

# **Employer Perceptions**

*of the*

# **Long-Term Unemployed**

for KWCD Employer Exchange

**Research Includes:**  
**Current Recruitment Practice**  
**Employer Perceptions of  
Long-Term Unemployed**  
**Company Benefits**  
**Corporate Social Responsibility**



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*Research and Report by Niall Watters, Unique Perspectives.*

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## REPORT SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

### BACKGROUND

KWCD Employer Exchange is a project funded under the EQUAL EU Community Initiative. The KWCD Employer Exchange brings together a group of employers from Dublin 12 and other 'travel to work' areas in Dublin West. As part of its action plan, the KWCD Employer Exchange commissioned this research with employers and how they perceive the target group, the long-term unemployed. The research also explores barriers that hinder people from the target group in finding work and seeks to gain a better understanding of recruitment practices and corporate policies that impact on them. The long-term unemployed are a diverse group with varied profiles. It would be impossible in one piece of research to seek employer perceptions of all the groups that find themselves long-term unemployed e.g. those whose skills have become obsolete, early school leavers and so on. Therefore, the focus of this research was further narrowed to younger and older job-seekers, people with disabilities and ex-prisoners.

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the research involved 5 phases. The initial phase discussed the project in detail with the KWCD Employer Exchange. The second phase reviewed literature, studies and statistical data. The third part of the research developed a systematic random sample of employers. In this phase also, the research questionnaire was developed based on the aims of the research. The questionnaire included single option as well multi option questions to get a broader picture of the views and practices of employers. Typically, employers were presented with a range of options and because most used a number of methods, a number of options were ticked. The questionnaire was disseminated to employers by traditional post, email and online. Intensive follow up calls to surveyed employers were undertaken in order to complete the survey. 373 completed surveys were received of which 366 were valid for input and analysis. This data was analysed in terms of the key themes of the Research. This produced a range of statistical tables which were then further analysed for subsequent documentation and write up as part of the report.

## LABOUR MARKET EXCLUSION

The key context of the research is the most recent report from the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), 'Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market', 2006<sup>1</sup>. This suggests that exclusion from the labour market is, despite the economic and employment buoyancy of recent times, still generated today. The reasons underlying labour market exclusion can be categorised in terms of economic, social, labour market and personal factors. As such the labour market may not be open equally to all due to a combination of these factors above. The groups that are most vulnerable to exclusion from the labour market, as identified by the NESF, are those: 1. with low skill and educational qualifications, 2. who are displaced from the labour market; and 3. who are currently employed in insecure jobs with limited training and progression opportunities.

## PROFILE

As a starting point in the research, the profile of the employers responding to the survey was assessed. This shows that 46.5% of the employers who responded are located in the Dublin 12 postal area. The next largest proportions of employers are situated in Dublin 10 (29.5%). These two postal districts account therefore for nearly 70% of the all the employers who took part in the research.

Table ES.1: Employer Location

Area	No.	%
Dublin 12	167	46.5%
Dublin 10	75	20.9%
Dublin 24	46	12.8%
Dublin 6W	45	12.5%
Dublin 8	18	5%
Dublin 22	8	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>100%</b>

The clear majority (84.4%) of businesses responding class themselves as belonging to the private sector. Nearly one in ten of employers indicated that they were in the not for profit sector while 6.4% indicated they were public sector employers.

<sup>1</sup> National Economic & Social Forum (2006), Report on Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market, Forum Report No. 33. Dublin: NESF

Table ES.2: Business Sector

Area	No.	%
Private	302	84.4%
Not for Profit	33	9.2%
Public	23	6.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>100%</b>

The breakdown of categories that best describes the business of employers in the survey was as follows:

Table ES.3: Business Description

Area	No.	%
Construction & trades	70	19.6%
Factory/Warehousing operations, Transport & Distribution	61	17.1%
Retail & sales	59	16.5%
Health, social, community, children, education & training	50	14%
Engineering & electronics	48	13.4%
Administration, clerical, accountancy & customer services	32	9%
Catering, hospitality, security & cleaning	17	4.8%
Sports, leisure, tourism & travel	9	2.5%
Other	11	3.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>100%</b>

The largest proportion of the respondents, nearly one in five, sees themselves as belonging to the construction and trades category. This is followed by factory/warehousing operations, transport and distribution in 17.1% of cases. Thus, the first six categories, taken together, account for 90% of the employers who took part in the survey.

In the survey, companies with between six and ten employees make up the largest proportion of responses, 31.9%. The research reveals that 78.7% of companies had 25 employees or less. Companies in the construction and trades category mostly employed between 11 and 25 staff. The other main business categories of employers mostly employ between six and ten staff.

## RECRUITMENT & SELECTION

When it comes to recruiting staff, the research shows that 47% of employers use informal/word of mouth sources as their means. The next largest proportions of employers (42.3%) use the national newspapers. 20 to 30% of employers use the following methods: recruitment agencies (28.4%), local newspapers (28.1%), internet/web (25.1%), FAS (24.2%) and internal recruitment (20.3%).

Table ES.4: Recruitment Sources

Area	No.	%
Informal/word of mouth	168	46.8%
National Newspapers	152	42.3%
Recruitment Agencies	102	28.4%
Local Newspapers	101	28.1%
Internet/web	90	25.1%
FAS	87	24.2%
Internal recruitment	73	20.3%
Other	41	11.4%
LES	20	5.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>359</b>	

The research demonstrates also how slightly more private employers use the informal/word of mouth on average as a source for recruitment. Public sector employers were more likely to use national newspapers, recruitment agencies, internal recruitment and FAS and less likely, in comparative terms, to use the informal/word of mouth which is understandable given public recruitment policies and procedures.

The research also show some differences in the responses based on the business area in which an employer operates.

Table ES.5: Recruitment Sources by business description

Recruitment Sources	Overall %	Greater than the overall	Less than the overall
Informal/word of mouth	46.8%	Construction & trades (62.9%) Retail & sales (55.9%)	Engineering and electronics, and; Administration, clerical, accountancy & customer services (37.5%) Health, social, community, children, education & training (38%);
National Newspapers	42.3%	Health, social, community, children, education & training (60%); Administration, clerical, accountancy & customer services (50%)	Construction & trades (35.7%) Catering, hospitality, security & cleaning (35.3%)
Recruitment Agencies	28.4%	Administration, clerical, accountancy & customer services (46.9%) Factory/Warehousing operations, Transport & Distribution (44%) Engineering and electronics (35.4%)	Health, social, community, children, education & training (4%); Sports, leisure, tourism & travel (11%)
FAS	24.2%	Sports, leisure, tourism & travel (66.6%) Health, social, community, children, education & training (42.2%); Construction & trades (32.9%)	Catering, hospitality, security & cleaning (11.8%) Administration, clerical, accountancy & customer services (12.5%) Factory/Warehousing operations, Transport & Distribution (14.8%)

The data suggests that private sector industries or business areas with typically a high number of employees, high turnover and contract staff are those that are most likely to recruit staff through informal means. On the other hand, professional services were less likely overall to use this source and more likely, especially in the public sector, to use national newspapers.

A majority of employers (58%) choose their methods of recruitment due to the quality of staff that they hired as a result. Half of employers suggested that the reason behind their choice was its efficiency in time terms and just over one third of employers cited cost effectiveness.

In respect of the selection methods used by employers, one-to-one interviews are the method by which the clear majority of employers select staff, 84.1%. This is followed in 73.6% of cases by use of the Curriculum Vitae. Just over half (53.8%) of the respondents cited using reference checks. The remainder of the various selection methods noted were chosen by only a minority of employers.

**Table ES.6: Selection Methods**

Area	No.	%
1-to-1 interview	302	84.1%
CV	265	73.6%
Reference check	193	53.8%
Word of mouth	100	27.9%
Panel Interview	69	19.2%
Application form	57	15.9%
Recruitment Agency	38	10.6%
Other	23	6.4%
Aptitude/psychometric test	20	5.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>359</b>	

Private sector employers are much more likely than their public and not for profits counterparts to carry out one to one interview as a means of selecting potential staff. This trend is also seen in the case of Curriculum Vitae. Private sector employers are also twice as likely to select staff by word of mouth relative to the other sectors. This data suggests also that the public services recruitment policies are more regimented than those in the private sector.

At the category of business level, the research shows that retail and sales employers use one to one interviews more than the average seen across all the employers. Employers best described as belonging to the administration, clerical, accountancy and customer services category were more likely than the average to make use of reference checks and CVs. Word of mouth as a selection method was more prevalent in construction and trades and retail/sales.

**Table ES.7: Selection methods by business description**

Recruitment Methods	Overall %	Greater than the overall	Less than the overall
1-to-1 interview	84.1%	<i>Retail and sales (93.2%)</i>	<i>Sports, leisure, tourism &amp; travel (66.7%) Health, social, community, children, education &amp; training (76%)</i>
CV	73.6%	<i>Administration, clerical, accountancy &amp; customer services (87.5%)</i>	<i>Sports, leisure, tourism &amp; travel (55.6%)</i>
Reference check	53.8%	<i>Administration, clerical, accountancy &amp; customer services (81.3%)</i>	<i>Factory/Warehousing operations, Transport &amp; Distribution (42.6%)</i>
Word of mouth	27.9%	<i>Construction and trades (42.9%) Retail and sales (42.4%)</i>	<i>Sports, leisure, tourism &amp; travel (11.1%) Health, social, community, children, education &amp; training (14%)</i>

In similarity to the choice of recruitment sources, a significant majority (77.4%) of employers cite the quality of staff selected as the main rationale in their use of their chosen selection methods. This proportion is emphatic when compared to the just over one third and twenty percent respectively who cited time efficiency and costs as their rationale.

## EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS OF THE TARGET GROUP

The research reveals that nearly 85% of the employers surveyed agree – based on their experience – that people find themselves unemployed due to their attitude to work or work ethic. This is interesting and suggests a belief that there is lack of a work culture amongst the long-term unemployed (LTU). In parallel to this, over 78.9% of employers also believe that social problems such as anti-social behaviour, problematic alcohol or drug use are contributory factors to LTU. Almost seven out of every ten employers surveyed (68.9%) indicate that the interrelated issues of low self esteem, lack of confidence and poor social skills also play a part in LTU. In addition, ranging from 62% to

Table ES.8: Reasons for long-term unemployment

Reason	Disagree Strongly/ Disagree	Unsure	Agree/ Agree Strongly
Family Issues	21.4%	16.1%	62.5%
Skill levels	30.3%	3.6%	66.1%
Physical health	19.2%	15.2%	65.6%
Level of Ed.	33.2%	7.2%	59.6%
Mental health	12.9%	24.8%	62.3%
Family difficulties	32%	22.7%	45.4%
Ltd./Inappropriate Job opportunities	64.2%	5.9%	29.9%
Personal choice	12.9%	10.8%	76.2%
Social problems	10%	12.1%	78.9%
Low self esteem/Lack of confidence	19.7%	11.4%	68.9%
Attitude to work/Work ethic	10.8%	5.1%	84.1%
Changing labour market needs	50.2%	13.9%	36%
Financial reasons	44.4%	11.7%	44%

*The research reveals that nearly 85% of the employers surveyed agree – based on their experience – that people find themselves unemployed due to their attitude to work or work ethic*

66% of employers opinions, the survey suggests the following as reasons why people become LTU: skill levels, physical health, family issues and mental health.

64.2% of employers do not however feel limited job opportunities area a reason for LTU. Other areas the respondents suggest are not reasons in LTU are: changing labour market needs (50.2%), financial reasons (44.4%), level of education (33.2%), family difficulties (32%) and skill levels (30.3%). However, these also suggest some equivocation in the overall responses. In this sense, 44% of employers agree as well as disagree that financial reasons contribute to LTU. While around one third do not see lack of education or skill levels as a reason for long-term unemployment, over 60% of employers do etc.

The proportion of employers who indicated that they were unsure of the contribution of specific reasons for LTU is also telling. Almost one in four were unsure of the relationship between mental health and LTU, and 22.7% were unsure of this relationship in respect of family difficulties.

What these results tell us overall is that there are definite opinions about the reasons why people find themselves unemployed. It also shows how employers, from their experience, acknowledge (albeit to differing degrees) that there are a range of factors which are at play in LTU. This seems to reflect the reality of how these factors can interact in any one individual's biography. The research also illustrates that the perspective of each sector (private, public, etc) is linked to their core business area or function and this may dictate to a certain extent their understanding of the experiences of LTU and their role in employment situations.

The research also looked at the extent to which employers have employed members of the target group. The findings indicate that significant number of the employers surveyed have employed persons who are under 21 and over 50 years of ages. In addition, 12.2% have employed a person with disabilities which is encouraging considering that at any given time it has been estimated that the numbers making up people with disabilities nationally is around 10%.<sup>2</sup> Less than 3% indicated that they have employed people who have a criminal record.

<sup>2</sup> Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996). A Strategy for Equality, Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities. Dublin: Government Publications.

**Table ES.9: Employment of groupings that make up the LTU target group**

Reason	%
> 6 mths unemployed	21.1%
Disability	12.2%
Criminal Record	2.5%
< 21 yrs	42.8%
> 50 yrs	57.5%

Employers substantially agree that they would hire people who are under 21 or over 50 years of age. In terms of people with disabilities, roughly 71% implied that they would hire someone from this group. 30% of employers indicated that they were unsure or were less likely to hire someone who is six months or more out of work. Nearly 80% of employers agreed that they would be less likely to employ someone with a criminal record – and this trend is evident throughout the research.

**Table ES.10: Likelihood of employing members of the target group**

Reason	Likely to employ	Unsure	Less likely to employ
'is out of work for six month or more'	68.7%	9.6%	21.7%
'has a criminal record'	10.8%	10.5%	78.7%
'has a disability'	70.8%	12.6%	16.6%
'is less than 21 years of age'	83.5%	3.4%	12.8%
'is over 50 years of age'	86.9%	3.7%	9.7%

In terms of the concerns employers have about employing members of the target group, they are uncertain in terms of the comparative ability of people with disabilities to undertake a job with the employer.

*Nearly 80% of employers agreed that they would be less likely to employ someone with a criminal record – and this trend is evident throughout the research*

*In terms of an employees initiative, one quarter of employers expressed concern about the under 21s.*

**Table ES.11: Concerns in employing members of the target group**

Concern	Disability	> 50 yrs	< 21 yrs	Criminal record
Ability to do job	62.6%	27.8%	25.6%	16.8%
Interaction with colleagues	13.2%	9.8%	8.4%	27.2%
Reliability	12.1%	8.2%	37.1%	46.1%
Interaction with customers	14.3%	5.9%	13.5%	21.1%
Initiative	8.1%	7.3%	25.3%	13.5%
Trust	4.8%	5.1%	9%	72.8%
Training time	21.3%	19.4%	20.2%	7.9%
Adapting the work environment	53.9%	5.1%	3.7%	6.5%
Individual's welfare	32.9%	8.4%	7.9%	12.9%
Time required to manage individual	14.9%	6.2%	14.6%	17.1%
Company reputation	4.2%	3.1%	5.6%	36.8%
Health & safety	64.3%	12.9%	9%	10.4%

For the most part, employers were involved in physical types of employment and as such it is reasonable to assume that these employers view disability in physical terms also. In tandem, employers were most concerned in terms of adapting their work environment for people with disabilities. Employers were more likely also to have concerns in the employment of people with disabilities relating to their individual welfare and to health and safety.

Generally, employers have less concern about the interaction of people over 50 with their customers relative to the other three groupings. This concern is most acute for those with a criminal record. Employers were least concerned when it comes to time required to manage an employee when it came to people over 50. In terms of an employees initiative, one quarter of employers expressed concern about the under 21s. This is well in excess of the corresponding figure for the other groupings.

*Over 90% of employers suggest that they would be more likely to employ someone if they could have the individual work on a trial basis in order to assess their suitability.*

Concerns about the reliability of employees are most obvious in respect of those under 21 and those with a criminal record. Most of the surveyed employers suggested that trust was a concern in employing people with a criminal record. Predictably, employers have reservations about employing ex-offenders in respect of the reputation of the company. This collectively suggests the existence of, rightly or wrongly, a strong negative stereotype of this group.

Overall, this data confirms that the stereotypes that are most prevalent about the people that are perceived to make up these four groupings are also held, quite naturally, by employers. The stereotypes however colour the views of employers around a range of potential concerns in the employment of members of the groupings. For examples, people with disabilities are viewed mainly in terms of physical disability with some charitable nuances. As such, employers register higher relative concerns with this group when it comes to ability to do the job, adapting the work environments, health and safety and the welfare of people with disabilities. In similarity in terms of a stereotypical view, employers have most concerns about those under the age of 21 when it comes to reliability and initiative. There exists a trenchantly negative perception of those with a criminal record when it comes to trust, interaction with customers, reliability, interaction with colleagues and the reputation of the company. The implication of this is that such stereotypes need to be addressed when it comes to increasing the employment of these groups. Thus employment strategies have to factor these views in along with more practical needs.

Following this, the research also assessed the type of supports that would make employers more likely to employ someone from the target group. Over 90% for instance of employers suggests that they would more likely to employ someone if they could have the individual work on a trial basis in order to assess their suitability.

Table ES.12: Supports for the employment of the target group

Statement of Support	Disagree Strongly /Disagree	Unsure	Agree/ Agree Strongly
<i>The company could take the person on a trial basis to see their suitability</i>	6.2%	3.6%	90.2%
<i>The company could meet the person informally to see their suitability</i>	8.9%	5.2%	85.9%
<i>The person has completed work experience in another company</i>	7.8%	3.9%	88.3%
<i>The person has been in regular contact with employment services such as FAS/KWCD LES</i>	20.5	6.7%	72.8%
<i>Incentives were available to compensate for any additional resources required</i>	25.9%	12.3%	61.8%
<i>If the company heard about employers who had positive experiences when they employed such a person</i>	30.2%	10%	59.8%
<i>There was somebody to call if they felt the person required support on the job</i>	33.4%	8.6%	58%
<i>If the company felt that they were contributing to the community and improving the company's reputation</i>	33.8%	12.5%	53.7%
<i>If the company received up to date information on statutory requirements such as equality legislation</i>	38.2%	18.9%	42.9%
<i>The company knew more companies in the area that hired people who were long-term unemployed</i>	46.8%	16.2%	37%

This implies that potential candidates could be supported as part of a programme and assisted in this process. This would overcome the stigma of being from the target group in the eyes of both the employers and individual regardless of the objections that could be made against the existence of such a stigma. It is evident from the research nevertheless that such preconception exists and countering these must be a part of supporting unemployed persons in the labour market. This includes work with both the employers and the potential employees.

In terms of supports therefore, the research suggests that employers are concerned with the proven ability of the potential employee to work in their companies. This is not only based on experience but also on specialised assessments and trial periods within the employment setting. This is a significant finding and outlines the future direction for the provision of supports in this context.

### PROVISION OF EMPLOYEE BENEFITS & EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

The research shows that the main benefit employers offered to their employees was training (80%). This was followed in the case of two thirds of employers by the provision of canteen facilities. The research suggests that over half of the employers surveyed offered pension schemes of some sort.

Table ES.13: Employers benefits

Benefits	Yes	No
Training	80.2%	19.8%
Canteen	66.9%	31.1%
Pension	56.8%	43.2%
Flexi-time	39.8%	60.2%
Educational assistance	39%	61%
Bonus/profit sharing	38.4%	61.6%
Health insurance	30.6%	69.4%
Job sharing	13.6%	86.4%

The majority of employers do not offer their staff flexi-time (60.2%), assistance for the education of staff (61%), bonus and profit sharing (61.6%) and health insurance (69.4%). Of the 366 employers surveyed, only 13.6% provided job sharing.

### *The research reveals that 65.4% of employers employed persons from outside Ireland*

Private, public or NFP employers generally reveal similar proportions as each sector overall in the provisions of benefits. The main difference is in relation to private employers in different categories, in crude terms office and non office based work. This trend is also seen in relation to pensions. Larger employers are often those that are in a position to provide a wider range of benefits to their employees.

Roughly half of employers have an equality in policy in place. 46% of private sector employers have such a policy; however this rises to 61% in the case of public sector and 73% in the case of the NFP sector employers. This is probably attributable to the statutory policies of public sector companies and the focus of NFP sectors in contrast to the commercial activity of private sector employers. The findings reveal that just over 20% of employers have an ethnic diversity policy. Notwithstanding this, the research reveals that 65.4% of employers employed persons from outside Ireland. This underlines the challenge that immigration poses to employers and the need to explore their approach, perhaps through an ethnic diversity policy, to changed circumstances with regards to the ethnic makeup of their employees.

The research illustrates that 26.5% of employers have a Corporate Social Responsibility policy. In addition, a similar proportion stated that they were involved in activities in their community. About one quarter of private sector employers had a CSR policy, while this rose to 44% in the case of the public sector, about one third of NFP employers had such a policy. Less than one fifth of private sector employers suggested they engaged in activities in the community. The corresponding proportions for the other two sectors were considerably higher. Of the employers who indicated they had a CSR policy (26.5%), if the policy had a particular focus the following areas were cited: workplace (17.8%), community (13.4%), marketplace (6.7%), and, the environment (15.3%).

## CONCLUSIONS

### ONE

The research suggests that there exist some preconceived ideas – stereotypes – about the long-term unemployed as a whole but more particularly about some groupings that make up this wider group of LTU. The research drew parallels between these views and the stereotypes that are more prevalent in wider society. These stereotypes colour the views of employers around a range of potential concerns employers have in the employment of members of the groupings. The implication of this is that such stereotypes need to be addressed when it comes to increasing the employment of these groups. Thus employment strategies have to factor these views in along with more practical needs.

### TWO

Employers have quite clear ideas about the causes of unemployment. For instance, they generally do consider the following to be factors: negative attitude to work/work ethic, social problems such as addiction, and personal choice, and to a lesser extent low self-esteem/confidence, poor social skills, skills in general, physical health, family issues and mental health. What is striking about these findings is the apparent contradiction between choice and personal attitude when it comes to unemployment and external factors to the individual. In other words, the data suggests a view that unemployment is caused by the individual through their choices (agreed to by over three quarters of employers) and/or personal circumstances and environmental factors. This is not to say either factor is not responsible to some extent for unemployment. Both views are supported in the responses and they are on closer examination not contradictory. How factors come together in any one individual biography and a point in time is a complex process, and the responses by employers in the research inadvertently acknowledge this. The research suggests that the perspective of each sector is linked to their core business area or function and this may dictate to a certain extent their understanding of the experiences of LTU and their role in employment situations. Indeed, throughout the research it is apparent that commercial feasibility lies behind many of the views expressed by private sector employers.

Thus the approach to take with private employers is one that must be cognisant of their core focus as a commercial enterprise first and foremost. As the research findings have

shown, supports, information and dialogue with employers must be in a practical format to facilitate the employment of LTU. The emphasis on practical supports and a proven experience of LTU in placement type programmes is a clear need. Consequently, any employment supports offered must meet employers half-way. In tandem, it is also the case that supports of an integrated or holistic nature should be provided for people who are long-term unemployed. This will need to be individually tailored to the particular circumstances of a client. This joint approach is likely to be the most effective.

### THREE

The research suggests that employers are concerned with the proven ability of the potential employee to work in their companies. This is not only based on experience but also on specialised assessments and trial periods within an employment setting. This is a significant finding and outlines the future direction for the provision of supports in this context. As such, it appears that employers are willing to consider for employment those that have undertaken some type of pre support work such as placement etc with the company or elsewhere. This is in keeping with the more practical bent of the type of supports that employers, and employees who are previously LTU, require to enhance employment among this group.

### FOUR

Overall, people with criminal records are those that are most likely to experience direct or intentional discrimination in the labour market due to their membership of this social group. For the other groupings, there is no outward sense that employers would be less likely to employ people from these groups in ideal terms. That is, the other groups are less likely to experience direct discrimination based on their sole membership of the social grouping of, say, people with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, etc. They are, however, likely to experience indirect discrimination.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> NESF (1996: 12) understand direct discrimination as occurring where a person(s) is treated less favourably than another person on the grounds of their membership of a particular social group. This form of discrimination is relatively overt and usually involves intent. Indirect discrimination on the other hand is less visible and does not always involve intent. Indirect discrimination occurs where policies, practices, terms or conditions apply which are unnecessary and have a relatively adverse affect on a particular group. Indirect discrimination refers therefore to "to the differential impact of the same treatment where the differential is not justified". National Economic and Social Forum (1996). Equality Proofing Issues, Forum Report No. 10. Dublin: NESF.

Along with the other findings, and the level of responses in the unsure category, this leads the research to conclude that practical considerations from the employer's perspective are paramount here. In other words, employers do not want to have concerns along a range of the factors presented in the research in employing someone from this group. They may for instance be positive about employing someone with a disability, but have related concerns, based on stereotypes and perceptions, about the costs associated with adapting a business premises, providing additional training for long-term unemployed people, or direction for those who are aged under 21 and so on. A positive practical experience in employing someone from the group will go along way to achieve this. As suggested elsewhere, this implies the need for education and support for employers in employing people from these groups while simultaneously putting in place the provision of supports – of a tailored nature – for members of the various social groups that make up the LTU, whilst also in keeping with the particular biography of individuals.

## FIVE

While there are undoubtedly very clear trends in the research, the research also suggests that not all employers have the same opinion, standpoint, perspective etc. Different approaches with different content should be taken with employers because they are also a diverse group. This relates to whether they are private sector or not, large or small, and in what business area. It also relates to their extent of interacting, and critically the capacity to do so, with employment support programmes such as the LES, FAS and the KWCD Employer Exchange etc. Thus one size does not fit all. Accordingly, this calls for a tailored approach to different categories of employer.

## SIX

Employers choose their recruitment and selection methods on the basis of what they consider are best for them in terms of adding quality staff to their workforce. However, the research shows that most do not undertake any form of review of the methods they choose. This is an area that could be developed as well as dovetailing with efforts to increase the employment of the long-term unemployed. In others words, this points toward employers being supported to look at alternative methods of recruitment and selection. One example here

might be work based assessments which again is in keeping with the concern on the part of employers about work experience and the proven capability of potential employees.

Information provision is also a key aspect of the work of the KWCD Employer Exchange. The reality of the experience of different categories of LTU and labour market exclusion has to be factually and sensitively conveyed to employers. It is clear that they have varied grasps of this reality and the many factors that play a part. Areas such as family problems, mental health and social problems all need to be discussed so as to decrease any unfounded concerns potential employers might have. Emphasising the positive, the practical and what supports are in place are all fundamental elements of this approach. This will involve challenging stereotypes about age, disability, previous prison history and unemployment as well as the other range of causes of unemployment. The provision of information must be practical and specific to the individual, showing successful case studies and step by step guides. Notwithstanding this, this approach must tie in with the viewpoint and concerns of the employers. It should therefore not be viewed as time consuming and onerous to the employer.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The main areas for future actions, recommendations, arising from the research are set out below.

Firstly however, in keeping with the conclusions above, there are some important principles that should underlie each of their recommendations, including their implementation. They are as follows:

1. Each of the recommendations is not stand alone, that is, each one is reliant on the implementation of the others. They are mutually inclusive and therefore should be integrated;
2. Employers are a diverse group in size, area, focus, private, public, etc. As such, the approach must be one which is tailor-made to the needs of groupings of employers and be aware of the worldview of employers when it comes to employment;
3. Both employers and the LTU require simultaneous supports and dialogue so as to bring the two together.

### ONE

When supports are discussed and presented to employers or the LTU (initially and as part of a programme), they must be operational, and effective. Although this is self-evident, it is nevertheless crucial in promoting the credence, professionalism and value of a service to both groupings. This approach seeks to avoid even minor initial negative experiences on the part of employers – who may be sceptical – and the long-term unemployed of such supports so as to build their confidence in the efficacy and value of supports in the long run.

### TWO

Activities to enhance employment of LTU must be of a practical nature such as specialised assessments and in-company trial periods.

### THREE

Services to the unemployed should develop an information dissemination process on LTU to employers as part of a wider programme. This will challenge and overcome the

stereotypes that are prevalent not only about groupings who are LTU (people with disabilities, ex-offenders, etc.) but also the factors that contribute to unemployment. This should also be accompanied by a strategy to ensure closer contact between employers and target group members which will challenge stereotypes naturally by helping the employer to focus more on the individual and less on their membership of a social group.

### FOUR

The findings clearly indicate there is a continuing need for innovative programmes to increase workplace access for marginalised job seekers. As such, services to the unemployed should set about devising a new (demonstration) programme<sup>4</sup> and sourcing funds to run the programme while being cognisant of the need to provide continuity in such a service to both employers and potential employees who are presently LTU.

### FIVE

The demonstration programme should be reviewed and evaluated and the results used to inform national policy and local initiatives.

### SIX

Services working with the unemployed should work closely with the Department of Social and Family Affairs so that job seekers can be given assurances about their respective welfare payments during the trial periods associated with a demonstration programme.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the setting up of a demonstration programme on a trial basis, which links LTU individuals with employers. This will mean sourcing LTU persons in the first instance, then providing a range of supports around their specific reasons for LTU from mental health, to family problems, to skills and education levels etc. This will include working with other service providers as appropriate to the needs of the client. This will involve a case management approach. The aim will be to build a bridge between potential employees and employers. Once the client is in a position to take employment, the KWCD Employer Exchange will arrange a placement period with employers who have been initiated into the programme and have knowledge about the real needs of LTU. This will underline the practical benefits of the programme in terms of taking employees on placement or those who have been on a placement to date. The placement and first period of the employment will be supported by the case management approach.

#### SEVEN

Employers should be supported to put in place a suitable system to choose the best recruitment and selection methods for them which is in keeping with the overwhelming view that quality of staff is the main rationale used when deciding what methods to use.

#### EIGHT

Work should be undertaken with employers to improve the provision of flexible work arrangements in order to assure the recruitment and retaining of quality staff

#### NINE

Employers should be encouraged, and facilitated, to more widely adopt equality policies, ethnic diversity management programmes etc.

#### TEN

The greater adoption and implementation of CSR by employers is an important recommendation arising from the research.

#### ELEVEN

Area partnerships and services to the unemployed should look to dialogue with other agencies and advocacy groups which deal with or provide services to LTU people in different guises.

#### TWELVE

Dialogue should be undertaken with Government agencies, policy makers and employers groups to increase the awareness of the LTU and its relationship to labour market exclusion.



The KWCD Employer Exchange is a network of leading employers from the locality who want to promote best practice in the recruitment of the long-term unemployed.

The network is partnered by employers and service organisations who want to change people's lives and have a positive influence on their local community.

Employers will benefit from training, work-shops on issues of interest to them and support in organising work placements for local long-term unemployed.

The KWCD Employer Exchange is partnered by  
**John Sisk & Sons, Contract People,  
PEI, Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children, Enable Ireland,  
Johnson & Johnson, The Linkage Programme,  
Department of Social & Family Affairs,  
KWCD Local Employment Service,  
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