

PAUL Partnership Limerick CLG

Submission to Indecon's Review of Local Employment Service (LES)

March 2017

Introduction

This paper is being submitted in response to an invitation from Indecon to contribute our views on the LES, with specific reference to the effectiveness and efficiency of the LES operated by PAUL Partnership as well as the governance arrangements that we have in place.

Staffing, Management and Governance

Management of the LES staff rests with the PAUL Partnership Employment Services Co-ordinator who reports to the CEO of the Partnership, thus ensuring integration, close collaboration and complementarity with all programmes managed by the Partnership.

The LES is overseen by the Employment Services Sub-Committee – a sub-structure of the PAUL Partnership Board. The Employment Services Sub-Committee meets quarterly and reports directly to the PAUL Partnership Board of Directors.

Overall governance of the LES rests with the PAUL Partnership Board of Directors. PAUL Partnership is committed to excellence in our governance and management processes with a focus on strong leadership from our Board of Directors and Management Team. This commitment to excellence in governance is evidenced by:

- Clear roles and responsibilities for the Board of Directors, Sub Committees, CEO and staff and established processes for the induction of new members and the review and renewal of Board and Sub Committee membership.
- Appropriate internal and external control procedures to comply with relevant legal and regulatory frameworks including internal auditing, external auditors, financial control procedures, HR policies and procedures, performance management systems etc.
- Best-practice accounting procedures are documented in a Finance Manual – approved by the Board - covering the key areas, namely: Finance Reporting, Documentation, Internal Control, Budgetary Control and Compliance. The Finance Manual also reflects any specific control and reporting requirements of individual Funder Organisations, including the Department of Social Protection. Qualified finance staff are employed and the operations of the Finance function are monitored by an Audit and Finance Sub-Committee of the Board.
- Regular audits and financial monitoring of the LES carried out by DSP note compliance with all requirements. Any issues raised are promptly addressed.
- Staff Training and Development policies and procedures in place with opportunities for professional development and up-skilling provided for board members and staff of PAUL and our partner's organisations.

- A commitment to continuous learning and improvement through the planning and review processes. Since its establishment in 1989, PAUL Partnership has always striven to be a learning organisation, with a strong commitment to organisational and staff development, as supported by the following policies and practices:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Protection Policy • Communications Policy • Confidentiality and Data Protection Policy • Customer Charter (including complaints procedure) • Equality Statement • Harassment and Anti-Bullying Policy • Health and Safety Statement • Induction Policy for New Staff • Induction Process for Transferred/Promoted Staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet Usage Policy • Protocol for Dealing with Challenging Behaviour • Recruitment Procedures Policy • Stress Management Policy • Training Policy • Whistleblower Policy • Work Experience Policy
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Staff Resources (FTE)

- 1 Co-ordinator
- 12 Mediators
- 1 Guidance Counsellor
- 1 Administrator
- 1 Information Officer (part-time)
- 9 Activation Support Team (clerical), 3 in Central Office; 2 in Northside LES; 1 each in St. Mary's, Our Lady of Lourdes and Tait House.

Locations

Central Office, Unit 2, Tait Business Centre, Dominic St. Limerick

Contact Point Offices

Northside LES	Watch House Cross	2 Mediators + 2 Support Staff
St. Mary's	Nicholas St	1 Mediator + 1 Support Staff
Our Lady of Lourdes	Greenfield Cross	1 Mediator + 1 Support Staff
Tait House	Southill	1 Mediator + 1 Support Staff

The LES provides a local gateway or access point to a full range of services and facilities to help jobseekers to enter or return to employment. Within PAUL Partnership, Limerick LES is closely integrated with other services of the Partnership, including Enterprise Support, SICAP, Job Club education and training, and lifelong learning. The integration of the service in communities experiencing significant disadvantage ensures the activation infrastructure is in place in areas of high unemployment. A hallmark of the LES is one of working in an integrated manner with local education, training and other relevant services, to provide a service tailored to the client's needs. The Board of PAUL Partnership includes representatives of various sectors, including adult and

continuing education, whose expertise is available to the LES in planning and delivering its services to its target groups.

The LES is committed to:

- Provided a client centred service customised to the client needs
- Using a case management approach
- Ensuring the service is holistic and integrated
- Putting a strong focus on placement and progression outcomes

Committed to Quality

Limerick LES has achieved the Q Mark accredited quality standard each year since 2006, consistently achieving higher scores with each assessment, demonstrating a continued commitment to the provision of a quality, professional service to jobseekers.

The need for quality guidance is one that is now noted in the delivery of employment services. John Sweeney, member of the Labour Market Council, noted that this body would like to see ‘assurances that a consistent and high standard of career guidance service will be provided.’ Limerick LES meets these criteria, with 10 practitioners holding a Certificate or Diploma in Adult Guidance and Counselling from NUI Maynooth, and 3 with Graduate Diploma or Masters Level in Guidance and Lifelong Learning from UL. Other qualifications include B.A., B.Ed. and Diplomas in Counselling and Psychology. In line with PAUL Partnership’s commitment to the development of staff, Limerick LES staff continuously update their skills.

Adaptable and Flexible

Limerick LES has evolved over 21 years to deliver services which have been an integral part of the Public or National Employment Service since 2000. It offers jobseekers an effective, professionally delivered service, providing guidance and support to enable the jobseeker to prepare for employment.

The initial remit was to work intensively, over a long period, with clients who experienced multiple barriers to gaining employment. Up to 2009 this was evident in the length of time and the number of interventions needed for clients to progress to employment or employment related opportunities. This was achieved in many cases by a process of moving clients along a continuum of services, from the early stages of building a trustful relationship based on mutual respect, encouraging and supporting clients into training or education, (initially possibly non accredited), then on to accredited training and/or labour market programmes and mainstream employment. The constant throughout this journey was the Mediator, working hand in hand with the client and other agencies and service providers to provide a holistic service, aimed at addressing the specific needs of each individual.

Following the economic downturn after 2008, when unemployment steadily rose to a high of 15%, Limerick LES responded by agreeing to take up to 3,000 extra clients each year from 2009. It should be noted that each LES responded to this request (from FAS) in a proactive manner and, despite the large increase in the workload and caseload, this was managed without any IR issues. Innovative practices were explored, Limerick LES was one area which piloted the idea of Group Engagement Sessions. This was introduced to meet the increased demands in an efficient and effective manner,

the concept worked very well and was later introduced nationally when Employment Services came within the remit of DSP. Staff made the necessary adjustments and skillsets were updated to meet the needs of clients who were short term unemployed, educated and highly skilled and whose demands differed significantly from the previous target groups.

Innovative

Over the years many innovative practices were introduced in response to local needs. Clients were offered tailor made courses in personal and soft skills development before moving on to formal skills development. These courses were run inhouse with specially selected tutors who could deliver to the target audience. Close links with the Adult Learner Support Service led to the development of specially tailored programmes and assessments for people with literacy/numeracy difficulties.

Collaborations with other agencies, notably the then Limerick City VEC, enabled clients to be referred to suitable and appropriate courses, with places ring-fenced for LES clients. The introduction of the Limerick Regeneration Project provided further scope for collaborations:

- The development of the First Steps Programme, whereby identified clients from Regeneration Areas were offered pre-development courses (6 weeks, part time, supported) prior to taking up ring fenced places on a designated FAS course - e.g. Kerbing and Concreting, Retail and Customer Service
- The use of a Social Benefit initiative with contractors for building and refurbishment - Limerick LES agreed to be the liaison between clients of LES, Job Clubs and (then) FAS and the main and sub contractors, to collect and collate CVs from which to refer suitable personnel to contractors.

Value for Money

In addition to the financial or metric measurement of value for money, PAUL Partnership considers it important to stress there are wider values which should be included in any such assessment. In his presentation to the Joint Committee on Social Protection Debate (20/10/16), John McKeon, then Assistant Secretary with responsibility for Employment Services in DSP, stated that

"..it is...important to recognise that services and supports provided as part of a labour market activation regime have an important social or active inclusion role."

Minister for Social Protection Leo Varadkar, in a Dáil reply on 7/3/17, noted that enhanced and improved level of (employment) service would have a sharper focus on qualitative outcomes. This is particularly relevant in assessing the client base of the LES, the breadth and range of options that are discussed with clients and the integrated supports that are offered due to its location within PAUL Partnership. The ESRI (2016) report on employment and training intervention under the national local community development programme stresses the importance of local autonomy and flexibility as well as the need to recognise soft interagency or community development outcomes outside of formal quantitative metrics.

PAUL Partnership believes that the community based model of service employed by the LES has far reaching positive impacts on social inclusion, and on the local community and society in general, which should be included in any measurement of Value for Money.

Networking and Building Local Relationships

Some of the collaborations between Limerick LES and various agencies have been noted above. From the outset, and long before DSP was responsible for Employment Services, PAUL Partnership and Limerick LES recognised the importance of that Department in the lives of Jobseekers. Relevant Officers were intrinsically linked to the LES. The Jobs Facilitator in the then Department of Social Welfare provided a weekly onsite service in LES Central Office, providing invaluable advice to clients who were being supported into employment or training/education. The result was a seamless transition for clients with entitlements and responsibilities clearly explained and relevant paperwork completed.

The Employer is also a Client

Given the multiple disadvantage experienced by so many of the LES client target group, placements rely very much on developing good working relationships with local employers, particularly SMEs. This allows the Mediator to advocate on behalf of a particular client, to offer aftercare supports and thus achieve better outcomes for the clients. Supports offered during the duration of the JobBridge Scheme proved invaluable in progressing clients into employment. It should be noted that not all employers have good IT skills or a high level of HR experience; this is particularly the case with many sole traders or small businesses. The Employer Liaison Officer of Limerick LES provided invaluable services to such potential employers, linking them with potential employees, providing advice and support in the development of Job Descriptions, advertising of posts and providing facilities for conducting interviews. Much of this autonomy has been lost in recent years with the removal of that post in the LES. As a Mediator, that staff member now has a caseload and so has reduced capacity for specific services to Employers.

LES is Under Utilised

The ILDN, in discussion with DSP Employment Services, noted that Partnership Companies could offer tailored services to young unemployed under the terms of the Youth Initiative. PAUL Partnership and Limerick LES have capacity to offer specialist and supportive guidance to this vulnerable target group, developing a realistic progression path for each individual and delivering ongoing support as required. The wraparound services available within PAUL Partnership through programmes such as SICAP and labour market activation programmes, together with the good relationships with local agencies and employers, could deliver a better qualitative outcome for young unemployed and prevent the drift into long term unemployment with the consequent adverse personal, social and financial impacts. Similarly with a new Internship programme, Limerick LES can build on its largely positive experiences of the JobBridge programme to deliver positive outcomes for clients and employers.

Limerick LES in the Future

The Action Plan for Jobs 2016 aims to build on the success of previous years and to continue to generate jobs to move toward full employment. This will require forward thinking to work with those who are currently outside the labour force, to enable them to move along a realistic path towards sustainable employment. Pathways to Work 2016-2020 provides the strategy whereby jobseekers will be supported to achieve employment. However, as noted previously in this submission, the goal of moving long term unemployed people into employment will require a

'specialised employment service'. Since 2012, Pathways to Work has a stated aim of moving as many people as possible from the Live Register into employment.

The guidance model of the LES remains highly relevant in enabling Ireland manage future labour market challenges, build post crisis social inclusion and avoid mistakes of previous recovery periods which may have missed real opportunities to build high levels of labour market participation.

The delivery of Limerick LES by a not for profit company ensures all resources are concentrated on the needs of ALL clients, not just those who will offer the best return to the Company. Local autonomy and flexibility are key to meeting local needs. Good local and regional networking offers opportunities to deliver a real one stop shop or gateway service with integrated service delivery, ultimately providing an effective, efficient and accessible employment service at local level.