wexford
local development

Forbairt Áitiúil Loch Garman

'A Missing Generation?': Youth Unemployment in Co. Wexford - The Stories behind the Statistics

June 2013

Foreword

It is my pleasure to present this report which details for the first time the situation of young people in our County who are looking for work at present. Wexford has the unfortunate distinction of having a youth unemployment rate of 47%, the third highest in the country. Behind each number is a person with a family, friends, parents, each unsure of their future, each trying to forge a way forward for themselves in what can feel like a climate of overwhelming gloom and uncertainty. Our aim in carrying out this research was to put faces and stories to these statistics.

At the centre of the project were the 70 young people who gave of their time and energy to tell us how it is for them. They told stories some distressing, many inspiring, of their efforts to find a niche in our economy, in our society.

We also spoke with other agencies and ourselves opened up to the researchers about our shared experiences of trying to provide appropriate and helpful support for young unemployed people. We all have a lot to learn about the good work that is happening, the obstacles that can obstruct that work and the opportunities that exist to provide a more effective and agile system of support and training to young people as they search for work.

Last but not least we were very grateful for the time given by 21 employers in Wexford in completing our questionnaire and speaking with us in person and on the phone – they know better than anyone what is required of employees in today's competitive jobs market and are more than willing to work alongside service providers and young people to achieve that.

I hope that this document will be a blueprint for concerted local action and collaboration to tackle this issue head on and begin to turn things around for our young people. The dividends of success will be reaped not only by these young people but also by employers and the community as our economy and systems of support begin to function in a way which values and finds a place for everyone, irrespective of their background or educational attainment.

Pat Rath

Chairperson

Wexford Local Development

May 2013

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1. Introduction

The Context

Census figures released in July 2012 contained the stark revelation that that Co. Wexford has the third highest rate of unemployment amongst 15–24 year olds in the country, with 47% of people in this group currently unemployed. Although Wexford is at the top of this scale, the problem is a national and international one - the rate of youth unemployment in Ireland shot up by 74% between 2006 and 2011 with 39% of those aged between 15 and 24 out of work. The unemployment rate climbs to 70% for individuals with low-level qualifications and those who have left school early.

The first major study of youth unemployment in Ireland in the aftermath of the 'Celtic Tiger' era was conducted by the National Youth Council of Ireland in 2011[1] and concluded that '*there has been no coordinated, coherent or focused policy approach developed in response to the pressing needs of young jobseekers in Ireland - particularly those who have yet to gain experience in the labour market*.' This report echoes international evidence which suggests that a prolonged period of unemployment creates a 'scarring' effect which persists long into a person's working life, damaging future employment prospects, earning potential, health status and family relationships.

For many young people, even those with third level qualifications, finding employment can be challenging. They lack workplace experience, encounter problems accessing support services and face constant rejection when attempting to find employment. These difficulties are compounded for those who have low levels of educational attainment.

In April of this year, Ireland's presidency of the European Union saw agreement reached amongst member states on the introduction of a 'Youth Guarantee' initiative to tackle youth unemployment rates which have reached epidemic levels in many member states. Already in place in Finland, Sweden and Austria, a Youth Guarantee scheme would ensure that a young person aged between 18 and 25 would be offered a job, work experience, an apprenticeship, training or combined work and training within 4 months of becoming unemployed.

Report after report has testified to the need for a 'holistic' and 'joined up' approach to unemployment and the Government's 'Pathways to Work' policy document also places a strong emphasis on the need to adopt a person-centred and tailored approach to the provision of employment supports.

Despite this agreement at policy level, a detailed implementation plan for the delivery of a 'Youth Guarantee' in Ireland has yet to be developed. Government has indicated that it intends to develop this plan by the end of 2013 to coincide with the budgetary process – it is therefore essential that consultation takes place in the near future as to how best to address the varying needs of young unemployed people in the context of this new policy initiative.

A local response

In response to the youth unemployment crisis in the county, Wexford Local Development initially held a conference in November 2012 at which an audience of over 200 consisting of young unemployed people, service providers and community representatives gathered to raise awareness of the current situation and examine how unemployment is affecting our young people, our communities and our economy. We looked at this issue both in the context of the national research outlined above as well as considering the European and global perspective on this challenge.

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[1] 'Youth Unemployment in Ireland – The Forgotten Generation' National Youth Council of Ireland, 2011.

In addition, we commissioned the Men's Development Network to assist us in designing and conducting research with young people, services providers and employers. We wanted to establish a clear picture of youth unemployment and how it is affecting young people in rural and urban areas throughout the county. We also wanted to look at existing services for young unemployed people – how well they connect with each other and how well they connect with young people.

Finally we wanted to explore how, by working together across Co. Wexford, we could achieve more than the sum of the parts represented by all the different organisations involved in this area. Our hope is that through better collaboration we can succeed in making a real and tangible difference to the prospects of what could quickly become a 'missing generation' of young Wexford people.

We sought the views and perspective of three distinct groups of stakeholders in this process. We brought together seven discussion groups in Wexford, Enniscorthy, Gorey, New Ross, Bunclody and Clonroche involving approximately 70 young people aged between 18 and 25 who are currently unemployed. These groups took part in a structured discussion lasting from one to two hours and exploring common themes in both urban and rural settings. The research also included an email/postal survey of 21 employers in sectors such as retail, services and manufacturing which traditionally attract higher numbers of young employees. Finally we spoke with 26 individuals involved in the provision of services to young unemployed people in the county by means of questionnaires and phone interviews.

Taking a three-pronged approach to this project provided a valuable opportunity to contextualise the experiences of the young unemployed people whose experiences are to the forefront of this research. It afforded us an opportunity to compare the issues which impact on young peoples lives from different perspectives. In doing so, we were able to highlight areas which are working well for young unemployed people as well as areas where more work needs to be done or fresh thinking is required.

Who are Wexford Local Development and why are we involved in this work?

Wexford Local Development is a Local Development Company, one of 52 nationwide. We offer support and services to a wide range of groups and individuals in Co. Wexford including those who wish to start or expand a business, job seekers and persons in receipt of social welfare payments, community and voluntary groups, children, young people and their families. We deliver several national programmes in Co. Wexford including the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP), the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) and the Local Employment Service (LES). Under LCDP and LES in particular our work focuses on those who are most disadvantaged in terms of education, training and access to the labour market.

While WLD is involved in the design and delivery of innovative projects to address social inclusion needs directly, our role also includes the development of initiatives to improve access to services on the ground for our target groups. We do this by facilitating a partnership approach to local issues and involving all relevant stakeholders in this process.

Drawing on our practical experience of delivering projects on the ground as well our strong track record in bringing together effective collaborative networks in the past, we hope to work with others in the county over the coming months and years to lessen the impact of joblessness and prevent as many of our young people as possible from sinking into a pattern of prolonged unemployment and the hopelessness that this engenders. It is vital that we work together to ensure that our young people are motivated, engaged, trained and ready to take up new employment opportunities when they arise.

2. Background, Key Findings and Overall Recommendations

The aim of this research project on youth unemployment in Co. Wexford was '*to establish the core issues at local level for three groups of stake-holders – young unemployed people aged between 18 and 25, organisations involved in the provision of training, education or employment guidance services to these young people and employers - and to identify possible responses*'.

Each group had a different perspective on the challenge of youth unemployment, each group required a different approach to broaching the issues and each group were answering different questions.

- What is the lived experience of young people without employment in County Wexford?
- How is it to be supporting young people when they are preparing for employment?
- How is it to be liaising with potential employers?
- How do employers react to the young people they meet on placements and at interviews?
- What experience do employers have of interacting with the services that support young people?

We convened a series of seven focus groups with young people across the county in a variety of locations, accessing a variety of services. We also conducted a telephone survey of service providers and a postal/email survey amongst employers.

The detailed responses dealing with each strand of the research in turn are contained in Sections 3, 4 and 5 of this document. Here we set out to summarise the findings: we have drawn together the issues where there is overlap and common ground but also highlighted the elements that to us are important in providing focus and clarity for a strategy to respond to the challenge inherent in the fact that nearly every second young person aged between 15 and 24 in the labour force in Co. Wexford is currently without paid employment.

Key Findings

- Young people know that with nearly 50% of their number unemployed they face a future that will, for **a significant number of them, be without work for a considerable time**.
- Providing support and skills to build the capacity of all young people to be effective in the face of the current unemployment crisis will benefit all young people and the community at large.
- Those coming from communities already impacted by the consequences of marginalisation are even more **marginalised** by the pressure to compete in a jobs market and indeed in a training 'market' that values most those who are most job-ready.
- **Service providers experience significant groups of young people as having real challenges surviving and thriving in their support services** and in their movement onward towards employment. Young men seem to be more likely to struggle and seem less resilient in the face of adversity.
- Those who have struggled academically will struggle again if the provision of employment and training services is experienced as inflexible.
- There is a **need for individual planned support between agencies** for a number of service users, in order that they can benefit from a level of coordination and focused ongoing support rather than feeling moved from pillar to post. 45% of service providers are either unsure of the referral procedures in place with other organisations or describe them as inefficient.
- **Young people** are reported to be relatively **unaware of the different services available to them**, so they are unable to coordinate their services for themselves.

- Service providers would welcome a closer and ongoing relationship between themselves, employers and their service users.
- Awareness was lacking or scant among employers of the services available to young people or indeed for them to employ or take young people on placement. **75% of enterprises had limited or very limited awareness of supports or incentives available to employers** to offer positions or placements to young people.
- **Employers** showed a significantly **positive attitude to young people** as employees and potential employees and were **willing to engage** with and involve themselves in support services.
- Employers spoke of their **need for young employees who can communicate and understand the responsibilities of work life.**

Overall Recommendations

- Develop **an integrated plan** enrolling the relevant stake-holders in County Wexford in addressing the diverse needs of all young people who are without work.
- Acknowledge the **need to provide support and services** to a significant group of young people for whom the possibility of paid work is some time away.
- Ensure that the needs of all stakeholders are known and understood by each other, providing focus for the **development of capacity and skills** among young people.

The size of the challenge of youth unemployment in Co. Wexford demands that a coordinated approach to meeting the needs of young people seeking work be undertaken. There are many interested parties - employers, providers of services to young people, young people themselves, statutory agencies and community and voluntary groups. They share an interest in developing a strategy which will smooth the path between seeking work and employment and provide young people with support to survive and thrive during their search for work.

Recommendations specific to each group of stakeholders are detailed below:

Working better with Service Providers

- Harness the positive energy among different Service Providers by **supporting inter-agency networking** across the county. Participants felt that inter-agency effectiveness was greatly enhanced when there were personal relationships established between representatives of different agencies.
- Ensure a **person-centred approach** and develop **follow-up supports** during placements and employment. Create ongoing contact to encourage and support the young person to make a successful transition to employment. Seek out **opportunities to embed this approach at local level** with the impending roll-out of Intreo, Solas and the new Education and Training Boards.
- Develop a **role and a connection for employers**, particularly major employers, into service provision for young people. Develop a model for employer liaison to facilitate understanding and clarity about their needs as employers from young people in interviews and on placements, making referrals easier and more productive for both sides.
- Ensure that **programmes of training and support which** target young unemployed people are designed to specifically **enhance personal competence** in facing into the world at large and the world of work in particular.

Working better with Employers

- Develop **strategic partnerships with employers** focused on increasing their awareness of available supports and incentives and strengthening their connection to organisations and agencies providing training, education and employment guidance services to young people. Provide a forum for service providers to better understand the needs of employers and stay informed of the changing needs in the local labour market.
- Work with employers to develop practical actions to **introduce young people to the requirements of the world of work** such as work shadowing, site visits, 'soft skill' development and interview practice.

Working better with Young People

- **Acknowledge the distance from employment** for large numbers of young people who are aware of the national and international aspects to their struggle to find work. Plan for innovative and meaningful interventions to help young people stay connected to the world of work while they await an upturn in job creation.
- Integrate **support for personal development, health and wellbeing** into programmes targeting young people who are looking for work.
- Support young people to engage in community activities, sport and recreation as an alternative means of **developing 'soft skills'** relevant to the workplace such as team working, leadership, initiative and problem-solving. Create the means to **map and document these skills** in order to demonstrate the development of these competencies in young people, particularly those who have low educational attainment.
- Champion the development of a **strategic county-wide approach** to youth employment, meeting the needs of diverse groups across the county and **involving young people** themselves as key stakeholder in and drivers of this approach.

3. Focus group research with young unemployed people

Discovering the core issues at local level for young men and young women, for service providers, for employers and for other stake-holders, meant trying to step into each of the day to day worlds occupied by these individuals and listening hard. By listening for the issues, and making connections between different group responses we were able to identify possible responses. This section sets out how we approached the focus groups, analysed the results of these discussions and formulated recommendations.

3.1 Process

Seven focus groups were held with young unemployed men and women between the ages of 18 and 25, between 20th November and 4th December 2012. The groups met in Wexford town, Enniscorthy, New Ross, Gorey, Bunclody and Clonroche – a mix of urban and rural settings. Other than the group in Clonroche, where there were only 3 young women in attendance, there were between 8 and 12 participants at each group. One group was all women, another was predominantly women, another was predominantly young men and the others were to a greater or lesser extent composed of both young men and women.

Four of the groups took place within the context of formal education or training programmes, the other three were recruited in community groups offering services to young people. An agreed topic list was covered with each group determining the focus of their particular interest. These topics included:

- Experience of Education, Experience of Services, Job-seeking - attitudes and behaviour, Transition from Education, World of work, Preparation for work,
- Connection & Engagement, Values & Beliefs, Hopes & Fears,
- Big picture – Recession, class, neighbourhood, experience in life, experience of services, long-term impacts on individuals, families or community, barriers to training, education, employment.
- Heroes & Villians, Dreams & Hopes, What I always wanted!, Examples right here on your doorstep.
- Survival, Life without work, Treatment, Fairness.

During analysis a range of themes were identified and they are explored with recommendations coming from those explorations. These themes included age, gender, programme environment, alcohol, connection and disconnection, parenthood, contribution, rural living, 'life on hold', 'stepping stones', support, multiple marginalisation, plans-hopes-dreams-vision-ambition, educational experience and the experiences of young Traveller women.

3.2   Findings and Analysis

Programme Environment – Education, Training, Support

The groups were recruited in a variety of setting types – educational, training or community-based support. The focus group sessions were conducted 'within' the programmes from which participants were recruited. The background of the participants, the service offered and experienced and the different 'ethos' in those settings had an impact on the responses of the participants.

There is a real and natural difference between the environments, the outputs and the outcomes experienced by young men and women in different programmes. The focus of the participants who were in a more educational setting was on achievement of the short-term goal as a part of a longer-term plan. Those in a more training oriented programme were likely to be gearing themselves towards finishing the programme in the short-term and most had little sense of what direction they were likely to take at that stage.

Some of those in a more community oriented setting were more likely to have spent time and energy considering what their individual needs were and were likely to have a sense of how they wished their lives to progress and have a sense of what they could do to make that happen. A formal educational programme is directed at a very particular outcome and by committing to the programme the young person can be sure that his energy and engagement will be rewarded by attainment of the offered outcome – if he/she studies and does the work he/she will pass the exam. Some support is offered to support that commitment.

The less formal the educational programme the less predictable the outcome from the young people's perspective. Less formal programmes seem to be the territory of those with less formal qualification from secondary school and in some cases at least less supportive experiences at school. Their youth, experience at school and their struggles in other parts of their lives mean that certainly some of them struggle with the environment and outputs in their programmes and experience less successful outcomes as a result.

Those who are engaged in community based training or support programmes speak of finding connection and engagement and in some instances being supported to use their experience and training to have an impact in their community. The location, environment and flexibility available encourage and affirm this engagement.

Age

There were differing responses from those at the younger end of the age spectrum and those older. Those younger were less inclined to be able to see beyond the end of the programme they were engaged in. They were more concerned with the immediate and less likely to be thinking about the longer term. They struggled to see to the end of their course and there was some sense of anger and distress at being put in a position of having to consider the longer term. They were unlikely to feel that they had any control or could have any impact themselves on the outcome for themselves at the end of the programme.

Older participants were much more likely to see the programme – whichever programme they were involved in – as part of a process to support them to move into employment. The likelihood of gaining employment seemed distant and difficult but the older participants were engaged with the idea that they had to commit to building their competences and capabilities if they were ever to be able to find employment.

Older participants were more aware of their situation – or more able to articulate it. They were more likely to express anger and frustration at the position they found themselves in. While being more engaged with taking responsibility for their own situation, at the same time they were vocal in their condemnation of the apparent inability of those who were charged with creating change to make any inroads into improving the chances these young people were likely to have - even in the longer term. The timing of the research meant that in the run up to the national budget 'political kites' were being flown and possible cuts were in general discussion. This provided a focus for the anger and frustration but these participants were prepared to see beyond this to challenge themselves to try to find responses that were appropriate for themselves.

Gender

There were marked differences between the responses, in general, of the young women and the young men. The young women were more focused on making the best of what was possible right there and then. They were more likely to have a long-term picture of how they wanted to see their lives playing out.

Young men were more likely to have experience of the work-place. They were likely to have a long-term goal but were less likely to be coping well with the more immediate challenge of stability in the short-term. This affected their view of how likely they were to succeed in meeting their goal.

The young men at the younger end of the age spectrum were unlikely to have a clear sense of how things would be for them in the longer term. Their horizons were short and they had difficulty imagining any situation where they could be better off.

Connection

There were noticeable differences between the participants in the groups. Some were clearly connected to each other, to their group, to their community, to their families and to themselves. This was characterised by marked self-confidence, a preparedness to explore and be inventive, by a sense of the possibility of change and a sense of responsibility for making some change.

These young people had, or had begun to form, a sense of identity. This was more likely to be the case in groups in a community setting that had spent time together and that had some personal development focus to the work that they had done together. These participants were more likely to

consider group responses to their challenges rather than just individualised responses. Asking more vulnerable, less connected young people to look at and face the reality of their lives in a group setting was more likely to lead to silence and, what seemed like resentment and anger, perhaps a reasonable response to being put in a situation that felt unsafe and challenging and maybe felt like being blamed for their situation and their inability to see a way forward.

Disconnection

The impact of isolation and disconnection was visible among some participants. The most challenged young people were younger, more likely to be young men – but not exclusively so and more likely to be at the younger end of the age spectrum. These younger people seemed to have not been able to maintain connection to their families; they spoke of difficult experiences at school and also seemed to have less engagement with the programmes they were involved in and little sense of a positive outcome from that involvement. They sounded unsupported and unable to imagine a time or circumstances that they would have a sense of control over their own destiny.

They spoke in anger and with a sense of blame about those who should be making things better for them. They were unfocused in this anger and less able to be specific. Their educational background and lack of engagement or understanding left them vulnerable to frustration and further isolation. Some spoke of the efforts being made to support them and they were conscious of that but were distrustful of its likely effectiveness. Their daily struggle to engage must pose a real challenge for those seeking to support them and ensure their continued well-being.

Alcohol

There was the common thread across all groups. For those who were not parents, alcohol played a significant part in their lives. 'Oblivion' drinking was a regular, sometimes weekly, practise. Whatever surplus money was available was spent on alcohol. None were prepared to discuss any other substance use. Escape and relaxation of boundaries, was permitted under the influence of alcohol. They were prepared and allowed to revert to childish behaviour, to overstep the bounds, to regret actions with a smile and escape the reality of the day-to-day slog. Younger participants both men and women seemed to be more likely to see no problem with this pattern. For some this caused issues of attendance at their programme on Mondays, for some on other days as well.

Parenthood

Those participants who were parents, both mothers and fathers, showed a real and committed engagement in whatever group or programme they were connected to. The arrival of their child or children created an immediate sense, according to them, of having to take control, control of their lives, their future and the day-to-day nitty-gritty. Finding themselves in that responsible place, having no option but to find a route that had a longer-term horizon, and commit to it, created an ability to see further and work in the short-term to take steps to build a future for themselves and their child.

Some were possibly inclined to be naïve, but even if that, were inclined to be realistic about the need for them to shape their future themselves. A majority of the mothers spoke of having experienced a real and positive change in their relationship with their mothers from the time of the birth of their first child. For most of these their mother was their partner at the birth. This was not exactly mirrored by the experience of participants who were fathers. The arrival of a child did seem to call up a sense of responsibility in the young men but they seemed to have a sense of having created another disappointment in their own parents – particularly their fathers.

Contribution

Connection and usefulness, rather than dependence and aimlessness, seemed to create a powerful motivation among some of the participants. Making a contribution and having a sense of the impact of what they were doing on the lives of others created a powerful sense of their own worth, capability

and control. This engagement varied from involvement with their own group, to creating support for themselves and others, to working in the wider community particularly with younger teens and children in a variety of ways in community settings.

The impact on how they were engaged with their own lives was similar to that of those young people who were parents. Those who were making a successful contribution were prepared to think about the future and imagine possibilities, and while well able to express disgust and anger at the inability of those in power, they were prepared to take responsibility for their own destiny.

Rural Living

In addition to the challenges facing all of the young people who participated, those who lived outside the urban centres face additional struggles. Their isolation was deeper, their access to services was more constrained, and their struggle with coming in from the margins was more intense. Lack of public transport challenged the constrained budgets on which they lived. It constrained the kinds of programmes to which they could have access.

Societal constrictions were felt to be more entrenched. Young people in rural settings described being stigmatised as troublesome, threatening and marginalised. Village life seemed to make no provision for a young man or woman who was not engaged in competitive sport. To create new and different activities that suit their needs was a struggle in the face of a community that they experienced as being set in its ways and controlling access to resources or venues.

'Life on Hold'

Across all groups, there is a sense of young people seeing their lives on hold. Without any sense of control over their own lives young people are left feeling that they have little option but to live by the script of those making decisions for them. The threat of reduced benefits, the belief that there will be no real work for them at the end of the programme and the sense that they can have little real impact on how they will be in the future – all of these militate against these young women and men feeling a sense of autonomy.

Some are resilient enough to acknowledge and accept that this is a time to invest time energy and resources in establishing a foundation of education and training for the future. But there are some whose experience, of education in particular, is such that they see little potential return from that investment and therefore they struggle to stay engaged. They find it painful to look towards the end of their programme and foresee at time when they are thrown back on their own resources to find even work experience not to mind paid employment.

'Stepping Stones'

All training and education programmes are presented explicitly or implicitly to young people as stepping-stones on the way to qualifications and experience and ultimately work and fulltime employment. The experience of young women and men and the versions that they hear among their peers contradict this certainty. For some, particularly those in more formal established education programmes the perception is closer to reality. But those doing FETAC Level 3 Programmes know they will be competing with people with higher qualifications when they go seeking work experience and work and they struggle to hold onto their confidence and resilience in the face of this challenge.

Multiple Marginalisation

Poverty, a history of family and generational unemployment, educational struggle, family difficulty, poor housing, violence and a marginalised community, all work in an unholy combination that increases the impact of each. There was a real sense that some of the young men and women were living with the consequences of more than one of these if not many of them.

The likelihood of completing a programme with any degree of success must be reduced exponentially in the face of these levels of marginalisation. Young men and women living with these consequences spoke of the pressure to complete the programme and spoke of the anticipated struggle they faced when trying to find work experience in order to meet their commitments to the programme. Their sense of isolation and inadequacy when faced with initiating an approach to a prospective employer for work experience left them feeling intimidated, frustrated and angry.

Support - Offered & Felt

All participants that were engaged in any programme or more informally in community based support identified teachers, project workers or trainers that were offering real support alongside the challenge they offered to individuals. The support and challenge was as varied as the individuals offering it but all spoke of the commitment and engagement and some spoke of the positive impact of that support. They spoke of the positive impact of being seen as individuals and of having their individual struggles and triumphs recognised.

For some groups any question about the future was answered with gusto and enthusiasm. As individuals and together they were able and happy to speak about hopes and ambitions for the future. They were clearly together in a comfortable supportive and energetic way. They were not diffident but expansive. They spoke and encouraged each other and believed in each other. They saw potential and possibility. They had real contact and relationships with each other. They shared common experiences and learnt together, whether in a formal setting or in the more open community based setting.

Our sense was that in each case there was a pivotal support person providing the safety and the holding space for very diverse individuals. They were able to distinguish between hopes and plans; they were shy and careful with their more cherished dreams and ambitions but were prepared to be open about them. They offered real affirmation to each other in a way that was supportive.

Educational Experience

Participants experience at school acts as a gateway to participation and engagement in future programmes that will impact on the level of qualification a young man or woman can achieve. Those who perceive themselves to have failed at school struggle to engage and seemed to be enacting what they prophesy for themselves. Those with Junior or Leaving Certificates feel able to see themselves progressing. Those without cannot see themselves measuring up even in non-academic endeavours.

Young Traveller Women

At one of the groups, 2 of the participants were young women from the Traveller Community. Maybe because it was the group of 3 and because there was an accompanying community worker they were happy to participate. Each of them had finished or was intending to finish her education as early as possible. Their needs were for engagement at a local level in a programme that was safely tailored to their needs, living within the strictures of their community.

When told of the FETAC Level 3 Programme in Hair & Beauty on offer in Wexford they saw real opportunity to participate and to gain some qualification and felt that there would be wide spread interest from across their community among young women. While meeting very stereotypical needs of young women, the interest and enthusiasm was very real. Maybe because that programme is meeting stereotypical requirements, it could deliver safely to this particularly marginalised group.

3.3　Recommendations specific to the needs of young people

- Focus resources and develop a strategy based on tailored interventions for those who are most marginalised and in greatest need of support - young men and women who have struggled in education and continue to struggle in training programmes.
- Acknowledge personal development and support as an essential part of working with young men and women in training or education towards activation. Promote self-efficacy as a starting point.
- Consider including separate group development work to support individuals by age and gender, creating safety to find common ground and identity.
- Create open discussion of the dangers and impacts of alcohol and substance abuse.
- Acknowledge the reality of programme participation, as a stepping-stone to the *possibility* of further qualification or employment.
- Consider the development of a Parent Training Syllabus for young mothers and fathers, including Parenting, Nutrition, Budgeting and Relationships to support their involvement in training and workforce.
- Acknowledge individual and group contribution at community level affirming individual achievement and group identity.
- Target outlying communities with specific responses, resources and strategies – consider IT solutions.
- Focus resources and develop a specific approach to address the needs of young Travellers.

4. Service Provider Survey

4.1　Methodology

The research carried out amongst Service Providers consisted of the completion of a phone questionnaire by individuals invited to participate on the basis of their positions within various organisations in the county who provide training, educational, employment and support services to young (aged between 18-25) people in the county (purposive sampling). Initially all prospective participants on the project received a letter explaining the context and purpose of the project, a copy of the questionnaire being used for the research and an invitation to take part. This letter was followed up by a phone-call where times were arranged to facilitate the completion of the questionnaire at the convenience of the participants.

The questionnaire consisted of a number of closed-ended questions, in conjunction with a series of open-ended questions where participants were given greater freedom to explore their own opinions, feelings and ideas on a number of issues pertinent to the isssue of youth unemployment.

On the whole the response to this procedure was positive. A small number of individuals felt that because their positions did not allow for face to face interaction with young people their opinions would provide neither a valid nor relevant contribution to the process so declined to participate. One or two others felt that that colleagues were better placed to take part, so decided that joint responses were more appropriate. We were happpy to accommodate some who preferred to complete the questionnaire by post or e-mail.

In total there were twenty-six different respondents to the survey of service providers. These participants came from a range of organisations including Co. Wexford VEC , the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and FÁS Employment Services. A small number of participants chose to run through the questionnaire quickly using pre-prepared answers, a process which took no more than twenty minutes. On the whole though most participants were happy to engage fully and frankly with the process to the point where it would be more accurate to describe the engagements as structured interviews rather than questionnaires. The open-ended nature of so many questions facilitated this process.

Most of the engagements lasted around forty-five minutes. This allowed for a greater depth and richness to the research findings than a straight-forward questionnaire might normally allow. This depth and richness of engagement more than compensated for the limited number of responses it was possible to generate, and underlines the validity and value of the project .

4.2   Profile of service providers surveyed in Co. Wexford

Fifty percent of the service providers surveyed in Co. Wexford are providing more than just one service for young unemployed people. Figure 3.1 provides a breakdown of the services offered and the number of services providers involved.

Fig 3.1. Types of service provided by participants.
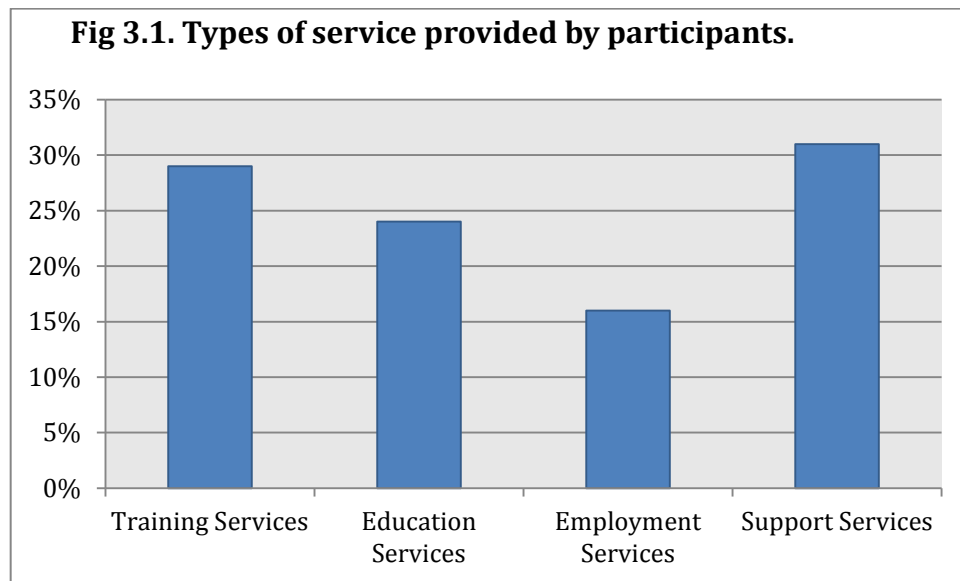
The vast majority of service providers surveyed have been in 'business' for more than 5 years (Fig 3.2) and engage with approximately 20-50 young people per week .

Fig 3.2. Number of years participant organisations have been providing services to young unemployed people in Co. Wexford.


Legend:
- 1 -3 Years
- 3 - 5 years
- > 5 years

9%
9%
82%
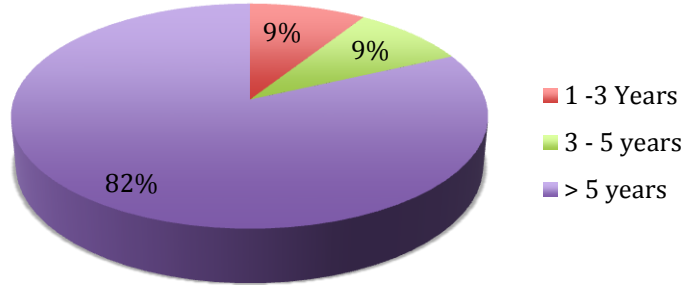
Figure 3.3. The number of young unemployed people who engage with service providers per week.

Legend:
- 1-5
- 5-10
- 10-20
- 20-50
- 50-100
- > 100

14%
9%
9%
9%
14%
45%
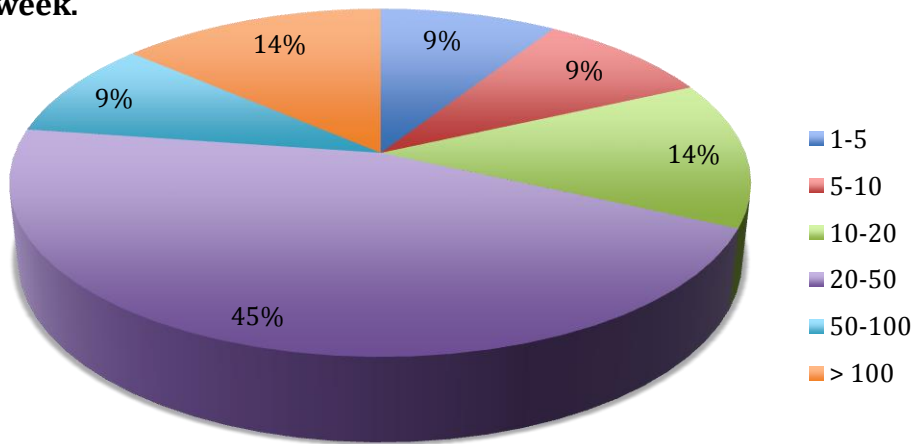
The uptake of services is not gender specific. Figure 3.4 shows that the majority of service providers feel there is, an approximate, even split between young males and females who engage with their services.

**Fig 3.4 Ratio of Male: Female uptake of services in Co. Wexford.**
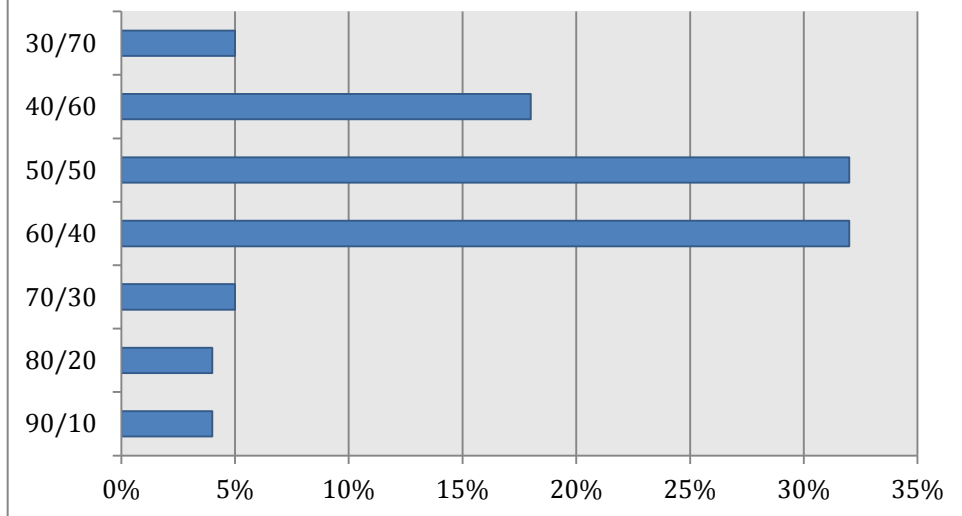

4.3   Findings and Analysis

What are the biggest issues facing young people?

According to the Service Providers who participated in this survey, the lack of jobs and job opportunities which are currently available for young people is the biggest single problem facing young people (see Fig 4.1 and 4.2 below). Most respondents highlight the structural problems which beset the economy. There are simply not enough jobs being created. This point of view is best illustrated by the respondent who was adamant that '*young people are not the problem, older people are the problem. The solution doesn't lie in trying to fix young people'.*

Fig 4.1 Service providers' views on young unemployed barriers to employment in Co. Wexford (Male).

■ Very Important ■ Important ■ Not Sure ■ Not too important ■ Not important at all
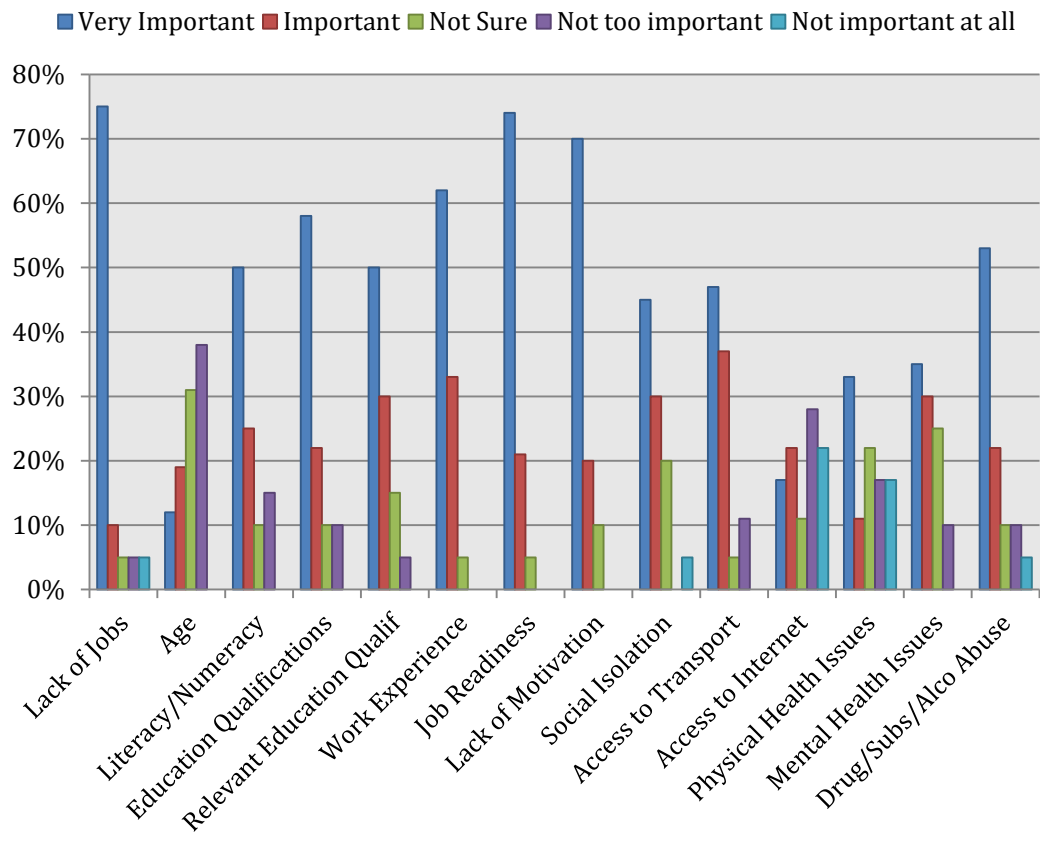
Fig 4.2 Service providers' views of young unemployed barriers to employment in Co. Wexford (Female).
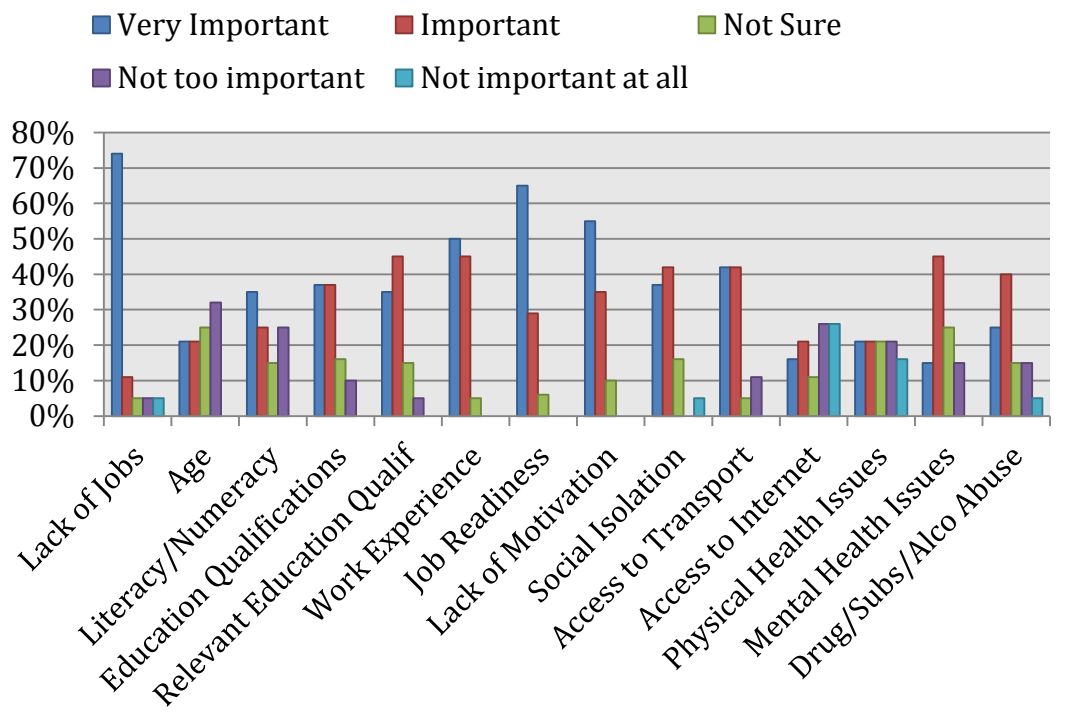
Whilst there was widespread acknowledgement of the difficult environment which young people were exposed to, service providers reported that many of the young people they engaged with *'lacked motivation'* or suffered from *'apathy'* and *'despondency'.* This was a recurring theme of the survey.

A minority of respondents laid the responsibility for this *'lack of motivation'* squarely on the shoulders of the young. Some pointed out that this was particularly true of those young people with lower educational qualifications. However, most of the service providers had a more nuanced understanding of the attitudes of young people to work. Whilst they highlighted the significance of the sense of distance from the conventional world of work and the service providers which characterised the more marginalised elements of the young unemployed especially, they attempted to contextualise this *'lack of connection to the real world of work'.*

There was much speculation as to why there was so *'little value for work'.* Many accounted for this sense of *'apathy, despondency'* by reference to the pervasive sense of *'negativity'* which permeates contemporary discourse. *'There is a sense that there is no point due to lack of jobs and meaningful work'.* They describe a sense of *'depression'* brought on by a *'lack of jobs'.* There was a serious concern that there was little *'incentive'* for young people to look for jobs or training and educational opportunities. Often the type of low skilled jobs which were available for poorly educated young people were so poorly paid they provided little incentive for the young people to take them up. Other participants in the survey bemoaned the fact that many of the training courses which provided opportunities and were attractive to young people could not offer financial incentives to encourage further participation.

A *'lack of confidence'* amongst the young unemployed is also viewed as a significant barrier to their engagement with service providers. Many may have suffered previous negative experiences in their
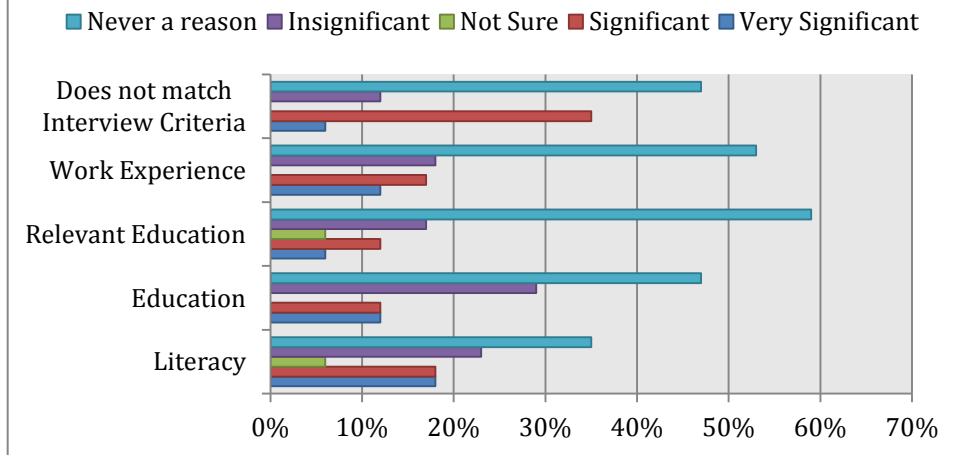
engagements with the education system. Many of these young people respond much better to the practical, participation based training approach offered outside the conventional secondary–school environment.

A more flexible approach at second-level may be a more appropriate response to the needs of these young people. Despite this, over 70% of the service providers who participated in this study said that *there is a specific criteria* necessary to access the services they provide with over 40% of service providers turning away between 5-20% of people based on these criteria (Fig 4.3). This raises the question of appropriate promotion to the appropriate people in order to ensure that they are not served another blow in confidence by receiving yet another rejection from another educational establishment.

Fig 4.3. Percentage of applications/referrals which are unsuitable for service.
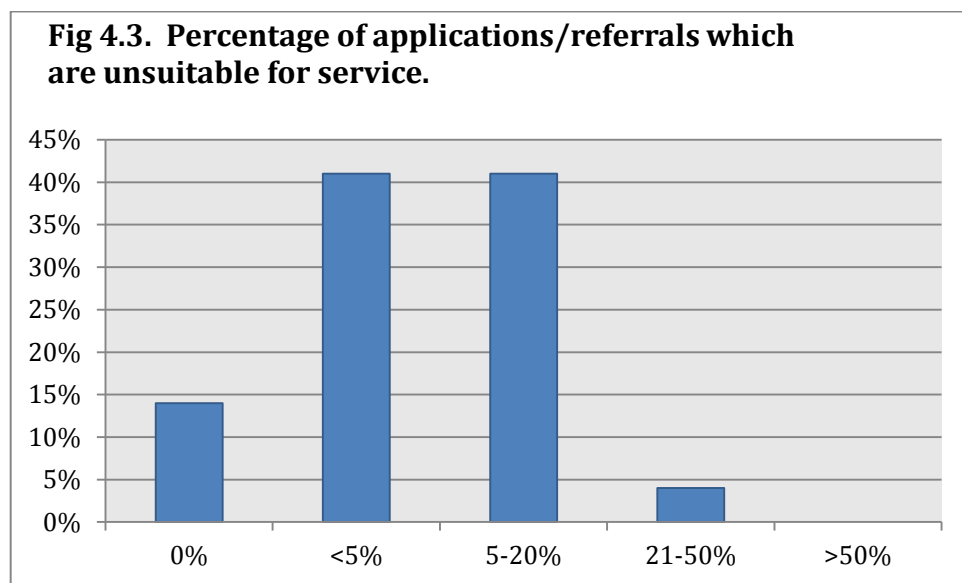
It was beyond the scope of this project to go into the specific criteria details of each service provider however, figure 4.4 provides an overview of some of the reasons young people may be considered unsuitable for participation. The issue of literacy was widely seen as having very significant impact on the lives of many of the young unemployed. While this is not an issue for all young people the extent to which it restricts the employment opportunities available to those young people who are affected by it was frequently remarked upon, but rarely seen as a significant reason to disallow access to services.

Fig 4.4. Significance of particular criteria for non-suitability to your service.

Legend: ■ Never a reason ■ Insignificant ■ Not Sure ■ Significant ■ Very Significant

Categories (top to bottom): Does not match Interview Criteria, Work Experience, Relevant Education, Education, Literacy

X-axis: 0% to 70%

In this context it is essential that the service provision for young people was *'compatible with',* and sensitive to the needs of young people. Lack of training was highlighted as a significant impediment to productive engagement with young people. A *'non-judgemental'* approach amongst staff was seen as essential in this context.

One highly significant aspect of the research which figured prominently and consistently in the contributions of the service providers was the impact of intergenerational unemployment on the lives, prospects and attitudes of the young people they dealt with. One participant referred to anecdotal evidence which suggested that his agency was now dealing with the fourth generation of long-term male unemployment in one working class housing estate in the county. In such circumstances *'young people can lose a sense of their own identity'* and become mired in a dysfunctional culture of poverty and drink. Poor educational achievements were endemic in this environment and many are brought up without any understanding of the value of work.

There is a feeling that, especially amongst young men, this sense of *'undirected energy'*, unless harnessed positively, can be transferred into negative and destructive directions. It is in this context that one respondent described young men as being '*more likely to be "unemployable" than women … it is usually because of early pregnancy that women fall through the system, and their babies provide a focus and sense of meaning in their lives, which the young men lack'.*

With this in mind, the majority of the service providers found that the young people possess many positive traits (Fig 4.5) that should be exploited when engaging with and establishing programmes for dealing with youth unemployment. It is the assessment of the barriers to meaningful engagement with the world of work which face so many of the young people of Co. Wexford, that highlights the need for effective and robust measures of support and direction from all stake holders in the county.

Fig 4.5. Responses to statements about the young people accessing their services.
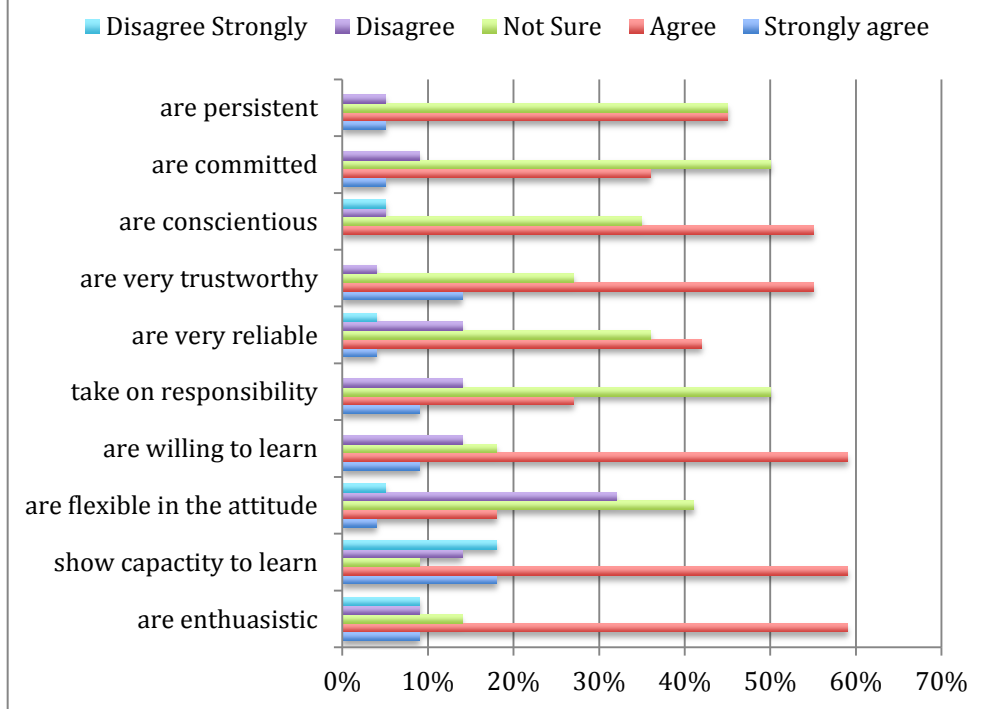
What Do Young People Respond Well To?

Training and Education

Training and Education providers who took part in the research were in widespread agreement that the young unemployed people who engage with their services were looking for, and responded positively to, services which provide a change from the conventional educational environment which they would have experienced in school.

Many of the young people who engaged with these services were not well served by the conventional educational system. One participant reported that what young people liked about their service was that it was *'not school…a different environment, less formal than school and learner-centred where possible, geared at what interests people.'* This was a view echoed by others. Young people were responsive to

- Practical training: *'Wood-work encourages young men in particular to feel they have skills, and this can be built upon and developed'; 'Activity based training, skills based training'.*
- A person-centred approach: *'Pastoral care, listen and discuss problems, offer guidance and assistance…motivate'; 'Holistic approach, supportive, person centred, group work'; 'One-to-one approach, working at own pace'.*
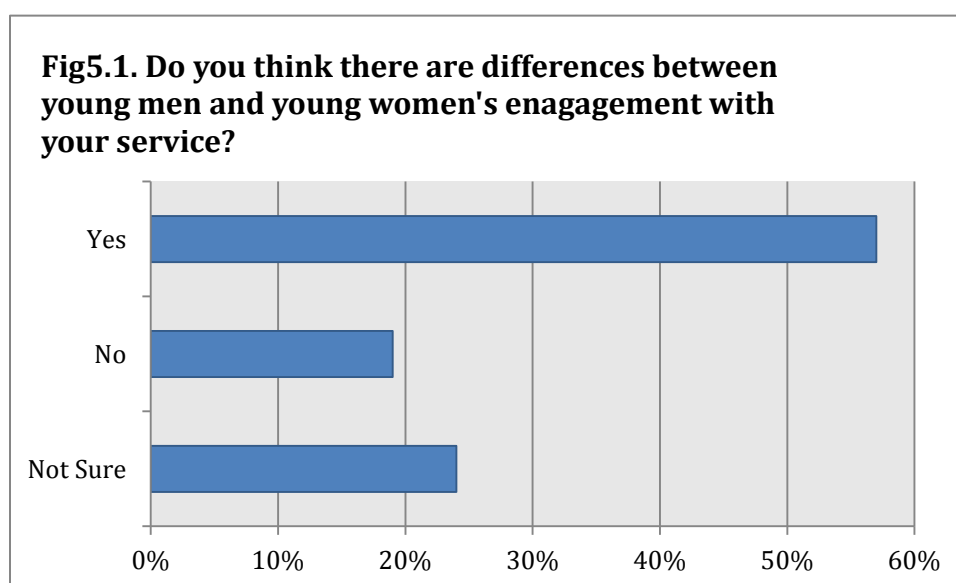
Service providers reported the challenges they faced in persuading young people to engage with some of the more demanding aspects of the courses they offered. *'Issue based work, pre-development work is important and can be difficult for young people'.* Others noted that '*personal reflection and personal development*' were areas which young people showed resistance to. The discipline and structures which are fundamental features of these courses are frequently difficult for these young

men and women to adapt to, but often come to be greatly appreciated, and recognised for their importance and significance.

Specific areas were particularly appealing however: Sport and Recreation was one direction which young people were particularly well-disposed to. Another participant noted how well young participants related to *'Digital media, visual kinesthetic work.'* Other significant factors which can influence how young people can engage with the training and education services which are available to them are the attitude and training of staff and the location of services. It is important that the location is convenient and that the surroundings and facilities are welcoming for young people.

This research revealed significant agreement amongst service providers as to the differences between young men and young women's engagement with the services at their disposal (Fig 5.1). Not only do they generally agree that young women are much more willing to seek help and support than young men, but they also feel that the young women are much more confident and comfortable than the young men when they do.

Young women are viewed as being more likely to recognise the potential benefits of learning new skills. *'Women are more mature…better at working/talking together. They are happier in group situations. Women are much more likely to admit that they do not know something'; 'Young women are more eager to participate… men don't think it's important. They are too independent. Not motivated'; 'Younger males are harder to engage with. They can have a closed outlook';* young men can find the *'human interactive level difficult and are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem'.*

Fig5.1. Do you think there are differences between young men and young women's enagagement with your service?

A significant outcome of this aspect of the research was the widely held view amongst service providers that the needs of the young people that they engage with have been poorly served by the excessive emphasis placed on academic achievement which characterises the Irish education system. Many of those who took part called for a re-assessment of educational priorities and the establishment of channels where young men and women can benefit from a vocational education which prepares them for the world of work, by providing them with skills which are valued in the work environment, and build on their capabilities and interests.

Training for work should not be seen as an alternative to the education system, but valued as an integral part of a more cohesive and inclusive system. This can only be achieved if all stake-holders are convinced of the merits of a new approach. The merits of vocational education, the practical skills which it generates, and the platform for a satisfying and productive working life which it can provide, need to be re-established and recognised at all levels of the community.

It is vital though that any measures in this regard enjoy the support and recognition of all significant stakeholders. An indication of the pitfalls which can undermine such measures is illustrated in the criticism of the Applied Leaving Certificate offered by one participant in the research, who described the current alternative to the more academic route as *'a road to nowhere'*, because it is simply not valued by potential employers or, indeed, the wider community. Any programmes which offer specific training for the world of work must be valued by employers and the wider community.

How can services for young unemployed people be improved?

There are a whole range of support services available to young unemployed people offering advice and guidance on job opportunities and placements, training and education and their entitlements. Representatives of many of these service providers participated in this survey. The chance to speak to so many providers presented an opportunity to utilise this experience and expertise, not only to pinpoint possible gaps in service provision, but also to generate fresh ideas as to how the services available to young unemployed people might be more effective in offering them support and guidance.

It is a particular and important objective of this research project to engage with employers in Co. Wexford and to establish their perspective on the issues which impact on the young unemployed people of the county, and how these issues might be most effectively tackled from their point of view. Given this strand of the research it was also necessary to question service providers about the relationship between themselves and employment providers; the extent to which they thought closer links between service providers and employers might improve the effectiveness of the services they offer; how closer links could be fostered and how this might improve the effectiveness of the services they offer.

One theme which proved significant in regard to the question of how services might be improved was participants' discomfort at what might be described as the somewhat fractured nature of the overall provision of services. Despite the fact that 95% of service providers described their over-all knowledge of the services available to young people as being good or very good, many had reservations about some aspects of the interaction between organisations, and suggest that the channels through which services providers keep up to date with other services predominantly consist of informal social networks and word of mouth communication (Fig. 6.1). However, there was a strong feeling that more could be done to ensure that vulnerable individuals receive a fully *'integrated'* service and more "formal lines of communication" are established between organisations.

Fig. 6.1 Channels through which service providers keep up to date with other services in Co. Wexford.
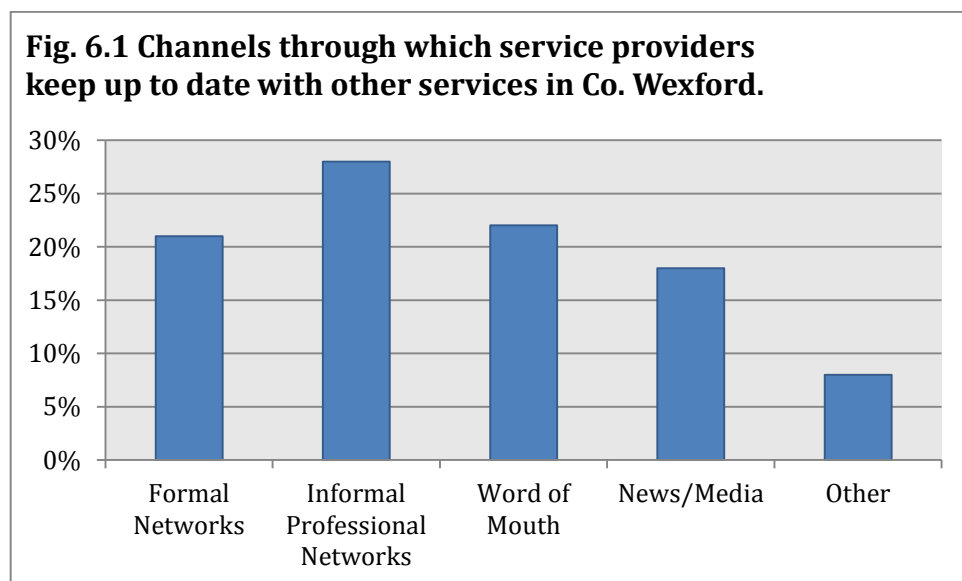
Creating more formal lines of communication between service providers may also enhance referral procedures between and within services. Although 64% of service providers have referral procedures built into their practice and a further 27% suggest that they 'often' refer people on, figure 6.2 shows that 45% of service providers are either unsure of the referral procedures in place or describe them as inefficient. The lack of specificity with referral procedures may heighten a young person's sense of disillusionment with seeking employment and confound beliefs about systems of support.

Many of those who took part in the research expressed their frustration at their inability to follow up referrals across agencies; *'Certain level of follow-up should be built in'.* While acknowledging the legal restrictions which restricted the free-flow of information between agencies, they felt that it was important that they should continue to be kept informed about the progress or otherwise of any individual who had been directed through them to another service.
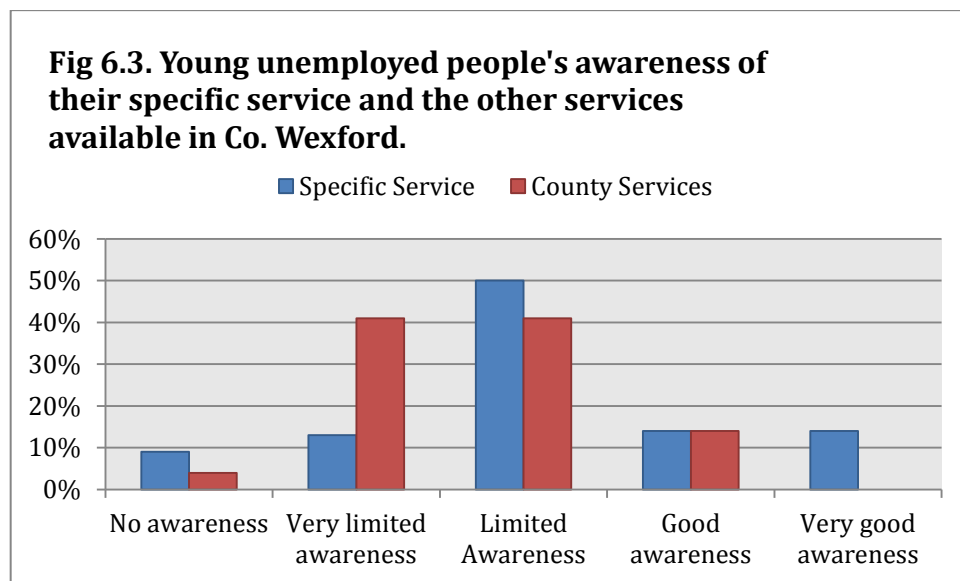
Some contributors suggested that more formal referral forms might play a part in facilitating the *'flow of information'* between agencies in this regard, and allow for *'sign-posting between agencies'.* Others felt that the streamlining process currently being undertaken between the DSP and FÁS might provide a model that could be replicated across the community and voluntary sector, while there was another proposal which considered the possibility of establishing a *'collective digital forum for client specific approach between services'.*

Fig 6.2. Description of the current referral process.
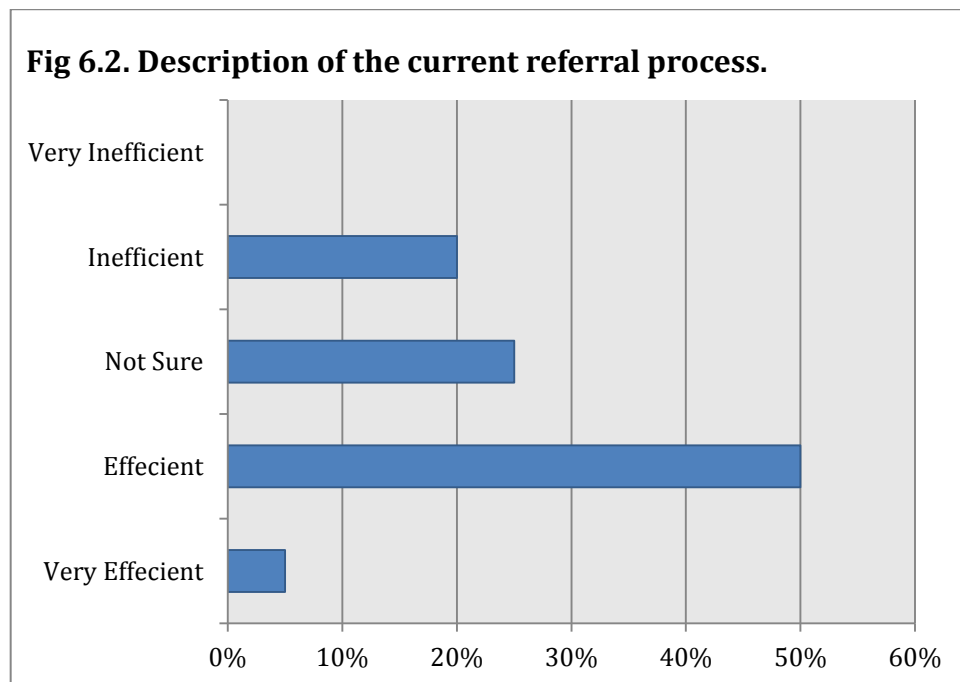
The importance of personal relationships also emerged as an important thread in relation to this topic. Participants felt that inter-agency effectiveness was greatly enhanced when there were personal relationships established between representatives of different agencies. The potential benefits of establishing a *'formal network or forum which would involve all organisations who engage with 18-25 year olds'* was echoed by a number of contributors. Such a forum could provide an opportunity for the fostering of personal networks, ensuring that everybody with the responsibility of working with or for the young unemployed of Co. Wexford could keep informed with detailed and up-to-date knowledge of all the services available to support young people in the county. Such knowledge is vital if a streamlined and efficient service is to be provided.

A frequent complaint from service users of all ages is the frustration involved in being bounced around from one service to the next, being told by one after the other that the services they provide are not appropriate to their particular circumstances. This can have a hugely detrimental effect on the confidence of these young people, and may prove to be an obstacle to future engagement with support services. It is worth noting that similar multi-agency initiatives have already been set up in particular towns in the county (e.g. Wexford) and are proving to be very successful.

Awareness of services by young people was also highlighted as a problem. Many service providers maintain that awareness of, not only their own service, but awareness of services in the whole of Co. Wexford are limited among young people. Seventy two percent of service providers suggest that awareness of services within individual facilities is either limited, very limited, or people have no awareness of the services being provided, while 86% of service providers think the same is true of county wide services (Fig 6.3).

Fig 6.3. Young unemployed people's awareness of their specific service and the other services available in Co. Wexford.

The question may be asked, if this is a target population and it is known that they have limited awareness of services, how are their needs being addressed? Almost 80% of the service providers interviewed stated that they do not explicitly target young populations. Additionally, less than 50% have a strategy specifically aimed at young people (Fig 6.4). More resources should be made available to developing and expanding strategies aimed at young unemployed people in Co. Wexford and subsequently promoting these strategies to the target populations. Furthermore, this promotion should not only be in the local community but should run county wide as 91% of service providers identified that individuals are travelling up to 10 miles and from all over the county to assess different services (Fig 6.5).

Fig 6.4. Service providers target population and the numbers who have a specific strategy for dealing with young people.
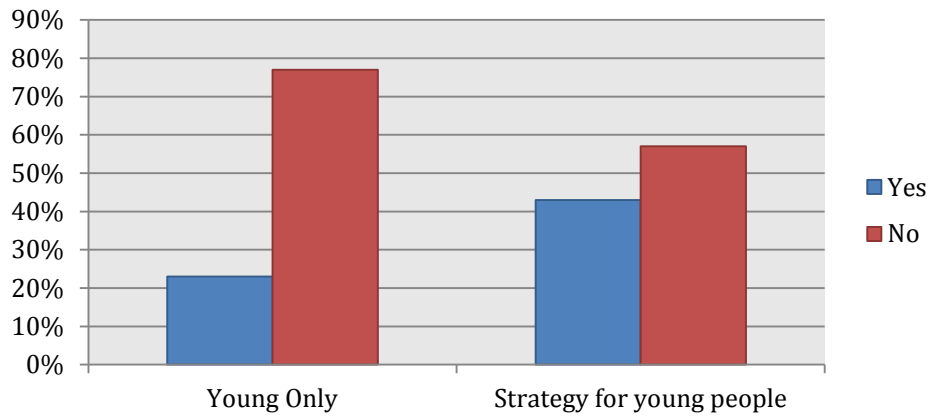

Fig 6.5. Distance travelled by young people to access service providers.
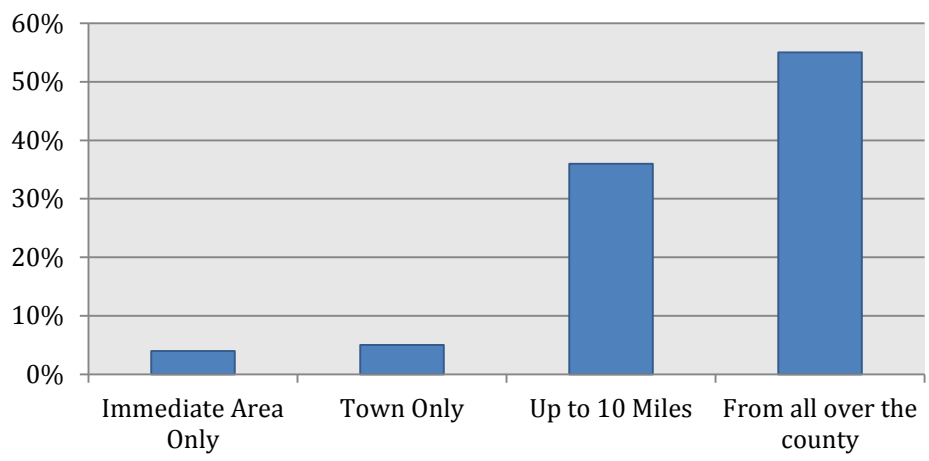
When asked how best to improve awareness of services, it may come as no surprise that word of mouth was considered 'very important' by the majority of service providers (Fig. 6.6). This in effect is 'free' advertising and should be exploited by service providers through establishing specific services for the specific needs of the young unemployed. Providing such services will enhance the views of individuals availing of the services but could be utilised further by engaging with some key individuals so that they will become ambassadors and endorse the service within the community. In addition, social media was also highlighted as an important avenue in raising awareness of services, in particular, Facebook and Twitter. Use of these two social media platforms is highly prevalent among young people, service providers could use this as an additional avenue for promotion and method of raising awareness.

Fig 6.6. Opinion of the importance of different of raising awareness for service providers.
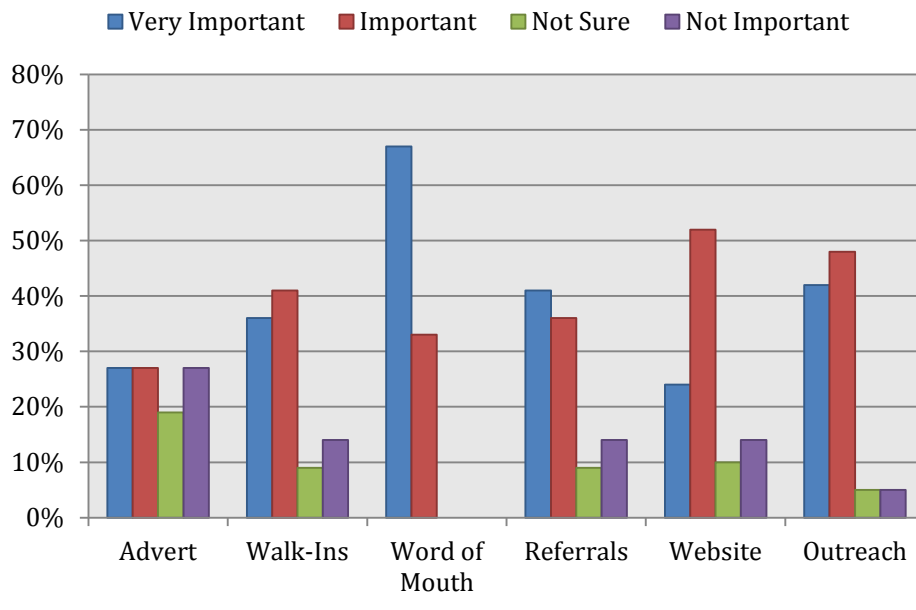
What role can employers play in the provision of services?

Service providers who took part in the survey felt employers should have an integral role to play in any initiative aimed at responding to the issue of youth unemployment (Fig 7.1), and that there was also a need to promote *'entrepreneurship'* amongst young people.

Fig 7.1. "Would increased co-operation between Service Providers and Employers improve services to young unemployed people?"
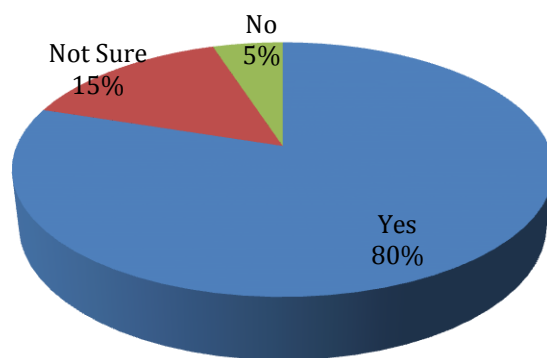
Contributors highlighted the potential role employers could play in informing the *'direction training takes',* and ensuring that training resources are directed into areas where there was genuine opportunities for employment and advancement for young people. According to one respondent what was needed was a forum where *'employers could tell us what is needed.'*

Contributors pointed to the benefits young people might derive from the provision of mentoring, job-shadowing, locally organised internships. Local apprenticeships which concentrated on employment

areas with which apprenticeships are not usually associated such IT and would probably prove very attractive to young people were also advocated. All these type of schemes would require the enthusiastic support of employers if they have any chance of progressing. Any strategy which did garner the widespread support of employers across the county would have the potential to generate a whole pool of mentors, who would be a hugely valuable resource for any community to have at their disposal.

Employers are also seen as having a vital role to play in engaging with young people through service providers - highlighting the importance of training and education and emphasising the qualities employers seek in potential employees. However, when asked what the relationship was like between service providers and employers the majority of service providers said 'could be better' (Fig 7.2). Despite this, many service providers see the advice of 'real world' employers as having great authority when it comes to offering advice about seeking employment.

Fig 7.2. How would you describe the relationship between Service Providers and Employers?
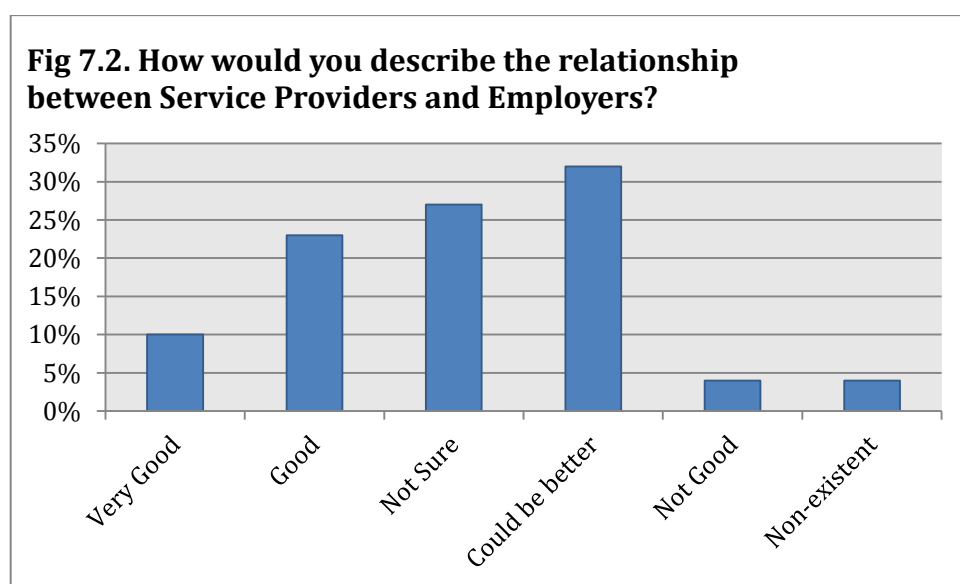
Contributors were adamant that in the current financial environment employers would need to be protected from any costs which participation in any such initiatives might generate *'It must be worthwhile for them to engage with service providers... financially viable.'* In this context the establishment of an employer liaison unit was suggested. This position could have an important role to play in promoting links between employers and service providers; advocating for greater participation by employers in the provision of support and training for the young unemployed, but also emphasising the potential value to them of the services which they the support agencies provide. By encouraging the direct involvement of employers in the design and provision of training programmes the value and legitimacy of these services are established in the local employment market-place, and the 'employability' of individuals who participate on these courses is enhanced.

4.4 Recommendations specific to service providers

- **Focus on job creation and the provision of relevant and worthwhile training**
  - o The single most important factor creating unemployment in Co. Wexford is the lack of jobs. Although the overall state of the economy remains gloomy, service providers and employers should work together in identifying areas of potential growth and potential employment opportunity. These growth areas should be given priority in the development of training schemes and programmes for youth development.

- **Stimulating and sustaining motivation amongst young jobseekers.**
  - o Many service providers identified that the unemployed youth lack motivation and have a negative view of the workplace. Again, working with employers, and the young people themselves, will help service providers develop a deeper understanding of the nature of this complex issue. Alternative approaches may then be developed to help tease the young people back into employment by bridging the gap between the dole queue and the employer. This method may also help break the cycle of intergenerational unemployment.

- **Develop a comprehensive system for referrals between services.**
  - o An overwhelming number of service providers who engaged in the research feel that all service providers should work together to develop efficient methods of referral. Providing an efficient service to the young unemployed people may help overcome any issues surrounding unsuitability for participation within a particular facility. Service providers should work together in developing the tools necessary to provide the most efficient service to the unemployed.

- **Use sport and recreation as a tool to engage young people who are marginalised.**
  - o Sport and recreation was identified as an area which young people were particularly well-disposed to. This area may be used as the initial hook to draw young people into a 'system', and once on-board they could be then introduced to personal and workplace development initiatives.

- **Adapt service / programme delivery to suit the different learning styles of young people.**
  - o Many of the young unemployed people were not well served by the traditional education system and instead respond better to practical / hands on / activity based forms of education and training. Service providers should consider this when planning programmes to cater for the needs of the young unemployed.
  - o Ensure that literacy and numeracy support is factored into the design of all programmes targeting marginalised young people as difficulties in this area can be a major barrier to accessing support and/or employment for many young people.

5. Survey of Employers

All enterprises are operating in an increasingly uncertain world with financial, fiscal, international and local conditions changing from day to day. The overall mood and environment impacts on how they see their day-to-day survival. Employers seek to reduce the uncertainty by hiring and keeping the most engaged and committed workforce to share this uncertainty and plot what they hope will be a future for all in the enterprise.

Recent UK research indicates that '*there is a real mismatch between employers' expectations of young people during the recruitment process and young people's understanding of what is expected of them,*

particularly when it comes to presentation and preparation'[2]. Strengthening the links between young people and the workplace is one of the critical success factors in preventing and tackling youth unemployment. Employers have a valuable role to play in becoming part of the design of work-related training at local level, sharing their 'real world' perspective with young people and underlining the importance of soft skills such as team work, communication and flexibility amongst others. This will pay dividends not only for the young people and society at large but also from a business perspective in terms of identifying and developing a steady stream of talent.

Our survey set out to understand how employers in Co. Wexford saw the young people they interviewed, took on placements and then hired. It looks to understand the struggles and triumphs of having young people as employees.

5.1   Methodology

Wexford Local Development distributed questionnaires through Wexford Chamber of Commerce and other informal contacts. Follow-up phone calls were made to encourage completion. Data was gathered about the characteristics of the enterprise, location, numbers employed, catchment area and sector. We set out to understand the level of awareness and engagement with employment support services. We looked to understand the issues facing employers in employing young people and the positives gained from having them in employment. 21 questionnaires were returned to the researcher, some respondents did not answer all questions. There were 18 complete questionnaires. All questionnaires were analysed without reference to source – anonymously.

5.2   Profile of employers surveyed

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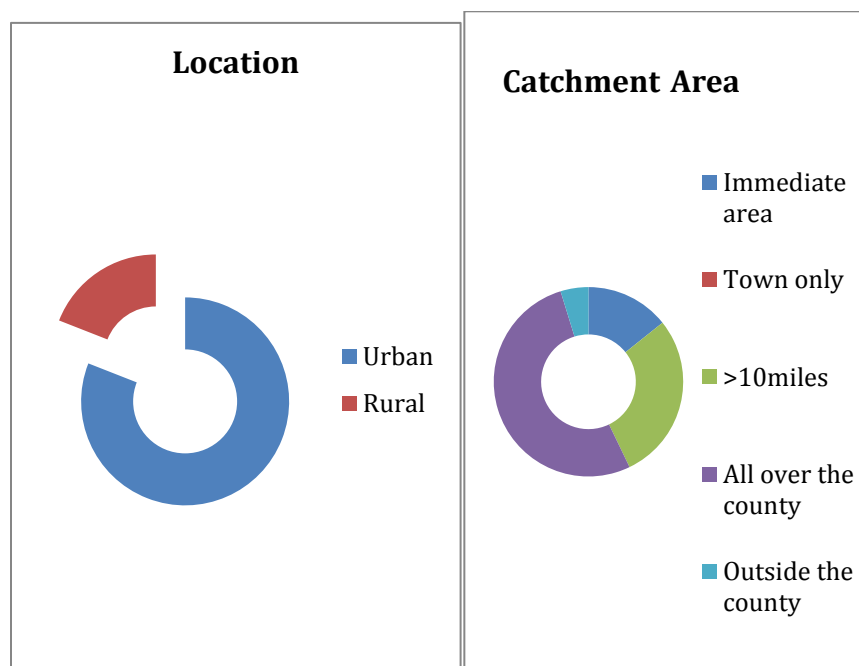
[2] Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, *Employers are from Mars, Young People are from Venus: Addressing the Young People/Jobs Mismatch*, Research Report, April 2013.

While only 4 enterprises were based in rural locations, more than 75% of all enterprises drew their employees from 10 miles or further from their location.
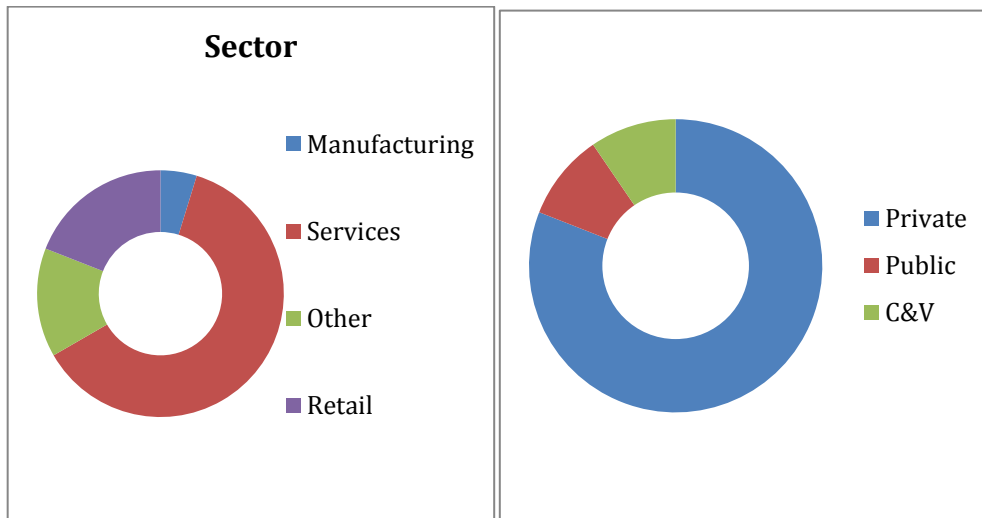
Services comprise more than 60% of the enterprises and retail another 20%. The Public & Community & Voluntary Sectors accounted for 20% of respondents.
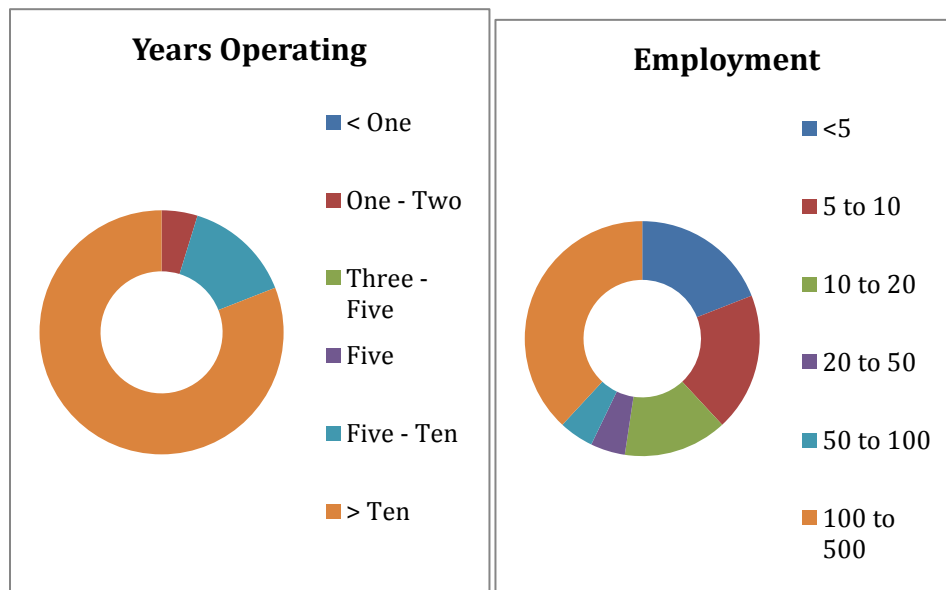
More than 80% of enterprises were up and running for more than 10 years. 40% of respondents employed more than 100 people each. Because of the significance of these employers we have looked at their data separately.

Together these draw a picture of long-standing successful businesses with employers concentrated in urban locations drawing employees from across the county with employee numbers concentrated in a small number of large enterprises.

5.3   Findings and Analysis

Awareness of and engagement with employment support services

- 75% of enterprises had limited or very limited awareness of supports or incentives available to employers to offer positions or placements to young people.
- Only 1/3 of Employers had a good awareness of supports available to young people.
- Only 25% of respondents reported coming into contact with young employees through State or Local Support Agencies.
- 50% of respondents get information on supports for employers from their network, and only 10% get that information from Employment Support Organisations.

The potential and need to offer support and advice to business on an enterprise level to ensure that they are able to support and encourage young people into employment seems obvious. The need to build close working relationships with all enterprises and particularly their support networks is evident while the potential to reach out specifically to significant employers is also clear.

While being well aware of the issues challenging young people, the impression among employers of young people was overwhelmingly positive evidencing a level of goodwill and openness. We will look at the detailed analysis of their sense of young people and the issues facing them and employers further.

Perceptions of challenges and positives of young people as employees

We set out to understand how employers perceived the young people they meet by asking about the reasons for their lack of success at interviews, the barriers to their gaining work and the positive attributes they experienced in the young people they had encountered.

Q16 Reasons for Lack of Success.

Putting the practical issue of 'not meeting interview criteria' to one side the most frequently given response for lack of success by young people is 'poor communication skills' – being given as very significant or significant by more than 80% of respondents.

More than half of respondents point to difficulties with basic literacy and numeracy. Nearly half of all respondents say that 'lack of flexibility' is very significant or significant. While, a lack of educational qualifications or needing more relevant qualifications is mentioned their lack is seen as less significant.

The more general characteristics - flexibility and communications skills – are issues that can be addressed by service providers and should be at the forefront of efforts to ensure that young people present themselves in a way that affords them the best chance of success at interview and during placements.

Q16 Reasons for Lack of Success (100+).
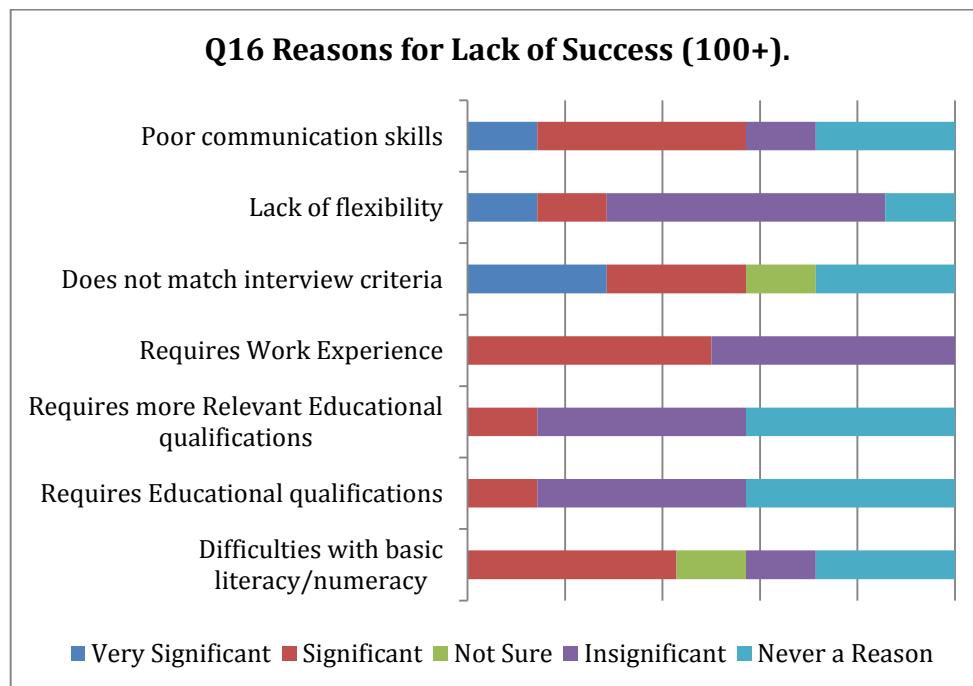
Enterprises employing over 100 employees highlight the issues in different ways – not matching interview criteria is still the most significant issue for respondents. 'Poor communication skills' is highlighted as the most significant issue that can be addressed, though at a less significant level than among employers in general. Requiring work experience then comes into focus as an issue for half of all major employers. This is followed by 'difficulties with basic literacy/numeracy'.

More rigorous screening by big employers with the support of Human Resources Departments at the pre-interview stage could account for the lower intensity of the issues among this group of respondents. Nonetheless, a clear need to provide all young people with support around basic skills is still evident.

The power to communicate well demonstrates confidence and competence in moving into and through the world of work and is of course crucial for any young person's success, nay survival in the world of work.

In summary, major employers are more positive about the young people they interview than respondents in general. They do need young people to have work experience and may be open to being encouraged to become part of a formal relationship that supports young people in placements that make this more likely. How young people behave, look and connect with potential employers at interview is crucial – it goes without saying, but here it is reiterated. For a young person to impress in a buyers' market, where the buyer – employer is under huge stress to get the best, most engaged and committed work-force to ensure her survival, she is going to be giving strenuous attention to picking those who seem from their way of engaging and connecting to be the most likely to be contribute.

Q38 Young people are...
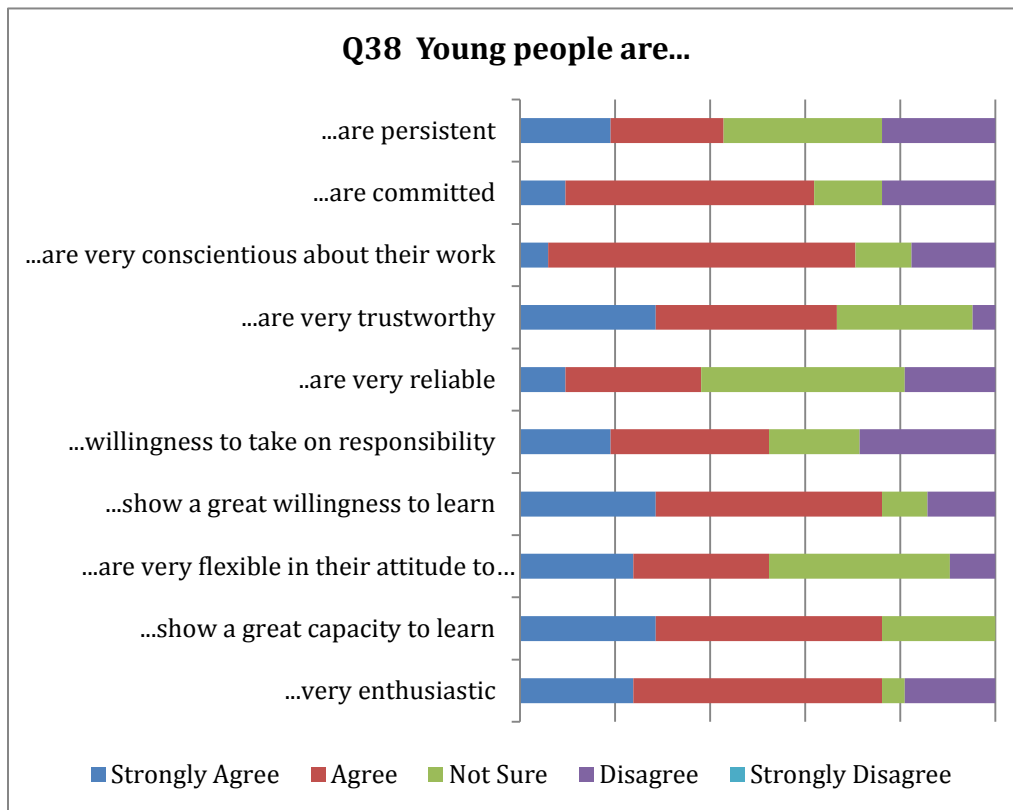
Employers were asked about their general opinion of 'the young people they meet' across a range of positive attributes. The capacity to learn was the most praised attribute among employers followed by a willingness to learn. There is some contrast between 'conscientiousness about work' and 'reliability' with 'reliability' scoring significantly less well.

Young people are praised for their 'enthusiasm' and seen as 'trustworthy', their 'willingness to take on responsibility' is acknowledged. However some employers struggled to attribute young people they meet with - 'willingness to take on responsibility, 'persistence' or 'commitment'.

Q38 Young People I deal with (100+)

- ...are persistent
- ...are committed
- ...are very conscientious about their work
- ...are very trustworthy
- ..are very reliable
- ...willingness to take on responsibility
- ...show a great willingness to learn
- ...are very flexible in their attitude to work
- ...show a great capacity to learn
- ...very enthusiastic

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Not Sure ■ Disagree ■ Disagree Strongly

Larger employers followed the pattern of the sample in general by praising the 'capacity' and 'willingness to learn' of the young people they deal with. Young people's 'flexibility' was acknowledged, as was their 'enthusiasm'.
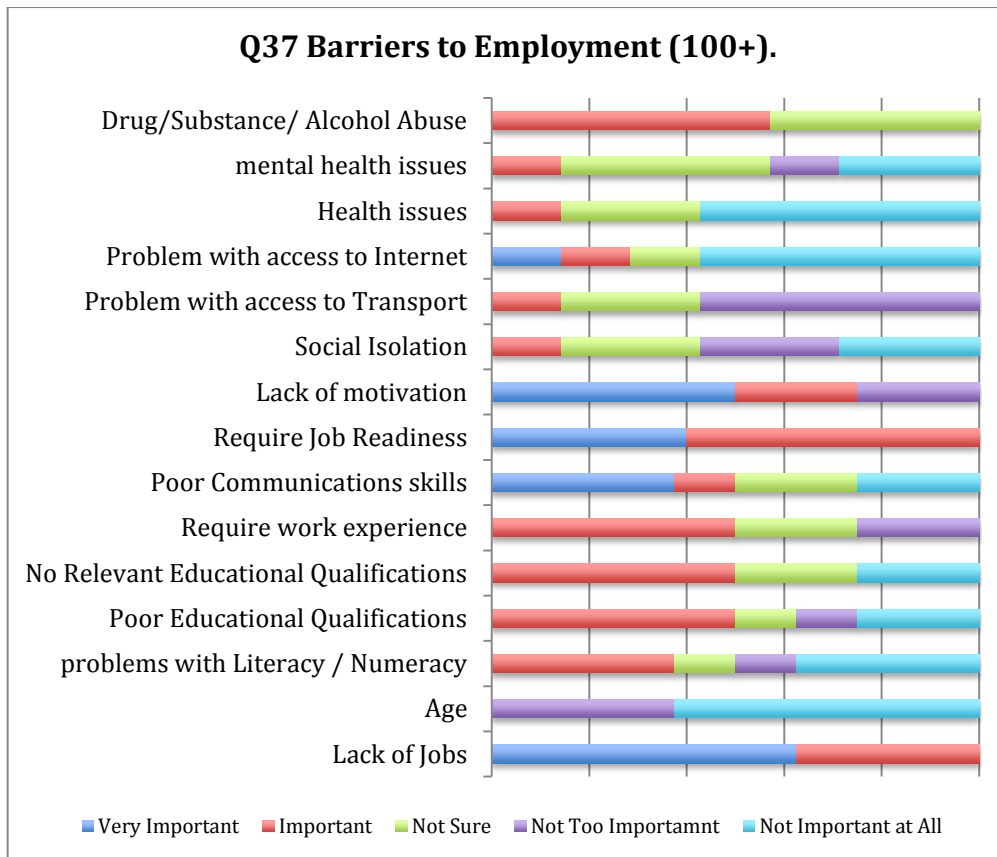
All employers are prepared to endorse young people as having to potential to learn, to engage and to develop. If young people understand that employers have this positive stance and if they can respond they are more likely to achieve their potential.

Q37 Main Barriers to Employment.

Legend: Very Important, Important, Not Sure, Not Too Important, Not Important at All

Categories (top to bottom):
- Drug/Substance/ Alcohol Abuse
- Mental health issues
- Health issues
- Problem with access to Internet
- Problem with access to Transport
- Social Isolation
- Lack of motivation
- Require Job Readiness
- Poor Communications skills
- Require work experience
- No Relevant Educational Qualifications
- Poor Educational Qualifications
- Problems with Literacy / Numeracy
- Age
- Lack of Jobs

'Lack of jobs' was universally held out as the most frequent barrier to young people finding work. 'Age' was least likely to be given as a reason.

'Lack of motivation' then appears as the most important reason. 'Poor communication skills' and 'lack of job readiness' then come in as the next most significant issues.

Qualifications then start to be mentioned as 'important', as do 'work experience' and 'literacy/numeracy'.

Q37 Barriers to Employment (100+).

Legend: ■ Very Important ■ Important ■ Not Sure ■ Not Too Importamnt ■ Not Important at All

For employers of more than 100 people, 'lack of job readiness' is the greatest issue preventing young people accessing employment.

'Lack of motivation' and 'poor communication skills' appear again as issues preventing the hiring of young people.

Employers were clear about the struggles they have with young people but equally clear about the positive experiences they have had and the optimistic light in which they view young people's capacity and ability to learn.

5.4 Recommendations specific to employers

- Ensure that the key people in business and business support in County Wexford are engaged with addressing the impact of the challenge facing young people in the county. Enrol major employers in County Wexford in particular in making available resources to address the challenge facing young people in the county.
- Support a process of engagement between employers and service providers based on building long-term relationships that foster understanding of the issues facing all sides.
- Develop a countywide programme to support the engagement of employers in programmes which actively bridge the perceived gap between the worlds of education and training and the workplace. These could include work experience programmes, mentoring, site visits, talks by employers and 'soft skills' development. Involving young people and business people in such a process would foster greater understanding of the different challenges facing both sides.
- Communicate to young people that employers acknowledge them as willing to learn – for young people to acknowledge their willingness to learn is a positive.

Participants in the Research Process

Young People

Focus group discussions with young people took place in seven locations both urban and rural during November 2012. The groups were engaged either with a training or education provider or with a community-based youth organisation. All were aged between 18 and 25 and were unemployed at the time of the research. Educational attainment tended towards the lower end of the spectrum (FETAC Level 5 and below).

Location	Host organisation	Profile of young people
Wexford	Youth Train Wexford Community Training Centre, Cornmarket, Wexford.	Young who have left Youth Train and are now looking for work.
Wexford	Young Mothers' Group, St. Michael's Hall, Green Street, Wexford.	Young women aged between 18 – 25 years undertaking a training and personal development programme under LCDP with support from WLD.
Enniscorthy	VTOS, Bellefield G.A.A Complex, Bellefield, Enniscorthy.	Young jobseekers aged 21 – 25 who did not complete Leaving Cert.
New Ross	Youth New Ross, CBS Primary School Grounds, The Bullawn, New Ross, Co. Wexford.	Young people aged 18 – 25 who are involved in a consultation group with Youth New Ross and are themselves unemployed
Gorey	Gorey Youth Needs, "Woodstock Hall", Lower Esmonde Street, Gorey.	Young unemployed people aged 18 – 22 who are participants in Gorey Youth Needs activities
Clonroche	Contacted via Clonroche Community Pre-School and WLD's Traveller Community Development Programme.	Young Traveller women, young mothers from the local area.
Bunclody	Bunclody Vocational College, Irish Street, Bunclody.	PLC students who are under 25 years of age and have returned to education following a period of unemployment.

Service Providers

- Department of Social Protection
- Co. Wexford VEC (VTOS, Youthreach, Vocational Colleges/PLCs)
- FÁS Employment Services
- FDYS Youth Work Ireland
- Youth Train Wexford Community Training Centre
- Wexford Local Development
    - Local Employment Service
    - Local and Community Development Programme
    - The Cornmarket Project

Employers

- All in One Marquee & Leisure Hire
- AMPM Safety
- Buí Bolg Ltd.
- Celtic Linen
- Celtic Link Ferries
- Culcita Garden Products
- D'Lush Restaurant
- Jungle Box Daycare
- Kelly's Resort Hotel
- Leisure Max
- Jones Business Systems
- Paganinis Desserts
- Pettitt's Supervalu
- PTX Tyres
- Riverbank House Hotel
- Riverside Park Hotel
- Sam McCauleys Ltd.
- Talbot Hotel
- Westgate Design
- Wexford Insurances
- St. Helen's Bay Golf & Country Club

Profile of The Men's Development Network

Commencing in late 2012, the Men's Development Network assisted Wexford Local Development in preparing and carrying out this research project which investigates the experience of young people, services providers and employers in relation to unemployment in Co. Wexford. Since 1997, the Men's Development Network has been supporting men in groups to see and address the issues facing themselves, their families and their community. The network has set out to hear men's voices and bring their issues to the fore by developing programmes to meet their needs. The Network developed and is in the process of completing the analysis and report on the fourth 'Survey of Challenges Facing Unemployed Men and Women'. Surveys have been carried out in Counties Waterford, Galway, Kilkenny and Wexford. The Network has developed programmes for men in Waterford and Galway in response to the needs identified.