



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Youth Employment Scheme: DEL Briefing

9 October 2013

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Employment and Learning

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Sammy Douglas  
Mr Phil Flanagan  
Mr David Hilditch  
Mr Chris Lyttle  
Mr Fra McCann  
Ms Bronwyn McGahan  
Mr Pat Ramsey

**Witnesses:**

Mr Colum Boyle	Department for Employment and Learning
Mrs Siobhán Logue	Department for Employment and Learning
Mr Jim Russell	Department for Employment and Learning

**The Deputy Chairperson:** I welcome Mr Colum Boyle, director of employment services; Mrs Siobhán Logue, assistant director of employment services; and Mr Jim Russell, deputy director. I am sorry for the slight delay. I ask you to give us your presentation, after which members will ask questions.

**Mr Colum Boyle (Department for Employment and Learning):** Thank you for the opportunity to brief the Committee on the progress of the youth employment scheme to date. Siobhán will walk through the paper with you and add a bit more colour to it.

There are a couple of key points to make at the outset. This is a voluntary scheme for young people and there is no level of requirement involved in it at all. The scheme is also voluntary for employers. It is now in its second year of operation and it is being delivered almost exclusively by our own staff in the employment service but with some input from Careers Service.

The client focus of the scheme is on young people who are closest to being job-ready or who are job-ready but who, were it not for the economic downturn, might already be working or have found a job. The scheme is still bedding in, which is normal for an initiative of this scale and time frame. We brought it from concept to implementation in seven months and we have just completed a post-implementation review, which was originally scheduled to be undertaken as the key vehicle for the continuous improvement of the scheme. It has been invaluable to us in identifying some key areas where we can make enhancements to the scheme as we go forward.

The scheme is about providing opportunities for young people as early as possible after they claim unemployment benefit. It gives them opportunities for work experience, skills and a job, and there is a mix of what is available. There is a six-month window for our front line staff to engage with young

people in the youth employment scheme between the point at which they make their claim and the point at which they are mandated to go on to a Steps to Work programme. It is in that crucial six-month window that we have to work with young people to try to build that engagement.

I will hand over to Siobhán, who will walk you through the paper.

**Mrs Siobhán Logue (Department for Employment and Learning):** As Colum said, I will give you a brief summary of the background and then walk through the key elements of the youth employment scheme. My main focus will be on the post-implementation review, the enhancements that we have introduced and a summary of performance, achievements and progress to date.

As the paper says, the Executive agreed to the range of measures in March 2012. The context at that time was that between November 2007 and November 2011 the number of under-25s out of work in Northern Ireland had increased by 155%, which was significantly higher than anywhere else in the UK. At that time, as the paper says, 30.3% of all jobseeker's allowance (JSA) claimants were under 25. You may wish to note that that figure is now 27.5% out of the existing 62,000 JSA claimants.

The youth employment scheme was introduced in the summer of 2012. The latest figures that we have, for the May to July 2013 quarter, show that the unemployment rate is now 18.8%. This is a slight improvement, down 4.7% over the year. However, it is still very clear that we need the scheme because, ultimately, young people are facing greater obstacles in accessing employment.

I will summarise the key elements of the youth employment scheme. As Colum said, the aim of the scheme is to help young people gain work experience, develop additional skills and, through particular elements, achieve recognised qualifications. When it comes to qualifications, we have been looking at the sectors with the potential for future growth. Primarily, however, the scheme is designed to help young people by addressing their employability skills gaps with a view to moving them into employment as quickly as possible.

For us, this has been quite a new initiative, in a sense. We set the agenda quite high in that we were trying to build a covenant and a partnership between employers, the Department and young people. It was very clear that we needed that triangle if we were going to achieve the impact required. We already have the other partners such as Careers Service and contract providers and the further education (FE) provision. This is building on that work.

Just to reflect, one Committee member has already referred to the actual targets and the number of opportunities. There were 6,500 work experience opportunities; 3,600 training opportunities through skills development; and 2,500 jobs with enhanced employer subsidies attached.

Members will note that the figure for enhanced employer subsidies was originally 3,000 in the business case, but that figure was revised when First Start was introduced in November 2012, when 500 places were allocated to it. They are 26-week subsidised jobs in the voluntary and community sector.

We have a budget of £31 million to invest in the scheme over three years. The profile is as follows: £4 million; £12 million, and £15 million for next year. Let me walk you through the scheme. Essentially, it is managed by the employment service front line staff. An employment service adviser will interview the young person and undertake a diagnosis to assess his or her needs. The focus is on carrying out a work-readiness assessment, so that the adviser can identify the young person's specific employability skill gaps and job-search skill gaps, and try to meet those through the programme.

First, we will look at the work experience programme. All these elements are voluntary. Essentially, when we introduced the programme initially, we provided work experience for two to eight weeks, because it is very apparent that the biggest barrier for young people is that they lack that experience, particularly if they have come straight from education or training. We are really just trying to connect them with the labour market at an early stage. The important thing to realise is that Steps to Work, as you know, is a mandatory programme. If you are a young person, you are required to go on to Steps to Work when you have been unemployed for six months. In addition to that, we introduced the measure that our front line staff could provide to try to enable young people to progress into employment or upskill before they reached that mandatory point.

Work experience is delivered primarily in the private sector and in the social economy, but there also are some public sector opportunities. To illustrate this, our Department has committed to providing 150 work experience opportunities, in 2013-14 and 2014-15. This year, to date, 78 young people

have started work experience with us. In work experience, young people retain their benefit entitlement. They can access travelling expenses and childcare costs. To create an incentive for employers, we provide a support grant of up to £250 for employers' individual needs, such as uniforms, health and safety and so on.

Here is a brief summary of how we have progressed. The target was set at 6,500. It is broken down as follows: 1,000 in the first year; 2,500 in the second year, which is this year, and 3,000 in the third year. In the first year, we secured 108% of the work experience opportunities that we set out to secure, and, to date in 2013-14, we have achieved 91% of the target.

We have projections for budget and expenditure. Compared to what we projected, 93% of young people have actually started the work experience element of the scheme.

I will turn to the skills development programme. As you can see, it is basically sector-specific work experience, and it is for six to nine months. The key thing is that an element of skills training is incorporated, which allows and enables young people to do particular units of their qualifications and accreditation framework. In this skills development programme, the focus is closely aligned with the Department's priority skills sectors. So we concentrated on those skills which had potential for future job growth, and they are listed below.

Young people who participate in the skills development programme receive a weekly training allowance, which is calculated at their benefit rate plus £45. To encourage employers to take young people, they will receive help of up to £750 for associated training costs.

Although we introduced the youth employment scheme in the summer of 2012, it was December 2012 and January 2013 when the skills development programme element was fully in place. So the targets were for 400 that year, 1,400 this year and 1,800 next year. When we produced the paper, 571 had started, but that is now 603. I am choosing this to reflect that the skills development programme is the one in which numbers are growing. This year, as regards the opportunities that we hoped to secure with employers, we are significantly above the profile for this stage, at 133%. Employers are very interested in the skills development programme and are signing up and providing high numbers, which reflects their commitment to provide training, which is important. The actual number of projected starts in the skills development programme is at 144%, so we are above the projected number of opportunities secured and the number of young people taking them, which is very positive at this stage.

You may be aware that for a significant number of years through Steps to Work we have had an employer subsidy, either for 18- to 24-year-olds or for those who are 25-plus. It was primarily for a six-month period. Through this programme we have introduced an enhanced employer subsidy, which is up to £5,750 a year for a 12-month period. GB also provides a subsidy through the youth contract, but that is for only 26 weeks and is basically for half the amount — £2,275. We tried to make sure that the programme was going to work from our point of view and for our employers, because they are SMEs. If you are in the youth contract in GB, the employer claims the money in full after 26 weeks. There are some exceptions through which a small employer can claim part of it earlier, but we have introduced and profiled ours so that if employers sign up — and we have a significant number of small employers taking on young people using the employers' subsidy — they will get £500 after the first four weeks and then 12 monthly payments of £375. It includes 30 hours a week, including training. The key thing is that we have extended the subsidy to a year and we have added the skills development condition.

The numbers of opportunities that we hoped to secure were 300 in year 1, 1,000 in year 2, rising to 1,200 in year 3. In the first year, we secured 92% of the opportunities that we had hoped for. At the stage that we profiled for this year, we were basically on track at 101%. In terms of starts this year, we are just below 90%.

Before we look at the post-implementation review, there are key things that are different about the youth employment scheme. The way that we partner with employers and young people has been quite innovative. Also, throughout the Department, we are trying to have a much more joined-up approach. We have involved the Careers Service. We have examples of employers, such as Bombardier, which was recently very keen to be involved, particularly in the skills development programme element. We have tried to not just have a standardised scheme but to tailor it to meet the employers' needs, because it is ultimately about getting people into employment.

For Bombardier, we involved the Careers Service and did preparation workshops with young people on completing forms, preparation and interviews. Along with the employer, we held an event in which

the company explained to the young people what it was actually looking for and what it was trying to offer. To me, that is the direction in which we should proceed. The company met a large number of young people and conducted one-to-one interviews to allow them to identify, through a range of disciplines, what would suit their needs regarding employability and progression. The outcome is that we have filled all of the places.

That is the direction in which we want to go. As an employment service, we need to broker the earliest engagement possible between young people and employers so that the young people can understand what employers needs.

I will summarise the key elements of the post-implementation review. As Colum said, we brought in the programme and developed it very rapidly. The intention was to do a review to make sure that we captured what worked and identified what we needed to improve. In that regard, we had focus groups with young people to get feedback. The uptake in some areas was of concern, and we wanted to understand why. We receive ongoing feedback from employers and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) about what works for them.

The Minister engaged with a number of bodies in advance of introducing the youth employment scheme. We were surprised at the uptake by small, medium and large employers. We have mentioned some of them. From a very early stage, we built up a huge bank of opportunities due to the very high level of interest in all three elements of work experience and skills development. It is heartening that employers are willing to take on young people. They recognise that they need to play their part. However, the challenge was that young people did not initially take up the opportunities at the rate at which they were being offered.

It is much too early to measure what we are hoping to achieve through the scheme. We have a key performance indicator, which is that we hope to achieve 33% sustained job outcomes. Obviously, we will have to go through the situation where somebody gets into employment in order to be able to measure that. We are planning to do an evaluation next year. Clearly, it is a key aspect. The target of 33% compares with the 25% or 26% Steps to Work target. We are setting ourselves a higher standard. All we can share at this stage is the number of opportunities that we are getting, which is 32% in starts. That is building and increasing. At this stage, we just do not have enough people who have progressed. They may have gone into work experience or skills development, but we do not have enough substantial numbers to be able to identify the trends.

We learned three key things from the review that we needed to take forward and improve. This is about voluntary participation, and we want to encourage young people to participate rather than wait until they are required to do so under Steps to Work. From listening to what they said, we needed additional incentives. We also needed to improve the engagement of young people, so we needed to bring in employers early in order that they could explain what they required. Employers such as Tesco and Asda are quite happy to engage with young people from the outset. Tesco makes it very clear that it takes young people on work experience only if it has a job for them at the end of it. So, young people can compete and apply for the jobs. By bringing in that reality check and genuine information from employers, we hope that it will improve uptake, because the young people can see an end goal. It is not going to be just eight weeks of work experience. It is up to them to prove that they can obtain a job. The Minister was particularly keen for us to improve the conversion rate of opportunities.

We introduced the enhancements on 30 September, which is why it is timely to speak to you today. I will summarise them. The first key enhancement was in the delivery of the youth employment scheme. The employment service is still very much in the lead in engaging with clients and young people. However, we are bringing in lead contractors for two reasons: they have expertise, particularly in training, and we want to improve our capacity to improve uptake. In effect, the employment service will engage with young people and will encourage and promote the scheme for the first 10 weeks. After week 10, young people can be referred to the lead contractor. Again, that is voluntary, and it is for a support meeting.

Copius Resources talked about how the job assist centre, which the Department funded, was helpful. When we set up the centre, it was to complement our local jobs and benefits offices. Some people, when they are in the jobs and benefits office, associate it with their benefit. This is a voluntary scheme, and it is about us encouraging people. So, getting a third party to explain the scheme may bring a different perspective and allow them to say more openly whether they are interested.

The key change to the work experience is that the young people who participate now get paid £15-38 on top of their benefit, whereas they previously received only their benefit. That aligns with the Steps

to Work programme. From our perspective, it is important there is no conflict or competition between the schemes; we do not want that. Another small change is that the work experience now lasts three to eight weeks, where previously, it lasted two to eight weeks.

The employment service will still promote the skills development programme, but the Steps to Work lead contractors will take on a significant area of work, including securing and delivering the training, doing the administration and monitoring the placements. A key thing that we learned about the employment service is that the front line staff are very good. As I said, we are ahead of target with the skills development programme. Those staff are very good at sourcing opportunities and engaging with employers, as they should be, because they are the ones who engage with them. In reality, their area of expertise is in addressing barriers, not in developing skills development plans or monitoring employers to ensure that they deliver. We want to use the lead contractors' expertise in that area so that our front line staff can spend time with the clients and young people rather than on the administration, management and monitoring of the programme.

There are another couple of changes to the skills development programme. Previously, the programme was for six to nine months and was flexible, and we have now said that it is a six-month programme. We have done that for two reasons: to align it with Steps to Work; and to enable the young people to get an increased number of credits so that they can then progress to employment and the employer subsidy within a shorter period of time.

As we said, we had restricted the skills development programme to the jobs growth sectors, but we have now modified that restriction. So, although the primary focus is still on those areas because they are the ones that will contribute to growing the economy, if an employee clearly has the prospect of a job outcome, we will not restrict that and they will be able to access the skills development programme. We need to make sure that there are good training plans in place to support that.

Similarly, the eligible sectors for the enhanced employers' subsidy are being relaxed. So, although the focus will still be on trying to secure opportunities in the jobs growth sector, if a young person is interested in employment outside that and an employer can provide an opportunity, the subsidy will be available.

Even though we still need to look at this and improve upon it, one of the things that we have learned about the subsidy is that employers have been slow in making claims for the enhanced employer subsidy, which has affected the profile of our budget spend. We will go out and look again at that to see whether we can address it, for example, by making it quarterly, and to see how we can reduce administration and encourage them to claim the subsidy. Significant numbers have signed up but, to date, have not made a claim. The employers have a choice; if they wish, they can choose to do it all at the end of the year. However, we want to investigate that further to see what we can do.

Finally, on the key performance indicators, I have highlighted the numbers and indicated where we have got to to date, but I will give an overall summary. On the work experience projections, at this stage of this year, we are at 93% of our actual figure compared with what we projected. On the skills development programme, we are at 144%, and on the enhanced employers subsidy, as I said, we are just under 90%.

I am happy to take questions.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** Thank you for your presentation to the Committee today.

A total of £31 million over three years is being spent on work experience and training opportunities. How many of those folk do you foresee in full-time employment at the end of those three years?

**Mr C Boyle:** We are targeting about 33% of the target that we set in the business case.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** So, do you reckon that 33% will be in full-time employment after three years?

**Mr C Boyle:** That is the objective.

**Mr P Ramsey:** How many is that?

**Mr C Boyle:** Pardon?

**Mr P Ramsey:** That is 33% of what?

**Mr Jim Russell (Department for Employment and Learning):** It is out of 12,500, so it is one third of that, which is around 4,100.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** So, we are talking about a figure of over 4,000. How effective is the two-to eight-week work experience? I am trying to visualise how effective it really is. If somebody goes into work experience or training for two to eight weeks, where do they go from there? Do they drop off after that? What happens to them?

**Mrs Logue:** The two to eight weeks' experience has two purposes, really. Imagine the young person who has no employment history. When he or she actually participates, even though it is for only two to eight weeks, there is an agreement with the employer about the specific employability skills that that young person needs to develop. So, for some of them, it is actually about, literally, the routine of being able to attend on a daily basis. For others, it is about teamwork skills, and for others again, it is about specific vocational skills. So, the young person participates for two to eight weeks. This is not what we have had in any previous programmes, but at the end of the eight weeks, the employer provides an assessment, which is feedback on the employability skills that that young person has developed. It helps us to determine what further training or support is needed. The other issue is that a significant number of employers, some of which I mentioned, such as Hastings, Moy Park and Tesco, have taken young people on for two to eight weeks, and those young people have progressed to either the skills development programme or employment.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** You sat in during the previous presentation, and we heard then that the £31 million to deliver work experience and training will not meet the need or fill the gap that exists. None of it will meet that need. Is that right?

**Mr C Boyle:** We came in halfway through the presentation. You were talking about a very intense and specific sectoral need. If you are looking at something such as that, you need an intense, specific sectoral response to it. We are trying to put a programme in place that covers all of Northern Ireland and a whole range of jobs for young people in Northern Ireland. First, it gives them a chance to get experience where otherwise they would not have got any at all in Northern Ireland. We are not pretending in any way that the two to eight weeks' work experience is anything other than what it says it is. It is literally a chance to put a mark on your CV that says, "I have been out in the world of work. I know what it is like to get out of bed in the morning and go to work, and I know what it is like to work with other people". The middle piece on skills development is getting more into the territory that you are talking about. Where some of the organisations and employers that are interested in that are concerned, we want to make sure that the quality of training there is good enough to result in a new job for the young person. Why would any employer want to go through the pain of training somebody just to let them go and not actually invest further in them beyond that period?

**Mr Russell:** That sort of experience also gives the young person the chance to find out whether the job is what they really want to do as their long-term job goal. People come out of school or training with ideas that they want to do childcare or whatever. What they perceive it to be and its reality can be quite different. Experience allows people to make decisions as much about what they do not want to do as what they do want to do. So, it is about progressing people along a continuum, hopefully. In theory, you could progress from short work experience into the skills development programme and, hopefully, into employment, or you could through any one piece at a time.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** I suppose that brings us back to the feelings in the Careers Service, which we did a bit of work on.

I have one further point. In your paper, you say that in 2012-13, there were 1,083 secured opportunities, yet only 278 people started. Can you explain that?

**Mrs Logue:** As we were saying, the key issue was that, at a very early stage, we focused on getting employers to sign up to ensure that we got opportunities to offer young people. So, if you look at the profile for last year, you see that we had a large number of opportunities, but the young people's uptake was lower, whereas this year, the profile for the number of secured places versus the number of people who have started is much better. Our overall aim is to fill 70% of the places that we secure. That is summarised at the end of our paper. We are on track to do that. Last year, we were building

that bank, because we were not going to attract young people's interests if we had not got any employers. This year, we are getting into it.

**Mr Russell:** When we sat down to draw this up, we thought that there were a lot of job-ready young people out there. The first thing is to set up work experience and training so that people can get jobs, and the challenge would be to secure the employer's commitment. We thought that the biggest risk would be our ability to get employers to sign up. We thought that, if we signed employers up, the young people would be knocking down the doors to take these opportunities on. However, we actually proved that it was the opposite and that the employers were more than willing to offer across the full range but the young people were a bit more reluctant. That is why, as Siobhán said, we asked a few questions in the post-implementation review about why they were reluctant and what we were missing that makes this not attractive enough for them to have a go.

A number of issues emerged from that. One was that it has to be worth their while financially. They should not be worse off for having a go at it. The second issue was that young people wanted to do things that they were genuinely interested in, so with the revisions to the scheme, we have added further incentives to encourage participation. As Siobhán said, instead of going out now and trying to secure loads of opportunities, we are asking young people what they would be interested in and we are then trying to source that for them from an employer. So, we have turned it around a bit, if you like.

**Mr P Ramsey:** You are all very welcome. The plan is very ambitious, and I hope that you succeed in your endeavours. You are talking about 18-8% youth unemployment and about taking 6% of that. That is a big target, and I hope that you succeed.

I want to tease out a few questions first. We were in the Titanic Belfast when we first heard about the youth employment scheme initiative. The scheme certainly covers all the areas. I know from my constituency how successful the collaboration with employers has been. Is it accurate to say that the youth employment scheme programme is a stand-alone programme?

**Mr C Boyle:** It is stand-alone in the sense that people can flow from it into jobs or into Steps to Work. It is a natural window —

**Mr P Ramsey:** I accept that. However, it is a stand-alone programme, yet it was not subject to procurement or tendering.

**Mr C Boyle:** No. It is delivered entirely by us, from inside the organisation.

**Mr P Ramsey:** If it is internal and not part of a tendering exercise, why would you gift it to lead contractors?

**Mr C Boyle:** Gift what?

**Mr P Ramsey:** There is a change or a variance from 30 September; you are saying that delivery of the programme will now be from a lead contractor who tendered for previous work under the Steps to Work programme.

**Mr C Boyle:** We have effectively created a youth strand of Steps to Work, and —

**Mr P Ramsey:** My original question, Colum, was whether it was a stand-alone programme, and you confirmed that it was and that it was an internal departmental initiative.

**Mr C Boyle:** It is. I am using extra capacity that exists in our supply chain through the Steps to Work arrangement to help us to achieve better outcomes for young people on one element of the scheme.

**Mr P Ramsey:** You obviously know what direction I am going in. Why was there a need for a variance of that on 30 September if, for example, the training providers were meeting the targets that existed to help you in the youth employment scheme programme?

**Mr C Boyle:** Universally, the training providers were not helping us to meet those targets across the piece. There was also an issue about control, consistency and standardisation of the providers.



**Mr P Ramsey:** I accept that as well. However, I will come back to a hobby horse of mine. Although we have 18.8% of youth unemployment in Northern Ireland, do you accept that it is higher in the north-west?

**Mr C Boyle:** Yes.

**Mr P Ramsey:** So, because it is higher, you would think that there would be more unique and creative variances when there are models of success. I think that your departmental officials would accept that there are models of success in the existing training providers in the north-west.

**Mr C Boyle:** The north-west is doing really well.

**Mr P Ramsey:** Why, then, were the training providers excluded on the variance or because of a directive coming from the Department that excluded those same training providers who are doing an excellent job of getting young people into work?

**Mr C Boyle:** There is no exclusion for the training providers. For example, where training plans for the enhanced employer subsidy are concerned, there is absolutely nothing to bar them at all. We are talking here about trying to put in place a mechanism to enhance the quality of training provision and to ensure its consistency across Northern Ireland.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I will cut to the chase. We talk about the scheme being voluntary, and until 30 September, a young person could have gone into a jobs and benefits office and decided that they wanted to go to a particular training company. Is that correct?

**Mrs Logue:** It is not a training company; it is an employer.

**Mr P Ramsey:** Training provider.

**Mrs Logue:** No. We will try to explain. Pre-30 September, essentially, a young person was matched with an employer, and the employer was the one who was going to draw down the £750 for training. So, if it was a large employer, they could have in-house training, which they could deliver in vocational skills, or that employer could source a training organisation or a further education college to provide it on his or her behalf. So, the young person was being submitted to and accepted by an employer, and the employer sourced whatever training is appropriate. The key change in the skills development programme is that, since 30 September, the young person will still be placed with an employer, but to manage and support that training element, the lead contractors are also being brought in through a partnership to assist us in doing it.

**Mr P Ramsey:** Do you accept that there are training providers in the north-west who felt quite aggrieved and upset when the directive came out from the Department that only those contractors on the Steps to Work programme would be the lead providers. Is that accurate?

**Mr C Boyle:** I was not aware of that until you called me to discuss that with me. I told you in the phone call that I would look at the issue. I am looking at the issue. I do not know the benefit of us discussing it in an open forum here. I am happy to keep discussing it if you wish, but until I have looked at it properly with my officials, there is not much more than I can do with it today.

**Mr P Ramsey:** If we have higher levels of unemployment in the north-west, which, you have conceded there are and NISRA figures are telling us that there are, there should be more unique and creative ways of establishing where there are models of good practice to encourage those same training providers to do that. I did not mention them particularly, but I have always said to you, Colum — I said this leading up to the Steps to Work plans — that there has to be bespoke programmes subregionally to target hotspots. There is an accepted hotspot in my constituency, so I am saying to you that the high levels of unemployment mean that there have to be bespoke realistic programmes with higher levels of targets for the north-west than for elsewhere.

**Mrs Logue:** We do our figures by office for Foyle and for Derry. So, essentially, we have 91% starts in the work experience programme versus target for where we expect to be this year. For the skills development programme, we are at 156%, and in the employer scheme, it is 82%. So, the programme is working in uptake and participation. Across all three elements, we are at 108%. This

year we are ahead of target in where we would expect to be with the numbers of young people participating and the numbers of employers engaged. However, it varies. We now want to look at trying to engage. A large number of employers have signed up to the employer subsidy. We are at 131%, but we need to look at how we can improve the numbers of young people taking up those vacancies. Somewhere else might be better in uptake of employer subsidy, but the programme is flexible enough, and, because we are able to analyse it by office, we are able to target how we respond and how we work with employers.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I accept that, but I have to come back to the unfortunate position that the north-west is in. There is a crying need for additional programmes and resources to target the high levels of youth and general unemployment. That needs to be reflected to ensure that there is a high level of resource going into it. If you are trying to establish a target of 6%, to balance it out, Derry would clearly need to be targeted at a reduction of 8% or 9% to get the Northern Ireland average.

**Mr Russell:** For this year, from April to the end of August, we were 14.47% ahead of target for the job outcome figures for the whole of Northern Ireland. In Derry, we were 28.43% ahead of target. For 18- to 24-year-olds in Northern Ireland, we were only 4.5% ahead of target, but in Derry, we were 21.69% ahead.

**Mr P Ramsey:** When NISRA presented its figures, it very clearly told us that, unfortunately, there was a higher level of unemployment in Derry than elsewhere over the past year. I asked how those stats are delivered, because we had the City of Culture, and you would have thought that there was going to be greater opportunities of employment. Its information was that unemployment in Derry increased over the past period. So, I do not understand your figures, because NISRA is telling me something different.

**Mr Russell:** Those are people moving from benefit to work in the past five months. Those are Department for Social Development (DSD) figures.

**Mr P Ramsey:** Maybe we should ask some of our researchers to look at that again. The evidence coming from NISRA and that coming from this group is different. We need to get an evidence base. I am not going to argue with you if your figures are right, Jim.

**Mr Russell:** They are.

**Mr P Ramsey:** However, NISRA is telling me that unemployment levels have risen in Derry compared with any other region in Northern Ireland. I have to accept what it tells me.

**Mr Russell:** I have to accept yours as well. We have to compare the numbers to see where they come from and what period we are talking about.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** We will maybe get Research and Information Service or somebody to look at the figures from NISRA again and the figures that you folk are providing. We will see where the discrepancies are, and we will come back to the issue.

**Mr Douglas:** Thank you for the presentation. Siobhán, in your presentation, you talked about the changes to the youth employment scheme. The paper states:

*"we are on track to achieve our Key Performance Indicator to fill 70% of opportunities secured."*

That is good news. The paper also goes on to state:

*"This compares favourably with the Youth Contract in GB."*

Obviously, we will look at GB to see how things are going. I hope that we do not put you in an awkward position and that, hopefully, you will be able to answer my question. At the Tory party conference, David Cameron talked about earning or learning. How does the Department feel about that whole attitude? I suppose that the attitude is that there are undeserving poor out there; young people are either skivvies or will not work.

**Mr C Boyle:** The Minister was on 'Good Morning Ulster' on the radio this morning on the very same subject. He made his view pretty clear: most unemployed people who seek our services to find work have genuine needs and genuine barriers to employment. It is our role to try to help them in whatever way we can to get round and remove those barriers, improve their lot and find and sustain that work. Our Minister made the point that asking people to come in and spend all day every day in a job centre is not really the best use of their time. Taking Pat's point about innovation and creativity, a lot more could be applied to that. We have tried to do that through Steps to Work and previously through the local employment intermediary service (LEMIS). The youth employment scheme is also an example of that. Although that is an Executive decision, the view in the Department is that that is not really one for us and that it does not really fit the psyche and mentality of people in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Douglas:** I get young people coming into my constituency office looking for jobs. I think that, by far, the majority of young people would love a job if they could get one. Obviously, there are elements that, for one reason or another, do not want to work. Do you agree that the work that you do certainly indicates that the majority of young people want training and job opportunities?

**Mr C Boyle:** Certainly.

**Mr Douglas:** I heard part of the previous presentation. There was talk about 55,000 jobs that have not been taken up. One of the things that was mentioned was the training that people need. One of the guys talked about the decommissioning of vessels. I have spoken to people and have learned that if, as was mentioned, a vessel came to Northern Ireland, it could create hundreds of jobs. Many of those jobs would not need high levels of training. One example would be young people or others working with burning equipment. That is not a huge skill, but it could be used elsewhere.

Chair, I suppose that we will ask the Department to come back to us to talk about those issues, and it would certainly be helpful if you could come back at some stage. It is not as easy as saying that there are all these jobs and that there is a problem in Northern Ireland and then asking why we are not linking them.

**Mr C Boyle:** We are very keen to target employers and their work through the youth employment scheme. So, if employers come to us and give us the specifications for the young people and the skill levels that they need, the scheme could fit those jobs particularly well, given that you said that a lot of those jobs could be of a lower skill base.

**Mr Douglas:** I said to those people that a lot of the training organisations link into the big employers and organisations for recruitment. However, they said that there is a mismatch between the jobs that are available, the opportunities for training and the various training organisations. It would be very helpful to look at that for the future.

**Mr Hilditch:** Apologies. I had to step out. We are in a sort of a training programme ourselves. It is steps to something or other. *[Laughter.]* We are getting there. Thanks for the presentation. Siobhán, thank you. I wanted some clarity on the training providers' role, which you obviously gave during the presentation.

From the positive end of it, I chair a local government staff committee that has been involved in the youth employment scheme programme. Wearing that hat, I can tell you that I have seen a number of successes, with people moving directly into employment from that programme. So, my experience of it so far has been very positive. Pat referred to one specific region, but, to be honest, I think that it has worked in my area. We appealed at various levels for more local government involvement in those schemes, and that is where it is coming from. I think that it should be borne in mind that local government has a lot to offer.

**Mr C Boyle:** We are pushing the public sector element very hard, and I think that we could push it harder again. We will need to focus some more resources on that internally to do that.

**Mrs Logue:** We have a particularly good partnership with Belfast City Council. Young people go through the youth employment scheme with that council, and it ring-fences job opportunities so that young people and those with disabilities can apply and compete. I welcome what you said. That is definitely one of the key strands of what we are doing.

**Mr Hilditch:** It gives people experience of a wide range of the different kinds of work that are in those organisations. Despite what some of the unions are maybe saying about cheap employment, I definitely see people moving out of that situation and into employment.

**Mr Russell:** I have had two work experience people in my office so far, and one had a full-time job within 12 days. All that he needed was a bit of help with his CV and some interview techniques.

**Mr Hilditch:** Yes; a wee bit of confidence and self-esteem. The change in some of those young people is very noticeable, and they come on within a very short space of time.

**The Deputy Chairperson:** No other member has indicated that they want to ask a question. Thank you for coming to the Committee, giving us your presentation and taking questions. No doubt, we will hear from you at some stage in the future.

**Mr C Boyle:** You will.