Good Practices in Social Security

Good practice in operation since: 2012

Intreo - Integrated welfare and employment service
A case of the Department of Social Protection

Winner, ISSA Good Practice Award - Europe competition 2016

Department of Social Protection
Ireland

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Summary

In 2011, during a period when unemployment increased by over 300%, delivery of employment and welfare services was fragmented across three organizations.

Unemployed customers dealt separately with each organization. As a result customer service processes were inefficient and employment outcomes for clients were poor. Intreo was the response to this challenge, involving:

- Development and communication of a clear business strategy.
- Merger of three large organizations.
- Integration of the services and staff of these organizations.
- Design and implementation of new service processes.
- Implementation of client profiling to prioritize resource allocation.
- Delivery of all these services in ‘one-stop-shops’ – Intreo Centres.
- Transaction processing times reduced from three weeks to about three days.
- Lead time for engagement with employment services has reduced from at least three months to about two weeks.
- Persistence rate from short to long term unemployment has reduced from 35% to 26%.
- Progression rate of very long term unemployed people has increased from 25% to 44%.

CRITERIA 1

What was the issue/problem/challenge addressed by your good practice?

Due to economic recession, unemployment grew by 300% from 2008 – 2012 and transaction volumes grew by a factor of six. This placed a huge burden on the State’s welfare and employment services when it did not have the financial capacity to respond to the crisis by increasing resources. Even before the crisis, the service model underpinning the provision of welfare and related employment services was inefficient. Unemployed customers engaged with multiple service points in three separate organizations. None of these organizations offered a full range of services. Fragmentation of service delivery meant that people who became unemployed faced a delay of about three weeks in receiving their jobseekers payment and a delay of at least three months before they could engage with the public employment service.
The overall challenge faced by the State was to reform business operations to provide a higher quality of service to clients and improve employment outcomes, and to increase the capacity of the service, with no additional resources, to cater for the significant increase in the client base and transaction volumes.

**CRITERIA 2**

**What were the main objectives and the expected outcomes?**

The objectives and outcomes were set out in two key documents.


In 2011 the NEES project plan objectives and expected outcomes were summarized as follows: “to integrate the provision of employment services and benefit payment services within the Department and in so doing to ensure that the payment of income supports to people who do not have a job is directly linked to the equally, if not more important, task of supporting such people in their pursuit of employment and related opportunities and improving their life chances. As part of this approach the Department is seeking to change its focus from the passive provision of transaction based services (claims processing and payments) to the active case management of clients.” The PathWays to Work strategy identified a number of input, output and outcome measures.

**Outcome Measures**

- Move 75,000 long term unemployed people into work by end-2015.

- Reduce persistence rate from short-term to long term unemployment from 35% to 25%.

- Increase progression rate of very long-term unemployed people from 25% to 40%.

**Output Measures**

- Provide Group Information Sessions for 30,000 new jobseekers (2012), 85,000 registered jobseekers (2013) and all new jobseekers plus 100,000 (i.e. c250,000) long term unemployed jobseekers (2015).

- Profile 150,000 new jobseekers (2012) increasing to all newly registered jobseekers plus all long-term unemployed jobseekers (i.e. c 400,000 ) during 2015.
• Conduct 130,000 one-to-one case officers meetings with new jobseekers (2012), 185,000 meetings (2013), all jobseekers plus 100,000 long-term unemployed (total c 250,000) (2015)

Input Measures

• Establish 60 Intreo centres between 2012 and 2015.

• Introduce a a record of mutual commitments.

• Recruit over 200 key employers to a long-term unemployed and youth activation charter.

• Implement a ‘penalty rate’ process linking receipt of welfare payments to participation in activation.

• Implement a payment-by-results contracted resourcing model.

CRITERIA 3

What is the innovative approach/strategy followed to achieve the objectives?

The first challenge was to design a combined welfare and employment service that would meet the objectives. The second was to implement the design successfully, including the merger and integration of three large organizations. The approach followed was to research best practice in other countries and to adapt good practice to Ireland. Service innovations were introduced:

• A profiling model using answers to a jobseeker questionnaire to predict the probability of remaining unemployed for over 12 months.

• The profiling model also informs the frequency of engagement with each jobseeker, allocating high-risk clients a case-officer who remains with that client for the duration of their unemployment.

• A Group information Session providing jobseekers with information on the range of services.

• A record of mutual commitments • Reduced payment rate for people who fail to engage with the service.

• Initiatives to engage with employers and support them in recruiting staff.

• Roll-out of Intreo centres, integrating welfare and employment services.
• A common means-assessment object so that means data captured for one purpose can be used for other purposes.

• A payment-by-results contract model - JobPath - was developed using third party providers to deliver case work capacity for some jobseekers.

For implementation, a number of innovative measures were adopted including:

• Internal Governance through a programme board chaired by the Department’s Deputy Secretary.

• Cross-Government Governance by identifying over 200 specific actions, attributing these to relevant Departments with delivery deadlines. Senior officials from each Department meet monthly to review progress.

• Government oversight and commitment through reporting at monthly cabinet committee meetings chaired by the Taoiseach.

• External Governance through the Labour Market Council, comprising senior representatives from business, trade union, advocacy groups and labour market experts.

• Quarterly progress reports published on the Department’s website Staff engagement was prioritised through.

• Large scale briefings.

• An engagement and innovation programme.

• Staff surveys.

• A Culture and Values programme.

• Online fora and communications.

• A single external brand – Intreo Distributed Responsibility.

• Implementation of the reform programme was achieved through the existing line-organization.

A small team worked with each Division to articulate the service vision and hand over ownership, via facilitated workshops, of the implementation of this vision to local staff and managers.
CRITERIA 4

Have the resources and inputs been used in an optimal way to achieve the set objectives and the expected outcomes? Please specify what internal or external evaluations of the practice have taken place and what impact/results have been identified/achieved so far.

Intreo clearly had an impact in a number of areas e.g. Outcome targets in the Pathways to Work strategy have been largely achieved:

- Over 75,000 long-term unemployed people have returned to work.
- Persistence rate has reduced from 35% to 26%.
- Progression rate has increased from 25% to 44%.
- Economic recovery has been ‘jobs-led’ rather than ‘jobs-less’.
- 60 Intreo offices operational.
- 300 employers signed up to the long-term unemployment and youth activation charter.
- Processing times for jobseeker claims reduced from an average three weeks to three days.
- Waiting time for access to employment services has reduced from about 3 months to 2/3 weeks.
- Over 500,000 people participated in c.20,000 Group Information Sessions.
- Over 1,000,000 1-2-1 interviews conducted.
- Customer satisfaction measured by a recently completed independent study is very high.

Total expenditure on the programme is estimated at c.€40m - very low compared to similar reforms in other countries. OECD and the Troika (EU/ECB/IMF programme funders) have commented favourably on the reforms.

The Department is undertaking a series of quantitative econometric reviews of Intreo reforms - to be completed during 2016/2017. The JobBridge Internship scheme has been evaluated, finding that progression rates to paid employment were c.61%. This compares very positively with progression rates for similar schemes in other countries and suggests that 20 - 30% of employment growth could be attributed to JobBridge.
CRITERIA 5

What lessons have been learned? To what extent would your good practice be appropriate for replication by other social security institutions?

The experience indicates that the merger of employment and welfare services for jobseekers results in service efficiencies and improved outcomes for jobseekers. As the reforms have adapted practice from other countries, they are replicable in other administrations. A number of key learnings include:

- Developing and securing high level government support for a clear road-map is critical.

- Setting clear targets, identifying actions and inputs required and allocating responsibility for each action helps to focus performance.

- Strong governance including involvement of external stakeholders helps to secure key stakeholder commitment to reforms and ensure that progress is subject to external oversight.

- Implementing service reforms in parallel with process reform helps to create energy and build momentum by giving staff ‘new tools’ with which to work.

- Distributing ownership for implementation to the line business units can work.

- High levels of communication to and engagement with staff helps to explain the rationale for change and identify staff concerns, generating further ideas for change.

- Implementing a new identity when merging organizations/services both signals change to customers and helps to coalesce staff from different backgrounds around a common purpose.

- Profiling works and helps with the efficient allocation of scarce resources.