline over the medium term in Ireland, due to their perceived effectiveness in reducing offending and promoting pro-social behaviour, and to their limited geographical coverage currently, whereby large numbers of appropriate participants are not referred to projects currently by virtue of living outside the catchment areas of existing projects. It should be noted however that the activity and expenditure profile for the remainder of the PEIL programme does not factor in any general expansion that might arise, which would be a separate policy decision and may or may not give rise to a change in PEIL's support for the Activity (i.e. any expansion could involve exchequer support only). Some programmes of long-term research have been commissioned, and a revised mission, organisational structure and set of support arrangements and reporting requirements are in preparation, in anticipation of a renewed and expanded set of GYDPs commencing in 2019/20.

Young Persons Probation Projects

The Probation Service is the national criminal justice agency responsible for the management and delivery of non-custodial sentences and offender supervision in Ireland. It delivers core offender assessment and offender management services, and its work falls under four principal categories:

- offender supervision and sentence management;
- community service and community return;
- Young Persons Probation (YPP); and
- community partner initiatives.

The objectives of the Young Persons Probation (YPP) projects are to support the work of the Probation Service in working with young people who are under supervision by the Probation Service or at risk of becoming involved in crime. Young people are referred to the service by the Courts for supervision, or are the subject of assessments requested by the Courts or other criminal justice agencies, and services delivered can include provision of family

conferences, community supervision, and through care and aftercare engagement with young people who have been in detention.

Each year the Probation Service is presented with many hundreds of new referrals of young people from the courts, and continues to provide supervision services for large numbers of young people serving such orders:

- in 2014, 861 young people were referred (i.e. newly referred by the Courts to the Probation Service), while 740 were supervised (under ongoing supervision by the Probation Service having been referred in previous years);
- in 2015, 888 were referred while 811 were supervised;
- in 2016, 725 were referred, while 595 were supervised.

The numbers of young people coming through the Irish Courts system has, according to the Probation Service, fallen somewhat in the past few years, due in part to the effectiveness of measures designed to divert them from criminal behaviour and keep juveniles out of the criminal justice system. Such a focus on diverting children and young people from criminal activity is a cornerstone of criminal justice policy, and an active goal within this is to ensure there are effective community-based sanctions available to the Courts, and hence allow the detention of children and young people to be used as an absolute last resort.

The PEIL Programme supports four of 18 national YPP projects funded by the Probation Service, each of which deals with other young persons at risk of criminal behaviour as well as those referred by the Courts. As such they collectively serve only a small proportion of the target population of young people referred to the Probation Service on an ongoing basis, and an ongoing need for the services the projects deliver is anticipated by the Probation Service.

The PEIL Programme support under this Activity is directed towards four of 18 community-based projects that deliver services to young offenders in their communities. The supported projects are described below.

1. Le Chéile, is a nationwide mentoring service which seeks to address offending behaviour of young people referred to it, and to make positive changes in their lives. Such services are provided for young people under a Mentor (Family Support) Order, or where mentoring is a condition of a Probation Bond. A one-to-one mentoring programme is delivered by a trained volunteer mentor for 3 hours a week for up to 2 years. The service is offered from seven centres across the country, including in the major cities.
2. Céim ar Chéim is a community-based education and training day centre based in Moyross, Limerick, which provides education and training, outreach, counselling, restorative justice and support and awareness programmes for young people involved or at risk of being involved in anti-social behaviour. It provides full- and part-time programmes that blend academic learning with the development of positive behaviour, responsibility, self-confidence, lifeskills, resilience, determination and other attributes to strengthen and direct the person's personal and social development.
3. Southill Outreach is a community-based support and advocacy project based in a particularly disadvantaged part of Limerick. It delivers preventative and supportive work to young people who may present or be referred with issues such as substance misuse, homelessness, offending behaviour and poor or non-attendance in school or training courses. It provides a range of vocational and developmental programmes and activities which comprises individual, group and family work and trained outreach workers are assigned to and advocate for each young person. Its principal aims are to engage and support

young offenders in developing positive and progressive life styles and making positive life choices and thereby minimising and eliminating offending behaviour.

4. Dóchas don Óige is a community-based outreach centre based in Galway city that focuses on providing “second chance” learning, support and development programmes for young offenders. Its focus is on helping young people achieve second level educational qualifications through participation on an accredited training programme at an equivalent qualification level. Progression to higher level qualification and vocations is actively encouraged, while participants are also provided with a range of supports, information, advocacy, counselling and work experience opportunities aimed at addressing anti-social behaviour and directing young people towards progressive and positive life choices.

All of the projects work intensively with participants to address personal and social challenges, to provide learning and development paths and opportunities, to provide individual counselling and other support, and to help identify routes to successful community and social integration.

Financial and non-financial progress is shown below.

	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
	Expenditure (Euro M)	2	12	0	2	2	2	2	2
Participants	664	996	0	322	170	172	170	834	1,174
Expenditure per Participant	2,861	11,687	-	5,457	10,471	11,279	11,412	8,893	9,881

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

Participant numbers, including all participating in 2015 as well as additional individuals participating since, are in line to reach a 2018 milestone of 834, with annual expenditure per participant reasonably stable.

There has not been a systematic evaluation of the YPP projects, and the Probation Service has informed us that such an evaluation is intended during 2019. One of the Programme-funded projects (Le Chéile) published an evaluation of its mentoring service in 2017. Key findings are summarised below.

In 2017 Le Chéile published the results of an independent evaluation of its mentoring programme²⁹. The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach to examine the impact of the mentoring programme for young people and of the mentoring activity provided for parents, to assess the mentor-mentee relationship, and the mentoring process. It also presented findings within a “Social Return on Investment” framework that considered the programme’s costs against a range of monetised benefits associated with more positive individual and societal outcomes.

²⁹ O’Dwyer, K (2017) Reducing Youth Crime in Ireland: An Evaluation of Le Chéile Mentoring. Le Chéile, Ireland.

The evaluation found that mentoring has a range of positive impacts for young people and parents who engage with the service. For young people these include reduction in alcohol and substance misuse, improved self-confidence, greater hopefulness and happiness, greater participation in structured activities outside the home, greater participation in work, education and training, improved interpersonal relationships and communication skills, reduced association with negative peers, and reduced offending behaviour. Such positive effects and outcomes were observed for most service recipients, and the extent ranged from moderate improvements in some areas to substantive improvements across many or all.

For parents that receive mentoring, the observed effects include improved self-confidence, enhanced self-esteem and emotional well-being, improved parenting skills and confidence, and greater involvement in activities outside the home.

The evaluation concluded that the programme generated a substantial social return on investment, with the returns spanning improved family and peer relations, increased involvement in activities, greater engagement in work, education and training, reduced offending and re-offending, reduced detention and reduced health costs as well as others.

The model of mentoring provision was also found to be robust and of considerable merit, including the matching of mentors and mentees, relationship building and goal-setting, the mix of joint activities, the role of co-ordinators, the flexibility of the engagement process, the voluntary status of mentors, and the structures and processes for ongoing review and closure.

The research found strong evidence of need for early intervention among both young people and parents, and the need to avoid much hardship through early access to such programmes, or the need to avoid developing hardened offending or anti-social behaviour patterns if already offending and going through the courts and legal system.

The evaluation made a range of recommendations that cover the expansion of the service, the further identification and development of best practices, the means to establish earlier intervention, the mentoring of young people from care backgrounds, mentoring in detention, referral criteria, parental involvement, case reviews and case tracking.

Disability Project

The Ability programme was launched by DEASP in September 2017 and aims to promote employment prospects, and meaningful social roles, for young people with disabilities. Its specific objectives are to:

- bring young people aged 15-29 with disabilities who are not “work ready” closer to the market using a range of person-centred supports;
- assist young people aged 15-29 with disabilities to develop the confidence and independence required to participate in education, training and employment;
- assist young people aged 15-29 with disabilities at key transition points between education, training and employment;
- support young people aged 15-29 with disabilities who are not in education, training or employment to access and participate in education training and employment;

- build the capacity of mainstream employment services, education and training providers to support the progression of young people with disabilities; and
- build the capacity of employers to recruit and retain young people with disabilities within their workforce.

Promoting equal opportunity is one of the EU's three horizontal principles and people with disabilities (including mental health) are one of the nine grounds for discrimination. The labour market difficulties facing the disabled is evident from the Irish 2016 Census:

- labour force participation for those with disabilities, at 30.2%, was only half that of the general population's rate of 61.4%;
- the unemployment rate among those with disabilities was 26.3%, more than double the 12.9% rate for the general population; and
- people with disabilities also have lower education levels with 13.7% of those aged 15-50 having only completed primary school compared to just 4.3% of the general population.

Reflecting this, there is a strong and on-going need for policies and programmes to address the problems faced by those with disabilities both to encourage entry to the labour market and training programmes and to transition them into employment.

The ex-post evaluation of the Disability Activation Project (funded by the ESF under HCIOP 2007-13), the recommendations of the 2017 report "Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities" and of the "Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2025" all helped shape the contours of the Ability Programme. In particular, and reflecting their low labour force participation rates, Ability focuses strongly on pre-activation and providing funding to projects which bring young participants with a disability nearer to the market. The authors of the ex-post evaluation suggested future programmes encompass personal development and social inclusion as part of their design, although in this case within the context of bringing participants who are not work-ready closer to the labour market. Nevertheless, the six specific objectives of the Programme still encompass a broad-spectrum approach that supports projects transitioning participants into employment and building employer capacities to recruit and retain young persons with disabilities.

The programme is administered for the DEASP by Pobal (an organisation which manages Government supports for communities and local agencies towards achieving social inclusion and development). Pobal advertised for submissions, with a closing date of end-January 2018, outlining grant availability for appropriate projects ranging from minimum grant of €200,000 and a maximum of €750,000.

The Programme attracted a total of 59 project applications. The initial plan had envisaged that possibly around 16 projects would be funded but this was expanded to a final number of 27 that were awarded funding. The quality of the proposals, evaluated by Pobal, was the reason for this. As a result, an increase in the budget allocated to Ability was put in place.

Table 5.11 presents an overview of the Activity's delivery status.

TABLE 5.11 ACTIVITY AND EXPENDITURE – DISABILITY PROJECT									
	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	0	10	0	0	0	0	1	0	16
Participants	0	2,900	0	0	0	0	600	600	2,662
Expenditure per Participant	-	3,448	-	-	-	-	1,667	1,667	6,011

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

With contracts for projects only signed in July 2018 there was very little on-the-ground activity by end-September 2018. However, 26 of the projects are organising or already up and running with one commencing in 2019. Details on all 27 projects are available on the Pobal website. The expectation at present is that Ability will draw down all of its €16 mn budget. The original estimate of expenditure per participant appears to have been significantly underestimated, and the revised target a more appropriate reflection of the costs involved.

Many of the 27 projects approved for funding incorporate a broad-spectrum approach to improving employment prospects although most have some form of coaching or training as a core element. Eleven of the 27 projects incorporate work placements. While all 27 projects address the core aim of the Programme – improving employment prospects for young people with disabilities, none address building the capacities of employers or mainstream services, education and training providers (which are specific objectives of the Activity).

Pobal have employed an independent consultancy firm to assess and monitor the rollout of Ability and its constituent projects and to provide an interim review in early 2020 and final report by 2021.

Integration and Employment of Migrants

The policy background for this Activity included a commitment in the Programme for Government to “promote policies which integrate minority ethnic groups in Ireland, and which promote social inclusion, equality, diversity and the participation of immigrants in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities.”

Further, the European Union’s Common Basic Principles on integration of migrants state that “Employment is a key part of the integration process and is central to the participation of immigrants, to the contributions immigrants make to the host society, and to making such contributions visible.....Basic knowledge of the host society’s language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is essential to successful integration.” While increasing the employment rate of adults was a key national objective under the Europe 2020 Strategy, at the time of programme preparation Ireland’s adult population was 12% non-Irish, of whom significant numbers were non-EU nationals. The AIP therefore undertook that Programme financial support under this Activity would target “the most vulnerable of legally resident migrants who are having difficulty accessing employment because of language difficulties, lack of training or social skills. The measure proposes to increase the levels of employability of the participants”. The following overall objective for the Activity was set out:

“To implement a programme which will increase the employment possibilities for the participants through a comprehensive employment programme embracing all stages of preparation which will include language training around the work place, social skills training and a mentoring programme that will lead to long term placement of the participants in either employment or further training, where appropriate.

Participants will be given the skills and support to become economically viable. The programme will include work place language and social skills training, CV preparation, interview skills; referral to other services will be made as appropriate. This focused approach will ensure that the overall objectives of the programme are met”.

The EU Funds Unit of the DJE launched a Call for Proposals in late 2016 seeking funding applications for projects to enhance migrant employability that would be “aimed at the most vulnerable legally resident migrants who are experiencing barriers to participation and employment because of language difficulties, lack of training or social exclusion. The object of the activity is to increase the employment potential for such persons. Indicative actions, all of which must be specifically targeted at migrant employability, could include employment training, workplace language training, training in CV preparation, interview skills, work placements, referral to other services (where appropriate), and mentoring, all with the objective of placement of the participants in either employment or further training”³⁰.

Public, private and voluntary bodies were eligible to apply for a minimum of €250,000 in funding and to operate for between 1 and 4 years. The projects would explicitly target either:

- EEA Nationals who are resident in Ireland; and/or
- Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) with permission to enter employment in Ireland.

The full Activity financial allocation of €3.3m was allocated across five successful projects in early 2017. The projects are:

1. EPIC – an employment programme for people from immigrant communities based in Dublin and surrounding areas, delivering support services to a target number of 1,280 participants aimed at raising skills, providing work experience, mentoring and job finding;
2. New Start Programme – an outreach programme to 250 disadvantaged migrants in the Kilkenny area, providing English language and IT competency tuition and assistance, provide job-readiness programmes, and place all participants in work, further education/training, self-employment or a relevant support agency.;
3. JUMP – a programme targeting 560 migrant participants in the County Meath area, focused on providing English language tuition, career planning, work experience, coaching and mentoring, and support in relation to employment rights information and awareness;
4. Migrant Access Programme – a nationwide initiative aimed at empowering 240 disadvantaged migrants through a process of needs assessment and tailored language and work-preparation training and support as well as a programme of information provision; and
5. Welcome to Work – a programme seeking to engage 507 marginalised migrants at various locations in Ireland and progress a high proportion into employment through a programme of assessment and personalised intervention, training and support in English language, employability skills, volunteering and job-search strategies.

³⁰ Guidance that accompanied Call for Proposals

Table 5.12 shows an overview of spend and activity.

TABLE 5.12 ACTIVITY AND EXPENDITURE – INTEGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT OF MIGRANTS									
	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	0	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
Participants	0	1,624	0	0	0	450	1,000	1,450	2,300
Expenditure per Participant	-	2,047	-	-	-	1,473	915	1,088	1,430

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

The trend in expenditure, participants and expenditure per participant all reflect the underlying process, whereby five projects commenced in 2017, spend occurred immediately in relation to preparatory work, their participant numbers increased significantly in 2018, and both are expected to increase steadily over the remaining period as the projects become fully operational and work through their delivery phases.

The EU Funds Unit is actively monitoring the five projects, which over their respective periods will utilise and absorb all Programme funding under the Activity.

Tus Nua

Tus Nua is a project that supports women leaving prison and women referred from the community with a history of offending, with respect to safe supported housing, a positive living environment, and the transition and progression towards positive reintegration in the community. Its aims are to:

- prevent the risk of re-offending by recognising users' short- and long-term needs;
- provide users with life-skills and opportunities, promoting independent living;
- encourage users to take a positive role in the community and avail of communal support; and
- challenge and address barriers faced by women with a history of offending.

The initiative began in 2002 and is delivered and managed by DePaul, a charity working to support homelessness, and funded by the Department of Justice and Equality through the Probation Service.

The objectives of the Activity are to:

- provide needs assessment and planned support to women offenders through a structured case management approach; and
- support women offenders to develop skills for independent living and personal development.

The project provides residential accommodation for women leaving prison for a period of 6 months post-release, along with individual rooms with kitchen and furnished living accommodation as well as access to communal areas. The women are each allocated key workers that design and put in place a support plan involving programmes in life skills, budgeting, alcohol harm reduction, detox access, and physical and mental health support, which is delivered over the 6-month maximum duration of their stay.

As seen in Table 5.13, the Activity provides resource-intensive supports to relatively small numbers of participants, reflecting its design and the needs of the target group. Participant numbers increased between 2015 and 2016, but are expected to remain stable each year from that point until Programme-end.

	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
	Expenditure (Euro M)	0	2	0	0	1	1	1	0
Participants	0	126	0	17	32	35	30	114	174
Expenditure per Participant	-	18,992	-	15,529	13,594	16,943	19,767	16,535	13,793

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

The Activity is contracted, funded and monitored by the Probation Service. While the number of participants entering the programme has been reasonably high, completion rates are low for various reasons including the complexity of needs that present, the communal nature of the service which requires that equal consideration be given to participants and their co-habitants, and the need for strict adherence to certain principles (e.g. non-tolerance of alcohol or substance abuse). However those working closest with the participants feel that even small amounts of support and direction are beneficial to most participants, and referrals to other supports and agencies can have important positive outcomes. The service has also begun working within the prison setting prior to release, and in supporting female prisoners on temporary release.

Gender Equality

Unlike in most other Activities, the PEIL Programme has been directed towards new programmes of action under this Activity, rather than for the support of ongoing interventions. The AIP for this Activity described its objectives as follows:

To develop and deliver one or more training models to offer self - developmental training in employment related skills on a part time basis to women who are currently detached from the labour market and who are interested in entering/re-entering employment.

The Activity will also include an entrepreneurship strand in line with the objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy, which refers to entrepreneurship as a powerful driver of economic growth and job creation. In order to address the gender gap in entrepreneurial activity (as per the thematic objective of this AIP), there will be a focus on supporting business women (irrespective of their economic status) to realise their full business potential.

The purpose is to increase women's overall participation in the labour market, while offering women increased economic independence; decrease their risk of poverty in older years, associated with detachment from the labour market; and to foster the achievement of the female employment target in Europe 2020 and meeting the objectives of EU Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan.

The EU Funds Unit of the DJE launched a first Call for Proposals in late 2016 inviting applications for funding to deliver projects under this Activity for a period of up to three years. Two strands of activity would be funded:

- Strand A: Women Returning to the Workforce; and

- Strand B: Women’s Entrepreneurship.

The rationale for the Activity and its inclusion in PEIL lay in the overarching Europe 2020 target of increasing both male and female employment rates, the comparatively low rates of both at the outset of the Programme, but particularly the female rate, and the low levels of female entrepreneurship relative to those of males³¹.

Policy statements including the Action Plan for Jobs and Pathways to Work also highlighted individuals who have the potential and desire to be more active in the labour market, although not formally unemployed, as valid target groups for job activation measures. Women in this category were to be targeted under Strand A, while women interested in starting a business would be the target group under Strand B.

The initial call allocated €4.5m towards Strand A projects and €1m towards Strand B projects, and any public, private or voluntary body was eligible to apply. In the event, funding awards amounting to just over €4m were allocated to 14 projects under Strand A, and approximately €1.2m to 4 projects under Strand B. Table 5.14 shows the formal position with respect to progress.

	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	1	11	0	0	0	1	2	1	11
Participants	4,480	7,040	0	0	0	1,004	1,000	2,004	2,749
Expenditure per Participant	223	1,563	-	-	-	1,180	2,022	1,600	4,001

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

All of the projects already awarded funding are being closely monitored by DJE, and are reporting regularly with regard to financial and operational progress, with key objectives, milestones, outcomes each reported on systematically. All are currently deemed to be generally “on track”.

A further Call for Proposals is planned in which the remaining PEIL funding under the Activity will be allocated to projects.

“Working Women” is a project aimed at supporting women to become active in the labour market, which is being financially supported under Strand A of the Gender Equality Activity of PEIL 2014-2020 (from which it was awarded a grant of c.€242,000 over three years). It is being led by Equal Ireland, a community-based not-for-profit charitable trust active in designing, developing and delivering a range of flexible accredited educational programmes aimed particularly at adults who for many reasons may not have fulfilled their educational potential.

³¹ As was evident for example in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2014

The project has sought to identify, recruit and guide 165 women from the Galway city and county area who wish to gain a qualification with a view to joining or returning to the active labour market, with candidates coming from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and circumstances. The programme seeks to build participants' 'self' and 'academic' confidence, develop relevant skills and knowledge, improve communication and self-presentation abilities, and ultimately allow them to gain beneficial employment while still having the option of continuing their education and training. A tiered structure is offered, with participants able to join at a level appropriate to them, and to advance from lower to higher levels. The levels are:

- a Foundation Level, the accredited option for which offers 60 credits earning the applicant a QQI level 6 Certificate Award;
- an Intermediate Level, the accredited option for which offers 60 credits earning the applicant a QQI level 6 Higher Certificate Award; and
- an Advanced Level, the accredited option for which offers 60 credits earning the applicant a QQI level 7 Certificate Award (Ordinary Degree equivalent).

Among the modules delivered are at foundation level are "learning to learn", communications, ICT, everyday numbers, enterprise development and humanities, while those at intermediate level include office and financial management, campaigning and media, psychology, organisational management, and Ireland and EU studies. The modules at advanced level include community development, enterprise development, ICT, financial management, applied human resource management, and job-seeking strategies.

Accreditation is provided by a number of Institutes of Technology.

As is the case for all supported projects under the Gender Equality Activity, the promoters report regularly and systematically to the DJE in relation to progress against pre-agreed targets and milestones, and in the case of this project, progress to mid-2018 is satisfactory:

- participant recruitment was effective and successful;
- delivery of foundation level modules was at or ahead of target;
- the numbers of participants having completed a prior learning portfolio and job seeking plan was on target;
- the numbers accomplishing intermediate and advanced qualification were anticipated to meet or exceed targets.

Discussions were held with a number of project staff and promoters to elicit viewpoints and perspectives on the project, its goals, challenges, likely successes, and learning points.

The ultimate aim is to provide the means of transitioning women from non-engagement with education, training and the labour market, to full engagement, equipped with appropriate skills, confidence, qualifications and knowledge, and the promoters anticipate substantive success in this respect. Practical aspects of planning, initiating and delivering the project have not brought any surprises, although the participant cohort have departed somewhat from the promoters' expectations in two respects:

- their self confidence at the outset which has been lower than anticipated;

- their ambition, once evident, which has been higher than anticipated.

This has required staff and managers to emphasise confidence-building activity and work, but has also meant that higher numbers wish to and are likely to progress to intermediate and particularly advanced levels than originally planned for. Ultimate impacts are expected to include the qualifications achieved, high levels of transition into employment, higher degrees of community and civic engagement and activity, greatly-enhanced confidence and esteem, and impacts with respect to leadership, with many participants likely to become role models encouraging others to follow similar paths, including intergenerationally within families.

Challenges have included overcoming initial self-confidence deficits, and practical challenges, most critically childcare constraints. While the timetabling of coursework has always sought not to conflict with childcare responsibilities, occasional unscheduled constraints have inevitably arisen. What has been surprising has been the absence of any contingency efforts or support from family or wider resources when this occurs – participants still prioritise and fulfil that role over everything else. However the flexibility of aspects of timetabling has been helpful to overcome these problems.

Numerous factors are considered critical success determinants:

- the experience, knowledge, and networks of the promoters/contractors;
- the emphasis on peer learning and the ability to structure delivery within small groups;
- project flexibility;
- the emphasis on, and means to gain, recognition of prior learning (RPL);
- the accredited status of the qualifications; and
- practical aspects of course-work, and the emphasis put on understanding and utilising participants' own talents and capabilities.

The ESF involvement is also considered important. Irrespective of opinions as to whether financial support would be provided by Government for such projects in its absence, the ESF and EU dimension is felt to attach important status and gravitas to the initiative which adds to its attractiveness for participants, its perceived legitimacy by them, its importance, its expression of official policy, and its national and EU-wide relevance and significance. All of these are felt to matter at the outset and throughout the delivery of the project and the involvement of participants.

Contextual considerations are also important for the project's prospects and success, and for similar projects and activity. The economic recovery is seen as providing employment opportunities and incentives for women working in the home that haven't existed for many years. Flexible and mobile working models are increasingly available, acceptable and practiced. Also considered important are social and cultural trends and developments, including those supporting gender equality, feminism, gender recognition and diversity. The heightened profile and awareness of women in leadership positions, the "me-too" movement, the outcomes of the marriage-equality and abortion referenda, and the official and unofficial work advocating and championing equality and gender rights, are all perceived as providing momentum and encouragement for such projects and their participants in the current environment.

Key lessons the promoters would point to as relevant to wider policy and practice are:

- the critical importance of these types of projects in providing the platform to transition inactive women to becoming active in education and the labour market. Their self-perceived “distance” from such activity, family structures and responsibilities, and low confidence (often unnecessarily so), mean such transitions are unlikely to occur for significant numbers of women in their absence;
- recognition of prior learning (RPL) is very important, to allow projects to offer the appropriate blend and level of courses and modules, and to encourage participation and completion;
- target group definitions need to be updated and remain relevant. Disadvantaged women and groups need to be defined more widely than with respect to financial disadvantage within family structures only;
- the Call for Proposals was managed very well, and it and the ongoing systems of reporting and monitoring are clear, consistent and supportive;
- delivering such programmes on any greater scale or breadth requires more consistent, structured and fixed funding and delivery arrangements.

5.3.3 Priority 3: Investing in Education, Training and Life Long Learning with a view to upskilling and re-skilling the labour force

Third Level Access

The Third Level Access Scheme is comprised of two programmes: the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) and the Fund for Students with a Disability (FSD). Both funds aim to enhance retention in HEIs and attainment of third level qualifications by disadvantaged and disabled students, thereby supporting their access to the labour market. The SAF supports students facing temporary or ongoing financial hardship, while the FSD supports students with disabilities to overcome barriers to participation in Higher Education, through provision of necessary assistance and supports. The two programmes are administered separately as sub-programmes by the HEA. The funds are available to Universities, Institutes of Technology, and other public and private HEI’s, based on applications from the HEI’s.

Table 5.15 shows the status regarding financial and non-financial progress. The initial milestones and targets have been significantly revised to reflect individuals participating. The Activity has been actively operating and spending since 2014, and expenditure and participant numbers have been reasonably stable each year.

TABLE 5.15 ACTIVITY AND EXPENDITURE – THIRD LEVEL ACCESS									
	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	6	22	7	7	9	10	10	6	22
Participants	132,254	185,296	14,700	7,300	12,000	9,000	9,000	52,000	52,000
Expenditure per Participant	48	121	461	978	754	1,056	1,086	812	431
SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY									

Both programmes have been reviewed by the HEA³²; both were found to be highly valued and heavily relied upon by students. While these programmes are part of a range of supports aimed at increasing access to third level education, the SAF and FSD have been in high demand and it is acknowledged that students from disadvantaged areas or backgrounds and students with a disability continue to be underrepresented in higher education in Ireland.

The Review of the SAF found that the largest proportion of the fund was used to assist with the costs of rent (52%), along with heating, lighting, fuel (23%), transport (15%) and childcare costs (8%). The review of the FSD found that the majority of expenditure has been on services to assist with study skills/learning supports, personal assistants, assistive technologies and targeted transport³³.

Some changes have been made following the reviews to targeting, administration and the funding allocation models. The reviews of the SAF and the FSD concluded that there was a need for both funds to be available to both full- and part-time students, to support students that by virtue of their socio-economic disadvantage could only participate in Higher Level Education on a part-time basis. Since 2017 the SAF was extended to part-time students who are lone parents or members of other access target groups. The 2017 FSD review recommended extension of the FSD supports to learners on part-time courses, and institutions have been invited to begin preparations for inclusion of learners on part-time courses and may use their allocations to assist students on part-time courses on a pilot phased approach.

Back to Education Initiative

The BTEI is designed to help people with less than upper second level education increase their life and labour market opportunities by furthering their education and accreditation. It supports Priority 3 of the OP. Its aim is to increase the base of adults with upper second level education and/or qualifications at QQI FETAC Levels 3, 4, 5 and 6 and relevant or updated skills to meet the needs of the economy, through the provision of a range of part-time learning opportunities that enable learners to reconcile participation in education with family and/or employment responsibilities. The part-time provision is flexible in relation to timing (i.e. mornings, afternoons, evenings, and block) and to facilitate progression to achievement of full awards over time.

Table 5.16 provides an overview of progress.

TABLE 5.16 ACTIVITY AND EXPENDITURE – BACK TO EDUCATION INITIATIVE									
	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	22	101	13	13	19	19	19	22	101
Participants	140,600	208,600	17,000	7,500	14,000	16,344	11,000	65,844	87,844
Expenditure per Participant	156	484	746	1,735	1,344	1,151	1,711	1,248	1,149
SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY									

³² Crowe Horwath, Review of the Student Assistance Fund (2016); and Review of the Fund for Students with Disabilities RSM/PACEC (2017).

³³ Crowe Horwath, „Review of the Student Assistance Fund p.21-23. ; RSM/PACEC Review of the FSD p.29.

High levels of aggregate expenditure and participant numbers are reported each year under the BTEI, which has been in existence for many years prior to PEIL. The expenditure per participant has been reasonably stable based on the reported activity, and one of the lower-cost interventions within the Programme per-participant.

The continued need of this target group is unquestioned and the underlying concept and approach has much merit. However no distinct evaluation has been undertaken. SOLAS plans to commission an in-depth evaluation of BTEI in 2018.

Adult Literacy

This Activity involves PEIL support to adult literacy training, as a key transversal skill area facilitating access for citizens to services and participation all across the labour market, FET and society as a whole. The AIP describes its aim as to “provide increased access to literacy, numeracy and language tuition for adults whose skills are inadequate for participation in modern society. It will also aim to increase the quality and capacity of the adult literacy service”.

The Activity targets adults with primary education or less and whose literacy and numeracy skills do not match Level 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The unemployed, particularly the long-term unemployed, disadvantaged groups, those under-35’s and those formerly employed in what were declining sectors such as the construction sector, as well as employed adults in need of improved basic literacy, language and numeracy skills, were all set out as potential target groups.

Some target groups identified at the outset of the OP are no longer a priority (e.g. workers leaving construction), and levels of literacy are rising. However, adult literacy remains a key challenge. At the outset of the OP it was estimated (by the OECD) that some 1 in 6 Irish adults had basic literacy problems, with a higher number having less severe difficulties. Participation is part-time of its nature, and literacy training is provided by a mix of ETBs and external staff.

Improving adult literacy (including numeracy and digital literacy) is a consistent and high-profile aim of national education and training, including FET policy and strategy. Extensive resources and efforts continue to be targeted at it involving DES, SOLAS, the ETBs and the dedicated National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).

There has also been investment in associated policy and practise development, including regarding training material and incorporation of literacy and numeracy training into other FET training. The concept of adult literacy is also broadening to be much wider than traditional literacy, and to also encompass numeracy and key digital skills³⁴.

Table 5.17 presents the details regarding financial and non-financial progress.

³⁴ See A Review of Adult Numeracy Policy and Practice in Ireland, NALA, 2017.

TABLE 5.17 ACTIVITY AND EXPENDITURE – ADULT LITERACY									
	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	20	92	15	15	21	21	21	20	92
Participants	218,000	318,000	22,750	11,000	21,000	27,392	15,500	97,642	113,142
Expenditure per Participant	92	288	650	1,395	1,003	769	1,359	956	810

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

While lower than originally estimated, the numbers of participants under this Activity is expected to be amongst the highest across the entire Programme, and high numbers have been reported each year since 2014. The costs per participant are relatively low, reflecting the non-intensive nature of the intervention.

There has not been a singular thorough independent evaluation of FET adult literacy provision over the course of the PEIL programme to date. Consultations indicate a perception that provision is generally seen as effective, with continued focus on improving the quality of support and provision. The consistency of provision is unclear, both across ETBs and across education and training programmes, and the nature of needs may result in a blurring of lines between literacy provision and wider education and training, with the former increasingly necessary to provide as part of wider education and training programmes.

SOLAS 2017 data show that in that year 93% of starters on such programmes were retained, 91% of these were due to complete in 2017, but only 30% of completions were accredited.

Integrating Literacy and Numeracy into Wider FET

Literacy and Numeracy training is a consistent priority in FET in Ireland, and reflecting this Adult Literacy is an activity under Priority 4. The PEIL period has also been one of experimentation and innovation regarding more integrated literacy and numeracy (ILN) in other parts of the OP and the wider FET delivered by ETBs

This innovation commenced in Galway and Roscommon ETB (GRETB) which initiated a more interpreted approach in a range of apprenticeship programmes. This demonstrated the potential of ILN to enhance performance in early theory-based subjects, leading in turn to greater learner confidence, and greater ability to succeed in later higher-level modules including those in Institutes of Technology. This work resulted in GRETB receiving an EU Commission award as an “Innovative VET Provider”. With SOLAS support many other ETBs were stimulated to pilot ILN across in range of other FET settings.

A review of this experience was carried out in 2017³⁵. This highlighted the diversity of FET settings in which ILN was being used, and the variety of approaches being used. Most involve parallel vocational and literacy, numeracy models, but more embedded cases were also identified. The more embedded approach has long been used in Youthreach.

³⁵ ICF Consulting, Integrating Literacy & Numeracy: Final Report, SOLAS, Feb 2018

The review found that literacy and numeracy were mostly delivered by specialist literacy and numeracy tutors. However, these tutors would typically research the learners' courses to contextualise the learning for particular sectors, in some cases the FET tutors also played a key role in reinforcing the learning and structuring their courses to ensure it is accessible to individuals with low levels of literacy and numeracy. This 'blurring of the boundaries' between the roles of literacy and numeracy and subject tutors were generally well received by learners. It connected organisation level approaches to develop a culture in which literacy and numeracy is 'everybody's business' – a mantra repeated by several of the case study providers.

There was relatively little formal assessment of literacy and numeracy skills at the end of respective programmes, although there is extensive course evaluation in ETBs. This reflects that in all cases, the literacy and numeracy training did not lead to a formal qualification. The monitoring of learner progress was mostly conducted by subject tutors, who would assess whether learners were making sufficient progress in their literacy and numeracy.

While hard evidence proved challenging, the case studies and literature also provided qualitative evidence of increased learner confidence and progression as a result of ILN. However, there is little quantitative evidence on the impact of ILN on employment or productivity. This is perhaps to be expected given that there are inherent challenges in attributing impact specifically to the integrated aspect of literacy and numeracy provision.

5.3.4 Priority 4: Youth Employment Initiative

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme

The Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) is a self-employment incentive scheme aimed at Ireland's long-term unemployed. Its objective is to encourage the long-term unemployed to take up self-employment options. All participants in the scheme must be in receipt of a relevant social welfare payment for either 9 months (234 days) continuously or 12 months (312 days) with a break of no more than 30 days. While YEI funding for the scheme commenced in 2015, it was available to eligible applicants under the age of 25 since its inception in 1993. Since the introduction of YEI funding in mid-2015 promotion to long-term unemployed youth has been enhanced.

The central element of the scheme is that participants in BTWEA retain a proportion of their unemployment assistance payment for two years while setting up a new business with a view to continuing the enterprise after this time has elapsed. The portion of a jobseeker payment retained is 100% in year 1 and 75% in year 2. However, participants in the scheme also benefit considerably from having to develop a business plan as part of the application process and the mentoring and training that is a central part of this process. Local enterprise development agencies are key players in delivering this programme - applicant business plans must be signed off by a partnership company, by a local development company, by a local enterprise office or by a Department of Social Protection case officer.

Those approved under the BTWEA may also avail of additional financial support to assist the establishment of their business through the Enterprise Support Grant (ESG), paying a total of €2,500 in any 24-month period. The applicant must make a matching contribution of at least 20% to access grant support. Applicants are also able to avail of more general tax reliefs available to new start-up businesses.

The initiative has been in existence since 1993, and modified over the last 25 years but its very longevity suggests the BTWEA is a tried and tested scheme for combatting long-term employment (LTU), so its rationale at the outset of the PEIL Programme in the face of the youth unemployment problem was clear.

Table 5.18 shows progress to date. The costs-per participant are relatively high under this scheme, although their apparent volatility is more explained by timing differences between participation and expenditure. Drop-out rates have also reportedly been lower than anticipated, leading to higher costs-per participant as the duration of their involvement is longer.

	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
	Expenditure (Euro M)	0	5	0	0	0	2	2	0
Participants	0	540	0	72	138	113	100	424	424
Expenditure per Participant	-	8,607	-	2,630	3,420	14,584	16,480	9,340	10,849

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

Result indicators for participants in 2015 suggest 62 (85%) were in employment immediately upon completion of the Activity, and the same number were in employment six months subsequently. Of the 138 participants in 2016, some 107 (78%) were in employment upon completion, and 105 (77%) were in employment six months after exiting.

The programme was recently reviewed by the DEASP³⁶. It was found to be very effective in its primary objective of providing a successful path out of long-term unemployment. The financial benefits to scheme participants – retaining their jobseeker payments – combined with initial training and mentoring support were key elements of the scheme’s effectiveness and success. Findings from a counterfactual review indicated that the numbers returning from BTWEA to welfare were low - almost three-quarters of BTWEA participants were in employment or self-employment 18 months after the end of their period on BTWEA compared to non-participants. Of the cohort that joined BTWEA Youth, during its first six months and were being funded under the programme in Jan 2016, 12% had returned to the Live Register by end Sept 2018 although only 3% were without means so some level of trading was probably going on for 97% of those who successfully participated. This points to a very successful outcome for BTWEA Youth.

The Review recommended that the scheme be continued but it also identified a number of areas where improvements could be made to make it more efficient. Many of the clarifications were administrative. They included detail on assessing client suitability and the robustness and suitability of their business plan. In particular, the business sustainability of propositions and checking against deadweight and displacement effects.

³⁶ A Review of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance, DEASP, February 2017

The strengthening Irish economy since 2013 has resulted in a substantial fall-off in the number of young unemployed persons. In 2017 youth unemployment averaged 14.4% compared to 23.4% in 2014. On the one hand, this improvement might suggest less need for programmes aimed at combatting youth unemployment but on the other the numbers of young unemployed are still high and BTWEA is a successful and effective scheme for re-integrating young participants through both training and work experience. Furthermore it appears to be particularly important outside major urban centres - areas that have benefitted less from the rapid recovery of the Irish economy in recent years.

The 2017 Review of BTWEA for all participants indicated around 75% of scheme participants do not return to welfare payments within eighteen months of completing BTWEA. For the young participants funded by PEIL 2014-20 (compliant participants who commenced between July and December 2015) the dropout rate is lower – estimated to be around 12%. The ongoing buoyancy of the Irish economy was a factor but also under-pinning this better than expected result is the training and preparatory period during which business plans are developed as this process helps towards ensuring:

- the start-up business is a good fit for the participant;
- is commercially sustainable, particularly given the advantages offered by financial assistance to the participant via their welfare payment and ESG – as the participant is the only employee in around 90% of cases, the financial benefit is relatively very important; and
- the participants have themselves “invested” in their start-up business.

While the strong economy continues to present opportunities for BTWEA start-ups the pool of eligible and willing young long-term unemployed applicants is shrinking.

Over the period since it began under PEIL, BTWEA has been very effective in putting participants on a sustainable path out of LTU. The programme incorporates training, mentoring and two years in self-employment that exposes participants to the world of work and generally provides anchors that root them in that world. The scheme is also effective and popular outside Ireland’s major urban areas and fits well with any rural re-generation objectives.

JobsPlus Incentive Scheme

JobsPlus is a scheme encouraging employers to recruit the long-term unemployed. It works by offering a financial incentive, structured as follows:

- €7,500 for a jobseeker who has been on the live register for between 1 and 2 years (for 312 days within the previous 18 months).
- €10,000 for a jobseeker under 50 years of age and who has been on the live register for over 3 years (for 936 days in the previous 42 months), or a jobseeker over 50 years of age who has been on the live register for at least 1 year (312 days within the previous 18 months). No qualifying period applies to former one parent family payment customers whose youngest child is at least 7 years of age and under 14, who transfer to the live register and are not in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance, or persons with refugee status in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance.

For youths – those under the age of 25 when entering the scheme - the €7,500 payment is available under a slightly less onerous criteria - €7,500 for an employee who has been unemployed for 4 of the previous 6 months. The

scheme pays employees each month in arrears over a two-year period and the employer must offer at least 30 hours per week.

The JobsPlus Scheme commenced in July 2013 following the discontinuation of Revenue Job Assist Scheme and the Employer Jobs (PRSI) Exemption scheme. JobsPlus Youth was added in July 2015. Table 5.19 illustrates its progress thus far.

	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	8	8	0	1	3	3	4	0	8
Participants	0	1,800	0	406	729	480	500	2,115	2,115
Expenditure per Participant	-	4,440	-	1,707	10,309	7,213	7,400	3,783	3,783

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

The majority of participants are aged between 20 and 25, although small proportions are both younger and older (with the latter having been under 25 when they commenced). Robust expenditure is expected to continue in both 2019 and 2020 but not at the level of 2017 as numbers entering the programme declined during 2018. Participants progressing from the Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) will boost participation numbers in 2019 and 2020. YESS, which commenced in October 2018, is aimed at young long-term unemployed people who face significant barriers to work and many who successfully conclude the scheme will be encouraged into the JobsPlus programme. YESS is aiming for 1,000 participants in 2018, so if reasonably successful it will substantially boost spending on JobsPlus in subsequent years.

Of the 406 participants in 2015, some 365 (90%) are reported as being in employment upon completion and 274 (67%) remained in employment six months later. Of the 275 participants in 2016, 190 had left by May 2018. Of these, 94 (49%) were in employment upon leaving and 93 remained so six months later.

The relatively high cost per participant reflects the basic design of the scheme and its need to provide a sufficient financial incentive for employers.

The longevity of these types of schemes – directly incentivising employers – reflects their success. Youth unemployment averaged 26.7% in 2013, with 40% of these being long-term unemployed, and the rationale to expand JobsPlus to include participation by u-25s in a successful scheme was not difficult to sustain.

An evaluation of JobsPlus published in August 2017 provided empirical evidence of success. It concluded the overall scheme was proving very effective at re-integrating the long-term unemployed - 87% of participants remained off the Live Register between 30 and 36 months after their commencement date. For employees who completed 24 months on the scheme this share rose to 95%. While the same wealth of data was not available for u-25s post July 2015, DEASP officials believed it would prove just as successful for the young unemployed as for the general LTU population.

A survey of JobsPlus employers carried out for DEASP also indicates that employers are happy with the scheme. Three out of four employers retained their JobsPlus employees at the end of two years and of those who left two out of three did so to take up other opportunities. While the ongoing buoyancy of the Irish economy is a contributory factor, high retention rates underpin the scheme’s success in transitioning LTU people into sustainable employment. While the survey covers all JobsPlus participants DEASP officials are confident this outcome is equally true for participants under the age of 25.

The number of long-term unemployed and the number of youths that are long-term unemployed has dropped sharply since 2013. JobsPlus Youth has been a successful initiative in encouraging this trend although economic recovery has been a major driver of this decline. Youth unemployment is still high – it averaged 14.4% in 2017, over double the overall average of 6.7%. Youth LTU averaged 3.8% in 2017, down from 10.4% in 2013. Despite these declines, the rationale for retaining a strong focus on youth LTU and continuing schemes such as JobsPlus remains strong not just to try and reduce the overall rate of long-term unemployment but to halt drift into longer-term unemployed – the longer people are in long-term unemployment the harder it tends to be to re-integrate them back into the labour force.

With demand for workers increasing and continued economic buoyancy the appetite for JobsPlus workers is strong among employers. However declining numbers of young long-term unemployed that are “near to the labour market” is reducing the pool of potential participants. It could be argued that an increasing share of young long-term unemployed people are better suited to programmes such as the recently launched Youth Employment Support Scheme.

The DEASP is currently working on a counterfactual impact evaluation of the effect of JobsPlus Programme with the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre. The impact evaluation investigates the counterfactual question of what would have happened to the target group affected by the JobsPlus programme if the policy had not been implemented. The target group are those people who started work with an employer who benefitted from JobsPlus between mid-2013 until the end of 2016.

Youthreach

Youthreach was considered in Section 5.3.2. Its financial and non-financial progress under Priority 4 is shown in Table 5.20.

	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	80	80	34	32	46	46	0	90	101
Participants	5,950	5,950	2,400	1,200	2,200	2,960	0	8,760	8,760
Expenditure per Participant	13,425	13,425	12,916	31,640	26,865	15,315	-	17,898	11,555

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

Youthreach data for the period 2014-2016 was derived from a legacy data system which has since been superseded by the PLSS system within the FET sector. For that reason, participant data for Youthreach participants

in that period is not as complete as from 2017 onwards. However, from the data available, the following can be ascertained.

Over the period 2014-2016, a total of 5,309 participants were enrolled within the Youthreach programme. Of those for whom completion data is available, 61.8% had gained a qualification as a result of their participation in the activity. In addition, 33.9% were recorded as being in continued education and training 6 months after exiting the activity (2014 - 24.1%, 2015 - 31.3%, 2016 - 44.3%), and 13.7% were recorded as being in employment (2014 – 15.4%, 2015 – 9.7%, 2016 – 13.9%). Only 0.4% of participants were recorded as being in self-employment 6 months after exiting the activity.

For 2017, relevant data is drawn from the new PLSS system which underpins the collection of all ESF data across the FET sector. As Youthreach programmes are generally a minimum of 12 months in duration, with many participants undertaking a 24-month programme, results indicator data for 2017 participants is limited at this time. However, the limited data available currently indicates that 59.4% of participants gained a qualification, 50.2% went into continued education and training, and 10.3% of participants went into employment immediately after their exit from the programme.

Momentum

Momentum was considered in Section 5.3.1. Its financial and non-financial progress under Priority 4 is shown in Table 5.21.

TABLE 5.21 ACTIVITY AND EXPENDITURE – MOMENTUM (Priority 4)									
	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	13	13	14	0	0	0	0	14	14
Participants	4,000	4,000	733	1,057	122	0	0	1,912	1,912
Expenditure per Participant	3,333	3,333	18,827	0	0	-	-	7,218	7,218

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

Momentum was one of the actions included in Ireland’s Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan.

The evaluation of Momentum published in December 2016³⁷ showed that young participants (under 25 years of age) comprised of almost one-third of all participants on the programme.

The evaluation found that the “Momentum experience has worked particularly well for young people, including those previously not in employment, education, and training. The innovative approaches adopted by the training providers, coupled with the deliberate policy of mixing the age profile of Momentum training groups, resulted in a more appropriate engagement environment, as evidenced by the young participants. In this regard, Momentum

³⁷ Momentum 2 Evaluation 2015-2016, Exodea / SOLAS, December 2016, available at <http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/645-Momentum%202016%20Report%20r19.pdf>

has demonstrably provided a pathway to real jobs to a cohort that is a constant focus of national concern in terms of engagement and sustainable futures.”

A survey of participants conducted as part of that evaluation found that:

- just under 87% of young respondents indicated that they agree or strongly agree that what they learned on the Programme would help them to gain employment;
- just under 80% of young respondents found that both personal confidence and attitude to work had increased or significantly increased as a result of the Programme; and
- capacity to exit from welfare benefits was reported to have increased somewhat or dramatically for 80% of young respondents.

At the time of the survey, young respondents reported their progression as follows:

- 33% were employed;
- 17% were involved in further education or Job Bridge (the national internship scheme at the time); and
- 17% were still engaged in training or placement.

The evaluation concluded that the programme “achieved real employment success for young people and at a time when interventions are challenged in this regard.”

Community Training Centres

The CTCs were introduced into the OP under Priority Axis 4 (YEI) in 2017. Across a network of such centres, CTCs seek to provide participants with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to participate fully in society and progress to further education, training and employment. According to the AIP, “CTCs are independent community-based organisations, which provide training and education for early school leavers, primarily aged between 16 and 21. CTCs can also provide for other young people under the age of 25 who are disadvantaged and/or unemployed, with the agreement of the relevant Education & Training Board. All participants must be NEETs (Not in Employment Education and Training) as defined by the nationally agreed definition”. CTCs were originally FAS Youthreach Centres, and co-existed alongside separate VEC Centres. Both are now merged into ETBIs but CTCs retain a somewhat more training as opposed to educational orientation.

Examples of CTC programmes offered, according to the AIP, are employability skills, personal and social employment skills and science skills. All programmes furthermore offer personal and social skills development through a range of mandatory and optional courses in areas such as communications, personal effectiveness, teamwork, career planning and literacy and numeracy support. Courses are full-time and can lead to major awards on the NFQ at levels 3 and 4.

CTCs are part of the Youthreach initiative.

CTCs have a long-history, dating back to the 1970s. The centres have a national support body, the Irish Association of Community Training Organisations (IACTO). Their core role in FET provision has been affirmed in recent strategies and plans, including the annual SOLAS FET service plans.

Financial and non-financial progress is shown in Table 5.22. As can be seen PEIL expenditure lagged participation numbers between 2017 and 2018. However annual participant numbers and PEIL funding is expected to stabilise over the remainder of the Programme period.

	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	0	0	0	0	0	2	15	30	60
Participants	0	0	0	0	0	1,400	1,400	2,800	5,600
Expenditure per Participant	-	-				694	10,714	6,071	10,714

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

There has been no recent evaluation of CTCs, but they are included in the evaluation of Youthreach due to report shortly. Consultations held suggest the activity is particularly effective at reaching hard-to-reach young people particularly in urban areas. While it would appear to be distinguishable from Youthreach by virtue of its focus on vocational training rather than education, there may be increasing overlap between both.

Based on PLSS data, there were 2440 completers from the 2883 that participated in 2017 (85%). Of those, 11.1% were recorded as being in continued education or training immediately upon exit, 21.4% were recorded as having gained a qualification, and 10.4% were recorded as being in employment.

Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme (DFESS)

The DFESS is targeted at unemployed 18-24 year olds who face distinct disadvantages in developing their own human capital, and significant barriers to gaining employment, owing to their current socio-economic situation. To address such barriers, the scheme seeks to provide its participants with new skills, competencies and self-development, which will enhance their capacity to pursue employment, work experience or further educational opportunities. It is co-ordinated by the Defence Forces and the Department of Defence (DoD) in conjunction with DEASP (which supports its promotion and identified suitable candidates) and local ETBs.

It has its genesis in the publication of the White Paper on Defence in August 2015, wherein the Irish Government reiterated a commitment to developing a more cross-departmental approach to addressing issues of social responsibility, whereby targeted interventions that assist in tackling both social and economic impacts might be introduced across the public service. At the same time, the paper also highlighted wider benefits to be gained from the skills and capacities obtained through service in the Defence Forces, in particular the benefits that such skills and capacities would provide in assisting individuals' capacities to gain employment. From this it was considered important that the Defence Forces should contribute to such broader societal objectives, and a scheme of employment support delivered by and under an ethos associated with Defence Force training and education, would be developed for target participants from wider society. The Pathways to Work 2016-2020 Strategy, inter alia, set out how the Government intended to continue to implement the actions set out in the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan including the implementation of the Defence Forces "Skills for Life" Employment Support Programme (now the DFESS).

A pilot programme for the scheme was operated from June-August 2016, outside the ESF funded activity, with 25 participants, while an evaluation of this pilot, which was carried out by the key participating bodies³⁸, subsequently recommended that the programme should be mainstreamed. In particular, the evaluation concluded that participants derived positive benefits from the programme, including successful completion of accredited learning, successful completion of physical training and conditioning, increased confidence and enhanced personal development. Alongside this, the evaluation suggested that the programme provided evidence of good strategic collaboration between State agencies in enhancing benefits for young unemployed people.

The DFESS is a relatively new scheme within the OP therefore, having only been approved for inclusion within Priority 4 in 2016, for commencement in 2017. Table 5.23 illustrates its progress.

	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.84	1
Participants	0	0	0	0	0	33	58	91	119
Expenditure per Participant	-	-	-	-	-	9,424	5,172	6,714	6,395

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

Participants in the scheme undertake a residential training programme of 10 weeks duration, which incorporates five weeks of military-orientated training and five weeks of educationally-orientated training. Through this training, the scheme thus sets out to give participants an experience in an environment that encourages personal development, achievement and hard work, and successful completion of the programme should then enable participants to:

- develop life skills or other marketable skills that will increase their employability and prove their competence to prospective employers, leading to the likelihood of obtaining sustained employment, or else assist their journey into further education;
- improve their communication skills, interpersonal skills and team skills, including their ability to communicate more effectively and confidently with prospective employers;
- demonstrate an increased level of physical fitness, physical fitness education and motivation; and
- improve their personal development, self-motivation, self-discipline, social skills and overall self-esteem and self-confidence, thereby assisting in the development of a path to greater economic independence.

The scheme is designed to exert a positive influence on participants, with the specific aim to equip them with life skills and other marketable/certifiable skills, which will assist them to participate fully in society and enter the workforce or pursue further education.

³⁸ Participating bodies included the Defence Forces, the Department of Defence, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board, and Ballymun Jobs Centre.

Consultations with those managing and delivering the scheme suggest that the significant reductions in youth unemployment in recent years have contributed to lower than expected participation levels. In terms of promotion of the scheme, it was also suggested that the DEASP has made considerable efforts to recruit participants, with promotion and awareness raising for the scheme carried out through local DEASP offices in the course catchment areas, using the local Case Officer networks to raise awareness of the scheme among clients. The geographical spread of courses, meanwhile, appears to reflect a conscious decision to conduct the scheme in a range of different locations so as to make it as accessible as possible for a wider number of potential participants.

The application process for participants also involves several stages, including general briefings, one-to-one briefings, medical assessments and Garda vetting. The time lag involved in obtaining Garda vetting, in particular, can sometimes be an issue in getting participants registered, although this has so far not presented a significant obstacle to the throughput of participants on the course.

On completion of each course, DEASP held exit interviews to establish participants' future goals and their plans to achieve these. One-to-one interviews with a DEASP Case Officer were arranged for the participants and were followed up with regular telephone calls to monitor participants' progress with their job search or continued education. Their designated Case Officer in the DEASP continued to engage with all participants and a walk-in service was available to all participants to offer support and guidance in their local Intreo Office.

Finally, in terms of outcomes, 31 of the 33 participants (94%) who commenced in 2017 completed it. Six progressed to employment and 15 to continued education. In total therefore 70% progressed to either employment or further education.

Given the broader objectives of the scheme, discussions with key informants also point to positive feedback from participants, including regarding the self-development aspects of the experience.

Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS)

YESS is a new programme for tackling youth unemployment, commencing on October 1st 2018, focused on the sustainable integration of young people into the labour market. It targets young jobseekers who face difficulties in obtaining employment due to work inexperience, providing an opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement during which a social welfare payment will continue to be paid.

Economic recovery over the last four years has resulted in welcome declines in unemployment in general and in youth unemployment. As more young people leave unemployment and find work or enter education or training programmes those who experience the greatest difficulties in transitioning from the Live Register to employment become a proportionately larger cohort amongst all unemployed youth. In this context, the need for specific programmes targeted at this cohort is important. YESS is available to jobseekers and other eligible participants who are:

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

Jobseekers who fulfil the first two conditions are also eligible for other PEIL-funded schemes such as the BTWEA and JobsPlus. Case officers will point them in the direction of these schemes, or other suitable interventions, where they feel they are not among the target group facing substantial barriers to employment.

While it has similar target groups as the First Steps initiative, YESS is a more targeted intervention with:

- case officers more actively involved on a day-to-day basis;
- a better-defined learning and development component;
- higher rates of payment; and,
- an improved mentoring element.

The duration of YESS placements will also differ – the initial placement will be for three months with very close involvement by the case officer and a review after eight weeks. This review will also facilitate requests for an extension of the duration to six months. Duration may subsequently be extended out to nine months. Host organisations will complete an assessment at the end of the placement and will be encouraged to hire satisfactory participants and qualify for a subsidy under the JobsPlus Youth programme.

The scheme is not open to Public Service bodies but is open to organisations in the community and voluntary sector as well as private companies. To avoid displacement the host organisations should not have advertised vacancies in the previous six months in the area where the placement is offered and cannot offer a placement if they have made an employee redundant within the previous six months.

As the programme has just commenced – October 2018 – there is little activity or expenditure thus far (Table 5.24).

	Existing Milestone	Existing Target	Reported					Revised Milestone	Revised Target
	2018	2023	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Est)	2018	2023
Expenditure (Euro M)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	16
Participants	0	0	0	0	0	0	200	200	3,400
Expenditure per Participant	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,000	5,000	4,706

SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY

The introduction of the scheme is welcome, timely, and probably overdue. The strong recovery of the Irish economy and its current buoyancy proved fertile ground for reducing youth LTU but those who were most ready for entering the labour market were the primary beneficiaries and those facing significant barriers to work now constitute a much greater share of total youth LTU. The closely-targeted and intensive nature of the intervention is welcome, and overall it is a well-designed scheme. It is in a good position to therefore succeed as long as economic growth remains strong with good employment opportunities for young people.

5.3.5 Summary of Financial and Non-Financial Progress

Table 5.25 summarises financial and non-financial progress as reported to end-2017, comparing this to current estimates of 2018 and 2023 cumulative expenditure and programme outputs.

TABLE 5.25 SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL AND NON-FINANCIAL PROGRESS TO END-2017					
	Revised Milestone to end-2018	Revised Target to end-2023	Total estimated to end-2017*	Total to end-2017 as % 2018 Milestone	Total to end-2017 as % 2023 Target
Expenditure (€m)					
Priority 1	97.0	419.7	209.34	216%	50%
Priority 2	14.4	297.6	46.24	321%	16%
Priority 3	48.4	215.4	168.06	347%	78%
Priority 4	134.3	204.4	182.2	136%	89%
Total	294.1	1,137.1	605.84	206%	53%
Participants					
Priority 1	72,716	104,316	56,916	78%	55%
Priority 2	43,494	78,197	9,590	22%	12%
Priority 3					
Sub-Priority 1	52,000	52,000	43,000	83%	83%
Sub-Priority 2	163,486	200,986	136,986	84%	68%
Priority 4	16,300	22,330	14,042	86%	63%
Total	347,996	457,829	260,534	75%	57%
* Estimated expenditure figures based on reported exchequer funding. Actual claims against this funding may differ. SOURCE: MANAGING AUTHORITY					

Following the review and revision by the Managing Authority that has taken place regarding the number of unique participants under each Activity, the cost per unique participant across Activities, and the Activities being supported under each Priority and the timing of that support, the present position suggests:

- reported exchequer expenditure to end-2017 had reached more than double that anticipated by 2018, and 53% of that anticipated by 2023. However, actual claims against this expenditure have not yet been made in most cases and may differ from these amounts;
- in respect of participants, the equivalent figures were 75% and 57%;
- only one Priority (Priority 2) records significantly lower levels of progress, but this is explained by the front-loading of Youthreach Activity within Priority 4. Its support under Priority 2 for the remainder of the Programme, as well as the commencement of SICAP funding under Priority 2 also, will likely see progress under that Priority catch up with others over the remaining years.

The participant numbers and progress reported, the findings with regard to Activity effectiveness and impacts, and the direct relationship between Activity objectives and the Programme specific objectives under each Priority of which they form part, provide evidence of a strong contribution the Programme is making in respect of each of its specific objectives.

5.4 Wider Programme Implementation

5.4.1 Evaluation

A Programme Evaluation Plan was completed early following the approval of the Programme and has been updated since. The latest version was published by the MA in May 2018. Its stated objectives are to:

- improve the quality of evaluations through proper planning, including through identification and collection of necessary data;
- provide a framework to plan evaluations on effectiveness, efficiency and impact;
- ensure that resources for funding and managing the evaluations are appropriate and proportionate (in terms of budget/resources);
- enable informed programme management and policy decisions on the basis of evaluation findings;
- ensure that evaluations provide inputs for annual implementation and progress reports; and
- facilitate the compilation of the summary report on the findings of evaluations undertaken to be submitted to the Commission by end-2022.

A first evaluation of the YEI was undertaken in 2015, and the plan acknowledges the regulatory requirement to complete a second YEI, and further commits to:

- the present Mid-Term Evaluation of the OP;
- evaluation of activities under Priorities 1, 2 and 3 in 2019.

It further acknowledges the potential for new evaluation needs to arise, and for the MA to keep its evaluation intentions under ongoing review in that regard.

5.4.2 Transnational Activity

The MA has earmarked small funding allocations under each of Priorities 1, 2 and 3 to progress Transnational Co-operation (TNC) activities, and the OP confirmed Ireland's interest in TNC activity, and its intention to respond to Calls for Proposals and engage in TNC on its own initiative. No expenditure has yet taken place in relation to TNC.

5.4.3 Technical Assistance

Technical assistance funding has been utilised towards a number of items, including:

- costs associated with the e-cohesion IT system;
- training and guidance for Intermediate Bodies;
- evaluation; and
- information provision, events, networking and promotional activities.

While no claim has been made, and therefore no claim regarding technical assistance funding, precise levels of expenditure have not yet been ascertained. The Managing Authority will make use of any simplified cost option that it anticipates will be brought into force in 2019 regarding the claiming of Technical Assistance funding.

6. Programme Indicators and Horizontal Principles

6.1 Programme Indicators

6.2.1 Overview of Priority Level Indicators

The Programme defines indicators at a number of levels that are required to be collected and reported for all “participants” (i.e. persons directly benefiting from an intervention) and where appropriate “projects”:

- ESF common or programme-specific output indicators;
- ESF common result indicators (comprising immediate and longer-term indicators); and
- YEI common result indicators (comprising immediate and longer-term indicators).

Formal “targets” are established and adopted in respect of a number of programme-specific output and result indicators, as follows:

- Priority 1:
 - Output
 - The number of participants on training and upskilling programmes for the unemployed or jobseekers;
 - The number of Jobs & Advice Fairs and Dialog (EURES) projects taking place;
 - The number of youth (<25yrs) participants on training and upskilling programmes for the unemployed or jobseekers;
 - The number of LTU participants on training and upskilling programmes for the unemployed or jobseekers;
 - Result
 - The number of participants completing an education /training programme;
 - The number of LTU participants completing an education/training programme;
 - The number of youths (<25yrs) participants completing an education/training programme;
- Priority 2
 - Output
 - The number of participants from disadvantaged groups on social inclusion employability programmes, including personal development towards employability programmes;
 - The number of youths (<25 yrs) participants from disadvantaged groups on social inclusion employability programmes, including personal development towards employability programmes;
 - The number of participants from disadvantaged groups on social inclusion employability programmes, including personal development towards employability programmes;

- Number of equality mainstreaming projects targeting public administrations or public services at national, regional or local level;
- Result
 - Number of participants from disadvantaged groups that have completed a social inclusion employability programme and/or are in training/education/job search/work related environments upon leaving;
 - Number of young (< 25yrs) participants from disadvantaged groups that have completed a social inclusion employability programme and/or are in training/education/job search/work related environments upon leaving;
 - Number of participants from disadvantaged groups that have completed a social inclusion employability programme and/or are in training/education/job search/work related environments upon leaving;
- Priority 3
 - Output
 - Number of LTU disadvantaged and/or disabled persons assisted in accessing and continuing/remaining in third level education;
 - Number of disadvantaged and/or disabled persons assisted in accessing and continuing/remaining in third level education;
 - The number of participants with low education levels on further education/training programmes;
 - The number of LTU participants with low education levels on further education/training programmes;
 - Result
 - Number of disadvantaged and/or disabled persons that gained a third level qualification upon leaving;
 - Number of LTU disadvantaged and/or disabled persons assisted that gained a third level qualification upon leaving;
 - The number of LTU participants with low education levels gaining a qualification or successfully completing the programme;
 - The number of participants with low education levels gaining a qualification or successfully completing the programme;
- Priority 4
 - Output
 - The number of YEI eligible participants on training/upskilling/personal development towards employability and work environment (including supports for self-employed) programmes/projects;
 - Result
 - The number of YEI eligible participants completing training/upskilling/personal development towards employability and work environment (including supports for self-employed) programmes/projects.

The Programme Performance Framework comprises both financial expenditure targets and the output targets for the following indicators:

- Priority 1
 - The number of participants on training and upskilling programmes for the unemployed and jobseekers;
- Priority 2
 - The number of participants from disadvantaged groups on social inclusion employability programmes, including personal development towards employability programmes;
- Priority 3
 - The number of participants with low education levels on further education/training programmes;
 - The number of disadvantaged and/or disabled persons assisted in accessing and continuing/remaining in third level education;
- Priority 4
 - The number of YEI eligible participants on training/upskilling/personal development towards employability and work environment (including supports for self-employed) programmes/projects.

6.2.2 Reporting of Indicators

Up to end-2017 the reporting of indicators had involved:

- reporting on all required indicators as gathered and held by the MA in Annual Implementation Reports;
- the incorporation of participant and output numbers and volumes into Activity-level progress reports to the MA.

6.2.3 Assessment of Indicators

Under the relevant Regulations, MAs were required to establish systems to record and store individual participant data in computerised form. As has been noted elsewhere, the E-Cohesion information system established for this purpose in Ireland was delayed very significantly, and only went live in March 2018. Prior to its establishment and use, systems of indicator data collection were varied across IBs and beneficiaries, and intense work was required to make them operable and bring them into compliance with the requirements of the Programme. The challenges faced included:

- underdeveloped data collection systems at the level of beneficiaries and between beneficiaries and delivery agencies and institutions;
- incorrect categorisations of unique participants versus participant “places” on schemes and measures;
- problems associated with the treatment of participants recorded more than once, whether due to legitimate involvement in more than one instance of support or for reasons to do with data registering;
- issues involved in reconciling data captured and reported for academic versus calendar years;
- issues concerning the ability to isolate new starters from ongoing participants within data systems;
- issues arising from capturing appropriate data from historical datasets and systems not designed to enable it;

- issues concerning the designation of actions under specific Activities in different regions as between the present and predecessor OP and the appropriate capture of data that distinguishes between them.

For reasons that include some of the above challenges as well as Programme changes, the MA has proposed a revision to the Performance Framework and many of the Activity-level participant targets of which it is an aggregation. The final proposals were approved at the May 2018 PMC meeting for submission to the Commission, so reporting up to and including 2017 was prior to the finalisation of the proposed Performance Framework revisions, as well as prior to the commencement of the E-Cohesion system.

In the assessment of Activities set out in Section 5, output indicators, milestones and targets are based on data provided by the MA to the consultants in September 2018, that align with the proposed revisions to the overall OP Performance Framework targets (and show both existing and proposed revised milestones and targets). However the relatively recent commencement of E-Cohesion and the associated work involved in refining and revising data capture and reporting across all Activities, means that systems and reporting have not yet reached the stage of systematic and comprehensive capture, reporting and monitoring of output and result indicators, and their progress against suitable, valid, agreed interim and final targets understood and accepted by the MA, IBs and relevant beneficiaries. As the E-Cohesion system is now in place, and much of the work in validating data has been undertaken, indicators can fulfil their role much more significantly over the remaining years of the Programme.

6.2 Horizontal Principles

6.2.1 Programme Commitments

Sustainable Development

The OP acknowledges the status of the Sustainable Development HP in the Partnership Agreement and across all ESIF programming for the 2014-2020 period, and its implications regarding the support and integration of actions that address environmental protection requirements, resource efficiency, sustainable management of natural resources, and risk prevention and management. The Programme refers to the multiple strands of Ireland's sustainable development policy and strategy, and the national agenda of becoming a low-carbon, competitive, resource-efficient and climate resilient country to which the Europe 2020 Strategy and Ireland's contribution to it, is aligned. However no specific commitments were set out for this OP in respect of the Sustainable Development HP.

Equality between Men and Women

In respect of the gender equality HP the OP refers first to the Europe 2020 targets Ireland would pursue in respect of increasing the employment rate of men and women, and committed further to:

- pursue the gender equality objective and ensure its mainstreaming through the integration of a gender perspective at all stages of implementation;
- include specific actions to promote gender equality;
- take account of how the implementation of projects may affect women and men (gender mainstreaming);
- arrange for training of relevant staff in the fields of gender equality law and policy as well as on gender mainstreaming related to the Programme implementation; and

- promote gender balance on the PMC.

Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination

The OP acknowledges its responsibilities to take steps to prevent discrimination based on any of the following grounds in the preparation and delivery of any of its programmes of activity:

- sex;
- racial or ethnic origin;
- religion or belief;
- disability;
- age;
- sexual orientation.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Bill 2014 (since enacted) set out that all public bodies, in the performance of their functions would eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and protect the human rights of its members, staff and persons to whom it provides services. It also obliged public bodies to publish assessments of the human rights and equality issues most relevant to its functions and the policies, plans and actions to address them.

In relation to this HP, the OP committed to:

- involving bodies in charge of equality at all stages (preparation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation), including the provision of advice on equality and non-discrimination in fund-related activities;
- taking account of the potential contribution of the OP to equality and equal opportunities with reference to the specific challenges in the priority investment areas chosen, where relevant; and
- monitoring and evaluating the application of the principle.

6.2.2 Actions and Progress

All AIPS under PEIL have been required to set out how all HPs will be integrated and upheld in the delivery of the relevant Activities, and the Gender Equality Policy section of the DJE, and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Authority (IHREC) and the Resource Efficiency Section of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA) were invited to be members of the PMC.

A number of information sessions have been provided to IBs and beneficiaries and guidance generated in relation to fulfilling responsibilities under the HPs. In relation to the Gender Equality and Human Rights/Non-Discrimination HPs, a system of reporting on how Activities are delivering on their HP obligations, and a synthesis of progress being made is presented by the DJE Gender Equality and IHREC officials at PMC.

A summary of their observations from the 2017 reports is shown below, both at the overall level as well as for individual Activities.

Promotion of Equality between Men and Women

Common and overarching observations made regarding how the Programme is meeting its obligations regarding the Gender Equality HP are as follows:

- reporting for the HP is noted to have improved across most activities, with better statistics showing male and female participation as required;
- there is also, importantly, a greater understanding among activities of the issues involved, with a greater use of a “gender lens” to identify possible barriers, even in activities where objectives are not gender specific, and real commitment to tackle gender equality issues;
- more evidence is available to show specific targeting of male and female participation under certain activities;
- more detailed data collection also helps to promote more effective analysis of policies and better identification of barriers to participation.

FIGURE 6.1 MONITORING AND REPORTING COMMENTS – GENDER EQUALITY HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLE

ETB Training for the Unemployed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training programmes that are targeted at predominantly female cohorts, e.g. lone parents, are noted • The activity's gender sensitive approach to addressing needs is acknowledged and welcomed • Its collaborative approach to addressing barriers is also strongly commended in terms of addressing gender specific needs and associated supports, e.g. transport, childcare
Springboard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakdowns of participation by gender are required, however • The activity is noted as being open to all that meet the eligibility criteria, regardless of gender • The extension of eligibility for part-time courses in 2017 to homemakers (90% female) was also strongly welcomed
ICT Skills Conversion Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakdown of participation by gender is also recorded, with the proportion of female participants increasing • The extension of eligibility for part-time courses in 2017 to homemakers (76% female) was strongly welcomed • Breakdown of participation by gender is also recorded, with the proportion of females being three times higher than female enrolments for Level 8 undergraduate courses in ICT
Intra-EU Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The activity is noted as being open to men and women equally • Statistics are provided by gender and show a good level of female participation
SICAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased use of social media channels to enhance equal access to activity information is also welcomed • Activity is complemented for continued excellent work in promoting horizontal principles • Horizontal themes were critical to the consultation process for the design of SICAP 2018-2022, and horizontal principles were also incorporated into the procurement process
Garda Youth Diversion Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong efforts made to identify gaps and barriers to programmes, and associated actions • It is noted that access and participation is not gender specific, and eligibility is based on need and risk • Statistics showing female participation on projects are welcomed, however
Young Persons Probation Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The activity is also strongly commended for its work in promoting sexual health and gender education programmes for participants • The adoption of gender specific programmes within the activity is welcomed • Statistics showing female participation are also provided
Integration and Employment of Migrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the activity is not gender specific, statistics showing that nearly two-thirds of its 450 participants were women are welcomed • Current reporting requirements at project level do not include reporting on horizontal principles, however • More effort could be made to report on gender sensitive aspects that are included in the projects, e.g. any efforts regarding childcare or transport issues
Tus Nua	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The activity's efforts to apply a gender lens to identify specific issues, behaviours and needs of women offenders are welcomed • Its holistic, gender specific, multi-agency approach is also welcomed
Gender Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The activity is noted as being derived from good evidence-based need and learning from previous Equality for Women projects • The use of projects that specifically cater for the needs of a diversity of women is especially noted, and training on gender awareness is also welcomed • Current reporting requirements at project level do not include reporting on horizontal principles, however

FIGURE 6.1 MONITORING AND REPORTING COMMENTS – GENDER EQUALITY HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLE

BTEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The activity is noted as providing learning opportunities for key priority groups, which provides significant opportunities for disadvantaged women The inclusion of disadvantaged men is also welcomed, as are efforts to increase male participation (given the high level of female participation) Design and delivery of programmes are adapted to meet the needs of a wide range of learners Statistics are also provided on a gender basis
Adult Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The increase in numbers of male participants for the activity, and the offer of single sex courses for male participants, are welcomed
Third-level Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk research and consultations carried out for the activity in 2017 provided useful insights from a gender perspective While the activity is not gender specific, it supports objectives to increase participation in higher education by lone parents and people of all ages in both genders
BTWEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breakdown of statistics on a gender basis is also noted and welcomed, including the collection of data on unsuccessful applicants It has been noted that the activity is an equal opportunities demand-driven scheme, and that the 66/34 split between male and female participants is broadly reflective of Live Register figures over the 2006-2014 period Statistics should be updated to ensure that relevant information informs policy Uptake by both genders should also continue to be monitored so that any barriers to participation can be identified
JobsPlus Incentive Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The activity is noted as being open to all applicants regardless of gender Gender data is also noted as being collected on an ongoing basis, with comparisons made to Live Register profiles in order to identify gaps in participation
Youthreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An encouraging increase in the number of females between 2015 and 2016 has been recorded The activity is considered to be strongly embracing gender equality principles, and its holistic approach to addressing the profiles and needs of participants is commended The activity is also noted as being tailored to accommodate the individual needs of participants and include childcare services, which is welcomed Programmes aimed at personal, social and civic skills, including parenting and health education, are welcomed Monitoring statistics broken down by gender are required, however
CTCs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The activity is acknowledged as promoting gender sensitive activities in engaging young men, women entrepreneurs, lone parents and Traveller and Roma women The activity is also welcomed as being in line with the Action Plan for Jobs and the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 from a gender perspective
DFESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is acknowledged that the activity is not gender specific, but that the Defence Forces ensure that there are enough male and female instructors available to run the course A more recent increase in female participation is welcomed, though it is important to monitor gender participation levels more regularly The importance of applying a gender lens to projects should be emphasised, and supporting material regarding any gender sensitive activities that are identified and addressed would be useful

Promotion of Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination

Common and overarching observations made regarding how the Programme is meeting its obligations regarding the Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination HP are as follows:

- activities have developed a better understanding of reporting on equal opportunities and non-discrimination issues, though there appears to be a need for support to develop further understanding of the applicability of the nine equality grounds throughout activities and projects;
- adopting structured approaches to applying activities and actions that comply with the HP are important, and activities are to be encouraged to take steps to proactively encourage participation of people under the equality grounds;
- better understanding of the type of data that is relevant to the equality grounds would be welcome across all activities, alongside reporting of actions based on the equality grounds; and
- where activities are tailored to supporting identified target groups, it would be useful to give regard to intersectionality, i.e. attempt to capture data related to other equality grounds, and/or content to indicate actions taken to support participation and promotion of activities.

FIGURE 6.2 MONITORING AND REPORTING COMMENTS – EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND NON-DISCRIMINATION HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLE

ETB Training for the Unemployed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIP is strong with respect to this HP • Has been substantive consultation and policies developed • Limited reporting on participation breakdowns
Springboard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited evidence reported of efforts to embed best practices • AIP provides important references to the HP • Applications are open to all, and the activity providers' contract highlights obligations under the Equal Status Act • More reporting on compliance with Act would be useful, more information on key target groups (e.g. Travellers, minority ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities etc)
ICT Skills Conversion Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIP provides important references to the HP • Employers are also reminded of their obligations under equality legislation, although it would be useful to report when and how this is done (and if it is monitored)
Intra-EU Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIP is strong with respect to this HP • Dialogue training, "Diversity and Equality Works" and workshops on equality provide good examples of contents supporting the HP • It would be useful to provide further reporting on how activities (e.g. jobs fairs) promote the HP, e.g. through accessibility to events, accessibility to website
SICAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data on participant numbers and profiles in training, workshops would be useful • AIP is very strong with respect to this HP, and has an ambition that goes well beyond compliance requirements • Reports concrete steps and innovative measures that seek to achieve the aims of the HP in practice (including through procurement, implementation and review) • Highlights practical insights on the importance of the HP at ground level through case studies • Further enhancement in reporting could be achieved by bringing more focus to intersectionality in programme activities
Garda Youth Diversion Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIP is strong with respect to this HP • Strong effort made to capture data that is relevant to the HP • More reporting on actions and measures taken to facilitate participants on equality grounds while in the programme would be useful • More reporting on reasonable accommodation measures for people with disabilities would be useful (given number of participants from this cohort)
Young Persons Probation Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIP is strong with respect to this HP • Strong effort made to capture data that is relevant to the HP • Further improvement could be achieved by more detailed reporting on specific actions taken to support participants under specific equality grounds
Integration and Employment of Migrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIP is strong with respect to this HP • Important that the application of the activity specifically addresses the issue of intersectional inequalities

FIGURE 6.2 MONITORING AND REPORTING COMMENTS – EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND NON-DISCRIMINATION HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLE

Tus Nua	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIP is strong with respect to this HP • More reporting on reasonable accommodation measures for women with disabilities would be useful, and further information on any actions taken to facilitate the needs of women with a minority ethnic background
Gender Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further improvement on reporting could cover other equality grounds • AIP is strong with respect to this HP, primary focus of the activity is also covered by the equality grounds • Important that the application of the activity specifically addresses the issue of intersectional inequalities, meets the needs of the different cohorts of women covered by the equality grounds
BTEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All projects are required to report on participation of women under the equality grounds • AIP is strong with respect to this HP
Adult Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further focus on the equality grounds based on data analysis and actions could benefit the report • AIP is strong with respect to this HP • Significant reporting on measures affecting groups that may fall under the equality grounds • Reports on legislative requirements for the HP
Third-level Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would be useful to include data on number of participants under equality grounds and specific measures taken • AIP is strong with respect to this HP • Good reporting on volume of supports provided to students with disabilities and students from disadvantaged communities • Does not provide information on students from Traveller or minority ethnic backgrounds, or steps taken to encourage their participation, even though they are a specific target for the National Action Plan for Access to Higher Education 2015-2019
BTWEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIP provides important references to the HP, though it would be useful to report further on how it is implemented in practice
JobsPlus Incentive Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIP provides important references to the HP • Employers are also reminded of their obligations under equality legislation, although it would be useful to report when and how this is done (and if it is monitored)
Youthreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIP is strong with respect to this HP • Further focus on the equality grounds based on data analysis and reporting that reflects the cohort diversity (lone parents, migrants, people with disabilities, homeless) would be useful
CTCs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIP is strong with respect to this HP • While significant measures in policy formation are referenced, further focus on the nine equality grounds, based on data analysis and actions, would benefit reporting

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Evaluation Conclusions

7.1.1 Overall Assessment

Since its inception the PEIL Programme has undergone changes in its scope and coverage, extensive change and reform in its implementing bodies, delays in establishing necessary data and reporting systems, and very recent commencement of some strands of activity. No financial claims have been submitted to the EU Commission to date. The Programme at its mid-term stage is nevertheless progressing well and contributing significantly to a range of important education, labour market, and social inclusion policy goals and objectives as Ireland's economic recovery continues its path.

Much effort and time has gone into refining its architecture and scope in the face of a changing socio-economic context, extensive institutional reorganisation in the FET sector, operationalising the necessary accountability and reporting systems, integrating ESF and YEI involvement and requirements into a wide range of pre-existing and ongoing schemes and interventions, and specifying its role, planned contribution and appropriate monitoring framework within each strand of activity it supports. While all of this work was necessary, it was nonetheless prolonged. With the IT reporting and monitoring system necessary to comply with the regulations in operation from early 2018, a proposed revision to the Programme's performance framework currently awaiting approval, and the first financial claims to the Commission due to be submitted before end-2018, the Programme now has the prospect of transitioning from an establishment to a smoother operational and delivery phase extending up to 2023 in line with the N+3 rule.

While such processes have been taking place, a range of important Activities have been delivered or commenced with ESF and YEI support under the Programme, including labour market activation measures, upskilling and reskilling programmes, programmes addressing the needs of specific groups experiencing social exclusion, and programmes actively supporting and promoting educational participation. Furthermore, in the years to date the programme has delivered substantial support to young people and their education, training and socio-economic progression and development.

As the financial certification, claim and recoupment process progresses, and with continued active Programme monitoring and review, the likelihood is that the Programme will accomplish its goals and fully utilise Ireland's ESF and YEI allocations in ways that meet all regulatory requirements while aligned appropriately with Ireland's EU and national policy goals, objectives and commitments.

7.1.2 Achievement of Objectives

At the mid-term stage, the Programme has and is likely to continue to meet its objectives directly and commendably.

Under Priority 1, supported activities are quite evidently raising the relevance and level of job-seekers' skills and increasing their labour mobility. Supported training programmes delivered by ETBs that directly target the unemployed are focused on basic skills, on specific occupational skills in areas of employment growth, and incorporate blended in-company and classroom learning models designed to enhance knowledge, work experience and employability. Springboard and ICT Skills Conversion courses meanwhile are targeting recently unemployed individuals and providing upskilling and reskilling in areas of high labour and skills demand, and facilitating labour mobility amongst participants. The Momentum programme meanwhile provided upskilling and re-skilling of unemployed and young people in a model that involved active collaboration between employers and training designers and providers.

Priority 2 has and is supporting a range of disadvantaged and socially-excluded groups in programmes of learning and development designed ultimately to lead to their enhanced employability. Disadvantaged young people are particularly targeted in respect of education and early school leaving (Youthreach), and in respect of programmes targeting those engaging or at risk of engaging in crime and anti-social behaviour (GYDP, YPP). The SICAP Programme is considered very effective in addressing social disadvantage that manifests itself in geographical areas of deprivation and for individuals and groups displaying multiple and complex forms of social disadvantage (e.g. single parents, low income families, people with disabilities, those facing prejudice and discrimination).

A number of supported initiatives are also targeting those outside or distant from the labour market, with a view to enhancing their skills and employability. Migrants and women at a remove from participating in the labour market are specifically targeted with tailored support, education, training, and job-readiness programmes, as well as the personal engagement, encouragement, peer supports, networking, mentoring and other "soft" supports required to overcome actual or perceived barriers to active labour market participation. Such objectives and accomplishments will become increasingly important as the pools of unemployed but active people diminish and full employment approaches, while simultaneously addressing important social inclusion aims and policy objectives.

The educational objectives of the Programme are also being directly addressed under Priority 3. The Third Level Access scheme directly and effectively supports participation in higher education by both students with disabilities and students experiencing financial hardship. At the same time, the Programme's support for BTEI and Adult Literacy further education provision are enabling adults with low educational achievements to engage effectively in second-chance and further education, and life-long learning.

7.1.3 Continued Validity and Relevance

As was the case with its predecessor (the HCIOP), at its mid-term stage the PEIL Programme is operating within a socio-economic context that has changed significantly from that in which it was designed and formulated. In the case of PEIL the changes have been positive however, involving very significant improvements in economic and labour market conditions. While the ex-ante analysis that informed Programme and priority objectives and design no longer reflects contextual conditions and needs, the Programme as it was originally formulated and has been adapted since, remains a framework of interventions and initiatives that in most respects is responsive to what are evidently ongoing labour market, social and educational challenges and policy priorities. It is maintaining its relevance by:

- continuing to focus on those unemployed and inactive, the numbers of whom remain significant in certain demographic categories and geographic locations, although very substantially diminished in aggregate;
- increasingly focusing on the barriers to active labour market participation, activating the inactive, and addressing the needs of those furthest from participation;
- supporting the development of skills likely to be in ongoing demand, and of workplace competences and experience, with consequent human capital enhancements capable of yielding long-term benefits less vulnerable to cyclical economic trends; and
- allocating substantial resources towards social disadvantage, inequality, and the barriers to educational participation, the needs of which have not diminished in any way comparably to those of facilitating employment uptake.

While the Programme has adapted therefore in the changing socio-economic context, it must continually do so in the face of changes in socio-economic needs, wider policy developments, and on-the-ground implementation experience. Target groups may need to be re-considered, re-articulated and possibly consolidated, financial allocations altered where the pool of candidate participants may be falling or less likely to engage, and deadweight guarded against (e.g. where programme resources are used to incentivise or facilitate participation, employment or training outcomes that would likely occur in its absence in a much more positive labour market). A small number of Activities, but with significant resources allocated to them, are the important candidates to keep objectives, target groups, and underlying demand and uptake under ongoing review.

7.1.4 Efficiency, Effectiveness and Impact

All Priorities and Activities have progressed well or in the few cases where only beginning, appear likely to. Many predate the Programme significantly and operate continuously, others were conceived quite recently but operated for several years before the Programme began, and others have been implemented only since and as part of the Programme. Older ones have the benefit of long-standing delivery models, while more recent ones have the benefit of being designed for very specific and contemporary needs. While sufficient time has not passed to measure or evaluate the effects and impacts of all interventions, and the evidence base is also weak in many cases, the following points are made in respect of each PEIL Activity:

- PEIL-supported ETB Training for the Unemployed covers a wide and disparate range of training initiatives, courses and delivery models over which the evaluative evidence is currently quite modest. In one stream (traineeships) provision is being adapted, enhanced and increased, while in another (specific skills training) a thorough evaluation of provision is underway. While retention and completion rates may be high, accreditation rates appear low across two of the three strands. Costs per participant appear to compare to averages across all OP interventions;
- Springboard has been found to be effective in assisting unemployed people gain new academic qualifications and progress to employment thus-equipped. It is furthermore encouraging labour market mobility and transitioning people between occupations through the development of new and economically-relevant skills sets. Its expenditure-per-participant is moderate where such outcomes are being achieved;
- ICT Skills Conversion courses have similarly been found to be effective in upskilling job-seekers in ICT skills in demand from employers, although completion rates have been lower than anticipated. The evidence

is also from several years ago when unemployment levels were significantly higher. Costs per participant are comparable to those being achieved under Springboard;

- Momentum has been discontinued but evidently operated effectively as a model of education, training, and work-experience developed collaboratively with employers and under a unique incentivised contractual model with providers. Reported progression rates to employment were high, although its ability to maintain such a performance probably diminished as the numbers unemployed diminished and their needs became more complex. Unit costs appear moderate;
- the Intra-EU Mobility Activity incorporates a wide range of actions that span information provision, promotion, events, placement, brokering, job-matching and other initiatives aimed at supporting and facilitating cross-border labour mobility. Very modest Programme resources are devoted, and due to the nature of many of the interventions, it is difficult to provide quantitative evidence regarding delivery and effectiveness, although its role in assisting EU-wide labour mobility and cross-border job-placement services is one of increasing importance;
- research into the SICAP programme has found it to have unique strengths in addressing severe and persistent social deprivation, especially in geographical pockets where it particularly prevails. The model facilitates precise targeting and intensive and multi-dimensional support, and focuses on both individuals and groups within target communities. The complexity of the work supported, and the multi-faceted nature of needs it seeks to respond to, makes quantifiable impact measurement difficult. However it engages with high volumes of people and achieves low unit costs per case;
- Youthreach is a long-standing mainstream programme addressing early school leaving. Its rationale and role is clear and evidently justified, and it provides ongoing education for high numbers of young people whose circumstances lead to drop-out from mainstream education. A succession of evaluations have generally found it to be effective in reaching and assisting its target group. A comprehensive evaluation of the initiative is due to be completed and published imminently, the findings from which have not been shared with us in advance. The unit costs or provision are high in the context of the PEIL programme but reflective of the nature of the initiative;
- GYDPs have similarly not been formally evaluated in aggregate although such an evaluation is planned. Contextual and anecdotal evidence points towards their effectiveness in diverting young people from criminal and anti-social activity and offering them progression paths in education and training, and promoting positive personal development. Unit costs are relatively high, but reflective of the needs being addressed and negative outcomes and costs which the intervention is designed to later avoid;
- YPP projects support the positive social integration of young people under court-ordered supervision or are at risk of becoming involved in crime. While limited to one strand of PEIL-supported activity, there is evidence of its effectiveness and positive impact on such young people and their parents, with positive social outcomes attributed to participation. Interventions are resource-intense and the unit costs per participant relatively high;
- “Ability” has only recently commenced but it follows an earlier programme found to be effective in bringing young people with disabilities closer to labour market participation and employment. It has relatively high unit costs which reflect the nature and breadth of supports provided;
- the Activity supporting integration and employment of migrants is also relatively recently operational and has not been evaluated regarding effectiveness or impacts. However its constituent projects have the prospect of achieving significantly enhanced employability and progression in the labour market for

a specific group experiencing unique barriers, and at lower than average unit costs per participant when compared to other interventions across the Programme;

- Tus Nua is a specialist service targeting a very small group (female ex-prisoners) that face multiple and often profound social and personal challenges. Its effectiveness has not been formally evaluated. While its cost per participant is high, it is considered justifiable in the contexts it arises. PEIL support is very modest relative to other interventions;
- the Gender Equality Activity has also quite recently commenced and its impacts too soon to formally evaluate. The projects funded, their delivery and reporting mechanisms, their strands of activity and anecdotal evidence suggest they could be very effective in engaging women in education, training, enterprise and the labour market who would otherwise most probably remain inactive. Furthermore the suite of projects have the potential to do so at quite moderate costs per participant;
- evaluations of the FSD and SAF point to their effectiveness and importance in ensuring and supporting higher education participation by people with disabilities and students suffering financial hardship. Positive impacts on both target groups are readily identifiable in the evaluations and reviews undertaken. While both schemes operate alongside other financial supports towards their higher education, they are considered both effective and efficient on the basis of costs per participant;
- the BTEI scheme is an important channel for providing second-chance education opportunities for relatively high numbers of adult learners who for various reasons have not fulfilled their educational potential. It provides for such persons through part-time engagement at relatively low costs per participant. However no formal evaluation of the initiative has yet been undertaken;
- similarly, PEIL support towards adult literacy provision covers a wide range of diverse provision. Provision is perceived to be generally effective and cost-effectively provided, however its quality and consistency is unclear. It has not been systematically or independently evaluated.

7.1.5 Youth Employment Initiative and Youth Guarantee

The YEI provides Union financial support to Member States in meeting their commitments under the Youth Guarantee. Priority 4 of PEIL is the programme framework through which YEI is implemented in Ireland. The specific objective of the Priority is to “raise the skills and education levels of people eligible for support under YEI, by providing education, training, work experience and/or work opportunities, including support for self-employment”. Its expected results, as set down in the OP, are that “more young people, in particular those who are not in employment, education or training, aged under 25 progress to education, training or employment”.

In 2013 the rate of youth (15-24 yr old) unemployment in Ireland was 26.7%. In 2017 it had fallen to 14.4%. In total some 36,000 fewer people in the age cohort were unemployed in 2017 than 2013, and the 14.4% rate that remained was equivalent to just under 40,000 individuals. Further reductions have occurred into 2018. The economic and labour market recovery has therefore provided a very positive environment for employment gains amongst those below the age of 25.

A wide range of programmes and initiatives have been implemented to support the Youth Guarantee in Ireland, many of which exist outside PEIL (e.g. Tus, Community Employment, VTOS, PLC and various strands of ETB training). However the YEI has very directly played a leading role in implementing the Youth Guarantee and supporting the labour market progression of eligible young people and to diminishing the rate of youth unemployment. By end-2017, a reported 14,700 individuals had participated in PEIL Activities supported by the

YEI, and current expectations are that the number will ultimately reach 22,330. By end-2018 the YEI is expected to have supported:

- 11,500 young people participating in secondary and avocational and community-based education and training;
- 2,100 long-term unemployed young people to gain employment through subsidised recruitment scheme for employers;
- 1,900 participate in PEIL-supported projects providing education, training, and work experience designed to lead to employment;
- 420 young people start enterprises while receiving ongoing welfare assistance.
- 200 young people participate in formal programmes of work experience; and
- 89 youths engage in employment support schemes delivered by the Defence Forces.

Several of the initiatives supported by the YEI have only quite recently commenced (e.g. YESS and DFESS), while a thorough evaluation of the most substantive programme – Youthreach (along with Community Training Centres which operate as part of Youthreach) – is due to be completed shortly. However the available evidence points to effectiveness in progressing the educational engagement, skills and knowledge, and employability of participants across YEI-supported schemes. In relation to interventions supported by the YEI, the evaluation has found the following:

- the BTWEA scheme has been shown to be very effective in providing a path out of long-term unemployment for participants, including those under 25, and few participants return to welfare indicating its sustained impact;
- similarly, the JobsPlus scheme is evidently very successful in bringing long-term unemployed young people successfully into the workforce and into sustained employment with strong employer buy-in and satisfaction;
- the Youthreach and CTC schemes, as discussed, have been shown to very directly benefit those at risk of early school leaving, and to provide platforms for young people to complete basic education and progress their education, skills, employability and career paths in circumstances where there are significant barriers otherwise facing them;
- similarly Momentum was found to be an effective and efficient intervention that provided effective transitions for young people from recent unemployment and long-term unemployment, through tailored training provision and employment in occupations where skills were in known demand. It provided an innovative model of shared risk with employers and training providers;
- the Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme, while targeting small numbers of young people, is doing so in ways appropriate to its target group, combining physical and educational training and discipline in a residential context. It can point to reasonable levels of progression to further education and training, as well as evidence of personal and self-development among participants;
- the Youth Employment Support Scheme, while only commencing recently, targets young jobseekers who face difficulties in obtaining employment due to work inexperience, and provides basic work and social skills development and support through work-based learning and experience. Its is likely to prove an effective intervention in integrating long-term unemployed young people into the more buoyant labour market that they now face.

7.1.6 Horizontal Principles

The Programme has embraced the two key HPs of clear relevance to it quite commendably. It has integrated formal consideration of them in intervention design and planning, has instilled formal processes of regular reporting comprehensively across the Programme, and brought information and expertise to bear in advising and supporting delivery agents in meeting their obligations. A result is that in many areas of PEIL-supported work, understanding of the HPs has been enhanced, and performance is moving beyond minimally compliant levels to more thorough consideration, examination and reporting on accomplishments and further challenges.

7.1.7 Programme Management and Delivery

We consider the structures and arrangements for programme management and delivery to be generally appropriate and working reasonably well, although it has taken a lot of focused work on the part of the MA, IBs and beneficiaries to reach this point. Significant management time and resources have gone into the establishment of data systems, operational procedures, and channels and mechanisms to ensure compliant financial management, control, reporting and administration, and the delays to procuring and installing the E-Cohesion system have contributed to unwanted risks associated with delayed financial claims.

There is also a degree to which legal, regulatory, financial, technical and audit-related obligations and processes associated with ESF programming have come to dominate the overall “management” task, with the consequent lower status and role of policy-oriented perspectives and considerations. In this respect the policy-role of all EU funded programmes and hence the policy role in their management and monitoring, could usefully be reconsidered and perhaps strengthened before or during the next funding round. It should also be acknowledged however that the Programme has instilled additional layers of financial control and accountability on what, when first delivered, are exchequer-funded programmes and interventions.

The fact that no financial claim has yet been made is unfortunate, and successfully drawing down EU funds is an important milestone to reach in smooth programme delivery. A lesson from the current programme, similar to previous ones, is that planning and preparation for the design, management and delivery of the next ESF and wider structural funding round can and should begin as early as possible, to minimise delays when it commences and mitigate its risks.

7.2 Recommendations

Programme-Wide Recommendations

1. The programme continues to allocate substantial resources to interventions that directly or indirectly target the unemployed. Given the substantial reduction in the numbers of unemployed over the years since the Programme began, the MA should request IBs and beneficiaries of Activities addressing unemployment to re-assess their objectives, target groups and numbers of anticipated and planned unemployed participants, with a view to avoiding competition for participants and potentially re-redirecting any surplus resources from such actions.
2. The DEASP has initiated a process to update the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion for the period 2018-2021. When published, the MA should assess any potential role for the PEIL Programme in

- supporting a renewed national focus on addressing social inclusion and poverty objectives, in light of the further progress required to meet Ireland’s targets in this area under the Europe 2020 Strategy.
3. The MA should complete the process of operationalising, validating, gathering and reporting all output and result indicators, along with final agreed milestones and targets across all Priorities and Activities as soon as possible, and a paper detailing all aspects of what is then to be the overall data and reporting system presented to the PMC.
 4. The MA should revise the Evaluation Plan setting out in more specific detail (a) evaluations that will take place over the course of the remainder of the programme (b) their intended timetable and sequence, and (c) revised output and result indicators and data that will then be available to inform such evaluations.
 5. A number of specific Activities are priority candidates for independent evaluations or reviews, including ETB Training for the Unemployed (or components of it), GYPD, YPP, BTEI, Adult Literacy, while evaluation lessons from others would be beneficial after sufficient implementation progress has been made (including Integration and Employment of Migrants, Gender Equality, SICAP and YESS). In addition consideration should be given to evaluating “clusters” of initiatives targeting the same or similar participants in distinct settings (e.g. BTEI, Adult Literacy). This latter might be approached at individual ETB level.
 6. The MA should decide how best to use TNC resources within the Programme and commence planning them.
 7. The input and involvement in Programme management and monitoring of officials with policy and programming responsibilities, as well as those with financial management and control, should be maintained across the spectrum of Programme interventions.

Post-2020 Planning

8. There may be merit in Ireland re-defining and articulating its policy objectives and goals for all EU structural and investment funding ahead of the next round, which considers issues such as
 - a. the optimal strategic role, alignment and relationships between EU-supported and exchequer only-funded investment in the key policy arenas;
 - b. the appropriate focus of EU supports on long-established national programmes or more recent or new interventions;
 - c. the costs, risks and administrative ease of EU funding compliance and absorption;
 - d. the non-resource role of EU funding (e.g. where and in what ways does EU funding add value and how can that be maximised);
 - e. the role of ESF, ESIF and other funds, and of Ireland’s interface with these, in wider post-Brexit policy regarding our increasingly important relationship with the EU and its institutions.
9. Planning for the 2020-2027 round of ESF programming in Ireland should begin as early as possible. As well as ensuring systems are in place early to avoid delays and risks associated with financial management, control and claim processes, the remaining implementation period of the current OP may offer opportunities for to explore innovative approaches, carry-out new research, and develop pilot initiatives appropriate for emerging shared EU and national priorities, needs and challenges.

Activity-Specific Recommendations:

ETB Training for the Unemployed

- The exclusive or non-exclusive focus of the “ETB Training for the Unemployed” Activity on the unemployed should be clarified and the Activity re-named and/or re-branded as appropriate. The implications of any widening of its focus beyond job-seekers only, for milestones and targets in the Performance Framework should be addressed.
- Any remaining issues involved in reconciling SOLAS/ETB performance data system (PLSS) pre-2017 data with OP data requirements under this Activity (or others overseen by SOLAS) should be addressed urgently.
- Consider continued validity of low certification levels in elements of provision.

Springboard

- The policy rationale for Springboard may need to be re-articulated in the much improved economic and labour market conditions that have emerged.
- The scope for multi-annual funding of the Activity should be considered, in light of the timescale required by HEIs to design new programmes in response to changing sectoral skill needs.
- The profile of courses being offered needs to be continually reviewed and adapted in the light of emerging skills gaps, with increased focus on sector-specific provision.

ICT Skills Conversion

- The scope to seek a greater financial contribution from employers towards tuition fees should be examined.

Intra-EU Mobility

- The participant indicator could be expanded to better capture work placements facilitated under the EURES programme.

Youthreach

- The implications for the remainder of PEIL co-financing should be considered on foot of the evaluation of Youthreach due to be completed shortly.

GYDPs

- The revisions to the GYDP mission, organisational structure, geographical and financial scope should be finalised and communicated as soon as possible, and an evaluation undertaken.

Gender Equality

- A decision should be taken soon on whether to launch another Call for Proposals under the Activity.

Third Level Access

- The effectiveness of the revised funding allocation models within the SAF and FSD need to be kept under review in light of anticipated growth in demand for support under both schemes.

Adult Literacy/BTEI

- Commence independent evaluations of provision.
- Consider continued validity of low certification levels.

DFESS

- The revised output target should be revised upwards if two courses for 2019 are confirmed.
- The financial allocation to the Activity may however need revision if only one course is run in 2019.

Annexes

Annex 1 Simplified Cost Options

Activity	Priority	Claim Type
ETB Training for the Unemployed	ESF 1.1	Standard Scale of Unit Costs
Springboard	ESF 1.2	Standard Scale of Unit Costs
ICT Skills Conversion Course	ESF 1.3	Standard Scale of Unit Costs
Momentum	ESF 1.4	(a) Actual Costs (Invoices) (b) Direct Staff Costs
Intra EU mobility	ESF 1.5	Direct Staff Costs +40%
Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)	ESF 2.1	Standard Scale of Unit Costs
Youthreach	ESF 2.2	(a) Direct Staff Costs +15% (b) Participant Allowances
Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs)	ESF 2.3	Direct Staff Costs +40%
Young Persons Probation Projects	ESF 2.4	Direct Staff Costs +40%
Disability Project ³⁹	ESF 2.6	Direct Staff Costs +40%
Integration and employment of Migrants	ESF 2.7	Direct Staff Costs +40%
Tus Nua project	ESF 2.8	Direct Staff Costs +40%
Gender Equality	ESF 2.9	Direct Staff Costs +40%
Third Level Access	ESF 3.1	Direct Staff Costs +40%
Back To Education Initiative (BTEI)	ESF 3.2	Direct Staff Costs +40%
Adult Literacy	ESF 3.3	Direct Staff Costs +40%
Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) Scheme	ESF 4.1	Actual Costs - Payments to participants
JobsPlus Incentive Scheme	ESF 4.2	Actual Costs - Payments to Employers
Momentum	ESF 4.6	(a) Actual Costs (Invoices) (b) Participant Allowances (c) Direct Staff Costs
Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme (DFESS)	ESF 4.8	Direct Staff Costs + 40%
Community Training Centres (CTCs)	ESF 4.9	Standard Scale of Unit Costs

³⁹ To be confirmed

