

Falling through the net:

An exploration of barriers to employment for long-term unemployed Irish men aged 35 and over



National Development Plan 2007 - 2013

Transforming Ireland

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April 2009**

ABSTRACT

Unemployed men are not mere statistics: they are individuals, fathers in many cases, who happen to be without paid work. According to Alcock *et al* (2003, preface xiii) ‘the detachment of large numbers of men from paid employment is one of the most significant social changes of the last twenty years or so. We should not assume that men’s growing detachment from work is mainly a voluntary phenomenon, prompted by rising influence and greater choice’.

It is remarkable how little ethnographic research about unemployed Irish men aged 35 and over has been carried out over the past ten years. In light of this, the following ethnographic research project aspires to provide a fresh insight on what factors are preventing long-term unemployed Irish men from approaching key agencies such as the Blanchardstown Area Partnership (BAP), in an effort to re-enter the labour market. ¹ In doing so, it attempts to fill a gap in the academic literature and build upon research conducted by ADM Ltd (1998) with this same age cohort of men.

In December 2007, when the research project was originally proposed unemployment was at an historical low in Ireland. Nonetheless, despite impressive national employment figures, large numbers of unemployed Irish men remained detached from the labour market in Blanchardstown. The research sought to reach out to these men.

The literature review section describes the social and psychological consequences of unemployment with particular reference to previous studies by Jahoda (1982), Classen (1998) and MacMillan (2003). In addition, it also compares Irish and Swedish active labour market programmes.

The fieldwork phase discovered that legacy issues from the informant’s childhoods had long-term consequences for their subsequent engagement in

¹ Please refer to appendices A for an overview of Blanchardstown Area Partnership. According to the guidelines of Local Development Social Inclusion Programme 2000-2006, the definition of a long-term unemployed person is someone signing on the live register for 12 months or over.

the labour market. The majority of the men interviewed also suffered from physical and/or mental health issues. I would contend that the combination of these issues necessitate that many of these men require prolonged mediation support to help them re-enter the labour market. These support mechanisms are not available from BAP, but are from its sister company the Local Employment Service (LES). I suggest that this is possibly one reason why fewer men than women approach BAP.

Finally evidence is presented demonstrating that poor information provision and inequities surrounding CE payments may deter the head of traditional nuclear families from registering for active labour market scheme with FÁS.

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² Ireland's national training and employment agency.

Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to thank the following individuals.

- In particular the men from Blanchardstown who freely agreed to participate, and share their views and thoughts with me.
- Michael Rigby, Dissertation Supervisor, Open University.
- The Board of Blanchardstown Area Partnership who supported me towards a MSc in Social Research Methods.

Other interviewees

- Terry McCabe, Deputy Manager of the Blanchardstown Area Partnership.
- Gerry Keogh, Co-ordinator of the Blanchardstown Local Employment Service.
- Rosaleen Kinane, Co-ordinator of FAS Community Employment ...

Other contributors

- LES mediators who helped set-up several interviews.
- Patricia Swords and Brian Chadwick, Department of Social and Family Affairs.
- Kevin Quinn, Blanchardstown Centre for the Unemployed.
- Fergus Dunne, proof reader.
- My colleagues who also proof read the report.

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Blanchardstown Area Partnership, Blanchardstown Local Employment Service.

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Glossary of Terms

BAP	Blanchardstown Area Partnership
BCU	Blanchardstown Centre for the Unemployed
BTWEA	Back to Work Enterprise Allowance
CD	Community Development
CDVEC	County Dublin Vocational Education Committee
CE	Community Employment
CSP	Community Services Programme
D/CRGA	Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
D/ES	Department of Education and Science
D/SFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs
ED	Electoral Division
FÁS	Foras Aiseanna Saothair
HSE	Health Service Executive
LDSIP	Local Development Social Inclusion Programme
LES	Local Employment Service
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
OPFP	One Parent Family Payment
PES	Principal Economic Status
PIB	Planning Implementation Board
POBAL	Formerly Area Development Management Ltd.
SFTU	Services for the Unemployed

Chapter 1.

Introduction

The aims and objectives of the research project are set out in sequence beneath. These helped direct my focus throughout the research process. Reference to these aims and objectives will be made periodically throughout the various chapters.

1.1 Research Aims

- To conduct an ethnographical study with 10 long-term unemployed men aged 35 and over in Blanchardstown, Dublin 15.
- To gather information from this cohort of men about what education and training strategies and/or labour market programmes they believe are appropriate to help men re-enter the workforce.
- To consult with local service providers about what education and training strategies and/or labour market programmes they believe are appropriate to help men re-enter the labour market.
- To compare and contrast the above perspectives with a view to establishing their compatibility.
- To contribute to the wider national and international policy discussion about long-term unemployment among men.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To interview 10 Irish men aged 35 and over about their experiences in connection with long-term unemployment.
- To examine these men's reasons for not taking up mainstream employment, training or self-employment opportunities.
- To gather information from this sample group about what that they consider should be done to help other men re-enter the labour market.
- To establish the extent to which, long-term unemployed men feel their needs are being met by various agencies in Blanchardstown, Dublin15.
- To review national and international literature and identify factors influencing the successful provision of services.
- To establish if there is a fundamental weakness in the way Irish labour market programmes are designed that discourages men from taking up supported employment options.
- To identify if there are systemic factors outside the control of agencies, which act as barriers to men's equality of access and participation in a range of courses or labour market schemes.
- To examine whether education and training courses being delivered on an inter-agency basis are appropriate for the needs of long-term unemployed men.
- To interview management from FÁS, LES and BAP about what they consider could be done to support more long-term unemployed men in their efforts to return to the labour market.

The literature review initially examines the contemporary labour market in Ireland. In doing so, it highlights the prevalence of long term unemployed among men in Blanchardstown. In addition, it also investigates the gender profile of clients registering with agencies who have a shared responsibility for supporting vulnerable groups back into the workforce.

In recent years BAP has allocated significant resources to try and integrate ethnic groups in the locality. Whilst this is justified, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some local communities feel that the needs of the unemployed Irish have been overlooked.

According to Alcock et al (2003, preface xiii) ‘the detachment of large numbers of men from paid employment is one of the most significant social changes of the last twenty years or so. There is scant evidence that this increase in labour market detachment among men was ever anticipated by policy-makers or academic analysts. We should not assume that men’s growing detachment from work is mainly a voluntary phenomenon, prompted by rising influence and greater choice’.

In light of this statement there are several questions that could be posed such as; what factors are causing men to withdraw or be removed from the labour market, and more importantly, what impacts this is engendering. Before exploring these salient issues it is important to stress that one of the challenges in compiling the following literature review is that the overwhelming body of international research conducted with unemployed men took place during the 1980s and early 1990s, some of whose findings are informed by competing research paradigms.

Marsh and Alvaro (1990, p238) point out ‘one major difficulty with comparative research is the establishment of equivalent measurement devices. Moreover in order to make comparative statements about more subjective and psychological aspects, it is vital that the measuring devices should be identical, within the limits of linguistic possibility’.

It is important to highlight this quote because the literature review explores the social and psychological consequences of unemployment based on previous studies by Jahoda (1982), Clasen et al (1998) and MacMillan (2003). This will be followed in turn by an examination of the barriers to re-employment. In this respect the National Economic and Social Council suggests that there are four policy arenas where barriers interacting to produce vulnerability, some of which are not amenable to local intervention.

Finally the literature review will examine policies that aim to alleviate long-term unemployment in Ireland and other countries.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

2.1 Contemporary labour market in Ireland

The contribution of self-employment and part-time employment to overall employment growth in Ireland between 1998 and 2007 was significant. Two thirds of the increase in part-time employment was accounted for by women (FÁS 2nd quarterly outlook 2008). This can be attributed to factors such as rising educational attainment amongst women, reduced family sizes, and shifts in the demand for labour in service type industry (Walsh, 1993).

A prominent aspect of the boom during the ‘Celtic Tiger’ era was also the importance of foreign nationals in filling vacancies, especially after the accession of many Eastern European countries to the European Union. The growing application of information technologies; increasing professionalism of the workforce; and a growing diversity of employment contracts have also been features of the employment market over the past decade (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2002).

A far less commented upon feature of the Irish labour market, however, during this era was the continuing higher percentage of long-term unemployed men signing on the live register in comparison with women. Indeed the most detailed recent live register data for Blanchardstown reveals that 70.0 per cent of all people signing on for one year or over are men (See table 1 overleaf)³. 78.0 per cent of all Irish people presently in receipt of unemployment assistance aged 35 and over are men. (February 2009)

³ Bi-annual data is released in April and October sheds light on the duration persons are signing on by gender. The Live Register is not designed to measure unemployment. It includes part time workers (those who work up to three days a week), seasonal and casual workers entitled to Jobseekers Benefit or Allowance. Unemployed is measured every 5 years applying the Principal Economic Status (PES) via the national Census or captured on a regional basis via the Quarterly National Household Survey using the International Labour Office methodology.

Table 1

Blanchardstown Local Office Live Register by Duration

	0-1 Year	1-< 2 years	2-< 3 years	3+ years	Total
Males	4,348	425	181	408	5,362
Females	2,218	216	85	129	2,648
Total	6,566	641	266	537	8,010

Source: BAP analysis of CSO live register April 2009

There are several reasons why more men than women are likely to be unemployed. In order to identify the factors behind this one needs to extrapolate data from the specific categories that constitute the ‘principal economic status of individuals’, and then establish what previous research has to suggest on the matter.

The 2006 Irish Census highlights that the labour market participation rate of women in Blanchardstown was 66.13 per cent in comparison with 83.03 per cent for men (Ryan, 2008). The divergence in participation rates is partially because 4,434 women are categorised as ‘looking after home/family’ compared with just 190 men. In addition 1,468 women are categorised as ‘unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability’ compared with 1,057 men. However, these factors alone do not fully account for why far more men than women are long-term unemployed.

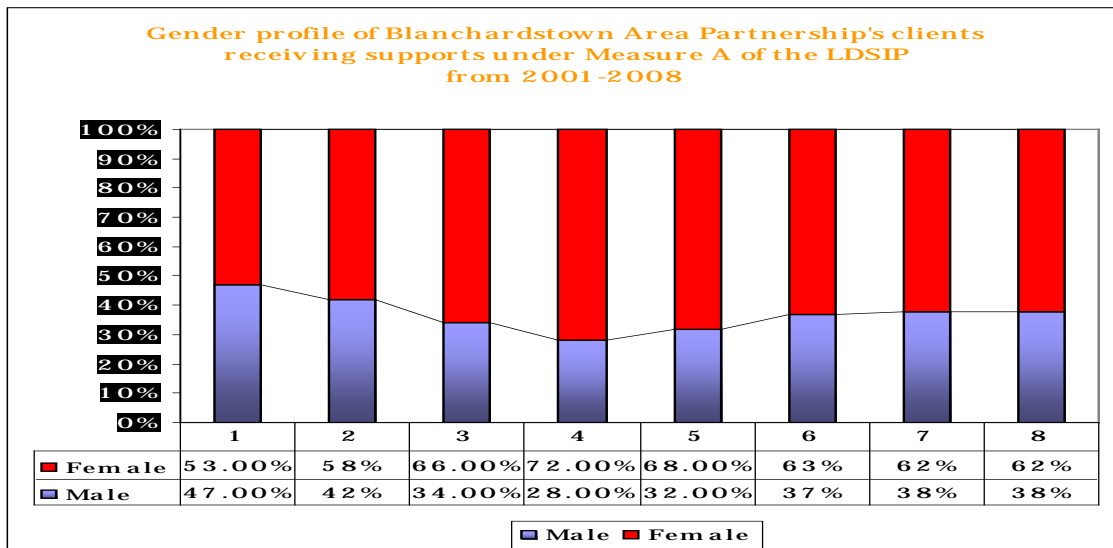
Aside from gender, educational attainment and age are also significant contributory factors towards a person’s chances of experiencing unemployment. For instance 31.6 per cent of all unemployed males in Corduff electoral division in Blanchardstown have no formal or primary education only compared to 19.8 per cent of men nationally in and out of work (GAMMA 2008). Duggan (1999, p43) outlines that the labour market has operated to ‘remove from the employed labour force specific categories of

workers. These categories have predominantly been adult and older male workers from predominantly manual occupational background'. Despite long-term unemployment being concentrated primarily amongst men in Blanchardstown, another trend has persisted for several years; namely the comparative under-representation of men approaching key agencies seeking education and training supports, and/or taking up specific active labour market schemes.

Two distinct data sets are provided to illustrate this phenomenon. For example 64 per cent of all adults who approached Blanchardstown Area Partnership seeking supports across Measure A of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme from 2001-2008 were women.

Other data also highlights that only 21 per cent of participants on FÁS Community Employment⁴ schemes in Blanchardstown are men. In this respect Duggan (1999, p47) notes that there is a 'core group within the long-term unemployed who maintain a prolonged period of continuous registration and do not access labour market programmes'.

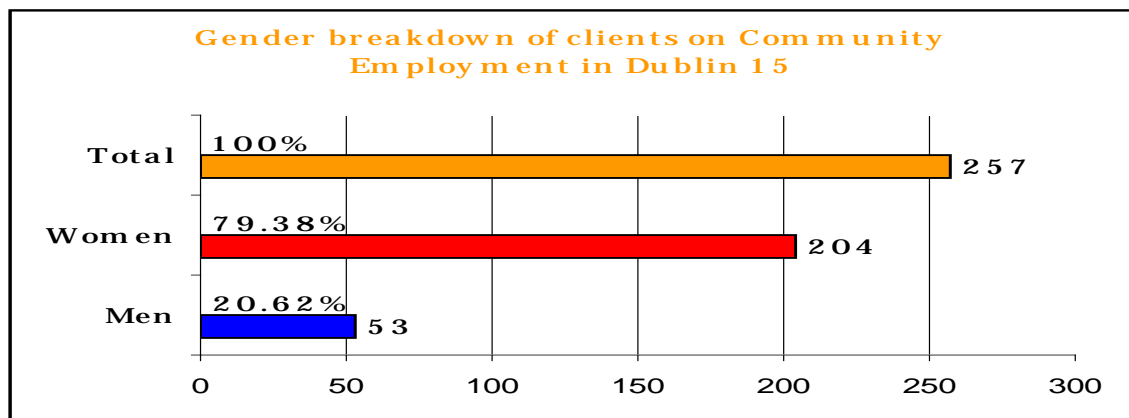
Bar Chart 1



Source: Extract from SCOPE database, Blanchardstown Area Partnership

⁴ Community employment is an active labour market scheme, which 'offers participants temporary employment doing useful work within their communities on projects sponsored by local organisations and funded by FAS. Projects are typically in the areas of social services, healthcare, heritage, arts, culture, tourism, sport, environment and education' (OECD, 2009). CE is divided onto two options (Part-time option and part-time integration option) both of which have different rules and conditions.

Bar Chart 2



Source: FAS, 2009

The combination of the data presented in table 1, and bar-charts 1 and 2, could naturally give rise to several legitimate questions such as;

- 1) Are there systemic factors outside the control of agencies which act as barriers to men's equality of access and participation on courses and/or labour market schemes?
- 2) Are local education and training courses being delivered appropriate to the needs of long term unemployed men?
- 3) Is there a fundamental weakness in the way labour market programmes are designed (in particular CE) that discourages men from taking up supported employment options?

A report by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) entitled 'Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market' sheds some light on the first question. According to NESF (2006, p X) there are 'four main policy arenas: economic, social, labour market and personal, where barriers are interacting to produce such vulnerability, most often experienced by an individual in a group or a cluster. An inclusive labour market strategy must be able to address all of these barriers'. Perhaps most importantly in terms of learning for this project, the NESF emphasise that not all of these barriers are

amenable to local intervention; in particular structural inequalities in society, which must be addressed at the national level.

Turning to the second key question Owens (2000, p4) suggests that the 'persistence of long-term unemployment indicates the need for inquiry concerning provision, access to, and participation in adult education and training'. This position is echoed by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in their report entitled 'Improving and Delivery of Quality Public Services'. In this particular report NESC discuss the 'personalisation of services', which gives people more choice over the options to meet their needs and a more direct say on how services are shaped by them. This matter is addressed in chapter 4 (fieldwork findings) where data is presented based on interviews with long-term unemployed Irish men.

Alongside the significant economic changes that have occurred in Ireland over the past fifteen years one question that could be posed, is are the social and psychological responses to unemployment the same or different in 2009, to those reported in previous decades? Once again the field research phase gathered data on these very sensitive matters, and will be presented in chapter 4.

An overview of the social and psychological consequences of unemployment, based on what previous studies have gathered, is now approached.

2.3 Social and psychological consequences of unemployment

According to Gershuny (1994, p213) 'people's psychological health has been shown to grow worse when they move from employment to unemployment and to recover when they return to a job. However, what is less clearly established are the precise mechanisms that lead to psychological stress'. To that end, two distinct arguments have been put forward. One is that distress comes about due to financial pressures brought about as a result of the fall in living standards experienced, and worries over whether household bills and other repayments can be met.

This position has been challenged by Jahoda (1982, p39) who singled out 'five aspects of the experience of unemployment in the 1930s in which the unemployed felt psychologically deprived namely: the 'experience of time, the reduction of social contacts, the lack of preparation in collective purposes, the absence of an acceptable status and its consequences for personal identity, and the absence of regular activity. In all of these aspects the unemployed felt psychologically deprived'.

One should not overlook though that Jahoda's research was conducted in the 1930s during a worldwide depression, when unemployment insurance was not universal and when physical deprivation in food and clothing was the rule and not the exception.

Another in-depth study by Marsden (1975) suggests that the unemployed were beset by difficulties in sleeping, by tiredness during the day, and by loss of appetite. As the length of unemployment increased, they lost a sense of meaning in their lives and even their sense of identity. Marsden posits that 'there can be little doubt that the unemployed do suffer from a process of cumulative disadvantage and that their weak labour market position is accompanied not only by much greater financial difficulty, but by disadvantage in both health and housing'.

Gallie *et al* (1994, p19) claim that there are a couple of central consequences of unemployment for household relations. The first 'centres on the gender roles with respect to domestic work and financial decisions. The other is the impact of unemployment centres on 'tensions in social relations within the household and on the stability of the marital relationship'.

Burchell (1993) on the other hand makes reference to 'agency theory'. Agency theory reportedly gives an insight into why women seem to be less affected by job insecurity than men. In as much as many women rely on a male's partner's wage as the main income for their household, they may not see threats to their own job security as putting them in as much jeopardy.

Finally more recent by Clasen *et al* (1998) indicate that unemployment brings about a loss in self-respect, social bonds, social isolation, and disintegration of the time structure of everybody life and further negative effects on one's personal and family situation.

In summary a significant body of evidence demonstrates that people who are made redundant undergo significant social and psychological changes. Aside from the financial hardship which unemployed people may suffer from, their psychological health has been shown to deteriorate perhaps induced by factors such as disrupted sleep patterns, loss of social bonds and increasing isolation from mainstream society.

2.4 Barriers to employment

Dr Phyllis Murphy examined key barriers to employment for clients of the Blanchardstown Local Employment Service in 1998. The theoretical framework proposed by Murphy is still a very valuable template for examining the research problem in 2009.

The actual six barriers identified by Dr Murphy were discouragement and low confidence, financial considerations, low levels of educational and skill qualifications, particular issues for women and early school leavers, availability and quality of supports services, employers' requirements and their views of long-term unemployed job seekers.

Many other academics have examined barriers to employment such as Mares *et al* (2005, p54) who note that 'a major determinant of the incidence of unemployment in a person's work career is human capital, indicated by completed education'. Further to this, Macmillan *et al* (2003, p205) argue that 'many men with health difficulties are deterred from seeking work by a belief that employers recruiting staff will not select anyone with ill-health or a disability, and that, coupled with age discrimination, this becomes a serious barrier to seeking work'.

A recent report by De Brun and Du Vivier (2008, p30) also outlines that men 'felt that their emotional needs were overlooked by agencies which tend to process clients in a more systematic and impersonal way'. However, a separate Irish study by Collins (2003), appears to indicate that matters are far more intricate and complicated. Collins contends (p31) that 'the barriers to accessing employment can be linked to a complex and multiple set of needs. Issues identified in this respect include mental health, drug use, early school leaving, family status, literacy difficulties and issues pertaining to particular groups such as the Traveller community'.

In summary a broad array of potential issues can operate in isolation or indeed interact with one another in preventing an individual from re-joining the local labour market. Many of these issues are often overlooked or indeed

unidentified in the debate as to why some individuals or clusters of groups remain unemployed even in the midst of an economic boom.

I shall now turn to review the factors influencing the successful provision of services for unemployed persons from across the European Union.

2.5 Successful provision for unemployed

The National Economic and Social Council contends that (2005, xii) ‘supply side interventions, such as training, education and work experience programmes, for those who are displaced from the labour market, continue to be highly important’.

In countries such as France and Germany there is an emphasis on social plans with training, retraining, transfers and early retirement as alternatives to redundancy; and in most there exist much more generous post-redundancy wage guarantees’ (Labour Market Department 1993). Indeed, in several European countries, new legislation has also made the employer financially more responsible for those employees that were laid off, in order to unburden public expenditure. In an effort to counteract the increasing costs of unemployment, early retirement and several disability regulations that the state pays for

- Developing personal policies by putting pressure on companies
- Job rotation
- Ergonomic adjustments
- Career planning and remuneration on the basis of skill and capacity assessment

In the UK there has been a deliberate policy shift toward providing ‘single gateways’ whereby marginalised groups have ‘one single point of contact with various services, in the form of a personal adviser, providing help with childcare arrangements and benefits as well as assistance with job search and advice on training programmes’ (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2002). The caveat however,

is that individuals are expected to take on board the advice or risk losing social welfare benefit should they not co-operate.

Responsibility for the design and delivery of training has also been devolved from government and government agencies to the employer-led, region-based. Training and Enterprise Councils, Job Clubs, Job Start Seminars, Restart Interviews and Course and Job Interview. Towers states (1994, p384) that 'the preference of the government for a cheap supply-side programme such as Restart fits both its ideological inspiration and its parsimony with the public purse'.

The experience from the United States seems to suggest that flexible labour markets can create jobs more readily than their regulated alternatives, but they do so through lower pay and inequality (Towers, 1994). It is unlikely Ireland would adapt this approach considering it already has a very flexible labour market by Western European standards and operates a social partnership model.

Oxfam (2002) undertook a thematic study of men, masculinities and poverty in the UK. This publication offers an overview of successful projects in employment training, fatherhood, health, violence and crime. In the report Ruxton (2002, p43) notes that peer-group approaches in some circumstances can be more successful in 'drawing men in than individual approaches..men are often more receptive to learning computer skills in single-sex groups as they believe women have better keyboard skills'. Projects such as the Fathers Plus project in Tyne and Wear, www.workingwithfathers.com Fathers Direct, YMCA's Dads and Lads, www.fathersinstitute.org and DIY dads are all highlighted for key learning in including men in services.

McGivney (1999) also carried out research with men and highlighted factors that would help improve the participation levels of males over 25. In terms of difficulties faced in getting men to register for courses, outreach strategies to contact men in pubs and sports clubs can be useful, as can face-to-face guidance in informal settings and telephone help-lines.

2.5 Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMP)

According to Standing (1988, p96) 'Sweden is generally regarded as the pioneer of what has been called the "active" labour market policy'. One company in particular Samhall has managed to create meaningful work for people with disabilities. Samhall www.samhall.se is a state-owned Swedish company, which employs 22,000 people in 250 locations that furthers the personal development of people with disabilities. Given the lower labour market participation rates generally of people with disabilities in Ireland lessons from the Sweden experience could be transferred to an Irish setting.

Over the last decade in Ireland there has been a gradual shift from passive to more active labour market schemes, which is reflected in the Irish National Action Employment Plan (NEAP). The NEAP is in turn influenced by the 2002 European employment strategy. Several reports examining active labour market schemes in Ireland have been undertaken some of which suggest deficiencies in how CE as an active labour market programme is rolled out across Ireland.

According to Cosgrove and Duggan (1994, p16) 'people who are eligible to participate in labour market programmes make their decision on the basis of a range of factors, such as the perceived quality of programmes, the likely outcomes of participation, aspects of the delivery of programmes, and financial issues over and above those directly associated with participation costs'.

More recently CE as a programme has been particularly successful in attracting participation from certain target groups like single parents and people with disabilities on work exemptions. One of the major criticisms levelled at CE is that the work experience gained while on the programme has little transferability to jobs in the open labour market.

Duggan maintains that the one size fits all approach of CE as a labour market programme should be discarded and replaced by more strategic employment objectives. As Duggan (1999, p5) puts it 'the growing emphasis on progression was not paralleled by attempts to address the actual labour

market needs of participants and as certainly not reflected in the limited training budget provided’.

The emphasis of the active labour market policies in the Netherlands have changed from passive to active. The Netherlands changed its social security system in the earlier part of this decade. The Centre for Work and Income, the Social Security Agency (UWV), municipalities and private reintegration companies have a joint responsibility for helping reintegrated unemployed persons into the workforce. Job seekers who have been unemployed for more than six months are transferred to the UWV to a reintegration coach. The coach can enrol the individual in an individual UWV project after nine months, which can be outsourced to private reintegration companies that meet conditions set down by the UWV. The choice of company remains with the job seeker and they can also arrange their own reintegration.

Reintegration of unemployed on social assistance benefits falls under the remit of the municipal Social Services. Municipalities have additional options such as wage subsidies and training of job seekers, vocational education, and volunteer work (European Anti Poverty Network, 2007).

The Netherlands: ‘centres for work and income’

In the Netherlands, substantial restructuring has resulted in the creation of new organisations at local level in the wake of the government’s national projects to achieve better coordination between social security and labour market policy and delivery (the ‘partnership for work and income and the structure for the administration of work and income’ – the SUWI project). The centres bring together a number of functions previously performed by other bodies, and seek to provide a more coherent approach to clients who are claiming benefits and looking for work. The change is based on a ‘one stop’ philosophy, and brings together staff from the former Employment Authority, the local authority and the private benefit-paying agencies. It is also intended that other bodies with related aims (reintegration agencies, employment agencies) will be able to acquire space in the same buildings.

Extract : Integrated approaches to active welfare and employment policies, European Foundation for the Improvements of Living and Working Conditions (Ditch and Roberts, 2002)

Chapter 3.

Fieldwork Findings

The initial field research sought to explore several thematic issues with the male informants on a one to one basis.⁵ These issues include the

- Circumstances leading to unemployment.
- Men still wanting to work.
- Offer employment but refused.
- Redefinition of men's working lives.
- Importance of place.
- Barriers to employment.
- Interaction of benefits system and labour market position.
- Participation costs.
- Awareness of employment options.
- Awareness of education and training courses.
- Improvements that could be made by the government to cater for the needs of unemployed men.

In the second phase of the field research several organisations were consulted. These interviews helped explore a couple of the stated research aims namely:

- To consult with local service providers about what education and training strategies and / or labour market programmes they believe are appropriate to help unemployed men re-enter the labour market.
- To examine and contrast the compatibility between each of the perspectives and those of long-term unemployed men.

Following on are the fieldwork findings gathered with the men.

⁵ Please refer to appendix for a copy of interview schedule

Interviews with long-term unemployed Irish men

Circumstance leading to unemployment

The majority of the men interviewed had not willingly resigned from their last post. Economic forces beyond their control had led them to being made redundant. For example one individual's employer outsourced the sweet manufacturing assembly line to a base in Eastern Europe. In another instance a property developer purchased the land bank on which a hotel was located with a view to re-developing the site for offices and apartments.

“Mrbought it. He bought us all out. I was a runner-in really. I was there only 22 years (laughter) That's the capitalistic system. What are you gonna do about it?”

“Two guys were 76/77 years of age and they had made money out of it. So they decided they wanted to wind it down”

In a separate case a man felt that he had no option but to vacate his post due to the poor working conditions he was exposed to on a daily basis and the pressure of this workload.

“I was working under a basement with no windows, and I found that it really affected me. After 4 years, I was very happy where I had brought the centre to. I also felt my own health was suffering, from the conditions I was working under and the workload..I must be honest, and feel that I did not have an option for my health's sake”

Unfortunately in one case, a member of the Traveller community had never secured a regular job in his life. He had managed to source periodic and seasonal work carrying out tree-topping and laying tarmac.

Significantly, several of the men had previously experienced unemployment back in the 1980s. This occurred, however, as a result of the depressed labour market.

Men still wanting to work

At the present time none of the men interviewed were 'voluntary unemployed'. This was established by querying men about the type of work they were willing to consider and take up, their level of 'active' job seeking activities and what education/ training options they were pursuing.

"Well I look at the papers..and I'm always listening, our Union has a job vacancies board, sometimes you can go in there and get a job. I wrote to about 40 places I think, and did I get one, two letters back. That was very disheartening"

"Somebody rang me from here to say which computer course I would be interested in, coming along 2 days a week for 6 weeks, and I found it great very good, I learned an awful lot"

All the participants were willing to take up low paid jobs to break the cycle of unemployment. One of the men in response to a question whether he would be take up a three months temporary job offer suggested that;

"Ah I would, of course I would, just to get back into (...) system somewhere you know. Even if I was earning €200-€300a week it would be enough to get me by"

Two men expressed a strong desire to work as counsellors because of their life experiences, which they felt would help them support other men in similar predicaments and help turn their lives around.

"If I was just left alone I would be grand. As I said it was always in my mind to do something like counselling, I would love to do that, I would love to be able to sit with someone who went through what I went through and be able to say"

Barriers to employment

A couple of the research participants had led chaotic lives earlier in their lives owing to serving prison sentences or being shot.

“70% of my mates are dead, drugs, shootings, crashing’s being honest. The way I am now. I have my family, which I thought I never would have in my life. Thought it would never happen in my life. Time I got shot...happens through stupidity and drink, I can say that now” (Former construction worker- late 40s, long-term unemployed and early school leaver)

However, the overall picture that emerged was that it is a combination of issues that were acting as barriers to these men’s subsequent engagement in the current labour market-a situation exacerbated by the chequered employment histories of a couple of the participants. The quote below neatly sums up the broad range of factors interplaying at any one time.

“Depression would have been another thing and self esteem issues, and confidence. That is all back to dyslexia. The more I look at it honestly the more I uh(...) It’s easy to blame the parents but at the time and the place they thought that working hard was the way to have a solid financial base, which they well provided for. But in overworking they missed neglected should have spotted the dyslexia”

The barriers to employment presented overleaf are informed by the detailed coding process outlined in the methodological section.

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Legacy issues from family upbringing

A critical overall finding of the field research was that many of the men had legacy issues linked back to their family upbringing and experiences from school and in their formative years, which had proved very difficult to let go of.

“When I was small, I was manipulated by him. He manipulated us, but we loved him. My father took me out of the dairies at 15 and a half and put me into the timber yard and said ‘There is a job here driving a forklift’, before I could drive one. I hated the whole job. My whole life was the dairies. That’s when I didn’t like my father. If I had stayed in the dairies, I would have had a totally different type of life, my father took me away from the life I had”

One interviewee was sexually abused as a teenager by a Roman Catholic priest. This incident marked him deeply and traumatised to the present day. Tragically it also impacted upon his relationship with his children.

“I could never show my kids affection. Hug my kids, what I always wanted”

A longer-term impact of this experience and others reported was that some of the men preferred to work on their own and were more introverted personality wise than might otherwise have been the case. Naturally this reduced the range of employment options available to the men.

“So for me to work in a factory, to start communicating with people. That bit is gone. I’m just by myself now. I broke away from all my friends. Broke away from everyone become wary of everyone.” (Identity hidden)

Education

Several of the men admitted that they struggled to keep up in class and complete homework when they attended school. This was partially because remedial help was not available to specifically identify dyslexia, which several of the men indicated they had. As a result these men were afflicted by a lack of confidence owing to poor literacy skills, which still remained a problem for them as working adults.

“The main thing to me when I was in work was I did not have the confidence. That’s what it was the confidence. All the time confidence. That’s why I wouldn’t take any bartender jobs, just a barman. That done me”

“Left school at 14, well you see I had..of the spine, I was out of school for 2 years between 5-7 and there was no such thing as a remedial teacher back then, so I was put into class 7...used to cover things up all the things, I was sick, tell your mother it was..that’s the way it is”

The majority of the research participants left school before they completed any formal state examinations, partially influenced by the above circumstances. However, a couple of the men indicated that they left school to take work opportunities and apprenticeships as teenagers in the 1960s. The male Traveller outlined, as a young man how *“Travellers were all left alone in class”* and allowed play football on their own re-enforcing his sense of isolation.

One man described how his father was an alcoholic and as a result his parent’s quarrelled late into the night and so he often went to school tired, where his teacher just left him sleep in class. This family turmoil and educational negligence had ramifications in terms of the men’s career options and choices as working adults.

What also emerged via the interviews was the lack of training the men received whilst in employment. All of the men had come to recognise the central importance of education to their eventual chances of re-integrating into the workforce albeit late in life. This stark realisation came when several of the men had to send off their curriculum vitae to employers by

email. This necessitated basic information technology skills than many of the men had not acquired before being made redundant. These key findings demonstrate the importance of first chance education along with the necessity for life-long learning to counteract long-term unemployed.

Interestingly a couple of men reflected and remarked upon how through the LES mentoring process they had come to realise and accept that deficits in their literacy and information technology skills had to be tackled before they could approach an employer with a reasonable expectation of finding employment again.

“Well I’d seen her about getting completing about back into education. Before that it had been about getting back into employment (...) she put me forward for and supplied the funding for doing a forklift (...) qualification”

Health issues

All of the men experienced either physical/sensory disabilities, and/or serious mental health difficulties. Many were also taking prescribed pharmaceutical drugs to treat depression. The struggle to come to terms with their predicament, however, was something that many of the men were battling with and overcoming.

“I was in St Brendan’s for a while. I had a breakdown, they were giving the tablets for this and the tablets for that, but as I said I broke away from the tablets”

“Well it’s a huge step. It’s got do with acceptance. That is if you accept alcoholism. That is where I came from. I spent twenty years trying to get out of it”

The conundrum of whether to disclose or not the existence of a health or disability related issue to a potential employer was something that a couple of the men also raised in terms of their potential re-entry to the workplace.

“I just discovered there last year, I was diabetic. Type two lucky enough. That’s another thing, I hate going for jobs, the hospital could send you for a job and all this, you are starting in a job and looking for time off. I know employee rights and all that”

“I was 25 years working at the roofing, construction work before I came into community development, and due to health problems, colitis, I wasn’t able to work outdoors or on ladders”

In one case it was the imminent expectation of unemployment and combination of stress that resulted in depression.

“It literally came on a Friday morning, give you a month to clear your desk, and I literally couldn’t handle that at all..yes I had a nervous breakdown, I can talk about it now, so as a result I had to see a psychiatrist and a doctor put me on medication, which I am still on”

Poverty traps and the black economy

There was strong evidence concerning the existence of poverty traps amongst several of the men interviewed. For example one individual who had a prosthetic eye and who worked in several occupations for many years was now finding it difficult to find full-time work because of medical examinations that employers insisted potential employees to undertake. More startling was the fact that the same individual did not want to make an issue of his prosthesis but it nevertheless appeared as though he would have to claim for a disability benefit or risk having his social welfare payments means tested. However, the decision to transfer onto disability payment would have longer-term ramifications for his potential return to the workforce. This demonstrates how the interaction of the welfare system and a medical model can impede re-integration into the workforce.

Another participant was still sharing the matrimonial house with his wife and was not officially divorced. Finding alternative local authority accommodation as a separated man was proving impossible because the local authority housing criteria is skewed towards families. Once social

welfare inspectors became aware of this co-habiting situation his welfare payments were cut because the combined household income brought them over a threshold limit by €90 and this impeded upon his ability to take up work.

Due to unforeseen circumstances another individual had to move out of the council house he was renting, and take up residence in a privately rented house. This likewise had a negative impact on his prospects of securing full-time work because he was now in receipt of private rent supplement.

“The neighbour’s son got released from prison. Mad thing. He came attacking me with knife’s, hatchets, and then exploded one morning, drinking...Went back to renting accommodation, back to where I was 16 or 17 years ago. Where I am now, I get rent allowance for living in the house. I’m on that now. For me to work now while I am on that now. I couldn’t do that”

As previously outlined several of the men had experienced periods of unemployment back in the 1980s. One impact of this according to three of the men was that it had pushed them to work in the black economy to earn extra pocket money just to survive. These men however, ran into difficulties with welfare officers when they were eventually ‘caught out’.

Age and gender discrimination

Two men, both of whom were in their early 60s specifically identified their age as the single greatest barrier to future employment opportunities.

“I’m 62 now. I would definitively say my age because I never had any problems meeting people or holding down a job. People say ‘oh that’s a great CV’. They can’t ask your age ah look at this guy he’s old” (Former sales representative)

One individual expressed the opinion that his gender was a deciding factor in him not been allowed to register for a training course with FÁS.

“I did want to have a go at interior design a few years ago, and I went and I had a go produce a portfolio for FÁS out in Fingal. I felt the guy out there. You know didn’t give me a fair shake. Was more in favour of having a female rather than a male”

Recruitment practices

One individual criticised modern recruitment practices, which were used as a screening device to save on costs and cut back on interviews e.g. aptitude and colour association tests. This he felt was unfair because it prevented candidates with extensive work experience histories even getting to the formal interview stage where they would have had an opportunity to convince an employer that they were the right person for the job.

“While I had a few interviews..most of the interviews today give you an aptitude test, which I don’t agree with, I’d prefer it if they took you on experience”

“They took on this PR company and they sat us down and they said ‘We’re going to give you a little test now, and one of the questions was ‘What colour do you see the factory? How would you visualise that- good, bad, indifferent and say what colour it should be, so we thought this very strange questioning, some of the questions were off the wall”

Another man expressed what he perceived as the lack of genuine transparency regarding a couple of posts he had been interviewed for. He did, however, qualify this and point out that that he could see the logic behind the reason to appoint someone from within the organisation especially where the actual appointee had ‘come up through the ranks’ and was deserving of an opportunity to hold down the post advertised externally.

“I could be wrong, but I feel that some of the positions I went for were already gone and they just wanted to go through the semantics of having to advertise a post. I think a bit of that goes on”

Several of the men had never had to attend interviews in the past as they had always been able to source a job through word of mouth. Once again this placed them at a disadvantage compared to other men who may have had experiences of attending interviews.

“I never needed an interview, I knew all my mates from the building”

Redefinition of men’s working lives

UK based evidence (Gallie and Marsh) suggests that unemployment can lead to a re-definition in men’s working lives and relationships with their spouses. This was not the scenario painted by the research participants in Blanchardstown.

There was passing reference to having more time to spend with their grandchildren than may have been the case heretofore. One man outlined how he kept himself busy for a while doing DIY jobs around the house whereas another cared and took his wife along to hospital for treatment. The important factor though is that these were tasks that men did before they became unemployed.

“We do have a grandchild, we do take care of the grandchild, twice a week, Wednesday and Friday, something we didn’t do before. I forgot about that, they have a 2nd child now. I’m glad to hand back at the end of the time. You know what I mean (laughter)”

“There’s really been nothing positive for me, the only really positive thing is my daughter is pregnant and 40, been a boost for me as there has been a lot of negativity for the past year”

“I’m not as rushed as now or anything, before when I worked in ...I don’t even drive, I had to get bus into town and the LUAS out to Tallaght, it was 3 or 4 hours a day”

Several of the men recognised the key importance of women in their lives in helping them get by on a day to day basis. This thematic issue was something that I did not read about during the literature review phase.

“Great wife at home, and she is helping me as well”

“Yep she is putting me forward, apart from reading her books at the beginning, ye should go in for counselling ‘ If you can deal with me you can deal with anyone and I would have to put my hands up and say yes, I can deal with her I can deal with anyone”

Importance of Place

The interviewees resided in a mixture of working and middle class neighbourhoods. All were very contented about the areas in which they lived. There was an acknowledgement that positive changes had occurred particularly in some working class districts over the past decade. Transformations in the built environment from council houses being upgraded, better kept public greens and a higher proportion of owner occupier dwellings were singled out as having made a difference to men’s perceptions of an improved quality of life.

The reductions in the exceptionally high levels of unemployment from those experienced in the 1980’s and the departure of drug pushers was also singled out as being critical. This finding is in sharp contrast to extensive door to door needs analysis carried out with residents in the RAPID areas of Blanchardstown from 2001-2004. Community safety and crime emerged as the issues of most concern to individuals living in these estates.

“Ah yes, we’re living in Blanchardstown since 1997, a nice quiet residential area, no hassle in it, people of my own generation and that, a younger generation coming in a lot of retired people in the area, retired Gardai”

Social and psychological effects of unemployment in 2008

The research participants all mentioned how they were finding it difficult to adjust to the reality of unemployment. The dole was clearly no substitute for paid work. The disruption to social networks, which the men could access through their most recent place of work, and the loss of camaraderie, were important factors for several men.

“There was a great atmosphere because blokes always contributed to one another. Always back up one another or ..camaraderie, that’s gone, very sad. I feel quite upset that a job was taken away from us, you know what I mean? But what are you gonna do about it”

“I miss the lads in work, more than anything else. You know that I mean? Social aspect of it and then but I’m getting there, beginning to adjust”

Life on the dole had naturally forced men to re-adjust their spending patterns and household budgets e.g. cutting back on nights out, petrol and shopping for basic necessities in cheaper supermarkets. One man expressed a real fear of going bust and having to access his savings to supplement his welfare payments.

From a psychological perspective a couple of men also alluded to bouts of longer sleeping patterns induced by the experience of unemployment and resulting depression. Re-establishing a sense of routine and pattern into their lives to get over the boredom was cited as being important as was the introduction of exercise to help counteract it.

“It’s just the boredom really you know, like you’re trying to think what to do for the day, to be so active and then come to a sudden stop. It’s the mental change more than anything”

“I’m really happiest when I’m working and when I’m busiest, and hardest is getting started in doing something big fear of beginning things, (...) you know?”

Sadly one interviewee admitted to a sense of embarrassment and shame at the thought of coming forward and seeking employment support from people who he knew and had worked alongside in the past. Because the same individual had worked in a specific post for several years he felt that the skills he had acquired were now in danger of being lost and not necessarily transferable to other sectors of the economy. Compounding that sense of shame was a feeling of déjà vu or returning to the previous “start-off” position he had found himself at eight years earlier when he was originally trying to re-enter the workforce.

“I’d be afraid that all that has gone to waste on me. It’s one of my fears. I feel like I’m going backwards”

“I was looking at a job on a CE scheme. Again, I didn’t know whether I was going backwards having come from where I was. The truth is I have gone back a bit and I just have to deal with”

The sole Traveller participant expressed the view that his experience of long-term unemployed was owing to his ethnic background, which employers were not prepared to accept. In his mind the feeling of rejection because of his attempts to find employment

“Was cruel and burning away inside. Travellers are all tarnished with the one brush. Twice as difficult being a Traveller and trying to find work”

He suggested that many Travellers were *“drinking to hide that”* and in turn this was leading to higher levels of suicide within the Traveller community.

Familiarity with the Blanchardstown Area Partnership / Local Employment Service

All of the men, with the exception of one, were genuinely very thankful for the help and support they received from the LES/BAP and FÁS in their quest to re-enter the labour force. One of the men approaching the end of his 3 year placement on a labour market scheme was adamant that without the support of an LES mediator he could have ended up homeless. He had recently been referred onto the Partnership's Enterprise Officer for a face to face discussion about the possibilities of setting up his own business.

"Linda she got me back to education and doing VTOS number for two years, and started the English today business tomorrow"

"When I did the course here that I started to get a bit of confidence back in myself and it's only really now that I'm beginning to really look for a job. I've an interview tomorrow"

"I like the idea that you are not seen as being like the big County Council or government. Aideen you can go to her with a problem and she can help you with it"

"My previous experience of the LES was very helpful. I thought of them very highly"

"I'm very disappointed with the girl, I have been dealing with. The only correspondence I received was the letter you sent me"

Interestingly a couple of men reflected and remarked upon how through the LES mentoring process they had come to realise and accept that deficits in their literacy and information technology skills had to be tackled before they could approach an employer with a reasonable expectation of finding employment again.

"Well I'd seen her about getting completing about back into education. Before that it had been about getting back into employment (...) she put me forward for and supplied the funding for doing a forklift (...) qualification"

One of the objectives of the research was to explore why more men were not availing of community employment as a labour market integration tool. As a result one individual who is presently drawing towards the end of a 3 year labour market programme was interviewed.

He suggested that the part-time nature of CE was more attractive to women because it enabled them raise their family and work part-time while their children were at school. He was unhappy about what he perceived to be an inequity associated with CE, which enables some categories of welfare dependents (people with disabilities and single parents) to retain their original social welfare payment but also receive an allowance for being on community employment. This can result in them being financially better off than other men or women who are also doing the same job with the same CE sponsor.

In direct contrast another individual who completed a CE scheme in the late 1990s was very pleased with his placement for personal and economic reasons.

“I actually enjoyed doing CE because I could go off and do another bit of work at the same time. I could fit in my hours and then go off and fit in a nixer or two, build a wall. I was off the live register, ..I could earn a few extra quid on CE”

Another factor that appeared to make CE unattractive to a few of the men was the part-time nature of the scheme. One man expressed a preference to re-enter the building trade whilst another mistakenly believed that he couldn't register without claiming for a disability payment something he was vehemently opposed to doing.

“Ay yeah. It's kinda like 3 days. No not really. No, I have never thought about it. I've been wanting to get back into the building”

“If I do want to go back to work, I can't go back and work full time. Here you can't register as having a disability and still working”

The majority of men interviewed were reasonably familiar with various government job support schemes and training courses delivered in Blanchardstown. This was established by providing the men with a list of the programmes and speaking about their overall knowledge of the options available. In general though men displayed far less knowledge about community employment. Half of the participants simply did not know about it or there was confusion about the length of time one had to be unemployed to qualify under set criteria for community employment.

“I thought you had to be 3 years on the dole”

Interestingly a couple of men reflected and remarked upon how through the LES mentoring process they had come to realise and accept that deficits in their literacy and information technology skills had to be tackled before they could realistically approach an employer with a reasonable expectation of finding employment again.

What the research participants thought why other long-term unemployed men did not approach BAP / LES

Each of the men was asked why they thought more men were not approaching BAP/LES given the numbers signing on the live register. There were divergent opinions about the reasons behind this phenomenon. One interviewee expressed the opinion that it was simply due to a lack of awareness of the BAP/LES, whereas another dismissed the services presently available as not being appropriate to his needs or other men of his age cohort.

“But this place itself here. Nobody really knows about it. I don’t know, lack of advertising?”

“If I saw something out there that addressed men of a certain age or from a certain work experience. That’s not there”

Another man took a different line:

“Do you not think the persons who are long- term unemployed don’t want to do it?” “It is very hard to teach an old dog new tricks”

The opinions offered by two other men pointed to the mental blockages, which some men encounter in their quest to re-enter the labour market.

“Not many men will set up tables, not many men will wash dishes. That’s what I done. I used to polish, hover, the whole length of the stairs, every evening. I enjoyed it. Not many men that would stand up because it’s not a macho thing to wash floors. Not many men would wash dishes, stand by sink, carrying out tray, putting out biscuits”

“Men don’t like come up here, ... because man doesn’t like to talk about being out of work. Women don’t have that problem. I don’t have that problem, but many men wouldn’t like to come up and say, give me a hand....like men don’t go to doctors. Same thing. ...I don’t think the older blokes will be approaching, you know, they’ll say, ‘What is out there for me? You can tell them about FÁS and goodluck.. ye they wouldn’t bother going”

One man made a telling remark based on the observations during recent visits to his local FÁS employment office, which is strategically located next door to the offices of the local welfare labour exchange.

“Most of them looking for jobs on the notices are women. I haven’t seen any men looking for jobs”

Paradoxically the same individual shed some light on why men are reluctant to approach services, the issue discussed just a few minutes earlier in the interview.

“I did a computer course here. Electronic course. E Cert, you know? I thought I could have done with another course. But I didn’t like to go back and ask for another course you know”

Men's suggestions for statutory and non-statutory organisations that support men back into employment

One of the key objectives of the research proposal was to provide men with an opportunity to articulate what they wanted local agencies and the government to do to help men back into the labour market. Some surprising suggestions were suggested by the research participants.

Labour Market Schemes

One interviewee suggested that there is a lot of work 'out there' for people if the government really put its mind to it. Specifically in the context of CE he indicated that the work experience component should be more in the line of looking after public parks and repairing government buildings. Tellingly he also suggested that there should be an opportunity for people who actually complete their period of CE, to source mainstream/open employment with the same employer.

He also strongly argued that inequalities associated with CE payments should be removed as some categories of welfare dependents were receiving a higher rate than others while being on CE. In that context he pointed out that individuals should be paid a higher allowance for being on CE than jobs seekers allowance than at present as this would act as an incentive to more individuals to take up CE.

Lack of outreach and specific male community based initiatives

Another man reflecting on his own set of circumstances suggested that agencies should implement effective outreach strategies for engaging with isolated men. This individual was able to reflect upon his extensive experience of working with men in a men's centre outside of Blanchardstown. In that respect his comments are particularly insightful.

"I suppose, even though they talk about targeting men in the community, and to find out why they become involved in things. If I was to look out and see

what was is on offer, I would not see anything that is targeting men in my position that I can fit into. ..I don't see anything standing out"

"They need to send out somebody and try to speak to men in general. Strictly addressing problems like men's interests or problems. Having found that to actually do something with it, rather than just put it down on paper, this is what we found"

Improved communications

A couple of men alluded to the need for improved communication and dissemination of information aimed squarely at men.

"I suppose it would be no harm to have an information day. Having gathered the information you have, would be an information day strictly for men...cover those sensitive issues, employment, health and to cover all of that and put it into one day"

"We ran workshops on health, education, spirituality, sexuality, and let them decide what workshops they wanted to do to..all held on the one day"

Very vulnerable men with suicidal tendencies or homeless men were singled out as often being overlooked by agencies and the government.

"When I used to go into work I used to see people living rough at 6.30 in the morning. Wasn't nice to see. It's unbelievable"

"Highlights the fact that there is no support structure out there for them. There was nowhere I could refer them too. There is not even a phone number for them to ring, not in regards a health phone line"

National pay agreements

One man expressed very strong views about national pay agreements, which provided some workers primarily in the public sector with fixed percentage pay increases over the last 6-7 years. This arrangement was perceived as being harmful in the longer-term for the economy and in turn jobs prospects. Instead flat rate pay increases across the board for all workers regardless of occupation should be introduced.

“I’ve always said all along..if we gave an increase in wages to everyone on a flat rate, not percentages. Let’s say everybody got €30, everybody in the country. I’m talking about, judges, everybody else like that, we would have a national pay agreement tomorrow because there are too many greedy people in this country, trade union leaders, they do get 10%, we get 10% of the dole, €20 a week, people in the high places that 10% on €2000 a week that €200 extra they got a week, you know so that is what I’m against the greed that is going on in this country, it keeps everything the same”

Banking System

The same participant also suggested that banks should be more strictly regulated as they were responsible for reckless lending practices in recent years.

“I remember when we got married first, you just to get two and a half time your wages, that’s all you were getting [mortgage] mortgage. I know people who got 8 times double wages, yourself and your wife [16 times] Ye, it’s going to ruin the kids, somebody got away with it”

Migrant Labour

Several men questioned the wisdom of the governments policy decision to open the national labour market to migrant workers from the 12 E.U. accession states back in 2004. This reportedly enabled employers reduce Irish people's wage levels especially across the construction industry. It is important to emphasise the respondents did not blame the migrant workers from eastern Europe for availing of these employment opportunities.

Access to Social Welfare for Some Welfare Dependents

Another man recommended that the government should make it more difficult for some people to access social welfare payments especially teenage lone parents.

"It comes back to the social welfare. How easy do you get it? It's so hands for them to get it"

One man simply wished that the government would look after the poor and apply means testing in a fairer manner than he understood especially for people moving into their second year of unemployment.

Finally one Traveller man suggested that *"Travellers need help"*

Interviews with Stakeholders

Why more women traditionally approach BAP across Measure A of the LDSIP

Several explanations were offered as to why more women than men traditionally approach BAP across Measure A of the LDSIP. Firstly, it was noted that not everyone is equal when it comes to accessing the labour market. Secondly it was suggested that it can take some people a lot longer to get onto a 'progression path' and that this was something BAP/LES had encountered in the past. Further to this, it was outlined how some men became accustomed to surviving on social welfare payments and redundancy payments for extended periods.

“Men tended to manage on their social welfare payment and become accustomed to a social welfare payment and fell into a trap of not accessing if their wife was accessing LES or BAP”

Aside from the above factors a general lack of skills, low self-confidence and motivation on the part of men were also outlined as key contributory factors preventing some men from accessing BAP services. Another factor identified was male pride and an unwillingness to seek help, which corresponds with what two men earlier outlined in the field research phase with male participants.

“I suspect it has something to do with the lack of skills or a confidence thing. Because if you look at men in general who are made redundant. There are different categories, third level qualification, who have the skills to go, and do that for themselves. But it seems that it is the very disadvantaged men who could do with our service that actually don't come and look for it because they have low self-esteem and confidence, low motivation”

“Perceived weakness in using some of the services there. Making a broad statement, women are more motivated, if they get a knock a woman might be more motivated to get up and go whereas a man's pride tends to dominate a situation 'I've lost my job and I'm not going down there' (Manager of LES)

Why fewer men avail of Community Employment as a labour market integration tool

In keeping with one of the research objectives one key issue explored was why fewer men than women nationally participated on CE schemes. One explanation put forward was that with the rapid growth in the wider economy more 'open employment' options became available for BAP and LES target groups to source. As a result CE as a labour market option no longer held the same appeal for some men.

In contrast another factor discussed was the withdrawal of the option some participants previously had to source open employment with the employer whom they had completed their period on a CE scheme with. The diminution in the number of eligible CE places nationally especially across certain categories of employment which men traditionally would have chosen were also set out as being important.

“A high proportion of the men on the project I managed a proportion of them did get full-time jobs from CE so it did work as a progression route for them ..just co-incidentally roles did come up as lab assistants or caretakers in the schools and they actually went into the jobs” (Assistant Manager of Blanchardstown Area Partnership)

“CE evolved. It became involved in childcare, running community centres, other activities that traditionally may not have been labour market activities or industry activities , whereas the likes of horticulture, gardening, maintenance, fence repair are probably things traditionally for men to get involved in and those positions may have been reduced and childcare or admin positions may have been increased” (Assistant Manager of the Blanchardstown Area Partnership)

“They did away with other programmes. They used to have a work experience programmes for 18-25 year olds who would do 6 months” (Co-ordinator of CE Projects in Blanchardstown)

A critical issue discussed was around the changing constituency and qualifying criteria of CE from the late 1990s onwards. As a result 'other welfare dependents' such as single parents and people with disabilities on work exemptions became eligible for CE. The introduction of this policy however had reportedly resulted in negative outcomes. Specifically certain CE participants such as single parents were now receiving more take home pay than other CE participants who might be placed with the same CE sponsor carrying out the same job. This was leading to resentment among participants. This key finding triangulates with what a CE participant outlined in the field research phase.

"The guys on the unemployment assistance / unemployment benefit no. They're gone. That might be part of your dilemma with the men is that once they sign off UA or UB and are on CE that is it. That is what they get. That is where a lot of the inequalities are lying. So why would you be attracted onto CE programme when you can have a lone parent sitting beside you with twice the money and you may have 3 children at home and a wife, she is earning more. That is a central plank" (Co-ordinator of CE Projects in Blanchardstown)

Finally it was noted that some men didn't see CE as a real job and might be happier with a longer working week than CE presently offers (19.5 hours) and how more focused training would attract men to it as a labour market scheme. A lack of communication on the existence of CE schemes was also put forward as a reason why fewer men took up places on CE.

"I think some of them just don't know. I am amazed by people down through the years who said, I didn't know. Nobody told me" *"Still the message is not getting through"* (Co-ordinator CE Projects in Blanchardstown)

Get people into work

Regarding how BAP could help facilitate getting more unemployed men 'into work' it was suggested that the community services programme offered an alternative progression path for some men to that of CE.

“Observing the Community Services Programme there would be more scope for men to work in those jobs that with CE because are actually ..if you look at the breakdown of people engaged in BASE and BAPTEC they are a good breakdown of persons who could be done by either men or women. You see it is a job. The CSP only grant aids the company but if you get that job it's not a labour market programme it is a job and usually what happens is that the trading income supplements that wage so it is actually a job and they are not coming off after a year” (Assistant Manager of the Blanchardstown Area Partnership)

There was also a recognition that supporting actions solely across Measure A of the LDSIP in isolation to Measure B might not be the most effective. In that respect developing more solid linkages with community development infrastructure across Blanchardstown were suggested as key constituents of any proposed changes in BAP's labour market strategy. The provision of apt information and advice by LES mediators was also outlined as pivotal in the efforts to reach out and access vulnerable target groups. Finally the advocacy work which BAP has taken up in the past in giving a voice to the unemployed was also argued as being important in helping influence government policy.

“I would see community development certainly as being a precursor for people entering employment. The LES is specific and they deal with people with employment needs. That's all they can do, because that's their remit. But in terms of the overall Partnership work and looking at Measure B and community development, we are looking at the new Measure B which is capacity building and community development” (Assistant Manager of the Blanchardstown Area Partnership)

“I think we can support it in two ways, through the LES by giving information and by making sure that people have the proper information so that they can access the services ...but also how we did it in the past through highlighting the anomalies such as the rent allowance because there are anomalies that are unfair and wouldn't encourage people to go back to work..and all we can do is bring it to the attention and produce position papers , so it is two- fold give people the information of what they can do and be an advocate for the other part”

Chapter 4.

Conclusions

This final chapter provides a summary of the project's main findings and suggests some avenues for future research that may build on the present study. One of the intentions of this project was to gather data regarding the factors preventing long-term unemployed Irish men aged 35 and over from entering the labour market in 2008. In doing so it aims to build upon previous research conducted by ADM Ltd (1998) with a similar age cohort of unemployed persons.

In December 2007, when this research project was first proposed, Ireland's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 4.6 per cent. As of April 2009, unemployment now stands at 11.4 per cent, and will most likely increase even further as the worldwide recession continues. Throughout the 1980s, joblessness rose most sharply in Ireland among the less skilled. This is not the present situation as thousands of skilled construction workers, architects, estate agents, retail and agency workers have recently been made redundant.

The new economic crisis should not detract from the aims and objectives of this research project, which are still valid. There is a real danger however, that pilot initiatives will be weighted in favour of the new stream of unemployed people signing onto the live register, to the detriment of the existing long-term unemployed.

Blanchardstown Area Partnership is certainly not alone in finding it more difficult in attracting more men to avail of its services. As Ruxton (2002, p110) points out 'many workers, across a range of settings, report difficulties in attracting men to use services'.

I am reluctant to draw *firm* conclusions from this inductive research process based on a sample of interviews with nine men and three organisations. The priority of this research project was *to collect non-numeric data with the aim of achieving a 'depth rather than breath' of understanding.*

It became apparent from the field research that the men interviewed were badly in need of one-to-one mediation support before they were in a realistic position to re-join the labour market. In that respect the tailored response to the needs of unemployed men offered by the mediation services of the Blanchardstown Local Employment Service (LES) are pivotal. This factor was widely recognised by the male participants themselves who on the whole rated very highly the service they received from the LES and FÁS. I would contend that without the mediation support provided by the LES, many of these men would have retreated altogether from the labour market, and become ‘economically inactive’.

According to Murphy and Walsh (1997, p15) ‘while the increasing tendency for men to drop out of the labour force before the normal retirement age poses important social and human questions, its economic significance is limited by their lack of skills and weak motivation to seek employment’.

My findings demonstrate that in many cases it is not the lack of skills that led the men to being “laid-off”, and certainly not a lack of motivation on their part which is preventing them from finding new employment. All of the men were actively engaging with service providers in Blanchardstown or further afield either up skilling or retraining themselves. Economic factors beyond the control of the sample group of men had led them to being made redundant.

Aside from gender, educational attainment and age are contributory factors towards a person’s chances of experiencing unemployment. As Belbin (1965, p15) points out ‘older workers who have received no training in youth are the most unfavourably placed. Their choice of jobs in the labour market is usually confined to those that others would not accept’.

A critical overall finding of this local research project is that legacy issues in the men’s formative years such as father-to-son relationships, clerical sexual abuse and educational oversight/neglect had long-term consequences for their subsequent engagement in the local labour market. One of the outcomes of these experiences is that several of the men were lacking in self-

confidence, which was compounded by low literacy skills that still remained a problem for them as working adults.

All of the men had physical/sensory disabilities, and/or serious mental health difficulties. Many were also taking prescribed pharmaceutical drugs to treat depression. The struggle to come to terms with their predicament, however, was something that many of the men were battling with and overcoming. The conundrum of whether to disclose or not, the existence of a health or disability related issue to a potential employer was something that a couple of the men also raised in terms of their potential re-entry to the workplace. Age discrimination was also cited as a barrier to employment by two men, both of whom were in their early 60s.

These findings mirror those of Macmillan *et al* (2003, p205) who reported that 'many men with health difficulties are deterred from seeking work by a belief that employers recruiting staff will not select anyone with ill-health or a disability, and that, coupled with age discrimination, this becomes a serious barrier to seeking work'.

There was also strong evidence concerning the existence of poverty traps. One case clearly demonstrated how the interaction of the social welfare entitlements and the 'medical model' can impede an individual's desire to re-join the local labour market.

Another finding that emerged was that none of the research participants were offered an opportunity to attend training courses 'while in employment'. As a result these men never acquired IT or literacy skills, which are critical in the present employment market. This finding demonstrates the importance of maintaining life-long learning on the policy agenda, in helping keep people '*at work*'.

On a positive note it was established that the majority of men interviewed were reasonably familiar with various government job support schemes and training courses delivered in Blanchardstown. It would appear though that education and further training supports taken in isolation from mediation support cannot adequately cater for the holistic needs of long-term

unemployed men based on the sample of informants. Revealingly the majority of the men interviewed had been referred on by the LES mediators not to BAP, but to other organisations that could cater for their ‘individual needs’. This is possibly one explanation why fewer men than women are registered with the BAP seeking support across Measure A of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme. The LES is liaising with the County Dublin Vocational Education Committee where their clients attend VTOS accredited training and local projects such as the Blanchardstown Local Drugs Task Force.

I would argue that the distinct national monitoring systems of the Area Based Partnerships Companies (SCOPE) and the Local Employment Services (Client Services System) are not linked is hampering a greater inter-agency approach to helping support the progression of long-term unemployed persons back into the workforce.

In general the male participants displayed far less knowledge about CE as an ‘active labour market scheme’. Half of the participants simply did not know about it or there was confusion about the length of time one had to be unemployed to qualify under set criteria. One factor that made CE unattractive to several men was the part-time nature of the scheme, and the restricted nature of the venues in which they could receive work experience.

Evidence was also collated, which shows that some categories of welfare dependents (people with disabilities and single parents) that retain their original social welfare payment but who also receive an allowance for being on CE are financially better off than other CE participants who do a similar job with the same CE sponsor. This can act as a disincentive for some individuals especially the head of traditional nuclear families that might otherwise take up a CE post. (Please refer to appendix 3, pages 62/63)

There were conflicting views about why fewer men compared with women approached BAP, not least among the research participants but also the stakeholders interviewed. One unemployed male expressed the opinion that it was simply due to a lack of awareness of the BAP/LES, whereas another

man dismissed the services presently available as not being appropriate to his needs or other men of his age cohort.

A couple of men however, pointed to the mental blockages, which some men encounter in their quest to re-enter the labour market e.g. unwillingness to talk about their problems or take up some CE work as a canteen assistant as opposed to an opening as a plumber.

One individual paradoxically shed light on why some men are reluctant to approach key services.

“I did a computer course here. Electronic course. E Cert, you know? I thought I could have done with another course. But I didn’t like to go back and ask for another course you know” (Former confectionery worker)

Another interviewee admitted to a sense of embarrassment and shame at the thought of coming forward and seeking employment support. Owens (2001) who studied barriers to male participation in education and training initiatives also found that many men were embarrassed or afraid to seek help with their difficulties.

Within BAP and the LES, it was suggested that ‘not everyone is equal when it comes to accessing the labour market and that it takes some people a lot longer to get onto that road to succeed’. Further to this, it was noted that some men became accustomed to surviving on social welfare payments and redundancy payments for extended periods, which could explain why more men were not as active in approaching employment agencies. Male pride and an unwillingness to seek help similar to what some of the men identified was also put forward as a reason. However, it was acknowledged that the better educated males did not fit into this general category. Finally a lack of skills, low self-confidence and motivation on the part of men were also emphasised as contributory factors preventing men from accessing BAP services.

The research participants all mentioned how they were finding it difficult to adjust to the reality of unemployment. From a social perspective the lack of access to former social networks and the loss of camaraderie via their most immediate places of work were singled out as important issues. Financially the men were trying to juggle with the realities of being unemployed and managing on smaller household budgets because the dole is clearly no compensation or substitute for 'paid work'.

From a psychological perspective a couple of men also alluded to bouts of longer sleeping patterns induced by the experience of unemployment and resulting depression. Re-establishing a sense of routine and pattern into their lives to get over the boredom was cited as being important as was the introduction of exercise to help counteract it. This is in keeping with an in-depth study by Marsden (1975) who found that unemployed people were beset by difficulties in sleeping.

A couple of the men pointed out the importance of their wives or female partners in helping them come to terms with their present predicament. This finding is at odds with some UK based research (Gallie *et al* 1994) around changes that take place in household relations when a husband is made unemployed.

Regarding what improvements could be made by the relevant agencies several of the men cited and criticised the absence of specific male community based initiatives in Blanchardstown. A couple of men suggested the need for improved communication strategies and dissemination of information aimed 'squarely at and for men'. The lack of visible 'on the street' outreach work occurring in venues that men are more likely to frequent was also identified as a gap in services. Very vulnerable men with suicidal tendencies and homeless men were singled out as often being specifically overlooked by agencies and the government.

Evidence from the UK appears to suggest that peer-group approaches in some circumstances can be more successful in drawing men in than individual approaches and men are often more receptive to learning computer skills in single-sex groups.

McGivney (1999) who carried out research with men highlighted factors that would help improve the participation levels of males over 25. In terms of difficulties faced in getting men to register for courses, outreach strategies to contact men in pubs and sports clubs can be useful, as can face-to-face guidance in informal settings and telephone help-lines. Eye-catching contemporary design and branding, posting information in sports clubs and youth clubs, exploiting the potential of local radio, and using positive role models from sport and music all have a role to play.

Active labour market policies are important and have a role to play in helping prevent people drift into long-term unemployment. Duggan notes (1999, p14) that 'the blanket programme dimension of CE as a labour market programme must be abandoned in favour of a more strategic statement of different employment objectives'.

As aforementioned, poor physical and mental health issues are significant psychological barriers that many unemployed men struggle to overcome. However, as Ruxton notes (2002, p104) 'a focus on these issues within employment training is virtually absent'. Equally concerning is a recent report by the OECD (2009, p5), which highlights that 'the number of staff in FÁS Employment Services and the Local Employment Service, relative to the number of wage and salary earners in the economy, appears to be relatively low, about half the average level of staffing of institutions responsible for the placement function in Australia and Northern and Western Europe'.

Given the record numbers of persons signing on the live register in Ireland at present, additional resources must be allocated by central government to FÁS Employment Services and LES mediation support services. Should this not occur those men *who are presently long-term unemployed* will end up receiving less one-to-one support time from their LES mediator. The real danger is that this could prolong their experience of unemployment and result in them falling / regressing into a depressed state of mind.

The implications of joblessness among men aged 35 and over should not be underestimated. Rising male unemployment cannot be explained simply due to increased female labour force participation.

According to NESF (2006, p X) there are 'four main policy arenas: economic, social, labour market and personal, where barriers are interacting to produce such vulnerability, most often experienced by an individual in a group or a cluster. An inclusive labour market strategy must be able to address all of these barriers'. Perhaps most importantly in terms of learning for this research project, the NESF emphasise that not all of these barriers are amenable to local intervention; in particular structural inequalities in society, which must be addressed at *national level*.

Finally, several men remarked on the need for improved communication and dissemination of information aimed squarely at and for men. In light of this finding, research specifically on how to communicate more effectively with men should be undertaken, in an effort to attract more isolated men into community services and employment agencies.

Recommendations

Local Recommendations

In school supports

1. Blanchardstown Area Partnership should continue to prioritise LDSIP funding towards actions that aim *to prevent early school leaving*. These interventions are critical in helping improve individual's subsequent labour market opportunities as working adults⁶.

Attracting people towards work

2. Blanchardstown Area Partnership /LES should *continue to strengthen its linkages with community based initiatives* across Dublin 15 that interact with very disadvantaged individuals far removed from the labour market.

3. The new guidelines drawn up by Dr Jane Pillinger for the Citizens Information Board on '*accessible information for all*' should be reviewed to help Blanchardstown Area Partnership improve should how it communicates with its target groups under the LDSIP including unemployed men.

Attracting people into work

4 *Information technology skills* are paramount in helping to upskill unemployed persons in their quest to re-enter the workforce.

Pilot computer training courses for male target groups of BAP / LES should be run to help some men overcome embarrassment issues in registering for IT classes⁷.

5. The potential of the *community services programme* as a means of attracting groups more distinct from the labour market such as long-term unemployed men should be further developed.

⁶ The ESRI point out that the genesis of early school leaving arises between ages 4 to 10 but is often ignored and argue that it would be more effective in the long run to intervene at an earlier age by investing more heavily in education.

⁷ The Flexible Training Unit operated by the Dodder Valley Partnership is an example of a successful project engaging solely with unemployed men.

Keeping people at work

6. *Life long learning* should be maintained on the policy agenda of the Blanchardstown Area Partnership and the Dublin Employment Pact via programmes such as *learning at work*.

Need for special interventions

7. Men and women's *mental health needs* are generally overlooked in education and training course delivery.

8. The *Community Development Team* of the Blanchardstown Area Partnership should explore projects with their counterparts in Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership catchment area, which has supported a successful Men's Group and overflow projects.

Equality and discrimination

9. Blanchardstown Area Partnership should implement an *age conscious policy* alongside its other core policies.

National Recommendations

Need for ongoing support and aftercare

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

10. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment should re-direct additional resources to *frontline FAS and LES services* given the enormous increase in persons signing on the live register. The services offered by the mediation services of the Blanchardstown Local Employment Service (LES) are pivotal in meeting the needs of unemployed men as a counter measure to preventing depression⁸.

⁸ According to the OECD (2009, P 5) 'the number of staff in FÁS Employment Services and the Local Employment Service, relative to the number of wage and salary earners in the economy, appears to be relatively low, about half the average level of staffing of institutions responsible for the placement function in Australia and Northern and Western Europe (countries which also have high benefit coverage rates for unemployment).'

11. Employers should be actively encouraged by the government to upskill and invest in their employees at regular periods in helping *keep people at work* as a labour market integration tool.

12. *Active labour market schemes* need to be re-examined in the context of the rapidly deteriorating national labour market. Additional places on Community Employment schemes need to be planned for as long-term unemployment becomes a stark reality for thousands of individuals in communities across Ireland.

13. The principle of *equal pay for equal work* should apply for all participants on community employment schemes irrespective of former welfare status.

Appendix

Age >35	yes
Nationality	IRISH

Count of Date of Birth			
Scheme	Sex	Marital Status	Total
UA	M	C	11
		D	17
		M	163
		P	10
		S	115
		W	1
		Z	12
	M Total		329
	W	C	2
		D	1
L		1	
M		32	
P		15	
S		34	
W Total		94	
UA Total			423
UB	M	C	2
		M	25
		S	8
		W	1
	M Total		36
	W	C	2
		D	1
		M	43
		P	3
		S	6
W		4	
Z	2		
W Total		61	
UB Total			97
UBCO	M	D	1
		M	40
		S	5
	M Total		46
	W	M	70
		S	10
W		1	
W Total		81	
UBCO Total			127
Grand Total			647

Comparison of take home pay of a single parent with two children on CE and a married man with two children on CE.

1. Husband, on Jobseekers Allowance Wife & 2 children

Alan and Ashley are a traditional nuclear family with two children. Alan takes up a community employment scheme.

The family's rate of Jobseekers Allowance is calculated as follows:

Claimant's rate	204.30
Qualified Adult rate	135.60
2 Qualified children's rate	<u>52.00</u>
	€391.90
Fuel Allowance	<u>23.90</u>
	€415.80

Community Employment Scheme payment is calculated as follows:

Claimant	228.70
Qualified Adult	135.60
Two Qualified Children	<u>52.00</u>
	€416.30
Fuel Allowance	<u>23.90</u>
	€440.2

Goes -on a Community Employment Scheme	€416.80
Gives-up Jobseekers Allowance	<u>€391.90</u>
Better off financially by (<u>Net income without calculating the fuel allowance</u>)	€24.90

**Total Household income:
€416.30**

The Fuel Allowance scheme operates for 30 weeks (32 weeks from April 2009) from the end of September to mid-April.

2. Lone Parent with 2 Children on a Community Employment Scheme

One parent Family Allowance Payment: (3rd. February 2009)

Claimant	204.30
2 Children	<u>52.00</u>
	€256.30

Community Employment Scheme payment:

Claimant	228.70
2 Children	<u>52.00</u>
	€280.7
Earnings Threshold disregard for O.P.F.A.	<u>€146.50</u>
Assessable Earnings	€134.2
Less 50%	<u>67.10</u>
	€67.10
Less D.S.F.A. Sliding Scale	<u>7.10</u>
O.P.F.A. payment reduced by	€60.00

Full-Rate One parent Family Allowance Payment:		€256.30
	Less	<u>€60.00</u>
Reduced One parent Family Allowance Payment:		€196.30
Community Employment Scheme payment:		<u>€280.70</u>
Total Household income:		€477.00

Difference in household income €477- €415.80= €61.20

Initial questions

Circumstances leading to unemployment

1. Could you tell me about your work experience and how you came to sign on?

Prompts

-How do you feel about that today?

-How do you get by on a day to day basis? What helps you to manage?

-Have any of the recent social welfare increases made any difference?

-Who has been the most helpful to you during this time? How have they been helpful?

Men still wanting to work

2. What's the main method you use of finding out about a job vacancy?

Offer employment but refused

3. Have you attended any interviews in the past year?

Redefinition of men's working lives

4. Could you tell me about the positive changes that have occurred in your life over the past year?

5. Have you taken on any new roles?

Prompts

-Like sharing more in grandchild caring or more house work?

-Community or voluntary work?

Importance of place

6. How about the area or neighbourhood that you live in. Do you like living there?

Intermediate questions

Barriers to employment

7. What would you identify as the main barriers to finding work over the past few years? e.g. low pay, age, qualifications (don't mention them)

Interaction of benefits system and labour market position

8. Are there any poverty traps you know of that have prevented you from taking up a job?

Participation costs

9. Are there any disincentives to taking up particular courses or labour market schemes?

Prompts

-Cost of travel, childminding, socialising costs

Awareness of employment options

10. Did you ever consider going onto a Community Employment Scheme or the Full Time Jobs Initiative? If not, were there specific reasons that you did not pursue it?

11. Have any of your male friends considered CE?

Awareness of education and training courses

Statement: I'd like to show you a list of courses that the LES / Partnership and FAS have run over the past 2 years. They are designed to help provide people with the skills to re-enter the workforce.

Can tell me if you are familiar with any of them, if that is ok?

Improvements that could be made

12. How adequately do you feel your overall needs are met by the various agencies and schemes? e.g. FAS, LES and BAP

13. What improvements do agencies have to make?

14. What would you like to see the government do differently?

15. Has any organisation been particularly helpful? What did ___ help you with? How has it been helpful?

16. Is there anything about how the way the LES is set up that you would like to see change?

17. Have you ever approached the Blanchardstown Area Partnership?

Ending Questions

Is there anything else you think I should know to help me understand your situation better?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Methodological Discussion

Given the basic research problem namely: “*why are more long-term unemployed Irish men aged 35 and over not approaching the Blanchardstown Area Partnership and seeking education and further training*”, the question arises as to what is the most appropriate research method(s) for gathering evidence about Irish men’s firsthand experience of unemployment and secondly what they want agencies and the government to do to support them back into employment. Please return to pages 7 to 10 for a reminder of the research aims and objectives as these have helped influence my choice of research methodology.

This research project clearly does not start out with a working hypothesis or theory, which it then tries to prove through the verification of data, as a deductive research process would. Instead I have chosen an ethnographical research approach that tries to gather meaning through the collection and analysis of qualitative data and so offer a naturalistic insight into men’s perceptions of what the barriers to re-integration into the labour market are. Any eventual theory will be based on the data gathered and grounded in a number of relevant cases.

This point is picked up on by Charmaz (2007, p14) who notes that one great advantages of a qualitative approach over our quantitative approach is that ‘we can add new pieces to the research puzzle or conjure entirely new puzzles- while we gather data- and that can even occur late in the analysis. The flexibility of qualitative research permits you to follow leads that emerge’.

Coleman *et al* (2007, p655) point out that ‘philosophical assumptions underpin the research process which dispose researchers towards different paradigms and methodologies’. To that end Outhwaite (, p285) outlines that versions of anti-naturalism rely on a couple of claims which approximate to the view that ‘the social world is intrinsically different from the (rest of the) material world; thus our knowledge of it will be fundamentally different’ and secondly that ‘our ‘cognitive interest’ in the study of the social world is

radically different from our interest in the rest of the world, and thus our knowledge of it is radically different’

These ontological and epistemological positions outlined above are in accordance with my own. However, I also concur with Dreher (1994, p293) when she states that ‘providing a rationale for using a specific method should not be a treatise on the relative merits of phenomenology or logical positivism, but rather the clearest explanation possible for why the proposed strategy has the most potential for answering the specific research question and ultimately improving the practice on which the research question bears’. Pragmatic factors such as resources, time and access also need careful consideration. The priority of this research project is to collect non-numeric data with the aim of achieving a ‘depth rather than breath’ of understanding (Coleman, 2007).

Table 1 Contrasting Positivist and Naturalist Axioms

<i>Axioms About</i>	<i>Positivist Paradigm</i>	<i>Naturalist Paradigm</i>
The nature of reality	Reality is a single, tangible, and fragmentable.	Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic.
The relationship of knower to known	Knower and known are independent, a dualism.	Knower and known are interactive, inseparable.
The possibility of generalisation	Time and context-free generalisations are possible.	Only time-and context-bound working hypotheses are possible
The possibility of casual linkages	There are real causes, temporally precedent to or simultaneous with their effects.	All entities are in a state of mutual simulation shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects
The role values	Inquiry is value-free	Inquiry is value-bound

Source: *Naturalistic Enquiry*, SAGE 1985

Boyle (1994, p159) claims that 'to understand how ethnographic data are analyzed, it is necessary to be clear about the epistemology of the study - that is, whether the final analysis represents the emic or the etic point of view'. In response to Boyle's statement it should be pointed out that 'interviews are first and foremost interaction, a conversation between the researcher and interviewee. The knowledge that is produced out of this conversation is a product of that interaction, the exchange and production of 'views' and that data collection and analysis involves switching back and forth between the etic perspective and the emic viewpoint and testing the first against the second'.

The goal of ethnographic interviewing as Heyl (2001, p370) puts it, should be to 'listen well and respectfully, acquire a self awareness of our role in the construction of meaning during the actual interview and to recognise that dialogue is a process of discovery and that only partial knowledge will be attained'. Ethnographic research after all is said to produce situated knowledge rather than universals and to capture the detail of social life rather than abstracting from this detail to produce reductive models. (Ethnographic Research A Reader, p3) It is argued by many that knowledge in the social sciences is not fixed but rather fluid or contextual.

Howe argues (1990, p19) that 'a more rounded understanding of what it means to be unemployed can only be obtained by situating individuals in their local contexts. Effectively this means documenting the ideas the unemployed and employed have of each other (including the way the unemployed view other unemployed), and the factors, which influence typical forms of interaction between these groups'. This statement taken on face value would appear to justify a descriptivist account on tackling the research problem. Bishop notes that (2007, p52) 'descriptivist's seek to describe the personal and social meanings structuring human life on its own terms rather than explain human life as the products of universal laws and efficient causes'.

In light of the aforementioned, I believe that ethnographic research is better suited to capture, document and analyse unemployed men's responses because of its complexity and because it otherwise could be too difficult to

formulate appropriate questions to identify relevant variables via a postal questionnaire. Further to this the quality of data collated via a standardised questionnaire might be problematic and overlook essential factors. As Howe points out (1990, p16) 'much research into unemployment uses survey methodology, but because this individualizes and fragments social life, important types of social relationship often go undiscovered'.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2006, p7) suggest that 'human actions are based upon, or infused by, social meanings: that is, by intentions, motives, beliefs, rules and values'. It is highly unlikely that a questionnaire would capture such actions or meanings in contrast to an open and fluid conversation, which is more likely to unearth these issues, granted the interviewee is open to imparting such information. When the reasons behind such human actions and social meanings in the context of unemployment are not known to the researcher how can he or she even begin to construct a standardised questionnaire?

Population, sample and access

The sample of men for the research project was drawn on the basis of the conceptual and informational requirements of the study rather than purely on drawing on demographic criteria. This approach is backed up by Hammersley and Atkinson (2006, p137) who note that 'a representative sample of informants is not always what is required in ethnographic research. This is especially so where the primary concern is with eliciting information rather than with documenting perspectives or discursive practices'.

It transpired that nine long-term unemployed Irish men aged over 35 years of age were interviewed. Two of the men were aged in their early 60s, three in their 50s, three in their 40s and finally one man was in his mid 30s. One informant on a CE programme was interviewed deliberately so he could provide lent insight on CE.

Seven of the men had relatively low levels of formal education owing to leaving school early. Four men were employed in the same occupation for

twenty to thirty years; although one had changed career path due to the onset of an illness. Three of the other men had broken employment histories and experienced unemployment previously in the nineteen eighties.

Local stakeholders who share a joint responsibility for supporting vulnerable groups were also interviewed. A local FÁS representative in Blanchardstown was interviewed. As Co-ordinator of CE projects in Blanchardstown, she was looked upon as being a potentially invaluable source of information who could lend some practical insight upon one of the research objectives, namely why more men are not registering for CE schemes. In addition the Assistant Manager of the Blanchardstown Area Partnership and the Manager of the Local Employment Service were jointly interviewed to discover what they considered could be done to support more long-term unemployed men in their efforts to return to the labour market.

In terms of access a very broad range of tactics had to be devised to reach out to unemployed Irish men. First of all posters entitled '*Notice to Men*' were strategically located on the notice boards of pubs, community centres and the Blanchardstown Centre for the Unemployed premises. This was done in a deliberate effort to engage with men who may not have been registered with FÁS, the LES / BAP seeking employment related supports.

Secondly a feature article was placed in the 'Community Voice' a local newspaper delivered free of charge to every household in Blanchardstown. Unfortunately neither of these tactics proved successful as no Irish men volunteered to participate through contacting the researcher directly.

Thirdly letters were also posted out by mediators of the LES to male clients of the service who fitted the research profile. Prior to this LES mediator were initially spoken to on a group basis to explain the purpose behind the research project. This was also done to remove any element of suspicion that the research was an exercise in evaluating the ethos and services of the LES. Once this had been communicated to the mediators they posted out letters.

In practical terms, the mediators therefore acted as gatekeepers. However, both the letters and the notice were drafted by the researcher beforehand. For ethical reasons and also for reasons of confidentiality the letters were posted out by the LES mediators. This approach proved far more successful as six of the interviewees who engaged in the research process were sourced through this approach. Following the circulation of a general letter to the potential research participants several of them were spoken with on the telephone to verbally explain the purpose behind the research and to reiterate that it was a completely voluntary exercise.

Further to the above, a local men's group was also approached in Blanchardstown. Permission to do so was sought beforehand through the local community worker attached to the Resource Centre. At the actual meeting the researcher provided an overview of the strategic approach of the Partnership to tackling unemployment. Information about specific training courses delivered by the Partnership was also distributed to the men's group. This presentation was received very positively by the men.

Following this introduction a request for the men to refer on potential participants to the researcher through a snowballing method was also communicated. Unfortunately no actual research participants came forward. However, one positive outcome that did emerge was that two members of the men's group subsequently signed up to introductory computer and catch up with technology courses, run by the Blanchardstown Area Partnership.

A separate pre-development community support group (for men and women who cannot gain access to their children) was also approached in Blanchardstown. Two telephone conversations between the co-ordinator of the project and the researcher took place. An evening meeting was arranged with the co-ordinator of the project, two of its committee members and the researcher. The same presentation that had been applied with the men's group in Blakestown was delivered. Following this engagement one individual agreed to participate in the research process himself, which proved very insightful.

Finally in a further attempt to reach unemployed men, letters were posted out to 20 men aged between 35-45 years of age. On this occasion the letters were disseminated through the local social welfare labour exchange. This option was only chosen as the researcher had exhausted all other avenues available. One man rang the Partnership and willingly agreed to participate.

In conclusion, the field research phase with the men was a long and drawn out process taking almost 4 months to complete. The breakdown of the various steps adopted during the field research phase reflects how difficult it can be to engage with long-term unemployed men. However, it is important to emphasise that the men who did agree to participate were extremely open and engaged positively with the researcher. Some very sensitive issues were uncovered during the course of these exchanges, which the men were not afraid to discuss.

In contrast the field research with local agencies progressed very smoothly and was completed in early January. These stakeholder interviews only occurred after all of the men were interviewed and the literature review was complete. Some of the issues raised by the men helped inform the interview schedule with the agencies, which is in keeping with the inductive nature of a grounded theory approach.

Data collection

The majority of the interviews with the unemployed men were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Hand written notes were taken for 2 of the sessions. At the end of these particular interviews, verbal feedback from provided to the interviewees, to obtain 'respondent validation' as a way of ensuring that no misinterpretation of the hand recorded notes had taken place.

The issues discussed with the men covered a wide range of topics including the circumstances leading to unemployment; barriers to employment; awareness of education and training courses, and suggested improvements that could be made by agencies. In practice however, not all of the questions needed to be directly asked because some men covered the material, which I

was seeking to explore during the course of their interview. An interview schedule of open-ended initial, intermediate and final questions was followed. The ideas contained in the procedures, described in the textbook by Charmaz (2007) on grounded theory, facilitated the drawing together of the interview schedule.

Likewise both of the interviews with the agencies were digitally recorded and transcribed. The interview schedule with the agencies was slightly different. Some of the questions were introspective whereas others built upon some of the evidence gathered from the men.

Data analysis

The transcription process was very time consuming. On average a 1 hour interview took 7-8 hours to transcribe. The interview data was analysed using a grounded theory approach. The constant comparative method consistent with the grounded theory approach of Strauss and Corbin 1990, and Charmaz 2007, was applied.

The data was initially brain-stormed line by line (open coding) to provide open codes to discover concepts discussed by men. Following this the process of reducing the number of themes began (axial coding). On this occasion a conscious effort was made to relate categories to their sub-categories by switching to and forth between the data. Data from different interviews was cut and pasted and then placed under the categories identified to help saturate the data.

Version of grounded theory

Glaser believed that a literature review should not be undertaken in the interests of circumventing the creation of prior assumptions, which might have an unconscious influence on the later interview schedule. In contrast Strauss and Corbin argued that there could be pre-exposure to relevant literature. For the purposes of this research project the latter option was chosen.

Ethical factors

A genuine concern for the research participants was the prime justification for choosing a qualitative approach. One also has to be mindful that the literacy levels of long-term unemployed men are generally lower than those of persons in work. The expectation that this cohort of men should complete a questionnaire might in some circumstances have been deemed inappropriate or unethical.

The following codes and guidelines were examined before attempting to conduct field research.

- British Psychological Society (2006) Statement of Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Human Participant.
- British Sociological Association 1993 Statement of Ethical Practices, Durham.

The purpose of the study was relayed to each of the research participants and they were informed in advance that they could withdraw at any stage during the interview. Each of the men signed a waiver giving their consent to use direct quotations but careful attention was made to secure their anonymity. This ensured that the interviews proceeded on the basis of their 'informed consent'.

Some very sensitive material arose during the course of several interviews such as sexual abuse, broken relationships, alcoholism, and educational neglect. It could be argued that these issues came about because the interviewees felt comfortable enough in the setting to divulge such information. Generally I did not interrupt when the research participants voluntarily disclosed such information.

I listened attentively and tried to empathise with them while still keeping my professional distance. For them it was clearly important that they spoke about certain episodes from their past. It would have been inappropriate to

cut them short and move onto the next question. A couple of the men alluded to feeling better after the interviews.

Reflexivity and bias

One factor I was very conscious of throughout the field research phase was the fact that I was actually in employment in contrast to the research participants. I became 'acutely aware of the contradictory collaborative nature of my research strategy' as Bourgois once noted (Ethnographic Research: A Read, p16-17)

I was also cognisant that I was requesting men to visit an organisation, which they had visited previously to attend mediation meetings and/or training courses. Ideally I would have preferred to have interviewed the men in more neutral settings such as their own houses, a coffee shop or a pub. In reality the men were very eager for the interviews to take place in the offices of BAP/ LES. Many of the men choose the time of the interviews to fit around their daily chores. Every safeguard was taken to ensure that the interviews proceeded in a calm and relaxed atmosphere. To this end each of the interviews took place in the resource room that affords some privacy away from the public glare.

Another factor that crossed my mind was that I was relying on colleagues in the LES, who facilitated the process of reaching the target audience. Because of this, I retained the right throughout to use 'purposeful sampling' so as to avoid the possibility of gatekeepers "cherry-picking" men off their caseload who might 'say the right things'. This is why I had a back up contingency plan in place, to make strident efforts to engage with the target population in pubs, community centres and men's support groups.

Reflection on research approach taken

Although the primary field research with unemployed men and stakeholders was carried out using an ethnographical approach, it is important to emphasise that the overall project is broken down into distinct but connected stages from a literature review, fieldwork, data collection, and data analysis to dissertation production. In effect a number of complementary methods were used. For example a special supplementary spreadsheet of live register data was sought and provided by the Central Statistics Office in Ireland. This empirical data is very detailed.

As previously outlined it took far longer than anticipated to interview the 9 men. At the outset, this seemed a reasonably straightforward task considering the nature of the researcher's day-to-day employment. Before beginning the fieldwork, the presumption and expectation was that there would be a group of men with a heartfelt desire to go on record and share their opinions with the researcher. It would appear that this is not necessarily the case.

The interviews proceeded in a very satisfactory manner. No two cases were the same. Indeed the individual's picture of their respective circumstances was very different; a fact one might plausibly argue validated an ethnographical approach over the contending option of circulating a questionnaire to a random sample of unemployed men.

The participants were also very open and honest. Some very sensitive issues arose and at no time did I feel that I was being deceived or lied to. I was slightly surprised that the men did not communicate a more coherent picture of what improvements they wanted to see made by agencies and the government.

It should be stated that the men were on the whole very satisfied by the support and service they received from the BAP/LES. The prior expectation was that the men would have more particular ideas of how the government could safeguard or create employment. In the event, some of the ideas that

the men discussed were actually very relevant in the present economic climate.

Finally one important factor that became apparent on visits to University College Dublin library and the Open University on-line library was the lack of actual examples of transcripts that are coded using a grounded theory approach. This could lead one to question whether the three pronged approach recommended by Glasser and Strauss is actually being followed in many cases.

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