

**Evaluating the effectiveness and implementation of new
employment enhancement programmes in an Irish context:
A focus on well-being and employability**

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A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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November 2017

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ACRONYMS

ALMP - Active Labour Market Programmes

CSO - Central Statistics Office

CWO - Community Welfare Officers

DSP - Department of Social Protection,

DEASP - Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (July, 2017)

ESRI – Economic and Social Research Institute

ETB - Education and Training Board

FÁS - Irish National Training and Employment Authority

ILO - International Labour Office

IMF - International Monetary Fund

Intreo - Public Employment Income Support Office

LESN - Local Employment Service Network

LMC - Labour Market Council

LTU - Long-term Unemployed

NEES - National Employment and Entitlements Service

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PES - Public Employment Service

PEX - Probability of Exit

PTWP - Pathways to Work Programme

SAU - Service as usual

SAU PTWPLESN - Service as usual in a Local Employment Service

SAU PTWPINTREO - Service as usual in Intreo

Solas - Further Education and Training Agency

STU - Short-term Unemployed

WHO – World Health Organisation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere and heartfelt thanks to my supervisors, Prof. Sinéad McGilloway and Dr. Mary Murphy. Their unfaltering belief in me and their continued support and patience right through to the final hours will forever be appreciated. Their knowledge, attention to detail, clarity of expression, and enthusiasm for research, has guided me through this process and given me new goals to aspire towards. I am also indebted to Dr. Colm McGuinness and his vast statistical knowledge, for his detailed discussions on analysis, and his continued patience with me!

I would also like to thank the wonderful staff of the Ballymun Job Centre especially the guidance team, the administrative staff, and the management team, for their continued support, their participation in the study, and for putting up with all my requests! This research would not have been possible without their enthusiasm and belief in what the BJC stands for. Thanks also are due to the BJC Board of Management for their support and for allowing me the time to pursue this research.

Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the many participants (job seekers, practitioners, managers, support organisations, policy makers) without whom, the study would not have been possible. Thank you also to the Irish Research Council who funded this research and for their investment in me as a researcher. I hope the collective findings advance our knowledge and understanding of unemployment and its psychosocial impact, and make a contribution towards future labour market policy in Ireland.

To Mum and Dad, thank you for always encouraging me to pursue my dreams, for helping me to believe in myself, and for your continued support and words of

enthusiasm throughout. Also, thank you to my wider family for your reassuring words, phone calls, and texts, which were always appreciated!

To my husband Ken, thank you for being by my side throughout this journey, for your constant and unwavering belief in me and my ability to achieve. Your patience, tolerance, and understanding have been truly amazing. Finally, to my three wonderful children, James, Rían, and Éabha, your presents, pictures, cards, and most importantly, your patience and love, have kept me going every day. I hope we can spend lots of time together now!

ABSTRACT

Unemployment is a persistent global problem which has attracted considerable interest in recent years from governments, policy makers, researchers and practitioners. During the last three decades or so, there has been a significant shift in international labour market policy (and its implementation) toward activation and active labour market policy to help the unemployed progress more quickly into employment. In Ireland, policy changes in this direction have been more recent, with the implementation of the new Pathways to Work policy (PTWP). However, long-term unemployment (LTU) remains high and more work is needed, both nationally and internationally, to identify how best to intervene effectively and appropriately with this vulnerable group.

This research comprised three separate, inter-related studies, designed to: (1) critically examine the implementation and perceived effectiveness of the PTWP in Ireland; (2) evaluate the effectiveness of a new high support intervention (when compared to services as usual) in terms of its impact on psychological well-being and related psychosocial factors which influence employability; and (3) conduct a small-scale process evaluation to explore the implementation aspects and mechanisms underpinning the new intervention and to draw some comparisons, in parallel, with routine PTWP services.

The three studies were conducted within a mixed-methods pragmatic framework and comprised: (1) an exploration of the perceptions and views of the PTWP amongst a range of stakeholders ($N=21$) using semi-structured interviews and analysed using a constructivist grounded theory approach; (2) a single-centre randomised controlled trial (RCT) with a sample of LTU clients ($N=149$) who were followed up immediately post-intervention and six months later to assess changes in primary and secondary outcomes;

and (3) a process evaluation using both semi-structured interviews (n = 6) and focus groups (n = 9) and analysed using standard thematic analysis.

Study One identified three overarching themes relevant to the effectiveness of the PTWP including: (1) ‘the reform agenda’; (2) ‘depersonalisation’: and, (3) the missing ‘how to’ of implementation. Study Two indicated high levels of psychological distress at baseline, as well as findings to suggest that both the intervention and services-as-usual had led to improvements over time in well-being and employability, albeit with a number of more positive effects observed amongst the men who took part in the intervention. The process evaluation revealed three important themes with regard to implementation aspects of the intervention including the important role of: (1) the practitioner-client relationship; (2) the service setting; and (3) the skill sets of practitioners.

This study is the first to examine the PTWP with regard to psychological well-being and employability outcomes for the LTU. It provides support for detailing the ‘how to’ of implementation, emphasising the potential added value of well-designed interventions both in terms of mental health and well-being outcomes, and career progression. The findings suggest that practitioners, employment services, policy makers and other stakeholders, should recognise the important role of careful, appropriate, and quality-focused ALMP interventions in terms of promoting increased and sustainable employability, positive mental-health, and improved quality of life for our most vulnerable and disadvantaged job seekers.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background

Unemployment is a persistent global problem which has attracted considerable interest in recent years from governments, policy makers, researchers and practitioners. The term ‘unemployment’ may appear straightforward at first glance, but definitions tend to vary across and within countries/jurisdictions as well as over time, as different governments change their views of the concept and how it is measured (Feather, 1990; Klehe, Zikic, van Vianen, Koen, & Buyken, 2012). For instance, government incentives, such as early retirement, may take large cohorts of older workers out of the labour market in order to free up employment opportunities for younger workers while, in a different context, or at a different time, the former may be considered to be unemployed. Similarly, participation in labour market initiatives such as employment, education, and training programmes, can redefine an individual’s labour market status so that they are no longer included in unemployment statistics. For example, the 52,607 people participating in Irish labour market programmes are not considered to be unemployed and are therefore not recorded as such (CSO, Live Register, July, 2017).

Unemployment rates also vary depending on the definition used. For instance, unemployment figures in Ireland are published in the National Quarterly Household Survey and the Monthly Unemployment Estimates by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The unemployment figures include only individuals who are actively seeking work, thereby concealing those who would like to work but who are not actively seeking work (often referred to as ‘the hidden unemployed’) whilst excluding those who

are working, but are seeking more work (i.e. the ‘under employed’) (Feather, 1990). The ‘gold standard’ definition of unemployment provided by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines the ‘unemployed’ as any persons of working age who: (a) have not been in paid employment or self-employment during the previous week; (b) are currently available for paid employment; and (c) have taken steps in the previous four weeks to find work (International Labour Organisation, 1982). The ‘long-term unemployed’ (LTU) are similarly defined as people of working age who are out of work but who have been actively seeking employment for *at least one year* (Eurostat, 2015). By contrast, the term ‘employment’ is defined as work which necessitates a contractual relationship between an employee and an employer and involves the payment of a salary as a reward for labour (Eurostat, 2013). Precarious employment is used as a blanket-term for insecure work where employment contracts are fixed-term, temporary or offer poor zero hour conditions (Nugent, 2017). More specifically, the ILO describe the employed as individuals ‘in employment’ who have worked for at least one hour for payment or profit during the previous week, including individuals who had a job, but were not at work due to illness or holidays.

Conceptually, employment and work differ in their meanings. Work is described, on the one hand, as an activity with defined goals which can take place in the absence of employment and which is performed in order to achieve those goals (Warr, 1987a). These may include, amongst other things, unpaid work, caring, work in the home, education, or volunteering. Employment, on the other hand, is regarded as an expansive concept with important benefits for the individual, the economy and society as a whole. It is generally the main means of obtaining an income and providing financial security, whilst ideally allowing individuals to participate fully in society. Employment is also tied to an individual’s identity and their social status, fulfilling an important psychosocial need in modern society where it is typically regarded as the

social norm (Waddell & Burton, 2006). A related concept underemployment refers to people employed at less than full-time or regular jobs or at jobs inadequate with respect to their training or economic needs.

Another important concept ‘employability’ is an important element of national and European labour market policies, and has been promoted by international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the United Nations (UN) (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005) since the late 1990s. For example, employability has been a central strategic pillar and goal of the European Employment Strategy (1997, 2003). However, the term is difficult to define and has been fraught with ambiguity due to the varying definitions used in the literature. For example, it has been referred to as a ‘slippery’ concept (Green, de Hoyos, Barnes, Owen, Baldauf & Behle, 2013, p. 11) and a ‘fuzzy notion’ that is often not defined (Gazier, 1998a, p.298). Much of the vagueness derives from a focus on either supply-related factors which reflect the characteristics of the individual or wider demand-related factors which influence the labour market. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) argue that employability should be defined more broadly than supply or demand because it is influenced by both individual characteristics and circumstances, and external broader social, economic and institutional factors. Likewise, Green et al. (2013) conceptualise employability as ‘gaining, sustaining and progressing in employment’ (p.11), thereby supporting Kellard et al.’s (2001) notion of sustainable employment which goes beyond simply getting people into work. The concept of employability will be discussed further in the thesis.

Since the recent financial crisis (2008-2011), unemployment has risen globally by 27 million to 197.1 million (2015), and is expected to increase further to over 201 million in 2017 (ILO, 2017). Reassuringly however, overall unemployment rates in

post-crisis Europe are now beginning to improve, however, long-term unemployment (LTU) rates remain stubbornly high. For example, in the EU-28, LTU accounted for 47.8 per cent of the total unemployed in the second quarter of 2016, more than two-thirds of whom (or 6 million people) had been unemployed for more than two years (ILO, 2017). In the case of Ireland, the unemployment rate over the last three decades has fluctuated dramatically from 4.4% in 2006 to 15.1% in 2012, at the peak of the recent economic crisis. Despite a current (low) rate of 6.4% (Central Statistics Office (CSO), Quarter 2, 2017), the LTU rate remains persistently high, with almost half (48.7%, $n = 68,900$) of the total unemployed out of work for 12 months or more (CSO, 2017). In 2015, slightly more than a third (or 111,490 people) of those on the live register¹ had been registered to receive Jobseekers Benefit (JB), Jobseekers Allowance (JA) or other statutory payments for two years or more (CSO, 2015). In fact, 85,202 people had been on the live register for over three years indicating persistent levels of LTU.

The effects of unemployment can be serious and all-pervasive, reducing economic output, while increasing social welfare costs for the state (Goldsmith, Veum, & Darity, 1996). It is widely acknowledged that unemployment results in a loss of income at an individual level as well as declining job-related skills. Moreover, loss of employment is often considered a stressful life event (Wanberg, Zhang, & Diehn, 2010), comparable with other traumatic life events such as coping with divorce or the death of a spouse (Chen & Lim, 2012; Defrank & Ivancevich, 1986).

¹ The Live Register provides a monthly account of the numbers of people registered to receive Jobseekers Benefit (JB) or Jobseekers Allowance (JA) or other statutory payments from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. It does not measure unemployment as it includes part-time workers, seasonal and casual workers

Indeed, a large body of research undertaken since the early 1980s has provided convincing evidence that psychological well-being and subsequent re-employment are both negatively affected by unemployment (e.g. Fryer & Payne, 1986; Jahoda, 1979, 1981; Murphy & Athanasou, 1999; Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012). For example, a number of meta-analytic studies, which have synthesised much of the research in this area, provide robust evidence for the strong association between unemployment and lower levels of psychological well-being (e.g. McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005; Murphy & Athanasou, 1999; Paul & Moser, 2009). The collective findings also shed light on key concepts within the literature such as the causal nature of reduced well-being in the unemployed and the influence of moderating variables, such as age and gender on psychological health. In fact, Paul and Moser (2009) warned that unemployment poses a serious threat to public mental health and should not be underestimated when compared to other potential mental health risk factors.

Furthermore, several studies have also investigated the impact of longer spells of unemployment and found that LTU can have devastating consequences and long lasting economic, social and psychological “scarring” effects for individuals and their families (e.g. Clarke, Georgellis, & Sanfey, 2001; Liem & Liem, 1988; McKee-Ryan & Maitoza, 2015). The duration of unemployment has also been found to exacerbate the chances of re-employment due to decreased levels of motivation, out-of-date skills, and reduced social networks (Aaronson, Mazumder, & Schechter, 2010). The negative impact of unemployment on psychological well-being is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

1.2 Tackling unemployment at a governmental/policy level

Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) are the most commonly used means of tackling unemployment at a policy level in developed countries; these broadly

aim to increase employability, support people to re-access the labour market, and reduce the risk of future unemployment (Coutts, Stuckler, & Cann, 2014) . However, the ways in which these policies are designed and implemented can vary considerably across different jurisdictions. For example, Nordic countries such as Denmark and Sweden have traditionally opted for models which aim to build human capital by, for example, enabling access to up-skilling and ‘refreshing the skills’ of the workforce (Larsen, 2013). Other countries, such as the UK, the US, and Australia, use more direct ‘work-first’ approaches which require unemployed people to accept the first job offered regardless of its quality in terms of pay and conditions.

Increasingly however, there is evidence of convergence between countries and especially amongst those with similar welfare regimes (Achterberg & Yerkes, 2009). Considerable similarity in policy direction has emerged in recent years and, while countries have had differing starting points with regard to ALMPs, they tend to favour labour market participation overall (Bonoli, 2010). Thus, there has been a general shift toward conditional types of approaches whereby access to income support is conditional upon the job seeking efforts of the unemployed (Clasen & Clegg, 2011). This is particularly evident in the recent reform of labour market policy (LMP) in Ireland. Significant restructuring of Ireland’s Public Employment Services (PES) and the income support system was undertaken in 2011 and a newly designed labour market activation strategy called *Pathways to Work (PTWP)*, was rolled out nationally. A fuller description of this reform process and the PTWP within the context of wider LMP regimes in other countries is outlined later in this thesis.

Despite the now widespread use of ALMPs, and their potential in mitigating the impact of unemployment on health, motivation, and behaviour (e.g. Jahoda, 1979, 1981: Warr, 1987a), there have been very few evaluations of ALMPs; in particular, we know

little about their impact on well-being and employability. Evidence from existing evaluations tends to focus on quantitative outcomes such as re-employment (Coutts et al., 2014) and, therefore, their effectiveness is measured specifically in terms of job placement or reductions in welfare dependency. Few attempts have been made to assess the impact of these programmes on the psychological well-being of the unemployed or the LTU. Some studies, discussed later in this thesis, have assessed the impact of specifically designed interventions on the unemployed, such as the vocational rehabilitation ‘Työhön’ in Finland and the ‘JOBS’ programme in the USA, but these tend not to be part of the suite of more typical ALMP programmes used by governments.

The Irish PTWP includes three employment services and a number of ALMP. All job seekers, through the activation process, engage with one of the three employment services. The main public employment service Intreo, established in 2012 following the integration of Ireland’s PES and income support system, provides both public employment services and income supports. The 60 Intreo nationwide offices focus on delivering employment services for the short term unemployed (STU). A pre-existing smaller community based employment service with offices in 22 local disadvantaged areas, the Local Employment Service Network (LESN) was incorporated into PTWP to provide backup capacity to Intreo, as well as employment services for the LTU. In 2014, in a time of tight employment services capacity and high unemployment, the Department of Social Protection (DSP) subcontracted two private sector agencies to provide *JobPath*, an employment service to LTU job seekers. *JobPath* is contracted using a ‘Pay by Results’ model, similar to services implemented in the UK and Australia (O’Connell, 2017). The PTWP also includes a number of ALMPs including community based subsidised employment, enterprise, education, training and work

experience or internship programmes. These services and programmes are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Ireland has a relatively poor evaluation culture and both employment services and ALMPs have not been subject to extensive evaluation (O’Connell, 2017) and it is only recently that the services are using customer satisfaction surveys to gauge participants’ satisfaction levels. Evaluations are currently underway for both Intreo and *JobPath*, while the LESN is currently the subject of a governance and value for money review. Both Intreo and *JobPath* service evaluations will use econometric methods such as counterfactual evaluations to establish impact in terms of job-placement. They have not focused on the impact of the PTWP on key re-employment factors, such as well-being, career efficacy, and increased employability for the LTU. A number of ALMP evaluations have been published over the last three years including Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) (Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI, 2015), and JobBridge (Indecon, 2016). The first of these the BTEA, is a second chance education scheme which enables jobseekers, lone parents and people with disabilities to undertake a full-time second or third-level education course, while maintaining their welfare payment (Kelly, Mc Guinness & Walsh, 2015). The second JobBridge (now defunct) was a national internship scheme which provided job seekers with an opportunity to gain work experience and enhance their skills and competencies, while remaining close to the labour market. Both ALMP evaluation used econometric methods and counterfactual evaluations and again failed to examine the impact of the PTWP on key re-employment factors, such as well-being, career efficacy, and increased employability for the LTU. An important gap exists, therefore, in our understanding of the true effect of ALMPs and, more specifically, the effectiveness of the PTWP on psychological well-being and its role in the re-employment process.

1.3 The Current Study

The research reported in this thesis originated from the work of an NGO in Ireland called Ballymun Job Centre (BJC) which delivers supports to the unemployed and to job seekers from the local community within which it is based. The BJC also delivers the LESN services in the Ballymun area under contract to the DEASP². The researcher is currently working in the BJC (as the Assistant Manager) on a part-time basis. The BJC is a strong advocate of person-centred and strengths-based approaches and staff recognise the importance of addressing well-being, motivation and related issues in their unemployed clients. This work provided the impetus for the present study which was funded by a PhD scholarship from the Irish Research Councils' Employment Based Postgraduate Programme and involved a collaboration between the BJC and Maynooth University.

The overarching aims of the research were: (1) to examine the effectiveness of the new labour market policy - the PTWP - in post-crisis Ireland; (2) to evaluate the impact of a newly developed individualised person-centred intervention on a range of outcomes identified as important for re-employment including, in particular, psychological well-being; and (3) to compare this approach with usual services. The beginning of this research coincided with the implementation of the PTWP, thereby providing a unique opportunity to investigate the positioning of person-centred approaches within the new labour market policy context.

² In July 2017 DSP (Department of Social Protection) was renamed DEASP (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection). It is mainly referred to throughout this thesis as DSP however for post-July 2017 references the acronym DEASP is used.

1.3.1 Objectives

The research comprised three separate inter-related studies which were conducted within a mixed methods framework. The specific objectives were to: (1) critically examine the implementation and effectiveness of Ireland's labour activation policy, the PTWP, in terms of its ability to impact outcomes such as psychological well-being, career efficacy and employment opportunities; (2) evaluate the implementation and impact of a new high support intervention in terms of its effectiveness with regard to impacting psychological well-being and related psychosocial factors which influence employability; and (3) conduct a small- scale process evaluation of the PTWP and the new high support intervention, in order to identify the extent to which the intended impacts of the PTWP were achieved and to make some comparisons with the generic PTWP as implemented by Intreo and the LESN. The three studies are described in detail below.

1.3.2 Study One

Study One explored how the PWTP policy was perceived to be working in the early stages of its implementation. Specifically, the PTWP aims to tackle unemployment using a 50-point action plan encompassing five strands, the first two of which formed the focus for the current study. These include: (1) 'more regular and ongoing engagement with the unemployed'; and (2) 'greater targeting of activation places and opportunities'. Both of these strands focus more on the engagement of unemployed people themselves when compared to the remaining three which focus on incentives for job seekers to take up opportunities, incentives for employers to provide jobs, and the reform of the institutions responsible for employment services.

This study explored the perceptions of a range of stakeholders (including, job seekers, guidance practitioners, managers of services, and policy makers) about the

early effectiveness of PTWP. A brief analysis of relevant policy documents was also conducted to provide a more rounded understanding of the policy and its initial implementation.

1.3.3 Study Two

The second study sought to assess the impact on LTU participants (across a range of outcomes) of a new individualised job seeking support intervention called ‘EEPIC’ (Enhancing Employability through Positive Interventions for improving Career potential) - developed by the researcher - versus the standard PTWP intervention or ‘services as usual’ as delivered by the BJC.

1.3.4 Study Three

The final study - which was conducted in parallel to Study Two - involved a small- scale process evaluation of the EEPIC intervention, whilst also considering services as usual which were provided in this study as part of the PTWP strategy within a LESN. While Randomised Controlled Trials (RCT) are considered the ‘gold standard’ in evaluations (Pawson 2006; 2013), they rarely explain the causal mechanisms responsible for the changes in outcomes and thus make it difficult to understand and identify why and how interventions work. Therefore, this study, which builds on the results from Study Two, was undertaken to capture the perceptions of a sample of intervention participants, practitioners, and other key stakeholders in order to help illuminate the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of the intervention, whilst also exploring how this compared to services as usual as delivered within the community setting.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis comprises a further eight chapters, each of which is summarised below.

Chapter 2 is the first of two literature review chapters which aim to provide contextual background to the research and situate it within the relevant psychological and sociological literatures. This chapter begins with a brief history of research on the psychological impact of unemployment, highlighting key theoretical developments and their value in explaining variations in individual responses to job loss. It then provides a review of the extant literature in this area, delving further into the long lasting effects for the LTU and highlighting specific impacts on key re-employment factors. The remainder of the chapter provides a brief introduction to other constructs relevant to re-employment such as employability and psychological capital before concluding with an overview of re-employment interventions.

Chapter Three presents the literature on unemployment and labour market policy. It provides a critical and descriptive overview of relevant policy developments internationally, particularly with regard to ALMPs and activation of the unemployed. The chapter opens by discussing the prevalence of unemployment and describes government responses in the form of LMPs and their variability across countries. The second part of the chapter focuses specifically on the Irish context, describing the historical development of its labour market policies, up to and including the most recent reforms involving the design and implementation of the PTWP. The third and final section of this chapter presents evidence for the use of ALMPs and their evaluation.

Chapter Four presents the research design and outlines the key methodological issues underpinning the overall research. The chapter begins with a discussion of the epistemological framework within which the research was conducted. The methodological details for each of the three studies are then presented, followed by a description of key ethical considerations.

Chapter Five is the first of three results chapters and presents the findings from Study One, which explored stakeholders' perceptions of the early effectiveness and implementation of the PTWP. This study was conducted during the early stages of the PTWP roll-out and the results, therefore, provide useful contextual background to Study Two. A number of key themes and subthemes are discussed (by category of stakeholder) and then synthesised at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Six presents the findings from Study Two which comprised a parallel group RCT. This comprises four main sections including: (1) a descriptive account of all participants; (2) a more detailed descriptive analysis of the intervention group (for whom more information was collected as part of the intervention); (3) a comparison of the intervention versus control group; and (4) an analysis of outcomes over time.

Chapter Seven, the final results chapter, presents the findings from Study Three. A number of key themes and sub-themes were identified and are explored in this chapter in order to provide insights into the implementation of the intervention, but also including some comparisons with the 'services as usual' delivered by the BJC. These findings are presented within the context of a small-scale process evaluation.

Chapter Eight, the first of two concluding chapters, provides an integrated appraisal and synthesis of the key findings from the three studies. It situates the results within the broader psychological and labour market literature, whilst also addressing the contribution of the research to relevant policy and practice. The key findings are discussed within the context of design, implementation, and evaluation of person-centred approaches to positive labour market re-attachment.

Chapter Nine, the final chapter of the thesis, provides a discussion of the evaluative aspects including the strengths and limitations of the study and some future directions for research. Finally, a number of policy-practice recommendations are suggested.

CHAPTER TWO

The Psychosocial Impact of Unemployment: An Overview

2.1 Introduction

Considerable research has illustrated the detrimental effects of unemployment on overall health and well-being including, in particular, psychological health (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). As outlined in Chapter One, this chapter will focus, in the first instance, on the relationship between unemployment and psychological health and psychosocial well-being. Evidence for the importance of employability, and psychological well-being in the form of psychological capital, will then be presented, with a particular focus on the types of interventions which have been designed to improve well-being and employability outcomes.

2.2 The Historical context

Since the 1930s, social psychologists have explored the relationship between psychological well-being and unemployment, in terms of: (a) psychosocial development (Erikson, 1959); (b) deprivation in relation to the benefits of work (Jahoda, 1979, 1981, 1982); (c) helplessness due to perceived lack of control and agency (Fryer, 1986; Seligman, 1975). One of the earliest most influential studies was conducted in the 1930s by Marie Jahoda and colleagues (1933) in which they documented the impact of a factory closure in the Austrian town of Marienthal, on the predominately male, unskilled and semi-skilled labour force. This descriptive study outlined how unemployment impacted the lives of the employees and provided a rich account of their experiences, enabling a greater understanding of the impact of unemployment at both an

individual and community level (Feather, 1990). Other important studies of the time (e.g. Bakke, 1933; Pilgrim Trust, 1930s) identified associations between worker skill level and coping ability, with lower skilled workers reporting lower levels of control when faced with unemployment, and increases in psychological characteristics associated with unemployment, such as anxiety, nervousness, depression and feelings of isolation, all of which were viewed as making the person unfit for work.

These early studies, and indeed much of the research carried out over the past 90 years, suggest that while impacts differ for individuals, the negative consequences of unemployment seem to depend, not only on variation within the individual, but also on contextual factors such as the environment and the labour market. For example, studies have found that the impact of unemployment is less marked or severe in countries which have more generous levels of unemployment compensation (Paul & Moser, 2009). Similarly, the effects vary depending on the characteristics of the individual, with some people able to cope better than others due to skill levels, abilities, values, self-perceptions, coping resources (e.g. personal, social, financial) and resilience (Feather 1990; McKee-Ryan, 2005). Thus, the response of individuals to unemployment varies considerably as the combination of situational and personal variables and the way in which they interact, can differ significantly (Feather, 1990; Jahoda, 1979; Warr, 1987). Some people, such as those with financial security or close to retirement may be less affected than others. In contrast, those with limited financial independence or weak formal education may be impacted more. This suggests that individual differences, both with regard to personal characteristics and personal situational factors, play a moderating role in individual responses to unemployment.

2.3 The Theoretical context

A number of theoretical perspectives have dominated the literature in this field and have made important contributions to our understanding of the impact of

unemployment and the causal mechanisms leading to these effects. For example, unemployment has been explained in terms of more general psychological concepts, such as self-concept theory (e.g. Kelvin & Jarrett, 1985), helplessness (e.g. Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale, 1978), and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986, 1988), and while these are useful, they tend to be limited, as their focus is on individual characteristics. Other theories have been specifically developed to focus on the psychological aspects of work, employment, and unemployment in broader environmental and individual contexts. These aim to explain the relationship between unemployment and psychological well-being, whilst also recognising the importance of considering both person and environmental variables in their conceptual analysis (Feather, 1990). Three key theoretical models are discussed below as they provide important context to this study, with regard to understanding the individual within the broader world of employment and unemployment.

2.3.1 The Latent Deprivation Model

The first of these theories evolved from the Marienthal studies which, as mentioned earlier, provided rich descriptions of the impact of unemployment during the 1930s. This model, known as the ‘latent deprivation model’ (Jahoda, 1981, 1982, 1987) is still regarded as one of the most influential theories on the deterioration of well-being in the unemployed (Creed & Bartrum, 2006; Wanberg, 2012). It proposes that the psychological distress of unemployment can be explained through the loss of manifest (income) and latent (time structure, activity, social contact, collective purpose and status) benefits of employment. Thus, while those who are in employment gain considerably from these, their loss as experienced by the unemployed, can lead to negative affect and depressed mood (Jahoda, 1979, 1981). Jahoda explains that these latent benefits have become a psychological precondition of modern everyday life and therefore, their absence can be harmful in the unemployed unless they can find other

ways to satisfy them through, for example, activities such as volunteering and education. While Jahoda's theory remains one of the most influential (Wanberg, 2012) it has also attracted much criticism in relation to its comprehensiveness, with some critics suggesting that it is better described as a meta-theory requiring a more detailed theoretical statement (Creed et al., 2001; Feather, 1990; Fryer, 1995; Fryer & Payne, 1986). Some have argued that it fails to explain the internal processes which occur for individuals, focusing instead on environmental and social factors (Creed & Bartrum, 2006). For example, it does not interrogate the quantity of latent or manifest benefits of employment required to increase well-being. It also focuses on the individual as a passive actor who has little personal control, rather than an active autonomous person who copes with unemployment (Fryer, 1986; Fryer & Payne, 1986; Hartey & Fryer, 1984).

Despite these criticisms, the theory has a number of merits in terms of its contribution to our understanding of unemployment. Firstly, and this may be its most significant contribution, it identifies the considerable variation in the response of individuals to unemployment, depending on how the latent functions are satisfied outside of employment (Fryer, 1986). Secondly, it enables interventions to be designed based on the latent benefits, such as simulated work programmes, internships, and training courses, all of which may alleviate some of the negative effects of unemployment (Carter, & Whitworth, 2016; Creed & Klisch, 2005; Paul, & Batinic, 2010). Finally, it links the literature on unemployment to research focusing on the wider concepts of loss and grief (Fryer, 1986) such as Kubler-Ross's (1969) theory on death and dying; this comprises five stages of grief (i.e. denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) which may also be applicable, to a greater or lesser extent, when an individual experiences job loss. In this way, Jahoda's research convincingly illustrated

that job loss or unemployment is a negative life event which impacts on mental health in a similar way to other losses.

2.3.2 The Agency Restriction Model

Fryer (1986) proposed an alternative theory to that described above, which views the individual as an active agent. Fryer's influential 'Agency Restriction theory' (1986) combines the importance of agency and control in relation to unemployment and psychological well-being. It contends that unemployment restricts the individual from economic self-sufficiency and reduces control over the life course, thereby impacting on psychological well-being. He argues that when agency is blocked, either in the workplace or during spells of unemployment, it causes frustration which has negative implications for psychological well-being. Fryer bases this theory on the assumption that individuals are active agents who strive to achieve goals, initiate new activities, and have expectations for the future aligned with cultural norms (Fryer, 1995). Unemployment, he contends, impoverishes and discourages agency.

While recognising that the latent benefits of employment play a part in the deterioration of psychological well-being in the unemployed, Fryer proposed that the negative impact on psychological well-being is predominately due to loss of the manifest benefits of employment or loss of income. He argues that loss of earnings plays a significant role in restricting personal agency, impacting on future planning and making it difficult to look forward. In addition, a loss of earnings leads inevitably to the unemployed experiencing relative poverty whereby they compare their levels of material deprivation to their peers and other self-selected reference groups (Fryer, 1995). He argues that it is the experience of poverty and its impact on the individual's future that ultimately leads to reduced levels of psychological well-being. Fryer notes that "It seems that almost everyone involved with unemployed people has been struck

by the role of poverty in their distress” (Fryer, 1992, p. 115). Several studies have shown support for this model with the findings suggesting that financial deprivation and future insecurity help explain the lower levels of psychological well-being experienced by the unemployed (e.g. Creed and Klisch 2005; Paul and Batinic 2010; Whelan, 1992). However, Paul and Moser (2006) argue that Fryer’s model focuses too much on the unemployed person and restrictions in their agency as a result of their frustration with poverty, low social power, and stigmatisation.

2.3.3 The Vitamin Model

The third dominant theory in the literature is Warr’s ‘Vitamin model’ (1987a) which extends his (1983) earlier concept of ‘psychologically good’ and ‘psychologically bad’ jobs to include ‘psychologically good’ and ‘bad’ unemployment. Warr maintained that ‘good’ jobs include certain characteristics such as opportunities for skill use and skill development, decision latitude, control, good remuneration, security, and interpersonal contact, all of which enhance psychological well-being in contrast to characteristics of ‘psychologically bad’ jobs such as low decision latitude, insecurity, and low pay. Based on this conceptualisation of good and bad employment, Warr identified nine characteristics or features of the environment which have been found to be associated with positive mental health in employment including: (1) opportunity for control; (2) opportunity for skill use; (3) externally generated goals; (4) variety; (5) environmental clarity; (6) availability of money; (7) physical security; (8) opportunity for interpersonal contact: and (9) valued social position. Warr compared their effect to that of a vitamin, proposing that a certain amount is required for good health, whilst too much either has no effect, or can be detrimental.

The model proposes that the negative impact of unemployment on mental health is related to reductions in one or more of the nine categories above. He posited that environments differ in the extent to which they provide opportunities for these nine

factors to be present (Jackson, 1999); for example, personal worth may be reduced, opportunities for skill use may not be available, or threats to physical security may be increased due to a poor housing situation. Warr describes unemployment as a type of anxiety-provoking existence, explaining that periods of unemployment can create an uncertain world where it is difficult to predict the future and to plan ahead. It is interesting to note that Warr's nine features overlap with Jahoda's manifest and latent functions of employment, and indeed to some extent, with Fryer's agency restriction model (Feather, 1990), thus providing some consistency, albeit from slightly different theoretical perspectives.

2.4 Contextual factors

Whilst the above theoretical models provide some explanation for the negative psychological impact of unemployment, Creed and Bartrum (2006) contend that an individual's response to unemployment is complex, and as mentioned earlier, numerous individual and situational factors (also referred to as moderator variables) can affect an individual's, often unique, response to unemployment. Baron and Kenny (1986) describe these as third variables which change the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (cited in Creed & Bartrum, 2006). These might include, amongst others, age, gender, social class, nature of the welfare system, personality variables, unemployment duration, education levels, and values (Feather, 1990; Fryer & Payne, 1986; Winefield, 1995); all of which may moderate the individual's reaction to, and experience of, unemployment.

Within this context, government responses to unemployment are important in how they counteract these negative impacts, particularly with regard to prioritising individual needs over interventions which assume homogenous responses to unemployment. Jahoda observed that the negative effects of unemployment may be

different for different groups of individuals under different conditions and therefore, research findings may also vary depending on both the personal and situational circumstances of participants. This variation/complexity is aptly illustrated by the following quote:

“In some respects every unemployed is like every other unemployed (i.e. without a job); in some respects every unemployed is like some other unemployed (i.e. without similar previous jobs); and in some respects every unemployed is like no other unemployed (i.e. a unique individual)” (Jahoda, 1982).

2.5 Unemployment and Psychosocial well-being

Research has linked unemployment to over 100 different psychological variables (Leana & Feldman, 1994), but the most commonly reported, focus on aspects of mental health and well-being. As indicated in Chapter One, employment provides financial reward, time structure, social contact, opportunity for skill development, use of individual abilities, and physical and mental activity (Reneflot & Evensen, 2014). Unemployment, on the other hand, implies the absence of employment, resulting not only in financial penalties and skill depletion, but in wider personal and societal consequences. Arguably, work has increasingly become a significant part of individual identity and status in society and unemployment can, therefore, impact both the individual ‘self’ and their perceived role or function in society. Researchers have explored this complex personal - societal relationship within the context of unemployment, and found significant associations with societal stigma and feelings of anxiety and insecurity (Brand, 2015; Newman, 1988). Sen (1997) described the effects of unemployment as being ‘negative’ and ‘cumulative’, threatening and subverting life

at personal and social levels. Others also suggest much wider social implications arguing that it ‘undermines the social fabric of society’ (Goldsmith & Diette, 2012).

These negative effects, as already discussed, have been of interest to researchers since the early unemployment studies of the 1930s (e.g. Bakke, 1933; Jahoda, 1979, 1981) which yielded predominately descriptive accounts of unemployment and its perceived impact (Feather, 1990; Henderson, Muller, & Helmes, 2013). More recent empirical studies have sought to gain a more precise appreciation of how unemployment impacts constructs such as stress, coping, well-being, and reemployment (Gowan, 2014; Hoare & Machin, 2010; Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2013; Prussia, Fugate & Kinicki, 2001; Wanberg, Hough & Song, 2002; Wanberg, 2012).

A large body of epidemiological research suggests that both physical and mental health are affected by job loss and periods of unemployment (e.g. Creed et al., 1996; Maguire, Hughes, Bell, Bogosian, & Hepworth, 2014; Vinokur, van Ryn, Gramlich, & Price, 1991). A substantial amount of this research - as well as a number of reviews and meta-analyses - have explored the impact of unemployment on psychological health and well-being, with the findings consistently showing lower levels of psychological well-being amongst unemployed people when compared to their employed counterparts and the general population (e.g. Clarke et al. 2001; McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg & Kinicki, 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012). Psychological health in this context refers to an individual’s emotional and mental well-being, their ability to function in society and their capacity to meet the demands of day-to-day life (Wanberg, 2012).

Furthermore, these negative effects have been found to prevent re-employment (Hanisch, 1999; Proudfoot et al., 1999). For example, Paul and Moser (2009), in a large and important meta-analytic study, reviewed the results of 237 cross-sectional studies

($N=458,820$) conducted in 26 Western countries³, and found that the proportion of individuals who could be considered clinically distressed was twice as high in an unemployed versus employed sample of participants. They also reported an average overall effect size of $d_s = 0.51$, indicating a medium-sized effect likely to be “visible to the naked eye of a careful observer” (Cohen, 1992, p. 156).

These meta-analytic reviews (e.g. McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009) have also shown that the experience of unemployment and its negative impact differs for various individuals or groups of unemployed. For example, these reviews found a higher prevalence of psychological ill health amongst men, blue collar workers and the long-term unemployed. Conversely, unemployed individuals who had a higher sense of self-worth, perceived control, optimism, less financial strain, and who had less association with work, tended to have higher levels of psychological well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

As mentioned earlier, the unemployed are significantly more likely to suffer negative effects on their psychological health and well-being, some of which are shown in Box 2.1. These effects are often multiple and act as barriers to returning to work, affecting levels of motivation and subsequent job seeking strategies (Eden & Aviram, 1993). Thus, many people who become unemployed are at increased risk of developing stress-related disorders or psychological distress which can distance them from the labour market and increase their likelihood of becoming long-term unemployed (Audhoe, Hoving, Sluiter, & Frings-Dresen, 2010).

³ Paul & Moser (2009) included studies from 'USA, UK, Germany, Australia, Finland, Canada, Netherlands, Ireland, Austria, Sweden, Italy, New Zealand, Denmark, India, Norway, Israel, France, China /Hong Kong, Mexico, Belgium, Turkey, Chile, Spain, Japan, Greece, Switzerland (ordered according to the number of studies published in the respective country)' (p.271)

- **Anxiety** (Donovan & Oddy, 1982; Hamilton et al., 1993; Leim & Leim, 1988)
- **Psychological stress** (Jackson & Warr, 1987; Paul & Moser, 2009)
- **Loss of confidence and low self-esteem** (Creed, 1998; Vuori & Vinokur, 2005; Winefield, Tiggemann, & Winefield, 1992)
- **Depression** (Price, van Ryn, & Vinokur, 1992; Waters & Moore, 2002; Winefield & Tiggemann, 1990)
- **Lower levels of coping** (Waters & Moore, 2002)
- **Suicidal ideation and increased rates of suicide attempts** (Argyle, 1989; Blakely, Collings, & Atkinson, 2003; Lundin & Hemmingsson, 2009; Platt & Hawton, 2000)
- **Higher mortality rates** (Korpi, 2001; Moser, Goldblatt, Fox & Jones, 1987)
- **Loss of motivation** (Eden & Aviram, 1993)
- **Psychosomatic problems** (Vnamäki, Koskela, & Niskanen, 1993)
- **Poor cognitive performance, behavioural problems, and paranoia** (Goldsmith et al. 1997; McKee-Ryan et al. 2005).

Box 2.1 Negative psychological effects of unemployment

While these studies have provided evidence to support the heterogeneity of reactions to unemployment, they also illustrate the complexity of designing supports and re-employment interventions that will benefit all unemployed people. This point is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

2.5.1 Causal links between unemployment and psychological well-being

The causal basis for the deterioration in well-being associated with unemployment, has been a recurring theme throughout the literature (Wanberg, 2012), with researchers exploring the direction of the relationship between each. The predominant view is that lower well-being is a causal outcome of unemployment, also referred to as a ‘social causation effect’ (Dooley, Catalano & Hough, 1992); other researchers propose a ‘drift effect’ which suggests that the unemployed may have had lower levels of well-being to start with, thereby predisposing them to a risk of unemployment (Creed & Bartrum, 2006).

These opposing arguments have remained unresolved (Creed & Bartrum, 2006; Hammarstrom & Janlert, 1997), although many recent empirical studies provide more robust evidence to support the hypothesis that reduced levels of well-being are a causal outcome of unemployment (e.g. Paul & Moser, 2009). These studies have used longitudinal designs and therefore follow the same individuals over a longer period of time and over changes in their labour market status allowing researchers to see how changes in employment status link to changes in psychological well-being (Wanberg, 2012). Meta-analytic reviews of these studies have demonstrated that unemployment is largely causally related to a decline in well-being, rather than poor well-being being associated with less healthy people drifting into unemployment (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Murphy & Athanasou, 1999; Paul & Moser, 2009; Winefield, Tiggemann, Winefield, & Goldney, 1993). For example, Paul and Moser (2009), again using meta-analytic methods, reviewed and synthesised the results of 64 longitudinal studies. The findings across studies suggest that there was a significant increase in psychological distress as individuals became unemployed ($d_s = 0.19$). They also found decreases in distress as individuals became re-employed ($d_s = -.35$). Although these effect sizes are small (Cohen, 1992), they are consistent with findings from an earlier meta-analysis conducted by McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) (Wanberg, 2012).

2.5.2 The longer-term effects of unemployment

The duration of unemployment has also been found to be a factor which may affect the mental health of the unemployed. Existing evidence suggests that those who are unemployed for longer periods show higher levels of mental distress which seem to worsen, and then plateau, as time goes by (Dockery, 2005; Strandh, 2000; Strandh, Winefield, Nilsson, & Hammarstrom 2014;). For example, Leim and Leim (1988) found evidence for psychological impairment after just two months of unemployment, with symptoms increasing after 4-5 months, and again after 8-12 months.

The negative psychological effects of unemployment may not only be present at the time of unemployment, but may also persist following re-entry into the labour market. Studies have found that lower levels of psychological well-being persist for a period of five to eight months after re-employment (Liem & Liem, 1988). Longer-term mental health ‘scarring’ has also been found in studies focusing on youth unemployment and on individuals with multiple periods of unemployment during their life course (Clarke, 2003; Dockery, 2005; Kessler, Turner & House, 1989; Winefield, Winefield, Tiggemann & Goldney, 1997). Strandh et al. (2014) found evidence for poorer mental health in individuals who had experienced unemployment spells in early adulthood, and substantially poorer mental health in those who had been exposed to more than one period of unemployment in their adult lives, when compared to individuals in the same cohort who had not experienced unemployment. This association between youth unemployment spells and well-being later in life, has been found to exist despite later experiences of employment (Clark, Georgellis, & Sanfey, 2001). Thus, the negative impact on psychological well-being can have important health implications for longer-term mental health over the life-course (Strandth et al., 2014).

An improved causal understanding of the mechanisms associated with reduced well-being in the unemployed is important as it can help to inform the development of more effective interventions and policies (Cole et al., 2006; Creed & Bartrum, 2006). For example, the design and implementation of training programmes, unemployment support and assistance, career counselling, work experience, and work sampling, can all be informed by a greater understanding of the mechanisms involved.

2.6 Long-term Unemployment (LTU)

Whilst a number of moderating variables have been identified in influencing how individuals respond to unemployment (e.g. Creed & Bartrum, 2006; Fryer & Payne, 1986; Winefield, 1995), one variable - long-term unemployed (LTU), has been a

consistent preoccupation of governments since the 1970s (Clasen & Clegg, 2011). As periods of unemployment increase, the probability of finding a job decreases due to a range of factors, including a decline in skills, reduced motivation due to setbacks in job search, shrinking social networks (Aaronson et al., 2010), employer bias, lack of recent employment references, and the stigma associated with a long spell of unemployment (Blanchard & Diamond, 1994; Gallie & Russell, 1998; Helsin, Bell & Fletcher, 2012). Recent research in this area (e.g. Koen et al., 2013) continues to support the argument, not only that joblessness impairs psychological well-being but that long-term unemployment has substantial negative effects on mental health.

Koen et al. (2013) argue further that re-employment for the LTU is more difficult than it is for STU or for other job seekers, as they face a range of personal-circumstantial barriers to employment which are not present to the same degree in other groups. These include: depleted job networks (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000); physical and psychological barriers to work (Lindsay, 2002; Wanberg, Hough, & Song, 2002); a lack of basic skills, qualifications, and recent work experience; and significant gaps in work records (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2002). For some LTU, even participation in society can be challenging (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2002). Furthermore, within the labour market, there is a perception that long periods of unemployment act as a barrier to re-employment with many employers believing that unemployment duration either leads to, or reveals, below average skills or work ethic. This view supports the notion that it is easier to find employment if someone is already in a job, as the re-employment prospects of employed workers, were they to become unemployed, were found to be better than those currently unemployed (Blanchard and Diamond, 1994).

The value of social capital - defined as access to formal and informal networks - has been emphasised in much of the literature on employability as important for

facilitating progress in the labour market (e.g. Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Lengthy periods of unemployment can weaken the strength of existing or previous social networks (Jahoda, 1982). In addition, as LTU tends to be concentrated in areas of high social disadvantage, LTU job seekers often find it difficult to access, not just social networks, but ‘vertical networks’ (Reingold, 1999) which allow access to better jobs, thereby limiting their career choice and subsequent career progression opportunities. The shrinking social networks of the LTU can also lead to social isolation (Gallie, Paugam, & Jacobs, 2003) with potentially negative consequences of prolonged isolation on individuals’ employability and their broader well-being (Clasen, Gould, & Vincent, 1997).

2.6.1 Scarring effects

There is also some evidence to suggest that periods of previous unemployment can lead to scarring effects (Knabe and Ratzel, 2011; Nilsen et al., 2011). These can affect how people judge their own futures, as negative judgements lead to insecurity and are detrimental, therefore, to life satisfaction and well-being. Nilsen et al. (2011) define scarring as ‘the negative long term effect that unemployment has on future labour market possibilities in itself’ (p.1) implying that those who have been unemployed are more likely to experience negative labour market experiences in the future.

Similarly, research conducted by Clarke et al. (2001) indicated that, firstly, previous unemployment was found to reduce the well-being of those who were in employment, suggesting that for the re-employed, previous periods of unemployment leave scarring effects. Secondly, previous unemployment was found to dilute the negative effects on well-being of current unemployment amongst those who had experienced more unemployment in the past. This is consistent with what Clarke et al. term ‘habituation’ (p. 221); that is, if individuals are unemployed for a period of time,

they may become used to their situation. The authors found that men, who had been unemployed for 60 per cent of the previous three-year period were indifferent about both their current employment and their unemployment, an effect which was especially evident amongst males with lower levels of educational attainment. Conversely however, the findings from elsewhere are mixed in this respect. For instance, Oesch and Lipp (2011) found no evidence of habituation effects or a ‘culture of unemployment’ (p. 955) and they argue that the strong harmful effects of unemployment exist despite low or high regional unemployment rates, and that its impact does not wear off over time, nor do repeated periods of unemployment make it any better. Similarly, Paul and Moser (2006) found no evidence that long-term unemployed people adapt to their situation, or lower their levels of employment commitment; instead the incongruence between their unemployed state and their levels of work commitment were found to impact negatively on their levels of psychological well-being.

Despite the conflicting research regarding habituation effects, research on self-regulation of effort and emotion may help explain why some unemployed are more affected than others in terms of their subjective well-being. Wanberg et al. (2012) found that the mental health of unemployed people was lower when they engaged in self-defeating cognition (i.e. negative self-talk), and higher when they engaged in more motivational control (i.e. goal setting and job search strategies). In any case, communities with consistently high levels of LTU are clearly vulnerable to lower levels of well-being whether due to a habituation effect, self-defeating cognition or individual factors.

2.7 Employability

As briefly indicated in Chapter One, employability is a contested concept (Gazier, 1998) which incorporates both supply-side aspects relating to the individual,

and demand-side aspects which focus on a broader range of contextual factors, including labour demand (Green et al. 2013). While employability used to be the responsibility of the state and employers, there has been a shift in recent times toward a greater onus on the individual to take responsibility for their own employability. This shift toward individualisation has been linked with the changing nature of employment, from ‘jobs for life’ to the more ‘boundaryless career’ (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), characterised by individuals moving from job to job. Employability in this context is therefore critical for re-employment and future career success, and has been referred to as the ‘new job security’ (Prujit & Derogee, 2010). The following section focuses more specifically on employability as a supply-side dimension, exploring its relationship not only to re-employment and well-being, but also to sustainable quality jobs.

2.7.1 Employability: A psychosocial construct

Fugate et al. (2004) define employability in terms of its role as an influencer of employment-related behaviour, rather than from the individual’s perspective of their own perceived employability, or the personal factors which contribute towards employability. They describe it as a ‘*synergistic collection*’ of person-centred constructs which combine to help the individual adapt to the changing labour market and organisational contexts of work (Fugate et al., 2004, p.18). They highlight its person-centred psychosocial characteristics which separate it from employment status and enable individuals to identify their strengths and limitations in terms of personal factors (McArdle, Waters, Briscoe, & Hall, 2007). While employability does not guarantee employment, it enhances the possibility of re-employment as individuals with higher levels of employability tend to cope better with job loss and experience less negative psychological effects (Fugate et al., 2004; Koen et al, 2013).

Koen et al. (2013) found that increased employability impacts job searching and the possibility of finding re-employment. While it is well established that employability plays an important role in the re-employment process, Koen et al. found that this was also the case for the LTU. Job seekers must have the skills required to survive and adapt within the context of an increasingly changing labour market environment, where traditional careers (i.e. bounded careers within the same organisation) are in the minority (Fugate et al., 2004). Furthermore, Hall (1986, 1996, 2002) introduced the concept of the 'protean worker' which implies that, to be successful in today's labour market, employees need to be highly adaptable (Mirvis & Hall, 1994). They require the ability to manage change and multiple identities (Fugate et al., 2004), whilst also being willing and able to adapt and change to maintain successful careers (Hall 2002; Pulakos et al., 2000). Within this context, Fugate and colleagues (2004) proposed the concept of 'employability' as an important influencer of career success, which goes beyond the ability simply to secure and sustain employment.

This psycho-social model of employability assumes that the individual has no input into external factors, such as an employer's selection decision, or a rapidly changing labour market. The person-centred nature of the construct is considered important (McArdle & Waters, 2007) as it allows the individual to alter their own employability, regardless of their labour market status which, in turn, may improve coping and psychological well-being. The construct focuses on three person-centred factors: (1) adaptability; (2) human and social capital; and (3) career identity. The first dimension, 'adaptability', represents the individual's willingness to adapt and change with regard to personal factors such as behaviours, feelings, career related knowledge and skills, in order to meet the demands of the work environment (Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle et al 2007). Adaptability is linked to career exploration and a readiness to plan for the future (Savickas, 2002). This dimension is underpinned by the construct of

proactive personality (Crant, 2000) which has been linked with feelings of control, self-efficacy, self-direction, and coping (Bateman & Crant, 1993, Seibert, Crant & Kramer, 1999), all factors which play an important role in re-employment (McArdle et al. 2007).

The second dimension, ‘human and social capital’, contributes to an individual’s ability to distinguish and fulfil career aspirations, and as with all other types of capital, involves an investment by individuals and organisations in order to increase capacity and production (Jackson & Schuler, 1995). Human capital describes the ‘knowing how’ variables including career related knowledge and skills gleaned through education and training (Chen & Lim, 2012; Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; McArdle et al., 2007). Social capital, on the other hand, refers to the ‘knowing-whom’ variables found in formal (e.g. Public Employment Services (PES), Employers, professional organisations) and informal (e.g. friends, family) networks (Chen & Lim, 2012; Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; McArdle et al. 2007). It is described as the interpersonal element of employability, encapsulating not only the connectivity, support, and access to career related knowledge and experience enabled by the social network, but also the individual proactive use of social skills (Koen et al. 2013). Interestingly, McArdle and Waters (2008) identify social support as an important aspect of social capital during periods of unemployment, citing McIntosh’s (1991) description of its role in assisting the individual in managing stressful situations and increasing feelings of well-being. Similarly, higher levels of social support have been linked to higher levels of mental health and life satisfaction in the unemployed (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

Finally, the third dimension, ‘career identity’, is described by Fugate et al. as the ‘who I am’ construct and is similar to other identity constructs such as role identity or organisational identity, but defines the self within a work context. It is the ‘knowing-why’ competency (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994) which reflects work values, motivations, and personal meaning (McArdle & Waters 2008). Fundamentally, it provides a ‘*career*

compass' which guides and directs the individual to explore, to set goals, and realise their future selves in a work environment (Fugate et al. 2004).

Empirical support for Fugate's employability construct was established by McArdle et al., (2007) who tested the model with active job seekers and found that employability was related to re-employment at six month follow-up. Koen and colleagues went a step further and tested the model empirically with a sample of LTU; they found that, despite their significant personal and situational difficulties, employability promotes job searching and opportunities for securing employment amongst the LTU. Koen et al.'s findings build upon those of McArdle et al. (2007) and McQuaid and Lindsay who suggest that increased employability provides job seekers with new resources which can be used to access employment. Interestingly, the process of re-employment itself has been found to reverse some of the negative health impacts of unemployment (Lahelma, 1989; Thomas, Benzeval, & Stansfeld, 2005). Therefore, supporting the LTU in developing employability could positively impact re-employment while also having positive effects on well-being.

2.8 Psychological Capital

Psychological capital has its origins in positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) which focuses on human strengths rather than weaknesses. Positive psychology aims to understand well-being in members of the general population, their optimal functioning and productivity, and how they reach their full potential (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Seligman et al., 2005). This kind of capital is concerned with 'who you are' (Newman, Ucbasaran, Zhu, & Hirst, 2014) 'who you are becoming' (Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, & Combs, 2006; Luthans & Youssef, 2004) and is defined by Goldsmith et al. (1997) as a person's perception of self, their attitudes towards work, their ethical orientation and general outlook on life.

A more expansive definition of psychological capital is provided by Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, and Avolio, (2015) who describe it to be “an individual’s positive psychological state of development” consisting of four main psychological capacities or resources: hope, optimism, efficacy and resilience. The first of these, hope, is defined as having two components including: (1) agency (goal directed energy) which involves the motivation to succeed; and (2) pathways, which refers to the ways and means required for task accomplishment (Snyder et al., 1996). The second, component, optimism, is defined as the expectancy of positive outcomes or expecting good things to happen (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017) both now and in the future (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 2001), and has been linked to the motivation to pursue goals and cope with difficulties (Seligman, 1998). Optimists attribute positive events to personal causes and negative events to external causes (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). The third capacity, efficacy, is based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997, 2012) and reflects our confidence in our ability to succeed at challenging tasks and control outcomes. Finally, resilience is defined as the ability to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, risk or failure (Masten & Reed, 2002; Masten et al. 2009).

An interesting study carried out by Cole (2006) found a relationship between labour market status and well-being, and also that psychological capital significantly influenced well-being and labour market status. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous section, the importance of developing employability for re-employment success was illustrated through the work of a number of authors including Fugate et al. (2004), McArdle et al. (2007), and Koen et al. (2013). However, the psychological well-being of the individual would also seem to play a role in operationalising employability. Chen and Lim (2012) argue that career counsellors give little attention to the psychological well-being of the unemployed, and that positive psychological capital is

as important as human or social capital. Thus, the psychological capital of the individual could be an important element in activating employability.

In the human resources literature, human and social capital are both considered key factors in organisational performance (Luthans, Luthans & Luthans, 2004). Likewise, much of the job search and re-employment literature has focused on these forms of capital, with studies reporting that individuals with higher levels of both, tended to be more successful in re-employment (Gowan & Lepak, 2007). Similarly, psychological capital is an important asset for labour market competitiveness, in the sense that the unemployed compete on the open labour market against a labour force with, not only higher levels of human and social capital, but with higher levels of psychological capital.

The unemployed, whilst already experiencing lower levels of psychological well-being, are also faced with the challenge of securing employment, a task that many people find stressful. Chen and Lim (2012) argue that job seekers require adequate levels of self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience – or a kind of ‘psychological tenacity’ (p. 813) - to endure the job seeking process and to persist through such tough and stressful times. For example, job searching is an autonomous task requiring the individual to organise and manage their searching activity, a process that can lead to discouragement, uncertainty, frustration and difficulties in ‘staying the course’ (Wanberg, 2012). Thus, psychological capital, coupled with human and social capital, are required to support the re-employment process.

Another factor important in re-employment is self-esteem. Kasl’s (1982) ‘reverse causation theory’ states that self-esteem is negatively affected by unemployment, thus impacting psychological health and an individual’s ability and willingness to access employment. The longer the duration of unemployment, the

greater the impairment to self-esteem. This manifests in a negative cycle between psychological well-being and job seeking behaviour and ability. Evidence to support this theory has accumulated through a series of studies which have found associations between higher self-esteem and re-employment (Caplan, 1989; Vinokur & Schul, 1997). However, Waters and Moore (2002a) proposed that this theory could be usefully expanded to include other psychological traits, such as coping and cognitive appraisals.

2.9 Re-employment Interventions

The compelling evidence for the negative impact of unemployment on mental health and well-being, have led to relatively recent calls for policy responses to labour market detachment that include interventions to help promote and maintain good mental health and/or alleviate any adverse effects (Audhoe et al., 2010; Gowan, 2014; Moore, Kapur, Hawton, Richards, Metcalfe, & Gunnell, 2016; Paul & Moser, 2009). However, despite the overwhelming evidence, very few impact evaluations of specific interventions targeted at the individual level, have been published in the last two decades (Audohe, et al., 2010; Koopman, Pieterse, Bohlmeijer, & Drossaert, 2017; Moore et al., 2016). Researchers and policy makers have tended, instead, to focus, on re-employment interventions which, arguably, provide a more direct means of addressing the negative impact of unemployment (Paul & Moser, 2009).

Governments, in an attempt to reduce their LTU figures and the risks of remaining unemployed, have used Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) to support the unemployed back into work. These typically focus on increasing human capital through work experience and skills training, subsidised and direct employment, and intensifying job search behaviour, with the expected outcome being improved labour market access. As discussed later in Chapter Three, many of these ALMP interventions aim to improve people's job seeking skills, work related skills, and ultimately their chances of re-employment (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Nevertheless,

more tailored interventions, which focus on ameliorating the negative impact of unemployment on psychological well-being, have become more prevalent in the unemployment literature since 2000, with the JOBS programme, and its adaptations, in Finland, the Netherlands, and Ireland, being the most researched (Barry et al., 2006; Caplan et al., 1989; van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992; Vuori et al., 2002; Wanberg, 2012).

The JOBS programme, initially developed as a preventative intervention for the more recently unemployed, was designed to support job seeking and improve coping mechanisms while also aiming to prevent further deterioration in psychological health and promoting high quality sustainable re-employment (Caplan et al., 1997; Reynolds, Barry, & Nic Gabhainn, 2010). The programme distinguishes itself from other interventions based on its methodology and theoretical background, and utilises principles and theories from the behavioural and social sciences (Brenninkmeijer & Blonk, 2011). Of particular interest to the current study, is the adaptation of the JOBS programme to an Irish context, known as the *Winning New Jobs Programme*. It was piloted in 2006 as part of a *Cross-Border Rural Mental Health Project*, with a mixed group of participants ($N = 162$) including the LTU, and showed good outcomes in terms of well-being and increased employability, with 48% of participants employed at 12-month follow-up. While highlighting not only the characteristics of the LTU, and the ‘how to’ of an appropriate, potentially cost-effective and evidence-based response to the mental health needs and employability of job seekers, the programme was also found to enhance participants sense of control, improve self-confidence and inoculate against setbacks (Reynolds et al., 2010).

However, evaluations of the effectiveness of more typical ALMPs tend to focus on quantifiable outcomes such as job entry rates (Coutts et al., 2014), to the exclusion of the ‘softer’ more therapeutic outcomes relating to aspects of psychosocial well-being such as psychological distress, self-esteem, hopefulness or career identity; thus, they

may not be relevant to addressing the specific barriers faced by the LTU. In fact, Coutts and colleagues (2014) note that, despite the significant interest in ALMPs, and their effectiveness, there is a lack of evidence, and indeed very few studies, on how these interventions affect well-being.

2.9.1 Job search interventions

While ALMPs are the most widely used re-employment interventions, little is known about the health effects of these programmes (Coutts et al., 2014). However, there are many examples of ‘non-traditional’ ALMP interventions (e.g. JOBS programme) which are designed based on principles from the social and behavioural sciences, to support the unemployed, and which have been shown to have positive health and re-employment effects. These vary in terms of their content (theoretical methods and techniques), intensity, duration, target population, and delivery mode (group vs. individual) (Koopman et al. 2017). They can take many forms such as job club type interventions (e.g. Caplan, Vinokur, Price & van Ryn, 1989), stress management training (e.g. Maysent & Spera, 1995), Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (e.g. Harris, Lum, Rose, Morrow, Comino, & Harris, 2002; Proudfoot, Guest, Carson, Dunn, & Gray, 1997), Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (Folke, Parling, & Melin, 2012) or some combination of these approaches, all with the aim of enabling job seekers access re-employment more effectively and efficiently (Liu, Huang, & Wang, 2014).

In recent years, a number of important systematic reviews and meta-analyses have examined the effectiveness of these more tailored interventions on the re-employment and mental health of the unemployed (Audhoe et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2016; Koopman et al., 2017). These have aimed to synthesise the various theoretical perspectives underpinning interventions, to identify the characteristics, content and effectiveness of interventions, as well as exploring the

connections between programme components and mechanisms that lead to re-employment. For example, Lui et al. (2014) and Audhoe et al. (2010) found that job search interventions improved re-employment chances as well as depression. Using meta-analysis, Lui et al. (2014), summarised the findings from 47 ($N = 9,575$) experimentally or quasi-experimentally evaluated job search interventions and found that, on average, they had a positive impact on participants re-employment success. Similarly Moore et al. (2016) found that short one-to-two week job club-type interventions, such as 'JOBS I' (Caplan et al., 1989; Vinokur et al., 1995), and 'JOBS II' Työhön (Vuori et al., 2002) were effective in decreasing levels of depression, particularly for individuals at high risk of poor mental health. These interventions reduced the risk of depression for up to two years, with the largest effects seen in those who re-accessed the labour market.

However, mixed evidence has been found for CBT interventions. For example, short-term effects on depression symptoms and re-employment were identified in a trial with a 7-week CBT intervention ($N = 244$) (Proudfoot et al., 1997), but no effects were seen in a shorter (two-day) intervention (Harris et al., 2002). Conversely, an evaluation of the 'CHOICES for Well-being' project (Maguire et al., 2014), a CBT-based employment programme, showed improvements in mental health, self-esteem, job-search self-efficacy, and employment progression for 20 of the, albeit small sample of 47 participants, as well as a reduction in the occurrence of negative automatic thoughts. Improvements also persisted at three month follow-up.

The most recent systematic review of interventions found that those which combine re-employment focused vocational skills and psychological components, showed greatest impact, and were more effective than programmes that provided job seeking or psychological components alone (Koopman et al., 2017). Interventions targeting individual needs such as training and counselling have also been shown to

have positive effects on wellbeing (Creed, Machin, & Hicks, 1999; Machin & Creed, 2003; Henderson et al., 2013; Maguire et al., 2014). Similarly, Liu and colleagues isolated seven intervention components in those interventions found to be most effective. These focused on either skill development (i.e. teaching job seeking skills, and self-presentation) or motivation enhancement (i.e. developing self-efficacy, proactivity, goal setting, social support, job seeking stress management).

A key finding in these systematic reviews and meta-analyses has been the poor quality of included studies. For example, Koopman et al. (2107) found that of the 24 studies included, a significant number were of poor quality with regard to study design and reporting. They highlight the need for high quality research on the effects of interventions aimed at the LTU. Similarly, Moore et al. (2016) conclude that more high-quality randomised controlled trials (RCTs), which follow established guidelines (e.g. CONSORT, SPIRIT) are needed to provide evidence of the effects on mental health, of interventions which could potentially be implemented to support the unemployed. Audohe et al. (2010) reported using the validated Downs and Black instrument to evaluate the quality of six studies included in their systematic review (both RCTs and non-RCTs). Their evaluations ranged from ‘good’ to ‘poor’. Notably, they argue that too little has been done with regard to designing effective interventions aimed at ameliorating the re-employment and well-being of the unemployed and recommend further development and evaluation of interventions for job seekers at all levels.

In summary, while there is some evidence of effectiveness of interventions for the unemployed, there is much less on how to address the specific needs of the LTU. For example, Brenninkmeijer and Blonk (2011) identified only five studies which described interventions for the LTU and which used experimental designs, while a similar search on interventions for the unemployed (without the term, long-term)

yielded more studies. Thus they concluded that there is a need for more sophisticated intervention studies, focusing on this vulnerable group.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the, now considerable, evidence for the negative psychological impact of unemployment and the substantial variation in individual responses to job loss. The LTU, in particular, can have significant psychological health effects which impact employability and psychological capital in the longer term, both of which have been found to be essential for career success and sustained employment. While the casual mechanisms underlying the relationship between employability and psychological health remain disputed, it is clear that improved employability and the process of re-employment itself can have positive well-being effects. However, for many LTU, the impact of unemployment has been so profound that it has negatively impacted well-being. Therefore, if psychological capital is understood to be an indicator of psychological well-being within the employment context, then arguably, interventions which aim to support its development could usefully contribute toward enhancing employability, whilst also having important positive consequences for re-employment and career development. While research on interventions in this area has been helpful, the vast majority have been group-based, structured, and time limited. Furthermore, in view of the evidence for the role of contextual factors and moderating variables in individual responses to unemployment, a ‘one size fits all’ approach/intervention may not be sufficient to address the many potential negative effects of unemployment on those who have been jobless for long periods of time.

A review of labour market policy and its implementation is presented in the next chapter, with the aim of providing further context to the current study.

CHAPTER THREE

Labour Market Policy: An Overview

3.1 Introduction

Unemployment has significant negative implications at both a societal and individual level. Societal impacts are evident in terms of reduced economic growth and public finances, as well as increased levels of poverty and inequality, not to mention the additional costs incurred from the use of social services. As outlined in the previous chapter, the impact at an individual level includes skill erosion, the loss of personal income, increased reliance on social welfare, and a diminished sense of self and identity, often leading to decreased levels of well-being amongst individuals and by extension, their families. Historically, in the early part of the 20th Century, unemployment was considered an industry-related problem, and the cause of unemployment was related to the economic and political system of capitalism (Beveridge, 1909). A century on, the problem of unemployment is now seen through a supply and demand lens. While labour market programmes are typically implemented to address individual labour supply issues, unemployment remains a larger phenomenon shaped by struggles between labour market and welfare policy and institutions, and the wider economic environment (Brodkin, 2013).

This chapter further contextualises this research by introducing Labour Market Policy (LMP), defining its key terms, reviewing relevant LMP literature, and providing a case study outline of the development of LMP in Ireland in recent times. It explores general trends in LMP change both internationally and in Ireland and presents

contemporary frameworks used to explain such change. The significant shift towards activation, and related Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMP) and their implementation and effectiveness, will be a specific focus of discussion. Finally, the chapter will review issues related to LMP evaluation, focusing in particular on ALMPs and activation, with a view to highlighting how evaluations can inform the design and implementation of effective policies.

3.2 Unemployment rates

The unemployment rate reflects the inability of an economy to generate employment for those who want to work and who are available and actively seeking work. Levels of unemployment vary considerably across countries and over time, with 2016 unemployment rates in the OECD countries as low as 3.1 % in Japan and as high as 23% in Greece, and with even higher rates recorded in the emerging and developing world (ILO, 2016). EU unemployment soared from 7% in 2008 to 10.7% by the end of 2013 (Martin, 2014), but fell in 25 of the 28 member states during 2013-2017. Although the current rate of 8.1% (2017) is slowly approaching pre-recession rates of 6.8 % (Quarter 1, 2008), there is substantial variation across the EU with the lowest rates recorded in the Czech Republic (3.4%) and Germany (3.8%) and the highest in Greece and Spain (18.2%) (Eurostat, 2017).

Despite this downward trend, there were 12 million LTU in 2014 (5% of European Union population), 62% of whom had been without a job for at least two consecutive years (EU Council Recommendation, 2016). EU governments remain challenged by persistent unemployment as they seek to both generate employment and respond to the needs of the unemployed. For example, Irish unemployment has been described as a ‘roller-coaster ride’ with persistently high rates of unemployment (13%-17%) during the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, followed by a dramatic reduction to a low of

approximately 4% in the early part of the century, but rising sharply to 15.1% in 2012 (Martin, 2014), before declining further to 6.4% in 2017 (CSO Live Register, May 2017).

The declining trend in unemployment in Ireland since 2012 has been mirrored by a decrease in the LTU rate which now stands at 3.1%, or 48.7% of total unemployment. Similar levels of unemployment were last seen in the autumn of 2009 (Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, 2017) although, at that time, the LTU represented just 27.9% of those who were unemployed. Very long term unemployment has been a particularly challenging problem, in 2014, for example 74 percent of the LTU were unemployed for two years or more. This group tends not to fare as well as the short-term unemployed (STU) with regard to re-employment progression. For instance, whilst only 25% of the STU tend to remain unemployed after six months, 55% (1-2 years) to 66% (2 years+) of the LTU remain unemployed one year later (O'Connell, 2017). Challenges remain, therefore, in terms of how to design and implement effective LMPs which are responsive to fluctuating unemployment rates and supply conditions, whilst also supporting the unemployed through periods of joblessness and enabling them to secure employment.

3.3 Policy responses to unemployment

As highlighted in Chapter One, the recent global crisis (2008-2012) and subsequent high levels of unemployment, have led to an even greater focus on, and recognition of, the importance of labour market policy and job seeking (Manroop & Richardson, 2015). Government responses to unemployment are generally implemented through LMPs which frequently differ across countries, but tend to encompass a variety of similar regulative measures that influence the interaction between labour supply and demand (ILO, 2016). These measures also aim to address structural barriers, such as

income support, skills shortages, or discrimination towards ‘disadvantaged’ labour (Bredgaard, 2015), whilst ultimately ensuring efficient labour market functioning by matching supply and demand (Baruffini, 2013). Policy responses to fluctuating levels of unemployment are central to how a country decides to support its unemployed, not only in re-accessing the labour market, but in becoming resilient to future periods of high unemployment. These responses are driven largely by economic rather than social factors, as Governments limit their spend on social welfare and use more regulative and governmental approaches to direct the unemployed through a range of LMP programmes (Brodkin & Marston, 2013; Grover, 2009; Murphy, 2016).

LMPs are typically defined as either ‘active’ or ‘passive’ in focus. The latter meet the welfare needs of the unemployed through the provision of income replacement and policies that aim to decrease labour supply such as early retirement. Rather than attempting to improve employability, the focus is on easing the reality of unemployment. Active LMPs (or ALMPs), on the other hand, include labour market integration measures or programmes such as labour market training, private sector incentive programmes, direct employment programmes in the public sector, and job search and assistance (e.g. Bonoli, 2010; OECD Database on Labour Market Programmes; O’Connell, 2017). All of these aim to improve employment prospects for those who have difficulty in accessing the labour market or who are threatened by unemployment. Their impact on improving wage outcomes is contested, as these policies are seen as forcing people into low paid employment (Grover, 2005, 2015).

Nonetheless, ALMPs are the primary vehicle to improve employability in the unemployed (Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES), 2014). Baruffini (2013) describes ALMPs as being primarily aimed at integrating (or reintegrating) those who are on the ‘edge of unemployment’ (p.1) into the labour

market, with the long-term objective of pursuing the most efficient functioning of the labour market and reducing the numbers of LTU. Designed to directly improve the employment opportunities of individuals, they include interventions for employees (e.g. public employment services, guidance, job search support) and employers (e.g. public sector job creation, incentives to hiring, training subsidies) (Baruffini, 2013; Thomsen, 2009).

3.4 Activation

Activation as a strategy is not limited to LMP and unemployment, but is evident in many policy areas including pensions, family benefits, and social assistance (Barbier & Knuth, 2010). In recent decades, this approach has emerged as part of public policy design in North America, Australia and Western Europe (Brodkin & Marston, 2013). Increasingly, governments are using a so-called activation ‘approach’ in ALMP design, where benefit rules, and employment and training services are designed to help the unemployed – and particularly those in receipt of an income support – progress into work (Lødemel & Moreira, 2014; Sage, 2013). This type of approach uses a wide range of interventions which overlap fiscal, education and training policies, and other public services including childcare and transport (Lødemel and Moreria, 2014). Activation policies have become a ‘buzzword’ (Martin, 2014) in LMP with a global movement toward this more regulatory form of welfare, whereby established welfare rights become more conditional on job seeking efforts (Clasen & Clegg, 2011). Thus, LMP or employment services offer a specific set of activation options, often applying ‘*a specific set of rules and sanctions*’ (Lødemel & Moreira, 2014, p.9) such as mutual obligations and work-availability to progress the unemployed into work.

Despite its popularity, there remains ambiguity around the fundamental purpose of activation and what it means for policy and practice. Much of this uncertainty arises

from the different ways in which activation has been implemented in various countries and how it is described (e.g. as ‘workfare’, ‘work-first’, ‘labour market activation’, ‘welfare to work’) (Brodkin & Marston, 2013); however, all activation policies – despite the different labels – share a common aim of promoting participation in the labour market and reducing receipt of welfare payments (Murphy, 2016). Lødemel and Moreria (2014) describe activation as an approach that requires job seekers to participate in a range of ALMP programmes including education, training, and job search, leading to more long-term sustainable employment options. These programmes tend to focus on reducing the impact of particular barriers including lack of motivation (e.g. by utilising sanctions); lack of job search skills (e.g. by providing job search assistance); a lack of work experience (e.g. by providing wage subsidies), and lack of relevant skills (e.g. by delivering training programmes) (Thomsen, 2009). Workfare on the other hand, requires job seekers to participate in paid employment with the focus on getting the person back to work as quickly as possible.

Brodkin and Marston (2013) describe the activation approach as consisting of enabling, regulatory, and compensation policies, and they argue that the extent to which each is involved, determines the type of activation strategy designed. For example, enabling policies are mainly those which increase human capital and include, for example, education, training, and employment supports such as childcare or transport, which enable the individual to access suitable employment. Compensation policies, on the other hand, assist the individual through in-work income support to participate in paid and rewarding employment whilst regulatory aspects are those that enforce participation in paid employment through the use of sanctions or the withdrawal of welfare. Interestingly, the enabling aspects of activation have been de-emphasised in policies while the more regulatory and disciplinary aspects of policy have been reinforced (Brodkin, 2013).

3.4.1 History of Activation

Conceptualised in Sweden in the 1950s by Gosta Rehn and Rudolf Meidner, activation was considered a way of responding to the modernisation of the Swedish labour market by upskilling its workforce. Rehns' subsequent role as director of the OECD's manpower directorate (1962 – 1973) was influential in encouraging OECD countries to further develop their ALMPs and their activation approaches. Successive guidance by the OECD (2007) and the EU (2006, 2015) meant that many OECD countries have implemented ALMPs, all of which differ in their detail, implementation, and levels of effectiveness. Essentially, this shift toward activation has led to stronger links between unemployment insurance and benefits, ALMPs, and conditionality (Martin, 2014), and is part of a wider ideological shift toward neo-liberal governance (Grover, 2009; Murphy, 2016).

Since 1997, the European Commission, through the open method of coordination (OMC) - which directs national policies towards common objectives - has urged member states to learn from each other and to evaluate their activation programmes (Bredgaard, 2015). However, evaluation culture in Europe remains weak when compared to the US which, despite investing less in ALMPs, has a stronger evaluation culture (Kluve, 2010). A 'Europeanisation' effect may be in part responsible for this weak culture, as countries involved in the design and evaluation of ALMPs set the evaluation criteria and thus their effectiveness is judged on the basis of what those countries deem to be important (e.g. the inclusion of social partners and unions) (De la Porte & Pochet, 2012). In addition to this weak evaluation culture, the varying outcomes and often conflicting results of evaluation studies often make them difficult to compare, and as ALMPs are often complex interventions in themselves, they may have varying outcomes depending on the context within which they are implemented

(Bredgaard, 2015). Thus, programmes which have been effective in one member state may not be as effective in another.

3.4.2 Implementation of activation

According to the OECD (2007), the underlying goal of activation strategies is ‘to encourage jobseekers to become more active in their efforts to find work and/or improve their employability’ (p. 208). It argues for both the intensification of activation policies to get people into employment, and the enforcement of conditionality with regard to job seeking or training participation (OECD, 2015). With these objectives in mind, activation strategies tend to comprise a number of key features which, in theory, aim to improve employability and job placement.

They typically include early access to the PES including a high level of contact with employment counsellors, coupled with regular reporting and ongoing monitoring of job search activity. In addition, job seekers are directed to agree action plans or ‘back to work’ arrangements with the PES, and be directly referred to job vacancies. Finally, the PES can refer the job seeker to ALMPs to increase employability through, for example, training and work experience. An emphasis is also placed on the principle of ‘mutual obligations’, where the job seeker is expected to engage in job seeking, education or training, in exchange for receiving a welfare payment and employment services (Kelly et al., 2013). The PES monitor the job seekers’ compliance as agreed, and use temporary sanctions when considered necessary, to ensure compliance with the various stages. In addition, the involvement of private providers in the implementation of activation policies has become increasingly popular in a number of OECD countries including the UK, Australia and more recently, Ireland.

3.4.3 Implementation through ALMP programmes

Activation is largely implemented via a range of ALMP programmes which, according to the OECD Database on Labour Market Programmes and the Eurostat Labour Market Policy database, may be categorised as follows: 1) labour market training; 2) private sector incentive programmes; 3) direct employment programmes in the public sector; and 4) job search and assistance (see Table 3.1). These programmes aim to complement passive measures such as unemployment benefit and social welfare payments to job seekers, and increase their employment opportunities, thus reducing unemployment.

Table 3.1 OECD Classification of Labour Market Programmes

Programme	Description
Labour market training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - classic type of active programme encompassing general education and specific vocational skills training - key objective: to improve human capital and qualifications of job seekers, to enable access to the labour market, improve the individual's productivity - can be classroom based, involve on the job training and workplace learning gained through work experience.
Private sector incentive programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on employers, offers incentives such as wage subsidies to encourage employers to employ LTU job seekers, changing employer behaviour. - includes supports for self-employment such as start-up grants and self-employment assistance.
Public sector employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - direct job creation in the public sector, mainly in public works or producing public goods or services. - focus on keeping disadvantaged job seekers close to the labour market and preventing the deterioration of human capital.
Job search assistance programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - impact job search effort and efficiency, increase the match between the job seeker and available employment. - job search, vocational counselling, monitoring and sanctions.

They do not create new jobs, but enable job seekers to prepare for, and access, opportunities designed specifically to support access to paid employment and subsidised

jobs, some of which may have the potential to be mainstreamed into future paid employment. However, these programmes, their orientation and implementation, their connection to the payment of welfare supports, and their outcomes for participants, vary substantially across countries. This will be developed further in the next section.

3.4.4 Activation policies

There is considerable variation in countries across the developed world in terms of the extent and overall orientation of their activation policies (Bonoli, 2010). O’Connell (2017) distinguishes four critical dimensions of activation systems which may help to explain such variation. He identifies two dimensions related to ALMPs – the *nature of the intervention*, and the *scale of the implementation* - and two related to the links between activation and the welfare state – the *level of support* and *conditionality* (see Figure 3.1). The combination of these four dimensions and their interactions, account for variability across countries. For example, low level interventions interacting with high conditionality, could result in job-seekers taking the first available job, indicating a work-first type activation approach. Alternatively, high level interventions, with targeted implementation, leading to higher quality employment, suggest a more human capital form of activation (i.e. which enables access to more sustainable quality work in the labour market through upskilling).

As Esping-Anderson (2000) explains, these differences in country-wide approaches are often due not so much to explicit political choices, but to a reliance on path dependency, as ‘every member state has its own welfare policy legacy, distinct system of interest organisations, and democratic polity’ (pg. 25). Bonoli’s (2010) impressive contribution to this literature proposes that much of the existing variation can be explained by the interaction between the changing economic context and existing LMPs, and as understood by those who are tasked with the design and implementation

of these policies. This may also help to explain the ambiguity in terminology (Brodkin, 2013).

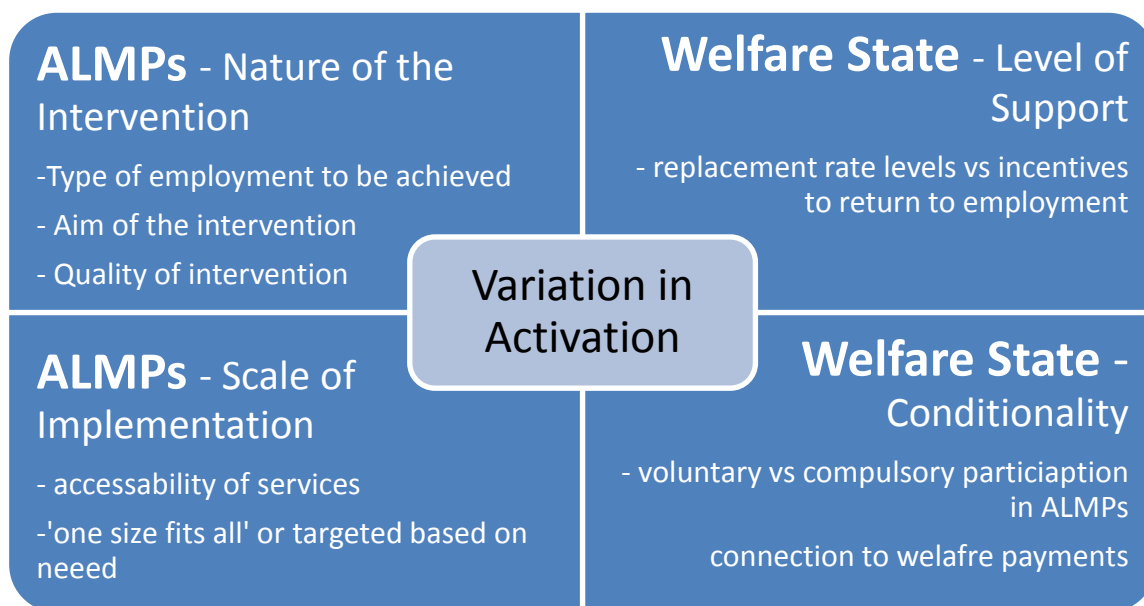


Figure 3.1 Four key dimensions of activation systems (O’Connell, 2017)

Thus, it is clear that activation is a broad approach which enables governments to implement a wide range of measures and to use differing levels of regulation and conditionality. Some countries, such as the UK and the US, implement a ‘work-first’ approach where the unemployed are required to work for their unemployment welfare. In contrast, countries such as Denmark and the Nordic states employ a ‘human capital’ approach, the aim of which is to enable access to more sustainable quality work through upskilling. Much of the research in this area conceptualises activation as two distinct and directly opposing approaches: liberal/ ‘full-conditionality’ versus universal/‘fully voluntary’, with many variations in between (Barbier & Knuth, 2010; Dwyer, 2010).

The first of these ostensibly opposing types, the ‘full conditionality’ or liberal type, requires the unemployed person to engage in a work-fare system where welfare payments are conditional on full participation. It emphasises sanctions and monitoring as a means of moving individuals into employment and includes stronger work

incentives and benefit conditionality. Conversely, the ‘fully voluntary’ or universal model provides supports independent of welfare payments (Dwyer 2010; Murphy, 2012). This type of approach emphasises improvement and investment in human capital essentially through training. The universal model suggests high quality activation programmes and progression into reasonable employment, while the liberal model limits the role of social policies, thereby facilitating low skilled employment (Murphy, 2010).

The implementation of activation strategies in the form of ALMPs, can also be described in the same way. A useful framework proposed by Bonoli (2010) describes ALMPs in relation to their impact on the political economy. He distinguishes initially between two dimensions: (1) pro-market employment orientation; and (2) emphasis on human capital investment. The first may be considered a ‘push policy’, whereby job seekers are directed into demand-driven public or private employment. The second dimension places an emphasis on investing in the human capital of the unemployed through vocational education and training and the development of soft skills, designed to ultimately improve employability. Bonoli’s framework is useful for distinguishing different types of ALMPs. While similar to the OECD and Eurostat classification types, Bonoli’s typology goes beyond description of the range of interventions to discuss their impact (see Figure 3.2).

Bonoli identifies four types of ALMPs within this overall framework including: (1) ‘*incentive reinforcement*’ aspects of which are evident in most ALMPs and which, as the name suggests, involves both punitive approaches such as sanctions and positive forms of in work supports; (2) ‘*employment assistance*’, popular in English speaking countries and the Nordic states, and which aims to remove barriers to participation by providing counselling and job search programmes, as well as individualised supports such as financial support for childcare and other identified barriers to labour market

access; (3) ‘*occupation*’, which is weak on both dimensions and focuses on the occupation of the unemployed or ‘keeping the unemployed busy’; and (4) ‘*up-skilling*’, which is strong on both pro-market employment and investment in human capital and which aims to provide job related vocational training as a second chance intervention, or as a way of developing new skills relevant for the labour market.

INVESTMENT IN HUMAN CAPITAL			
PROMARKET EMPLOYMENT ORIENTATION	None	Weak	Strong
Weak	(passive benefits)	Occupation Job creation schemes in the public sector Non-employment related Training programs	(basic education)
Strong	Incentive reinforcement Tax credits, in work benefits Time limits on reciprocity Benefit reductions Benefit conditionality	Employment assistance Placement services Job subsidies Counselling Job search program	Upskilling Job-related vocational training

Figure 3.2 Four Types of Active Labour Market Policy (Bonoli, 2012)

The workfare model in the UK could be described as an ‘*employment assistance*’ type of ALMP which encourages job seekers to find any job in order to reduce their reliance on social welfare. This type of policy is combined with ‘*incentive reinforcement*’ utilising tax credits, in-work benefits, and the threat of benefit withdrawal. By comparison, ‘Flexicurity’, most common in Denmark and the Netherlands, is a good example of an ‘*up-skilling*’ ALMP with its focus on enabling flexible transitions between work and unemployment. It recognises the need for flexibility in the labour market while also providing security for workers. This type of policy delivers a range of services including generous welfare schemes and the

opportunity to remain work active during periods of unemployment, but also includes 'incentive reinforcement' in the form of strong obligations. In reality, most countries use a mix of all four types of ALMPs.

3.5 Governance: Institutions delivering ALMP

A further factor which determines the level of success or effectiveness – aside from the type of ALMP and the approaches used therein - lies with the institutions responsible for both their design and implementation (Bonoli, 2012). Boyle (2005) argues that an analysis of policies cannot be separated from the institutions responsible for their design, development and implementation. In most countries, LMP is designed and implemented by the PES, which is commonly co-located in the department responsible for income support. In some jurisdictions, however, private contracted providers⁴ - both 'not-for-profit' and profit making organisations - are contracted in full, or to work in conjunction with the PES, to implement LMP (Kelly et al., 2013).

Activation governance differs, for example in Finland, activation is implemented at local levels with input from social partners, benefit agencies and local labour committees, and whilst a national PES exists, it has no involvement in the design and delivery of services to the unemployed (Martin, 2014). In the UK, the PES and benefit agency were merged in 2003 to form the new public institution *Jobcentre Plus*. This is now supplemented by the *Work Programme* strategy, which subcontracts out service provision to private employment service providers (predominantly for profit, but with a small number of not-for-profit organisations) to focus on the LTU, lone parents and disability recipients, with considerable freedom in terms of how to deliver the services. The Australian model is substantially different as the PES was abolished in the mid-1990s so employment services are currently delivered by over 100 providers (private

⁴ For example Australia, the Netherlands and United Kingdom

and not-for-profit) under contract with the government but with strict guidelines in place regarding the range of services to be delivered. Thus, while we see variability in policies and in institutions across different jurisdictions we also see some common trends including more use of private actors to deliver employment services.

3.6 The effectiveness of ALMPs

Despite their widespread use over the past 50 years, and the political interest in using them as a means of reducing levels of unemployment, there is relatively little evidence on the effectiveness of ALMPs (Card, Kluve, & Weber 2015). Evaluations of these programmes tend to be conducted using econometric impact evaluations, and randomised controlled trials (RCTs) which are considered the gold standard (Pawson, 2006:2013) for evaluating what works (Bredgaard, 2015). Therefore, effectiveness is generally assessed in terms of impact on the re-employment of the job seeker, and often in the absence of other effects, such as increased employability and improved well-being, both of which have been shown to enable and support re-employment (Fugate et al., 2004; Paul & Moser, 2009). In addition, a large variety of different ALMPs exist among countries and therefore evaluation and classification has been problematic. However, a number of researchers have used meta-analytic methods and systematic reviews in an attempt to synthesise the many disparate findings from the vast number of more recent studies conducted across the world, many of which provide evidence for the effectiveness of interventions with regard to re-employment (e.g. Filges, Smedslund, Knudsen, Jørgensen, 2015; Greenberg, Michalopoulos, & Robins, 2003; Heckman, Lalonde, & Smith, 1999; Kluve, 2010). For example, interventions such as counselling and training have been found to increase transition rates for the unemployed into employment (Van den Berg & Van der Klaauw, 2006). Other examples include cost-effective interventions such as, job search assistance comprising measures aimed at

improving job search efficiency, including job search courses, job clubs and intensified counselling (Filges et al., 2015).

In a recent meta-analysis ($N = 207$) Card et al. (2015) identified 857 different findings of effectiveness of programmes, but a key finding from this work was the fact that programmes had different impacts depending on the time points used within the research. For example, they found that work-first programmes, such as job-search assistance and sanction/threat programmes, tend to have larger short-term effects than human capital programmes, which showed small or even negative impacts in the short-term. However, these human capital programmes showed larger impacts if evaluated over a longer time period, such as two to three years after completion. They also found that there may be potential gains from matching participants and programme types, suggesting that programmes may work better for some than for others, depending on their labour market needs (Card et al., 2015). However, in practice, referrals to ALMPs are often based on availability of the intervention and eligibility criteria such as age, duration of unemployment, or type of social welfare payment, with little matching based on the individual's labour market needs. Clasquin, Moncel, Harvey, and Friot, (2004) refer to this practice as 'resource regimes', whereby an individual's access to PES resources depends on these types of factors.

Evaluation findings reported elsewhere are mixed, with interventions found to have little or no impact (Bredgaard, 2015). Martin and Grubb (2001), in one of the most influential narrative meta-analysis, due to its descriptive account of OECD countries' experiences with ALMPs, found that many programmes (e.g. subsidised public sector employment programmes) were ineffective or even counterproductive in assisting the unemployed to regain access to the labour market (Kluve, 2010).

The predominance of these types of quantitative economic and impact-outcome evaluations in ALMP evaluation, although useful in terms of identifying the effectiveness of an intervention on job placement, tell us little about why they work, for whom they work best, and whether success is context specific (Bredgaard, 2015). They are a crude evaluation of a programme in so much as they measure impacts solely related to employment outcomes. They lack analysis of the intervention content and its implementation, and while they may tell us that the outcome is a causal effect of the intervention, their capacity to illustrate what elements of the intervention worked for whom and under what circumstances, or what Bredgaard (2015) calls the ‘black box’ of interventions, is limited. Bartelheimer and colleagues examined this further and propose that the quality and conditions of the service, and its implementation by case workers, affect the capability set or range of options available to job seekers (Bartelheimer, Verd, Lehweß-Litzmann, López-Andreu, & Schmidt, 2012). Arguably therefore, evaluations that delve deeper into interventions for the unemployed could provide better evidence and ultimately improve policy making. However, currently there is little evidence of these types of appraisals of ALMPs, with typical evaluations tending to be either micro-econometric impact evaluations (e.g. Kluge & Weber, 2010; Martin & Grubb, 2001; Rosholm & Svarer, 2011) or macro-economic aggregate impact evaluations (e.g. Boone & van Ours, 2004; Martin, 2014). The former tend to focus on systematic meta-analyses where data from a number of evaluations are aggregated to show the impact across a range of interventions. Macro-economic evaluations, on the other hand, tend to focus on cross country analysis of panel data sets rather than on individual programmes and provide information on employment and wage outcomes (Bredgaard, 2015).

In summary, only a limited number of evaluations have attempted to investigate a wider set of outcomes from ALMPs. As outlined in Chapter Two, evaluations of interventions targeted at individual needs such as training and counselling, have

provided evidence for their positive effects on well-being (Creed et al., 1999; Henderson, Muller & Helmes, 2013; Machin & Creed, 2003) leading to re-employment. Similarly, evaluations of more therapeutic interventions such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) based employment programmes (e.g. JOBS I & II⁵, CHOICES for Well-being⁶) have yielded positive results with regard to mental health and job search efficacy (e.g. Caplan et al., 1989; Maguire et al., 2014; Proudfoot et al., 1999; Vinokur et al., 1991; Vuori et al., 2002). The findings from these studies are important in enhancing our understanding of unemployment and the types of interventions that impact job seekers. Notably however, evidence presented by Ecorys and IZA for the European Commission (Van der Ende, Peters, Biesma, Dimitrova, Schneider, 2012), suggests that there is no one specific ALMP which can improve employability for all, but rather that a shift toward a more tailor made or individualised approach in practice may be more effective. Similarly, Bartelheimer and colleagues (2012) argue that intervention-based PES services should allow job seekers to choose the interventions which they see as most appropriate to their progression toward the labour market and indeed tailor their own supports.

Whilst psychologists have made important contributions toward understanding the impact of unemployment on individuals in terms of well-being (Warr, Jackson & Banks, 1988), self-esteem (Tiggemann & Winefield, 1984), and the loss of the latent and manifest benefits of work (Jahoda, 1988), few psychological studies have focused on the effectiveness of activation as a policy approach, or the impact of ALMPs in potentially undoing the negative psychological impact of unemployment, and

⁵ JOBS I & II were trialled in the USA (Caplan et al., 1989; van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992); a Finnish version, the Työhön job search programme was trialled in Finland (Vuori et al., 2002); an adapted version 'The Winning New Jobs Programme' was trialled in Ireland in 2006 (Barry et al., 2006)

⁶ Trialled in the UK (Maguire et al., 2014)

supporting the individual in developing improved psychological capital and employability.

3.7 The case of Ireland

Ireland has been slow to implement activation when compared to many other OECD countries (Grubb, Singh, & Tergeist, 2009; Murphy, 2016). For instance, the recent move toward active measures has been described as ‘uncertain, insufficiently resourced and often poorly thought out’ (O’Connell, 2017, p. 240). A number of factors may help to explain the slow modernisation of Irish labour market policy, many of which are related to the context and the political dynamic (van Berkel, de Graaf, & Sirovátka, 2012). Firstly, Boyle (2005) emphasises the causal role of institutional configuration and the importance of ‘policy legacy’ stating ‘that past policy is the most important factor in determining the course of present policy’ (p.16).

Historically, from the 1970s, employment services in Ireland were passive or inactive, with the payment of unemployment benefits separated from job search activity, and consequently a fairly weak regulation of conditionality. The separation of benefits from job search was informed by an early Institute of Public Administration (IPA) report (1968) on the Placement and Guidance service which identified a major defect in the system at that time, being the dominance of the welfare payment function at the expense of the placement or guidance function. The IPA recommended that the placement service be ‘entirely divorced’ from the benefit paying function (p.33). Thus, from the 1970s, welfare recipients could claim job seeker benefits without being required to undertake upskilling, education and training, or work experience (McGuaran, 2013). According to the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) (2005, 2011b), this had the effect of validating the recipients’ status as being ‘out of the labour market’ rather than being unemployed.

A key institution, with regard to the job search and upskilling function, the national training and employment authority, Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), was established in 1987 (see Figure 3.3). FÁS had a breadth of responsibility that made it, according to Boyle (2005), unique amongst other labour market institutions. It was responsible for the national implementation of LMP, the design and delivery of ALMPs (e.g. community employment, apprenticeships, vocational training), and for social inclusion within the labour market. FÁS became an organisation with country-wide reach in terms of service delivery and funding, across an extensive range of social, educational, vocational and employment related policy issues. FÁS also became successful in accessing funding directly from the EU, thus by-passing the Department of Finance, and maintaining its independence from Social Welfare, enabling it to operate quite autonomously. By the late 1990s, FÁS was supporting various ALMPs, with over 40,000 people on Community Employment schemes and 27,000 on apprenticeships, and with many more participating in vocational training. Thus, at local levels across the country, FÁS enjoyed significant support both publically and politically (Boyle, 2005), therefore shielding it from any external criticism in terms of its implementation of LMP.

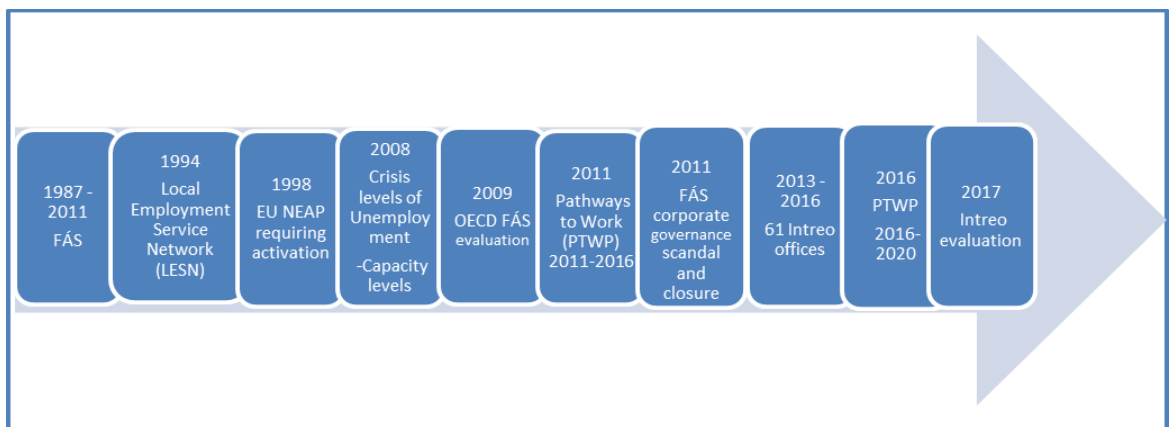


Figure 3.3 Timeline of Ireland’s LMP progression towards activation

As a result of persistent levels of unemployment in the early 1990s, a National Economic and Social Forum report on long-term unemployment recommended a new

type of labour market and social policy, with the creation of a client centred, more locally based employment service (The Local Employment Services Network - LESN) to be provided in conjunction with FÁS in disadvantaged areas (NESF, 1994). Boyle (2005) alludes to the perceived threat by the leadership of FÁS, to this new approach, and while the Department of Enterprise and Employment continued in its attempts to bring FÁS under its control, it remained protected politically until the mid-2000s, despite criticism from the OECD as well as the academic community, policy analysts, think tanks and other commentators (e.g. NESC, ESRI). Following EU policy initiatives the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) (1998) obliged Irish job seekers to attend activation meetings, however this policy did not lead FÁS to more actively engage with unemployed claimants, and FÁS continued to drive a passive LMP. Furthermore, an NEAP evaluation found that individuals who participated in FÁS engagement processes were 15% less likely to access employment in the subsequent 12 months (McGuinness et al., 2011). Martin (2014) refers to the ‘lip service’ which was paid to the principles of activation and the high spending effort, and contends that the lack of implementation in practice was due in part to complacency on the part of FÁS and Social Welfare, as a result of the high levels of employment during the 2000 – 2008 period. Attendance at the initial FÁS meeting was ‘quasi-compulsory’ (O’Connell, 2017, p. 241) and while conditionality existed in theory, its implementation was scant and the unemployed were essentially left to their own devices (Martin, 2014). Frustration with FÁS, also led the DSP to duplicate some FÁS functions, by establishing its own Activation Unit (2008) and placing job facilitators in local social welfare offices.

Ireland entered into the crisis period with this relatively underdeveloped activation strategy. Indeed, with the rapid rise in unemployment in the early years of the recession (2008 - 2012)⁷, the Irish government's policy was proving insufficient in responding to the needs of job seekers. For example, it was described as 'under-examined, fragmented and lacking in ambition... passive and low intensity in character ...' (Sweeney, 2011). Paradoxically however, Ireland was spending more than the OECD average on ALMPs (1% of GDP compared with the OECD average of 0.65). Despite this, the existing system had little capacity to deal with the high levels of unemployment brought about by the economic crisis and in some cases, the system was actually counterproductive, as those who engaged in the unemployment support services were less likely to move into work than those who did not (O'Connell, 2017). This, along with other weaknesses in the Irish system, were highlighted by an OECD review of Irish activation in 2009 (Grubb, Singh, & Tergeist) and combined with other subsequent influential and timely reports (e.g. Services for Unemployed Job Seekers (NESC, 2011)), and EU peer review and benchmarking exercises, led to a momentum for change.

Therefore, as a consequence of the economic crisis, the significant job losses during 2008-2012⁸ and significant pressure from the Troika⁹, the Irish government, committed not only to the implementation of Activation, but to reform of the institutions responsible for its delivery. Coincidentally, internal corporate governance failures within FÁS, and a loss of public confidence in the organisation (Martin, 2014),

⁷ Unemployment rose from 4.4% in early 2008 to 15.1% in 2012 (CSO; Martin, 2014)

⁸ 329,000 jobs were lost during the period 2008-2012

⁹ The International Monetary Fund, the European Union and the European Central Bank referred to as the Troika

led to its disbandment in 2011, and organisations which had previously been responsible for welfare payments, and PES, were subsequently amalgamated.

The reform agenda was the brain child of a small group of officials and political actors in the DSP who, over 2011-2012, had been working on the development of a new National Employment and Entitlements Service (Murphy et al., forthcoming). This work subsequently became the reforming ‘*Pathways to Work*’ policy (PTWP) (DSP 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016-2020). The implementation of this new LMP has been swift since 2012 as part of a wider institutional reform strategy which set out a 50-point action plan outlining the government’s intention to ensure that for every unemployed person ‘their first day out of work is also their first step on the pathway back to work’ (PTWP, 2012, p.5). The plan comprises five strands:

- Strand 1: More regular and ongoing engagement with the unemployed
- Strand 2: Greater targeting of activation places and opportunities
- Strand 3: Incentivising the take-up of opportunities
- Strand 4: Incentivising employers to provide more jobs for people who are unemployed
- Strand 5: Reforming institutions to deliver better services to the unemployed

(Pathways to Work, 2012)

In practice, Strand 5 of the PTWP was implemented through a new public employment service *Intreo*, while the vocational training function of FÁS moved to a new national agency called SOLAS, and to the new regional Education and Training Boards. This significant institutional reform involved the transfer of 2000 FÁS and Health Service Executive (HSE) community welfare staff, into the Department of Social Protection (McGuaran, 2013) and the subsequent establishment in 2013 of *Intreo*, a ‘one-stop-shop’ or single point of contact for all job seekers. Roll-out of the *Intreo*

service involved the establishment of 61 *Intreo* offices nationwide during 2013-2016 and the provision, not only of income support, but also assistance for job seekers in both preparing for and accessing employment.

The change management process associated with the reform typically took place in *Intreo* offices, led by a skilled change management team (Murphy et al., forthcoming). Köppe and O'Connell (2016) describe this as an iterative process with high level vision and design principles set by a small team, but deficient in detail or a specific plan. In theory such detail was left to innovation at the ground level in consultation with staff. The practice processes were in fact influenced by expert knowledge in the DSP and guided by the change management staff, all of whom had similar backgrounds and experience in communications and change management, both within and outside the civil service.

With regard to the policy itself, the PTWP has since been updated on three occasions (2013, 2015, 2016-2020) with some variation in terms of the prioritisation of strands and points of emphasis. For example, the 2012 version focuses predominately on the short-term unemployed (STU) and preventing their transition to LTU, while PTWP (2013) talks about a specific and 'unrelenting focus' (p.11) on those out of work for more than 12 months. By 2015, Strand 1 of the PTWP (2013) - which originally emphasised *Better engagement with unemployed people and jobless households* - had been replaced by '*Incentivising employers to provide more jobs for those who are unemployed*' (PTWP, 2015).

In the most recent version of the PTWP (2016-2020), the overall goal is to ensure that as many jobs as possible are given to unemployed people and, in particular,

those on the live register¹⁰. The reported success of the strategy to date is also highlighted as indicated by the following statement: ‘the strategy has been successful in contributing to a reduction of circa 38% in the number of people unemployed during that period [2012-2105]’ (p. 4); however there has been no formal evaluation to date. The 2016-2020 policy has two key focus points: 1) ‘consolidation’ (i.e. continuing to improve the services for example for LTU and youth to ensure the delivery of high quality, effective and efficient services); and 2) ‘development’ (i.e. expanding access to other non-employed people such as people with disabilities and qualified adults¹¹, to achieve the Government’s aim of full employment by 2020).

While there has been significant unrest on the ground regarding the implementation of the PTWP, this has had little impact on the policy itself (Murphy, 2016). Critical analysis of the policy has also been moderate with commentators highlighting: the delayed response to the crisis; the roll out of the PTWP in the absence of robust evaluation; the sanctions regime; the lack of person centeredness of the approach; the lack of quality guidance, education and training; an absence of staff skills and up-skilling (Boland & Griffin, 2015; INOU, 2015; Murphy and Loftus, 2015; O’Connell, 2016).

A number of critical factors merit attention. While the impact of the crisis became evident in 2008, the reform agenda did not begin until 2012 with the amalgamation of services and the publication of PTWP. O’Connell (2016) refers to this as being ‘too little too late for the long-term unemployed’. Secondly, the PTWP policy remains under evaluated with a lack of statistical data and analysis, leading to decisions

¹⁰ The live register is a count of all persons in receipt of Jobseekers Benefit, Jobseekers Allowance, part time workers, seasonal, and casual workers entitled to a jobseekers payment, and individuals signing for PRSI credits but receiving no payment (INOUE, 2017)

¹¹ The spouse/partner of a person in receipt of a job seekers payment

made based on narrow data (Boland & Griffin, 2015). The Labour Market Council¹² (2016) also comments that, in the absence of robust evaluation, the impact of PTWP cannot be established and thus recommendations cannot be made with deficient evidence. O’Connell highlights the heterogeneous nature of the unemployed and the need to understand what measures are most effective for whom. Other commentators such as the INOU have consistently argued for a person-centred activation approach which focuses on inclusivity and participation without coercion (INOUE, 2015). The Labour Market Council recommend the provision of quality driven career guidance to unemployed people and emphasise that the ALMPs to which people are referred should lead to decent sustainable employment. In addition, the Council propose that organisations such as NGOs with a history of working in active inclusion and with an understanding of constructive and effective engagement with job seekers, should be consulted (O’Connell, 2016; Sweeney, 2017).

3.7.1 Post crisis labour market policy

The PTWP reflects a shift from passive to more active participation and the strengthening of conditionality whereby the unemployed were required to engage in job search and activation programmes in order to continue receiving social welfare support. Conditionality has been strengthened by the ‘rights and responsibilities’ aspect of the policy whilst legislative changes introducing new penalties, mean that job seekers must now comply with certain job seeking obligations or face a reduction in, or disqualification of, their social welfare payment (Boland & Griffin, 2015). This is comparable in approach, but not in scale, with the ‘work- first’ approaches in the UK, Germany, the US, Australia and other European countries, many of which have been

¹² The Labour Market Council (LMC) is an independent group of industry leaders and labour market experts appointed by the Minister for Social Protection to oversee the effective delivery of the Pathways to Work strategy (DSP, 2017) <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/LabourMarketCouncil.aspx>

developing their activation strategies since the early 1990s. There are notable similarities, in particular, between the Irish model and UK welfare reforms principally in relation to: the re-design of welfare services, such as Jobcentre Plus in the UK and the *Intreo* service in Ireland; the implementation of conditionality (Boland & Griffin, 2015); and the sub-contracting of re-employment services to private providers on the basis of performance-related results (Martin, 2014).

Whilst this reform has been critiqued as a work-first policy which is highly managerial in nature and uses the threat of sanctions and conditionality to control the behaviour of the unemployed (Boland & Griffin, 2015), many have also recognised the scale of institutional reform and greater capacity for engagement with unemployed people (O'Connell, 2017) leading to what the OECD has described as a 'much improved labour market activation regime' (2015, p.16). Ultimately this approach has significantly changed the delivery of services to the unemployed and impacted in mixed ways on the capacity of the Irish welfare state to deliver a modernised activation policy that is, in theory, more consistent with OECD and EU member state's principles. At a service level, its implementation is driven by administrative processes which dictate the level of assistance available, both in terms of types of support, and the scheduling of the service to the job seeker (i.e. monthly, bi-monthly meetings). NESC (2011) have commented that activating people misses the point and ignores the real barriers to work which, for many people, particularly the LTU and other vulnerable workers, is often a complex mix of issues that require longer term engagement and support, as well as decent jobs. The activation policy and how it is implemented, therefore, seems at odds with the traditional view of the welfare state and social welfare provision, which has its origins in poverty prevention. As NESC (2005) argue, social policy should aim to support and facilitate the development of each individual in achieving their potential, and enable them to take more risks than they may have taken in the past. This type of

supportive approach requires trust between the job seeker and employment service, a culture based on care and respect, and a longer term intervention which aims to support each individual in identifying their distinct capabilities and future potential.

3.8 Effectiveness of the PTWP

The PTWP places an emphasis on prioritising and adequately supporting vulnerable groups including young unemployed and LTU, through the provision of activation services. However, the implementation of this goal in practice, translates as increased frequency of engagement i.e. one meeting with a case officer per month, rather than an intensive meaningful engagement for the individual. In the context of the fall in unemployment (15.1% in 2012 to 6.4%, Q2 2017), this new policy is widely considered, by both government and public discourse, as successful in terms of reducing unemployment (DSP, 2015) however nothing is known about its actual impact on wider aspects of employability. This is an important knowledge gap in view of the extensive literature linking unemployment to poor mental health and well-being (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg & Kinicki, 2005; Murphy & Athanasou, 1999; Paul & Moser, 2009). This evidence indicates that unemployed people are more likely to experience: anxiety; loss of confidence; low self-esteem; loss of motivation; suicidal ideation; low levels of coping; psychosomatic problems; poor cognitive performance; behavioural problems; and paranoia (Cole, 2006; Creed, Machin, & Hicks, 1999; Goldsmith, Veum, & Darity, 1997; Wanberg, 2012), all of which impact on their future employability.

In addition little is known about the impact on employability and sustainable re-employment of job seekers, and in particular, its impact on the long-term unemployed and their progression into quality jobs. It is important to note that the PTWP does not engage with issues of job quality, rather it considers any job as better than unemployment (Murphy et al., forthcoming). Interestingly, job quality is included in the

OECD's well-being framework and identified as a key component of individual well-being and a means to better economic performance (OECD, 2015). They define and measure quality work as consisting of three key dimensions or outcomes including: (1) earnings or the extent to which the employment contributes towards living standards; (2) labour market security or the risk of becoming unemployed; and (3) the working environment, the amount of pressure the work involves, and the amount of control people have over the tasks they perform.

Research in Switzerland (Arni, Lalive, & van Ours, 2009) found that using negative incentives in ALMPs led to lower quality post-unemployment jobs both in terms of job duration and level of earnings. Studies have also shown that work of poor psychosocial quality can have negative long-term health impacts (Butterworth, et al., 2011) which can be significantly worse than long-term unemployment itself. Bonde (2008), in a systematic review, highlighted people's perceptions of negative psychosocial factors in the workplace and their links to mental health, with harmful psychosocial job conditions (e.g. low job security, low decision latitude, high psychological job demands, and low co-worker support) increasing the risk of developing mental health problems (Ten Have, Van Dorsselaer, & de Graaf, 2015). While activation has been shown to increase exits from unemployment, it is important that the aim of effective activation regimes should also be to help people access quality jobs (Martin, 2014).

3.9 LTU and ALMPs

Many LTU have low or obsolete skills, poor health and working ability, care obligations, and a variety of other obstacles to employment, leaving them vulnerable to the risk of social exclusion and lifetime unemployment (EU, 2012; Thomsen, 2009). In addition, the negative impact of unemployment on psychological well-being has been

found to increase during the first year of unemployment (Paul & Moser, 2009); thus, for job seekers who have been out of the labour market for longer periods of time, the problems they encounter may overshadow their skills and abilities and pose a significant barrier in terms of their ability to reconnect with the labour market (Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2013). Arguably therefore, interventions designed for the LTU should aim to enable a change in the job seeker's career trajectory and assist them in accessing sustainable jobs rather than short term or precarious work, where after a few months, they may become unemployed once more. However, the work-first approach assumes that any job is better than no job and arguably therefore, reinforces the sustainability of low paid precarious work in the labour market (Murphy, 2016).

For these reasons, it is important to investigate empirically whether the LTU who receive needs based person-centred services (that focus on promoting greater self-awareness, improving well-being, increasing hopefulness for the future, and enhancing self-esteem and self-efficacy as part of an activation strategy) become more employable and able to access sustainable quality employment. In theory, the new PTWP (2016-2020) strand *Building Workforce Skills* goes some way towards achieving this by aiming, through co-operation with the education and training sectors, to continuously develop the labour force and to provide job seekers with the opportunities to develop the skills and competencies required to access and sustain employment. However, as noted by the LMC the absence, in practice, of sufficient guidance and institutional integration with skills planning, education and training, will make this a difficult reality to achieve for the LTU (Sweeney, 2017).

3.10 Conclusion

Ireland's LMP has undergone significant change in recent years with the introduction of the PTWP, and its implementation as a work-first strategy, characterised

by increased engagement and job search. This chapter described these changes within the global context of unemployment, while also exploring frameworks which help us understand the various types of ALMPs and how they are used. The history of the development and implementation of Ireland's labour market policy is deeply connected to the institutional structures responsible for its implementation, and tracing Ireland's slow modernisation towards ALMP provides an important context for understanding the evolution of the PTWP. However, the PTWP has been implemented, to date, in the absence of robust evaluation and while a programme of evaluation is underway, traditional evaluations tend to be limited in their focus. In particular, the outcomes of work-first policy regimes tend to focus on job placement and reducing reliance on social welfare, where any job is considered better than unemployment. This new model of LMP makes social welfare payments conditional on job seeking activity. However, as explored in the previous chapter, many of the barriers faced by the LTU and by other vulnerable workers require more tailored and individualised approaches, enabling a wider choice for the job seeker, leading to increased and more sustainable labour market attachment.

The next chapter describes the methods used in the current study to, amongst others, evaluate aspects of the PTWP with regard to its effectiveness for the LTU, and to evaluate a new employability based model founded on a holistic guidance approach to activation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Method

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first outlines the philosophical stance underpinning this research and the overall study design. The subsequent three sections describe the methodological approaches underpinning Studies One, Two and Three respectively. The final section describes the ethical considerations relevant to the research.

4.1 Epistemological and Ontological approach

Research is guided by a set of beliefs about the nature and production of knowledge (Gubba & Lincon, 1994, 2005), often referred to as a paradigm or world view, which is based on a number of assumptions. Broadly speaking, there are four paradigms or worldviews including ‘Post-positivism’, ‘Constructivism’, ‘Advocacy’ and ‘Pragmatism’, each with its own ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology and rhetoric, or particular way of conducting and reporting research (Creswell & Clarke, 2007). The current study is rooted in the Pragmatist paradigm which is oriented towards ‘real world’ problems and applications based on what works in practice.

Pragmatism is not new to the social sciences (Morgan, 2008) with the first proponents - known as the ‘classical pragmatists’ - dating back to the late 19th and early 20th Century (e.g. James (1890), Dewey (1938), and Pierce (1905)). More recent commentators have been interested in exploring the practical consequences and empirical findings relating to psychological, social and educational phenomena, and how these inform, and allow us to further develop, our understanding of such phenomena (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pragmatism offers a middle ground, both

philosophically and methodologically in the sense that it rejects traditional dualism (e.g. subjectivism vs. objectivism) and the historical contradiction between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Instead, it advocates for the use of diverse approaches (e.g. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) and both objective and subjective knowledge (Creswell & Clarke, 2007), thereby adopting a common sense view of how research can be used to solve the problem under investigation.

In addition, pragmatism accepts knowledge as being both constructed and based on reality (i.e. how the world is experienced) (Morgan, 2007). The method of inquiry is both practical and outcome oriented, based on incrementally developing an understanding of the phenomena under investigation, and making further decisions and actions to develop a robust understanding (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). As an approach, it allows the researcher to move between induction and deduction, and subjectivity and objectivity, mirroring real world research practice (Evans, Coon, & Ume, 2011). However, pragmatists acknowledge that we are constantly adapting to new situations and environments, and, therefore, researchers, continuously aim to improve upon past understandings and appreciate that the ‘present is always a new starting point’ (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, pg.18). The focus therefore is on the current research problem or question and how best to address and fully understand it using the most appropriate methods (Crotty, 1998).

4.1.1 Mixed methods research

Mixed methods approaches are most strongly associated with the Pragmatic worldview, often described as the ‘third methodological movement’ (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) (quantitative and qualitative research being the other two). Mixed methods research was formally linked to pragmatism by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003a), when they contended that both qualitative and quantitative methods could be

used within a single study. They also argue that the research question is fundamental and more important than either the method used to address it, or the philosophical paradigm within which it is located (Creswell & Clarke, 2007). The specific research methods used enable researchers to collect more than one type of data (i.e. quantitative and qualitative) to gain a deep understanding of the issue at hand (Creswell & Clarke, 2007; Green, 2008). The data can then be combined in ways that provide a more complete picture of the problem under consideration. This can be achieved by merging or connecting the data, or by using one set of data to build on, or support another (Creswell & Clarke, 2007). The decision as to which approach to use, ultimately lies in the research question.

A mixed methods research design was deemed most appropriate for the current study for two overarching reasons. Firstly, the use of only quantitative methods of inquiry may diminish the quality/meaning of the results by failing to consider the context or setting within which people operate (Creswell & Clarke, 2007). Real world problems cannot be disconnected from the social context within which they occur, and researchers, therefore, must be aware of the contextual environment (Tashokkori & Teddlie, 2010) and its impact on the research question. Tashokkori and Teddlie (2010) propose that a mixed method approach closely mirrors everyday problem solving by using both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods, a sort of 'humanistic conceptualisation of the research process' (pg. 273). Secondly, the use of qualitative methods alone may be considered too limited in terms of foregrounding material containing personal interpretations and possible biases as (Creswell & Clarke, 2007). In addition, the small sample sizes typically used in qualitative approaches may be viewed by some, as a weakness. According to Creswell and Clarke, a mix of both approaches can counterbalance the weakness of either approach used in isolation.

4.1.2 Study Design: Overview

The mixed methods research reported here comprised three separate, but related studies nestled into an overall programme of inquiry including: (1) a qualitative study designed to contextualise the research at the outset; (2) a quantitative study measuring outcomes and change over time following the design and implementation of a new intervention versus services as usual; and (3) a qualitative study designed to provide insights into stakeholders' experiences of the new intervention with regard to its underlying mechanisms and processes. This sequential three-phase design was developed to provide a nuanced understanding of a complex research problem by combining both breadth (quantitative data) and depth (qualitative data). This approach was also influenced by suggestions that mixed methods may be an appropriate choice in studies where policy and practice could be affected, or impacted, by the results due to the broad approach taken to understand the phenomenon under investigation (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

4.2 Study One

This study involved an initial qualitative exploration of the Labour Market Policy, the PTWP, to assess how it was working in the early stages of implementation.

4.2.1 Participants and settings

A total of 21 stakeholders - comprising fourteen females and seven males – were identified and recruited through purposive sampling, based on their direct role with regard to policy implementation; these included job seekers, practitioners, organisational managers, other stakeholders and policy makers. Participants were identified through an NGO in North Dublin called the Ballymun Job Centre (BJC), where the researcher is based part-time as part of her IRC Employment-Based scholarship. The BJC employs twenty-nine staff, and provides employment services,

including the Local Employment Service (LESN), as described in Chapter One, under contract to the DSP, to approximately 2,500 unemployed clients per annum. All interviews were conducted within the Dublin region and some required rescheduling on a number of occasions due to the participants' busy schedules.

4.2.1.1 Job seeker participants (n=6)

Six job seekers, who were already clients of the BJC, were invited to participate in a one-to-one interview. Participants were purposefully recruited on the basis of key demographic variables (e.g. age, gender, engagement with the service to date, duration of unemployment) and unemployment status (e.g. long-term unemployed, young job seeker, lone parent), with a view to capturing a range of experiences of employment services. The sample comprised both males ($n = 3$) and females ($n = 3$) ranging in age from 18–55; three (males = 2, female = 1) had previously participated in the Youth Guarantee pilot (YGS), a programme which provides a high support career-focused intervention over a four-month period and is similar in content to the intervention trialled in Study Two. The remaining three participants were part of the new policy programme PTWP, and were obliged to participate in the services in order to continue receiving full unemployment payments. All interviews took place in the BJC where participants were receiving employment support.

4.2.1.2 Practitioners (n=6)

A total of six practitioners whose primary role was the delivery of employment support services in the BJC, were invited to participate in a one-to-one interview. Three practitioners had been involved in the delivery of the Youth Guarantee programme and all were involved on a daily basis in the delivery of the new PTWP. All practitioners

were female, in their forties ($M = 45$) and with a minimum of 10 years' experience. All interviews took place in their work setting.

4.2.1.3 Service Managers ($n=3$)

Six service managers were initially contacted and invited to participate in a one-to-one interview but two declined, and one did not respond despite a number of attempts on the part of the researcher. The remaining three comprised two males and one female, with a mean age of fifty and based in three different (urban) organisations; all were interviewed in their own workplace. All managers had at least 25 years' experience working in the area of employment supports and social inclusion. The organisations within which the participants worked were, at the time of the interview, contracted by the DSP to deliver employment services. The managers were responsible for the delivery of PTWP within their own organisations, and were thus influential in how the policy was implemented on a daily basis.

4.2.1.4 Policy Makers ($n=2$)

Five policy makers were identified through the BJC's links with the DSP and were invited by email to participate in a one-to-one semi-structured interview. Two agreed to participate, two did not respond, and one, declined by email. The two participants - one male and one female - worked closely together and were aged in their forties ($M = 45$). One had private sector experience unrelated to employment services whilst the other had extensive experience in the NGO sector; both had moved into a policy making role within the previous three years. Interviews were conducted within their work setting.

4.2.1.5 Other Stakeholders (n=4)

A final group of stakeholders was invited to participate based on their close links with employment services in terms of delivering training and education to job seekers, providing information on unemployment supports, critiquing the labour market policy from the perspective of the job seeker, or advising Government on labour market policy. Five potential participants were invited to participate in a one-to-one interview, four of whom (three females and one male) agreed to take part. All had at least 25 years' experience of working in the sector. Two participants were interviewed in the BJC; the remaining two were interviewed in their work setting.

4.2.2 Measures and approaches

A number of measures and approaches were used in this study including: (1) five semi-structured interview schedules; (2) observations at relevant seminars. These are described below. Both measures were supplemented with a review of relevant policy documents.

4.2.2.1 Stakeholder interview schedules

Five interview schedules (see Appendix 1) were designed to elicit stakeholders' views and attitudes on PTWP and how it was perceived to be working in the early stages of development. The schedules were developed based on the researcher's experience rather than on a comprehensive literature review as the application of a constructivist grounded theory approach in the analysis, required that the researcher remain largely free from existent ideas within the literature to allow the themes to become apparent (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, the researcher has 18 years' experience of working in the employment services so this approach ensured that preconceived ideas and their impact on the study were limited. The design also allowed

the researcher to use her extensive experience to better understand how participants were experiencing the new policy.

All interviews were semi-structured and used open-ended questions to elicit the views and opinions of stakeholders. The interviews explored, amongst other things, the experiences of job seekers accessing the PES, their perceptions as to whether or not their specific needs had been met, and how they felt about their employability as a result. Practitioners were asked about their experiences of implementing the new policy, how it differed from previous approaches, and how they perceived its effectiveness. Similar topics were explored with service managers, other stakeholders and policy makers.

4.2.2.2 Observations at relevant seminars

During the period 2014-2015, the researcher attended five key LMP seminars which were organised by a range of actors within the PES sphere. For example, the Geary Institute at University College Dublin, facilitated two seminars which focused on the challenges and opportunities for social protection policy (September 2014) and wellbeing and economic conditions respectively (November 2015). Staff from Maynooth University Department of Sociology organised two seminars, the first focused on Irish activation policy and practice (September 2014) whilst another focused on rethinking the Irish welfare state (January 2015). Lastly, the researcher participated in a focus group facilitated by the *Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed*, which focused on the needs of the unemployed, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (September 2014). The aim of these observations was to gain a broader understanding of how the policy was perceived at a wider stakeholder level (i.e. practice, policy, academic and political levels). The seminars also provided insights into the challenges and issues raised by the various stakeholder groups whilst

also enhancing the researcher's understanding of the wider impact of the policy implementation with regard to, for example, education, training, housing, disability, tax, and the various social protection payments. Field notes were taken throughout these seminars in order to capture key points of interest as well as the mood of the wider stakeholder population.

4.2.2.3 Review of relevant LMP documents

Key labour market policy-related documents ($n = 10$) were also reviewed in order to inform the analysis of the current PTWP and its implementation. This included documents published during the period of the study (i.e. 2013 to 2015) as well as some earlier, but equally relevant, publications. The review included, amongst others: PTW (2012, 2013, 2015); the National Recovery Plan (2011-2014); the Interim Report of the Labour Market Council (2014); the SOLAS Further Education and Training Strategy (2014-2019); Ireland, Towards an Integrated Public Service (OECD, 2008); and Activation Policies Ireland (OECD, 2009). The aim of this part of the study was to provide contextual background to the research and to deepen the researcher's understanding of the PTW policy design and its overall aims. For example, by the end of 2015, three editions (2012, 2013, and 2015) of the PTW policy had been published and, whilst its overall goal of achieving a more engaged client journey into employment remained the same, each version built upon the previous version(s) and slight variations in the priorities were in evidence. These policy adaptations created a continuously changing PES environment which was difficult to monitor at times due to its changing procedures, systems, programmes, and target groups. These documents provided the researcher with an ongoing enhanced understanding and appreciation of the government policy with regard to the unemployed and a critical appraisal of the policy from a wider perspective (e.g. Labour Market Council Interim Review, 2014; OECD, 2009).

4.2.3 Procedure

Over a six-month period in 2015, participants were contacted and invited to participate as outlined above. A schedule of interviews was developed based on participants' availability and accessibility of an interview room, if required, within the BJC.

One-to-one interviews lasted approximately 20-30 minutes with job seeker participants and 30-90 minutes with other participants. Interviews were recorded (with informed consent) using an Alon Dictaphone Audio Recorder Application for iPhone. Recordings were uploaded immediately post interview to a secure Dropbox file and downloaded to an encrypted laptop. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Once transcribed, the audio files were saved to an encrypted USB device and stored in a locked filing cabinet. The transcribed anonymised interviews were imported into MAXQDA software for analysis. Detailed notes and memos were recorded by the researcher during and after each interview. These notes were also transcribed following the interview.

Participants were given assurances of confidentiality prior to the interviews and of the option to withdraw at any time up to data analysis. At the outset, participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the background, the rationale, and the objectives of the study (see Appendix 2). Participants were required to provide their written informed consent before taking part in the study (see Appendix 3). In addition, both documents were explained verbally to ensure they were properly understood by participants. In cases where poor literacy was disclosed ($n = 3$), verbal consent was sought.

As previously mentioned, a number of participant observations were conducted at policy relevant seminars with the aim of understanding the policy domain and current

thinking across a range of stakeholder organisations. A ‘moderate’ ‘peripheral’ (Spradley, 1980), participation role (Adler & Adler, 1994) allowed the researcher to be involved in both the seminars and discussions, whilst also maintaining a distance in order to remain objective. As recommended by Pretzlik (1994), detailed unstructured field notes relating to, for example, the tone of the seminar and issues regarding the design and implementation of PTWP, as well as comments on effectiveness and other interesting points made by participants, were recorded by the researcher and included in the analysis.

4.2.4 Analysis

All data (i.e. from the transcribed interviews, five observations and key policy documents) were analysed using a constructivist ground theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) in order to categorise key themes by stakeholder group and to identify the recurrence of themes across stakeholder groups. Constructivist grounded theory was chosen as a method due to its inductive and data driven nature and its use of a bottom up approach, which results in categories linked strongly to the data. Grounded theory itself focuses on social processes, asking about what happens and how people interact (Sbaraini, Carter, Evans & Blinkhorn, 2011). Constructivist grounded theory accepts the researcher’s role in the social world as central to the study, and therefore, any analysis is a construction of that reality (Chamaz, 2014). This acknowledgement of the subjectivity of the researcher’s role in the construction and interpretation of the data, was important in this study both in terms of the researcher’s experience and the continuously changing nature of the labour market policy environment.

The interview data were initially labelled using an open coding method which helped to break down the data into concepts (Barclay, Everitt, Rogan, Schmied, & Wyllie, 1997). Charmaz refers to coding as ‘a pivotal link’ between collecting data and

developing a theory (2014, p113). This initial coding was achieved by using line-to-line coding, where segments of the data were categorised with a short name which summarised the meaning of that piece of data. Categories then started to emerge, based on their prevalence in the dataset, or whether they captured something important in relation to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These were compared to each other before returning to the data using the constant comparative method which is fundamental to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Focused coding, a more conceptual type of coding, was then used to establish more analytic codes. These include, for example, segments of data such as 'Because I don't want to be unemployed, I don't want to be a statistic, I really don't but there is nothing I can do about it unfortunately' and 'None of us asked to be on the dole' were initially coded as 'experience of unemployment'. By comparing codes and data, a wider category of 'lack of control' was identified, and by comparing it with other categories such as 'a sense of waiting' and the 'lack of action', an overarching category of 'Control' emerged. This category captured the feelings of helplessness and lack of agency expressed by job seekers as they entered the public employment services.

In addition, memos which were written throughout the data collection, reflected the researcher's impressions and thoughts after each interview. These were also used to contextualise the interviews and enrich the analysis as they provided reminders for the researcher of specific incidents such as the requirement to read the information sheet for interviewees due to their weak literacy, or pausing the interview when so required.

The emergent themes and categories illustrated the perception of the PTWP from a range of perspectives. A provisional model/graphic of the implementation of PTWP was also outlined so that relationships between the various categories could be further analysed. This was supplemented with data observed at two relevant seminars and with key policy documents as a form of theoretical sampling as it seemed that

categories emerging from the policy data were quite different from those emerging from the other stakeholder categories. An additional level of analysis was conducted to investigate if this additional data developed the categories further.

4.3 Study Two

This study entailed the design and conduct of an RCT - called the EEPIC trial (Enhancing Employability through Positive Interventions for improving Career potential) – to assess the effectiveness of a newly developed positive psychological intervention when compared to ‘services as usual’ (SAU (PTWP-LESN)). A detailed Study Protocol for the EEPIC trial was submitted for publication during the trial design stage and has subsequently been accepted for publication in *Trials* subject to minor amendment (see Appendix 4). This trial was designed in accordance with the SPIRIT (Standard Protocol Items: Recommendations for Interventional Trials) Statement and CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) criteria (Boutron, Moher & Altman, 2008; Chan, Tetzlaff, Gøtzsche, Altman, Mann, Berlin, et al., 2013). The protocol describes the intervention and SAU, as well as all methodological details pertaining to the RCT including the study design, participants and setting, outcome measures, recruitment, allocation, blinding, data collection methods, and a statistical analysis plan. Thus, in order to avoid duplication, the reader is referred to pp.289 - 313 of Appendix 4 for all methodological information relevant to the RCT. However, a description of the intervention and SAU PTWP-LESN is provided below for ease of reference. In addition, some minor changes to the analysis were required, which deviate from those described in the protocol. These are outlined in a short document appended to the study protocol in Appendix 4.

4.3.1 Interventions: The EEPIC Intervention

The EEPIC intervention is a high support therapeutic guidance programme which focuses on the development of a career plan and strengthening the human, social and psychological capital required to implement this plan. The intervention consists of a four-stage process (see Figure 4.1), which typically lasts 8 to 12 weeks, and which aims to support the job seeker in developing the skills necessary for labour market access while building self-efficacy and esteem and improving psychological well-being:

Stage 1: The individual's needs (education, training, skills, personal situation, employment history, perceived employability competencies, work values, barriers to employment, well-being etc.) are assessed using the *Participant Profile Form* (see Appendix 5) adapted from the Ballymun Youth Guarantee (Ballymun Job Centre, 2013) and EMERGE (Ballymun Job Centre, 2010-2012) initiatives. Identification of specific needs and their severity is vital in understanding the barriers faced by the individual and the types of supports and actions required to enable them to move towards the labour market. The outcome of the individual needs assessment determines the extent to which guidance practitioners may need to support the individual to engage with appropriate services to address issues which pose barriers to progression (e.g. addiction, literacy). Interaction with other services and supports are documented by the practitioner in their case notes.

Stage 2: A tailored career guidance process is implemented to support the job seeker in identifying latent skills, abilities, aptitudes, preferred behaviour style in the workplace, and values. This process aims to build career clarity, career identity, and improve self-esteem and career efficacy. Vocationally-orientated career guidance tools and approaches (e.g. career interest inventories, general and specific aptitude assessments, person-centred vocational counselling) are used to reveal hidden strengths,

aptitudes and preferences, while limitations are also acknowledged and documented. This information is used to inform the development of a detailed career plan.

Stage 3: The job seeker and guidance practitioner work together to develop a career plan which includes a career objective or aspiration, a number of shorter term career goals which should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound) and potential barriers to progression. A timescale for this plan is also identified and a method to achieve it is discussed, particularly in relation to responsibilities and extent of contact required (e.g. weekly/fortnightly meetings with the guidance practitioner).

Stage 4: The career plan is implemented in a supportive and positive way. This involves the job seeker and the practitioner working together to accomplish the planned career goals, to maintain levels of motivation, to build resilience against setbacks and adapt and re-plan as required.

This intervention was implemented on a one-to-one basis with the guidance practitioner and the client working together to identify key strengths, career identity and learning needs. The successful implementation of a career plan relied heavily on the client-practitioner relationship and commitment to the plan. This intervention was, therefore, highly dependent on the skills and approach of the practitioner involved in delivering the service. It also relied on the continuum of support offered so that the client was supported throughout their journey toward, and into, the labour market. This involved building networks with those who could offer support, such as mentors within the education and training sector and within the workplace.

4.3.2 Interventions: Control group – ‘service as usual’

Control group participants received the ‘service as usual’ (SAU (PTWP-LESN) as provided nationally by the DSP’s Intreo service, the Irish state public employment

service. This service was also delivered within the NGO and consisted of a number of steps:

Step 1: Once the individual has attended a GIS, a first appointment is made, the timing of which is determined by the individual's score on a statistical profiling model, 'PEX', which can be classified as 'low', 'medium' or 'high'. The 'Probability of Exit' or 'PEX' profile, introduced in October 2012, is based on a number of factors including: history of long-term unemployment; age; number of children; level of education; literacy/numeracy issues; urban living; transport availability; levels of labour market engagement; spousal earnings; and geographic location. All of these can affect a person's probability of remaining unemployed for twelve months or more and therefore becoming classified as 'long-term unemployed' (O'Connell, McGuinness & Kelly, 2013). Clients, who have a low probability of exiting the live register within the coming 12 months, receive more frequent interaction with the employment services than those classified as having a high probability of leaving the live register and accessing the labour market.

- 'High PEX' clients are invited to attend a meeting with a case officer six months after attendance at the GIS.
- 'Medium PEX' clients attend within two weeks.
- 'Low PEX' clients attend immediately.

At this first appointment, the client and practitioner agree a number of steps or goals which the client commits to undertake as part of a *Personal Progression Plan* (PPP). This plan is signed and becomes the client's responsibility to fulfil. Within the current study, case officers are also required to use the *Cantril's Ladder* scale at the first appointment to assess the client's perceived progress towards the labour market.

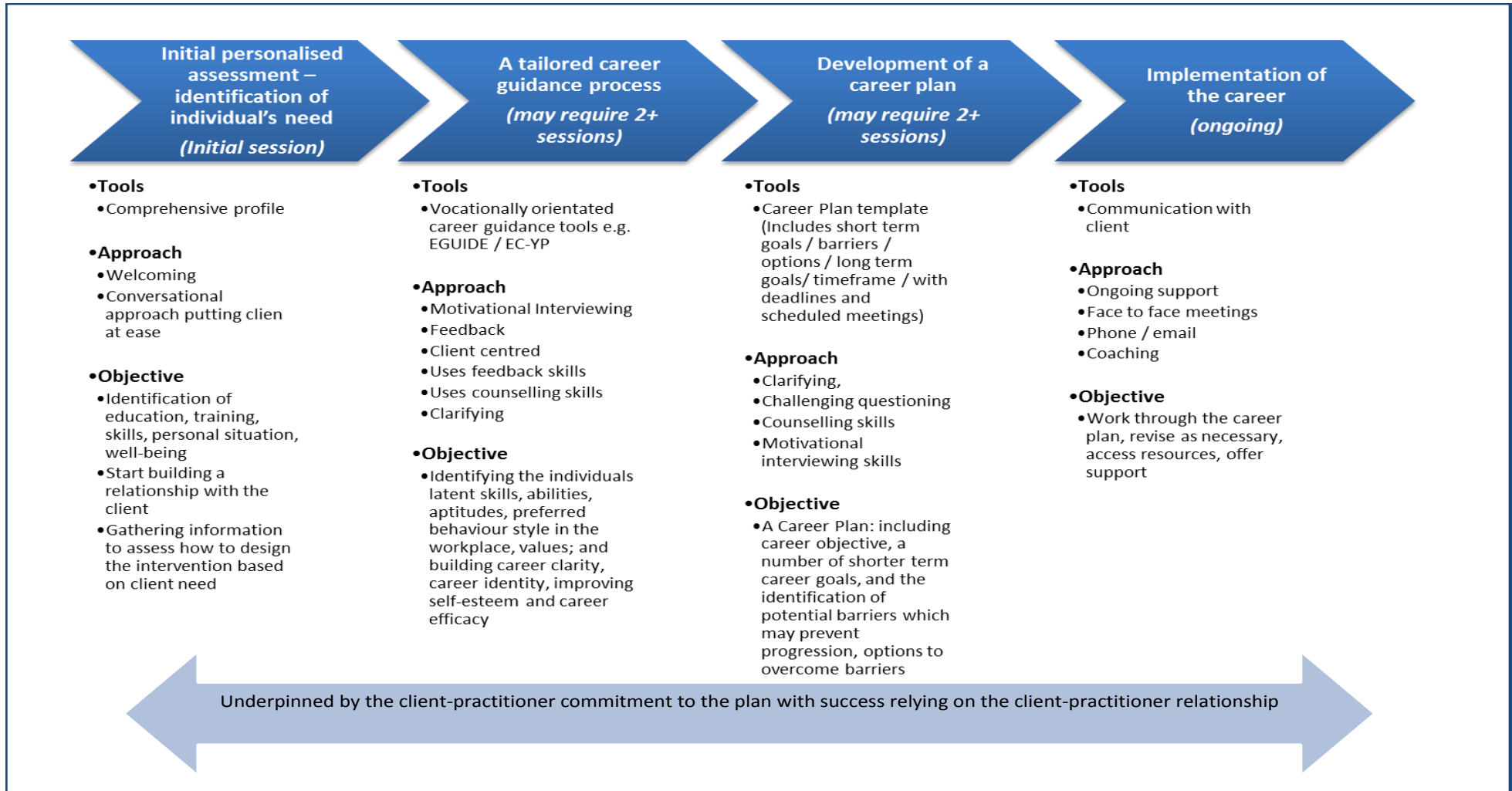


Figure 4.1 Four Stage EEPIIC Intervention Process

Step 2: Case officers decide on and conduct systematic follow ups (e.g. phone call, email, text) after the first meeting in order to ‘check in’ with the client and to see how they are progressing. The level of contact is normally agreed in the PPP and a follow-up category is set in the DSP’s IT database (called BOMI) which calculates when the client is due for systematic follow-up.

Step 3: The case officers are required to conduct *Activation Review Meetings* (ARM) by the DSP which can include a phone call or a face-to-face meeting to review progress of the tasks identified and agreed in the PPP. This is essentially a monitoring meeting and the timing of these meetings is dependent on the client’s initial PEX score:

- ‘High PEX’ clients receive an ARM meeting at six-months and every 3 months thereafter
- ‘Medium PEX’ clients receive an ARM meeting every 3 months
- ‘Low PEX’ clients receive an ARM meeting every 2 months
- Under 25s (‘High, Med and Low’ PEX) receive monthly ARM meetings

Within the current study, case officers were also required to use *Cantril’s Ladder* at the ARM meeting to assess perceived progress towards the labour market.

4.4 Study Three

This final study involved a small scale process evaluation nested within the RCT and designed to provide insights into the implementation and experiences/views of the intervention and the SAU as delivered in a Local Employment Service (SAU PTWP-LESN). LMPs tend to be complex programmes in that participants experience a range of barriers to employment upon entry to the programme, whilst the methods used to improve employability are difficult to standardise, and programmes often operate alongside other policies (e.g. education) (Bredgaard, 2015). Therefore, Study Three was important in gaining a richer understanding of how and why the intervention worked or did not work, and in looking inside the ‘black box’ (Saunders, Evans & Joshi, 2005) at

the role of a number of potentially influential context level factors (e.g. staff morale and competence, programme resources, the support of other local service providers (Hawe, Shiell, Riley & Gold, 2004)).

4.4.1 Participants and settings

A sub-sample of intervention participants and practitioners who were delivering the intervention and ‘service as usual’, as well as other key informants ($n = 16$) were invited to participate in one-to-one interviews and focus groups. All interviews and focus groups were held in the BJC due to its suitability and accessibility for all participants. Each group is described in more detail below.

4.4.1.1 Intervention Participants

A total of six intervention participations comprising two males and four females (aged 18-55 years), were invited to take part in a one-to-one interview six months after completing the intervention (T2) (in late 2016). A maximal variation strategy was used whereby participants were selected on the basis of key demographic variables (e.g. age, gender, engagement with the intervention service, progress towards employability) with the intention of capturing a range of experiences from a variety of perspectives; for example, the sample included a long-term unemployed older male, a young job seeker, and a lone (female) parent. None of the participants had contributed to the interviews in Study One, but all had participated in Study Two as part of the intervention group. In all cases participants were still in contact with their guidance practitioner, although some ($n = 2$) had progressed to education, Community Employment (CE) ($n = 1$), and job seeking ($n = 3$). All interviews took place in the BJC and were scheduled to accommodate the participants, most of whom, as mentioned above, had progressed onto further education and training or an activation intervention (e.g. CE).

4.4.1.2 Practitioners

During late 2016, seven practitioners (six female, one male) participated in the (post-intervention) focus groups, which included one focus group for those delivering the intervention ($n = 3$) and another for those involved in providing the ‘service as usual’ ($n = 4$). A (female) team leader responsible for supporting the practitioners in their daily work with job seekers also participated in both focus groups. All were experienced guidance practitioners with a minimum of five years’ experience each, with all but one having over ten years’ experience in guiding job seekers. Practitioners were typically in their forties ($M = 45$) and from a range of educational backgrounds (e.g. psychology, career guidance, education and training, counselling) with a minimum qualification of the Certificate in Adult Guidance (offered by Maynooth University). Those delivering the intervention had been trained in a variety of tools in-house¹³ such as ‘EGUIDE’, ‘ECYP’, ‘Naviguide’, and ‘Join-in-a Job’, all of which were developed to support disadvantaged job seekers in their progression to the labour market. All practitioners worked in the BJC, and the focus groups took place in their work setting.

4.4.1.3 Key informants

A small group of key informants (one male and two females) was also invited to participate in a focus group to discuss the current labour market policy at the time of completion of both Studies One and Two (early 2017). All were heavily involved in research on labour market policy implementation and in facilitating focus groups on policy practice gaps, as well as overseeing the daily delivery of services.

¹³ The NGO, in association with similar organisations across Europe, has developed a number of tools, approaches, and assessments, which can be used as part of a career guidance and employment support process. Training in the use of these tools is delivered in-house by staff involved in their development.

4.4.2 Measures

A number of interview schedules and topic guides were designed for use in the interviews and focus groups respectively which were conducted with the various stakeholder groups described above (see Appendices 6 and 7). This material was supplemented with observations at two seminars and a review of relevant policy documents. These are described further below.

An interview schedule was designed to elicit participants' views and experiences of the intervention (see Appendix 6) and how it had worked for them during the previous six-month period, with a particular emphasis on the process of change, perceived increased employability, and their relationship with the practitioner. The guide sought to elicit rich detail on participants' experiences of the intervention and its implementation. The semi-structured design allowed the researcher to ask open-ended questions and probe the participants in order to obtain more information and clarifications. This schedule was developed on the basis of a comprehensive literature review, and the researcher's own experience of working in an applied setting.

Two focus group topic guides (see Appendix 7) were developed to assess practitioners' views and experiences of the intervention and SAU, and their effectiveness for job seekers. This technique was chosen as it enables interaction both between participants and with the researcher, which form part of the method itself (Kitzinger, 1995). Participants are thus encouraged to talk to one another and comment on each other's points of view, thereby allowing the researcher to tap into interpersonal communication and identify shared and common knowledge (Kitzinger, 1994). These group interviews generated new ideas and questions, allowing the researcher to identify needs, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and consensus and discrepancies in opinion.

4.4.3 Other approaches

4.4.3.1 Observations at relevant seminars

In late 2016 and early 2017, the researcher attended two key LMP seminars organised by: (1) Pobal¹⁴ (entitled ‘Creating an Inclusive Labour Market’ (November 2016); and (2) the DSP and the Geary Institute¹⁵ at University College Dublin (entitled ‘Evaluation of Labour Market Policy’) (February 2017). The purpose of these observations was to understand recent changes and advancements in the PTWP, and to gain an insight into how these changes were being perceived at practice, policy, academic and political levels. The seminars were attended by a broad range of stakeholders and differed in their content and tone, thereby providing the researcher with a more holistic view of the general situation with regard to LMP and its implementation at this juncture. Field notes were taken throughout these seminars documenting the narrative of Irish LMP as described from a policy perspective, the mood and tone of the seminars, attendees’ comments and issues, and key points of interest.

4.4.3.2 Review of relevant policy documents

A review of recently published (2016-2017) LMP related documents was also undertaken to supplement the findings from the focus groups and seminars to provide

¹⁴ Pobal, is a not for profit company established by the Irish government to support social and economic development. It is governed by a board of management appointed by the Minister of the Department of Housing, Planning Environment and Local Government, and manages a range of funding programmes including SICAP and DSP funded community services programmes. In 2015, Pobal dispersed €345.1m through 4269 contracts with beneficiary groups (Murphy et al., forthcoming).

¹⁵ The University College Dublin based Geary Institute (founded in 1999) is a centre of excellence for policy-relevant, theoretically-informed, empirically-grounded research. It supports research in empirical social and behavioural sciences and microeconomics. <http://www.ucd.ie/geary/>

the researcher with the most recent analyses of the PTWP and its implementation, as well as the broader context within which it has been operating. These documents included: (a) the transcript of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection's debate on Labour Activation (Sweeney, 9th February, 2017); (b) a Study on the integrated delivery of social services aimed at the activation of minimum income recipients in the labour market - Country Study Ireland (Murphy et al., forthcoming); (c) a summary of the National Economic Dialogue – Supporting Labour Market Participation (June 2017); and (d) three documents evaluating aspects of the PES as of January 2017. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, the PTWP has undergone three adaptations in recent years (2013, 2015, 2016-2020) since the original PTW was implemented in 2012, and the labour market environment for job seekers has also improved significantly during this same period, with the rate of unemployment falling from 15.1% in 2012 to 6.4% in 2017 (CSO, Quarter 2).

4.4.4 Procedure

4.4.4.1 Intervention participant Interviews

The one-to-one interviews with participants had a mean duration of approximately 30 minutes. As in Study One, interviews were recorded using the Alon Dictaphone Audio Recorder Application for iPhone, uploaded immediately post interview to a secure Dropbox file and downloaded to an encrypted laptop. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and once transcribed, the audio files were saved to an encrypted USB device and stored in a locked filing cabinet. Transcribed anonymised interviews were imported into MAXQDA for analysis. Detailed notes and memos were recorded by the researcher during and after each interview. These notes were also transcribed post interview.

Participants were assured of the confidentiality of the interviews, and of the option to withdraw at any time up to data analysis in line with the information sheet provided (see Appendix 2). Written informed consent was sought prior to each interview and all interviewees were given a €20 shopping voucher as a small ‘thank you’ for their participation, although they were unaware of this until after the interview had been completed.

4.4.4.2 Practitioner focus groups

Each focus group lasted approximately two hours (with a break about halfway through). As above, they were recorded using the Alon Dictaphone Audio Recorder Application for iPhone and were uploaded immediately post-focus group to a secure Dropbox file, after which they were downloaded to the researcher’s encrypted laptop. Focus groups were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and using the same procedure as employed with the interviews in Study One, the audio files were saved to an encrypted USB device and stored in a locked filing cabinet. Focus group data were analysed using MAXQDA software. The researcher’s supplementary notes and memos were also included in the analysis.

Once again, participants were assured of the confidentiality of the focus groups, and of the option to withdraw at any time up to data analysis in line with the information sheet provided. Written informed consent was sought prior to the start of each focus group.

4.4.4.3 Focus group with other key informants

The third focus group with other key informants was undertaken as a type of ‘quality control measure’ to check that the policy and its implementation had not changed over the course of the study. The session was not audio recorded, in accordance

with the specific wish of one participant, but notes were taken by the researcher and their accuracy checked with participants at the end of the session.

4.4.5 Analysis

All of the data from the six interviews, three focus groups, two observations, and the reviewed documents were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify key themes which could illuminate the elements of the intervention that worked well, or that did not work well. The analysis sought to uncover aspects of the intervention that worked well (or which did not work well), clarify participants' perceptions of the change that occurred and delve into the causal mechanisms enabling change as part of the 'mini' process evaluation.

Thematic analysis offers a flexible non-theory bound approach which can be used to analyse data from a range of sources, and which aims to both reflect reality and 'unravel the surface of reality' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pg.9). This involves the identification of themes and subthemes which capture important information relevant to the research question, based on prevalence and quality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, this approach was chosen as it enabled the researcher to focus on particular features of the data that would help to provide a insights (insofar as possible) into how the intervention worked, in what way it worked (or did not work), for whom it worked (or did not work), and under which circumstances.

Thematic analysis also allows for the identification of themes or patterns in the data from an inductive or theoretical perspective. Inductive thematic analysis is data driven and uses a 'bottom-up' approach to identify themes. Conversely, theory driven or deductive analysis uses a 'top down' approach (Boyatzis, 1998) and tends to be more analyst-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, themes can be identified at either a semantic or latent level, whereby the former involves identifying themes at a surface

level without looking beyond this level of meaning, whilst the latter allows for the examination of the underlying assumptions and conceptualisations identified within the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The current study used a theoretical semantic thematic analysis to uncover themes relevant to the effectiveness of the intervention and the mechanisms underpinning it.

4.5 Ethical considerations

This research received ethical approval from the National University of Ireland Maynooth, Social Research Ethics Committee in June 2014 (Ref: SRESC-2014-028). The EEPIC RCT (Study Two) was registered by the ISRCTN registry (ISRCTN16801028) in February 2016. All three studies were conducted in line with the 'British Psychological Society Code of Good Practice for Psychological Testing' and the 'Psychological Society of Ireland Code of Ethics'. Written informed consent was obtained from participants involved in the study at the first meeting with the researcher. Each participant was provided with an information sheet (see Appendix 2) outlining the background to the study, the rationale and the objectives. Participants also received a consent form (see Appendix 3) which they were asked to sign, and a copy was given to them to retain for their own records. The researcher also talked through both documents to ensure they were properly understood by the participants. Verbal consent was sought on a few occasions when issues regarding poor literacy arose. Participants were required to provide written informed consent before taking part in the study.

While Studies One and Three involved participation on one occasion, Study Two required repeated participation (i.e. at post-intervention and at six-month follow-up), and for that reason, continued consent was sought before the follow up study commenced. If the participant did not wish to continue, they were entitled to withdraw at any time. Completion of the withdrawal slip which formed part of the information

sheet was requested for the researcher's records. Data could be withdrawn up until the point of completion of data entry.

As this study was closely linked to the services provided by the DSP, participants may have had concerns that non-participation would have had a negative effect on their social welfare payment. The information sheet and the informed consent form clearly indicated that there was no conditionality related to participation (or not) in the study and that no penalties would apply for non-participation. Participants were also informed that they may, at any time, contact the researcher should they have any questions or concerns regarding their participation.

Participants were assured of confidentiality and all identifying information was removed from the data. Each participant was allocated a unique identifier at the point of consent and was informed of this in the consent form. A document (encrypted and password protected) containing the coding key was only accessible by the researcher and was located (separate to the data) on a removable storage device in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. Participants were also informed that all data would be held securely in a locked cabinet for 10 years after completion of the study, after which they will be destroyed by the researcher. All coded data were stored on the researcher's computer protected by encryption software (McAfee Endpoint Encryption), and backed up every week on a separate removable storage device (also encrypted) which was stored safely in the researcher's office.

Participants were also made aware that there may be instances where the researcher could not maintain confidentiality (e.g. where a participant's safety or wellbeing, or indeed the safety of others was at risk) and that a referral to the relevant services (e.g. mental health service) may be required. A case in point was the completion of the GHQ-12 (General Health Questionnaire) which could have caused

some minor distress. However, the researcher is an experienced administrator of this measure and other similar questionnaires, as well as having well developed test administration skills. If the client had a negative reaction to the administration of the questionnaires, a referral was made to an experienced Guidance officer (i.e. the client's case worker) in the DSP/NGO and the primary health care team. In addition, information on a range of support services was provided to the client (see Appendix 8). Questionnaires were administered in the NGO which has its own Health and Safety policy with procedures in place regarding the safety of clients and staff. These procedures were followed alongside the Department of Psychology's 'Guidance for safe working practice in psychological research'.

Other potential risks were addressed by ensuring that there was appropriate local information pertaining to support services available. Such services included counselling services, addiction services, Local Employment Centre services, and other community based services. The researcher's own training as a psychologist and experience of working with numerous disadvantaged clients, also ensured that each participant was treated with respect and that any signs of distress were appropriately identified and the participant referred immediately, if so required, to an appropriate service(s).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the epistemological, ontological, and methodological framework underpinning the three inter-related studies that form the programme of research reported here. Ethical considerations were also outlined. The next chapter presents the results from Study One.

CHAPTER FIVE

Results Study One

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results from Study One which sought primarily to explore stakeholders' perceptions of the effectiveness and implementation of the early stages of the new labour market policy in Ireland (PTWP). The findings generated from this study also provide important contextual information for the research.

As outlined in Chapter Four, a 2014/2015 series of one-to-one semi-structured interviews ($N=21$) was conducted with key stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, managers, staff, support organisations, job seekers) and supplemented by observations of relevant seminars on labour market policy, as well as a brief analysis of pertinent policy documents. Data were analysed using a grounded theory approach to identify key themes. The analysis was guided first by an understanding of the extent to which each stakeholder regarded the policy (i.e. useful or helpful) in terms of achieving outcomes at micro, meso, and macro levels. Second, the implementation of PTWP was explored by focusing on stakeholders' perceptions at a practice level.

The results are presented in two major sections. The first section presents the themes both anticipated and emergent. Stakeholder interviews are described, conceptualised and presented from an 'insider versus outsider' perspective. Insiders are those who work within, and who can directly influence or be influenced by the policy 'system' including policy makers, managers and practitioners. Outsider refers to those outside the system who use services or support individuals using those services,

including job seekers and other stakeholders. The second section of the chapter presents the overarching themes identified across the full range of interviews.

5.2 Insiders: Policy level stakeholders “Changing a culture and a mind-set”

This section presents the perceptions of policy level stakeholders, captured through interviews (October 2014) with two participants (one male, one female) and supplemented by observations from five key LMP seminars - as described in Chapter Four (section 4.2.2.2) - held in 2014 and 2015.

5.2.1 The Rhetoric of Policy Effectiveness

Perceptions of progress at policy level were observed in the LMP seminars - often led by senior civil servants and the Minister responsible for Social Protection. The rhetoric was one of “moving in the right direction”, with the focus on the design and implementation of a best practice model, characterised by a combined income support and activation programme, as well as its PEX profiling system, all of which were perceived to deliver services based on need. The Minister attributed much of the perceived success of the PTWP to the merging of the DSP with the historical PES services, FÁS and the Community Welfare Services. This reform was considered effective as it enabled the establishment of 44 Intreo offices nationwide. From the Minister’s perspective, based on feedback from Intreo staff and job seekers, the service was viewed more positively than its predecessor FÁS.

Senior civil servants attending the LMP seminars viewed the nationwide roll-out of activation programmes as successful. Core elements of the process of engaging job seekers had been established countrywide and included GIS, PEX profiling, and case management, all perceived to offer a more standardised approach.

Despite there being no evaluation, falls in the live register, and particularly in LTU and youth unemployment, were attributed to the PES reform process. The Minister

viewed the reformed PES approach as one of collaboration, underpinned by a social contract and individualised service in a one-stop-shop ‘Intreo’. Plans for the introduction of *JobPath*, a new intensive activation process, were also well underway. At departmental level, policy makers expressed satisfaction with the PTWP based on positive anecdotal feedback from staff and job seekers.

“Certainly the feedback I get from staff and from job seekers that I speak to, are mainly positive.”

Three key reforms specific to strands 1 and 2 of the PTWP were identified as effective at policy level; (1) Linking of payments and benefits to activation had enabled Intreo to work with clients “*to help them to help themselves*”; (2) The model of income supports and the type of incentives provided for job seekers to reduce reliance prevented any sense of clients settling on the income they receive; and, (3) Education and training sector changes complemented the PTWP reforms. Overall, the PTWP was described as an effective framework for reform:

“a very good framework document setting out reasonably achievable and precise actions for what needs to be done and when...it’s by no means perfect but I think it’s one of the few examples where we can actually say, there has been implementation of a lot of these actions”.

Policy makers and the LMC referred to the successful achievement of targets and milestones set within the Pathways 2013 50-point action plan:

“The targets were reasonably ambitious for the point in time that we were at.... a lot of the targets have been met.”

5.2.2 Positive aspects of Implementation

Interviewees identified areas of significant change as evidence of effectiveness, the most significant change being the establishment of Intreo and delivery of a continuous service to job seekers:

“... it was undoubtedly the Intreo. Pathways put the marker on the ground and said this is happening... it’s absolutely massive the amount of change that has happened both from a policy perspective and from an operational perspective”

It was noted that some of the simpler changes, for example, the GIS, had been the most positive. ALMPs such as *JobsPlus* and *JobBridge* were reported to be effective tools for caseworkers trying to secure employment for job seekers with the latter for example enabling employers to trial job seekers for a few months, without obligation to offer employment contracts. One-to-one meetings between practitioners and job seekers were considered most effective and senior policy makers recognised that resource constraints limited the frequency of these meetings:

“If we were to pull everybody who is unemployed back every month, there are 180,000 people roughly on the live register or more.... that is 180,000 interviews a month.”

Interviewees believed that some job seekers, especially those most distant from the labour market, required intensive one-to-one meetings, and services such the LESN and other voluntary organisations, were already offering this.

Implementation was understood as a task in itself that has an impact on effectiveness. One interviewee opined while there was nothing specifically challenging about the PTWP in terms of its implementation per se, there is a perception that Ireland had difficulty with implementation in general, often due to the political climate, vetoes, and indifference to reform. The timing of the PTWP, alongside the Troika presence

(Chapter Three), contributed to a more successful implementation than may have otherwise been achieved:

“...we have in Ireland, the famous implementation deficit disorder, it can be a challenge, to actually deliver on these things.”

“We had the IMF breathing down our necks, saying you got to do these things, the government was kind of scrambling around saying you know we gotta do something.”

5.2.3 Challenges to implementation

“It is not perfect by a long shot and that is the caveat”

A number of challenges to the implementation and effectiveness of the PTWP were identified. Firstly, the PTWP was designed specifically with job seekers in mind rather than the wider welfare working age population:

“the PTW strategy is only as good as it is, ... there are a lot of other groups who are not part of PTW... the activation needs of lone parents is a fine example, and people with disabilities.”

The conceptual and philosophical challenge in moving beyond the current cohort of the ‘working age’ job seeker, and the practicalities of achieving this in the context of a complex social welfare system, with numerous conditionalities, meant some challenging policy changes were not implemented:

“...in terms of the operational side of things, because even a small change means a significant rewrite of systems to do that, and then obviously you have the financial and political considerations as well.”

Secondly, there were concerns about whether there were sufficient supports for those experiencing genuine barriers to employment, including those with social and personal issues, who were not job ready. Without sufficient engagement, this group

were likely to experience re-employment on a short-term basis, with a subsequent return to the live register. This resource issue affected the Department's vision:

“The intensity is not happening because of resource constraints at the moment”

Despite the movement of staff into the Department from FÁS, the case management capacity was still considered too low to provide the type of service desired. It was expected that the introduction of *JobPath* would increase both the capacity and the effectiveness of the service for those who required more engagement.

Additional challenges included levels of staff productivity, as a more intense work model required case workers to shift the pace of engagement and see, for example, 35 clients per week rather than 20 or fewer:

“They got used to a pace of work, a methodology of work, and an approach to things in the good years which isn't what works in the bad years”

Staff buy-in was also considered an implementation challenge, while infrastructures were in place in all offices (e.g. profiling, group engagements, IT changes, and guidelines), staff were slow to change:

“It is the enthusiasm with which it is followed is an issue. And getting staff to buy into that will take time. It is a demonstration effect”

Senior management felt once PTWP was up and running, their job was done. The follow through and “bedding down” lay in service delivery implementation and it was recognised that this was complex and challenging, with unanticipated obstacles which varied across the regions and elements of the service. Maintaining the change was a challenge in itself, and senior management stressed the role of regional

management and local reinforcement, but remained concerned that the full PTWP vision might not be achieved:

“the economy is recovering so we don’t have to keep our foot on the pedals quite so much and there is a danger that the momentum might be falling down if not lost”

5.2.4 Reform – “a hearts and minds job”

“I don’t underestimate the scale of the change...the Intreo reforms have been enormously complex, a huge burden on staff to be dealing with all these changes while at the same time having to deal with all the people coming in the door....”

A significant theme was the level of reform undertaken within the DSP. This reform was described as a “*hearts and minds job*” and moving “*the old oil tanker*”. Shifting the mind-set amongst staff was a key part of merging FÁS staff and CWOs into the various sections with the DSP, including the new one-stop-shop, Intreo. The traditional priority of paying social welfare claims had to integrate with getting people back to work. This process involved rebuilding a staff capability that had declined in previous years:

“It is easy to put the organisation in place, it is easy to write up processes, changing what is done takes time.”

Unlike private sector reform where all jobs are “*up for grabs*” general restrictions within the civil service rules restricted reassignment of job roles or redefinition of competencies in light of the competencies required. Staff could not be recruited based on their suitability for the role:

“...that would have made a big difference but you can't do that in the civil service.”

The reform process was considered under-resourced; it had taken place during a period of significant austerity in Ireland when a balance had to be struck within the Department, between spending on the development of a new PES and the payment of politically sensitive social welfare payments:

“The change process was difficult to do properly mainly due to the political situation and the need to spend money on the unemployed”

5.2.5 Evaluation – “the case of one”

Senior management appeared to base perceptions of effectiveness on anecdotal evidence. They agreed formative evaluations should have been conducted in parallel with the roll-out but blamed resource constraints for their absence:

“It’s a bit like putting the cart before the horse - ideally, we should be drafting the strategy after we have the evidence”

They expected PTWP to be evaluated using econometric evaluations focused on employment outcomes, albeit there was recognition of the need for qualitative research and customer feedback:

“..., we are not very good at a rigorous assessment of that concept of distance travelled, that human resource capacity...and I think we can get at that to some degree with the qualitative stuff, and if we marry that to the quantitative...”

Senior management feared there was insufficient data available for robust evaluation and that the collection of relevant data should be prioritised, for example, in relation to quality of jobs or educational qualifications. There were also concerns that the evidence would inform policy, opining that even when rigorous evaluations were conducted, policy decisions are often made based on very weak or anecdotal evidence:

“...as a person that’s interested in evidence based policy we have a bit too much of the epidemic of ‘a case study of one’ and unfortunately sometimes policy decisions are made on the case study of one”

5.3 Insiders: Managers of Services

This second section presents the insider views of Managers of services ($n = 3$) (two male, one female) who had been contracted to deliver the PTWP, all of whom had considerable experience (25+ years) working in the sector.

5.3.1 Policy effectiveness: From Passive to Active engagement

Overall, managers were positive about the PTWP as a policy, approved of the policy shift from passive to more active processes of job seeker engagement, and supported a policy positioned around ALMPs and proactive engagement with young people, older workers, the LTU, and job seekers. There was an understanding that long-term unemployment leads to demotivation and detachment, and addressing this barrier to employment requires effective policy and appropriate interventions and supports. While broadly positive about the PTWP, managers expressed concerns that the model could be moderated in terms of rules and regulations. They sceptically questioned the degree to which policy had been driven by financial constraints rather than a public policy based on ideology or a philosophy around citizens.

5.3.2 Well-informed Reform

Managers understood the significant scale of the challenging public reform programme, but felt a lack of communication and integrated joined-up thinking, negatively impacted the policy. Overall effectiveness required more strategic cross departmental policy formulation.

They questioned the level of consultation in the reform process, arguing that there was a missed opportunity to utilise the extensive experience of those on the ground such as LESN. Prior to the merger of FÁS, Community Welfare and the DSP,

there was a culture of negotiation and discussion when agreeing the work of contracted services with LESN but this was no longer the case:

“[They] just saw it as a contracted service that they could tell it what to do, even though they had no sense of what to do, and there was no expertise or understanding of it”.

The Department culture appeared to focus on increasing productivity and numbers processed, rather than on the quality of support provided. In contrast to FÁS, many of the DSP decision makers had no background in labour market activities.

“They become national programmes very quickly without any road testing..... this happens without listening to people who have been doing it on the ground for many years.”

LESN managers contrasted the difference between negotiating with experienced FÁS staff, many of whom had service delivery experience, and DSP staff who had little such experience.

Managers also identified an absence of knowledge and skills at the Intreo level, where staff make decisions about further education and employment options, without expertise or training. In one example job seekers were prevented from taking a FETAC (QQI) course:

“... clients were stopped doing back to education with FETAC because they were told, ‘you already have a FETAC level 5’....but, actually they don't, they have a module in FETAC level 5 in First Aid that they did when they were on CE.”

Rather than valuing very experienced services on the ground that could be utilised more, an ‘anyone can do it’ mentality existed. While the PTWP focused on frequency of engagement with services, managers believed it was the nature rather than the frequency of services that was more important. They supported an “a la carte menu” of services for job seekers, led by case officers and guidance personnel, with individualised services to support job seekers in pursuing their career plans.

Managers - based on their experience of working in communities characterised by multiple, intergenerational unemployment - argued their preferred approach was not a “soft option” but a quality service with more meaningful outcomes than quick-fix poor quality job placement metrics. While they recognised that resource constraints and high levels of unemployment restricted government options over the 2011 – 2014 period, alternative approaches could now be considered.

They unanimously agreed that activation worked for those willing to participate and engage, but recognised that others are less willing or able and that a ‘one size fits all’ approach was not effective for everyone. They felt powerless and conveyed a sense of disconnect between their organisational goals and wider often contradictory policy goals.

5.3.3 Implementation: “The principle I agree with, the roll-out I disagree with”

The reform tested manager’s positive beliefs about what their organisations offer the unemployed, but they remain convinced that the PES contributes towards a healthy society and that people are better off in work, and when they are involved in something meaningful. However, rather than an “any job will do” approach, a well-functioning labour market should be characterised by:

“...legislation that protects people's rights at work, that there is a minimum wage, where the standard of employment is fair and reasonable, not slave labour”.

Managers were concerned that clients were being forced to participate in a process without any meaningful outcomes. They believed many of the changes in, for example, numbers of clients, referral processes, the allocation of time, and the system itself, were based on “political priorities” rather than need:

“Is the principal of activation that every client gets a meeting, or is it that every client is helped on a pathway to a defined outcome?”

5.3.4 Redefining the PES

All three managers expressed concern about the policy choice to relocate the PES into a department dominated by its function of control of public money. This leads to a narrow view of the PES as linked to controlling payments and reducing live register costs:

“Has a public employment service only got to do with payments and people who are in receipt of payment and controlling and regulating that payment, or is it broader... “You could argue it is not a public employment service at all..... it’s an add-on”

It was further argued that an effective PES should be available to anyone interested in securing or changing employment, or obtaining information about employment related issues:

“People should be able to walk in, anyone, and access the service, even if you are in a job you should be able to walk in and look for another job. The State should provide that service for its citizens”

The PTWP is also critiqued for its sole focus on the live register, albeit it was recognised that there is some intent to expand its reach to lone parents and people with a disability. Despite the significant redesign of the PES public offices - now renamed Intreo - the three managers expressed concern that the offices failed to create a space where job seekers could think through career plans in a meaningful or trusting way. The presence of security and the ‘hatch style’ service desks did not facilitate this type of service delivery. Intreo is perceived as the social welfare office where the unemployed get “the dole” and in that sense, nothing had really changed. While the new one-to-one meetings with an activation team member were welcomed, the loss of drop-in services (as was the case in the former FÁS offices) was noted.

Managers felt the state should be more accountable and in control of the PES ensuring they provide quality employment services. They expressed concern about

proposed privatisation of services which, they believed, government anticipated would be more efficient and better value for money than the third sector.

5.3.5 Evaluation- valuing what matters

Managers explained there were no systematic ways of following up on clients' progress, or indeed evaluating the service overall, and identified that an evaluation programme was required to establish the effectiveness of various aspects of the PTWP and clarify elements of the policy that were effective:

“There must be elements that are contributing to that but which elements they are it is just difficult to say”

Rather than perceiving success as numbers through the 'system', managers argued that evaluation criteria should focus on the ability of the PES to respond in a more dynamic way around profiling, understanding the needs of all job seekers, or having the ability to invest resources in supporting people over time.

5.4 Insiders: Practitioners

Six practitioners (all female) took part in one-to-one interviews, three of whom were working with the Youth Guarantee pilot (YGS), and all of whom were delivering general PTWP services in the LESN. At the time of interview, practitioners, while insiders, had little input into the reforms, but had experienced significant change, particularly in terms of increased caseloads.

5.4.1 A 'one size fits all' approach

All practitioners emphasised that an effective service should be based on meeting client need. This involved reviewing various aspects of the client's life, including education, qualifications, work experience, mental and physical health, and deciding on a suitable approach relevant to, and useful for, that specific job seeker:

“I think even with not knowing what they want to do, not knowing all their lives what they want to do, career confusion or career identity, you can help them figure that out through a series of discussions”

They expressed concern that PTWP was system driven, all job seekers receive the same service, with the sole objective of job placement. They referred to this as a ‘one size fits all’ approach where eligibility based on unemployment payment type, unemployment duration, age or address, created barriers to accessing appropriate needs-based supports and interventions. For example, YGS participants were all expected to progress at the same pace and within the same (four-month) timeframe:

“Some people are more ready than others and I don't think it is a case of one size fits all but that is what is happening.... it stops us from carrying out a proper guidance process because you are trying to boot them out the door, get out, get out, four months!”

Some clients were not eligible for particular programmes due to payment type, or unemployment duration, despite the suitability of the programme to their specific employability needs. For instance, YGS job seekers had to be aged 18-24 years and in receipt of a Job Seekers payment:

“In the youth guarantee we are not allowed have single mums or single dads”

“...there is no movement with social welfare and they could be really suitable to that position, but they [social welfare] won't budge.”

Practitioners typically reported assessing client’s labour market readiness at the first meeting. Some barriers, real or perceived, could be overcome with minimal support (e.g. access to financial support for travel, improved understanding of job options), some were complex (e.g. extreme low self-esteem, poor mental health, addiction) and required greater levels of intervention, presenting the practitioners with more challenges:

“...sometimes they are not ready to be offered [education training, employment] especially with mental health, when you are dealing with anybody with mental health issues, they are not in the right place to even talk about moving on and where they are going to go. They can't see past next week, never mind ten years from now ...”

Practitioners working with younger clients expressed concern about their lack of commitment often due to fear of failure and influence from negative role models. Without understanding unemployment this could be misinterpreted as laziness or a lack of motivation, neither of which is accommodated easily within the system. All interviewees identified difficulties which while not considered obstacles to employment (e.g. lifestyle, cannabis use, gang membership) do necessitate longer, more intensive types of interventions.

5.4.2 Implementing the system

During the initial roll out of the PTWP, practitioners reported feeling overwhelmed by large numbers of clients and limited time to work with them. Client outcomes were left to chance. The system regarded the unemployed as homogeneous, and likewise, practitioners were considered a uniform group, with their professional judgement viewed as secondary to ‘system’ rules:

“If I was working in the DSP I reckon I'd be grand but that is not why I wanted to be a guidance officer, I wanted to help and guide someone because I think you are there to gently ease someone but not push, and that is what is happening.”

Overall, practitioners recommended greater flexibility and time to interact with clients whilst also emphasising the need to measure effectiveness relative to the client’s starting point:

“Like some of the clients they are drug using, they don't move on very quickly, getting them up to see you to see you on time is a huge achievement in itself but you can't measure that, there is no measuring that achievement for that particular client”

Despite these challenges, activation was considered positive as it encouraged job seekers to engage, thereby providing an important opportunity to develop a relationship. Practitioners stressed that a little pressure was much better than the pre-PTWP system where nothing happened and clients were quite happy to ‘just plod along’.

That said, practitioners conveyed as problematic, how the work itself had become highly administrative rather than person centred, absorbing the time needed to undertake the more important tasks:

“At the start it was very, very hard, it really was. Trying to get used to it and get your head around the admin was the biggest part and remembering to do it all the time because the clients would be penalised if we don't.”

They felt pressure from within the system to fit clients into programmes that were often inappropriate to meeting client needs, and led to ‘a revolving door’ for the LTU. The increased pace of work, in turn, impacted negatively on service quality while increases in duration of time between appointments also negatively influenced service effectiveness:

“If you are seeing clients back to back you don't have time to do the paperwork, to update the spreadsheet, that is left until 5:00pm and you want to go home then but you can't.”

Overall practitioners expressed unease and disappointment that they had become administrators, monitoring and updating clients’ job seeking behaviour. However, they believed that, more time and flexibility would enable more appropriate and effective support:

“When you have the time to invest in people you really get down to what their needs are, the things that they maybe struggle with all their lives, figure out what they want to do. It may be the first time in their lives they are getting someone helping them figure that out.”

5.4.3 Trust and control

Having time to develop the client-practitioner relationship, and build trust and rapport, was identified as critical to understanding the person and identifying real and perceived barriers to progression. An understanding of the job seeker enabled practitioners match the client with appropriate vacancies or training courses. In contrast, if the client is not known to the practitioner, it is more difficult to meet their needs:

“If it is somebody you have only met once or twice and that gap is there, something might come in that might have suited them and they are just not in your in your psyche ... that is where you fall down.”

Clients’ trust in the social welfare system was perceived as low, and practitioners had to differentiate their service from social welfare in order to develop a trusting relationship. The conditional nature of the PTWP was identified as an important barrier in this regard:

“I don't like feeling that we are part of the social welfare because I feel like the clients see us as the enemy kind of thing, I don't think they are being totally honest when they are telling me things. I think they are scared a lot of the time and that can be hard to try and break that barrier...a lot of them are over here because they are being threatened by the DSP”

Controls impacted upon the client-practitioner relationship as well as on practitioners own work. For some, the system was a source of stress, as administrative errors (e.g. not ticking a box, or updating the database) impacted negatively, as the client could be penalised as a result of practitioner error:

“It is horrible, it is very hard because you are trying to do a job and you are trying to encourage the client, guide the client but you have this at the back of it it is always at the back of your mind, even if you make a mistake and you forget to put something on the social welfare system the client can be affectedyou don't want them being penalised for something you didn't do.”

Similar to activation, the control imposed on job seekers was viewed as both positive and negative. For example, one interviewee spoke about a young client and how the ‘control’ aspect of the system had been an important factor in compelling him to attend and engage:

“...it pushed him in a direction where he realised this could open doors, all this world is out here and I can do all this.... he wouldn't have come in, only with the pressure from Social Protection.”

At the same time, others expressed concern that control could impact clients' decision making behaviour, as the threat imposed forces them to do something, indeed anything, to ensure maintenance of their payment. On a related point, practitioners sometimes felt they were pushing clients into something they may not have wished for and felt under pressure to ensure job seekers engaged with the service. This negatively affected their own feelings about their role. For example one practitioner reported:

“I feel like I am bullying them into something”.

5.5 Outsiders: Other Stakeholders

This section reports the views captured through one-to-one semi structured interviews with four other stakeholders (three female and one male) who were recruited from organisations (e.g. education providers, employment support organisations) that worked closely with, but did not directly provide, the PES at a national level. Four key themes were identified, each of which is described below.

5.5.1 An Ethos of Control

The ethos of control underpinning the PTWP was considered an important determinant of effectiveness and implementation. Stakeholders identified an ethos underpinned by an assumption that job seekers predominately did not want to work.

Thus, engagement started from a position of distrust with the primary cause of unemployment viewed as lying within the individual:

“And I think the scary bit for me is the underlying assumption that the fundamental problem is the person, who is the client, and therefore we have to harangue, bully, harass, pressure them to be motivated to do something....and test them consistently to see if they are prepared to do something”

One stakeholder, explained that if you start from a different understanding of the person - one where nobody wants to be unemployed or feel socially excluded - then implementation of the policy would be completely different, leading to greater feelings of support from the state:

“the person would feel that the State is trying to be supportive, is trying to be helpful, is trying to actually get you back [to work]. Rather than saying there is something wrong with you because you can't get a job in a climate where there are 400,000 unemployed and there are no jobs.”

The Department was viewed by one stakeholder as playing a ‘control and fraud’ game in the public arena, which was counterproductive to the roll-out the PTWP. One participant explained how values underpinning the system reflect in service delivery, with conflict between the ethos of the government department leading out the policy, and the goals of the policy itself:

“One of the difficulties is that the primary driver is the Department of Social Protection which still thinks of itself as primarily an income department and that therefore then it needs to have good controls and make sure that the income is being spent as it ought to be spent. There seems to be a lack of understanding that they are engaging with people, to help people get back to work.”

These participants believed that the Department saw itself as dealing with income (to the individual, in terms of training, or subsidies to an employer), rather than actually matching the person to the job. Thus activation was approached from a control perspective rather than from engagement:

“So creating a service that both unemployed people and employers see as being a local employment service, a national employment service, a public employment service they can use. That entire way of thinking is missing.”

The Department’s underlying culture was perceived to lack both social inclusion and equality values. One stakeholder remarked that only once, at the launch of the PTWP, had government referred to unemployed people as “our unemployed citizens”. Generally the rhetoric focused on where the government want people to go and how they would get them to go there, regardless of their various barriers.

5.5.2 Local Relationships

Local interagency relationships between services were viewed as critically affected by the PTWP. One interviewee from the Further Education and Training sector explained that, in his local area, PTWP had reversed previously strong local interagency relationships between schools, colleges, literacy and community education, training centres and the local DSP. PTWP implementation had negatively impacted interagency working and ignored any local informal protocols enabling a needs based approach:

“Because the push to introduce the Intreo offices and move FÁS staff to DSP meant that there was a huge turnover of staff on the ground in the offices....and a consequence of that was all of the existing relationships seemed to go.”

5.5.3 The ‘how to’ is missing – “we will roll it out and then we will sort it all out”

Stakeholders agreed that while the principles of the policy were progressive, the difficulty lay in how the Department chose to implement it. One interviewee differentiated between the principles, and the change in culture required to ensure that the principles and policy are implemented in a meaningful way and with positive longer-term outcomes:

“... and the purpose of it is not to reduce the dole and get as many people off your list, it is to get as many people on the pathway to work as possible.... that changes the ethos

to the service and the culture of the service and the engagement. So you are not being summoned to doing things that are meaningless, and you are not being penalised for not doing them.”

Similar to the view of managers, these stakeholders maintained that ‘the how’ of implementation was missing. For example, strand 1 *Better engagement with unemployed people* does not explain the ‘how to’ of improving engagement, and while the case officer role is identified as crucial in this regard, the Department do not clearly specify this role. Staff on the ground operate on the basis of top down directives. There was a view that it was up to each individual case officer to know what to do, but the type of person and the skills required to do this were considered as very different to those of a typical civil servant:

“I think for that role you need to have good interpersonal skills, a real curiosity box, ...So it is a very particular person type for that role and again in good civil service fashion they just drew in staff from other places, put their own staff in situ”.

Staff with varying levels of expertise, and knowledge, from very different backgrounds, were doing the same job, with implications for consistency and effectiveness. Rather than using skills, knowledge, and professional judgement, or engaging with the person to understand their difficulties, rules or guidelines were used as mechanisms to help case officers make their decisions. The Department’s legislative mandate impacted on the flexibility to use professional competencies and provide a person-centred approach, as decisions to help progress the person towards work were made from the perspective of adhering to the rule book, rather than on the needs of the individual:

“So in FAS you could still stand over your decision but in DSP there is a black and white mentality – legislation may impact on this lack of flexibility”

Stakeholders from the FET sector believed that the highly administrative PTWP process sometimes slowed down the journey for the person, as case officer approval was often required before the person could take up training options:

“And that would have been a much more spontaneous thing before. Now you have to go and make an appointment with your case officer, you have to agree... that process is more rigid and more structured and as a consequence people are being blocked in some ways from the things that they want to do”

The policy implementation was perceived as rushed by stakeholders, and motivated by a mixture of determination and pressure. There was awareness of Ireland’s poor history of policy implementation “Ireland's implementation deficit disorder” but stakeholders agreed that it might have been prudent to take more time to get it right:

“I think there was almost a sense of we will roll it out and then we will sort it all out”

5.5.4 The effectiveness of staff as implementers

Staff delivering the service on the ground were recognised by all as key drivers of implementation, and stakeholders had insight into the type of environment and culture these staff were operating within. There were reports of increased levels of stress and sickness amongst staff, particularly those who had moved from FÁS into the DSP’s more formal, hierarchical “no ideas, no voice” work environment. Stakeholders talked about top-down policy implementation with one interviewee describing the implementation strategy as a “read-apply policy, no training provided”.

Stakeholders alluded to the depletion of professional skills experienced by the many FÁS staff re-assigned to case officer roles within DSP. As the PTWP does not promote a guidance approach, the professional supervision and training in guidance, which characterised the FÁS approach, was no longer relevant in the implementation of the PTWP:

“...their skills are depleting, no upskilling, no space to discuss issues with the client, and practitioners might not want to bring up these issues as they are not in supervised practice – no self-care.”

Stakeholders expressed frustration with the lack of departmental understanding of the guidance process, and the Department’s insistence that Intreo provide guidance, was offered as proof that DSP failed to understand and differentiate guidance from other services offered:

“DSP would say out straight, why would we duplicate the guidance, why are we duplicating guidance there? ‘Because you are not doing guidance DSP’. But that is denied completely.”

At policy level, the Department appeared opposed to guidance perceiving that “it’s a touchy feely approach”, yet stakeholders believed civil servants had little understanding of labour markets or of why the PES should include a guidance approach thus, denying unemployed people the opportunity to explore career options, an option available to the unemployed during previous periods of high unemployment. Consequently, other organisations compensated for the lack of guidance provided at the Intreo level, sometimes bridging the journey for the client by ticking the box for DSP but also providing their own guidance to ensure, for example, that a referral by Intreo to a training programme was the correct referral

5.6 Outsiders: Job seekers: Depersonalisation of the long-term unemployed

This section describes three key themes identified from one-to-one interviews with the final group of stakeholders ($n = 6$) which comprised an older and younger group of LTU job seekers (three in each group). The former were aged 25 to 55 and were engaging with PTWP services whilst the younger were aged 18 to 24 and were involved in a high support YGS pilot intervention.

5.6.1 Meeting Expectations

At the initial PTWP roll-out stage, participants expressed expectations regarding its effectiveness. They conveyed a desire to work and hoped the service could support them in overcoming their perceived barriers to employment. They described being made unemployed as a culture shock, and felt lack of control of their situation:

“I don't want to be unemployed, I don't want to be a statistic, I really don't but there is nothing I can do about it unfortunately”

Participants had expectations that employment would make them a better person, allow them plan and move on in their lives, and for some of the younger interviewees, help them move away from negative activities:

“It all depends on if I get the job, then I will start looking and planning more, where I will go from here and what path I will take. I never thought of that so far, it is more like achieving the small goals first and it will lead to the big ones.”

They identified job seeking supports they felt were needed, for example, job seeking and interview skills, getting back into a routine, motivation, and work experience. They also expressed fears and perceived barriers to re-accessing the labour market, yet hoped they would be alleviated by the PES. Others identified more complex barriers such as hopelessness, low self-esteem, complex family issues, and addiction:

“Well it is probably my personal life, there was nothing really going on in my life last year and the stuff that was going on wasn't particularly beneficial for me or my mates”

YGS and PTWP interviewees experienced the services differently. YGS participants explained how the high support approach effectively met needs such as low confidence, and how this was more important than job seeking support:

“What I like is the building of the confidence and showing you that you are better than this, you know, the belief system... building you up so you have confidence. That is what I like more than the actual helping out”

They linked increased confidence to the personalised approach of the YGS, explaining that it made them feel like a human being, motivating them to attend interviews and take up training courses. Communication, one-to-one meetings, and discussing options, were identified as being particularly effective:

“... they don't make you feel like you are unemployed. When you come in here you feel like a human being. They know the people who are genuinely trying to get work...but I do think that I have to do this now, I can't have someone take my hand and say, here you go, here is a job for you. It doesn't work like that.”

One younger participant explained that many young unemployed people had complex lives and self-belief and confidence were hugely important. He believed the practitioner was working on his behalf and expressed gratitude for the help he received:

“if it wasn't for [guidance practitioner]...God knows what I would be doing, probably sitting in my house, probably getting into trouble, probably end up in prison or something or just lying around getting up to things I shouldn't be getting up to”

In comparison, PTWP job seekers expressed lower satisfaction with the services explaining that overall, their expectations had not been met and that services needed to be more comprehensive. For example, the GIS despite its ample information, was perceived as insufficient to help participants overcome complex barriers:

“The information that you got was great but information doesn't always get you a job.”

Clients referred to the lack of personalised approach or supportive environment in Intreo explaining that it did not meet their expectations:

“I know the social welfare office is not that long built but I think they make them dull to put people off going in. I don't like going in there..... they can be very snotty with you.”

While expressing the need for support, participants also accepted some responsibility, acknowledging that the PES might not be able to help them overcome all barriers. They were frustrated that the services had not met expectations and felt let down by what they did experience.

“When we signed on, I think it was about three weeks later you got a one-to-one with a member of the social welfare staff, very nice guy and he was looking at my CV and he was like, I'll have you in a job in a week. And I haven't heard from him since.”

5.6.2 Control

Connections between social welfare payments and job seeking were raised by older participants who felt blame for their situation, in part because the system required them to prove they were job seeking.

“... I was working for 16 years and we didn't have a choice, the shop was closing and you are gone...none of us asked to be on the dole”

Participants perceived their behaviour as under someone else's control, believing that they must adhere to a type of conduct to maintain their job seekers payment. One participant had been advised to change her job search strategy (described as “old school”) to an online approach so she had proof of job search behaviour for the Social Welfare office:

“I prefer going around to the shops personally and giving the CVs, but I haven't got any proof that I have been in..... my key worker said to me, get some sort of stamp or proof because the social welfare. They have pulled me in and I say that I have applied to all these places but how do you prove it?”

While participants accepted the rules of PTWP and recognised that noncompliance could affect their social welfare payments and possible job opportunities, they expressed concern that their choice had been removed. Others were frustrated that they had contributed to the social welfare system through taxes yet their choice was limited, and the decision as to what training should be undertaken lay with the social welfare officer.

They expressed dissatisfaction with the control approach of PTWP which emphasises a preferred job seeker behaviour, and what they perceived as a depersonalisation of the relationship between the job seeker and the service. They also had similar perceptions of the labour market, with new forms of job seeking (e.g. online applications), influencing their perceived ‘chance’ of getting a job. Most participants reported limited IT skills and felt that online applications did not allow them to sell their skills or show the employer the type of employee they would be:

“If I could just get a one- on- one [interview] and sell myself.”

5.6.3 Employability and the future

Improved employability was reported by four of the six interviewees, three of whom had participated in the YGS. They felt closer to the labour market, had greater confidence, and an increased motivation to access employment:

“I think the [YGS] has helped me a good bit... to be fair I wasn't really pushed as much as I could be, I would have been waiting for employment to come and find me. But now I am a lot more motivated to go out there and find something because it makes you feel like getting up early and doing something rather than sitting at home playing the X Box or whatever.”

This, they attributed to engagement with the PES, indicating that sufficient time was allowed for them to work through their employment needs, this was particularly the

case for those who reported complex barriers such as low motivation, previous convictions, and addictions:

“If it was last year and I was having this conversation with you I'd be saying I am nowhere near where I want to be going. I am not motivated and I don't want to be motivated. But now I feel like I can go out and get what I want, certainly if you work hard enough you will get it”

Having financial and personal independence was important for younger participants, whilst others hoped to find an enjoyable job.

“I know there is something there for me, I just have to find it hopefully.”

5.7 Summary of findings: Overarching Themes

This chapter described and explored the perspectives of five groups of key stakeholders – insiders and outsiders, each with their own unique experiences and views - of the effectiveness and implementation of the PTWP during its initial roll-out. An analysis of the data emanating from the series of one-to-one interviews (as well as, in the case of the policy makers, the LMP seminars) revealed a number of key themes and sub-themes. This final section of the chapter attempts to synthesise the collective findings to provide a sense of the overall perceptions and views of the PTWP, at a particular point in time, amongst the various stakeholders. To this end, three overarching themes (see Figure 5.1) were identified, depersonalisation, the missing ‘how to’ of implementation, and the reform agenda, each of which is described below.



Figure 5.1 Overarching themes and key themes per stakeholder group generated from the qualitative analysis

5.7.1 Depersonalisation

The importance of a person-centred approach to facilitate access to employment was consistently referred to by both job seekers and practitioners. The former expressed how critical a connection with the practitioner based on trust enhances self-esteem and employability. Practitioners also identified a trusting client-practitioner relationship as important, explaining that this facilitates the disclosure of complex needs and the real issues preventing re-employment. All job seekers described unemployment as a dehumanising experience - a feeling of being a number - reinforced by the PES

approach. Importantly, they attributed their rejuvenation as a person, particularly with regard to self-confidence and self-esteem, to more person-centred approaches.

However, both job seekers and practitioners reported that the implementation of the PTWP system and control driven approach prevented this re-humanisation. Rules and regulations had taken precedence over the improved employability of job seekers. Practitioners' time was spent completing administrative tasks (e.g. updating databases), ensuring eligibility, monitoring job seeking behaviour, and regulation, all of which was viewed as antithetical to offering meaningful support to the unemployed.

Increased reliance on the IT system also impacted practitioner's behaviour, for example, IT rather than professional judgement determined the timing of client meetings. The primary purpose of client-practitioner meetings had shifted from supporting the job seeker in terms of enhancing employability and career development, to placing the job seeker into employment, with effectiveness gauged solely on job placement metrics.

5.7.2 The missing "how to" of implementation

While job seekers and practitioners experienced the depersonalisation of the PES, managers and other stakeholders maintained that the depersonalisation resulted from deficiencies in the 'how to' of the policy. The PTWP clearly outlined the tasks and actions to be achieved (i.e. 'the what'), but lacked detail on the 'how to' of implementation. This was reflected in how top down directives had shaped service delivery, which was now primarily focused on ensuring adherence to rules and regulations. The system of implementation considers the unemployed as a homogeneous group, and lack of implementation 'know-how' limits the service, in the extent to which it can provide a person-centred approach. Frontline practitioners, including ex-FÁS and LESN staff, were highly skilled and experienced in delivery of person-centred approaches using adult guidance methods, counselling skills, and occupational and

labour market knowledge . Despite this, implementation focused on adhering to rules at the expense of utilising available skills. Managers and other stakeholders questioned whether the PTWP and Intreo constituted a PES when services excluded much of the working age population due to its overwhelming focus on the live register. Thus, whilst there was general agreement, in principle, with the actual change in policy, its implementation and roll-out was widely viewed as uninformed and under-evaluated.

5.7.3 The Reform agenda

The third overarching theme reflects the significant focus, by policy makers, other stakeholders and managers, on the actual reform process itself. They understood effectiveness and implementation of the PTWP in terms of the reform agenda and how successful (or not) it had been. They spoke about the physical reform and the establishment of Intreo, staff mergers, changes within the Department, establishment of a programme of evaluation, and challenges the reform process had brought about. Policy makers, tasked with the overall reform of the PES and its roll-out nationally, were also concerned with the implementation of the reform, but largely from an organisational change perspective. They described this change process with precedence over a PES reform which sought to improve outcomes for job seekers.

5.8 Conclusion

The views and experiences explored here cover a broad landscape of perceived impact of the PTWP policy in Ireland. Insiders tended to view the policy in terms of the reform process, how it changed work practices and service delivery, the metrics, and the measures of effectiveness. There is an underlying de-skilling of practitioners towards a more top-down controlled managerial approach, which arguably, is easier to measure. However, outsiders, emphasised control, a theme which was either experienced directly in how the service was received (by job seekers), or through observation of the PTWP

roll-out, and stakeholder perceptions of the underlying ethos of the Department and its view of the unemployed.

An understanding of how the policy was received and how it is currently working, is critical in providing contextual background to the overall study, and more specifically, illuminating evidence not examined in the RCT (Study Two), such as the predominant focus on reform, the lack of evaluation, the absence of ‘how to’, and the administrative process of engagement with job seekers. The findings reported suggest limited effectiveness with regard to promoting outcomes such as psychological and overall well-being, career efficacy and employment opportunities. These findings will be appraised and discussed further in Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight. The next chapter presents findings from Study Two, which evaluated quantitatively the impact of a personalised intervention on the well-being and employability of LTU job seekers.

CHAPTER SIX

Results Study Two: The EEPIC trial

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings from Study Two (EEPIC) which, as mentioned earlier, was a single-centre randomised controlled partially-blinded trial, with two parallel groups, the EEPIC intervention group and a ‘service as usual’ control group. This study was undertaken to examine any changes across time both within and between the two groups of long-term unemployed job seekers. In addition, data captured as part of the baseline analysis provided interesting and normally hidden insights into how long-term unemployed job seekers present to the PES with regard to their psychological health and well-being and perceived employability. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first briefly outlines the allocation and flow of participants through the trial. The second section presents a detailed description of participants at baseline ($N = 149$); this analysis was undertaken to explore the characteristics of a typical group of LTU job seekers as they present for activation services in the PES. The next section details the findings from the RCT which assessed changes in the well-being and perceived employability of participants across time, both within and between groups. The fourth and final section includes a descriptive analysis of potentially interesting findings from the data, with regard to perceived employability and employment outcomes.

6.2. Participant allocation and flow through the trial

As mentioned earlier in Chapter Four, 196 unemployed PTWP clients were invited to participate in the RCT, 14% (28) of whom were deemed ineligible and 10% (19) of whom declined to take part. The remainder ($N = 149$) were randomly allocated

to either an intervention ($n = 71$) or SAU control group ($n = 78$) and all were assessed at baseline. Both groups were followed up at immediate post-intervention, with a 32% ($n = 48$) attrition rate. Approximately 85% of all assessments were completed within 10 days of finishing the intervention. Participants who ‘dropped-out’ did so mainly because they had been placed in education or training (see Figure 6.1). A further 34 (33%) participants (17 in each group) were lost to follow up at T2, mainly because they had started employment or an ALMP, or had disengaged from the service, yielding an overall attrition rate of 55%. A description of the full sample at baseline is provided in the next section.

6.3 Profile of participants at baseline

This section presents a descriptive analysis of the demographic profile of the entire sample as well as more detailed information on the intervention group. This level of detailed demographic information was available for the intervention group ($n = 71$) as a comprehensive profile was completed for each participant during the ‘needs assessment’ which was conducted by practitioners as part of the EEPIC intervention (see Appendix 5). This information was sought to enable the practitioner to work more effectively with the job seeker. It was not collected for the SAU group because it was not mandatory to do so (although some of this information may have been collected informally as part of the practitioners’ general engagement with the job seeker).

6.3.1 Background characteristics of the sample ($N=149$)

All participants ($N = 149$) were LTU jobseekers who were typically male, in their forties ($M = 40.93$, $SD = 9.95$; range = 40) and unemployed for more than three years (see Table 6.1). Only six participants were classified as ‘unemployed youth’ and aged 21-25 years. Upon entry to the study, almost two-thirds (63%) had either no formal qualifications (29%), or had obtained a Junior Certificate (34%) before leaving

school. Interestingly, a higher proportion of females (37%) reported having no formal qualifications when compared to males (22%), whilst proportionately more men also reported having a Junior Cert (41% and 25% respectively) as their highest qualification. All participants were living in an urban area and were registered with the local *Intreo* service.

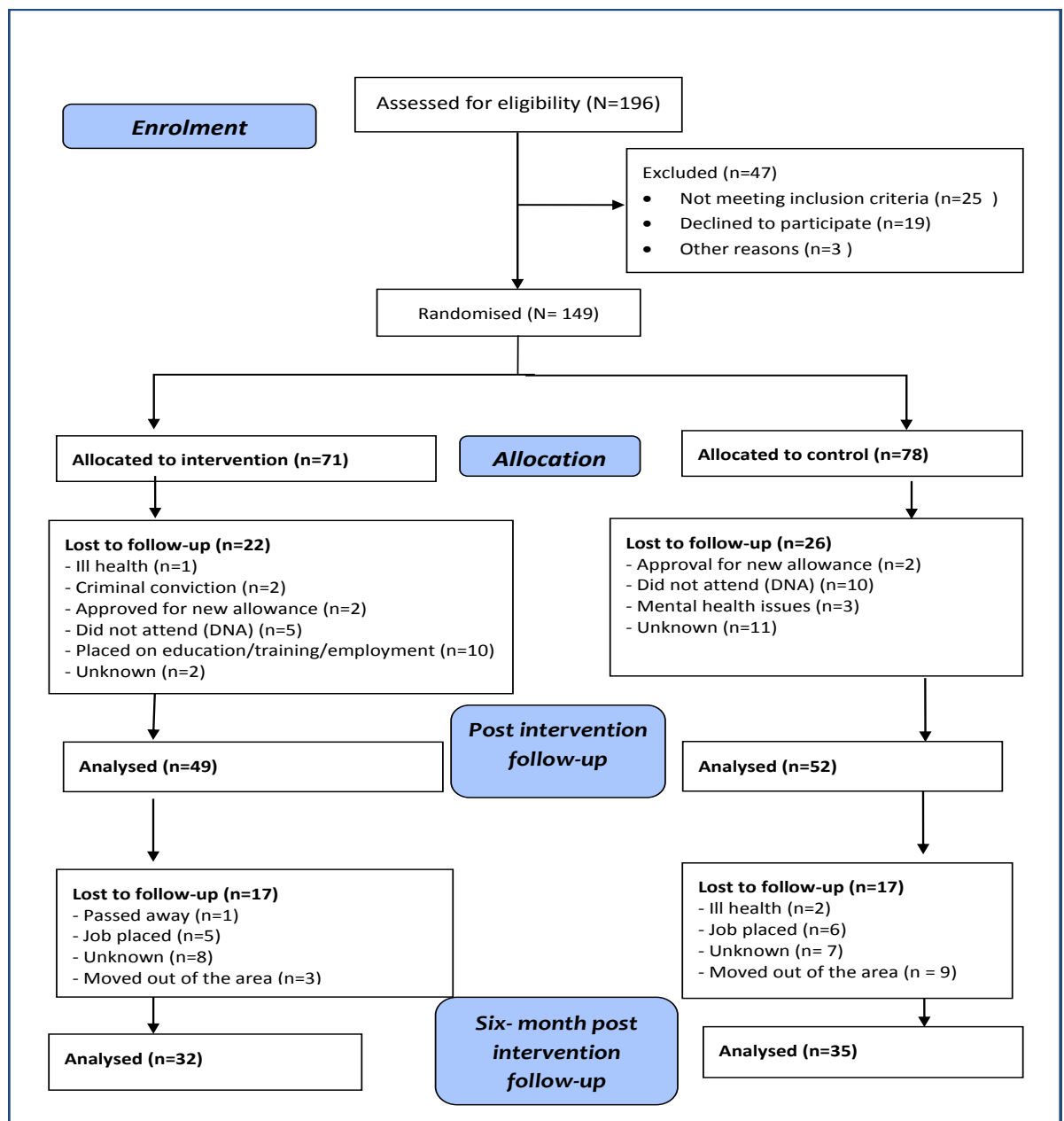


Figure 6.1 Flow chart of participant enrolment, allocation, follow ups, and analysis

Table 6.1 Demographic characteristics of the sample (N=149)

	Male (n = 85)	Female (n = 64)	Total (N = 149)
Age	M (SD) 39.5 (10)	M (SD) 42.8 (9.4)	M (SD) 40.92 (9.95)
Unemployment status	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
1-2 years	23 (27)	29 (45)	52 (35)
3-5 years	29 (34)	10 (16)	39 (26)
5+ years	33 (39)	25 (39)	58 (39)
Education level	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
None	19 (22)	24 (38)	43 (29)
Junior Cert	35 (41)	16 (25)	51 (34)
Leaving Cert	28 (33)	20 (31)	48 (32)
Other	4 (4)	4 (6)	7 (5)

6.3.2 Detailed profile of the intervention group

The intervention group participants ($n = 71$) had a similar profile to the larger sample (Table 6.1) in terms of gender, age, educational attainment and duration of unemployment (see Table 6.2). One notable difference between the intervention group and the full sample was that a slightly higher proportion of the males in the intervention group had a Leaving Certificate (46%) when compared to males in the full sample (33%).

The more detailed information shows that the intervention participants were predominately Irish (90%) with a small number from other countries (see Table 6.3). Over 80% reported living with their families or with their partner; two people were homeless. Five participants reported having a disability, although this information was not available for 17% of the sample.

Table 6.2 Demographic characteristics of the intervention group

	Male n = 39	Female n= 32	Total n = 71
Age	M (SD) 39.1 (10.74)	M (SD) 42.6 (9.53)	M (SD) 40.70 (10.28)
Unemployment status	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
1-2 years	11(28)	12 (38)	23 (32)
3-5 years	12 (31)	4 (12)	16 (23)
5+ years	16 (41)	16 (50)	32 (45)
Education level	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
None	11 (28)	13 (41)	24 (34)
Junior Cert	10 (26)	9 (28)	19 (27)
Leaving Cert	18 (46)	9 (28)	27 (38)
Other	0 (0)	1 (3)	1 (1)

Table 6.3 Baseline information for the Intervention group (n = 71)

Characteristic	Intervention Group n (%)
Nationality	
Irish	64 (90)
EU/EAA	6 (8)
Non-EU/EAA	1 (2)
Household status	
With family	52 (73)
With partner	6 (8)
Lives alone	10 (14)
Homeless	2 (3)
Unknown	1 (2)

Approximately 70% reported no formal education post second level, whilst 30% reported a mix of other higher level qualifications (Table 6.4). A lack of qualifications was reported as the ‘most significant’ barrier to employment (23%), followed by long-term unemployment (15%), care responsibilities (15%), lack of experience/work skills (9%) and personal disposition (9%) (Figure 6.2). The vast majority of participants (85%) had previously worked for at least one year, generally in non-skilled (e.g. cleaning, factory work, general operative) and semi-skilled (construction labourer, factory, administration, hospitality) employment (Table 6.5).

Table 6.4 Employability skills (EEPIC Intervention group)

Post second level qualification N (%)		ICT skills N (%)		Literacy N (%)		Driving licence N (%)	
None	49 (69)	Basic	34 (48)	No	66 (93)	None	32 (45)
PLC	11 (15)	None	16 (22)	Difficulty		Full	31 (44)
University	8 (11)	Intermediate	12 (17)	Difficulty	5 (7)	Learner	7 (10)
Technical	3 (4)	Advanced	9 (13)			Permit	
						CPC	1 (1)

Table 6.5 Employment history (EEPIC Intervention group) (N, %)

Previous Employment		Work history/experience		Voluntary work	
Yes	66 (93)	1 year +	60 (85)	None	58 (82)
		1-3 months	4 (5)	Previous	8 (11)
No	5 (7)	3-12 months	2 (3)	Current	2 (3)
		Unknown	5 (7)	Unknown	3 (4)

Additional information was collected on possible risk factors which could hinder re-employment, or reduce the number of employment opportunities, such as a criminal history, substance misuse issues, a disability, or literacy issues. The results showed that 14% ($n = 10$) reported drug use on a daily basis, 9% ($n = 6$) had a criminal record, 8% ($n = 5$) had a disability and a further 8% ($n = 5$) reported literacy difficulties. Participants were also asked to rate themselves along a number of dimensions as shown in Table 6.6. The results demonstrate that participants rated themselves high with regard to their employment competencies. For example, 83% ($n = 57$) indicated that they had high levels of understanding of employer needs, while 77% ($n = 53$) and 71% ($n = 49$) indicated high levels of adaptability and resilience, respectively. Furthermore, 70% ($n = 48$) indicated high levels of self-awareness.

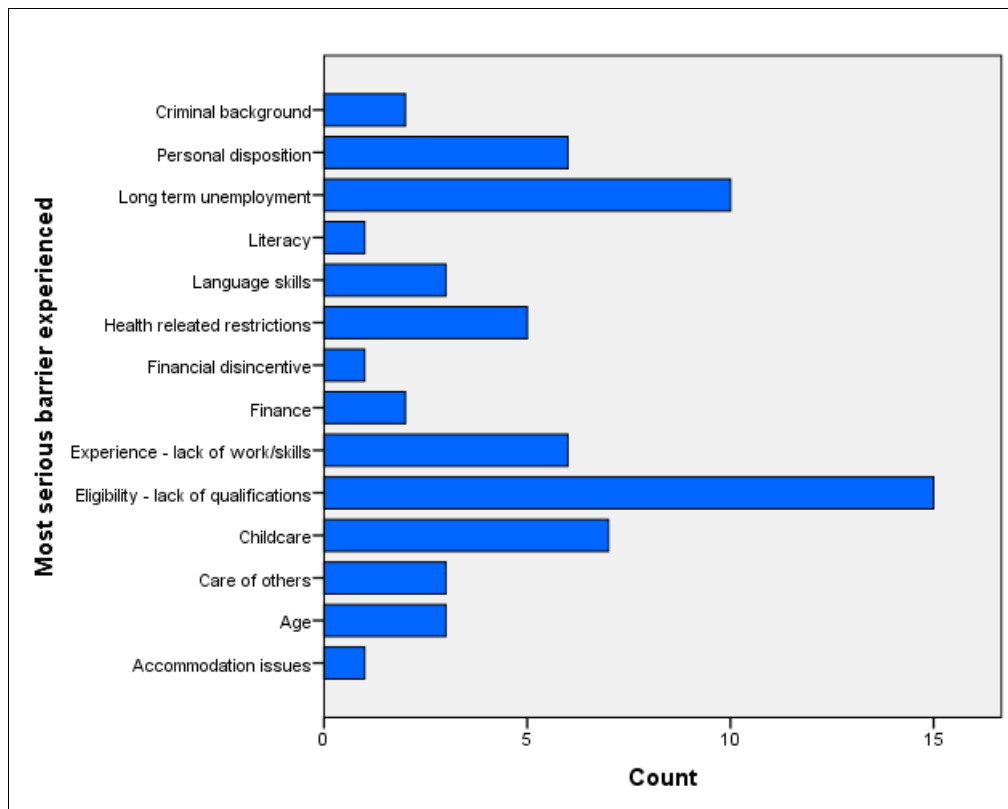


Figure 6.2 Most serious barriers to employment

With regard to desirable work-related factors (i.e. rating high), 45% of participants identified ‘work/life balance’ as desirable, while 45% aspired to work in an area in line with their career choice (Table 6.7). Interestingly, only one third cited salary as highly important with 68% rating this item as medium or low importance. Finally, participants rated ‘attendance’ as the most important work value, with 77% rating it either first or second (i.e. high), followed by ‘punctuality’ (71%) and ‘attitude’ (41%) (Table 6.7). Remarkably, 76% rated ‘presentation’, and 49% rated ‘following instructions’, to be of low importance.

Table 6.6 Self-rated competencies at baseline (n= 69): intervention group

Employment Competencies			
N (%)			
Competency	Low	Medium	High
Self-awareness	5 (7)	16 (23)	48 (70)
Self -belief	10 (14)	17 (25)	42 (61)
Resilience	4 (6)	16 (23)	49 (71)
Recognition of employers needs	5 (7)	7 (10)	57 (83)
Employment Motivation	8 (11)	15 (22)	46 (67)
Hope	8 (11)	17 (25)	44 (64)
Adaptability	4 (6)	12 (17)	53 (77)

Key: dark red = lowest, dark blue = highest

Table 6.7 Self-rated future work and work values at baseline: intervention group

Desirable work-related factors (n = 69)			
N (%)			
Factors	Low	Med	High
Work/Life Balance	24 (35)	14 (20)	31 (45)
Location	32 (46)	8 (12)	29 (42)
Work environment	37 (53)	8 (12)	24 (35)
Salary	27 (39)	20 (29)	22 (32)
Career Choice	18 (26)	20 (29)	31 (45)
Work Ethic values (n = 66)			
N (%)			
Value	Low	Med	High
Attendance	5 (8)	10 (15)	51 (77)
Punctuality	8 (12)	11 (17)	47 (71)
Following Instructions	32 (49)	16 (24)	18 (27)
Presentation	50 (76)	4 (6)	12 (8)
Attitude	22 (33)	17 (26)	27 (41)

Key: dark red = lowest, dark blue = highest

6.3.3 Baseline description of the sample: psychosocial domains

Prior to the baseline intervention vs control group analysis, it was considered important to explore how the entire sample ($N = 149$) was faring in terms of their overall psychological health and well-being and related constructs, mainly because this information is not normally captured in an Irish context. Employment services in

Ireland and internationally are often designed and delivered in the absence of, or without any consideration of, this type of information (Coutts et al., 2014; Helmes & Fudge, 2016). Each measure/construct is considered below in the context of a descriptive analysis in the first instance, followed by a test of selected subgroup differences (based on independent t-tests and one-way ANOVAs) involving four key background variables which were deemed to be important and relevant including: gender (male versus female); age (under 35s, 35-45, and over 45); level of education (none, other, Leaving Certificate (LC)); and duration of unemployment (1-2 years, 3-5 years, 5 years+). The three age and duration of unemployment groups were categorised in this way based on the researcher's experience of working in this field and knowledge of the literature. For example, those aged under 35 often tend to differ from older clients in terms of their hope for finding employment and their attractiveness to employers, whilst those over 45 may present with difficulties and challenges not seen in younger clients. Similarly, with regard to unemployment duration, those unemployed for over 5 years tend to have obsolete skills resulting in low levels of hope for future employment, while this generally is not the case for those unemployed for 1-2 years.

6.3.4 Psychological health and other aspects of well-being

An analysis of self-reported psychological well-being, as measured by the GHQ-12, revealed that almost three-quarters (72%) of the entire sample had scored at or above the clinical cut-off (see Appendix 9 for scoring band and psychometric properties) indicating a need for formal mental health intervention ($M = 15.37$, $SD = 6.49$; range = 32). An independent samples t-test showed a small, but statistically significant difference in mean GHQ-12 by gender with females reporting higher levels of psychological distress [$t(147) = -1.99$, $p = .049$, $d_s = 0.33$]. There were no differences in the mean GHQ-12 by age-group ($p = .55$), nor by duration of unemployment ($p =$

.83). Similarly, no significant differences in mean GHQ-12 were found based on level of educational attainment ($p = .79$).

Approximately 60% of the overall sample reported lower than average (see Appendix 9) levels of satisfaction with life ($M = 17.63$, $SD = 6.56$; range = 30) according to the author guidelines (Diener et al., 1985). An independent samples t-test and several one-way ANOVAs showed that there were no statistically significant differences in mean life satisfaction by age-group, gender, level of education or duration of unemployment ($p > 0.05$).

The sample, on average, demonstrated ‘normal’ levels (see Appendix 9) of self-esteem (according to test norms) as shown by the mean score ($M=18.41$, $SD 4.73$; range = 27) which fell within the ‘normal’ range of attainable scores (15-25). An independent-samples t-test revealed statistically significantly higher mean scores amongst males when compared to females [$t(147) = 2.62$, $p = .01$, $d_s=.43$] but no other differences emerged ($p > 0.05$), either by age-group, duration of unemployment, or education level.

The final aspect of well-being related to resilience as measured by the Brief Resilience Scale. The overall sample scores here indicated average levels of resilience (see Appendix 9) amongst participants when compared to general population test norms ($M = 3.27$, $SD = .68$; range = 3.33) with no statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$) observed in terms of age-group, gender, level of education or duration of unemployment.

6.3.5 Other measures

As indicated earlier in Chapter Four, levels of hope were measured using the *Adult State Hope Scale* which contains two subscales entitled ‘hope-agency’ and ‘hope-pathways’, as well as a total ‘hope’ score. Overall, the sample reported ‘average’ scores on the total ‘hope’ scale (see Appendix 9) according to the general population test

norms ($M = 29.55$; $SD = 8.71$; range = 41). Similarly, participants' scores indicated average levels of 'hope-agency' ($M = 12.86$; $SD = 5.40$; range = 21) and 'hope-pathways' ($M = 16.65$; $SD = 4.46$; range = 20). No significant differences ($p > 0.05$) were found with respect to any of the key background variables. A paired samples t-test indicated that mean scores on the hope-pathways scale were statistically significantly higher than those on the hope-agency scale [$t(148) = -9.61$, $p < .001$, $d_s = 0.77$].

Likewise, no statistically significant sub-group differences were noted on the final measure of career self-efficacy ($M = 40.65$; $SD = 7.42$; range = 34.6).

6.3.6 Summary of pre-intervention levels of self-reported psychological well-being and employability

- Almost three-quarters of participants reported moderate to high levels of psychological distress with higher scores amongst females, albeit only marginally so.
- Participants reported below average levels of satisfaction with life when compared to the general population.
- Self-esteem and resilience scores for the full sample were within the 'normal' range, although males reported statistically significantly higher levels of self-esteem than females.
- Scores on both the 'Hope' and 'Career Self-Efficacy' scales also fell within the normal range with no differences detected along each of the four background factors.

6.4 Baseline analysis: Intervention versus control group

As described earlier in Chapter Four, participants were randomly allocated to either the intervention or the SAU control group. A baseline analysis was conducted to identify if any differences existed between the intervention and control groups in terms

of both socio-demographic characteristics and baseline outcome measures. Importantly, no significant differences were found between groups with regard to age-group, gender, education level, or unemployment duration (see Appendix 10). Similarly, no significant between-group differences were found across the range of outcome measures (see Table 6.8). This analysis was conducted on both primary and secondary outcome measures in order to explore pre-intervention levels. As illustrated earlier, all participants reported high levels of psychological distress at baseline with over 70% of each group (71% intervention and 73% control) scoring above the threshold of 11 indicating ‘moderate’ to ‘severe’ levels of psychological distress according to the author guidelines. The mean level of life satisfaction was slightly below average in both groups, although there were no statistically significant differences between the two.

Table 6.8 Well-being and perceived employability differences between intervention and comparison group using Independent Samples t-tests/Chi Square

<i>Questionnaire</i>	<i>Intervention (n=71)[‡]</i>	<i>Comparison (n=78)[‡]</i>
GHQ-12	15 (6.3)	15.4 (6.8)
N (%) scoring ≥ 11	51 (71%)	57 (73%)
Satisfaction with Life Scale	17.2 (6.3)	18 (6.8)
Rosenberg's Self Esteem	18.6 (4.8)	18.2 (4.7)
Brief Resilience Scale	3.3 (0.7)	3.2 (0.6)
State Hope Scale – Agency	12.3 (5.9)	13.4 (5)
State Hope Scale – Pathways	16.9 (4.9)	16.4 (4.2)
State Hope Scale - Total State Hope	29.2 (9.2)	29.7 (8.1)
Career Self-Efficacy Questionnaire	41.1 (6.7)	40.4 (7.6)

No significant differences were present at a p level of 0.05.
[‡] Mean (SD), except where noted.

6.4.1 Baseline to follow-up analysis

The analytical approach used in the follow-up analysis was described earlier in Chapter Four and in the study protocol in Appendix 4. The results are presented below for each of the primary and secondary outcome measures.

6.4.1.1 Primary outcome: well-being

As outlined earlier, the primary outcome of psychological well-being was assessed using the GHQ-12 and the SWLS.

6.4.1.1.1 Psychological Well-being

The results of the MMRM analysis demonstrated a significant main effect for both time, $F(2, 92.972) = 61.09, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .57$, and for group, $F(1, 125.3) = 4.067, p = .046, \eta_p^2 = .03$. The main interaction effect between time and group, $F(2, 92.97) = 1.77, p = .176, \eta_p^2 = .04$, did not reach statistical significance (see Table 6.9).

Planned post-hoc contrast analysis indicated that participants in both groups improved from baseline (T0) to six-month follow-up (T2) [intervention group: estimate of mean improvement (EMI) = -7.59, $SE = 1.02, t(92.57) = -7.47, p = .001, d_s = 1.17$; control group: EMI = -5.01, $SE = 0.972, t(92.57) = -5.162, p = .001, d_s = 0.78$] (Figure 6.3)

Table 6.9 MMRM Test of Fixed Effects

Type III Tests of Fixed Effects^a				
Source	Numerator df	Denominator df	F	Sig.
Intercept	1	125.306	773.128	.000
timing ^a	2	92.972	61.090	.000
group.f ^b	1	125.306	4.067	.046
timing * group.f	2	92.972	1.770	.176

^a timing refers to the three time points T0, T1, T2
^b group.f refers to the condition i.e. Intervention (coded in SPSS as 1) and Control (coded in SPSS as 2)

a. Dependent Variable: GHQ0123.

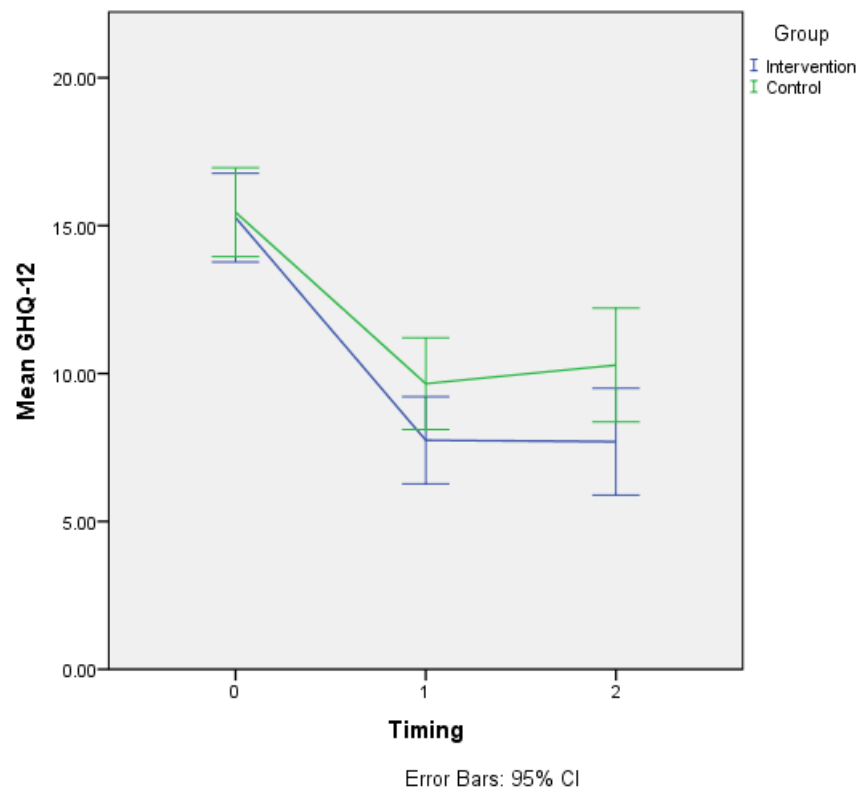


Figure 6.3 Mean GHQ-12 scores for participants in the intervention and control groups at T0, T1 and T2

Overall, while a statistically nonsignificant difference was found between groups at T1 [Contrast estimate of mean difference = -1.88, $SE=1.04$, $t(105.21)=-1.80$, $p = .074$, $d_s=0.29$] post-hoc exploratory analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in mean GHQ-12 scores between groups at T2 [Contrast estimate of mean difference = -2.76, $SE = 1.22$, $t(75.34) = -2.26$, $p = .026$, $d_s= 0.43$], indicating that the initial improvement in both groups had been sustained over time (see Table 6.10).

Further MMRM analysis found no main gender effect, $F(1, 124.20) = 1.089$, $p = .299$, $\eta_p^2=.01$, nor group $F(1, 124.2) = 3.262$, $p = .073$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, nor group-time interaction, $F(2, 93.0) = 1.516$, $p = .225$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, effects (see Table 6.11).

Table 6.10: Contrast estimates difference of means for GHQ-12 from T0→T1, T1→T2, and T0→2 for Intervention (I) and Control (C) participants

Group	T0 M (SD)	T1 M (SD)	<i>p</i>	EMD	<i>d_s</i>	CI [‡]
I	15.27 (6.30)	7.74 (5.10)	.001	-7.35	1.14	(-1.48, -0.80)
C	15.45 (6.67)	9.65 (5.56)	.001	-5.66	0.88	(-1.21, -0.54)
Group	T1 M (SD)	T2 M (SD)	<i>p</i>	EMD	<i>d_s</i>	CI
I	7.74 (5.10)	7.69 (5.0)	.802	.239	-0.04	(-0.39, 0.31)
C	9.65 (5.56)	10.28 (5.59)	.484	.644	0.10	(0.26, 0.46)
Group	T0 M (SD)	T2 M (SD)	<i>p</i>	EMD	<i>d_s</i>	CI
I	15.27 (6.3)	7.69 (5)	.001	-7.59	-1.17	(-1.55, -0.80)
C	15.45 (6.67)	10.28 (5.59)	.001	-5.01	-.78	(-1.15, -0.40)

EMD = Estimated mean difference between time points; *d_s* = Cohens *d_s*; CI = 95% Confidence Interval for *d_s*
[‡] These follow the convention that positive values agree with the proposed intervention, while negative values disagree, so an interval such as [1,-2] is saying that the effect size ranged in actual value from -1 to +2, but in interpretation, for GHQ-12, this changes to [1, -2].

Post-hoc exploratory contrast analysis revealed a statistically significant subgroup difference for males, between groups and across time with regard to psychological distress levels (see Figure 6.4). Males in the intervention group showed a medium and significant improvement in scores from baseline to post intervention when compared to males in the control group [contrast estimate of mean difference = -3.90, *SE* = 1.33, $t(104.74) = -2.94$, $p = .004$, $d_s = 0.61$]. This pattern was also observed at T2 [contrast estimate of mean difference = -3.36, *SE*=1.64, $t(75.08) = -2.05$, $p = .044$, $d_s = 0.53$]. No such differences were observed for females at T1 [contrast estimate of mean difference = .975, *SE*=1.56, $t(105.03) = .623$, $p = .535$, $d_s = 0.15$], nor at follow up [contrast estimate of mean difference = -1.925, *SE*=1.83, $t(74.65) = -1.06$, $p = .295$, $d_s = 0.30$] (see Figure 6.4).

Table 6.11 MMRM Test of factorial fixed effects including gender

Type III Tests of Fixed Effects^a

Source	Numerator df	Denominator df	F	Sig.
Intercept	1	124.203	786.537	.000
timing	2	92.997	64.564	.000
group.f	1	124.203	3.262	.073
gender	1	124.203	1.089	.299
timing * group.f	2	92.997	1.516	.225
timing * gender	2	92.997	1.565	.214
group.f * gender	1	124.203	2.560	.112
timing * group.f * gender	2	92.997	1.301	.277

a. Dependent Variable: GHQ0123.

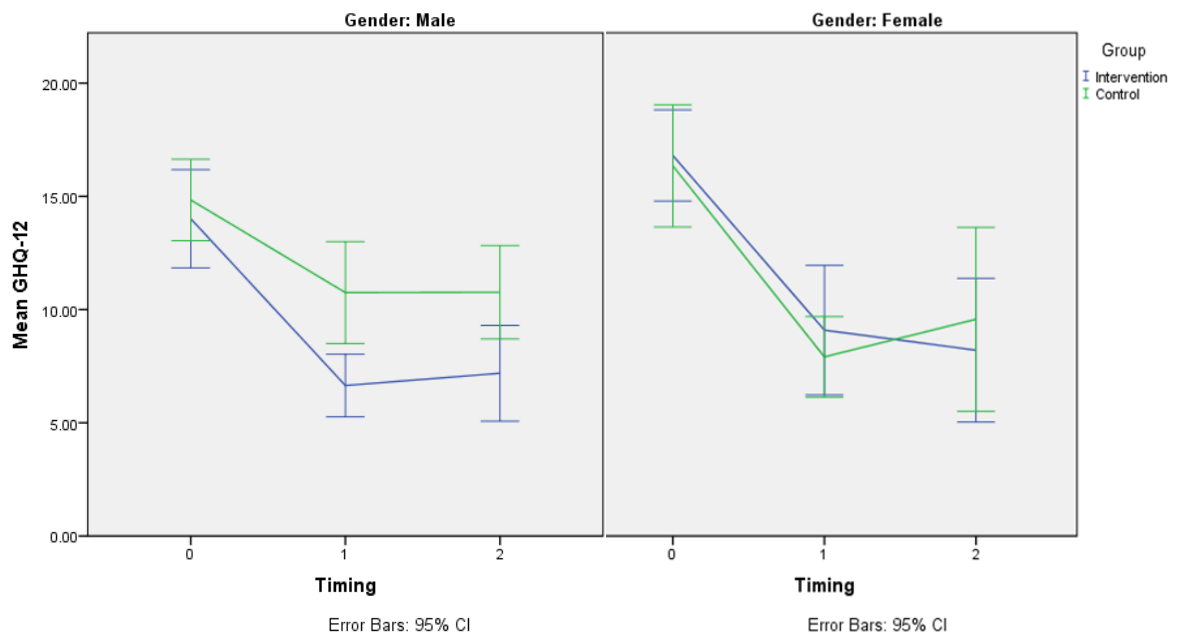


Figure 6.4 Mean GHQ-12 scores for males and females in the intervention and control groups across all three time points

6.4.1.1.2 Satisfaction with Life

With regard to the effect of the intervention on satisfaction with life, the associated MMRM analysis showed a significant main effect for time, $F(2, 85.89)=10.27, p =.001, \eta_p^2 = .19$, but no effect for group, $F(1, 130.68)=.205, p=.652, \eta_p^2 = .001$, or group-time interaction, $F(2, 85.89)=1.02, p = .364, \eta_p^2 = .023$.

Post-hoc exploratory contrast analysis indicated that the Intervention participants showed a medium significant increase in satisfaction from baseline to post intervention [estimate mean improvement = 3.97, $SE = .997$, $t(110.61) = 3.98$, $p = .001$, $d_s = 0.61$] (Figure 6.5) whilst a significant, albeit smaller effect, was also observed for the control group during the same period [estimate mean improvement = 2.10, $SE=.969$, $t(112.39)=2.164$, $p = .033$, $d_s =0.32$].

Further MMRM analysis revealed no main effects by gender, ($F(1, 128.91)=2.54$, $p=.114$, $\eta_p^2=.02$) nor any difference between males or females within groups across time (see Appendix 11 for a sample of MMRM tables).

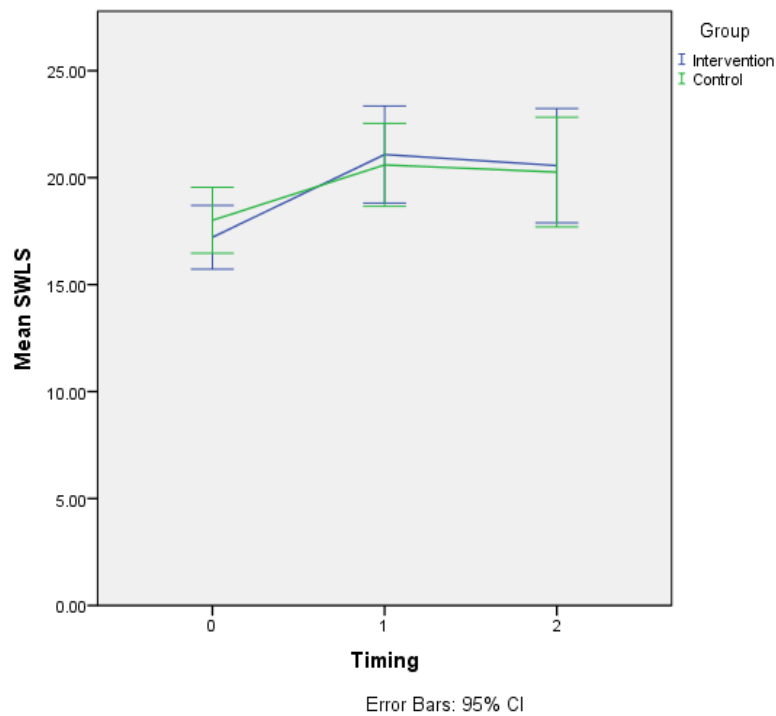


Figure 6.5 Mean SWLS scores for participants in the intervention and control groups at T0, T1 and T2

6.4.1.2 Secondary Outcomes

6.4.1.2.1 Hopefulness

As described earlier in Chapter Four, the ‘hopefulness’ outcome was assessed using measures of ‘Hope-agency’, ‘Hope-pathways’ and an overall measure of hopefulness. Each is discussed below.

Hope-agency

The MMRM analysis for ‘Hope-agency’ (i.e. motivation for pursuing goals) provides evidence for a significant effect for time $F(2, 87.57) = 52.39, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .54$, no effect for group, $F(1, 133.53) = 0.061, p = .805, \eta_p^2 = .00005$, but a medium significant group-time interaction, $F(2, 87.57) = 3.46, p = .036, \eta_p^2 = .07$. This interaction probably occurred because while hope was higher for the control group at T0, it was lower than the intervention group at T2, as the intervention group continued to improve between T1 and T2 [overall improvement $EMI = 4.455, SE = 0.777, t(111.77) = 5.73, p = .001, d_s = 0.83$]. Planned post-hoc contrast analysis also points to this pattern, albeit at a reduced level and borderline significance, between post-intervention and the six-month follow-up [$EMI = 1.54, SE = 0.779, t(89.53) = 1.98, p = .051, d_s = 0.29$] (see Figure 6.6). In contrast, while the control group showed a similar (but medium sized) improvement from baseline to post-intervention [$EMI = 3.52, SE = 0.747, t(111.57) = 4.716, p = .001, d_s = 0.66$], there was little evidence of change from post-intervention to the six-month follow-up [$EMI = -.07, SE = 0.742, t(87.164) = -0.095, p = .924, d_s = 0.01$].

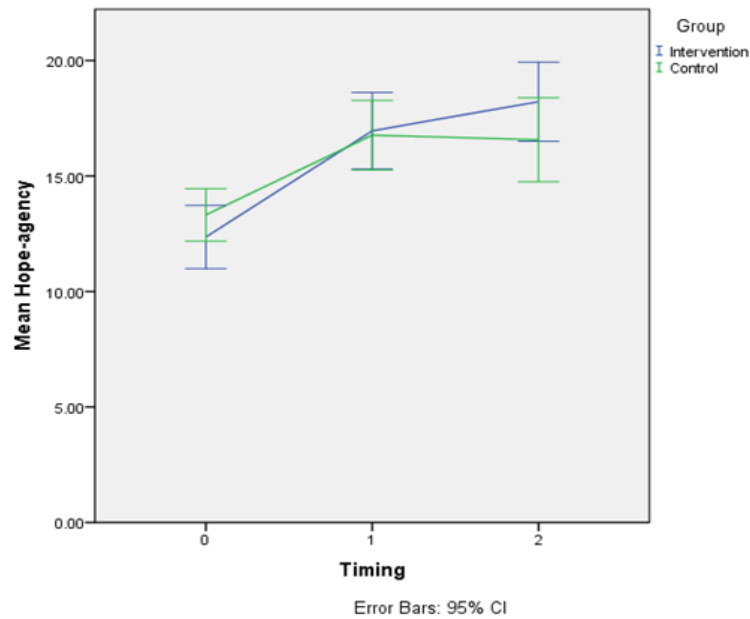


Figure 6.6 Mean ‘Hope-Agency’ scores for participants in the intervention and control groups across the three time points

Further MMRM analysis by gender showed a main effect for time, $F(2, 88.516) = 54.761, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .55$) but failed to show main or interaction effects for gender or group.

Exploratory sub-group contrast analysis indicated a medium significant difference between males in each group at T2 [contrast estimate of mean difference = 2.99, SE = 1.36, $t(90.40) = 2.19, p = .031, d_s = 0.56$], whereby intervention group males were faring better in terms of hope agency than their control group counterparts (Figure 6.7). This suggests that the male intervention participants had greater improvements in their goal-directed energy and motivation for pursuing goals at six month follow-up than males in the control group. No such effects were found for females at six-month follow-up [T2 contrast estimate of mean difference = -.47, SE = 1.53, $t(89.15) = -.307, p = .759, d_s = 0.09$].

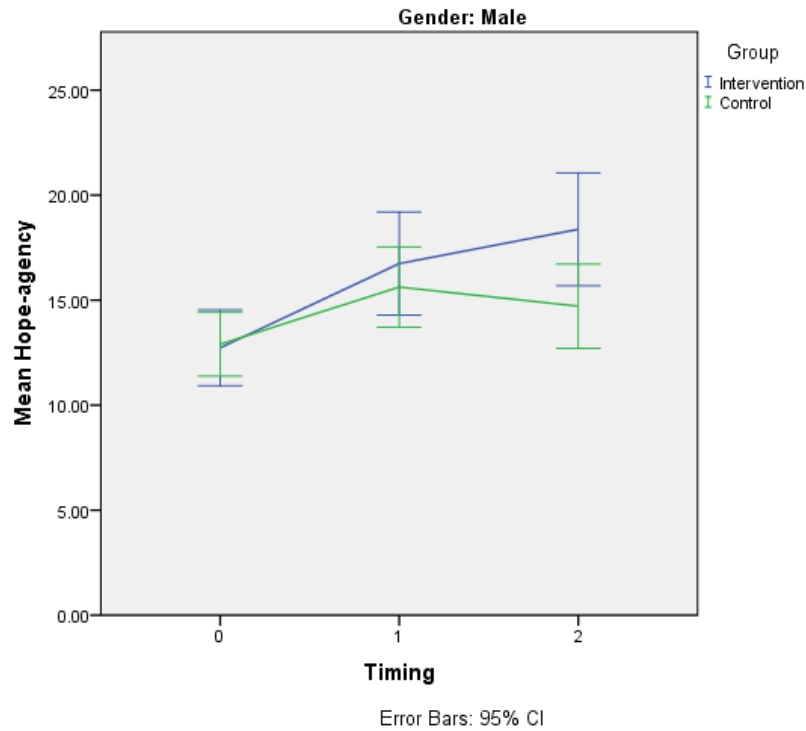


Figure 6.7 Mean Hope-agency scores for males in the intervention and control groups across the three time points

Hope-pathways

With regard to ‘hope pathways’ (i.e. the ability to identify the way to achieve planned goals), the MMRM analysis identified a statistically significant main effect for time, $F(2, 90.77) = 13.34, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$, but no significant effect for group $F(1,143.33) = 3.07, p = .082, \eta_p^2 = .02$, nor any interaction effect, $F(2, 90.77) = .596, p = .55, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Thus, both groups improved over time from baseline to follow-up [Intervention group: $EMI = 2.46, SE = .60, t(85.63) = 4.1, p = .001, d_s = 0.56$] and [Control group: $EMI = 1.58, SE = .57, t(85.59) = 2.75, p = .007, d_s = 0.36$] (see Figure 6.8). Much of this improvement occurred between baseline and post-intervention for both groups [Intervention group: $EMI = 1.88, SE = .63, t(118.64) = 2.97, p = .04, d_s = 0.43$] and [Control group: $EMI = 1.28, SE = .61, t(118.66) = 2.11, p = .037, d_s = 0.29$]. Further MMRM analysis showed no differences by gender $F(1, 142.96) = 2.05, p = .154, \eta_p^2 = .01$.

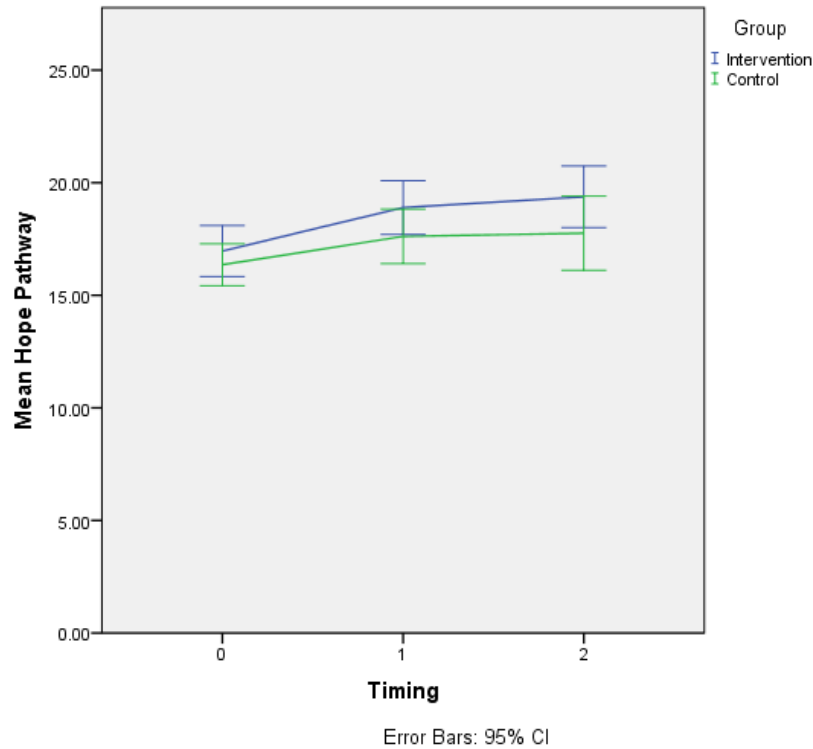


Figure 6.8 Mean ‘Hope-Pathways’ scores for participants in the intervention and control groups at T0, T1 and T2

Hope Total

As outlined in the Study Protocol, the Hope Total scale consists of the ‘Hope-agency’ and ‘Hope-pathways’ sub-scales. Analysis of each of these sub-scales has been presented separately in the previous sections. The following analysis, using this global measure of hope, found no statistically significant effects for group, $F(1, 141.40) = 0.952, p = .331, \eta_p^2 = .01$, or for a group time interaction, $F(2, 91.41) = 2.53, p = .086, \eta_p^2 = .05$. However, a main effect for time was evident, $F(2, 91.41) = 44.93, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .50$, thereby indicating that both groups improved with regard to hopefulness over time.

No main effects were identified for gender, $F(1, 139.76) = 1.97, p = .163, \eta_p^2 = .01$, but exploratory sub-group contrasts provided evidence for a medium statistically significant difference in total hope scores at T2 in intervention versus control group males [contrast estimate of mean difference = 4.63, $SE = 2.23, t(98.32) = 2.08, p = .041, d_s = .53$] (see

Figure 6.9). As mentioned earlier in this section, the Hope Total scale combines both ‘hope-agency’ and ‘hope-pathway’ scales and is therefore not a new variable, but a combination of these two.

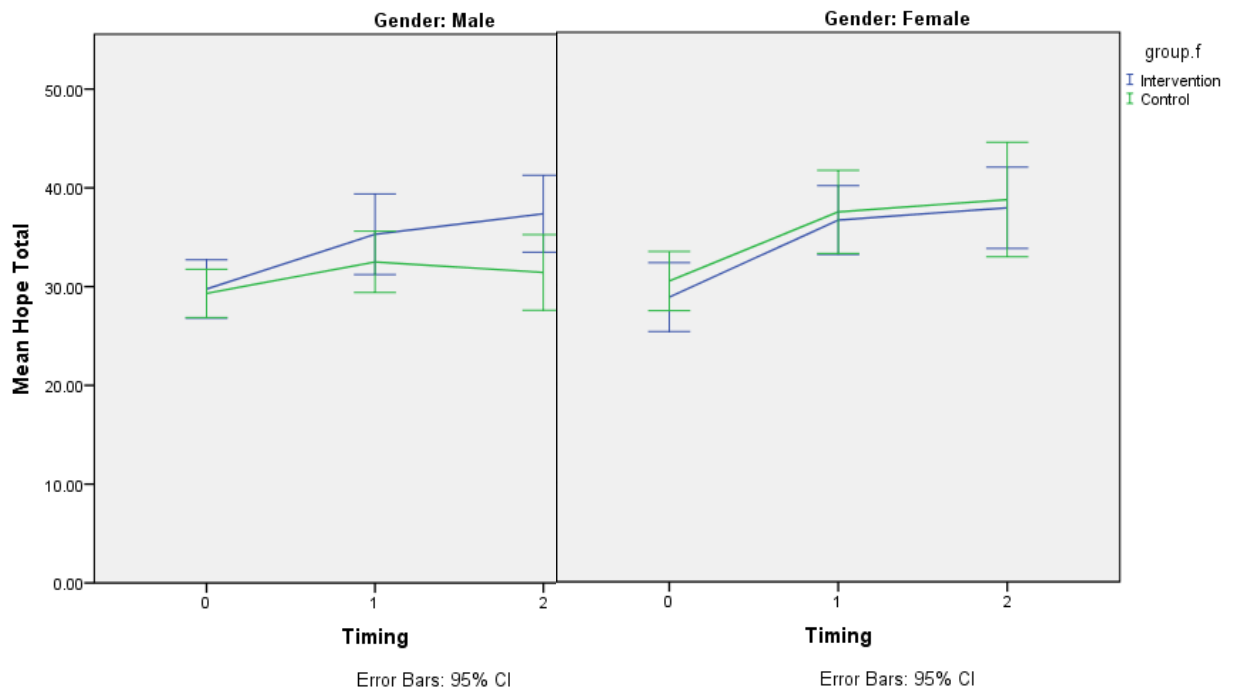


Figure 6.9 Mean ‘Hope-Total’ scores for Males in the intervention and control groups across the three time points.

6.2.4.2.2 Self-Esteem and resilience

The results with regard to self-esteem, showed no significant main effects for group, $F(1, 131.11) = 1.59, p = .21, \eta_p^2 = .01$, or group time interaction, $F(2, 90.46) = .88, p = .42, \eta_p^2 = .02$. However, a large significant main effect was observed for time, $F(2, 90.46) = 8.95, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .165$, whereby both groups showed significant improvements across the three time points.

In the case of the intervention group, a significant medium improvement was observed through post-hoc exploratory analysis, from baseline to six month follow up [EMI =2.74, SE=.835, $t(92.30) = 3.28$, $p = .001$, $d_s = 0.58$] (see Figure 6.10).

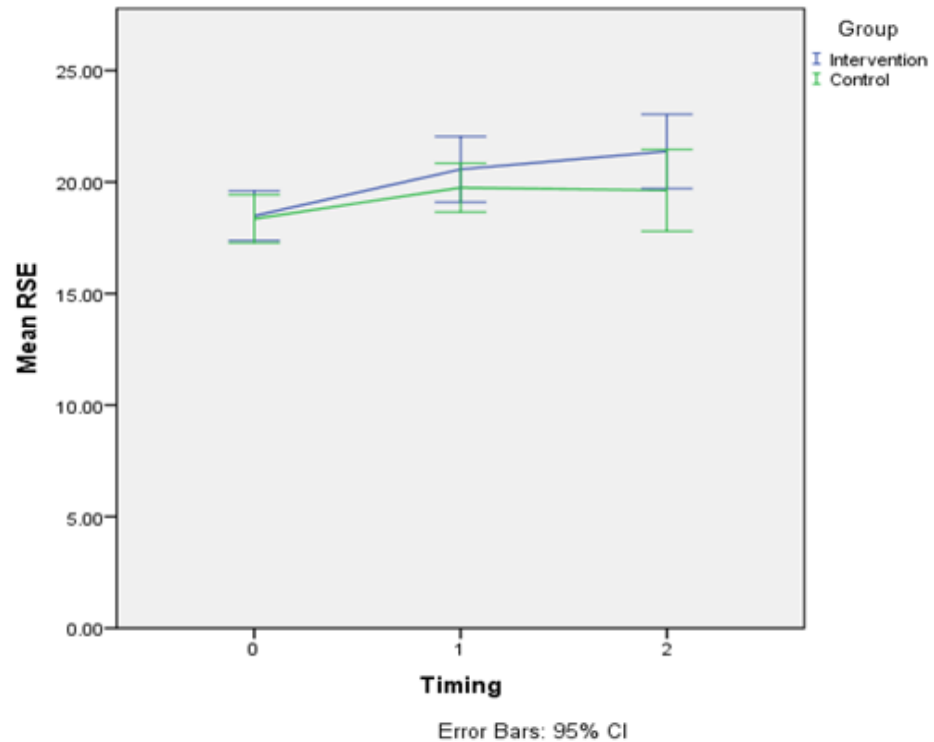


Figure 6.10 Mean self-esteem scores for the intervention and control groups over time

Changes also occurred for the control participants, but only statistically significantly so, with regard to the baseline-post-intervention time points [EMI =1.24, SE=.566, $t(113.82) = 2.19$, $p = .031$, $d_s = 0.26$]; there was no statistical evidence of change between the post-intervention and six-month time points [EMI = 1.23, SE=.80, $t(92.125) = 1.54$, $p = .128$, $d_s = 0.26$]. Further MMRM analysis demonstrated no main effect for gender, $F(1, 130.72) = 2.62$, $p = .108$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$.

With regard to the effectiveness of the intervention on resilience, the findings from the MMRM analysis showed no significant effect for time, $F(2, 83.52) = 2.44$, $p = .094$, $\eta_p^2 = .055$, group, $F(1, 125.44) = 0.275$, $p = .60$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$, nor a time-group

interaction, $F(2, 83.52) = .238, p = .79, \eta_p^2 = .005$ (see Figure 6.11). Following a further MMRM analysis, no gender effects were observed either, $F(1, 127.24) = 2.76, p = .99, \eta_p^2 = .02$.

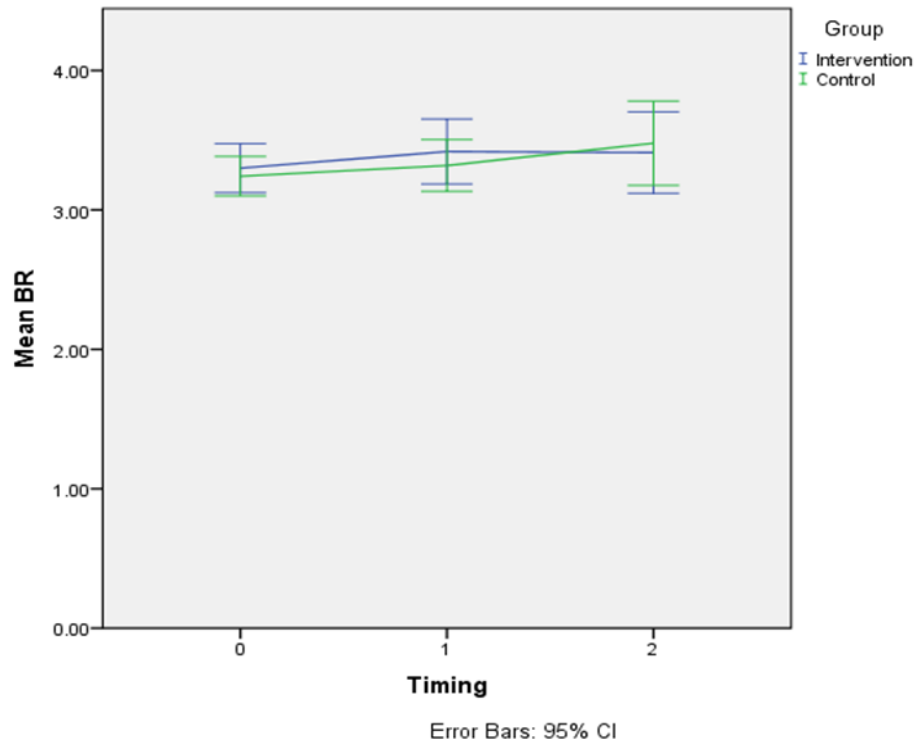


Figure 6.11 Mean resilience scores for participants in the intervention and control groups across the three time points

6.4.1.2.2 Career Efficacy

Similar to several other analyses, the analysis of career efficacy revealed a large significant effect for time, $F(2, 88.61) = 10.92, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .20$, but no significant effect for group, $F(1, 137.02) = 2.85, p = .094, \eta_p^2 = .02$, or time-group interaction, $F(2, 88.61) = 2.54, p = .085, \eta_p^2 = .05$.

Exploratory post-hoc analysis by way of contrasts suggests a significant improvement in career efficacy for the intervention group from baseline to follow up (Figure 6.12). A medium statistically significant difference was found between groups at the six-month follow-up [estimate of mean difference = 4.07, SE = 1.63, $t(83.61) = 2.50, p = .014, d_s = 0.55$].

With regard to the intervention group, a small statistically significant effect was found between baseline and post-intervention [EMI =3.28, SE=.96, $t(110.88) = 3.43$, $p=.001$, $d_s = .44$], and a medium to large effect from baseline to six-month follow-up. [EMI =5.02, SE=1.23, $t(90.72) = 4.085$, $p = .001$, $d_s = 0.68$].

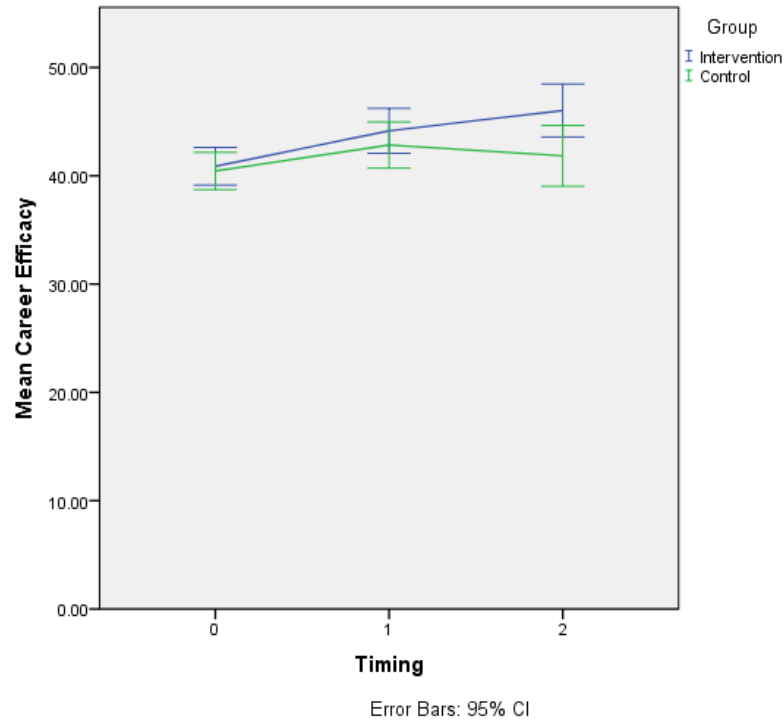


Figure 6.12 Mean ‘Career Efficacy’ scores for participants in the intervention and control groups at T0, T1 and T2

A small significant improvement was also evident within the control group from baseline to T1 [EMI = 2.49, SE =.94, $t(113.06) = 2.65$, $p = .009$, $d_s = 0.34$] but, as in the case of some of the other outcomes, there was no further change from T1 to T2 [EMI =- 1.15, SE=1.06, $t(75.04) = -1.09$, $p = .278$, $d_s = -0.16$].

Further MMRM analysis including gender as a fixed effect, revealed no significant effect, $F(1, 136.94) = .02$, $p = .889$, $\eta_p^2 = .0001$. Exploratory analysis provides some evidence for significantly higher levels of career efficacy for males in the intervention group at the six-month follow-up when compared to control group males [contrast estimate of mean difference =6.10, SE = 2.15, $t(83.85) = 2.83$, $p = .006$, $d_s =$

0.83] (see Figure 6.13). No such effect was observed for females [contrast estimate of mean difference =1.46, SE = 2.44, $t(83.34) = .602$, $p = .549$, $d_s = 0.20$].

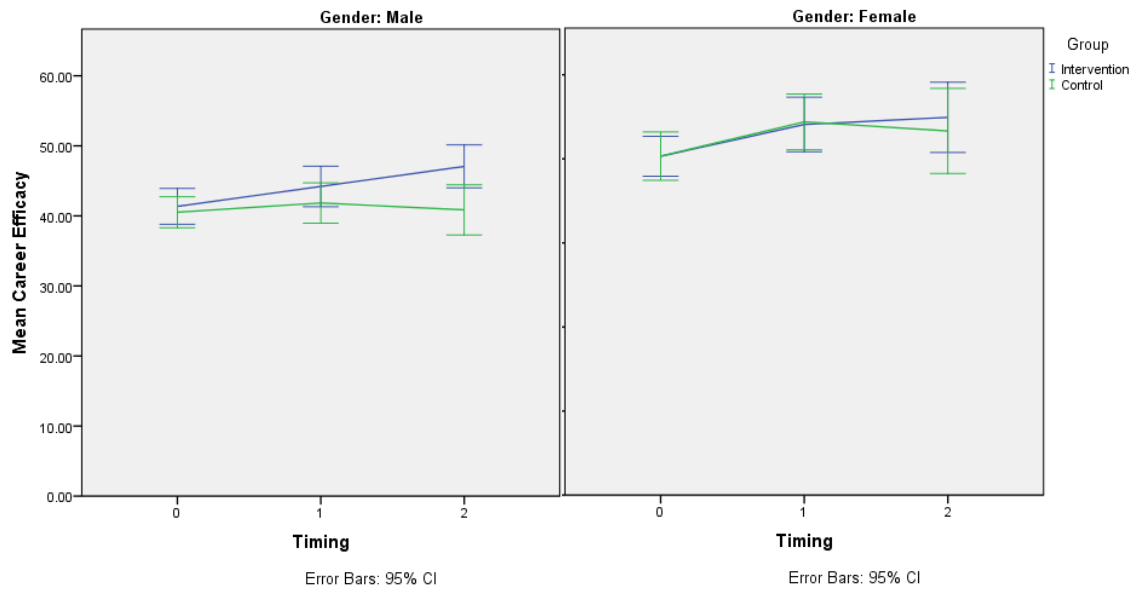


Figure 6.13 Mean ‘Career Efficacy’ scores for Males and Females in the intervention and control groups at the three time points

A summary of the results of the MMRM analyses presented above can be found in Table 6.9.

Table 6.9 Summary of MMRM results across all measures

	Interaction effect: Time x Group	Main effect		Contrasts			
		Group	Time	Within group	Between groups	Between groups (T2): Males	Between groups (T2): Females
	p (d_s)	p (η_p^2)	p (η_p^2)	p (d_s)	p (d_s)	p (d_s)	p (d_s)
GHQ-12	-	.046* (.03)	.001** (.57)	.001** (1.17)	.026* (.43)	.044* (.53)	-
SWLS	-	-	.001** (.19)	.002** (.55)	-	-	-
Hope-A	.036* (.07)	-	.001** (.54)	.001** (1.12)	-	.031* (.56)	-
Hope-P	-	-	.001** (.23)	.001** (.56)	-	-	-
Hope-T	-	-	.001** (.50)	.001** (.98)	-	.041* (.53)	-
RSE	-	-	.001** (.165)	.001** (.58)	-	-	-
BR	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Career	-	-	.001** (.197)	.001** (.68)	.014* (.55)	.006** (.83)	-

* significant at $p < .05$
 ** significant at $p < .01$

6.5 Further Analysis of the re-employment measures

An additional planned analysis was conducted to assess differences within and between groups with regard to their re-employment outcomes. These analyses are reported below.

6.5.1 Cantril's Ladder and perceptions of improved employability

Cantril's Ladder was used to assess perceived employability at T0 and T1. Descriptive statistics at baseline ($n = 135$) revealed a range of scores from 1-8 (out of a maximum of 10) with comparable mean scores for the intervention group ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.96$) and control group ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 2.07$). An independent samples t-test found no statistically significant differences between means at baseline ($p > 0.05$).

There is evidence that participants perception of their employability improved overall with paired samples t-tests showing statistically significant (and large) increases from T0 to T1, in scores for both the intervention group, [T0 ($M = 3.71$, $SD=1.92$); T1($M = 5.82$, $SD=1.72$, $t(48)=-11.22$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .724$], and the control group, [T0($M=3.29$, $SD=1.55$) to T1 [$M=6$, $SD=2.4$, $t(20)=-5.45$, $p=.001$, $\eta^2 = .597$]. However, an independent samples t-test identified no statistically significant difference between groups with regard to mean change at T1.

6.5.2 Re-employment outcomes post intervention

Outcome data relating to re-employment or progression toward the labour market were gathered by practitioners at T1 and T2. However, very little T1 (post-intervention) data were available as participants were either receiving ongoing support, were referred to external services, or were implementing career plans (see Table 6.10).

At six-month follow-up, 49% of the participants in the Intervention group were implementing a career plan compared to 40% of the control group, whilst similar

proportions (approximately one in five) in each group were receiving ongoing support, such as job seeking, guidance, training support. Only a relatively small proportion of participants in each group (13% intervention, 18% control) had accessed employment either in their preferred job or in another form of employment.

The perceived quality of the outcome, in terms of its relevance to participants' career plans and progression paths to sustainable employment, was also captured at the six-month follow up (where possible) (see Table 6.10). Participants in the intervention group were twice as likely to be in education or training, with 20% in basic, vocational, or industry specific training, compared to 9% of those in the control group. Similarly, twice as many intervention participants (24%) had started a supported employment activation initiative such as CE or TUS, when compared to control participants (10%). However, 22% of control group participants were actively job seeking compared to only 4% of intervention group participants.

Table 6.10 Re-employment perceived quality of outcome status at six-month follow-up

Outcome	Intervention (n=71) N (%)	Control (n=78) N (%)
Preferred job	5 (7)	5 (6)
Other employment	4 (6)	9 (12)
Implementing Plan	35 (49)	31(40)
Ongoing Support	15 (22)	19 (24)
Referred to another service	6 (8)	6 (8)
Unknown	6 (8)	8 (10)
Perceived quality of outcome		
Basic Training	2 (3)	3 (4)
Vocational Training	10 (14)	3 (4)
Industry Specific training	2 (3)	1 (1)
CE	12(17)	7 (9)
TUS	5 (7)	0
Gateway	0 (0)	1 (1)
Job seeking	3 (4)	17(22)
PT employment	1 (1)	6 (8)
FT employment	8 (12)	9 (11)
Unknown	28 (39)	31 (40)
CE: Community Employment / TUS: Community work placement / Gateway: Local Authority Labour Activation Scheme / PT work Part-time employment / FT employment		

The number of participants from either the intervention or control groups, who progressed into employment at the six-month follow-up point, was too small to examine any between-group differences by levels of job satisfaction, job sustainability, or levels of earnings.

6.6 Summary of the findings

6.6.1 Primary Outcomes

1. Almost three-quarters of the overall sample reported moderate to high levels of psychological distress at baseline; females reported significantly higher levels than males.
2. Levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem were below average or low average respectively when compared to general population norms.
3. There were no differences at baseline between the intervention and control groups.
4. The results of the MMRM suggest that both the intervention and SAU had led to improvements in levels of psychological distress whereby both groups were reporting mean levels below the clinical cut-off at the six month follow-up. A more marked improvement from T0 to T1 was seen in the intervention group, albeit not sufficiently large to lead to differ statistically from the control group.
5. Exploratory sub-group analysis provided some evidence to suggest that the intervention may be more effective for males, as male intervention participants reported statistically significantly lower levels of psychological distress at follow-up when compared to males in the SAU group.

6.6.2 Secondary outcomes

6. Levels of hope agency in both groups improved significantly over time suggesting that both the intervention and control services had helped to increase levels of

motivation for pursuing goals, an important factor in career development and job seeking behaviour.

7. Exploratory sub-group analysis suggested that the intervention may be effective in leading to moderate improvements in hope-agency i.e. goal-directed energy, amongst males as statistically significant differences were identified when comparing intervention group males to control group males at the six-month follow up. No such effects were found for females.
8. Over time levels of overall hopefulness increased in both groups but there was no statistical evidence for differences between groups, or differences between groups across time.
9. Both groups showed significant improvements in self-esteem across the three time points but again there was no statistical evidence for differences between groups, or differences between groups across time.
10. With regard to resilience there were no changes across the three time points, nor differences between groups.
11. Levels of career efficacy improved over time in both groups, but with no statistically significant differences between the two. Exploratory sub-group analysis indicated that the intervention may be more effective for males with significantly higher levels of career efficacy evident at the six-month follow-up when compared to their control group counterparts.
12. Both groups showed statistically significant increases in perceptions of improved employability between baseline and post-intervention. No differences were found between groups.
13. Intervention participants were more likely to be engaged in an ALMP such as training or supported employment and less likely to be job seeking than their control group counterparts.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has identified the changes that occurred for a sample of LTU job seekers participating in a high support intervention when compared to a SAU control group. The EEPIC trial has provided quantitative evidence for the effectiveness of both EEPIC and the SAU with regard to improving psychological well-being and some employability components. Exploratory sub-group analysis has suggested that the intervention maybe more effective for males. These findings will be appraised and discussed further in the concluding chapters.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Results Study Three: Small Scale Process Evaluation

7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the processes that shaped the implementation of both the intervention and SAU services and aims to understand the casual mechanisms and contextual factors which influenced the outcomes observed in Study Two. As outlined in Chapter Four, data were gathered through a series of one-to-one interviews with intervention participants and focus groups with practitioners and key stakeholders, as well as the analysis of a range of policy documents and reports.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first details the experiences of clients who participated in the intervention, whilst the second provides insights into the views and experiences of intervention practitioners. The final section focuses on the opinions of practitioners delivering the SAU. The findings are summarised in a brief concluding section.

7.2 Views of intervention participants

This section describes the perceptions of a sample of participants ($n = 6$) who received the intervention within the EEPIC trial. It first examines key perceived outcomes as described by participants and then explores the active components of the intervention leading to these outcomes. A brief description of each participant including their demographic and background details is provided in Appendix 12.

7.2.1 Perceived outcomes of the intervention

Participants reported five significant inter-related outcomes (see Figure 7.1) which they believed occurred as a result of their participation in the intervention.

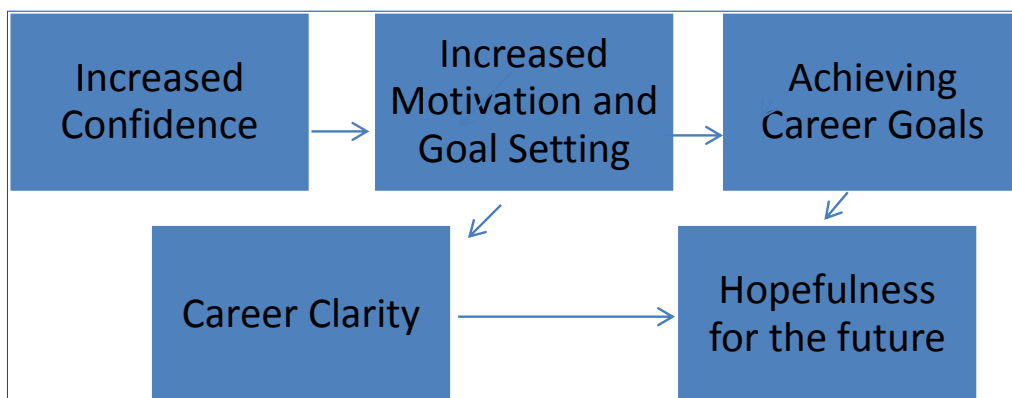


Figure 7.1 Main outcomes as identified by intervention participants

Firstly, participants spoke about feelings of increased confidence which enabled them to apply for jobs and training courses for which they would not have applied in the past. They described putting themselves forward for programmes, believing in their employability, and ‘giving in’ less frequently to barriers, such as a lack of qualifications or experience. Notably, participants felt different about themselves compared to when they first accessed services:

‘Being more confident and not that nervous any more, being able to talk more’ (21 year old female, never worked)

The second outcome reported was a belief that with good guidance, and practitioners support, there were many ways to achieve career goals outside of formal educational routes. For example, one participant reflected how, with guidance, she shifted her focus from surviving financially in basic jobs without any fulfilment, to

having a career goal in furniture restoration, a task she had always enjoyed and found interesting.

‘No matter what you want to do there is a way of getting around it ...they [NGO] will show you the right path..., whereas if you were on your own you probably wouldn’t have an iota what to do.’(21 year old male, never worked)

‘A job that I’d really like to do not just to pay the bills, something that I’d enjoy, that I’d want to get up for.’(38 year old female, unemployed for 10years)

Significantly, the need for career clarity was highlighted by all participants, some of whom had no initial understanding of the range of jobs they could do, while others did not consider certain jobs, either because of perceived barriers or a sense of not being able to do a particular job. In one instance, for example, a male participant (aged 48) considered himself too old for a specific job he had wanted to pursue all his life, yet after supportive guidance he had started training, had career clarity, and planned to move on to the next level:

“I thought ‘brilliant’ that’s exactly what I want to do and when I got it, I was over the moon, over the moon you know!” (Male, aged 48, unemployed for over 10 years)

With the fourth outcome, goal setting, participants described more frequent positive moods, higher levels of motivation and feeling happier with goals and career plans. For example, one younger participant spoke of behavioural change, increased motivation, and earlier rising compared to his pre-intervention lethargy:

“I wouldn’t have got the course if I hadn’t come up here...I already want more hours on it, more days...” (21 year old male, never worked)

Participants attributed increased happiness to a range of factors including gaining new skills and qualifications, acceptance onto programmes, and clarity about career plans. Feelings of increased employability were attributed to increased goal setting and the achievement of short-term goals such as attendance at a jobs club, or interviews.

A fifth outcome reported by participants was feeling hopeful for the future. All expressed hope, and spoke about feeling excited about getting a job, and the independence that it would bring:

“I’d like to have an income cause in that way...not just be able to have a life but I wouldn’t be going out on someone else’s pocket all the time...and I hate that feeling”
(38 year old mother of young children, unemployed for 10 years)

Participant’s felt more control over their situation with a clearer view of their short-term future. While still not fully decided on next steps, they reported things were ‘getting easier’, that they had achieved small goals through the intervention process, and had overcome employability related fears and anxiety. One participant explained that she had more skills and support to cope with still lingering fears.

“I think my future is brighter now, whereas I didn’t know where I was going...there is light at the end of the tunnel, I feel I could do a few more things, at least I know where I can go, where I can get to, whereas before I’d be saying there are too many things in the way, I can’t get there.” (48 year old female, unemployed for 5 years)

Nevertheless, one participant alluded to her continued lack of hope, seeing herself as ‘always being on the breadline’ as her current skill set meant little chance of accessing above minimum wage level employment. Her desire to remain in education in the short-term, was tempered by fears that social welfare rules would compel her to look for work, an illustration of the pressure and control often felt by job seekers, who know that to progress they need to spend a longer time in training and education, but who feel pressured to take up employment.

Despite progressing¹⁶, the participant, post-intervention, continued to have low basic skills, and required more time for significant skill development; the same was true of

¹⁶ This participant, as part of the intervention, completed a literacy programme at QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) level 3 and hoped to progress to level 5, equivalent to a Leaving Certificate on the National Framework of Qualifications.

two other interviewees, both of whom were motivated to continue participation over a longer time period.

Overall, participants were realistic about their futures, indicating that while there were still uncertainties, they had a clearer sense of direction. One 48 year old male spoke about his ongoing anxiety and how participating in the intervention and subsequent training course had helped him overcome his anxiety and look forward to Monday mornings:

“My downs are more at the weekends now, I’d be sitting at home ‘what will I do, will I get a couple of cans and sit in you know, bored, looking forward to getting back into college.” (*Male, aged 48, unemployed for over 10 years*)

For this participant, a growing sense of confidence and improved well-being had enabled him to think about his well-being more generally. He explained he felt different about his future as he could see a path for himself after completing his training. A recurring theme was how participants’ initially low expectations of the intervention based on, for example, their sense of self, and previous experiences of the employment services, had changed. They now had hopes for employment into the future:

“It’s been positive, and I didn’t think it was going to be but it’s got me where I want to be at the moment and I wouldn’t have got it without here... so I’m happy.” (*21 year old male, never worked*)

7.2.2 Active Components

Four key themes (see Figure 7.2), and drivers of change: approach, staff skills, process and service setting, emerged from participants’ interviews; all these active components of the intervention were reported as influential in enabling participants to achieve the outcomes described earlier. Each theme is described below.

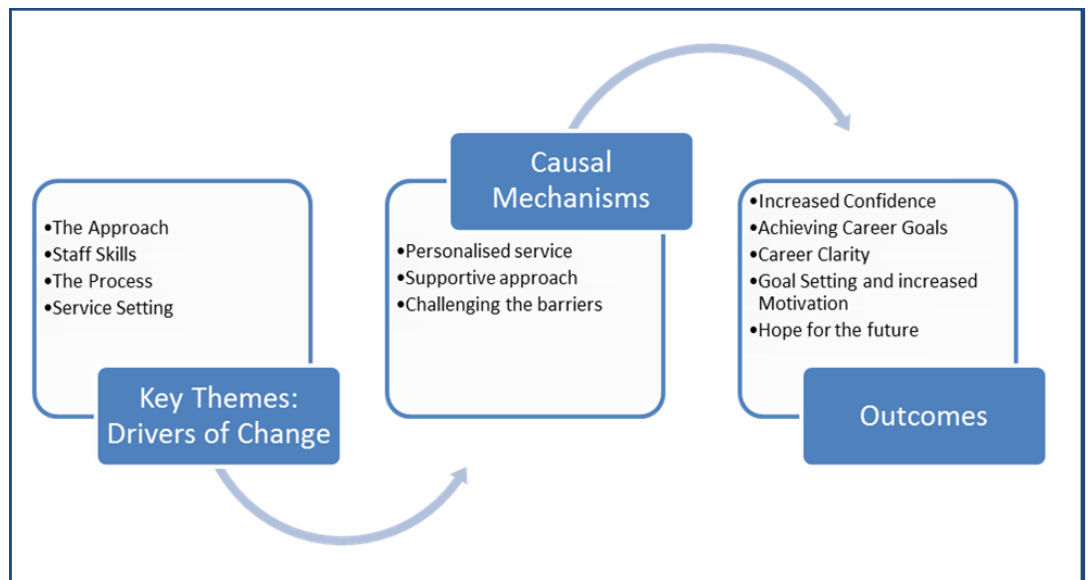


Figure 7. 2 Key drivers of change, causal mechanisms, and outcomes as identified by participants

7.2.2.1 The Approach

The approach used by intervention practitioners was emphasised by participants as contributing significantly to the effectiveness of the intervention. This next section outlines the three core elements or casual mechanism of this approach including: (1) a personalised service; (2) a supportive approach; and (3) overcoming barriers.

7.2.2.1.1 A personalised service

The personalised service gives participants a sense that they were known personally to the practitioner. This was enabled by the practitioner making time to get to know them and their skills, being available and willing to offer support, so that participants feel listened to and cared for, and know that practitioners had expectations and hopes for their futures. For example, three participants spoke about the ease with which their relationship developed with the practitioner, who came across as open and genuinely interested. This was important in enabling them to speak freely about their barriers to employment. Starting off and staying with a dedicated practitioner was highlighted by all participants as being essential to building a trusting relationship,

maintaining motivation and encouraging openness and honesty, as illustrated by the following:

‘They remember things that are going on in your life and you feel you are not just a number.’ (38 year old female)

‘They get to know you and understand where you are coming from it is important to have that, because they are not able to advise you on what to do next if they don’t know who you are.’ (42 year old female)

‘Why would you open up to a person if you are never going to see them again?’ (21 year old male)

The relationship had given them confidence in the service and in their own abilities and was markedly different to other similar services, such as Intreo, where such continuity was not always possible.

7.2.2.1.2 An enabling approach

Enabling features of the approach, are associated with improved feelings of well-being and subsequent progression, include information provision on the multitude of options available and feedback to participants on their decisions. A young, 21 year old participant explained how such features helped steer him onto the right path whilst also building his confidence. Participants received realistic feedback about whether or not they were ready for the next step, or whether they should aim for a smaller goal in the first instance. A young participant, with very weak communication skills, explained that as part of the intervention, her practitioner had advised a weekly routine of three to four brief participant-practitioner meetings which, in turn, had impacted positively on her confidence:

“I feel more confident, I don’t feel as shy, I feel I’m talking more than I used to, I was never able to talk to anyone before...It stopped me in a way from doing things, because of being shy, a lot of people would be saying to me, you have to talk more.....but I just couldn’t get it out right” (21 year old female)

Others spoke about having the freedom to ask questions, thus feeling more informed and enabled to make important decisions. It is interesting to note, that four of the six interviewees alluded to the assumption on the part of other service providers, that job seekers are aware of the system and all of the options available and, therefore, that job seekers should not have to ask questions.

“I think that there was some one there that I could ask if I needed something, because I would not have had a clue of where to turn...and I didn’t even realise that until I got called in here that was an option, someone that would help you along the way.” (38 year old female)

7.2.2.1.3 Challenging the barriers

One of the most significant aspects of the intervention related to how participants felt supported in challenging perceived barriers. All six interviewees presented to the service with a range of both practical and dispositional barriers (see Table 7.2.1, for the full range of barriers identified in interviews), and yet most had overcome or almost overcome these post-intervention. Importantly, three could now recognise differences between actual and perceived barriers to employment; for example, one participant felt, initially, that his employment options were limited by his weak formal educational qualifications, but following the intervention, he identified his ‘indecisiveness’ as being a more significant barrier:

“That was a big part as to why I was unemployed, cause I was never really sure as to what I wanted to do.” (21 year old male)

Arguably, some barriers, such as literacy, mental health problems, domestic issues, or addiction, are more stigmatised and therefore, more challenging than others to raise or discuss. Notably, despite the sizeable proportion (34%) of participants with no formal qualifications only a small number of intervention participants highlighted low

levels of literacy as a significant barrier in Study Two (see Table 6.4). In one case, an interviewee indicated disclosure of her low literacy levels only mid-way through the intervention, despite being asked about such barriers at the initial one-to-one meeting. Having been previously employed for 15 years she managed to conceal her poor literacy skills but upon being made redundant, her job choice was now limited. She described the entire process, from accessing social welfare to job seeking, as a ‘nightmare’ due to the high level of form filling.

Another participant described his mental health problems and their impact, not only in terms of his employability, but in his personal life more generally. He explained his initial reluctance to attend the employment services, describing feelings of low mood and lack of motivation and how he felt there was ‘absolutely nothing about’ him that would be beneficial to an employer. He described the intervention as a wide-ranging service which focused on other aspects of his life and not only employment, thereby allowing him to challenge many issues which were contributing to his low levels of well-being and his continued unemployment. Following the intervention, all interviewees recognised and emphasised the importance of disclosing and challenging barriers to employment, within the context of a trusting and supportive relationship with their practitioner.

Table 7.2.1 Perceived barriers

Practical and human capital barriers	Internal and psychological capital barriers
Out-dated skills /no skills	Dilemma of working / looking after family / children
Lack of Childcare	Low confidence
No Transport	Lack of career clarity
Weak / no computer skills	Allowing others to influence participation – peer pressure
Early school leaving / weak basic skills / literacy	Fear of only having choice of the jobs that no one else wants
No qualifications	Indecisiveness
Poor work history	Low self-esteem
Lack of communication skills	Feelings of low well-being / low mood
Low pay	Addiction (alcohol / cannabis)

7.2.2.2 Staff Skills

Little is known about the impact of staff skills on the improved well-being, increased employability, and subsequent re-employment of job seekers, however participants clearly linked staff skills to their progression. Practitioners were described as being extremely knowledgeable, very understanding, helpful, and encouraging. Their skill mix provided participants with appropriate career related information, an empathetic ear, supportive but yet challenging assistance, and progressive career planning.

All participants referred to a holistic approach, explaining that as part of the intervention, they discussed a wide range of issues in their lives that were preventing their progression into employment. Conversations with practitioners extended beyond identifying a training course, or getting a job, this appeared to have helped participants to ‘want to go after things more’, thereby having a motivating impact. An older male participant explained that many of his career-related barriers were ‘in his own head’ and that the practitioner had enabled him to reason these out, even though on the surface, these barriers could be regarded as having little to do with securing employment:

“...she helped me in more ways than she thinks.”

Approachability of the practitioners and their flexible approach was highlighted as a crucial aspect of the intervention process. The practitioner skills and competences described by participants included effective listening, and using non-judgemental and empathetic approaches, all of which contributed toward the person-centred and supportive approach mentioned earlier. For example, one 42 year-old woman who had been unemployed for five years, referred to her low mood and indicated how the practitioner had skilfully enabled her to express her fears and barriers. This helped her

gain perspective and increased her confidence which, in turn, had led to the setting of shorter-term and more realistic career goals:

“Not rushing you in and rushing you out, you actually feel like she dealing with you”
(42 year old female, unemployed for 5 years)

“I think I was really down at that stage, because I wanted to be working, I didn’t actually want to be there. I didn’t want to be talking about it, I wanted to be earning money.....it made me feel lower than low...I should have been in work in my head...I shouldn’t have been there...but she made me very relaxed, I wouldn’t be where I am now without her...” (42 year old female, unemployed for 5 years)

“She would put you at ease...nothing is a silly question” (unemployed female, aged 38yrs)

7.2.2.3 The Process

Overall, interviewees described the process itself as enjoyable and interesting. They highlighted the range of methods and tools used by the practitioners including EGUIDE¹⁷, Extended Choices for Young People (ECYP)¹⁸, ‘the ladder’¹⁹, and vocational counselling amongst others, and explained that the practitioner had tailored the process to meet their specific needs. Importantly, all participants reported how the process led to improvements in self-knowledge and self-awareness and described the range of options available to them, emphasising an enhanced awareness of ALMPs, education and training, and employment opportunities. One 21-year-old man stated that ECYP had helped maintain his motivation and focus (with which he had previously experienced difficulty) and subsequently enabled him to explore and take up a place on a retail training programme. Several participants referred to this type of supportive

¹⁷ An online career guidance tool which identifies career interests, behavioural styles, and cognitive strengths

¹⁸ Extended Choices for Young People: a career guidance approach used by practitioners working with younger clients - part of the career guidance tool kit

¹⁹ Cantril’s Self Anchoring Ladder (Cantril, 1965): as described in the Study Protocol, (p.20) (see Appendix 4)

process as being critical, particularly in the context of reportedly low levels of self-esteem and confidence and previously negative experiences of education and training:

“You feel like you want to do it more, because you chose it, it wasn’t something you were told to doand it opened up more doors than I ever thought I would be able to go through.” (*Male aged 48, unemployed for over 10 years*)

Three participants highlighted the goal setting aspect of the intervention process as useful in helping them ‘feel’ that they were progressing. A number of specific approaches were mentioned including Cantril’s ladder and the ECYP process; the latter includes daily goal setting tasks which involve achievable everyday goals such as walking the dog, or preparing a meal. Several of the participants referred to setting goals related to life skills, which while not directly connected to career development and job seeking, had helped to build confidence. Practitioners also encouraged participants to set larger goals such as researching a scheme or going for an interview. Notably, five of the six interviewees had never purposely set goals before, but all mentioned the positive impact of this activity on their overall levels of confidence:

“At first I was nervous coming in but now I’m getting used to it....[Practitioner] is keeping me on track with the goals.” (*21 year old female*)

All participants also mentioned their lack of awareness of the options available to them, particularly with regard to education and how the intervention process had provided them with options and greater choice than previously. One participant, for example, who was made redundant, explained that, having left school at the age of 15 and previously worked all her adult life, her lack of education became a significant barrier to re-accessing the labour market.

“I wouldn’t be on the course or even know about them” (*48 year old female*)

Three participants alluded to the effectiveness of activation in motivating them to attend and engage with the service in the first instance. Importantly, they identified the friendly non-threatening environment and the approach of staff, as factors which had contributed to their ongoing service engagement. Thus, while the activation aspect of the process succeeded in initially engaging job seekers, other factors had helped to maintain attendance. While the intervention consisted of career exploration, self-awareness, career planning, and job search assistance, participants consistently spoke about the one-one-one sessions, often referring to them as ‘counselling’.

There was a consensus from participants post-intervention, that they had been on a journey, which had reportedly far exceeded their expectations and not least due to the dedication of the practitioner coupled with the relaxed yet challenging pace. Progression and improved well-being were also attributed to practitioners’ style of ‘checking in’ to ensure participants were happy with the process and their progress, giving a feeling of ownership and control of the process, and a sense that it was their ‘choice’. Arguably, there is a more than subtle difference between this approach and the monitoring of job seeking as described in Chapter Three and evident in the PTWP, particularly with regard to its impact on well-being. This nuanced approach, both during the intervention and in terms of ongoing support, demonstrated the high level of practitioner skills and understanding of the specific needs of each individual job seeker.

7.2.2.4 The Service Setting

As outlined in Chapter Four, and the Study Protocol (see Appendix 4), the EEPIC trial (both intervention and SAU) was conducted in an NGO located in a disadvantaged urban area in Dublin. This was seen as less intimidating than official public offices which were described as ‘strict’ and ‘cold’. Participants indicated that this relaxed atmosphere made them more willing to engage with the service. Five

participants described feeling calm and able to talk and listen in small meeting rooms of the NGO. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of experiencing, from the moment they entered the service, a genuine and friendly atmosphere, especially as they were nervous and unsure when attending for the first time:

“It’s a more relaxed atmosphere, even just like the paintings and the colour of the walls.” *(21 year old male)*

“Everyone here is friendly, even the girl on the [reception] desk is friendly.” *(42 year old female)*

“If someone is nice to you and the atmosphere is relaxed, it puts you at ease.” *(48 year old male)*

Equally, participants spoke about the importance of practitioner accessibility if, for example, they had a query or something to discuss. This possibility of calling into the NGO, or contacting the practitioner by email or phone, were considered by all as important in sustaining their engagement with the service - and a sharp contrast to the perceived formality of the Intreo office:

“you would take a ticket, you’d be sitting there thinking who am I going to see, what are they going to be like, some of them are grumps....like they don’t want you to be there, like I have stuff to be doing without dealing with you at the counter kinda....well that’s the feeling you get off them all the time you go over there...” *(42 year old female unemployed for 5 years)*

7.3 Intervention Practitioners

As outlined earlier in Chapter Four, two focus groups were conducted with practitioners in order to assess their views of delivering the intervention. Three key themes were identified; the intervention; staff related factors; and the service setting. Subthemes identified from the analysis of the findings are outlined in Tables 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, while each of the major themes are described below. The first relates to the intervention itself.

7.3.1 Theme 1: The Intervention

A total of five sub-themes were identified including: (1) establishing trust in the relationship from the outset; (2) using tools to assess progress over time; (3) taking a longer-term view; (4) using an individualised approach; and (5) autonomy in the practitioners' role. Each of these sub-themes is described in the following section, while Table 7.2 provides more detail on each sub-theme, and its casual mechanisms, impact and outcomes, as perceived by the guidance practitioners.

Table 7.2 The intervention: causal mechanisms, impacts, and outcomes for the intervention

Aspects of the intervention	Casual mechanisms	Impacts	Outcome
Guidance Approach	Welcoming session Profile Tools Friendly approach	Thinking about employment Options available Like & dislikes Gets client talking Motivation Challenging beliefs	Thinking space Trust Reflection Self-awareness Short-medium-long term career goals
Illustrating progression	Cantrils Ladder To-do tasks Encouragement Realistic decision making Tools / approaches	Recognising progression Making decisions See process as scientific and trust worthy Physical change	Builds self-esteem Reduces dependency on service Ownership Increased confidence Improved well-being
Time	Building relationships No-time limit to engagement Flexibility to decide on length of meetings	Longer term impact Prevents revolving door Reduces short-term outcomes Thinking about options Limits quick decisions Allows for participants to change direction and return to service if option is not right	Longer term career thinking Longer terms career goals Culture change in seeing self as employee Increased Staff satisfaction
Individualised service approach	Identification of specific needs Profile Professional judgement Focus on needs and not the system Content of meetings Approach	Improved quality Trust Content of engagement designed to meet specific needs	Increased progression Decreased time Effectiveness Feelings of being valued, respected, dignified Hopeful for the future Increased self -belief Increased career efficacy
Autonomy	Professional judgement Flexibility to schedule appointments	Individualised service Reduced system adherence Eligibility based on need rather than system rules	Responsive service Needs based service

7.3.1.1 The guidance approach – establishing trust

The guidance approach was highlighted as an essential component of the intervention. Practitioners explained that many participants had not had a guidance opportunity prior to the intervention, perhaps due to leaving school early or the passive nature of the previous LMP as described in Chapter Three. They had not reflected on the world of work, identified preferences for various job tasks, or built upon previous experiences or skills. At the initial meeting, an in-depth profile form used by practitioners to gather important information was described as important in establishing a basic level of trust in the service (see Table 7.2). Practitioners emphasised the important outcome of trust and its role in promoting openness amongst clients about their needs and how best these might be met:

“The needs analysis is very good because it shows you where their starting point is and then how you are progressing and they can see that themselves in terms of the stages we have gone through. The relationship builds up and they trust you more..., I like the process.”

Practitioners contrasted how the intervention and the SAU facilitated trust but explained that monitoring of SAU participants, despite their continued progress and improved employability, did not enhance the relationship, leading instead to suspicion in the service:

“I feel like I am stalking people, people who are doing as much as they can, yet I have to meet them every month.”

7.3.1.2 Progress - a focus on assessing progress

The interviewees - believing that it was important to encourage participants to talk at the first meeting - facilitated this using the initial profiling tool with its mix of questions which were both factual, (e.g. previous education or employment) and personal (e.g.

hopes and ambitions) in nature, giving participants the opportunity to speak about themselves in a more holistic way. The profile assessment also acted as a useful yardstick for the practitioner to reflect on, and explore, any changes in direction or progress over time toward a chosen career:

“I would let the clients do most of the talking when I first meet them, I just let them speak ...

“The profile at the beginning was very helpful. I would refer back to it at times, ‘this is what you said at the very beginning, your career choice is so important to you, is that still the same now or has anything changed for you?’ it’s good to reflect back on it.”

The ongoing appraisal of progress had helped practitioners better understand changes in their client’s perceived employability, and to identify more individualised approaches (see Table 7.2). Tools such as Cantril’s Ladder were described as very helpful because these enabled participants to assess their own progress over time:

“Using Cantril’s Ladder, because it is visual so you can see whether they have gone up or down. Generally they go up but even how far they have moved up and the speed that they move up...”

7.3.1.3 Allowing sufficient time for the intervention

Practitioners reiterated the importance of allowing participants the time to achieve longer-term and meaningful career plans rather than ‘revolving door’ type outcomes, such as one day training courses (in the absence of a career plan) or unstructured ‘hap-hazard’ job search (see Table 7.2). This longer-term perspective was described by all as time consuming; despite this, staff felt positive in terms of their own job satisfaction and ethical obligations, they felt that they were not ‘pushing people’ into making decisions when they were not ready to do so:

“You have time to listen, time to know the client, the client has time look at the options, and opportunities, time for the client to get to a space where they are going to go into employment”

“One of the things that we learned from motivational interviewing is that change takes time, change can't be instant and if there is that much dependency and all those types of barriers”

Allowing time to reflect on progress was an essential aspect of the intervention which contributed positively to the client's self-esteem and enabling better informed decisions. Practitioners balanced encouragement and realistic decision making, while it might be quicker for the practitioner to be directive, this did not facilitate career decision making or the development of sustainable career management skills. The nonprescriptive approach and encouraging participants to take on tasks for their next meeting allowed participants feel a sense of ownership of the decisions made, this, in turn, increased participant's agency and decreased levels of dependency.

7.3.1.4 Individualised service

Practitioners also highlighted ‘the doing’ of the intervention, explaining that the frequency of meetings was less important than their content. By identifying a participant's needs early in the process, the practitioner could plan the meetings in terms of their content, thus ensuring an effective individualised service and enabling progression over a shorter period of time.

“So it is not the frequency of the interaction, it is really the content of the interaction is the key to getting that outcome or the impact after as few meetings as possible.”

Moreover, practitioners reported that the content of the interaction, combined with a caring and respectful approach, were important in allowing the participants to feel valued, respected, and dignified. The guidance approach and tools were highlighted as important aspects of the intervention, with practitioners expressing confidence in

their utility with regard to decision making and career clarity. Both practitioners and participants perceived the intervention as ‘scientific’, due to its process, tools, and approaches.

“It’s not just prescribing something, because when people feel that they have made the decision, that they have come to a decision through exploration there is a lot more excitement and also, they see it as scientific...”

The intervention also enabled practitioners to challenge person-specific barriers such as low motivation and self-belief, addiction, or hopelessness, all of which often tend to be normalised by clients. For example, one practitioner described a participant whose use of cannabis impacted his ability to follow through on career goals, yet he presented well and on time to every meeting. The initial profile and supportive approach helped uncover these issues which were affecting his progression towards employment. Similarly, practitioners spoke about participants presenting with a ‘don’t care’ attitude which can be successfully addressed with careful and tailored support:

“But it is about breaking that down, really working with them so they realise that they will gain more. You have to work on taking that fear away and sometimes because it can come across as being a real ‘I don’t care’ you have to be very careful the way you work and understand... Let’s try putting yourself in this person’s shoes, how would you feel about this?”

Issues identified through the initial profile could, be incorporated into, and challenged, as part of a structured career plan. Interestingly, the delivery of intervention also involved challenging participant’s goals and helping them to set more realistic aspirations, thereby avoiding possible feelings of failure in the medium to longer term:

“You know, you have to challenge them and be realistic about things even though it can be difficult..., if a client really wants to go somewhere we might say, ‘yeah that is a great idea but how about taking this step first?’”

Notably, there was consensus from all practitioners that job seekers differ, and that ‘one size does not fit all’. Personal knowledge of their participants gave insight into why behaviour might be inconsistent with that normally expected in the employment services. For example, one practitioner described a client with learning difficulties who had consistently missed appointments and been ‘picked up’ by the social welfare system, who had issued a verbal warning. Arguably, this client needed more intensive levels of support but the existing SAU system was too rigid for him to successfully achieve his employment-related goals:

“... having enough experience to know, you don't want to set them up for a fall or be patronising either because they might be very capable.....But I believe it is that listening, really listening, but sometimes you have to push as well as be gentle.”

7.3.1.5 Autonomy

The final subtheme related to the importance of autonomy. Here the practitioners reported that the intervention had enabled them to work in a more autonomous, needs-based and flexible way. This was particularly evident with regard to the greater flexibility in scheduling appointments as needed, rather than as recommended by the system, and they valued the freedom to work in that way. By contrast, the SAU system requires people to attend monthly or within certain time periods. However, while the interviewees valued the autonomous and flexible nature of the intervention, they also emphasised that some form of structured system was required which supported, rather than dictated, the response to clients:

“...to be able to bring them in and do meetings with them, as we feel necessary.”

Practitioners further described the intervention as providing a ‘safe space’ in which to review career decisions rather than being penalised for ‘dropping out’. Importantly, they

believed that clients should be confident to return to the service if they were unhappy or needed further support.

The ‘dosage’ or amount of the service required, was based on the professional judgement of practitioners coupled with information gleaned from the profile, the guidance approach, and the use of guidance tools, thereby enabling staff to clearly identify specific needs. Unlike the SAU, the intervention focused more on process rather than administration; the latter was seen as a significant obstacle to the provision of a meaningful and effective service within the context of a trusting client-practitioner relationship.

7.3.2 Theme 2: Staff-related factors

The second theme concerns staff-related factors including, in particular, the skills of staff in delivering the intervention. Table 7.3 provides more detail on the casual mechanisms (e.g. active listening, researching), impact (e.g. setting realistic career goals) and outcomes (e.g. individualised service), of staff skills as perceived by the guidance practitioners.

Table 7.3 Staff-related factors: potential causal mechanisms, impacts, and outcomes resulting from the key theme of Staff Skills

Staff	Casual mechanisms	Impacts	Outcome
Skills	Active listening Analytic skills Mentoring Researching Challenging Curiosity Caution	Hearing individual needs Setting realistic career goals Developing trust Regulating speed and intensity of the engagement	Quality individualised service Autonomy Freedom and scope Job satisfaction

For example, interviewees explained the importance of empathic/reflective listening, especially at the initial meeting and while completing the profile, in order to identify the real and often understated barriers experienced by participants:

“So you wear so many hats really as a guidance officer and I think it is the skill of the practitioner..... You are active listening, you are mentoring, counselling, you are a researcher, you have got a wealth of information, a wealth of knowledge”

“..... you have to be very astute, really listen underneath...you are using all of those skills that you have, to make sure that that client is moving up along the path”

The ability to challenge while at the same time expressing an interest and curiosity about participants’ ideas, goals and behaviours, were all highlighted as essential skills. This was seen as a difficult balance, but one which could be achieved with appropriate professional judgement and the kind of caring and trusting approach promoted within the context of the intervention:

“Now I had to challenge him on it ‘what time are you getting up in the morning and what time are you going to bed at? How many jobs have you had since you came out of prison?’ All this kind of stuff. And he didn't come for his next appointment, and I knew he wasn't happy but I have spoken to him since and he knows. So we have to work on that and that is going to take a lot more work than getting a ticket for scaffolding”

Job satisfaction was also a second key factor in providing a high quality service to participants and particularly in the context of manageable caseloads and having sufficient time to implement the intervention. Interviewees described taking pride in their work and how their clients’ career plans, barriers, and next steps, were all to the forefront of their minds, so that opportunities as they arose could be easily matched with need, thereby leading to a positive outcome.

7.3.3 Theme 3: The Service Setting

The third theme emerging from the focus groups related to the environment/setting within which the intervention was delivered. It is important to note that in this study, the service setting - a community based NGO - was similar for both the intervention and SAU, but different from the typical formal Intreo setting. Table 7.4 provides more detail on the casual mechanisms (e.g. non-public office), impact (e.g.

warm and friendly atmosphere) and outcomes (e.g. puts client at ease) of the service setting.

Table 7.4 Service setting: Potential causal mechanisms, impacts and outcomes based on the identified theme of Environment

Service Setting	Casual mechanisms	Impacts	Outcome
	Community based service Non-public office	Facilitated person centred process Created an environment where it was ok not to know	Open trusting environment where real needs are identified
	Reception	Warm & friendly atmosphere	Respectful 'non official' environment, puts client at ease
	Separate from conditionality / penalties	No fear of financial penalty driving the interaction No punishment Supportive environment	Focus is on meeting the needs of the client rather than directing client based on maintaining payment Facilitates client if they make the wrong decision – they can come back
	Non – system driven	Flexibility Person centred	Focus is on the person rather than facilitating a system

For example, practitioners explained that the community-based setting facilitated a person-centred process appropriate to the intervention. They highlighted the importance of organisational culture and its impact on the experiences of the individual and importantly, they believed that it was the responsibility of each staff member to ensure that a positive and welcoming culture was maintained throughout the service.

“...but to have the right people, so on the reception ... and you know people are going to be welcomed, going to be looked after, that is always a very important part of everyone’s job.So they are relaxed before they come into you.”

As mentioned earlier, interviewees recognised that participants were generally not aware of what was available to them when they first entered the service. It was vital, therefore, that the setting was seen to be non-intimidating and supportive, unlike the more formal and unwelcoming nature of most public employment offices. Thus, it was reported that the intervention provided a space where the participant was aware of being listened to, where they had confidence in the practitioner, and if they were unsure about

something, that was ok. They believed that this type of approach in the right environment had impact.

“A lot of people don't like to say, 'I wouldn't know what to do.' So if you are going into an official office, you are going to pretend you know but you don't maybe...a lot of people are not honest when they go into an official type of place....because they feel they have to do what is expected of them, or their money might be cut or they might be penalised in some way.”

There was also a belief that the administrative nature of the SAU delivered within an overly formal environment, as in the case of Intreo, created a negative atmosphere within which job seekers were expected to improve their employability. This type of formal environment motivated job seekers to do what was expected of them for fear of financial penalty. This impacted, in turn, on the development of trust and the job seekers' confidence in the service. Again, practitioners referred to the importance, for the participant, of having the option to return to the service, an option facilitated by the intervention, if their chosen career path was not successful. By contrast, the public employment service did not generally facilitate this, as practitioners explained that failure to complete a chosen option was often met with punishment in the form of a reduction in social welfare payments.

7.4 Service as Usual Practitioners

This section presents the views of the SAU practitioners, captured through a focus group which was conducted six months after completion of the EEPIC trial. To enable comparison, the findings are discussed under similar themes as the previous two groups: (1) Work-first approach; (2) Staff; and, (3) Service setting.

7.4.1 Work-First Approach

The SAU was described by practitioners as essentially an extension of the Intreo service where practitioners delivered a 'work-first' approach (i.e. the PTWP Intreo

model, as described in Chapter Three as a highly administrative process, which aims to progress job seekers into employment as the first option), but within a community setting. Typically the PTWP is delivered in the 60 Intreo offices nation-wide; however in 2014, the LESN were tasked with delivery of the PTWP in order to build capacity within the Intreo service which, at that time, was being rolled-out across the country.

The SAU therefore involved scheduling appointments, checking job seeking progression, as well as using and updating the ‘Bomi’²⁰ IT system. Employment is the only progression that is valued within the work-first model. Job seekers, as a condition of their payment, are required to job seek and, therefore, the service was oriented solely toward directing people into employment. Thus, the pressure to secure employment is placed on the job seeker, and failure to comply can affect their unemployment payment.

“Job seekers were constantly being pushed into looking for work”

There was a strong belief amongst practitioners that this approach was not suitable for all participants and that many job seekers required training, up-skilling or education to improve their chances of securing quality employment. Participants who had applied for, and been accepted onto education or training courses, were still required to job seek while they waited for the course to commence. If they became employed in the interim, even on a part-time basis, funding for the course was compromised. Practitioners described this as a double-edged sword in the sense that the ultimate goal of the PTWP was to secure employment regardless of the job seeker’s own goals and aspirations but the participant could secure a better position if permitted to complete a training course prior to taking up their employment:

²⁰ The DSP’s Bomi system is a shared data entry system used by Intreo, JobPath and the LESN

“You are jeopardising your [training] for getting a job that isn't going to lead you anywhere”

Despite the fact that staff were tasked with delivering a service that was focused completely on employment, they reported ‘very weak’ links with employers. Vacancy notices were sent to all job seekers, rather than matching vacancies with job seekers’ skill sets. This appeared to be a source of some frustration, as prior to the PTWP, a core aspect of the practitioner’s role was to advocate on behalf of the client, by contacting employers and promoting the individual. While in theory employers should trust a practitioner’s judgement because they know the client, this is not the case with the PTWP work-first approach.

The SAU practitioners also described the work-first approach as highly systematic and administrative and one which prioritised the collection of administrative data, the checking of the employment status of job seekers, and the systematic reporting of progress. For this reason, the practitioners viewed the service as a type of box ticking ‘production line’ and ‘numbers game’ whereby all job seekers were receiving the same service regardless of their levels of need:

“...call people, checking everything but nothing happening. It is ticking boxes.”

They described a highly rigid and ‘standardised’ system which identified job seekers as ‘just numbers’ rather than individuals, and they expressed their disappointment at the lack of focus on the ‘behind the scenes’ work required to support their clients. Overall, there was a belief that the sole aim of the service – or the ‘be all and end all of the system’ - was to reduce the number of people on the live register:

“But it is kind of interesting the important bit of the work [e.g. discussing and exploring options, supporting the individual, liaising on their behalf, maintaining their motivation, linking them to relevant support services] is never asked for!”

Furthermore, their way of working had changed dramatically because, as illustrated by the quote below, the Bomi system now dictated their work by prompting them to schedule appointments, identify participants for review meetings, and organise their daily tasks:

“...so what Bomi will tell you is the room you are in, the clients you are going to see for the day and your tasks. And you don't engage with anybody else.”

Notably, staff capacity to develop relationships with participants (a key aspect of their role) had also been significantly compromised. Instead, the model was judged to be working well if the job seeker was compliant and attended appointments:

“And it is about that relationship and that is missing...not actually helping the client. If they attend, they attend and that is it.”

There were attendant concerns amongst practitioners that the approach enabled some clients to ‘work the system’ and maintain their Job Seekers payment without making any real progress. In many such cases, these clients were not penalised, but returned to the services via the GIS, and the revolving door process started again. This appeared to be a significant source of dismay and frustration amongst staff and not least because they felt demoralised by such time wasting and the ineffective use of available and often scarce resources:

“They tell them they are going to penalty rate them, they go over there [Intreo] and they are back over and make a new appointment and the whole process starts all over again”

The guidance aspects of the SAU approach were also discussed with particular reference to the Personal Progression Plan (PPP) which is developed at the first meeting in collaboration with the client. This was seen as having a number of drawbacks for

LTU clients including, in particular, the lack of time available to explore career directions or potential barriers. This impacted, in turn, on the extent to which it was possible to develop a relationship with the client.

Practitioners reflected that the work-first approach was more suited to, and was effective for, recently unemployed participants who have a clearer idea of the type of job they were looking for and which skills and experience are relevant to the labour market. The SAU had no space for exploration or time to challenge barriers and build self-esteem that longer-term unemployed clients often require.

“That is the problem, we are putting so many people through the same process when actually if you have got somebody who is very long-term unemployed there is a lot more that has to happen before they ever get to a job.”

“It is not one size fits all, they are not the same. One long-term unemployed person in a category is not the same as another person.”

Practitioners expressed concern about the rigidity of the approach and requirements to follow procedures, often at the expense of meeting clients’ needs, and to be ‘compliant with no progression’.

“It’s a bit like ensuring everyone gets service...better to do something than nothing.”

In addition, the administrative nature of the SAU reportedly failed to create an environment where participants could speak openly about complex barriers; in fact, they reported incidents of engagement with the Intreo service when they felt significant barriers to employment had been ignored or brushed over:

“Okay they might disclose it but if they are dismissed by the case officer, and told ‘sure that doesn’t mean anything, you are on job seekers allowance, you need to be actively seeking work..... it is not any one particular group of job seekers they are dismissive of, it is anyone”

In common with intervention practitioners, SAU practitioners emphasised the value and positive effects of activation, particularly in terms of encouraging attendance amongst participants who were long-term unemployed. For example, practitioners referred to participants who had been linked into literacy services, had progressed to CE, or who were motivated to attend appointments.

“[they were]...coming in the door when they wouldn’t have before.”

“...being sent in from social welfare, sometimes it can be good in that people like that would be still at home not doing anything but this is the start of a different circle for them, starting to improve their education and you can see it in them, they are enjoying it.”

7.4.2 Staff

While the intervention practitioners emphasised their skill sets, the SAU practitioners reported lower levels of job satisfaction, low control and feelings of demotivation, all of which they attributed to the high levels of administration and the limited capacity of the SAU to support clients. Despite their best efforts, the SAU system was perceived to be an obstacle to providing a more appropriate, comprehensive and effective support service:

“We are not offering a quality service because we are not looking at what the client wants, we are looking at what social welfare want us to do”

A lack of professional autonomy also impacted on their own work-related stress, whilst the inflexibility within the process, and the rigid scheduling of clients had restricted their ability to avail of collegial support to deal with difficult client meetings, or to have sufficient time to think through the issues and record the meeting:

“as a practitioner you really feel under pressure to get them in, move them on, make sure they get their payment by ‘ticking the box’, it’s a lot of pressure but the process is the process and there is no way around it.”

“... you know how you feel sometimes when you’ve had a particularly heavy client, and you just need a break afterwards, but its back to back and you just have to get on with it.”

7.4.3 Service Setting

Finally, it is crucial to note, as mentioned earlier, that the SAU was delivered within a community based organisation, thus enabling a different experience for clients than if they had engaged with a more typical SAU based in an Intreo office. The service setting meant a more welcoming, friendly environment and the ethos of the community organisation softened the SAU approach, as it prioritised the person over the process which, in turn, influenced how the SAU was experienced by participants. Equally, practitioners described the service setting as being less intimidating for participants than a public office, providing a calmer space to discuss employment-related issues.

Interestingly, two practitioners believed that they were perceived by Intreo staff with suspicion, and accused of ‘handholding’ and ‘mollycoddling’. This lack of trust by the Intreo service was explained in terms of an apparently misfounded loyalty to the PTWP model, and a belief that it should be delivered in a standardised way:

“You are colluding with the client, you are hiding something”

7.5 Conclusion

The PTWP is yet to be evaluated and no previous SAU process evaluations have been conducted to identify and understand the factors, both causal and contextual, which influence participant outcomes. As outlined in Chapter Six, the findings of the EEPIC trial suggest that both the intervention and SAU groups had improved over time, albeit not on all outcomes and not to the same degree. The current study attempted to identify the reasons why and how either intervention worked for this LTU cohort. In particular, it sought to isolate the mechanisms and core features of the intervention

which potentially influenced participant outcomes, highlighting not only the tools and methods used therein, but also the participant-practitioner relationship, the allocation of time, and other important elements such as practitioner autonomy and professional judgement. Staff skills such as active listening and research capacity were also identified as contributing toward the delivery of an effective and quality driven service. Interestingly, the service setting was identified by all as an important contextual factor influencing the development of trust between the participant and the service, thereby enabling real needs to be identified and met. These findings will be appraised and discussed further in the concluding chapters.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Discussion

8.1 Introduction

The three studies described in this thesis were undertaken to: (1) assess the effectiveness of the new labour market policy - the PTWP - in post-crisis Ireland; (2) to evaluate the impact of an individualised person-centred intervention on a range of outcomes including, in particular, psychological well-being (and related constructs) and employability; and (3) to explore the subjective experience of the intervention (including its implementation) and compare this approach with services as usual.

The findings from Study One highlighted some interesting insights into stakeholders' perceptions of the early effectiveness and implementation of the PTWP, whilst also providing contextual background to Studies Two and Three. No published studies have examined stakeholders' perceptions of the roll-out of this new policy, nor assessed its perceived impact, in terms of service provision or reform of the policy itself. The results from Study Two, based on the EEPIC trial, suggest that both the individualised job seeking support intervention and SAU were effective, to a greater or lesser degree, across a number of psychological well-being and employability-related factors. A sub-group analysis further indicated that the intervention may be better suited to males with respect to greater post-intervention improvements in their psychological well-being, hopefulness, and career efficacy when compared to females. Importantly the baseline analysis indicated that more than two-thirds of the entire sample of participants ($N = 149$) reported moderate to severe levels of psychological distress. The findings from Study Three, a qualitative analysis, further examined the processes within the intervention and to a lesser extent within the SAU, uncovering the active components - from the perspectives of both practitioners and participants - that contributed to the

effects seen in the EEPIC trial. These findings will be discussed in the sections that follow.

8.2 The reform agenda and its translation into services for the unemployed: depersonalisation and the ‘missing middle’

The qualitative analysis in Study One (Chapter Five) identified three overarching themes related to the initial roll-out of the PTWP: (1) the reform agenda; (2) depersonalisation; and (3) the ‘missing middle’.

The findings of the 2015 Study One are broadly consistent with both Study Three and a small number of recent Irish studies and policy discussions. The recent Irish studies are small-scale and include, for example: an NGO report on the employment services (*Report on Phase Two of the Employment Services Research Project* (INOUE, 2016)); two DSP customer feedback reports (*The job seeker’s satisfaction with public offices research* and *Job-Path performance data* (DSP, 2015a, 2015b)); an employment services evaluation (*Job-Path*, 2017); several presentations (e.g. The Labour Market Council presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection, 2017); and a small number of discussion documents (e.g. proceedings from the National Economic Dialogue, 2017). There has also been some useful and interesting but unpublished academic commentary on the roll-out of Intreo (Köppe & O’Connell, 2016), the experiences of job seekers (Boland, 2016), and the integrated delivery of services with a focus on activation (Murphy et al., forthcoming).

Overall, the findings from this limited literature are mixed, but a prevailing view is that the institutional reform in terms of merging the PES and income supports into the nationwide Intreo service has been largely successful if viewed from a narrow institutional reform perspective (Murphy, 2017; O’Connell, 2016). In addition, a recent nationwide customer satisfaction survey of the Intreo and DSP branch offices ($N = 1010$), indicated high levels of satisfaction overall with scores of 4.38 (on a scale of 1 –

5), and 4.44 recorded for the short and long-term unemployed respectively (DSP, 2015). It is notable though that important methodological information with regard to the anonymity and response rate are unknown for this survey. The results show that both staff and premises were rated highly in terms of their friendliness, welcoming nature, and staff competence and empathy. These findings are not consistent with the results reported in Studies One and Three, where job seekers reported the PTWP services as delivered by Intreo, to be depersonalising and the premises as being formal and presenting a barrier to fostering trust and openness. It is difficult to know why the results of both studies differ, but one key factor may relate to the fact that the survey respondents were asked to compare the service provided by Intreo, to those provided by a bank (Intreo's chosen benchmark), with nine out of ten customers rating Intreo services as the same or better than a bank. Arguably, such a comparison is questionable. Furthermore, surveys and interviews can often differ in the extent to which they may reflect participants' experiences and views. The following sections discuss in more detail the findings from the current study, yet the standards highlighted by stakeholders differ considerably from those identified in the Intreo customer satisfaction survey

As mentioned earlier some limited evaluation of the PTWP has taken place, albeit mainly of ALMPs or sub-programmes of the policy as mentioned in Chapter One and Three (i.e. *JobBridge*, 2016; the BTEA, 2015). While these evaluations reported mixed results, they also focused specifically on effectiveness with regard to outcomes into employment, rather than wider well-being and employability outcomes, which were the focus of this study. For example, the counterfactual evaluation of the now defunct *JobBridge* found that participants had a 48% probability of securing employment within a year, as compared to a 36% probability for a similar cohort of job seekers who did not participate. In addition, both participants and employers reported high levels of satisfaction with the scheme. By contrast, the evaluation of the BTEA indicated that

jobseekers who commenced a second-level or third level education option in 2008 were 28 - 30% and 20% less likely to have left the Live Register in June 2012 respectively, when compared to a control group. However, these figures had decreased to 25% and 14% respectively by 2014.

8.2.1 Reforming the PES

The first theme identified from Study One, ‘the success of the reform agenda’, is broadly consistent with findings by Köppe and O’Connell (2016) who identified successful institutional reform of the PES. Policy level stakeholders in this study focused on implementation of Strand 5 of the PTWP (*Reforming Institutions to deliver better services to the unemployed*), with little or no reference to the remaining four strands as outlined in Chapter Three, or the specific services for the unemployed. Effectiveness was articulated only in terms of organisational change, with references to the achievement of the broad goals of the reform process (e.g. numbers of new offices, signage, merging of staff), rather than effectiveness with regard to the increased employability of job seekers. Similarly, other stakeholders and managers focused on the actual reform process itself and changes to the system within which they worked, or systems which influenced their work.

The successful staff mergers were highlighted by most participants as a significant part of the reform process, and while perceived to be broadly effective, an ongoing challenge for the Department, was to change the ‘hearts and minds’ of staff, thereby suggesting a need to appeal to personnel, at both an intellectual and emotional level, to participate in the reform process. This is further evidenced by the ‘One DSP’ project, an in-house staff learning and development programme which aims to up-skill and unify staff in terms core DSP values and culture. Newly merging staff were expected to integrate, into the prevailing culture which was dominated by the income

support function of the Department. This had impacted, in turn, on the ways in which services were delivered on the ground, with little evidence of the previous more client-focused cultures of FÁS, or the Community Welfare services.

The reforms were driven by a skilled change management team which left much of the detail of the reform to the local offices (Köppe & O'Connell, 2016; Murphy et al., forthcoming). However, this raises questions as to why the reform was not based on an evidence informed process, with a thorough policy analysis and clear policy goals. Murphy (2017) points to the context of crisis and the sense of urgency presented by the Troika presence (Murphy 2017), and the stakeholders in this study believed it was a case of 'we will roll it out and then we will sort it out'. This was described as 'policy-based evidence making', the impact of which is seen in the next two themes of 'depersonalisation' and the missing 'how to', which are discussed later in this section.

The managers in the current study, believed that much of the reform agenda was politically driven while Murphy et al. (forthcoming) refer to the role of top level administrative leadership and the importance of political commitment to roll out the vertical reform through line management structures and within the prevailing 'fraud and control' culture of the Department. DSP's orientation to place fraud control as its priority permeated deeply with implications for the design of services, staff training, communication with claimants and its public discourse. There was little mention by policy makers in Study One, of the job seeker in the reform process; organisational change processes took precedence over any processes which may improve outcomes for job seekers. This suggests that the job seeker assistance processes were either unknown, perceived as straightforward, or deemed to be administrative processes which would automatically follow once the reform process was complete. The lack of local or

national consultation with an experienced NGO sector, had led to what was perceived by participants, to be an un-informed process.

The internal vertical downward change process described by Murphy et al. (forthcoming) had occurred in an organisation which, by its very nature, impacts on a range of other external organisations. However, DSP had little interaction with multiple external actors at Departmental, statutory, and local levels and Study One suggests a dilution of local relationships with the DSP. There was a sense that everyone was working for the DSP, following new rules, and, where possible, adjusting their own systems to fit with the new model. Managers of not-for-profit services contracted by the DSP to deliver LESN and Jobs Clubs were not consulted during the design of the reform process even though their daily work with job seekers was now significantly influenced, and indeed impacted by, the internal reforms within the DSP. The ‘fraud and control’ culture within the Department had started to appear in organisations driven by principles of social justice and community development.

The reform agenda and the PTWP appeared to re-define the PES, particularly the ‘control’ aspects of frontline services which were identified as a significant change to the PES, with the primary focus now on job seekers in receipt of a job seeker payment and actively seeking work. The new administrative approach and lack of detail on the implementation of the policy, had led to the loss of many important aspects of a fully effective PES, such as employment services for all job seekers including job changers, and people outside of the labour market who want to work, as well as the administration of labour market programmes (e.g. including placement, counselling and vocational guidance, intensified counselling for persons with difficulties in finding employment, and job-search courses (OECD, 2003)).

8.2.2 Personalising the depersonalised

A second key finding from the qualitative analysis in Study One, refers to the notion of personalised or individualised services (e.g. having trust in the service, and having a connection with the practitioner), which was identified as critical in enhancing job seekers' self-esteem and employability. Importantly, the job seekers who took part in this study, described the experience of unemployment as dehumanising and feeling 'like a number'; person-centred approaches/services, by contrast, were described as making them feel 'human'. This mirrors research by the INOU on the LTU which noted this feeling of being 'human' again after interacting with a LESN mediator (2016). Similar findings were reported by Howard, Agllias, Schubert, and Gray (2016) with regard to the dehumanising language used by the employment services, with phrases such as 'activating' people, 'terminating' payments, the 'stock' of unemployed, the 'DNAs' (did not attend) widely used by employment service practitioners. Indeed, this kind of mechanistic, bureaucratic, procedural and control-oriented language is now widely used within the employment services both nationally and internationally. Howard and colleagues argue that this may be related to the 'positioning' of staff; for example, in an Irish context and indeed elsewhere (e.g. the UK, US), civil servants or case officers are now delivering employment services, rather than human service providers, and in other cases staff delivering such services work under the pressure of 'pay-by-results' contractual arrangements (e.g. Australia, UK, the Netherlands). Other commentators refer to welfare recipients as 'half citizens' providing a similar view of the unemployed as being different, and reinforcing the long existing stigma of unemployment (Murphy, Murray, Chalmers, Martin, & Marston, 2011).

The theme of 'depersonalisation' also reflected the importance of building trust in the client-practitioner relationship and the extent to which this influences the level of engagement with the service, enabling appropriate disclosure of the real barriers to

employment. Van Parys and Struyven (2017) found that practitioner interaction styles which enable job seekers choice and potential within the labour market were deemed more meaningful and influenced intrinsic motivation. By contrast, practitioners who (deliberately or subconsciously) exerted psychological pressure in the form of threatening sanctions and encouraging feelings of guilt and/or shame, negatively affected the quality of the client-practitioner relationship and the client's motivation to engage meaningfully in the process.

Study One findings suggest that the implementation of a new highly administrative top-down system, driven by rules and regulations, clearly took precedence over the interaction with, or the improved employability of, job seekers. For example, practitioners reported that they spent much of their time completing administrative tasks such as updating databases, scheduling appointments, and monitoring job seeking behaviour. The study found that the PES has become overly administrative in its implementation, with a high dependency on the IT system to determine the scheduling of client meetings, and the monitoring of attendance, rather than relying on professional judgement. Indeed, these practices were also reported in Study Three which was undertaken two years later. Thus, there was a significant perceived gap between administrative type interactions and those designed to provide real and meaningful help and support.

According to the interviewees, the primary aim of jobseeker-practitioner meetings has shifted from supporting the job seeker in terms of enhancing employability and career development, to placing them into employment; effectiveness is judged solely according to the number of placements achieved.

8.2.3 The missing 'how to'

A third major finding from Study One was the 'missing 'how to'', in the sense that staff indicated that they were given no direction or support when implementing the

policy, while both practitioners and job seekers also felt their voices are often missing from labour market policy analysis or design. This was attributed to the vertical and administrative reform process which, as indicated above, lacked detail and specifics at the frontline level, and which may have led to the depersonalised service; thus there were clear deficiencies in the ‘how to’ of the policy despite the clear goals (i.e. ‘the what’) to be achieved by the policy.

Notably, Brodtkin (2013) describes this as the ‘missing middle’, and advises that the practices of activation that take shape on the ground should be more systematically examined. Existing approaches tend to focus on inputs (i.e. the policy), or outcomes with very little, if any, investigation of processes which occur in between. Research has informed our understanding of activation and the metric-type goals it seeks to achieve, but rarely provides insights into how such goals might be achieved or their non-anticipated outcomes. Furthermore, differences between countries are typically described in terms of the types of welfare states and systems that are used, but rarely are differences in implementation explored.

Analysis of policies cannot be separated from the institutions responsible for their design, adaptation, and implementation (Boyle, 2005). The current study reflects, to some extent, how top down directives have shaped service delivery which is primarily focused on ensuring adherence to the rules and service regulations and which views the unemployed as a homogeneous group, thereby limiting the extent to which services can be appropriately person-centred.

The skills of frontline staff have also been highlighted as an important component in the delivery of a person-centred approach (Millar and Crosse, 2017). However, despite the availability within the DSP of highly skilled staff including practitioners from FÁS, and the LESN (e.g. who have well developed skills in adult guidance methods, counselling, and occupational knowledge) the approach focuses

more on adherence to the rules rather than the utilisation of available skills. Stakeholders noted how roll-out on the ground is under-evaluated; this ‘missing middle’ cannot be understood by typical evaluations of policy programmes which use quantitative benchmarks (e.g. the number of hours or sessions with a job seeker or the number of placements into work, education or training), but rather by conducting qualitative studies to explore exactly what practitioners do, and how they do it.

Collectively, the findings from Study One suggest that the Irish activation approach is highly administrative and work focused; job seekers tend to be viewed as labour market units rather than citizens who need appropriate and effective support to improve the quality of their lives. More work is also clearly needed in terms of providing appropriate direction and support to staff on the ground in the implementation of the PTWP and in allowing them to develop and fully utilise their wide range of skills and competencies to address all aspects of employability, particularly with this vulnerable sub-group of LTU clients.

8.3 Study Two: Overall well-being and employability of the long-term unemployed

Another key finding in the research reported in this thesis, relates to the labour market readiness of the LTU, something about which very little is known. The quantitative analysis reported in Chapter Six provides some interesting insights in this respect.

8.3.1 Psychological well-being at baseline

Importantly, the baseline analysis of the RCT showed very high levels of psychological distress amongst the LTU participants who agreed to take part in the study. Almost three-quarters of the sample scored at, or above, the clinical cut-off, indicating a need for formal mental health intervention and most especially for depression and anxiety.

The results are broadly consistent with the levels of psychological distress found in a number of studies conducted in Australia and the UK. For example, Creed et al. (2009) in a cross-sectional study, and Maguire et al. (2014) in a RCT (with wait-list control), reported GHQ-12 means of 15.18 ($SD= 8.03$; $N= 173$) and 16.85 ($SD = 7.77$; $N= 49$) respectively, which are consistent with mean GHQ-12 scores in this study ($M = 15.37$, $SD = 6.49$). The samples in both studies consisted of both LTU (32% and 70% respectively) and STU participants. However, the rate of psychological distress (i.e. scoring at or above the clinical cut-off) seen in the current study (72%) is substantially higher when compared with results from the National Psychological and Wellbeing and Distress Survey (NPWD)²¹ (Doherty, Moran, Kartalova-O'Doherty, & Walsh, 2007) which found that 12%-14% of the general population had psychological distress compared to 31.5% of those who were classified as unemployed. These differences in a national context may be due to the fact that the current study focused only on the LTU group who would be considered more vulnerable than unemployed people more generally (e.g. McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

The females in this study also reported slightly higher levels of psychological distress than males which was not unexpected in view of research to show that this is often the case and that women are more likely than men to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety (Andrews et al., 1999; WHO, 2002) whilst males report higher levels of psychological well-being than females (e.g. Barry, 2009; Helmes & Fudge, 2016; Lehtinen et al., 2005). For example, the NPWDS (2007) report identified that 14% of females compared to 10% of males were classified as 'probable cases'. Similar

²¹ National Psychological and Wellbeing and Distress Survey (NPWD): A nationally representative telephone survey (2005-2006) conducted by the ESRI on behalf of the Health Research Board (HRB) designed to measure the extent of psychological distress and self-reported mental health problems in the Irish population. It also sought to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of the Irish adult population experiencing symptoms of psychological distress.

findings have been reported in Europe and the UK (e.g. European Opinion Research Group, 2003; European Commission, 2006; Scottish Health Survey, 2003; Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey, 2002).

Crucially, the Study Two findings show that the LTU are up to six times more likely than the general population to develop psychological distress. Given that the LTU account for 49% (68,900 people) of the total unemployed population, up to 57,451 people are potentially at risk of high levels of psychological distress due to their labour market status. This has important implications for how the PES provide initial services for the unemployed, particularly with regard to conditionality, sanctions, customer service, referrals and access to relevant ancillary services. This analysis also suggests that the LTU should be considered a vulnerable group and that careful consideration of individual cases is imperative to help them re-access the labour market.

In addition, this finding has important implications for the role of frontline staff and their capacity to engage participants and identify and refer job seekers to appropriate options. An interesting report by the National Women's Council (Murphy, 2012) proposed a well-designed 'careful' activation strategy to ensure gender equality in activation and employment services, a concept that could be utilised when supporting the LTU (both male and female). However, moving in this direction requires careful attention to the values and attitudes of state organisations implementing the PTWP. This argument was more recently reinforced by Millar and Crosse (2017) with regard to the activation of lone parents in Ireland.

These findings also support those found in Study One whereby participants referred to the depersonalising nature of the services as well as the difficulties experienced by practitioners required to deliver a highly administrative system. The development of a trusting relationship with participants requires staff to be sensitive to

the high levels of psychological distress experienced by LTU job seekers. Despite the significant PES reforms, no attention has been paid to the health impacts of activation in Ireland. The documentary analysis of the PTWP (2012, 2013, 2015, 2016-2020) undertaken as part of the current study, found no references to well-being or positive psychological health. Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter three, the PTWP intensifies conditionality, whereby the job seeker is mandated, regardless of levels of psychological distress, to participate in ALMPs such as job seeking, training or education, or supported employment in exchange for their welfare payment. Given that lower levels of psychological well-being impact significantly on job-seeking and the ability to access employment (Malmberg-Heimonen & Vuori, 2005), LTU clients are likely to find themselves in a vicious cycle of poor mental health and unemployment. Arguably therefore, one of the aims of LMP policy – and by extension, the daily practice of activation - should be to promote not only increased employability but to also address issues related to psychological well-being.

8.3.2 Levels of Education

The Study Two baseline analysis also identified low levels of educational attainment in two thirds of the sample. Higher proportions of females than males reported no formal qualifications and males were almost twice as likely as females to have a Leaving Certificate. While the vast majority of the sample had worked for at least one year, their employment was generally in low skill positions, and participants identified the lack of qualifications and skill as significant barriers in preventing them from re-accessing the labour market. As already indicated, the work-first model emphasises employment, rather than human capital development; thus, there are long-term consequences for low-skilled individuals who are placed into low-skill jobs where they may become ‘trapped’ in low pay positions, with little or no opportunity to use or improve their skills (Sweeney, 2017). The findings from the RCT demonstrate the

emphasis on employment in the SAU model; 22% of SAU participants, compared with only 4% of intervention participants, were actively job-seeking at six-month follow-up. Conversely, participants in the intervention group were twice as likely to be in education or training, or participating in a supported employment activation initiative such as CE or TUS, when compared to control participants, as might be expected in a more human –capital type approach.

This work-first approach also limits people's access to a fuller range of experiences of the world of work, and could potentially restrict access to the latent and manifest benefits of work as described by Jahoda (1981, 1982, 1997) and as enjoyed by others employed in quality work. While Paul and Batinic (2010) found that unskilled manual workers reported more access to 'latent functions' than the unemployed, arguably, a work-first approach which places people into low skill work, has all the hallmarks of Warr's (1987) conceptualisation of 'psychologically bad' employment. For many low skilled LTU, a work-first approach could potentially have devastating effects in view of their high levels of psychological distress.

Both the PTWP (2016-2020) and the National Skills Strategy 2025, propose the development of a strong and highly skilled labour force. Actions identified in Strand 6 of the PTWP (*Building the Workforce*) include 'upskilling' and 'quality employment' for those on the live register. Furthermore, Ireland's National Enterprise Policy, *Enterprise 2025: Innovative, Agile, Connected*, (2015-2025), sets out a longer-term strategic framework for enterprise growth and job creation. Its vision is for Ireland to be the best place to succeed in business, delivering sustainable employment and higher standards of living for all. It proposes a highly skilled workforce with 'higher order capabilities' (p. 22) and open to continuous learning, as the economy's greatest resource. In contrast Study Two shows that just over two thirds of the sample had no post-second level qualifications nor IT skills above basic levels, whilst approximately

half did not hold a current driving licence. Given the low educational levels and weak employability skills seen in this LTU sample, a work-first approach may not be as effective as alternative more creative approaches.

8.3.3 Self-rated competencies

The descriptive analysis in Study Two showed surprisingly high levels of self-rated competencies (i.e. self-awareness, self-belief, resilience, motivation, hope and adaptability) in the intervention group (see Table 6.6). This data is only available for the intervention group as it was captured through the initial profile which is not a feature of the SAU. Of particular interest was the highest rated competency - *understanding of employers' needs* - which indicated that, despite their distance from the labour market, the participants thought they had a very good understanding of what employers were looking for in an employee. Notably, these scales are non-validated self-report measures which are used to allow the client to reflect on important employment-related constructs upon initial engagement with the intervention service.

There are two possible reasons for the above findings. Firstly, job seekers complete this section of the profile form at the first meeting, where factors such as an unfamiliar environment, limited available time, and interaction with a practitioner (who is yet unknown to the client), can all impact on how the client presents. This 'clarifying' phase of the intervention seeks to set the scene for the job seeker and to help them develop an awareness of the goals of the service and its potential outcomes, whilst also allowing the practitioner to develop empathy, hear the clients' story, and make an initial assessment (Ali & Graham, 1996). One likely explanation for the above finding is that participants, at this early stage (i.e. before a trusting relationship has been established) may have been reluctant to rate themselves as low, for fear that this would be seen as a weakness or vulnerability. This is supported by the qualitative findings reported in

Study Three, which highlighted that participants were often reluctant to inform the DSP of their concerns, issues, or preferences for various programmes or jobs, as they were concerned that low participation or disclosure of additional barriers could affect their job seekers payment.

A second possible explanation relates to employment commitment, or the extent to which a person wishes to engage in work and be in paid employment (Creed, Lehmann, & Hood, 2009; Warr, Cook, & Wall, 1979); while this study did not directly measure this construct, the concepts for self-reflection (i.e. employment competencies) (Table 6.6), and desirable work related factors and work ethic values (Table 6.7), are related to those of work commitment (Jackson et al., 1983). High self-ratings across these factors suggest an interest in, and a commitment to, work. Indeed the qualitative findings from both Studies One and Three highlighted the participants' desire to work. While unemployment is situational (Jahoda, 1981; Paul & Moser, 2006; Warr, 1987), employment commitment is a stable dispositional trait, based on socialisation and normative beliefs about the value of work in society (Kanungo, 1982). The cohort of participants involved in this study, despite low skill levels and high unemployment, were living in an area characterised by high levels of labour force participation²² and, therefore, they may well have been influenced by an employment-focused social norm.

The above findings are broadly consistent with research which shows that the unemployed have only marginally lower levels of employment commitment than their employed counterparts. Indeed, high work commitment coupled with unemployment may give rise to incongruence which, if sustained over time, may lead to increased psychological distress (Paul & Moser, 2006) as seen in this study. As employment commitment is generally considered a stable dispositional trait (Warr, Cook, & Wall,

²² Labour force participation rate of 69%, compared with 62% nationally (CSO, 2011)

1979) the literature presents little evidence to show that the unemployed adapt their employment commitment over time in order to reduce the levels of psychological distress experienced as a result of unemployment (Creed, Lehmann, & Hood, 2009). Thus, levels of employment commitment remain stable. This may also explain the fairly moderate levels of hope, resilience and career efficacy found at baseline, despite long durations of unemployment.

Finally, hopefulness scores at baseline indicated higher hope-pathways scores than hope-agency scores, suggesting that the sample, overall, reported higher levels of perceived ability to achieve their goals than their motivation to pursue the goals in the first instance. The authors of the Hope scale, Snyder et al. (1996), propose that agentic and pathways thinking are both required for hopeful thought, and while they are reciprocal in their interactions, they differ from each other with regard to how they affect goal directed thinking. Thus, it is possible that agentic and pathways scores may differ as in the current study.

Collectively, the findings from the baseline analysis provide a normally concealed profile of the long-term unemployed as they present for activation services. They depict a highly distressed subgroup when compared to the general population, characterised by low levels of formal education and work experience. Females reported higher levels of distress and lower education levels than males. These findings have important implications for the future participation of this cohort of LTU in an ambitious labour market proposed by both the PTWP and Enterprise 2025, suggesting a need for more tailored approaches than the current work-first approach of the PTWP. Importantly, the baseline analysis also indicated high levels of self-rated employability commitment-type factors, and moderate levels of hope, resilience and career efficacy, all of which suggest that the LTU could respond well to careful person-centred

activation approaches. The next section discusses the findings from the comparison of a person-centred approach with SAU.

8.4 The intervention versus SAU comparison

The aim of the EEPIC trial was to investigate the effectiveness of an individualised job seeking intervention designed specifically to improve psychological well-being and employability-related characteristics (e.g. career efficacy and self-esteem) for the LTU. The trial results showed that both groups improved over time with regard to aspects of well-being and employability. Specifically, significant improvements in well-being and career efficacy from pre-intervention to six-month follow-up were identified for the intervention group. Furthermore, while no between-group differences on the remaining outcomes were identified at follow-up, significant within-group changes were identified with regard to satisfaction with life, self-esteem, and hope (global, agency and pathways), showing that, overall, participants improved their well-being and employability as a result of their participation in the study.

Overall, there may have been wider therapeutic benefits for all participants (both intervention and control) as a result of their participation in the study. For example, repeated contact with participants (including the control group) who received a total of three one-to-one meetings during the six-month period with the researcher, may have had a supportive effect. During these meetings, all participants completed questionnaires and provided a short update on their progress. As indicated by the practitioners in Study Three, this may have provided the SAU group with a useful opportunity - which they would otherwise not have had - to reflect on their progress. In addition, the SAU participants reported feelings of improved self-awareness, and positivity about their progress after meeting with the researcher which, in turn, may have impacted positively on some of the outcomes assessed in this study.

An interesting study by Dambrun and Dubuy (2014) found that LTU participants who met with a psychologist for the equivalent of one hour over a two week period (i.e. 30 mins per week), and who completed a workbook of five positive psychology exercises during the same two-week period, had significantly reduced levels of psychological distress, and significantly increased levels of well-being when compared to a control group. Thus, it is quite possible that the SAU group in the current study, had benefited in a number of ways which otherwise would not have been the case.

8.4.1 Well-being

The results demonstrate the effectiveness of *both* the intervention and SAU in reducing levels of psychological distress to below the clinical cut off at six-month follow-up, indicating the potential of an NGO-based job assistance ALMP, albeit two different versions. Importantly, the persistence of these positive well-being effects at follow-up suggest a potentially lasting impact which may be helpful, not only in enabling re-employment, but also in possibly helping to improve overall psychological health and well-being. This is consistent with findings from the Winning New Jobs evaluation in Ireland (Reynolds et al., 2010) which showed that positive effects persisted at 12-month follow-up. However, much of the research on job assistance programmes has found that impacts do not always persist (Creed et al., 1996; Creed, 1998; Koopman et al., 2017). Interestingly, Creed and colleagues (1996) found that the maintenance effects on well-being six months after the delivery of training programmes, were due to the encouragement and support from trainers, and the interpersonal relationships which developed between trainers and participants. Similar findings from Study Three indicate that the practitioner, and the participant-practitioner relationship, were both important factors in generating feelings of improved well-being and in helping clients to make greater progress toward the labour market.

These findings of increased psychological well-being are consistent with findings from previous studies, but while many of the interventions therein are categorised as job seeking assistance programmes, they often differ in their duration, content, and delivery, and thus it remains difficult to understand precisely which components impact well-being. One way of assessing this is to attempt to classify interventions in some way. Koopman et al., (2017) describes three types which include those focused on: (1) developing occupational skills and training; (2) addressing psychological factors; and (3) delivering a combined approach containing elements of both of the above. The intervention in the current study falls into the last category because it focused on tackling aspects of well-being, combined with elements aiming to improve career planning, training and skill development. Some comparisons may be drawn with the positive psychological intervention described by Dambrun and Dubuy (2014), the effectiveness of which was examined in a study involving a sample of LTU ($N=21$) from a small French city. The authors found that the approach reduced psychological distress and increased overall well-being including, as in the present study, post-intervention improvements in life satisfaction (which in the current study were more marked in the intervention group participants).

Interestingly, Dambrun and Dubuy note that to their knowledge, no study has been undertaken specifically to investigate the well-being of the unemployed, in spite of what is known about the strong links between levels of psychological well-being and employability (Andersen, 2008; Hanisch, 1999; Taris, 2002; Wanberg, 2012). The current study attempted to fill that gap, at least in part, by developing and evaluating a new strengths-based intervention underpinned by positive psychology principles and aimed at tackling aspects of both well-being and employability.

8.4.2 Employability

The findings also show improvements in factors thought to be important in the re-employment process, including self-esteem, hope, and career efficacy. However, no changes occurred in resilience, with levels remaining stable from baseline to follow-up. There are many definitions of resilience in the literature and the complexities of defining it, despite its relative simplicity as a concept, are widely recognised (Windle, 2011). The Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project (2008) in the UK define it as a feature of personality that allows an individual to bounce back from stress or adversity. However, defining it as a personality characteristic, suggests an element of stability and this has led to some debate, around the fact that it is not an observable trait (like other personality traits) (Rutter, 2007) and that, if stable, implies a weakness in those who do not have this attribute (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). The measure used in this study – the Brief Resilience Scale - is the only measure of resilience (according to the authors) that specifically assesses resilience in its original and more basic form (i.e. the ability to bounce back or recover from stress) (Agnes, 2005). The measure shows good internal consistency and test-retest reliability which suggests that resilience may be a fairly stable personality characteristic (Smith et al., 2008) and therefore, one which is not likely to change over time, or at least not within the short time frame of the current study. A need for future research is indicated.

Three of these factors - hope, resilience and self-esteem - are important components of 'psychological capital' thought to be important in sustaining individuals during periods of adversity. In organisational psychology literature, and as outlined in Chapter Two, psychological capital has been identified as important in employment as it can act as a buffer against organisational stressors (Avey et al., 2009). It has also been positively linked to well-being (Avey et al., 2010; Luthans et al., 2013) which, in turn, is associated with job satisfaction and work performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, &

Patton, 2001). For the unemployed, psychological capital can both protect the individual from setbacks during unemployment and promote well-being, thus enabling sustained job seeking, whilst it is also viewed positively by employers (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2014). Indeed, Cole (2006) recommends that interventions for the unemployed should incorporate approaches which seek to improve well-being and psychological capital, thereby improving productivity, employment status, and at a more general level, societal happiness.

The findings on hope in the current study, show significant increases in both groups, in 'hope-agency', the agentic aspect of hope which motivates individuals to act in goal directed ways. This improvement was sustained at six-month follow up for the intervention participants, but not for their control group counterparts. This suggests that the intervention was effective in increasing individual agency and, therefore, the motivation to achieve employment-related goals, even after participants had completed the intervention. Notably, increases in 'hope-pathways' were also seen in both groups, albeit to a lesser extent six months later, indicating that the support received as part of both the intervention and the SAU was important in helping individuals to set career goals during their interaction with the service. This important finding is supported by the results from Study Three which show that job-seeking participants, overall, were hopeful for their future.

Self-esteem has been closely linked with re-employment (Fugate et al., 2004; Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001) and is therefore essential for success in a work-first model. The RCT findings showed a sustained improvement in self-esteem in the intervention group, although no similar effects were seen in the control group. Likewise, and as indicated earlier in Chapter Two, career self-efficacy - a task-specific form of self-efficacy - is important in the rapidly changing world of work. McArdle et al. (2007)

used this measure as an indicator of career identify - one of the three factors of the psychosocial construct of employability (Fugate et al., 2004) – and found that it was positively related to re-employment. In the current study, improvements in career self-efficacy emerged for both groups immediately after completing the intervention, although the two groups differed at the six-month follow-up indicating a more sustained and continued improvement for the intervention group when compared to control group participants.

These findings are consistent with previous research on the use of guidance approaches, where LTU participants reported increased self-knowledge, improved direction in career goals, improved job seeking, validation of skills and abilities, and improved self-confidence and self-efficacy (Amundson & Borgen, 1988; Donohue & Patton, 1998; Gainor, 2006; Maaloe, 1994; Salveson et al., 1994). Goal focused thinking and behavior, a core element of the guidance approach, has also been linked with well-being outcomes (Pomaki, & Maes, 2002).

Other comparable interventions such as the JOBs programme, found that job search efficacy, sense of control and improved coping ability, all positively impacted re-employment, financial strain and depressive symptoms (Vinokur et al., 1991). Discussions which focus on coping with barriers to employment, a core feature of a guidance service, have been found to increase sense of control and thus improve well-being, job seeking and re-employment (Creed et al., 2009; Wanberg et al., 1997). An evaluation of the Winning New JOBs programme in Ireland suggests that such interventions encapsulate wider health promotion elements and therefore, have broader societal impacts that extend beyond the intervention (Reynolds et al., 2012).

8.4.3 The Gender effect

The unemployment rate amongst men continues to exceed that amongst women and especially during recessionary periods, despite a generally reduced unemployment gender gap since the 1980s (Albanese & Şahin, 2013). The sub-group analysis undertaken as part of the RCT showed that the intervention appeared to be particularly effective for men, who fared better over time than their female counterparts in terms of improved levels of well-being, hope-agency, and career efficacy, all of which were sustained at the six month follow-up. Likewise, Paul and Moser (2009) found that the differences in mental health between unemployed and employed men are greater than those found between employed and unemployed women. This raises important questions with regard to how men feel; that is, whether they suffer more from unemployment, or if they feel better than females when they are employed, feelings that are perhaps due to Ireland's historic 'male bread-winner' state which remains, and is embedded in activation policy (Murphy, 2016; Rice, 2015). Males in the intervention group also fared significantly better than males in the control group, although no gender difference was found in the intervention versus SAU comparison. Females seemed to fare well in either case. This may be explained, at least in part, by the findings from Study Three which found that both of the male interviewees valued their relationship with the practitioner and indicated that the intervention had affected them positively in ways that went beyond the employment-related aspects of their lives. While it is difficult to generalise from this finding, further research focusing on gender effects could be valuable.

In addition, the increase in hope agency seen amongst males, suggests an increase in agentic feelings of motivation to pursue goals which has been associated with improved well-being (Creed et al., 2009). It is interesting to note that pre-intervention measures of hope-agency in all males were significantly lower than hope-

pathways for the overall sample, possibly indicating that participants at that point, perceived their ability to identify the means to achieving their goals as greater than their motivation for actually pursuing those goals in the first instance. This is consistent with the findings by Paul, Vastamäki, and Moser (2016) who found that, similar to employment commitment, the unemployed do not change their life goals, and so it is the incongruence between their current labour market status and their inability to achieve these goals that contributes to increased psychological distress. This is also in line with Fryer's 'agency restriction theory' which proposes that a frustration with being unable to achieve goals, contributes toward lower levels of well-being seen in the unemployed.

It is interesting to note that Paul et al. (2016) also relate life goals to eudemonic well-being (i.e. well-being related to self-realisation and the achievement of goals) rather than the typical hedonic well-being or positive affect on which psychologists have traditionally focused. The former is associated with self-realisation and achieving potential (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Thus, the individualised job seeking support intervention developed as part of this study, focuses on enhancing eudemonic well-being by helping the client to achieve career potential through increased self-awareness overcoming obstacles, informed decision making, and a wider understanding of the world of work. Paul and colleagues suggest that through practitioner-participant meetings similar to those seen here as part of the intervention, participants could be counselled to re-evaluate goals from highly agentic to more communicative or socially focused goals, such as building relationships which, in turn, may have a positive effect on well-being.

8.4.4 Career progression

Another interesting finding from the RCT related to different job seeking behaviours, in that 22% of the control group were actively job seeking compared to only 4% of the intervention group, who were more focused on achieving longer-term career

objectives. Intervention participants were twice as likely to be in further education, or participating in an ALMP, than their control group peers. Thus, their longer term career objectives - which may have included up-skilling – confirm that the intervention was driven by a more human capital approach to activation as described in Chapter Three, than the work-first approach of the SAU.

These findings are important as research has shown that following re-employment, job seekers often ‘end up’ underemployed (Vansteenkiste, Verbruggen & Sels, 2016), or churn between employment and unemployment (Moran, 2016). Within LMP, the focus of career guidance is not always clear. As part of an ALMP, the goal of any intervention is usually, first and foremost, to achieve short-term career goals such as securing employment for the client. However, an alternative and arguably more effective approach may be to promote longer-term career planning and sustainable quality employment (Hooley, 2014). The type of intensive job search promoted by the PTWP and other work-first approaches strongly encourage job seekers to achieve unspecified goals such as ‘any job’, often leading to less satisfactory outcomes (Latham, Bardes, & Locke, 2015). Klehe et al. (2012) argue that lower psychological well-being associated with unemployment can lead to short-term thinking rather than longer-term career goals and job seekers, therefore, may look for the first job available rather than more sustainable and quality jobs (Leith & Baumeister, 1996). The authors refer to this as a ‘downward career spiral’ (p. 11) which is, arguably, an approach evident in the work-first PTWP which was described by stakeholders in Study One as an ‘any job will do’ approach. .

Importantly, a number of authors have found that enforced job-seeking participation negatively impacts re-employment outcomes and increases levels of discouragement (e.g. Claussen, 1999; Creed, 1999; Eden & Aviram, 1993; Halvorsen,

1998; Malmberg-Heimonen & Vuori (2005); Vesalainen & Vuori, 1999). For example, in a study investigating whether and how enforced participation modifies the impact of job-search training on re-employment and mental health, Malmberg-Heimonen and Vuori (2005) reported that the re-employment effects for the short-term unemployed are more positive from this type of policy measure, and yet, had the LTU acquired more skills or been more qualified, enforced participation may have been more successful. In addition, their findings show that the conditionality aspect of the policy impacted negatively on mental health in the sense that those participants who took part voluntarily fared better than those who were mandated to do so.

However, it is clear from the findings that both the intervention and SAU in the current study, had a positive impact on psychological distress. In Study Three, the jobseeker participants explained how some of aspects of the service made them feel better about themselves, and while these may not help them secure employment immediately - as in the work first approach - they may help to improve psychological well-being with a view to securing employment in the longer term. For this reason – and as proposed by Malmberg-Heimonen and Vuori (2005) - preventing psychological distress and poor well-being is more important than asking the LTU to search for jobs for which they are not qualified, or for jobs that may not even exist.

The collective findings from the RCT reveal important empirical evidence for the potentially therapeutic effects of both the intervention and SAU. In addition, participants in both groups improved across all employability-related measures (with the exception of resilience). Importantly, the intervention shows promising effects for males particularly with regard to well-being, hopefulness and career efficacy. Finally, the outcomes at six-month follow-up show some evidence of diverging career

progression, with intervention participants more likely to progress on a human capital path, while SAU participants were more inclined towards job seeking and employment.

8.5 Evaluating what works

While the RCT revealed some interesting and positive findings with regard to both the intervention and SAU (despite their differences in approach), the process evaluation, conducted in Study Three sought primarily to surface elements of the intervention that contributed to changes in participants' well-being and employability. A secondary aim of the process evaluation was to identify elements contributing to the effectiveness of both services, thereby examining any shared commonalities.

8.5.1 Participants' subjective experiences of the intervention

Firstly, the intervention participants in Study Three ($n=6$), alluded to their increased confidence and motivation following completion of the intervention, as well as their achievement of career goals, greater career clarity, and goal setting, and more hope for the future. Reassuringly, these mirror the findings from the RCT which, as already discussed, found that levels of psychological distress in the intervention group fell over time whilst measures of employability (e.g. hopefulness and career self-efficacy) increased.

The findings also show that intervention group interviewees, post-intervention, had a greater understanding of previous negative life experiences or perceived barriers, such as previous employment and education failures, and were able to reinterpret them as often being due to unsuitable environments. Thus, participants frequently had distorted interpretations of previous failures, attributing them to their own inability to achieve thereby perceiving them as barriers to any type of education, training, or employment progression. These findings can perhaps be best understood in the context of Person-Environment (P-E) fit theory which underpins the guidance model used in

this study. Conceptualised by Parsons (1909), it is one of the longest established theories in career guidance which, despite being contested, remains robust in influencing guidance practice today (O'Brien, 2001). Parsons proposed that three factors were necessary for career choice including 'knowing yourself', 'knowing the world' and 'true reasoning' (see Figure 8.1).

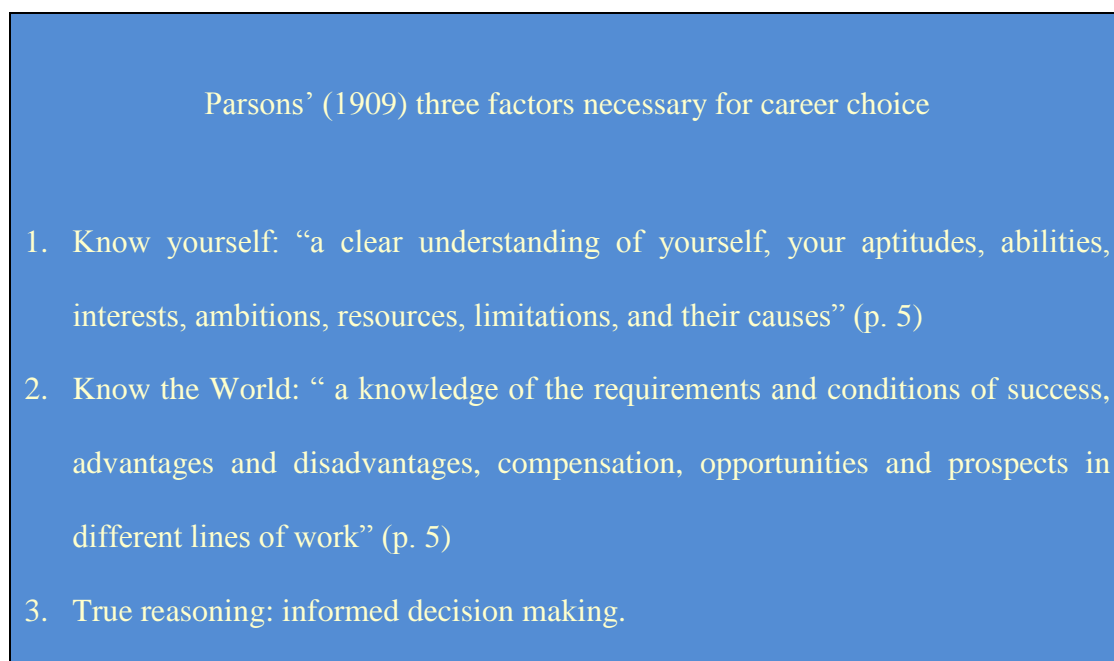


Figure 8.1 Parsons' (1909) Choosing a Career

This theory suggests that greater self-awareness and an understanding of our strengths and limitations, along with a wider understanding of the world, are all critical in making career choices. Career clarity was an important outcome for participants in the current study, who reported that they could now see a path forward and felt that they had more choice and control over their own employability. The P-E fit model also supports the notion of 'career adaptability' as proposed by Super and Knasel (1981) which is also considered important to employability (Fugate et al., 2004) and in continuing career decision making across the lifespan. This form of adaptability combines the attitudes, competencies, and behaviours that individuals use to match themselves to employment (Savickas, 2005). While the timeframe of the study was

limited, a longer-term follow-up would provide useful insights into longer-term career adaptability and career management for participants.

8.5.2 Quality of intervention delivery

As well as the overall guidance approach, several causal mechanisms were identified in this study, as contributing to the outcomes experienced by intervention participants. These related predominately to the personalised nature, and quality of service delivery, and the challenging yet supportive approach used. Importantly, other studies have identified similar findings which highlight the importance of the one-to-one interaction with practitioners (e.g. Creed et al., 1996; Creed, 1998). A person-centred approach relies strongly on the relationship between the practitioner and the individual and is central to guidance practice and therapeutic counselling (Kidd, 1996). The ‘helping’ nature of the interaction ensures the client receives attention and support in a trusting and safe environment (Robertson, 2013). Similarly findings by Westergaard (2012) and Hasluck and Green (2007) show that the quality of the relationship and creating a ‘safe space’ are important aspects of the guidance relationship.

The qualitative findings from Study Three, suggest that this interpersonal component may have been as, if not more, important than the content of the intervention itself in producing the outcomes outlined earlier. The personalised nature of the intervention and the importance of the one-to-one meetings were highlighted by both practitioners and participants alike. This is consistent with Jahoda’s (1989) argument that no one individual is the same as another and therefore, that more person-centred approaches may be more effective when supporting the unemployed (Koen et al., 2013). This also raises questions about the ‘one size fits all’ approach identified earlier in Study One. Notably however, the SAU practitioners indicated that, whilst this individualised approach was unfortunately absent from the PTWP approach, they were,

as NGO based practitioners nonetheless oriented towards delivering the highly administrative SAU in a person-centred way. This is an important point in view of some of the findings reported in the RCT and, in particular, helps to explain the absence of differences in some respects between the intervention and SAU groups. It also raises questions as to the extent to which practitioners elsewhere attempt, or are encouraged, to adopt similar approaches.

Despite an orientation to do otherwise, the findings from Study Three show that SAU practitioners felt compelled to use more bureaucratic approaches due to the intrinsically administrative approach of the SAU. By contrast, the intervention practitioners worked from a position of enablement and empowerment as proposed by a guidance approach. Hansen and Natland (2016), in one of few studies which focus on the shift in policy towards activation and its impact on the relationship between the practitioner and the client, found that practitioners use pragmatic approaches ranging from bureaucratic to person-centred, suggesting a continuum of practice from coercive to empowerment. By comparison, it is unlikely that the SAU approach in the current study was based on pragmatism, as practitioners reported that systemic rules had negatively affected their ability to use their own professional judgement and had restricted their choice with regard to the use of suitable interventions. Importantly, the Labour Market Council recommended that more attention be paid to the quality of engagement with job seekers, and that important lessons can be learnt from NGO and community based organisations with regard to their effective engagement with difficult-to-reach cohorts (O'Connell 2016). This includes the delivery of a 'consistent and high standard of career guidance' (Sweeney, 2017, p.5).

The friendly and non-threatening environment of the NGO was also highlighted to be an important factor for participants when accessing the service for the first time, but also in maintaining and supporting their engagement. Its non-punitive approach and

the lack of any conditionality had enabled participants to engage in a trusting relationship with the practitioner which was, in turn, essential for the disclosure of barriers and improved feelings of well-being. Westergaard (2012) recommends having the appropriate physical space to engage with clients, such as a confidential and comfortable room. In addition, time was highlighted in the current study, as an important component of the intervention and seen simultaneously, as a significant limitation of the SAU and PES more widely. All of the SAU practitioners expressed concerns about the lack of time to develop an open and trusting relationship with their clients, even though this was seen as an essential part of their work (Gothard, Mignot, Offer & Ruff, 2001).

The above findings raise important questions about the delivery (and attendant costs) of routine career guidance. The practice of career guidance is underpinned by both career theory (e.g. Holland, 1997; Parsons, 1909; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996) and counselling theory (e.g. Egan, 2007; Rogers, 1951), and its impact, therefore, may be both career and self-related. Career counselling, on the other hand, has its roots in the discipline of counselling and thus can be seen as a more therapeutic approach (Ali & Graham, 1996; Westergaard, 2005, 2012) with practitioners using counselling skills in their practice. Given what is known about the career readiness and well-being of the LTU - both in Ireland and elsewhere - it would seem logical and appropriate that approaches, incorporating lessons from both career guidance and career counselling, would be used in job assistance programmes designed to support the unemployed. However, the perceived costs and skills requirement for practitioners have been a constant barrier to including such interventions in mainstream LMPs and specific ALMPs (Pisoni, 2017). The provision of this kind of more intensive support for the most disadvantaged might be seen as prohibitive when compared to the status quo, in terms of greater perceived financial and 'political' costs (Lipsky, 2010).

However, it is important to note that a (rare) cost-benefit analysis of one of the most evaluated interventions used with the unemployed - the aforementioned JOBS programme in the US - showed that the benefits of the programme exceeded the costs within a two-year period and led to longer-term economic benefits for the state such as reduced unemployment benefit and higher wage tax contributions by participants (Vinokur et al., 1991). Thus, it is important to consider the longer term benefits of changing service delivery in the context of an injection of initial (shorter-term) costs in terms of training/upskilling and implementation. This is supported by the EU's social investment package (EU, 2013) which recognises the contribution of well-designed social policies to protecting people from poverty while also contributing to economic growth. Social investment encourages the strengthening of people's current and future capacities and emphasises the preventative and longer term efficiencies and effectiveness of social policies. With regard to ALMPs, the EU social investment perspective proposes the provision of tailored-made support particularly for people experiencing multiple disadvantage who require, not only job search assistance, but other specific services (e.g. rehabilitative services). A need for future research in this area is indicated (Wanberg, 2012).

8.5.3 Intervention vs SAU

It is difficult to know why more (and larger) significant differences were not observed in the current trial in favour of the intervention, and especially in view of the qualitative findings reported in Study One and Study Three, both of which emphasised the highly administrative, high control and low person-centeredness of the SAU and the positive experiences of both intervention clients and practitioners. A number of possible reasons for these findings are now explored here, some of which have already been mentioned briefly.

Firstly, both interventions were delivered within the same organisation, which, as already mentioned, is an NGO, with a particular ethos founded on social justice. This setting for this study however, has a unique mix of expertise, due to its history of managing EU funded innovative pilot projects, including being the site selected for the EU funded Youth Guarantee pilot in Ireland. Despite this, it has been the setting of the LESN since 1996, and thus bears many of the features common amongst LESN as described by Murphy and Deane (2016). This may have had positive effects on both the intervention and control participants, as the atmosphere and mood of the setting aim to reduce distress and promote positive engagement. This was also enabled by a friendly and open reception area, and by a highly committed staff team who are empathetic to the needs of job seekers. This is consistent with findings by Murphy and Deane (2016) who found that an empathetic and respectful setting, which offers clients dignity and privacy, was a common feature of the LESN. However, it is interesting to note that findings from both the *The Job seekers satisfaction with public offices research* (DSP, 2015), and *Job-Path performance data* (DSP, 2015), as mentioned earlier in this chapter, also indicate high levels of satisfaction with the Intreo and *JobPath* offices; they mention, in particular their friendly and pleasant settings, albeit these offices are benchmarked against bank services in the customer evaluation, thereby providing some insight into the type of environment Intreo aims to emulate.

Secondly, staff delivering the SAU were equally as experienced and qualified in adult guidance as staff delivering the intervention; therefore, their existing skills may have engendered a more guidance-focused SAU than would be delivered in, for example, the Intreo or similar services, many of whom were relocated from administrative work processing welfare claims. The findings from Study One indicate that while ex-FÁS staff within the DSP were qualified in adult guidance, their skills had become dated and under-used and had been allowed decline, and many were now in

administrative rather than client facing roles. Thus, it is unlikely that clients would experience the same guidance-focused service in Intreo as they received in the EEPIC trial.

Thirdly, participation in the study itself may have enhanced the SAU, both in terms of (a) practitioner awareness of being evaluated (i.e. demand characteristics) and, therefore, a desire on their part to do as good a job as possible; and (b) as already alluded to earlier in this chapter, the repeated contact with the all participants (including the control group) who received three one-to-one meetings during the six-month period with the researcher. Overall then, together with the repeated contacts with the practitioner and possible demand characteristics amongst the practitioners, there was a combination of factors within this study that may not have been present (or would be less likely to be present), had the control group been recruited from another setting. For example, had the SAU control group been recruited directly from Intreo - the one-stop-shop - all services would have been provided within a public office, from the GIS through to one-to-one meetings with the activation team. It is also interesting to note from anecdotal evidence in Study Three that *JobPath* participants, who would previously have engaged with Intreo and possibly the LESN, continued to attend LESN services informally despite being *JobPath* clients. Practitioners reported being unable to document interaction with these clients, as they were no longer ‘allowed’ work with them. Progress was then counted solely by JobPath or Intreo. This is an interesting area for future research, particularly with regard to evaluating effectiveness of services and one which will be re-visited in the concluding chapter.

8.5.4 The ‘missing middle’: core components

While the negative long-term psychological health effects of unemployment have been highlighted at several junctures in this thesis, the health and well-being of job

seekers are currently not recognised/recommended routinely within existing policy in Ireland; instead - and as indicated earlier - job seekers are required to move directly into work. This approach is summarised in Figure 8.2 but with the “missing middle” also included. The model shows the characteristics of the individual as they present to activation services - as revealed in Study Two - and how a work-first approach requires this cohort to progress directly into employment. Potential employees seek quality employment which offers not only decent income which improves their - and their families’ - quality of life, but also career development opportunities and sustainability. However, employers require employees with the right skill sets, who are a ‘good organisational fit’, who will perform well, and have a positive attitude towards work. The ‘missing middle’ identified by Brodtkin (2013) or the ‘how to’ as highlighted in Study One, has also been included in Figure 8.2, indicating how the strengths-based guidance model, underpinned by the approach and drivers of employability, leads to improved psychological capital and employability, thereby preparing the LTU for more sustained access to quality labour market opportunities.

In addition, there are a number of important variables involved in the ‘how to’ of service delivery which underpin the guidance approach used in the present study including: (1) the approach used and its content; (2) staff delivering the service; and (3) the environment within which the service takes place. Job seekers are a heterogeneous group, and yet this does not currently influence the type of intervention used by a practitioner with the client, or indeed what they are able to do with the client. Thus, for the PES to be fully effective and appropriately responsive to the needs of the LTU, the ‘doing’ of the work requires explanation.

Whilst acknowledging the broader employability agenda, this study - and indeed the ‘missing middle’ - focuses on the individual, their employability and their

psychological capital and well-being, all of which are required to ensure that individuals have more opportunity to access sustainable employment, thus breaking the cycle of LTU. The findings reported here provide some useful evidence detailing the missing ‘how to’ of implementation and how a highly administrative service can be adapted in order to potentially improve the system for this vulnerable cohort of people.

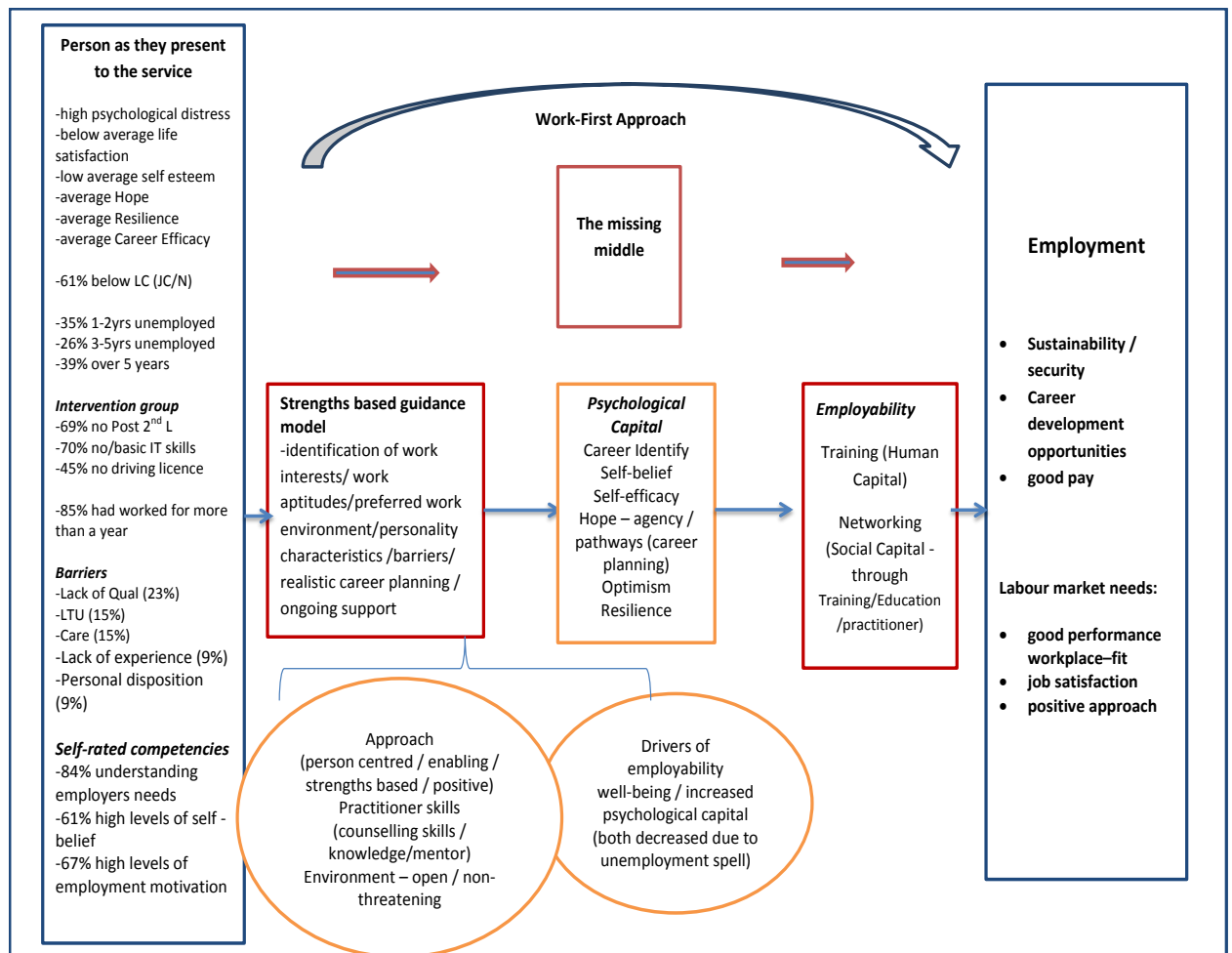


Figure 8.2 The Work-First approach vs the “missing middle” of implementation

Furthermore, the findings from Study Three suggest that the implementation of the Intreo model within an LES has only a short-term impact on well-being. Studies conducted elsewhere have found that an activation intervention can have a positive effect on well-being (e.g. Andersen, 2008; Caplan et al., 1989; Coutts, 2005; Creed et al., 1999; Vuori et al., 2002; Vinokur & Schul, 2002) and indeed the current study

shows that this is the case for both the intervention and the SAU. However, the more sustained effects seen in the intervention group, suggest that a more individualised approach may be more effective in the longer term. As Reynolds et al. (2010) argue, if environments are not created which are conducive to improvements in mental health, then any positive effects of interventions may be lost. The current study demonstrates the potential impact of both an individualised approach for the LTU and the regular Intreo service model as delivered in a sympathetic and supportive NGO setting.

8.6 Conclusion

This mixed-methods study - which incorporates a qualitative study of the PTWP in Ireland, a high quality RCT and a small-scale process evaluation - is the first study to evaluate the impact of the PTWP on the well-being and employability of the LTU in Ireland. It provides important insights into the PTWP from the perspective of a wide range of key stakeholders, with regard to its broad impact on service delivery and on the experiences of the unemployed. In particular, it affords a normally hidden view of the LTU as they present for activation in terms of their levels of psychological distress, education, and perceived employability, all of which should be acknowledged and recognised within a work-first LMP regime. The generally positive well-being and employability effects seen for both the intervention, and the SAU groups provide initial evidence, for the first time, on the provision of job seeking support interventions within a professionally led, community based service. Of particular interest is the effectiveness of the individualised job seeking support intervention for males with regard to well-being, hopefulness and carer self-efficacy outcomes, suggesting that this type of intervention may be used to help LTU males overcome some of the negative psychological consequences of unemployment. The study also provides useful insights into the 'missing middle' or 'how to' of implementation by identifying some of the key

drivers and causal mechanisms perceived to be responsible for the increases in well-being and employability.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

This concluding chapter incorporates an evaluation of the study, some directions for future research, and a brief discussion of the contribution of the research findings to policy and practice.

9.1 Evaluation of the study

9.1.1 Strengths

This research makes a number of important practical, theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions to our understanding of well-being and employability, as well as to the scholarship of unemployment and associated policies and processes. It involved three separate, but related studies which varied in breadth and depth and which bring interesting and informative insights into the outcomes and experiences of the LTU and the structures and processes within which this vulnerable group receive support and guidance in an Irish context.

Firstly, at a practical level, this is one of the first Irish studies, and one of the few internationally, to focus on the psychological well-being of the unemployed, particularly the LTU, within the context of policy reform and implementation. Despite the consistently strong evidence for the negative psychological impact of unemployment, there are few studies internationally which focus on how policy interventions affect well-being and other person-centred employability characteristics. Evaluations of labour market policy interventions generally focus on tangible quantifiable outcomes such as job placements, or referrals to further education or ALMPs. This study is one of the few internationally that has evaluated the impact of an

individualised job seeking employment intervention on a range of outcomes relevant to psychological well-being and employability.

Secondly, the findings support the theory that unemployment affects each individual differently, and while there may be commonalities across individuals, the specific barriers experienced by the LTU clearly require special attention. This is consistent with Jahoda's latent deprivation model and Warr's Vitamin model, both of which are described as situational models (Paul & Moser, 2006) and which identify the impact of the environment as detrimental to individual well-being. The findings from both Studies One and Three, indicate that participants want to, and are committed to, work, and demonstrate more positive levels of well-being when they are engaged in a process which they believe will enable them to progress into work. Whilst the intervention focused on developing employability (i.e. adaptability, human and social capital, and career identity), as defined by Fugate et al. (2004), the qualitative findings were important in understanding the contextual factors - common to both the intervention and SAU - which seemed to impact psychological capital, an important set of resources for career success in a more flexible labour market.

In addition, the results shed light on the important role of well-being in the reemployment process, and raise new questions from a conceptual perspective, about its positioning in the mechanism of re-employment. Most researchers agree that perceived employability increases well-being (Vanhercke, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2016), although Vanhercke et al. (2015) recommend that interventions such as counselling could help to improve well-being and, in turn, perceptions of employability. The findings from the current study support this relatively recent perspective on the relationship between perceived employability and psychological well-being, and suggest that ALMP and employment services have a role in improving well-being by

incorporating some elements of health promotion (and attendant approaches) for those most distanced from the labour market.

Unlike previous evaluations of ALMPs, this research sought to incorporate both an RCT and a small-scale process evaluation to assess the impact of a newly developed person-centred individualised support, delivered in a community based setting. This is an important methodological contribution to the evaluation literature on ALMPs. Evaluations of interventions which incorporate more psychological approaches to job assistance, have been found to be weak and lacking in quality with regard to study design and reporting. Thus, there have been calls (e.g. Moore et al., 2016) for more high quality research on the effectiveness of interventions aimed at the LTU to include RCTs, which follow established guidelines (e.g. CONSORT, SPIRIT). In addition, there is a need for more sophisticated evaluations which provide evidence on what works and for whom (O’Connell 2017). The current study sought to fill this methodological gap and indeed, the study findings add considerably to the international literature. The study also provides important findings in a national context which should help to inform both policy and practice and which are an important addition to the, as yet unpublished, impact evaluations currently being undertaken by the DSP and supported by the Evaluation Sub Group of the Labour Market Council (Sweeney, 2017), discussed further below.

Specifically, the RCT (or EEPIC trial) conducted as part of this research, was conducted in line with CONSORT guidance (CONSORT, 2001) and was accompanied, for purposes of transparency and clarity, by a detailed (soon to be published) protocol. It also involved a relatively large sample of participants who were assessed at three time points using a wide range of psychometrically robust measures of well-being, as well as other measures of employability. The intervention, as described in Chapter Four, was developed by the researcher over a period of six months and brings together a number

of approaches and tools used in both private career guidance (e.g. use of psychometric assessments to uncover aptitudes, interests, preferred personality style, and vocational counselling) as well as tools and methods developed as part of the NGO's participation in EU-funded projects which focused on quality career guidance for disadvantaged job seekers in the labour market. The new intervention is underpinned by theories relating to career interests (e.g. Holland's Vocational Choice Model, 1997), personality (e.g. the Big Five, McCrae & Costa (1985)) and human abilities (e.g. Fleishman, 1975) and it utilises a person-centred approach to try to account for individual differences. The model aims to enable the client to gain both a greater self-awareness and understanding of the issues which affect their ability to access employment, and to make informed decisions on how to achieve their career goals and aspirations. The approach is designed to be an enabling one, focusing on supporting the client to make change in their lives and move toward achievable goals.

The results from the RCT (Study Two) add to our empirical understanding of the LTU in a number of ways including: the very high levels of psychological distress experienced at baseline (i.e. the point of activation); the well-being and employability outcomes for job seekers from both intervention and SAU services based within a community setting; the potentially important benefits for males of the intervention service model with regard to well-being, hopefulness and career-efficacy; and the different intervention versus control group outcomes in terms of progression into education and training, or job seeking. Collectively, these findings support the 'train first' default position and preferred strategy recommended by Sweeney (2017) as well as the 'careful' approach to activation recommended by Murphy (2012), and in that sense, may help to inform policy reform into the future.

While the EEPIC trial produced a number of very interesting and informative findings, by its nature it could not identify the 'missing middle' or the 'how to' of

implementation of employment services for this cohort. For this reason, a small-scale process evaluation (Study Three) was undertaken to identify some of the mechanisms linking interventions and outcomes in an attempt to elucidate the ‘why’ (or ‘why not’) and the ‘how’ (Bredgaard, 2015) of the intervention versus SAU. The results of the process evaluation showed that three contextual factors - skilled staff, a personalised approach, and a friendly non-threatening environment – played a key role in successful outcomes. These findings are of both practical and theoretical importance.

Another key strength of this research was the inclusion of ‘real life’ examples through the voices of job seekers, practitioners and other stakeholders. In this way, the qualitative data helped to support, amplify and explain some of the quantitative findings, thereby providing a more holistic view of the intervention and SAU including their outcomes and participants’ subjective experiences and views.

The study is the earliest and only RCT of the Intreo SAU and gives practical insights into Irish ‘services to the unemployed’, a core strand of the Irish labour activation policy, PTWP. As such, it will complement the, as yet unfinished, impact evaluations currently being undertaken by the DEASP and supported by the Evaluation Sub Group of the Labour Market Council (Sweeney, 2017). In particular, its focus on the ‘how’ or ‘missing middle’ allows a potentially deeper understanding of the gaps in the Intreo process that may help explain some of the RCT results. The ‘missing middle’ model depicted in Chapter Eight, offers a potentially useful framework for reforming the current SAU approach. This reform agenda may become more urgent as the activation challenge shifts to the very long-term unemployed, and groups more distant from the labour market including people with disabilities, qualified adults and home-makers (PTWP 2016). Further, the three studies are consistent with, and add to, a number of new implementation-focused studies (Köppe & O’Connell, 2016; Murphy et al., forthcoming). Together, these offer valuable insights into the problematic nature of

vertical policy design and implementation and reinforce arguments for consultative policy processes. As such, this research makes an important Irish contribution to the international activation governance literature (Brodkin & Marston, 2013).

Lastly, this engaged research involved a collaboration between Maynooth University, Ballymun Job Centre, and the Irish Research Council who funded the study. The interdisciplinary approach underpinning the study drew on both the psychological and sociological literature and this, whilst acknowledging the disciplinary diversity of each, provided a more integrated and holistic understanding of the theories, issues and concepts explored in the research. This engaged approach allowed access to job seekers who were within the PTWP, and as noted in Chapter Three, were bound by the principle of ‘mutual obligations’, and thus expected to engage in job seeking in exchange for receiving a welfare payment and employment services. The engaged nature of the study provided an insight into how these job seekers presented for activation in terms of well-being and employability, whilst also monitoring their progress and perceptions through an individualised job seeking intervention. This is important as the study setting, as described in Chapter Four, has been identified by the CSO (June 2017) as containing 3 of the 79 unemployment blackspots across Ireland. These are defined as areas with a labour force of at least 200 people and with unemployment rates of 27% or higher (CSO, 2017). This study, therefore, has potentially important learning for the delivery of employment services in these areas in order to increase the levels of re-employment, but more importantly in the first instance, to enhance job seekers’ sense of well-being, confidence, hopefulness and belief in their own potential.

9.1.2 Limitations

A number of limitations must also be taken into account when considering the overall findings of this study. Firstly, it was not possible within the confines of this study to recruit the SAU control group from a more typical PTWP setting, such as an

Intreo office or a Job Path centre. This would have established whether or not the study setting had any impact on outcomes and perhaps explained, at least in part, the lack of any significant time-group interaction effects across both primary and secondary measures (with the exception of Hope-agency) in the RCT. As explained earlier, participants in both groups improved over time, despite substantial differences in the content of the intervention and SAU. The qualitative findings were invaluable here in terms of identifying other factors such as the study setting and staff skills which may have contributed toward the overall improvement experienced by participants regardless of their group membership.

Secondly, the attrition rate within the RCT, whilst not unexpected, was of significant concern throughout, as a 32% rate and a 55% rate were identified at post-intervention and at six-month follow-up respectively; thus, a large proportion of participants did not receive the full 'dosage' of the intervention which may, in turn, have negatively influenced the estimation of its overall effect. However, this is not unusual for this client group over an approximate 12-month period, as individuals progress into ALMPs, employment and health services, whilst their job seeking status may also change. Other participants moved out of the area, or simply did not attend either the BJC service or the DSP and thus were sanctioned. In a small number of cases of which the researcher is aware, participants entered prison ($n = 3$) or addiction treatment ($n = 3$), and in one case passed away due to illness. Typically, trials investigating therapies generally do not accept attrition levels of greater than 20% (Fewtrell et al., 2008). However, loss to follow-up is inevitable over time in this client group and especially over a one-year period and with a continuously improving labour market; nonetheless, it is problematic in that it can affect study power, bias, and generalisability of the findings.

Thirdly, the study was conducted in a single location in a very disadvantaged geographical area in north Dublin. The PTWP was, at the time of study design, continuously changing under the direction of the DSP and, other similar services were not in a position to commit to participation in the study due to, for example, their contractual obligations to the DSP. At that time, and indeed now to a certain extent, any evaluation might be described as ‘hitting a moving target’. For example, during the recruitment stage of the RCT, the DSP referred 60 clients per week to the BJC for activation. These were a mix of STU, LTU, youth, and job seeker-transition claimants. As detailed in the Study Protocol (See Appendix 4), the BJC identified those in the LTU category and invited them to participate. However, towards the end of recruitment, the policy changed and no job seekers were referred for a period of six weeks which meant that some participants ($n=23$) had a later start date than others. This may have impacted the delivery of either service to participants, as staff had lower and more manageable caseloads of clients by this point and reported feeling more in control of their daily work.

Another important limitation in this study was the small number of policy makers ($n=2$) who participated in Study One. As mentioned in Chapter Four, five policy makers were invited to participate, but only two agreed. While the two participants were key policy makers with regard to their daily involvement in the roll-out of the PTWP, those who did not participate were involved in the evaluative aspects of the PTWP and could, therefore, have contributed toward a broader understanding of the rationale for the programme of evaluation. Similarly, due to time constraints, no SAU participants were involved in Study Three, yet their views and experiences of the SAU control service could have provided important process-related findings and contributed to a deeper understanding of the RCT findings.

A final limitation of this study is the lack of an economic appraisal of the intervention which was not possible due to time and resource limitations, as well as the lack of comparative SAU costs data (Murphy et al., forthcoming). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the perceived costs and practitioner skill requirement have been frequently raised by policy makers as an obstacle to including individualised approaches in mainstream ALMPs. However, the results of Studies Two and Three suggest that job seekers made considerable progress both in terms of their well-being (to below the clinical threshold) and overall employability. Interestingly, - and as indicated earlier in Chapter Eight - an economic evaluation of the JOBs programme demonstrated longer-term economic benefits for the state (Vinokur et al., 1991). This is an important area for future research.

9.2 Directions for future research

There are a number of possibilities for future research in this field, some of which have already been highlighted in this and the previous chapter. Firstly, with regard to the RCT, it would be interesting to replicate the study (ideally on a larger scale) in order to explore the extent to which similar results would have been found with an SAU service delivered in an Intreo office, or within JobPath (i.e. the privately contracted service). A similar evaluation could be conducted in an urban area elsewhere and perhaps compared to a more rural location, particularly in areas classified as unemployment blackspots. For example, 18 areas of Limerick (located in the south-west of Ireland), and 9 areas of Waterford (located on the south-east of Ireland) have unemployment rates of over 27%, with some localities characterised by levels as high as 35%. These require special attention including the creative use of interventions known to help the LTU progress into sustainable employment.

Secondly, this study identified that males in the intervention service fared better than their control group counterparts. Given the persistently high numbers of longer term unemployed males, it would be interesting to conduct a further exploratory analysis to identify the specific causal mechanisms leading to these positive outcomes. Interestingly, during the mid to late 1990s, the BJC, funded through the EU, delivered a programme specifically aimed at LTU males over 40, who were considered extremely distanced from the labour market and who required specific tailored interventions to support them into employment. Many of these men had been unemployed since the recession of the 1980s. Similarly, the NESF report on the LTU (1992) recommends that a ‘comprehensive guidance, counselling and placement service’ (p.72) be set up in local areas of disadvantage and high unemployment. At that time, in the early 1990s, there was a recognition that an alternative to a ‘one size fits all’ approach was required for a similar cohort of job-seekers. A quarter of a century later, and after the implementation of individualised services in the late 1990s and 2000s, the provision of LMP has come full circle to a ‘one size fits all’ approach with the PTWP. Follow-up studies may, therefore, need to investigate the role of individual differences in the design and implementation of interventions tailored to meet the needs of a heterogeneous group. For example, Liu et al. (2014) suggest that effective programmes may offer a wide range of needs-based workshops or services for individuals and their families. Other researchers have also called for more individualised approaches (e.g. Fletcher, 2011; Thomsen, 2009).

Thirdly, future evaluations could explore the effectiveness of a ‘friendlier’ and more caring environment on client outcomes. With regard to implementation, this might constitute a relatively simple and cost-effective change within the PES with potentially beneficial outcomes.

Lastly, future studies might also incorporate longer term follow-ups (resources permitting) to assess outcomes over a longer period of time and to monitor and appraise changes in career trajectories, with a specific focus on well-being, quality of work, and income. Further evidence is also needed on the role of both employability and psychological capital in improving the re-employment chances of the unemployed, but within the context of career development rather than an ‘any job will do’ ethos. Building on the work of Vanhercke et al. (2015), future studies should identify the positioning of well-being in the mechanism leading to re-employment.

9.3 Implications for policy and practice

The aim of the NGO job assistance service is to increase re-employment through its SAU or, in the case of the current study, via the intervention. However, the collective findings suggest that these services had wider, and in some cases persistent, effects in terms of overall mental health and well-being, including impacts on self-esteem, hopefulness, life satisfaction and career efficacy. The current study proposes that the mechanism of re-employment for the LTU starts with well-being and, therefore, the initial focus of ALMP should be on improving wellbeing, followed by increased employability and leading to eventual re-employment. This process (and the dynamic interactions therein) is illustrated in Figure 8.3.

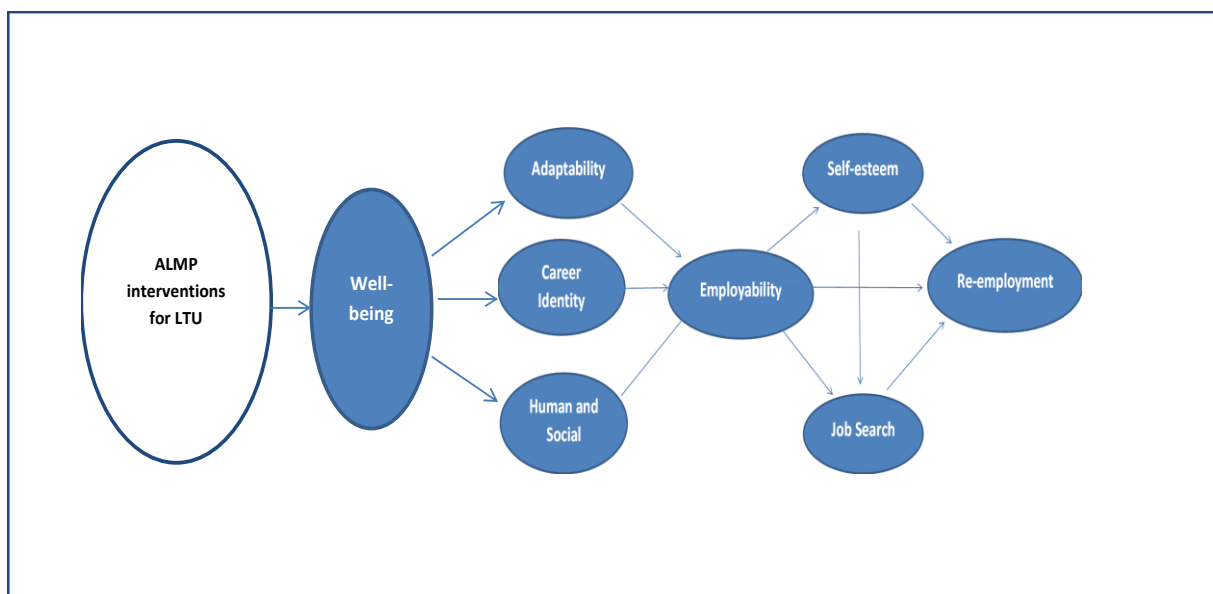


Figure 8.3 Mechanism of re-employment (adapted from McArdle et al., 2007)

Notably, the Healthy Ireland Framework²³ (2013-2025) identifies a role for non-health sector disciplines in improving health and well-being. This reflects the guidance from elsewhere which shows that positive mental health contributes to overall well-being, enabling individuals to realise their abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and make important contributions to their communities (WHO, 2012). The ‘whole system’ response proposed by the Healthy Ireland Framework invites both government and society to ensure that health is an integral part of a range of policies from environment to economics. The series of studies reported here provide useful evidence on the potential dual effect of ALMPs in terms of improving both employability and well-being in a highly vulnerable sub-group, thereby reflecting some of the objectives of the Healthy Ireland Framework.

The findings reported here suggest that person-centred interventions, if delivered sensitively, skilfully and in appropriate settings with ongoing follow-up, could be useful

²³ The Healthy Ireland Framework (2013-2025) supports Government’s response to Ireland’s changing health and wellbeing profile. It draws on existing policies while also proposing new ways to ensure effective collaboration to implement evidence based policies at Government, sectoral, community and local levels.

in promoting and maintaining well-being and employability effects into the workplace, thus building a stronger, healthier and more resilient labour force. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Five, the PTWP is now well-established and while the move toward activation was welcomed, the evidence suggests that its approach may now need to be fine-tuned, and perhaps revised to incorporate more caring and individualistic approaches. This would involve a re-framing of some of the goals of the PTWP to include a focus on meaningful outcomes for individuals rather than short-term welfare reductions. While this may involve a significant change to the current approach, it will only be enabled by a shift in culture toward a more supportive and caring welfare state which seeks to support the most vulnerable and which recognises that a 'one size fits all' approach does not provide equitable outcomes for our most vulnerable citizens. This is a more significant challenge in the longer term.

Furthermore, previous seminal work on services for the long-term unemployed in Ireland paid little attention to gender (NESF, 2004). LMP has subsequently focused on women's labour market participation and Murphy (2012) proposed a 'careful activation' strategy focused on the gendered needs of lone parents. To date, the PTWP has been described as 'male breadwinner activation' (Murphy, 2017), and little attention has been paid to gender patterns in ALMP participation or employment outcomes. The RCT study described in this thesis found gendered impacts and tentatively points towards LTU males benefiting from the personal interaction embedded in the intervention. Gender is an important variable for ongoing policy design and the PTWP would benefit from ex ante gender proofing and making gender an explicit focus for evaluation.

Finally, the potentially important contributions of the disciplines of psychology and sociology (separate and combined) to the study of unemployment and the design of

appropriate ALMP interventions to support the LTU in their well-being and employability, remain untapped in an Irish context. This study makes an important contribution, both nationally and internationally, in providing a nuanced understanding of some of the (many) psychological, sociological and economic factors underpinning the complex process of job seeking and re-employment. Finally, the collective findings from this study contribute towards our understanding of unemployment (particularly amongst the LTU sub-group), and the design and implementation of ALMPs.

9.4 Conclusion

Overall, these findings make an important contribution to the literature on ALMPs and the LTU, whilst providing some initial support for the potential added value of well-designed and carefully implemented interventions designed to address mental health and well-being outcomes. Most importantly, the positive effects of both the intervention and the SAU in this study meant that, overall, participants' levels of psychological distress fell to below the clinical cut-off at six-month follow-up. The findings from Study Three further indicate that participants and practitioners benefitted from being involved in the EEPIC trial, and that longer-term more sustainable career pathways were evident amongst intervention participants. Finally, it is important that practitioners, employment services, other stakeholders, and policy makers, recognise the important benefits of careful, appropriate, and quality focused ALMP interventions in terms of increased and sustainable employability, positive mental-health, and improved quality of life for those most vulnerable job seekers.

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Appendix 1

Interview schedules for Study One Interviews

The following questions aim to elicit views and attitudes on the Pathways to Work Programme (PTWP) and how it is perceived to be working at this early stage of implementation.

Five Stakeholder groups

Organisational (DSP/LES) - Managers

- How do you feel the Pathways to Work Programme is working?
- Do you believe that it's a programme which will 'fight back against unemployment'?
- What specific needs do you think it meets from an organisational perspective?
- Are you satisfied with its implementation to date?
- What services are provided and to whom?
- Are there unemployed clients who do not receive this service?
- Are the right people getting the right service? How do you know?
- Are the clients satisfied in your opinion, with the service they receive?
- Are the staff delivering the service satisfied that the service meets the needs of the unemployed?
- What would you change about the programme?

Front line staff (DSP/LES) - Practitioners

- How do you feel the Pathways to Work Programme is working?
- What specific needs do you think it meets from your perspective?
- How does the service identify, recruit and engage the clients?
- What services are provided and to whom?
- How much service is provided and what is the time frame?
- How do you feel about the way in which the service is implemented?
 - Tell me about your experience of implementing the approach
 - Take me through the process of interaction with the clients regarding the implementation of this approach
 - Can you explain the process?
- Are the right people getting the right service?
- Are there people for whom the service would be appropriate, who are not receiving the service?
- Are the clients satisfied in your opinion, with the service they receive?
 - What positive changes have occurred for clients since this approach has been implemented?
 - What negative changes if any have occurred for clients since this approach has been implemented?
- What services do you think should be provided?
- Do you have any suggestions as to how this service could be improved?
- Is there anything else you think I should know about the implementation of this approach?

Service user – Job seekers

- How are you getting on with the service here?
- Are you aware of the Pathways to Work Programme?
- How do you feel the Pathways to Work Programme is working for you?
- What specific needs do you think it meets from your perspective?

- What services have you received so far? How do you feel about the services you have received and how have they been provided to you?
- Are there services that you felt you required that were not provided?
- Do you feel that you are moving closer to the labour market?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Other stakeholders (Organisations providing a supportive role)

- How do you feel the Pathways to Work Programme is working?
- What specific needs do you think it meets from your perspective?
- What services are provided and to whom?
- How does your service interact with PTWP – has anything changed for you?
- Are there interventions/services you feel should be provided in order to assist job seekers move closer to the labour market?
- What are the positives and negatives of the PTWP from your perspective?

Policy Makers

- How do you feel the PTWP is working generally?
- What specific needs do you think it meets from your perspective
- How is the policy implemented what services are provided and to whom? How is the implementation going to date?
- Given your experienced are there interventions / services that you feel should be provided in order to assist the unemployed move closer to the labour market
- Have you any indication of the effectiveness of the PTWP?
 - Quality of outcomes for the unemployed
 - Quality of jobs offered
 - What type of evaluation has taken place or is planned?
- Do you have any suggestions as to how the implementation could be improved?
- Is there anything else you think I should know about the implementation of this approach?
- Is there something you would like to ask me?

Appendix 2

Participant Information sheet – Job seeker

Title of Research Project: Evaluating the Effectiveness and Implementation of new employment enhancement programmes in an Irish context

- You have been invited to participate in a research study.
- This sheet provides you with information about the study which will help you to decide if you would like to take part.
- Before you decide whether you would like to participate, it is important that you understand what the research is about.
- If any of the information provided is unclear or if you have any questions, please let me know as I would be happy to explain further or give you more information.

Details about the Researcher:

This research study is being carried out by Nuala Whelan a registered PhD Psychology student at the Department of Psychology, National University of Ireland Maynooth. Nuala is also a full time staff member at the Ballymun Job Centre, Dublin.

Purpose of the Study:

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of the employment supports you receive, most specifically the Pathways to Work programme (PTWP), which is currently delivered to job seekers through the Department of Social Protection (DSP) services and in some areas by the Local Employment Services.

This research will examine how job seekers perceive the service to be working based on their interaction with it. The impact of two types of supports will be measured with a sample of job seekers.

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are currently a jobseeker.

Do you have to take part?

- Participation is voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not.
- You may change your mind at any stage and withdraw from the process.
- You may be asked to participate over a period of time: at the beginning of your interaction with services and again towards the end (follow-up).

- You will be contacted in advance of the follow-up and consent will be sought. If you do not wish to continue at this time, you will be invited to complete the withdrawal slip at the end of this information sheet and return to the researcher for record purposes and all of your data will be destroyed.
- It is also important to note that you can stop and withdraw at any point in the process up to publication.

What will you have to do?

Your participation will involve some or all of the following:

- Participation in a focus group with other job seekers (approx. 1 hour duration)
- Participation in a one-to-one interview (approx. 45minutes to 1 hour duration)
- Participation in a study where you will be asked to complete a number of brief and easy-to-complete questionnaires relating to how you feel about yourself and your career. You will be asked to complete these questionnaires before your first appointment with the Ballymun Local Employment Service and again after your last appointment with the service. Each session will last approx. 40 mins²⁴.
- As part of this study there are two services that are being compared. We do not know as yet which of these two services is more effective. In order to test this, you will be randomly assigned to one or the other service which means that you have an equal chance of being in either. This is just like putting names into a hat and then drawing them out at random to decide who should go into which group. This is the best way of deciding which of two services works better. The two services are described briefly below.
 - Service 1: the Pathways to Work 'usual service' where participants will receive employment support services consisting of a group engagement session (approx. 30 mins), an initial one-to-one meeting (approx. 40mins) and follow up meetings every three months.
 - Service 2: a career guidance type intervention where participants will receive individualised job seeking support which includes career guidance and coaching over approx. 6-8 one hour sessions.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential and anonymous?

- Yes - no identifying information will be included within any aspect of the study.
- You will be allocated a unique code at the point of consent (to participate) so as to anonymise the data from the outset.

²⁴ To be adjusted depending on the pilot study.

- A document containing the coding key will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office at NUIM and will be accessed only by the researcher.

What will happen to the information which you give?

- Interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded, but no-one will be identified by name on the tape. The audio files will be kept in a password protected laptop protected by encryption software.
- Questionnaires will be completed on paper copy, with the participant's unique code as the identifier. This data will then be entered into a database on the researcher's laptop and the paper copies stored securely in the researcher's office at NUIM for a 10 year period, or until final publication.

What will happen to the results?

The results will be seen by the researcher, the supervisor and relevant examiners. The results will be presented in the published thesis and may also be presented at relevant conferences.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

We do not envisage any negative consequences for participants in taking part in this important study. There is no conditionality related to this study so no penalties for non-participation will apply.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, please feel free contact me.

Researcher: Nuala Whelan, B.A. (Hons.) Psychology, M.Sc. Industrial Psychology

Department of Psychology, NUIM, Maynooth, Co. Kildare

Tel: (01) 7086734

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The research supervisors are Dr. Sinead McGilloway and Dr. Mary Murphy who can be contacted as below:

Supervisors: Dr. Sinead McGilloway, Department of Psychology, NUIM, Maynooth, Co.Kildare

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Dr. Mary P. Murphy, Department of Sociology, NUIM, Maynooth, Co. Kildare

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If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

If you would like to **withdraw** from this study at any point, please sign below and return this form immediately to me at:

Nuala Whelan

Department of Psychology, NUI Maynooth, Maynooth, Co. Kildare

Signed:

Dated:

Appendix 3

Informed Consent Form

Research Project entitled: Evaluating the Effectiveness and Implementation of new employment enhancement programmes in an Irish context

Please read and sign this form if you would like to participate in this study

I understand the following:

- This research study will be carried out by Nuala Whelan, B.A., MSc., a registered PhD Psychology student at the Department of Psychology, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Nuala is also a full time staff member at the Ballymun Job Centre, Dublin.
- Participation is voluntary. It is my choice whether to participate or not. I may change my mind at any stage and withdraw from the process. I may be required to participate on more than one occasion as a follow-up questionnaire may be conducted. I will be contacted in advance of the follow-up and consent will be sought. If I do not wish to continue at any time, I will be requested to complete the withdrawal slip. This will be returned to the researcher for record purposes. Should this occur, all of my personal data will be destroyed.
- My participation in the study will be kept confidential and anonymous. No identifying information will be included within the transcripts/questionnaires nor will any information be included in the final write-up of the research. Any extracts from what I say that are quoted in the research report, will be entirely anonymous. The identities of participants/ interviewees will be concealed in all documents resulting from the research ensuring anonymity.
- I understand that I may be asked to be involved in some or all of the following:
 - a focus group with other job seekers/stakeholders (approx. 1 hour duration)
 - an interview with the researcher (approx. 1 hour duration)
 - a study where I will be asked to complete several questionnaires relating to how I feel across a number of areas.
 - (For Job seekers only) I understand that there are two services and I will be randomly assigned into one or the other, with an equal chance of being in either. The services have been explained to me
- All participants will be allocated a code at the point of consent (to participate) so as to anonymise the data from the outset. A document containing the coding key will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office at NUIM and accessible only by the researcher. All coded data will be stored on the researcher's laptop and protected by encryption software.

- All Interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded (with my consent), but no-one will be identified by name on the tape. The audio files will be kept in a password protected computer protected by encryption software. Questionnaires will be completed on paper copy, with my unique code as the identifier. These data will then be entered into a database on the researcher's computer and the paper copies stored securely in the researcher's office at NUIM until the point of final publication/10years. All of the information recorded is confidential.
- The results will be seen by the researcher, the supervisor and relevant examiners. The results will be presented in a thesis/report and may also be presented at relevant conferences and published in academic journals and, where applicable, in other outlets.
- There are no anticipated risks or negative consequences envisaged for participants taking part. There is no conditionality related to this study, no penalties for non-participation apply. The researcher is responsible for adhering to the ethical guidelines of the Psychological Society of Ireland.
- I have been provided with an information sheet related to this research project.
- I will receive a copy of this signed consent form for my own records.
- I may contact the researcher at point if I have any questions or concerns regarding my participation in this study.

Researcher: Nuala Whelan, B.A. (Hons.) Psychology, M.Sc. Industrial Psychology
 Department of Psychology, NUIM, Maynooth, Co. Kildare
 Tel: (01) 7086734

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Tel: (01) 7086556

Mary.p.murphy@nuim.ie

I have read and understand the information provided on the Information Sheet and the Consent form and agree to voluntarily participate in this research.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 4

EEPIC Study Protocol

The EEPIC Study Protocol was published on 26 February 2018 and is available at <http://rdcu.be/HSBm>

Whelan, N., McGilloway, S., Murphy, M.P., & McGuinness, C. (2018). EEPIC-Enhancing Employability through Positive Interventions for improving Career potential: the impact of a high support career guidance intervention on the wellbeing, hopefulness, self-efficacy and employability of the long-term unemployed-a study protocol for a randomised controlled trial. *Trials*, 19(1), 141.

Unpublished version of EEPIC Study Protocol included as Appendix 4

Administrative Information

Title Page

EEPIC – Enhancing Employability through Positive Interventions for improving Career potential: the impact of a high support career guidance intervention on the well-being, hopefulness, self-efficacy and employability of the long-term unemployed - study protocol for a randomised controlled trial

Roles and Responsibilities

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Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, Dublin 15, Ireland.

Abstract

Background: Labour market policy and its implementation have undergone rapid change internationally in the last three decades with a continued trend towards active labour market policy. In Ireland however, this shift has been more recent with ongoing reforms since 2012 and a concomitant move toward active labour market ‘work-first’ policy design (i.e. whereby unemployed people are compulsorily required to work in return for their social welfare benefits). Labour market policies vary from those that require this compulsory approach to those which enable the unemployed to move towards sustainable quality work in the labour market through upskilling (human capital approach). Despite this however, long-term unemployment - a major cause of poverty and social exclusion - remains high, whilst current employment support approaches aimed at sustainable re-employment are, arguably, unevaluated and under examined. This study examines the effectiveness of a new high support career guidance intervention in terms of its impact on aspects of well-being, perceived employability and enhancing career sustainability.

Method: The study involves a single-centre randomised, controlled, partially-blinded trial. A total of 140 long-term unemployed job seekers from a disadvantaged urban area will be randomly assigned to two groups: (1) an intervention group and (2) a ‘service as usual’ group. Each group will be followed up immediately post-intervention and six months later. The primary outcome is well-being at post intervention and at six-month follow up. The secondary

² Maynooth University

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outcome is perceived employability, which includes a number of different facets including self-esteem, hopefulness, resilience, and career self-efficacy.

Discussion: The study aims to assess the changes in, for example psychological well-being, career efficacy and hopefulness, that occur as a result of participation in a high support intervention versus routinely available support. The results will help to inform policy and practice by indicating whether or not a therapeutic approach to job seeking support is more effective for long-term unemployed job seekers than routinely available (and less therapeutic) support. The findings will also be important in understanding what works and for whom with regard to potentially undoing the negative psychological impacts of unemployment, building psychological capital and employability within the individual, and developing career trajectories leading to more sustainable employment.

Trial registration: ISRCTN registry with study ID ISRCTN16801028 (registered 9 February, 2016)

Keywords: Employability, High support career guidance, Positive psychological interventions, Long-term unemployed, Well-being, Labour market activation

Protocol Version: Original version 01 15/03/2017

Funding: Funding for this trial has been provided by the Irish Research Council. Non-financial support has been provided by the NGO participating in the trial in the form of administrative support. Neither organisation has been involved in the design of the trial.

Introduction

Background and rationale

The recent global crisis and subsequent high levels of unemployment in many countries throughout the world have led to a greater focus on, and recognition of, the importance of labour market policy and job seeking [1]. In 2015, global unemployment stood at 197.1

million, a 27 million increase on the pre-crisis level of 2007 [2]. In fact, across countries and over time, levels of unemployment vary considerably, with current unemployment rates in the OECD as low as 3.1 % in Japan (2016) and as high as 24.9% in Greece (2015), and with even higher rates recorded in the emerging and developing world [2]. In the case of Ireland, the unemployment rate over the last three decades has been described as a 'roller-coaster ride' culminating in a sharp rise of 15.1% in 2012, from a low of 4.4% in 2006, and a continuous decrease since, illustrating the variability within countries [3].

Thus, government reaction to fluctuating levels of unemployment is important in terms of supporting the unemployed, not only in helping them to re-access the labour market, but also to become resilient in times of high unemployment. Policy responses to unemployment are generally implemented through Labour Market Policies (LMPs) which can differ across countries, but tend to encompass a variety of similar regulative measures that influence the interaction between labour supply and demand [2], whilst also addressing imbalances in, for instance, long-term unemployment, income support, skills shortages, discrimination towards 'disadvantaged' labour [31], and ultimately ensuring efficient labour market functioning [4]. These policies are important in that they are broadly designed to assist the unemployed and those facing barriers to employment, to access the labour market.

At the same time, there is considerable epidemiological research suggesting that unemployment can have much deeper impacts than just the loss of manifest benefits of employment (i.e. financial remuneration), with evidence of impacts on both physical and mental health [5-8]. For example, many unemployed job seekers experience decreased well-being [8], high levels of psychological stress [9], low self-esteem and job search self-efficacy [10], which can act as barriers to returning to work due to low levels of motivation and attendant ineffective job seeking strategies [11]. Thus, many people who become unemployed are at increased risk of developing stress-related disorders or psychological distress which can distance them from the labour market and increase their likelihood of becoming long-term

unemployed [12]. Nevertheless, interventions aimed at re-employment tend to concentrate on increasing human capital through work experience and skills training, subsidised and direct employment, and intensifying job search behaviour, with the expected outcome being improved labour market access. Given the compelling evidence for the negative impacts of unemployment on mental health and well-being, it is imperative that policy responses to labour market detachment include interventions that help alleviate these adverse impacts and maintain good mental health [6, 12, 37, 43]

LMPs which seek to support unemployed people are often defined as ‘active’ or ‘passive’; the latter focuses on income replacement and the welfare of the unemployed, without improving their labour market access. Active labour market policies, on the other hand, include labour market integration measures which aim to improve the employment prospects and wage outcomes for those who have difficulty accessing the labour market such as the unemployed or those threatened by unemployment. Increasingly, governments are using a so-called activation approach in labour market policy design, where benefit rules and employment or training services are shaped with a view to moving unemployed income benefit recipients into work [13]. In recent decades this approach has emerged in public policy design in North America, Australia and Western Europe [14]. Indeed, according to Martin (2014) [3], activation policies have become a buzzword in labour market policy with a global movement towards a more regulatory form of welfare whereby established welfare rights become more conditional on job seeking efforts [15]. Nevertheless, despite its popularity, there remains ambiguity around activation in terms of what it means for policy and practice, with much of this uncertainty arising from how it has been implemented in various countries and under a variety of labels (i.e. workfare, work-first, labour market activation, welfare to work) [14].

This variation in activation policies across the developed world lies mainly in the intensity of their regulation. Some countries for example, the UK and the US implement a ‘work-first’ approach whereby the unemployed are required to work for their unemployment welfare. In

contrast, countries such as Denmark and the Nordic states employ a ‘human capital’ approach which aims to enable access to more sustainable quality work in the labour market. Interestingly Job quality has been included in the OECD’s well-being framework and identified as a key component of individual well-being and a means to better economic performance. Having a job is crucial for our well-being, but the quality of that job and its impact on our lives is also important and has been found to be associated with both mental and physical health [6]. Research in Switzerland [17] found that using negative incentives in ALMP led to lower quality post-unemployment jobs, both in terms of job duration and level of earnings. Studies have also shown that work of poor psychosocial quality can have long-term health impacts [18] which can be significantly worse than long-term unemployment itself. A recent systematic review found that people’s perceptions of negative psychosocial factors in the workplace is related to their mental health [19], with harmful psychosocial job conditions such as low job security, low decision latitude, high psychological job demands, and low co-worker support increasing the chance of mental health symptoms [20]. While activation has been shown to increase exits from unemployment, it is important that the aim of effective activation regimes should be to help people access quality jobs [3].

Relative to many OECD countries, Ireland has been slow to follow suit in terms of active labour market policy, and activation in particular. Interestingly, the recent economic crisis (2008 – 2012), has driven a significant and unprecedented move in this direction. With the rapid rise in unemployment in the early years of the recession²⁶, the Irish government’s policy was proving insufficient in responding to the needs of job seekers. For example, it was described as ‘under-examined, fragmented and lacking in ambition... passive and low intensity in character ...’ (Sweeney 2011) [21]. In an attempt to contend with the overwhelming rise in unemployment, recent changes in labour market policy have prompted a shift from passive to active

²⁶ Unemployment rose from 4.4% in early 2008 to 15.1% in 2012 (CSO; [3])

participation and the strengthening of conditionality with the unemployed now required to engage in job search and activation programmes in order to continue receiving social welfare support. This is comparable with the 'work- first' approaches in the UK, Germany, the US, Australia and other European countries, many of which have been developing their activation strategies since the early 1990s. There are particular similarities between the Irish model and UK welfare reforms principally in relation to the re-design of welfare services (i.e. Jobcentre in the UK and the Intreo service in Ireland), the implementation of conditionality [22], and the sub-contracting of re-employment services to private providers on the basis of performance-related results [3].

This shift towards activation was achieved through the implementation of the Irish Government's labour market policy, *'Pathways to Work'* (Department of Social Protection (DSP), 2011, 2013, 2014, 2016-2020)[23], which has been precipitous, and despite an explicit focus on long-term unemployment, there is little evidence of targeted approaches which acknowledge long-term unemployment and/or its impact on psychological well-being. Although the policy refers throughout to prioritising and adequately supporting vulnerable groups including the young unemployed and long-term unemployed through the provision of activation services, the response in terms of application is increased frequency of engagement (i.e. one meeting with a case officer per month). Thus, whilst this new policy is widely considered to be a success in terms of reducing unemployment by the Irish Government [23] and in public discourse through the obvious decline in unemployment (15.1% in 2012 to 7.1%, Q4 2016), nothing is known about its impact on the well-being and sustainable re-employment of job seekers in quality jobs, and in particular the long-term unemployed. This is an important knowledge gap in view of the extensive literature linking unemployment to poor mental health and well-being [24-25, 6]; considerable evidence indicates that unemployed people are more likely to experience: anxiety; loss of confidence; low self-esteem; loss of motivation; suicidal ideation; low levels of coping; psychosomatic problems; poor cognitive performance; behavioural problems; and paranoia [26-28, 8].

While there is little evidence of the effectiveness of such programmes, there is much political interest in using ALMPs as a means of reducing levels of unemployment. One of the most cost effective ALMP are 'job search and assistance' interventions which comprise measures aimed at improving job search efficiency such as job search courses, job clubs and intensified counselling [29]. Other components include monitoring and sanctions, which aim to incentivise job seekers to actively seek work and exit the benefit system [30]. However, the effectiveness of ALMPs remains unclear, despite many experimental evaluations (e.g. randomised controlled trials and micro econometric impact evaluations), and whilst these are a useful starting point, there is a need to examine programmes more closely in order to understand why they work for some and not for others [31].

Evaluations of Activation-focused LMPs (or ALMPs) are mostly conducted using gold standard econometric impact evaluations and randomised controlled trials (RCTs) [31, 55-56]. The effectiveness of these interventions is based on their impact on the re-employment of the job seeker rather than the changes which take place within the individual (e.g. increased employability/improved well-being) that, in turn, enable and support re-employment. For instance, labour economists have provided evidence for the effectiveness of the various types of ALMPs available to job seekers and how they might be used to reduce unemployment [29, 32]. This evidence suggests that some interventions can have a positive effect on re-employment. For example, Card, Kluve and Weber [33] found that job search assistance programmes were most likely to have positive impacts in the short term, with labour market training programmes impacting positively in the longer term. Interventions such as counselling and training were also found to increase transition rates for the unemployed into employment [34]. However, other findings are mixed where such interventions have been found to be unsuccessful or with little or no impact [31]. In one of the most Influential meta-analysis of ALMP evaluations, Martin & Grubb [35] found that many ALMP programmes were ineffective or often counterproductive in assisting the unemployed to regain access to the labour market. For example, subsidised public sector employment programmes fared least well in terms of

impact and improved access to the labour market [33]. Conversely however, Kluge and colleagues found that there may be potential gains from matching participants and programme types, suggesting that programmes may work better for some than for others, depending on their labour market needs [36].

Current evidence [38] suggests that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' ALMP which can improve employability, but rather that a shift towards a more tailor-made or individualised approach in practice may be more effective. Interventions targeted at an individual's needs such as training and counselling have been shown to have positive effects on wellbeing [39-41]. Similarly, evaluations of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy- based employment programmes such as the 'CHOICES for Well-being' project [42] showed improvements in the mental health, self-esteem and job-search self-efficacy of participants, as well as a reduction in the occurrence of negative automatic thoughts and employment progression for some participants. Improvements also persisted at three month follow-up. In a recent systematic review of interventions aimed at reducing the impact of unemployment on mental health, Moore et al. (2016) [43] reported that short one to two- week job club-type interventions can reduce the risk of depression for up to two years, with the largest impacts seen in those who re-accessed the labour market. However they found mixed evidence for CBT interventions, with only short-term effects on depression symptoms and re-employment in a trial with a longer (7 week) CBT intervention [44], and no effects in a shorter (2 day) intervention [45]. The question of whether such interventions could be implemented to support the unemployed in overcoming the negative psychological impacts of unemployment remains unanswered. Moore et al. 2016 [43] conclude that more high-quality randomised controlled trials (RCT), which follow established guidelines (e.g. CONSORT, SPIRIT) are needed to provide evidence of the effects on mental health, of interventions which could potentially be implemented to support the unemployed.

Psychologists and other social scientists have made important contributions towards understanding the impact of unemployment on an individual in terms of well-being [46], self-

esteem [47], and the loss of the latent and manifest benefits of work [48]. However, very little is known about the effectiveness of activation as a policy approach, and the impact of ALMPs, in potentially undoing the negative psychological impacts of unemployment, and building psychological capital and employability within the individual. Theories of employability such as the model proposed by Fugate et al. [49] define employability as a person-centred psychosocial construct and something separate from the environment thereby providing the individual with the opportunity to identify their strengths and weaknesses in terms of personal factors [50]. This is particularly important given the rapidly changing labour market, with its lack of security and increasing demand for flexibility within the workforce.

In the case of the long-term unemployed, many have low or obsolete skills, which leaves them vulnerable to the risk of social exclusion and lifetime unemployment [38]. In addition, the negative impact of unemployment on psychological well-being has been found to worsen during the first year of unemployment [6]; thus, for job seekers who have been out of the labour market for longer periods of time, the problems they encounter may overshadow their skills and abilities and can pose a significant barrier in terms of their ability to reconnect with the labour market [51]. Arguably therefore, interventions designed for the long-term unemployed should aim to enable a change in the job seeker's career trajectory and assist them to access sustainable jobs rather than short-term precarious work, where after a few months, they may become unemployed once more. Yet the work-first approach assumes that any job is better than no job, reinforcing the sustainability of low paid precarious work in the labour market [57].

Thus, it is important to investigate empirically whether long-term unemployed clients who receive needs-based individualised services become more employable by means of receiving a range of supports that focus on promoting greater self-awareness, improving well-being, increasing hopefulness for the future, and enhancing self-esteem and self-efficacy. For example, the most recent version of the Irish Pathways to Work 2016-2020 policy introduced a

new strand called *Building Workforce Skills* which aims, through co-operation with the education and training sectors, to continuously develop the labour force and to provide job seekers with the opportunities to develop the skills and competencies required to access and sustain employment.

As the Pathways to Work activation model is a recently established approach, no previous evaluations or comparable studies have been undertaken. However, a number of RCTs and pre-post comparisons have been conducted in other countries (e.g. Sweden [52], France [53], the UK [44], and the USA [54]) in order to assess the effectiveness of interventions on well-being and self-esteem in unemployed participants. These have included a variety of non-traditional employment-focused interventions including CBT, therapeutic training and individualised job search. However, there are few robust evaluations of *non-traditional* interventions targeted at individuals, their well-being and employability [12, 31, 43,]. This provided the impetus for the present study.

The Current Study: objectives

The principal aim of this study (called 'EEPIC) is to assess the impact of a newly developed therapeutic career guidance intervention – when compared to routinely available support - on the psychological well-being (including hopefulness and resilience) and perceived employability of a sample of long-term unemployed job seekers in a disadvantaged urban setting. The goal of the intervention is to support the unemployed in strengthening their well-being, build hopefulness, resilience and career self-efficacy in order to improve employability, and increase access to sustainable labour market opportunities.

This new high support intervention uses a career/vocational guidance approach and aims to increase levels of psychological well-being when compared to current employment support services (Pathways to Work) provided to the long-term unemployed. In terms of ALMPs, the intervention could be categorised within the OCED's classification as a 'Job Search Assistance'

programme. A full description of the intervention versus usual services is provided in Table 1. This new high support intervention is designed to: (1) increase levels of well-being in the long-term unemployed; and (2) help to improve their employability.

Table 1. Aspects of service as usual vs intervention

Aspects of Service	Service as usual	Intervention
Profile form detailing individual needs and barriers to progression		x
Tailored career guidance process		x
Career plan – with short and long term goals (agreed after the guidance process)		x
Stated importance of relationship building between client and practitioner		x
Personal progression Plan (agreed at 1 st meeting)	x	
Implementation of career plan with support of guidance practitioner		x
Review meetings	x	x
Timing of meetings	Indicated by PEX profiling score	Indicated by need as identified by practitioner/client
Number of meetings	3-4 over 6 month period	3-6 over 6 month period

Trial Design

The EEPIC study is a single-centre randomised, controlled, partially-blinded trial, with two parallel groups and a primary outcome of well-being and a secondary outcome of perceived employability, at post-intervention and at six-month follow up. The principal hypothesis is that participants receiving the high support intervention will have significantly better well-being and employability outcomes post intervention and at six-month follow up, when compared with participants receiving services as usual. The trial has been designed in accordance with the SPIRIT (Standard Protocol Items: Recommendations for Interventional Trials) Statement and CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials) criteria [58, 59]. For more information on the trial schedule, see Figure 1.

Activity	Staff member	Time to complete*	Study Period			
			Pre Study	to Baseline	t1	t2 six month post intervention follow up
Enrolment	Data Manager	Ongoing until required numbers achieved				
Eligibility screen	Data Manager	5 minutes	x			
Informed consent	Study Co-ordinator	5 minutes	x			
Introduction to Service	Study Co-ordinator	10 minutes	x			
Allocation	Data Manager	1 minute	x			
Interventions						
EEPIC Intervention	3 Career Guidance Officers	1-6 months				
Control: Service as usual	4 Case Officers	1-6 months				
Assessments						
General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)	Study Co-ordinator	2 minutes		x	x	x
Satisfaction with Life scale	Study Co-ordinator	2 minutes		x	x	x
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Questionnaire	Study Co-ordinator	2 minutes		x	x	x
Career Self Efficacy Questionnaire	Study Co-ordinator	2 minutes		x	x	x
Brief Resilience Scale	Study Co-ordinator	2 minutes		x	x	x
State Hope Scale	Study Co-ordinator	2 minutes		x	x	x
Cantril's Self Anchoring Ladder	Guidance Officer / Case worker	2 minutes		x	x	x
Re-employment or labour market participation	Study Co-ordinator	2 minutes			x	x
Re-employment Quality	Study Co-ordinator	2 minutes			x	x
Access to education / vocational training	Study Co-ordinator	2 minutes			x	x
Progress notes	Guidance Officer / Case worker	5 Minutes		x	x	x
Progress review meetings	Study Co-ordinator / Guidance Officer / Case worker	1 hour meetings scheduled at each timepoint	x	x	x	x

*Time to complete per individual

Figure 1: EEPIC: Schedule of phases

METHODS: Participants, interventions and outcomes

Study setting

The EEPIC study is being implemented in a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) contracted by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) in Ireland to deliver public employment services locally to the unemployed. The NGO is situated within an urban area characterised by socio-economic disadvantage and which has been classified as 'Very Disadvantaged' by the All-Island HP Deprivation Index (2011). This classification is based on demographic profile, social class composition, and labour market situation [60]. The unemployment rate for the area has remained consistently high since the 1980s and is approximately three times the national average, standing at circa 31% (based on CSO data, September 2015 [61]).

Participants and eligibility criteria

Participants in this study are unemployed male and female adults aged 18 – 60 years, who are in receipt of a Job Seekers payment for a minimum of 12 months. In Ireland, unemployed people are paid either a Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) or a Job Seekers Benefit (JSB) weekly through the Department of Social Protection. JSB is paid for 9 months and its recipients are people covered by social insurance (PRSI). When a person reaches the end of the 9 month period, or if they do not have enough PRSI contributions, they may be entitled to a JSA which is a means tested payment. The majority of participants in this study will be in receipt of JSA in order to meet the 12-month unemployment criterion for entry into the trial. Some participants, however, will be in receipt of a Job Seeker Transition payment which is available to lone parents whose youngest child is aged 7-13 years.

Study participants are clients of the DSP's public employment service called *Intreo* which offers clients a single point of contact for all employment and income supports. Participants are referred by the Intreo office to Pathways to Work (Activation) and will have attended a Group

Information Session (GIS) in the Intreo service. Participants are recruited thereafter and prior to starting a job assistance intervention. Exclusion criteria are evidence of a serious mental health problem and/or drug misuse. Participants who do not attend their first post-GIS appointment following at least three attempts to engage them and who have been referred back to Intreo, are also excluded from the study. Participants must provide written, informed consent before taking part in the study.

Eligibility criteria for staff delivering the interventions

Staff delivering the new intervention have been selected on the basis of their experience of working in a high support way on similar interventions such as the *Emerge Mount Street Employment*²⁷ initiative and the *Ballymun Youth Guarantee*²⁸ pilot. Staff must also have relevant training and skills in the use of key guidance approaches and tools (e.g. Interest inventories, vocational counselling skills, motivational interviewing).

Interventions

The EEPIC Intervention

The new EEPIC intervention is a high support therapeutic guidance programme which focuses on the development of a career plan and strengthening the human, social and psychological capital required to implement this plan. The intervention consists of a four-stage process (see Figure 2), which typically lasts 8 to 12 weeks, and which aims to support the job seeker in developing the skills necessary for labour market access while building self-efficacy and esteem and improving psychological well-being:

²⁷ Emerge was an initiative of the Mount Street Trust Employment Programme where a high support guidance intervention, based on a comprehensive profile of needs was piloted with a sample of long-term unemployed in a disadvantaged urban area.

²⁸ Ballymun Youth Guarantee pilot was a joint EU and Government of Ireland (Department of Social Protection) funded pilot implemented during the period 2013 – 2014 in the Ballymun area.

- Stage 1:** The individual's needs (education, training, skills, personal situation, employment history, perceived employability competencies, work values, barriers to employment, well-being etc.) are assessed using a Profile Form adapted from the Ballymun Youth Guarantee (Ballymun Job Centre, 2013) and EMERGE (Ballymun Job Centre, 2010-2012) initiatives. Identification of specific needs and their severity is vital in understanding the barriers faced by the individual and the types of supports and actions required to enable them to move towards the labour market. The outcome of the individual needs assessment determines the extent to which guidance practitioners may need to support the individual to engage with appropriate services to address issues which pose barriers to progression (e.g. addiction, literacy). Interaction with other services and supports are documented by the practitioner in their case notes.
- Stage 2:** A tailored career guidance process is implemented to support the job seeker in identifying latent skills, abilities, aptitudes, preferred behaviour style in the workplace, and values. This process aims to build career clarity, career identity, and improve self-esteem and career efficacy. Vocationally-orientated career guidance tools and approaches (e.g. career interest inventories, general and specific aptitude assessments, person-centred vocational counselling) are used to reveal hidden strengths, aptitudes and preferences, while limitations are also acknowledged and documented. This information is used to inform the development of a detailed career plan.
- Stage 3:** The job seeker and guidance practitioner work together to develop a career plan which includes a career objective or aspiration, a number of shorter term career goals which should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound) and potential barriers to progression. A timescale for this plan is also identified and a method to achieve it is discussed, particularly in relation to

responsibilities and extent of contact required (e.g. weekly/fortnightly meetings with the guidance practitioner).

- **Stage 4:** The career plan is implemented in a supportive and positive way. This involves the job seeker and the practitioner working together to accomplish the planned career goals, to maintain levels of motivation, to build resilience against setbacks and adapt and re-plan as required.

This intervention is implemented on a one-to-one basis with the guidance practitioner and the client working together to identify key strengths, career identity and learning needs. The successful implementation of a career plan relies heavily on the client-practitioner relationship and commitment to the plan. This intervention is, therefore, highly dependent on the skills and approach of the practitioner involved in delivering the service. It also relies on the continuum of support offered so that the client is supported throughout their journey toward, and into, the labour market. This involves building networks with those who can offer support, such as mentors within the education and training sector and within the workplace.

Figure 2 about here

Control group – ‘service as usual’

Control group participants receive the ‘service as usual’ as provided nationally by the DSP’s Intreo service, the Irish state public employment service. This service is also delivered within the NGO and consists of a number of steps:

Step 1: Once the individual has attended a GIS, a first appointment is made, the timing of which is determined by the individual’s score on a statistical profiling model, ‘PEX’, which can be classified as ‘low’, ‘medium’ or ‘high’. The ‘Probability of Exit’ or ‘PEX’ profile, introduced in October 2012, is based on a number of factors including: history of long-term unemployment; age; number of children; level of education; literacy/numeracy issues; urban living; transport availability; levels of labour market engagement; spousal earnings; and geographic location. All

of these can affect a person's probability of remaining unemployed for twelve months or more and therefore becoming classified as 'long-term unemployed' [62]. Clients, who have a low probability of exiting the live register within the coming 12 months, receive more frequent interaction with the employment services than those classified as having a high probability of leaving the live register and accessing the labour market.

- 'High PEX' clients are invited to attend a meeting with a case officer six months after attendance at the GIS
- 'Medium PEX' clients attend within two weeks
- 'Low PEX' clients attend immediately

At this first appointment, the client and practitioner agree a number of steps or goals which the client commits to undertake as part of a Personal Progression Plan (PPP). This plan is signed and becomes the client's responsibility to fulfil. Within the current study, case officers are also required to use the *Cantril's Ladder* scale at the first appointment to assess the client's perceived progress towards the labour market.

Step 2: Case officers decide on and conduct systematic follow ups (e.g. phone call, email, text) after the first meeting in order to 'check in' with the client and to see how they are progressing. The level of contact is normally agreed in the Personal Progression Plan and a follow-up category is set in the Client Services System (i.e. the DSP's IT database) which calculates when the client is due for systematic follow-up.

Step 3: The case officers are required to conduct Activation Review Meetings (ARM) by the DSP which can include a phone call or a face-to-face meeting to review progress of the tasks identified and agreed in the PPP. This is essentially a monitoring meeting and the timing of these meetings is dependent on the client's initial PEX score:

- 'High PEX' clients receive an ARM meeting at six-months and every 3 months thereafter

- 'Medium PEX' clients receive an ARM meeting every 3 months
- 'Low PEX' clients receive an ARM meeting every 2 months
- Under 25s ('High, Med and Low' PEX) receive monthly ARM meetings

Within the current study, case officers will also be required to use Cantril's Ladder at the ARM meeting to assess perceived progress towards the labour market.

Outcome measures

Primary outcome measures

Overall psychological well-being will be assessed using two measures, the *General Health Questionnaire* (GHQ-12) and the *Satisfaction with Life scale* (see Table 2). The *General Health Questionnaire* (GHQ-12) is a 12-item self-report questionnaire most widely used to assess levels of psychological distress and to screen for minor psychological disorders [63]. The GHQ has been widely validated and shown to be highly reliable, with a reported Cronbach's α ranging from 0.82 to 0.90 [64].

The *Satisfaction with Life Scale* is a five-item self-report questionnaire developed to measure global cognitive judgemental aspects of life satisfaction [65]. Life satisfaction has been identified as the cognitive judgemental component of subjective well-being where judgements of satisfaction are dependent on a comparison with a person's own standard as opposed to a criterion set within the scale, or in a particular domain [65].

Table 2 Primary and secondary outcomes and data collection

Outcomes	Method of collection	Assessment	Baseline (t0)	Post Intervention (t1)	Six month Follow up (t2)	
Primary Outcome	Increased well-being	General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)	x	x	x	
		Satisfaction with Life scale	x	x	x	
Secondary Outcomes	Self Esteem	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Questionnaire	x	x	x	
	Career Self Efficacy	Career Self Efficacy Questionnaire	x	x	x	
	Resilience	Brief Resilience Scale	x	x	x	
	Hopefulness	State Hope Scale	x	x	x	
	*Perceived progress towards the labour market	*Cantril's Self Anchoring Ladder			x	
	Re-employment or labour market participation			x	x	
	Re-employment Quality		Job satisfaction		x	x
			Job Sustainability		x	x
			Level of earnings		x	x
	Access to education / vocational training			x	x	

* Perceived progress towards the labour market is collected by the guidance practitioner during the intervention/ usual service, at a minimum of two time points i.e. first appointment and last appointment.

Secondary outcome measures

Data will be collected for eight secondary outcomes (see Table 2) which have been shown to benefit the unemployed in terms of mental health and increased employability. **Self Esteem** will be measured by the *Rosenberg Self- Esteem Questionnaire* [66], a 10-item scale designed to measure global self-esteem. **Career Self-efficacy** will be measured by the *Career Self Efficacy Questionnaire* which was adapted by Kossek, Roberts & Demarr [67] from Sherer and Adam's [68] General Self Efficacy Scale to measure a context-specific form of self-efficacy. This is an 11-item self-report questionnaire which measures an individual's belief in his or her ability to manage their own career.

Resilience will be measured by the *Brief Resilience Scale* [69], a six-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess the ability to bounce back or recover from stress. **Hopefulness** will be assessed using the *State Hope Scale*, a six-item self-report scale which examines goal directed thinking in a given moment [70]. **Perceived progress towards the labour market** will be measured by *Cantril's Self Anchoring Ladder* [71] a 10-step ladder where the top of the ladder represents the best possible situation for an individual and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible situation. The Scale has been used in research as a type of well-being assessment, and measures well-being as defined by judgments of life or life evaluation [72]. However, this scale has been adapted for the current study so that the focus is on career goals and the best and worst possible situation for the individual in relation to their career.

Re-employment or labour market participation will be assessed by rates of progression into employment post intervention at T1, and at six-month follow up, T2. This will be measured by a single item which asks individuals to indicate whether they are 'currently unemployed' or 'currently employed'. The **quality of re-employment** will be assessed in terms of:

- **Job satisfaction:** single item answered on a 4 point scale ("All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your new job?") [73].
- **Job Sustainability:** single item answered on a 7-point scale ("How likely is it that you will actively look for another job in the next year?") [74].
- Satisfaction with **level of earnings** will be rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 'very dissatisfied' [1] to 'very satisfied' [5].

Access to education / vocational training will be assessed by rates of progression into education and /or training and its relevance to the individual's career plan post intervention at T1 and at six- month follow-up (T2). This will be measured by a single item which asks individuals to indicate whether they have completed an education or training course relevant to their career plan, are currently registered on an education or training course relevant to

their career plan, are waiting to start an education or training course relevant to their career plan or are not participating in education or training.

Participant Timeline

The scheduling of study phases is outlined in Figure 1 with the overall study anticipated to run for a period of 24 months. This timeframe ensures that participants have sufficient time to receive an individualised service and to participate in a six-month post intervention follow-up in order to ascertain to what extent any changes from either intervention are maintained, improved or have deteriorated over time. Enrolment into the study is on a phased basis and is dependent on the referral of job seekers to activation and the GIS. Additionally, both the intervention and control group participation durations may vary per job seeker, due to the individualised nature of the services, but will not exceed six months.

Sample size

A power analysis was conducted using the primary outcome measure of overall psychological well-being (GHQ-12) in order to identify the minimum sample size required to detect an increase in well-being post intervention. As already indicated, the Pathways to Work activation model is a recently implemented approach and so no previous evaluations or comparable studies have been undertaken, although similar studies had been conducted in Sweden [37], Germany [38], Australia [39] the UK [27,40], Finland [61] and the US [41, 60]. Analysis of these studies indicate varying sample sizes (n=16 to 1,200); thus to ensure the minimum sample size is achieved and the study is powerful enough to detect significant differences between the groups, a power analysis was performed to establish a realistic estimate based on the primary outcome measure. This analysis was conducted for an independent samples t test, as this is expected to be the least powerful test in the overall main analysis. The analysis was two tailed, as we do not know in advance which group will perform better in GHQ-12 terms. Calculations show that for the current study, 128 unemployed participants (64 in each group) will be

sufficient to detect a change of .50 (medium) at 80% power, and at 5% significance. An allowance of (approximately) 10% will be made for possible attrition, so the actual sample size target will be 70 per group.

Recruitment

Participants in this study will be randomly selected from a pool of jobseekers, referred by the Intreo office to the NGO for activation (i.e. service as usual) on a weekly basis. Referred Job seekers consist of a mix of short- and long-term unemployed. The job seeker is invited to attend the first step in the activation process which comprises a GIS where information on all supports and interventions offered by the public employment service and delivered through the DSP's Intreo service, are outlined. The GIS normally occurs within two weeks of a social welfare claim being made; however, due to the large number of job seekers in Ireland who are currently long-term unemployed (100,600 individuals accounting for 56.1% of total unemployment (CSO, Q1 2016)), an accumulation of job seekers in the Intreo system has resulted in job seekers who have not yet attended a GIS. In response to this, the Intreo office identifies a specified number of long-term unemployed job seekers each week for referral to the NGO employment services. Currently, 60 job seekers per week, with varying durations of unemployment, are drawn randomly from the live register for attendance at a GIS which is held in the NGO and delivered by a NGO staff member. The GIS is a standard presentation, designed by the DSP, and delivered nationwide to all job seekers as part of their initial engagement with the employment services.

The list of job seekers referred to the GIS is sent to the NGO data manager a week prior to the GIS. Clients are allocated to one of 7 guidance practitioners and appointments made on the NGO appointments schedule. Clients attend the GIS and are informed of their appointment (i.e. given an appointment card with time and name of guidance practitioner for the following week). Client's first appointments are with the researcher who at this point invites eligible

clients to participate in the study and written informed consent is sought. This process will continue until adequate participant enrolment has been achieved for each group.

Methods: Assignment of interventions (for controlled trials)

Allocation:

Sequence generation and implementation

The participant's initial appointment is with the researcher who explains the study and consent forms and administers the participant questionnaire. The researcher informs the data manager of those clients who agree to participate and who give informed consent. The data manager randomly assigns eligible participants to either the intervention or control group on a 1:1 basis using the SNOSE (sequentially numbered opaque sealed envelopes) method as described by Doig & Simpson [77]. Randomisation is conducted by the data manager only, ensuring that the randomisation is achieved without any influence from the researcher or the practitioners involved in the delivery of the service.

Seven practitioners deliver services to the intervention and control groups. Practitioners who deliver the intervention are not involved in delivering services to the control group (and vice-versa) in order to ensure that practitioners deliver the service with fidelity and that there is no contamination between the intervention and control groups.

Allocation concealment mechanism and Implementation

The data manager has been provided with 200 sealed envelopes containing a treatment allocation paper with either 'Intervention A' or 'Intervention B' (control group) printed on one side. Using the SNOSE (sequentially numbered opaque sealed envelopes) method as described by Doig & Simpson [77], the data manager allocates participants to either the Intervention or Control groups. Participants are also tagged on the NGO's internal data management system as Intervention or Control group so that reports can be accessed at required junctures in the

study. The data manager informs the researcher of any issues arising, such as a delay in referrals from Intreo, a break in the referral cycle, or issues relating to randomisation.

Blinding:

After assignment to the respective interventions, the participants are blinded to allocation for the duration of the study. The researcher who performs the assessments at baseline is also blinded until the completion of baseline assessments. Due to the nature of the intervention, the staff delivering the interventions cannot be blinded and are instructed not to disclose information to either the researchers or the participants which may indicate which intervention the participant is receiving. Blinding of the researcher cannot be maintained post baseline as the researcher is also responsible for data collection in this study. For the participant, it remains unclear which intervention is being received as both interventions occur within the same site. For the researcher, knowledge of the staff responsible for each intervention and their caseloads indicates which intervention the client is receiving and therefore the blind is broken once the intervention starts.

Methods: Data collection, management, and analysis

Data Collection Methods

Participants are invited, as part of the trial, to complete a range of assessments at several time points (i.e. at baseline, at post intervention / 'service as usual', and six-month post intervention follow up) in order to measure the impact of the intervention or 'service as usual' on key dimensions including self-esteem, hopefulness, resilience, and career self-efficacy (Figure 1).

Each questionnaire (see Appendix 1) is coded with client ID, date of completion, researcher's name, and questionnaire version (i.e. baseline, T1, T2). Client IDs are generated by the NGO and link to the client's personal information contained on the NGO's client database. This will be beneficial to the researcher at the six-month post intervention phase in order to update data on the intervention or 'service as usual' and outcomes.

At baseline (T0), the study is explained to the potential participant and consent is sought (see Appendix 2). The baseline questionnaire is administered, coded, and signed by the researcher. At post intervention (T1), the researcher meets with each participant, administers the questionnaire along with a personal update questionnaire which aims to capture information on re-employment, quality of employment, training progression, and overall progress (see Appendix 3). This process is repeated at six-month follow up (T2).

A tracking file containing participant details - including client ID, completion of questionnaires, appointment dates, guidance practitioner name, and outcome updates - will be maintained by the researcher for the duration of the study. Due to the nature of this client group, non-attendance is common and so a tracking system enables the researcher to identify 'no-shows', 'drop outs' and patterns of attendance. Outcome data for participants who do not continue or who deviate from the intervention or 'service as usual' will be documented in this file to study completion.

Practitioners to whom intervention clients are referred, are required to complete an in-depth profile for each participant relating to education, previous employment, skills, values, perceived employability, and barriers to progression. These data will be held by the practitioner until the intervention is complete. All practitioners are required to administer the '*Perceived progress towards the labour market*' measure, Cantril's Ladder, at baseline and post intervention, although some practitioners may choose to administer this on a more regular basis.

A small token in the form of a voucher is offered to each participant to help increase participation and to thank participants for their time in completing questionnaires at post intervention and six-month follow up.

Data Management

Data management will be overseen by the researcher who will implement checks on a monthly basis to ensure the quality of the data collected, and the accuracy of electronic data entry and coding. The researcher will gather all questionnaires completed at each time point and ensure

the correct coding has been used and the appropriate date is on the front cover. This information will be entered into a database (IBM SPSS statistics version 22) on the researcher's encrypted laptop and backed up every week on a separate removable storage device (also encrypted) which is stored safely in the researcher's office. Data collected by practitioners will be gathered by the researcher post intervention and entered into the SPSS database for analysis. The tracking file will be updated by the researcher to ensure the visibility of each participant's engagement with the service and their participation in the trial. All hard copies of questionnaires will be held securely in a locked cabinet for 10 years after completion of the study, after which they will be destroyed. Participant identifiers will be stored separate from the data. The coding key and electronic raw data will be held securely for 10 years and will then be destroyed by the researcher.

Statistical methods/analysis

The null hypothesis states that there will be no difference between the two groups in terms of primary outcomes (wellbeing) and secondary outcomes (self-esteem, career self-efficacy, resilience, hopefulness, perceived progress toward the labour market) at post intervention and at six-month follow-up. Descriptive statistics will be used to describe the pre-treatment characteristics of participants. Baseline analysis will be conducted to establish the internal consistency of the outcome measure scales, where a Cronbach's alpha of above 0.7 will be required. Previous studies have reported Cronbach's alphas of at least 0.7 across all measures.

The study will use a randomisation technique (the SNOSE [sequentially numbered opaque sealed envelopes] method as described by Doig and Simpson [77]) which ensures that participants from both groups come from the same population. Pre-treatment analysis will be conducted on primary and secondary outcome measures to show, for example, levels of wellbeing (primary outcome) as indicated by GHQ-12 scores in comparison with appropriate established norms (*e.g. national wellbeing data, HRB (2008)*) so as to indicate how job-seekers present for activation services.

Mixed Model Repeated Measures (MMRM) will be used to investigate the effects of the intervention on primary and secondary outcome measures (i.e. wellbeing and employability). Continuous outcome data, including the primary outcome measure of wellbeing and five of the eight secondary outcomes which have been shown to contribute to mental health and increased employability (i.e. resilience, career-efficacy, hopefulness, self-esteem, perceived progress towards the labour market) will be analysed using MMRM. Where parametric test assumptions fail significantly, then non-parametric tests will be used.

MMRM will be used to investigate effects at two between (intervention and control) and three within (pre-intervention, post-intervention and six-month follow-up) levels. Initial MMRM analysis will control for age as a fixed co-variate, along with gender, and duration of unemployment or highest educational level, as applicable. Modelling for the primary outcome will be conducted using an unstructured repeated measures co-variance matrix and all other variables as fixed effects.

MMRM was chosen as the main statistical method for analysis as it can reduce several analytic problems that may arise from the EEPIC study design. First, it has the advantage of modelling change within individuals as well as across groups, thus enabling the isolation of factors contributing to the outcome, such as, age, gender, duration of unemployment or highest educational level (common to both intervention and control condition). Second, it allows for different numbers of measurements per participant, thereby tolerating a level of missing data, which are a particular problem with RCTs as follow-up data are often collected many months after treatment has ended and participants may be difficult to contact [79]. This enables us to use all of the data collected as opposed to deleting cases or imputing missing values. Third, it has the advantage of allowing for different time points for each individual, so data collected for one participant at month 4 can be tested alongside data collected for the next participant at month 6 [80]. Singer and Willet [81] identify this as the best approach for longitudinal data which has three or more time points.

The analysis will follow an intention-to-treat (ITT) principle where all randomised participants, including those who stop receiving the intervention, will be analysed 'as randomised'. MMRM analysis is a maximum likelihood statistical modelling technique whereby mean estimates and the repeated measures covariance structure for the observed data are based on a statistical model and possible values are generated for the missing data [85]. Attrition will also be analysed to assess the differences between those who 'dropped out' and those who stayed, and indeed if there are predictors at baseline to indicate same. MMRM will be used in the main, although t-tests will be employed to detail any significant differences found from the MMRM.

In addition, descriptive statistical summaries (means, standard deviations, frequencies) will be presented for primary and secondary outcome measures at each time point (baseline, post intervention and six- months post intervention). Of most interest will be the identification of changes in primary and secondary outcome measures at group level between T0 (baseline) and T1, and T0 and T2, and between T1 and T2. Additional descriptive analysis (e.g. frequencies) of the re-employment (secondary) measure will be conducted to assess the differences between the two groups in terms of their re-employment outcomes.

Sub-group MMRM analysis will be conducted to investigate if the intervention effects differ for certain participant groups, based on variables such as gender, age, education level and unemployment duration. T-tests and Chi-squared tests will be employed to identify mean differences and associations with regard to primary and secondary outcome measures.

A full statistical analysis plan (SAP)—in the form of a Trials (free) update—will be provided once all data are gathered and before opening the database. Analysis will be conducted using SPSS software (IBM SPSS Statistics version 22).

Methods: Monitoring

Data Monitoring

A data monitoring committee is not feasible for this trial due to its short duration and size. The researcher will have sole access to the data and will monitor it on a monthly basis to ensure that the quality of data is maintained throughout the trial. Furthermore, within the context of this trial, an interim analysis is not practicable as sufficient data may not be available at the interim point for analysis. However, the researcher through monitoring of the data will inform the NGO, should any issues arise with the data collection, the recruitment of participants or the implementation of the intervention. This is of particular importance due to the ongoing changes in labour market policy implementation in Ireland and its very real bearing on the trial progress. Nevertheless the flexibility of the NGO will ensure that should any changes to the trial be required, they will within reason be facilitated.

Harms

There are some (minimal) risks envisaged in this study. From the researcher's experience of working with job seekers, there can be a tendency for the client to disclose personal information that may not be sought within the interview/focus group and to express their own experiences, difficulties and barriers and expect that the researcher may be able to offer further assistance. In practice, this involves setting and recognising clear boundaries while still providing an open and supportive environment within which the participant can engage in the interview/questionnaire completion.

Completion of the GHQ-12 (General Health Questionnaire) may cause some minor distress, but the researcher is an experienced administrator of this measure and other similar questionnaires, as well as having well developed test administration skills. Close adherence to the British Psychological Society Code of Good Practice for Psychological Testing and the Psychological Society of Ireland Code of Ethics, will also ensure that any risk will be managed according to best practice. If the client has a negative reaction to the administration of the questionnaires, a referral to an experienced Guidance officer (i.e. the client's case worker) in

the DSP/NGO and the primary health care team will be made. In addition, information on a range of support services will be given to the client.

Other potential risks will be addressed by ensuring that there is appropriate local information pertaining to support services available. Such services include counselling services, addiction services, Local Employment Centre services and other community based services. The researcher's own training as a psychologist and experience of working with numerous disadvantaged clients will also ensure that each participant is treated with respect and that any signs of distress will be appropriately identified and the participant referred immediately to a suitable service(s).

Questionnaires will be administered in the NGO, which has, through its own Health and Safety policy, procedures in place regarding the safety of clients and staff. These procedures will be followed alongside the National University of Ireland Maynooth, Department of Psychology guidelines 'Guidance for safe working practice in psychological research'.

Further to the protection afforded by the above policies and guidelines, participants will be provided with a detailed and easily comprehensible information sheet and an informed consent sheet (see Appendices 2 and 4) and will be reminded of their option to withdraw from the study at any time (up until the point of data analysis) should they so desire.

Auditing

Auditing will not be necessary in this study due to its short duration.

Ethics and Dissemination:

Research ethics approval

The study was approved by National University of Ireland Maynooth, Social Research Ethics Committee on 05/06/2014 (Ref: SRESC-2014-028) and is registered by the ISRCTN registry (ISRCTN16801028).

Protocol Amendments

Should any amendments to the protocol be required, particularly those which may impact the trial and its implementation or the participants and their outcomes, a formal amendment to the protocol will be required. This will necessitate approval from the funder, the NGO and the National University of Ireland Maynooth, Social Research Ethics Committee. Administrative amendments which do not impact on the trial and participants will not require formal approval, but will be documented by the researcher in the tracking file.

Consent or assent

Consent is sought from participants involved in the study at the first meeting with the researcher. Each participant is provided with an information sheet (see Appendix 4) outlining the background to the study, the rationale and the objectives. Participants also receive a consent form (see Appendix 2) which they are asked to sign and a copy is given to them to retain for their own records. The researcher also talks through both documents to ensure they are properly understood by the participants. Verbal consent will be sought if any issues regarding poor literacy arise.

All participants in this study who may be considered potentially vulnerable are in receipt of a Job Seekers payment, thereby deeming them fit for employment. It is likely, therefore, that participants are capable of consenting to participation. However, assent is also sought on occasions where the researcher has concerns regarding the participant's understanding of the process. The researcher also talks through both the information sheet and the consent forms to ensure they are properly understood by the participant.

As this study requires participation on more than one occasion, participants will be contacted prior to the follow up assessment (post intervention and six month follow up) and continued consent will be sought before the follow up study commences. Again, a copy of the consent form will be given to participants as soon as possible after consent has been obtained. If the participant does not wish to continue, they may withdraw at any time. Completion of the withdrawal slip which forms part of the information sheet will be requested for the

researcher's records. Data can/will be withdrawn up until the point of completion of data entry.

Participants are informed in the information sheet of the ongoing nature of this study and will be informed throughout of their right to withdraw participation up until the point of data entry without penalty. As this study is closely linked to the services provided by the Department of Social Protection, participants may have concerns that non-participation may have a negative effect on their social welfare payment. The information sheet and the informed consent form clearly indicate that there is no conditionality related to this study and that no penalties apply for non-participation. Furthermore, participants are informed that they may, at any time, contact the researcher should they have concerns regarding their participation. Participants are also informed by email/post when each aspect of the study relating to their participation is complete, and may request a summary of the research findings when it becomes available.

Confidentiality

All identifying information is removed from the data in order to protect the safety and integrity of the research participants. Each participant is allocated a unique identifier at the point of consent and is informed of this in the consent form. A document (encrypted and password protected) containing the coding key is only accessible by the researcher and is located on a removable storage device in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office.

All coded data are stored on the researcher's computer and protected by encryption software (McAfee Endpoint Encryption), and backed up every week on a separate removable storage device (also encrypted) which is stored safely in the researcher's office. The coding key and electronic raw data will be held securely for a minimum of 10 years after completion of the study, after which they will be destroyed.

In addition, the information sheet alludes to the fact that: (a) this study will be published and the key findings presented at conferences and other public fora; (b) that all identifying information will be removed at the point of consent; and (c) that nobody will be identified in any publications.

Participants are also made aware that there may be instances where the researcher cannot maintain confidentiality, for example, where participant's safety or wellbeing, or indeed the safety of others is at risk, and that a referral to the relevant services (e.g. mental health service), may be required.

Declaration of Interests

The authors declare no competing interests. The NGO research site is funded by the Department of Social Protection and is therefore contracted to deliver employment services which are subject to change dependant on current government labour market policy.

Access to data

The researcher, authors, and the NGO will be given access to the cleaned data set at the end of the study. The data set will be password protected and will be housed on a server in the NGO. The anonymised data will be made publically available, as required by registration with the ISRCTN and upon request to the NGO.

Ancillary and post-trial care

Participants will be provided with post-trial care in the form of referral to ancillary services, such as primary health care, including mental health, counselling services, addiction services, local employment services and other appropriate community based services, should they be required. The researcher and practitioners implementing the intervention or usual service will monitor participants' responses to the services, and in the unlikely event that concern for a participant arises, particularly in terms of negative or adverse impacts stemming from their participation in the trial, a referral will be made immediately to a suitable service(s).

Should this study provide evidence of the effectiveness of the EEPIC intervention in improving well-being and employability, participants who do not receive the intervention (but who receive the PTWP service) may receive the intervention at a later point if agreed by the DSP. The researcher will make a strong recommendation to the NGO and to the DSP, that those who participated in the control group be offered this service as soon as possible.

Dissemination policy

Trial results will be disseminated to participants, employment services, relevant government departments and other interested organisations (e.g. charities, social justice organisations, community based services). Findings will also be presented at appropriate academic conferences and seminars and published in peer-reviewed journals and on relevant websites (e.g. the NGO website). As indicated above, the trial has been registered with ISRCTN, and has been promoted at community level, and with wider employment services and the DSP. A summary report of the findings will be prepared for the NGO and recommendations made for policy and practice. Anonymised data will be made publicly available through the Irish Social Sciences Data Archive (ISSDA) and the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (IQDA) as required by registration with the ISRCTN.

Discussion

The current trial is the first of its kind in Ireland and one of the few internationally to examine whether or not interventions which aim to build employability by targeting individual well-being, are more effective than conventional ALMPs and activation approaches. The EEPIC trial is also one of a small number of trials internationally [43] to incorporate a longer-term follow up at six-month post intervention, as a way of assessing the sustainability of any effects for a period after the intervention has concluded. This six-month post intervention phase is crucial as it is during this period that the career plan is implemented and the job seeker independently engages in job search related activities. Research on re-employment shows that self-regulation and effort are important in job seeking, and that individuals differ in their ability in this respect [82]. For some job seekers, discouragement, rejection, and uncertainty may make the job seeking process more difficult [8]. Furthermore, job search activities which are non-self-determined (i.e. carried out because of pressure to do so (as in the case of conditionality) as opposed to the individuals' own volition), have been associated with procrastination which, in turn, has been linked with increased hopelessness [83]. In addition, the relationship between job search and mental health has been shown to be negative in the

short term, although there is significant research confirming the positive relationship between mental health and reemployment [84, 85], and therefore the role of job search behaviour in re-accessing the labour market. Therefore, the possible maintenance of positive well-being and employability during this six-month post intervention phase could be fundamental to re-employment success.

The trial design has a number of strengths. Firstly, the location of the trial enables access to an existent group of long-term unemployed job seekers who are in receipt of a Job Seekers payment and are obligated to participate in the Pathways to Work programme/service as usual. This ensures that all potential participants are eligible, meet the inclusion criteria and expect to receive, at a minimum, the service as usual. Secondly, the data manager performs the randomisation thereby reducing potential selection bias and participants are assigned to the intervention or service as usual after baseline assessments have been completed. Thirdly, the researcher (initially), and the participants are blinded reducing potential bias in implementation of the services and in the performance of the participants.

There are however, also a number of limitations to this study. First and foremost, the duration of interventions and control conditions will vary as individual needs differ. To allow for this, the extent of the intervention or control conditions will be documented in terms of the number of contact hours provided across the number of weeks' of engagement with the service. These types of data could benefit the design of a model which promotes individualised approaches. Secondly, the NGO participating in the trial is implementing government policy, which could change at any time. The study is being conducted in a rapidly changing environment, where neither the NGO nor the researcher has the authority to reverse policy decisions. This leaves the trial vulnerable to external influences beyond our control.

Nevertheless, the trial is unique in terms of its timing and its potential contribution towards effective engagement with the long-term unemployed in Irish labour market activation. If the results of the trial show that the positive psychological intervention is superior to the service as usual in terms of increases in employability related outcomes, it will provide important

evidence to support the further design and implementation of a more therapeutic approach to job seeking support for long-term unemployed job seekers. It may also provide a model of good practice that could be replicated elsewhere whilst also identifying key implementation 'lessons' for similar services in other jurisdictions. For these reasons, a mini-process evaluation will be embedded within the trial, running in parallel with the study. A small number of participants, practitioners and managers of services will be invited to participate in a one-to-one interview, in order to capture their experiences of participating in the EEPIC intervention, both in terms of its content and implementation. This process evaluation will be important in terms of supplementing and amplifying the RCT findings by adding to our understanding as to whether the intervention works, how and why it works, and for whom and under what circumstances [31].

The findings from this study will also help to inform future policy in terms of highlighting what is needed to develop an increasingly sustainable labour force.

Trial Status

The trial started in September 2016. To date, 149 participants have been randomly assigned.

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Appendix 4 a

Participant Questionnaire

EEPIC

(Enhancing Employability through Positive Interventions for improving
Career potential)

Participant Questionnaire

Note:

Thank you for completing the EEPIC questionnaire. Your answers will help us to improve the quality of the services we provide to you and future clients. We are interested in finding out how you are feeling about yourself and your career at this point in time.

Remember

- Please answer the following questions as honestly as you can
- Answer all the questions
- It should take 5 - 7 minutes to complete
- If you are unsure of a question / need assistance in completing the questionnaire please ask the administrator to assist you
- Your answers will give us an indication as to how you are getting on
- You may be asked to answer these questions / similar questions again in a few months time.
- Your answers are confidential. They will be entered into a database and will not be associated with your name (only linked back to you via an ID number)
- All participants in EEPIC are being asked to complete this questionnaire

Thank you very much for your help and co-operation!

Official Use only:

Date of Completion:
ID number:

Administrator:

Please read this carefully:

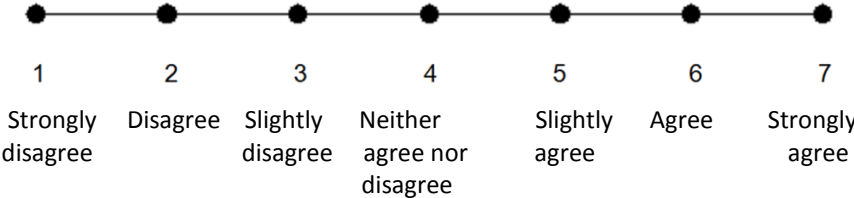
We would like to know how you have been feeling in general, *over the past few weeks*. Please answer ALL the questions simply by circling the answer which you think most applies to you. Remember that we want to know about how you are feeling today and how you've been feeling recently, not about how you have been feeling in the past. It is important that you try to answer ALL the questions. Thank you very much for your co-operation.

HAVE YOU RECENTLY:

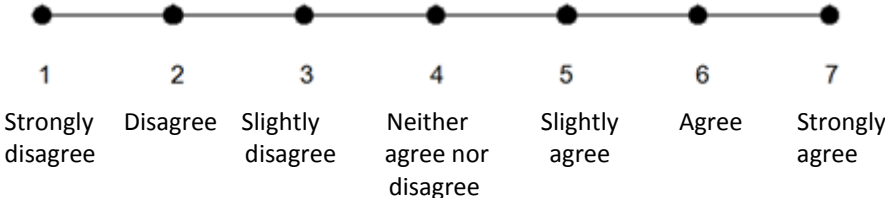
1 -	been able to concentrate on whatever you're doing?	Better than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much less than usual
2 -	lost much sleep over worry?	Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
3 -	felt that you are playing a useful part in things?	More so than usual	Same as usual	Less useful than usual	Much less useful
4 -	felt capable of making decisions about things?	More so than usual	Same as usual	Less so than usual	Much less capable
5 -	felt constantly under strain?	Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
6 -	felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?	Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
7 -	been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities?	More so than usual	Same as usual	Less so than usual	Much less than usual
8 -	been able to face up to your problems?	More so than usual	Same as usual	Less able than usual	Much less able
9 -	been feeling unhappy and depressed?	Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
10 -	been losing confidence in yourself?	Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
11 -	been thinking of yourself as a worthless person?	Not at all	No more than usual	Rather more than usual	Much more than usual
12 -	been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered?	More so than usual	About same as usual	Less so than usual	Much less than usual

Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by circling the appropriate number on the line beside that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.



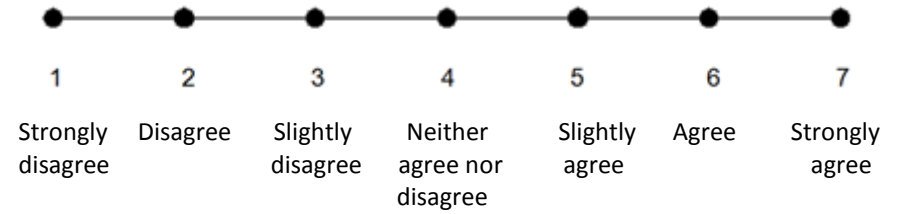
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.



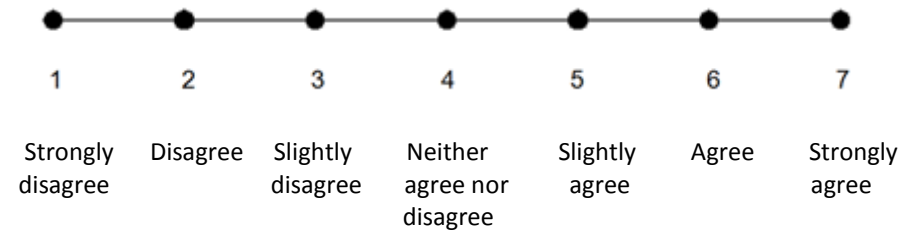
3. I am satisfied with my life.



4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.



5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.



Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself.

If you strongly agree with the statement, circle SA.

If you agree, circle A.

If you disagree with the statement, circle D.

If you strongly disagree, circle SD.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	SA	A	D	SD
2. At times, I think I am no good at all.	SA	A	D	SD
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	SA	A	D	SD
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.	SA	A	D	SD
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	SA	A	D	SD
6. I certainly feel useless at times.	SA	A	D	SD
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	SA	A	D	SD
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.	SA	A	D	SD
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	SA	A	D	SD
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.	SA	A	D	SD

Below are a few more similar items. Please respond to each item by ticking the box that most closely reflects how you feel (i.e. one box per row should be marked)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times					
2. I have a hard time making it through stressful events.					
3. It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.					
4. It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens					
5. I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.					
6. I tend to take a long time to get over set-backs in my life.					

Next, please take a few moments to focus on yourself and what is going on in your life at this moment. Once you have this “here and now” mindset, go ahead and answer each item according to the scale below.

For each statement, please select the answer that best describes *how you think about yourself right now* and place a tick in the box to indicate your answer.

DO be sure to read each item very carefully and answer as honestly as you can.

	1 <i>Definitely False</i>	2 <i>Mostly False</i>	3 <i>Somewhat False</i>	4 <i>Slightly False</i>	5 <i>Slightly True</i>	6 <i>Somewhat True</i>	7 <i>Mostly True</i>	8 <i>Definitely True</i>
If I should find myself in a jam, I could think of many ways to get out of it								
At the present time, I am energetically pursuing my goals								
There are lots of ways around any problem that I am facing now								
Right now I see myself as being pretty successful								
I can think of many ways to reach my current goals								
At this time, I am meeting the goals that I have set for myself								

Below are eleven statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 5 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by circling the appropriate number on the line beside that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

1. When I make plans for my career, I am confident I can make them work

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Disagree strongly	Disagree slightly	Neutral	Agree slightly	Agree strongly

2. If I can't do a job the first time I keep trying until I can

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Disagree strongly	Disagree slightly	Neutral	Agree slightly	Agree strongly

3. When I set important career goals for myself, I rarely achieve them

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Disagree strongly	Disagree slightly	Neutral	Agree slightly	Agree strongly

4. I avoid facing career difficulties

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Disagree strongly	Disagree slightly	Neutral	Agree slightly	Agree strongly

5. When I have something unpleasant to do that will help my career, I stick with it until I am finished

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Disagree strongly	Disagree slightly	Neutral	Agree slightly	Agree strongly

6. When I decide to do something about my career, I go right to work on it

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Disagree strongly	Disagree slightly	Neutral	Agree slightly	Agree strongly

7. When trying to learn something new on my job, I soon give up if I am not initially successful

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Disagree strongly	Disagree slightly	Neutral	Agree slightly	Agree strongly

8. I avoid trying to learn new things that look too difficult for me

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Disagree strongly	Disagree slightly	Neutral	Agree slightly	Agree strongly

9. I feel insecure about my ability to get where I want

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Disagree strongly	Disagree slightly	Neutral	Agree slightly	Agree strongly

10. I rely on myself to accomplish my career goals

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Disagree strongly	Disagree slightly	Neutral	Agree slightly	Agree strongly

11. I do not seem capable of dealing with most problems that come up in my career

<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Disagree strongly	Disagree slightly	Neutral	Agree slightly	Agree strongly

Thank You!

Appendix 4b

Minor Changes to the analysis

1. Unemployment status: Initially the sample was to be grouped as follows: less than 1 year, 1-2yrs, 3yrs +. Due to the numbers of participants who were less than 1 year unemployed ($n = 6$) the following groupings were used: 1-2yrs, 3-5yrs, and 5+ yrs.
2. Age groups: at the planning stage the age categories were identified as 18-24, 25-35, and 36+ age. Again due to the small sample of 18-24yr olds the following age groups were identified as more meaningful: under 35, 35-45, 45+.
3. The protocol states that the MMRM analysis will control for age as a fixed co-variate, along with gender, and duration of unemployment or highest educational level, as applicable. Due to time and resource constraints the current study controlled for group, time and gender. Further MMRM analysis will be conducted in accordance with the protocol in the coming weeks.

Appendix 5

EEPIC PROFILE FORM

CURRENT Practitioner:

ID NUMBER:	DATE OF PROFILE:			
COHORT	ENGAGING WITH SERVICES		JOB READY	
	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
PHONE / EMAIL ADDRESS				
DOB/AGE/ GENDER:		MALE <input type="checkbox"/>	FEMALE <input type="checkbox"/>	
NATIONALITY	IRISH <input type="checkbox"/>	EU/EAA <input type="checkbox"/>	NON EU/EAA <input type="checkbox"/>	
MEMBER OF TRAVELLING COMMUNITY	YES <input type="checkbox"/>		NO <input type="checkbox"/>	
HOUSEHOLD STATUS	LIVES ALONE <input type="checkbox"/>	WITH FAMILY <input type="checkbox"/>	WITH PARTNER <input type="checkbox"/>	
CHILDCARE	NO. OF CHILDREN <input type="checkbox"/>	LIVING WITH CHILDREN		OTHER
		YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	NONE <input type="checkbox"/>	JC <input type="checkbox"/>	LCA <input type="checkbox"/>	LC <input type="checkbox"/>
POST-SECOND LEVEL TRAINING/EXCLUDING ICT	PLC <input type="checkbox"/>	TECHNICAL COLLEGE <input type="checkbox"/>	UNIVERSITY <input type="checkbox"/>	
ICT SKILLS	NONE <input type="checkbox"/>	BASIC <input type="checkbox"/>	INTERMEDIATE <input type="checkbox"/>	ADVANCED <input type="checkbox"/>
DRIVING LICENCE & CPC	LEARNER'S PERMIT - B,C,D,E+		CPC	
	FULL LICENCE - B,C,D,E+			
DIFFICULTY WITH LITERACY	YES <input type="checkbox"/>		NO <input type="checkbox"/>	
HAS CLIENT EVER WORKED	YES <input type="checkbox"/>		NO <input type="checkbox"/>	
DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT	< 1 YEAR <input type="checkbox"/>	1 -3 YEAR <input type="checkbox"/>	> 3 YEARS <input type="checkbox"/>	
DISABILITY	YES <input type="checkbox"/>		NO <input type="checkbox"/>	
SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES	1 <input type="checkbox"/> NON USE	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> HIGH USE
CRIMINAL BACKGROUND	YES <input type="checkbox"/>		NO <input type="checkbox"/>	
USE OF SERVICES	CURRENT			
	YES		NO	

YOUTH TRAINING SERVICES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMUNITY RESOURCE SERVICES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BALLYMUN JOB CENTRE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LITERACY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DRUGS, ALCOHOL SERVICES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PACE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
OTHER SERVICES, IF SO, NAME _____		

EEPIC PROFILE FORM

WORK HISTORY	1- 3MTHS <input type="checkbox"/>	3MTHS – 1 YEAR <input type="checkbox"/>	1 YEAR PLUS <input type="checkbox"/>
VOLUNTARY WORK	CURRENT <input type="checkbox"/>	PREVIOUS <input type="checkbox"/>	NONE <input type="checkbox"/>
COMPETENCIES (circle number)	EXAMPLES		
SELF- AWARENESS	REALISTIC AIMS/GOALS/ EXPECTATIONS -UNDERSTANDING OF SKILLS & THEIR TRANSFERABILITY (PERSONALITY, INTERESTS, APTITUDE) EMPATHY		
LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH			
SELF- BELIEF	-'I CAN DO IT', -'I WILL...' – AIMING HIGH -NOT SELLING THEMSELVES SHORT -'I BELIEVE I CAN WITH SOME HELP'		
LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH			
RESILIENCE	-SPEAKS ABOUT BAD EXPERIENCE BUT THEY LEARNT FROM IT -ASKING FOR FEEDBACK FROM UNSUCCESSFUL JOB APPLICATION: ACCEPTING CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM -SENT OUT 20 CVS BUT WANT MORE -HOLDING ONTO THEIR GOALS AND BELIEVING IN THEM		
LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH			
RECOGNITION OF EMPLOYERS' NEEDS	KNOWLEDGE OF COMPANY/SECTOR (PERSONAL LABOUR MARKET) -SPECIFIC NEEDS- MATCHING -FLEXIBLE/OPEN TO CHANGE -WORK ETHIC -JOB SKILLS- TRANSFERABLE/ GENERIC		
LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH			
EMPLOYMENT MOTIVATION	-PASSION/WANT TO ACTION/ENERGY -OWNERSHIP OF OWN CAREER -ACHIEVE A GOAL OR IMPROVE - -WILLINGNESS TO OVERCOME BARRIERS - ACTION PLAN -'I WANT TO...		
LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH			
HOPE	-POSITIVE EXPECTATION FOR THE FUTURE -WILLING TO CONTINUOUSLY ENGAGE		
LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH			
ADAPTABILITY	WILLING TO CHANGE- LIFELONG LEARNING CAREER -MOBILITY UP SKILLING: HAVE DONE SO		
LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH			
FUTURE WORK (APPEALING FACTORS)			
RATINGS 1-5 –in order of importance			

WORK/LIFE BALANCE	LOCATION	WORK ENVIRONMENT	SALARY	CAREER CHOICE
WORK ETHIC VALUES RATINGS 1-5 –in order of importance				
ATTENDANCE	PUNCTUALITY	FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS	PRESENTATION (DRESS)	ATTITUDE

EEPIC PROFILE FORM

GUIDELINES TO DETERMINE BARRIERS PREVENTING RETURN TO WORK

BARRIER TYPE LIST	EXAMPLES
CARE OF OTHERS	CARER FOR FAMILY MEMBER
CHILDCARE	TAKING CARE OF CHILDREN, EFFECT HOURS OF TRAINING OR WORK
ELIGIBILITY- SW CRITERIA	JOB BRIDGE, MOMENTUM
ELIGIBILITY –LACK OF QUALIFICATIONS	FOR COURSES OR JOBS
EXPERIENCE- LACK OF WORK/SKILLS	NOT REQUIRED WORK EXPERIENCE
FAMILY ISSUES	LACK OF SUPPORT
FINANCE	UNABLE TO AFFORD COLLEGE FEES, OR BUS FARES
HEALTH RELATED RESTRICTIONS	ADDICTION ISSUES OR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES
LANGUAGE SKILLS	POOR LANGUAGE SKILLS FOR WORK OR TRAINING
LITERACY	POOR OR LOW LEVELS OF READING, WRITING, PREVENTING FROM PARTICIPATING IN COURSES/JOBS
PERSONAL DISPOSITION	ATTITUDE, MOTIVATION, SELF-ESTEEM, VALUES
YOUR MOST SERIOUS BARRIER EXPERIENCED	

Appendix 6

Study Three Interview schedule for Intervention participants

Six month post intervention questions for participants

1. Can you tell me about your experience of the guidance services you have received over the past number of months?
2. What did you find most beneficial?
3. What did you find least beneficial?
4. What information did you feel you needed to get (e.g. info on welfare, entitlements etc. or just guidance, information on jobs) what did you need?
5. Is this service similar to any services you have received previously?
6. Can you tell me how you feel about your employability? How different is it now compared to how you felt before you accessed the guidance service? In what way is it different?
7. What if anything has changed for you?
8. What do you do differently now that you didn't do before? (tap into the dependency aspect – have they gained confidence to make own decisions/ make that phone call etc.)
9. What did you think of the guidance practitioner? Can you describe your relationship with him/her? In what way did your relationship with the guidance practitioner impact on you? In what way was this relationship important (or not) in your participation in the service?
10. What changes have you noticed in yourself since you participated in the service?
11. Were there any negative outcomes from participating in the service?
12. In what way could the service be improved?
13. In what way has the service met your needs? What is your current status?
14. How do you feel about your future?
15. Anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 7

Study Three Focus Groups Topic Guide

1. Process - you have been delivering the intervention / SAU model to some of your clients for the past six months - Generally how do you think that is working for you?
2. Describe a typical process that you would do as part of this intervention - what would a typical process look like?
3. You have all delivered both the normal service, the Intreo model and the intervention model- what do you think would be the key differences between those two models?
4. So what do you think the main impact of the intervention /SAU way of working is on the client?
5. How does the system impact on the way you are working? Is it strong enough to change the way you are working?
6. What are the main barriers that you see clients presenting with in general?
7. Do you think the intervention / SAU increases or improves the clients chance of becoming more employable or increasing their employability?
8. But do you find that the majority of clients coming into this service, that their employability or their level of employability as you perceive it as practitioners, do you think that it is still quite low?
9. In terms of wellbeing as an impact, do you think that the intervention/SAU affects wellbeing?
10. What Practitioner skills do you feel are really required to be able deliver the intervention /SAU ?

Appendix 8

Information services available for job seekers

Participants were given the information below and also directed to *the Family Support Services Directory for Families Living in the Ballymun and Surrounding Community* with information on the following services locally: Accord, the Aisling project, Áit Linn, Ballymun Anseo School completion programme, Ballymun Child & Family Resource centre, Ballymun Community Law centre, Ballymun Family support, Ballymun Local Drugs & Alcohol Task force, Ballymun Regional Youth Resource, Ballymun Youth Action Project, Ballymun Educational Support Team – school completion programme, Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service, Crosscare, Depaul, Dublin City Council (DCC) Social Support Initiative, DCC Housing & Welfare, An Garda Síochána/ JLO, HSE primary Care – Psychology, Pieta House, Youth projects, TUSLA family support, YoungBallymun

<http://bmunjob.ie>

Ballymun Job Centre

The BJC provides a comprehensive service to create pathways to training, education or employment for its registered clients. This is achieved within a progression framework, which is initiated by: Client referrals/self-referral, registration, guidance & job seeking support. Processes (specialist services, training & education and job placement.)

<http://www.ballymunlocaldrugstaskforce.ie>

Ballymun Drug Task Force

Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force was set up in 1997 to respond to drugs issues in the Ballymun community. There are 14 Local Drugs Task Forces in the country which oversee the local implementation of the Government's National Drugs Strategy. There are also Regional Drugs Task Forces which cover wider areas. The Task Forces are government funded to work with community, voluntary and statutory services and put in place responses to drugs and alcohol issues. We do this by encouraging co-ordination and co-operation between services and by listening to the needs of the local community.

<http://www.drugs.ie/directory/view/233>

Star Project

Through working holistically, STAR aims to encourage individuals in reclaiming their full potential by offering support, training and education in order to cultivate positive change in recovery from drug addiction.

STAR works with people who have a desire to stabilise their drug use and or become drug free by putting the participant at the centre of their own recovery process.

<http://www.byap.ie>

Ballymun Youth Action Project

The Ballymun Youth Action Project (BYAP) is a community response to drug and alcohol misuse. As a response that has come from within the community of Ballymun, we strive to reduce the negative impact of drug and alcohol use on the lives of individuals and families, and on this community.

<http://sfpcouncilireland.ie/strengthening-families>

Strengthening Families Programme

The Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) is an evidence-based 14-week family skills training programme that involves the parents and teens/children in three classes run on the same night once a week. Families enjoy a meal on arrival, then parents and teens /children engage in separate skills based sessions for 1 hour. This is followed by a family skills session in the second hour, where skills are practiced with parents and teens/children. Incentives such as rewards for attendance, childminding and transport are also offered to enable families to complete the programme and remove barriers to attendance (UNODC, 2009). SFP can be applied across all prevention levels of support for families, and particularly targeted towards Level 2 and Level 3.

<http://www.paceorganisation.ie>

PACE

Provides training, education, personal and social development for offenders and ex-offenders. Programme also offers nationally recognised certification in education and training. Service has a focus on rehabilitation and reintegration with the objective of helping people to return to employment. Runs a Horticulture project.

www.bryr.ie

Ballymun Regional Youth Resource (BRYR)

Ballymun Regional Youth Resource (BRYR) is a youth work organisation working for the welfare, well-being and development of 10-24 year-olds in Ballymun. BRYR's mission is to play a part in building a stronger Ballymun community. BRYR does so by putting in place a range of resources for young people to help them have a happy, healthy and successful transition to adulthood. As young people, and eventually as adults, our young people will create a more independent and vibrant Ballymun.

<http://ballarkctc.weebly.com>

Ballark

Ballark Community Training Centre has been providing training and education to young people aged 16 - 21 years in the community for over 30 years. Ballark CTC delivers QQI Major Awards at levels 3 and 4 in a friendly and supportive environment. Our centre has evolved and expanded, reflecting the changing needs of our clients and the labour market. The result is a greater choice and range of modules and learning experiences available to our learners. Ballark

CTC has had considerable success in assisting our learners to secure placements in both employment and further education with over 70% progression rate.

<https://ie.depaulcharity.org>

De-Paul

Depaul is a cross-border charity supporting some of the most marginalised individuals, couples and families experiencing homelessness.

<http://www.mojo.ngo>

Mojo

Mojo is for men who are in distress and affected by employment issues. They must be motivated to make changes to their lives. Many men attending Mojo are unemployed for a variety of reasons including: a lack of availability of jobs in their related fields, poor physical or mental health and providing care to a family member.

Appendix 9

Psychometric properties of outcome measures and scoring criteria

Reliability analysis of outcome measures - EEPIC

Measure	Cronbach's α
GHQ (0-1-2-3)	.88
GHQ (0-0-1-1)	.85
Satisfaction with Life Scale	.82
Rosenberg's Self Esteem	.85
Brief Resilience	.70
Hopefulness: the Goals Scale – Agency	.80
Hopefulness: the Goals Scale – Pathways	.70
Hopefulness: the Goals Scale – Total State Hope Scale	.81

Psychometric Properties of scales used

Scale	Author	Reported Internal Consistency - Cronbach's alpha (α)	Reported test-re-test	Scoring
<i>GHQ-12</i> General Health Questionnaire 12-item	Goldberg, D. (1992).	Cronbach's α ranging from 0.82 to 0.90 (McDowell, 2006).		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scores range from 0-36 with a cut-off threshold for psychological distress of ≥ 11 - Likert method (items scored 0-1-2-3) as psychometric advantages in terms of reducing data skew (Goldberg & Williams, 1988)
<i>Satisfaction with Life scale</i>	Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985	Cronbach's α of 0.88 (Kobau, Snizek, Zack, Lucas, & Burns, 2010)	2-month test-retest coefficients ranging from 0.64 to 0.82 (Diener et al., 1985).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scores range from 5 – 35 - Scores can be interpreted in terms of absolute as well as relative life satisfaction. - A score of 20 represents the neutral point on the scale. - Scores between 31 and 35 indicate extremely satisfied - 26–30 indicates satisfied - 21–25 indicates slightly satisfied - 15–19 indicates slightly dissatisfied - 10–14 dissatisfied - 5–9 extremely dissatisfied

<i>Rosenberg Self-Esteem Questionnaire</i>	Rosenberg, (1965)	Cronbach's alpha range from .77 to .88 (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1993; Rosenberg, 1986)	Test-re-test correlations in the range of .82 to .88, (Rosenberg, 1965)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scores range from 0 - 30 - 0-15 Low Self Esteem - 15-25 Normal Self-Esteem - 25-30 High Self-Esteem
<i>Brief Resilience Scale</i>	Smith et al., (2008)	Cronbach's alpha ranging from .80-.91. (Smith et al., 2008)	Test-retest reliability of .69 for one month and .62 for three months Smith et al., (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scores range from 6-30: Total score is divided by number of questions answered, higher scores indicate higher levels of Resilience
<i>State Hope Scale</i>	Snyder et al., (1996).	<p>Cronbach's alpha:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total State Hope Scale: $\alpha = .88$ (Snyder et al., 1996) - Agency subscale: $\alpha = .86$ (Snyder et al., 1996) - Pathways subscale $\alpha = 0.72$. <p>(Martin-Krumma, Delasc, Lafrenière, Fenouillette & Lopezf, 2014)</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mean of six items; scores range from 6 to 48 with higher scores indicating higher levels of hope <p>Three scales:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total Hope scale - -Hope agency sub-scale - Hope pathways sub-scale
<i>Career Self Efficacy Questionnaire</i>	Adapted by Kossek, Roberts Fisher & Demarr (1998) from Sherer and Adam's (1983) <i>General Self Efficacy Scale</i> to measure a context-specific form of self-efficacy	Cronbach's alpha of .76 (Kossek, Roberts Fisher & Demarr (1998)		Scores range from 11 -55 with higher scores indicating higher levels of career efficacy
<i>Cantril's Self Anchoring Ladder</i>	(Cantril, 1965)	Despite the wide use of Cantril's Ladder, its psychometric properties of the instrument have not been well supported in the literature. Cronbach alpha reported by Bailey, Kazer, Polascik, & Robertson (2014). was 0.87		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - scale ranging from 0-10, with 0 representing the worst possible situation and 10 the best possible situation. - Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction or perceived closeness to the labour market.

Appendix 10

Randomisation – baseline comparisons

Baseline socio-demographic characteristics by randomisation status (n=149) for long-term unemployed sample (Differences compared using Independent Samples t-tests and Chi-Square)

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>EEPIC</i> <i>(n=71)</i>	<i>Control</i> <i>(n=78)</i>	<i>Total</i> <i>(N=149)</i>	<i>Statistical test</i>	<i>p</i>
Age	40.7 (SD=10)	41 (SD=9.7)		$t(147) = .275$	.783
Sex				$\chi^2(1) = .111$	.740
Male	39(55)	46 (59)	85 (57)		
Female	32 (45)	32 (41)	64 (43)		
Education level				$\chi^2(2) = 4.04$	.133
None	24 (34)	19 (24)	43 (29)		
Other	24(34)	39 (50)	63 (42)		
LC	23 (32)	20 (26)	43 (29)		
Unemployment duration				$\chi^2(2) = 2.246$	.325
1-2 years	23 (32)	29 (37)	52 (35)		
3-5 years	16 (23)	23 (29)	39 (26)		
5+ years	32 (45)	26 (34)	58 (39)		

* Differences between intervention and comparison groups using Independent Samples t-tests/Chi Square.

† Significant differences are present at a p level of 0.05.

Appendix 11

Sample Mixed Model Analysis

Model Dimension^a

		Number of Levels	Covariance Structure	Number of Parameters	Subject Variables	Number of Subjects
Fixed	Intercept	1	Unstructured	1	ID	149
Effects	timing	3		2		
	group.f	2		1		
	timing * group.f	6		2		
Repeated Effects	timing	3		6		
Total		15		12		

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

Information Criteria^a

-2 Log Likelihood	2054.518
Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC)	2078.518
Hurvich and Tsai's Criterion (AICC)	2079.548
Bozdogan's Criterion (CAIC)	2135.587
Schwarz's Bayesian Criterion (BIC)	2123.587

The information criteria are displayed in smaller-is-better form.

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

Fixed Effects

Type III Tests of Fixed Effects^a

Source	Numerator df	Denominator df	F	Sig.
Intercept	1	130.679	1289.836	.000
timing	2	85.892	10.274	.000
group.f	1	130.679	.205	.652
timing * group.f	2	85.892	1.022	.364

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

Estimates of Fixed Effects^a

Parameter	Estimate	Std. Error	df	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Intercept	19.727183635	1.109965330	86.839	17.773	.000	17.520949543	21.933417727
[timing=0]	-1.785573036	1.094446416	86.187	-1.631	.106	-3.961193216	.390047143
[timing=1]	.313612211	.989128185	73.614	.317	.752	-1.657440539	2.284664962
[timing=2]	0 ^b	0	.	.	.	.	.
[group.f=1]	1.064330080	1.603432580	87.036	.664	.509	-2.122646958	4.251307118
[group.f=2]	0 ^b	0	.	.	.	.	.
[timing=0] *	-1.794673073	1.577429058	85.507	-1.138	.258	-4.930756466	1.341410319
[group.f=1]							
[timing=0] *	0 ^b	0	.	.	.	.	.
[group.f=2]							
[timing=1] *	.074962816	1.429386446	73.764	.052	.958	-2.773303123	2.923228755
[group.f=1]							
[timing=1] *	0 ^b	0	.	.	.	.	.
[group.f=2]							
[timing=2] *	0 ^b	0	.	.	.	.	.
[group.f=1]							
[timing=2] *	0 ^b	0	.	.	.	.	.
[group.f=2]							

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

b. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

Covariance Parameters

Estimates of Covariance Parameters^a

Parameter	Estimate	Std. Error	Wald Z	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Repeated Measures	UN (1,1)	42.628006311	4.962326431	8.590	.000	33.931780226	53.552949770
	UN (2,1)	21.989935338	4.791854776	4.589	.000	12.598072558	31.381798119
	UN (2,2)	53.171161282	7.329504494	7.254	.000	40.582636260	69.664582012
	UN (3,1)	23.035878405	5.468525452	4.212	.000	12.317765471	33.753991339
	UN (3,2)	35.228182287	6.899898191	5.106	.000	21.704630336	48.751734238
	UN (3,3)	54.205413232	8.980206657	6.036	.000	39.176367513	74.999981115

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

Covariance Matrix for Estimates of Covariance Parameters^a

Parameter	Repeated Measures					
	UN (1,1)	UN (2,1)	UN (2,2)	UN (3,1)	UN (3,2)	UN (3,3)
Repeate UN d (1,1 Measure) s UN (2,1) UN (2,2) UN (3,1) UN (3,2) UN (3,3)	24.62468360 5	12.72650654 3	6.446847504	13.31436369 7	6.720252027	7.025847109
	12.72650654 3	22.96187219 7	20.11390046 3	16.08322108 7	16.92068556 8	13.40678337 1
	6.446847504	20.11390046 3	53.72163612 1	12.84606158 9	35.08593603 0	22.84870342 1
	13.31436369 7	16.08322108 7	12.84606158 9	29.90477061 6	20.51211345 7	28.55549652 2
	6.720252027	16.92068556 8	35.08593603 0	20.51211345 7	47.60859504 4	47.39710147 6
	7.025847109	13.40678337 1	22.84870342 1	28.55549652 2	47.39710147 6	80.64411160 2

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

Residual Covariance (R) Matrix^a

	[timing = 0]	[timing = 1]	[timing = 2]
[timing = 0]	42.628006311	21.989935338	23.035878405
[timing = 1]	21.989935338	53.171161282	35.228182287
[timing = 2]	23.035878405	35.228182287	54.205413232

Unstructured

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

Mixed Model Analysis - Gender

Model Dimension^a

		Number of Levels	Covariance Structure	Number of Parameters	Subject Variables	Number of Subjects
Fixed Effects	Intercept	1	Unstructured	1	ID	149
	timing	3		2		
	group.f	2		1		
	gender	2		1		
	timing *	6		2		
	group.f					
	timing *	6		2		
	gender					
	group.f *	4		1		
	gender					
	timing *	12		2		
	group.f *					
gender						
Repeated Effects	timing	3		6		
Total		39		18		

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

Information Criteria^a

-2 Log Likelihood	2048.576
Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC)	2084.576
Hurvich and Tsai's Criterion (AICC)	2086.879
Bozdogan's Criterion (CAIC)	2170.180
Schwarz's Bayesian Criterion (BIC)	2152.180

The information criteria are displayed in smaller-is-better form.

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

Fixed Effects

Type III Tests of Fixed Effects^a

Source	Numerator df	Denominator df	F	Sig.
Intercept	1	128.912	1292.519	.000
timing	2	86.151	9.554	.000
group.f	1	128.912	.125	.724
gender	1	128.912	2.539	.114
timing * group.f	2	86.151	1.309	.276
timing * gender	2	86.151	.708	.495
group.f * gender	1	128.912	.003	.953
timing * group.f * gender	2	86.151	.867	.424

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

Covariance Parameters

Estimates of Covariance Parameters^a

Parameter	Estimate	Std. Error	Wald Z	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Repeated Measures UN (1,1)	41.640708	4.850451	8.585	.000	33.141126	52.320146
UN (2,1)	22.112994	4.778571	4.628	.000	12.747167	31.478822
UN (2,2)	53.258703	7.359221	7.237	.000	40.623060	69.824614
UN (3,1)	21.803826	5.431399	4.014	.000	11.158479	32.449172
UN (3,2)	34.870461	6.841663	5.097	.000	21.461048	48.279875
UN (3,3)	52.486861	8.781320	5.977	.000	37.812921	72.855269

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

Covariance Matrix for Estimates of Covariance Parameters^a

Parameter	Repeated Measures					
	UN (1,1)	UN (2,1)	UN (2,2)	UN (3,1)	UN (3,2)	UN (3,3)
Repeated Measures UN (1,1)	23.526873	12.509154	6.506679	12.371878	6.378165	6.269093
UN (2,1)	12.509154	22.834744	20.537636	15.730395	16.580775	12.751422
UN (2,2)	6.506679	20.537636	54.158126	12.968444	35.047821	22.619852
UN (3,1)	12.371878	15.730395	12.968444	29.500095	20.507898	27.538924
UN (3,2)	6.378165	16.580775	35.047821	20.507898	46.808355	46.256970
UN (3,3)	6.269093	12.751422	22.619852	27.538924	46.256970	77.111584

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

Residual Covariance (R) Matrix^a

	[timing = 0]	[timing = 1]	[timing = 2]
[timing = 0]	41.640708	22.112994	21.803826
[timing = 1]	22.112994	53.258703	34.870461
[timing = 2]	21.803826	34.870461	52.486861

Unstructured

a. Dependent Variable: SWLS.

Appendix 12

Participant Interviewee Case Notes

Participant A (PA)

PA was a 38 year old female, married with three young children (aged 7, 4 and 2 years), and whose highest level of education was Junior Cert. As her husband was employed full time but in a low paid position, PA was in receipt of a job seekers allowance. She had worked previously in an administration role but had been unemployed since 2008. She spoke with confidence yet seemed defensive in the interview, closing up after mentioning her husband's name. She started to participate more in the interview towards the end but was quite limited in her answers. She had good administrative skills having completed two training courses in payroll and book-keeping, and had applied for a course in Human Resources. She felt that the combination of the three courses along with her existing IT and administration skills could help her access a job in HR administration. She also expressed an interest in working as a legal secretary but that was a longer term plan. She was willing to do further training and eager to get a job particularly in terms of her own independence. The hours of work were a significant issue for her as she explained that she had full responsibility for childcare within the home.

Participant B (PB)

PB was a 48 year old male with no formal levels of education who had left school before completing Junior Cert. He worked previously as a general operative but had been unemployed for over 10 years. He presented to the services through the DSP but had significant health related problems, particularly in terms of his weight. This, along with his low mood had become considerable barriers to his progression into work. He lived alone. His normal daily routine was 'to buy a few cans and drink them in the evening'. Through co-operation with his GP, the guidance practitioner helped him set goals around his health, education, and training. He started a weight reduction programme and participated in a part-time six week preparatory training programme, run by the NGO, which focused on social inclusion and self-development. Alongside

this he completed a four week part-time programme with the local literacy service. He then made an application to a QQI Level 4 certified programme in Horticulture in a local college and was successful. At the time of the interview he was halfway through the first year of this programme (part time) and was eager to progress to year two. His career plan included progression to QQI Level 5 and Level 6 programmes offered by the Botanic Gardens.

Participant C (PC)

PC was a 42 year old female single parent with no formal education. She previously worked for 5 years as a machinist but had to leave the job once she had her first child due to lack of childcare. She had been in receipt of a lone parent allowance for 20 years and although she had some part-time cleaning and care work during this time, it had been on a casual basis and mainly to supplement her social welfare payment. Upon attendance at the NGO she set out a career plan with her guidance practitioner which included an Introductory IT course. The course unfortunately was not what she had hoped it to be and she decided to leave after a few days explaining that it was not for her. She then completed a manual handling course and a Jobs club, both of which she found beneficial. She expressed an interested in furniture restoration, textiles, and fashion, and with her guidance practitioner has applied for a programme with the Rediscovery Centre. She was extremely passionate about a career in this area, and never thought it was possible until she participated in the intervention.

Participant D (PD)

PD was a 21 year old single male who had completed second level school but with a very weak Leaving Cert. He had never worked, nor had he attended any training or education post Leaving Cert. He was referred as a youth guarantee client due to his social welfare status and age. He was extremely articulate expressing his ongoing indecisiveness which caused him anxiety. His guidance practitioner used the ECYP method which involved setting goals in all aspects of his life, including leisure, social, employment, and training. He identified retail as an area of work he wished to pursue and applied for a full-time four month retail course associated with IKEA which was run in conjunction with the ETB and the NGO. After completion of the programme he was offered a full time position with IKEA, but due to anxiety issues he decided not to

accept the position. He attended the jobs club and was referred to the job seeking service in the NGO. He has since been placed in a retail position on a CE scheme with Enable Ireland.

Participant E (PE)

PE was a 21 year old single female with a weak Leaving Cert who had never worked. She was referred as a youth guarantee client due to her age and unemployment status. She presented as an extremely shy person, with very low self-esteem and what could be interpreted as a reluctance to engage despite attending all appointments with her guidance practitioner. She expressed an interest in beauty and hairdressing, however after starting a taster course she felt this was not an area she wished to pursue. The guidance practitioner used the ECYP approach where short to medium term goals were set in all aspects of her life, and this approach worked well. Her goals included taking her dog for a daily walk, participating in a social activity each week, and further exploring her career interests. She enjoyed home economics at school and subsequently decided to consider catering and food preparation as possible career directions. She completed a Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) course required for employment in the food sector and applied for a CE scheme in a local drop in centre for the elderly which offered daily meals. She was successful and works both as a waitress, taking orders and serving food, and also assisting with food preparation in the kitchen. Due to her extreme shyness, she found the work challenging but was getting great satisfaction from meeting the challenges. She expressed in the interview that her low self-esteem and severe shyness stemmed from being continuously bullied while at school.

Participant F (PF)

PF was a 48 year old female with four grown up children whom she had raised alone due to a marriage breakdown 14 years previously. She left school with no formal qualifications and very weak literacy and numeracy skills. She had been made redundant after 15 years working in a large supermarket, and prior to this had worked in a number of low skill positions. With her keen interest in dogs, she had qualified as a dog trainer and trained assistance dogs on a voluntary basis for autism and disability. She presented with quite low self-esteem and perceived her lack of literacy and

numeracy as significant barriers to progression. She concealed this while working but now struggled with job application forms and the application process in general. She was referred by her guidance practitioner to the literacy service where she completed two modules at QQI level 3 and a module at QQI level 4, and had progressed to advanced literacy and further dog training courses. Since her interview she was accepted onto a TUS activation scheme.

Appendix 13

List of publications and presentations

Peer-reviewed publications:

Whelan, N., McGilloway, S., Murphy, MP., & McGuinness, C. (in press). EEPIC - Enhancing Employability through Positive Interventions for improving Career potential: the impact of a high support career guidance intervention on the well-being, hopefulness, self-efficacy and employability of the long-term unemployed - study protocol for a randomised controlled trial. *Trials*

Non peer-reviewed publications:

Duggan, C., Whelan, N. & Togher, S. (2015). Lessons from the Ballymun Youth Guarantee Pilot: A focus on Employment related Career Guidance (DEASP) <https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/BYG-CareerGuidance-Report.pdf>

Conference Presentations:

Whelan, N., McGilloway, S., & Murphy, MP. (2017). *Enhancing employability for the long-term unemployed through positive psychological Interventions: a randomised controlled trial*. Paper presentation at the European Association of Work and Organisational Psychology (EAWOP) Congress, Dublin

Whelan, N. (2017). *Measuring the impact of interventions - Social Return on Investment*. Pre-congress workshop delivered at the European Association of Work and Organisational Psychology (EAWOP) Congress, Dublin

Whelan, N. (2016). *Stakeholder's perceptions of labour market policy effectiveness: enabling activation*. Paper presented at the Doctoral Programme (Pre-conference) at the Work, Employment and Society Conference 2016, Leeds, UK

Whelan, N., McGilloway, S., & Murphy, MP. (2016). *The perceived effectiveness of client centred approaches to activation in fostering the employability of job seekers: lessons from the Youth Guarantee pilot programme and the EEPIC study*. Paper presented at the NERI 4th Annual Labour Market Conference, Limerick.

Whelan, N., McGilloway, S., & Murphy, MP. (2016). *Well-being and Employability: putting the job seekers first*. Paper presented at the Irish Social Policy Association (ISPA) Conference, Dublin.

Whelan, N. (2016). *Evaluating the effectiveness and implementation of new employment enhancement programmes in an Irish context*. Poster presentation at the Unpacking Pathways to Work Seminar, Maynooth University

- Whelan, N. (2016). *Youth Guarantee Pilot: an example of positive Activation*. Paper presented at the Unpacking Pathways to Work Seminar, Maynooth University
- Whelan, N., McGilloway, S. & Murphy, M.P. (2015). *Perceived effectiveness of Pathways to Work: emerging themes and lessons for labour market activation policy*. Paper presented at the British Psychological Society: Northern Ireland (NIBPS) Annual conference, Armagh, Northern Ireland.
- Whelan, N., McGilloway, S. & Murphy, M.P. (2015). *Perceived effectiveness of Ireland's labour market policy: emerging themes and lessons*. Paper presented at the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) Annual conference, Galway
- Whelan, N., McGilloway, S. & Murphy, M.P. (2014). *New pathways to employment: evaluating in a time of change*. Paper presented at the British Psychological Society: Northern Ireland (NIBPS) Annual conference, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
- Whelan, N., McGilloway, S. & Murphy, M.P. (2014). *Unemployment, Well-being and Policy Impact*. Paper presented at the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) Annual Conference, Kilkenny

Invited presentations

- Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Social Protection: Update on the operation and impact of Job Bridge and the Youth Guarantee (Nov 2013 & Nov 2015): invited to present the Ballymun Youth Guarantee Pilot programme and its lessons for policy and practice
- Presentation of PhD thesis to the Board of Management, Ballymun Job Centre (2016)
- Presentation of the Youth Guarantee model of career guidance at the Pobal *Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme* conference (as part of a symposium convened by the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed) (2016)
- Guest lecture: *Employability and Well-being: Research and Applications*. Real World Research Module (3rd Year Undergraduate) Department of Psychology, Maynooth University (2016, 2017)
- Guest Lecture: *Employability and Well-being: Research and Applications*. MSc. Work & Organisational Psychology, Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick (2016)