Taoiseach and Ministers Burton and Hayes officially open new Intreo Centre in Castlebar

Transformative approach to employment services will help local jobseekers back to work

An Taoiseach Enda Kenny, Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton T.D., and the Minister of State with responsibility for the Office of Public Works, Brian Hayes T.D., today (Friday 21st February 2014) officially opened the new Intreo Centre in Castlebar, County Mayo.

A key element of the Government’s Pathways to Work strategy to tackle unemployment, Intreo is the Department of Social Protection’s transformative approach to helping people get back to work, offering an integrated employment and support service.

Located at Michael Davitt House, the Castlebar centre will provide a one-stop shop for jobseekers where they can get income and employment supports in the one place for the first time.

Intreo Centres in Achill and Belmullet are already operating while another is due to open in Ballina in the coming weeks. Together with Castlebar, these centres will play a crucial role in helping jobseekers in Mayo back to work, training and education. The Intreo Centres in Mayo and nationwide are being rolled out with the assistance of the OPW, which is responsible for property procurement and management on behalf of the State.

The Taoiseach said: “Just as the Government had a plan to exit the bail-out, we now have a clear plan for a recovery in jobs and growth. The pressing reform of our social welfare system and employment support service is an integral part of that plan. The launch of the Castlebar Intreo Centre today represents another step in achieving that plan. Clients of the Castlebar office will receive a higher level of personalised employment advice with more frequent face-to-face interviews and with better links to local training options and employers. The Government has opened 44 Intreo Centres around the country to date and, by the end of the year, the nationwide network will be complete.”

Minister Burton said: “As Minister for Social Protection, I have focused since coming to office on transforming the Department from the passive benefits provider of old to an active and engaged employment service, through the Pathways to Work strategy. That work – and the wider Government drive to boost job creation - is paying off. Unemployment has fallen from a peak of 15.1% to 12.3%, and an additional 58,000 additional people are now in jobs compared with last year. But there remains much to be done, and that’s why Intreo Centres such as Castlebar are so crucial, providing a range of supports for jobseekers and employers alike.”
Minister Hayes said: “I’m very pleased to be in Castlebar today at the official opening of the new Intreo Centre. My colleagues in the OPW were set very ambitious targets by Government with regard to the delivery of the new Intreo service offices. I’m very proud to say that, working closely with the Department of Social Protection, we have delivered a large portion of the targeted 63 new offices, the balance of which will be delivered by the end of this year.”

The new office in Castlebar will house 47 Department of Social Protection staff providing a full service, including an integrated reception, integrated decisions unit, activation and community welfare services Monday to Friday, serving Castlebar town and its environs.

While in Castlebar, Minister Burton also hosted a major Employer Briefing organised by the Department of Social Protection and supported by IBEC, Chambers Ireland, CIPD and ISME. At the briefing, which was held at the TF Royal Hotel and attended by more than 150 employers from the West and the North West regions, the Minister detailed the range of supports available to employers from the Department.

Minister Burton spoke in particular of the benefits of the JobsPlus wage subsidy scheme, which sees the State pay cash grants to businesses which hire jobseekers who have been out of work for more than 12 months.

The scheme offers a grant of €7,500 paid over two years to an employer who hires a jobseeker who has been unemployed for 12 months or more. The grant increases to €10,000 if the jobseeker has been more than two years’ unemployed.

Minister Burton said: “JobsPlus is a very generous and important scheme and I would urge employers to avail of it to expand their business. Already JobsPlus has helped to support 1,286 full-time jobs since its launch just a few short months ago. Employers can get all the detail they need on JobsPlus and other supports at the Castlebar Intreo Centre, by contacting 094 9063700 or by visiting www.welfare.ie.”

ENDS

Note for Editors
The Intreo process consists of five main elements:

An integrated ‘one-stop-shop’ reception service: This replaces the three previously separate services from FÁS, the Department of Social Protection and the Community Welfare Service (HSE). In practice, this means that the client receives complete information on a more timely basis in one location, and that all follow-on appointments can be scheduled at the same time.

A single decisions process: Previously, clients submitting claims for social welfare payments might have had to wait some time for their claim to be awarded as details of their employment status and income were assessed. While awaiting this payment, clients were entitled, by submitting a separate claim to the Community Welfare Service, to an emergency Supplementary Welfare Allowance payment. The new Intreo process significantly reduces the time taken to decide a claim and those clients who might still require a supplementary payment can have this decision made as part of the single process rather than having to submit a separate claim. As part of the decisions process, a personal profile (known as PEX) is captured for each individual and this profile informs the approach taken at the next stage in the process – activation.
**An integrated activation/employment service process:** Previously clients had to wait at least three months before an appointment could be made with an employment services officer, and in some cases this appointment had to be triggered by the client themselves.

Now, under the new process, all clients must attend a group engagement session – typically within a week or two of registering for jobseekers' payments. Depending on their personal profile, they are subsequently scheduled for follow-on one-to-one meetings with an experienced employment services officer.

The group engagement session is designed to give clients basic information on their entitlements and the services that are available to them in order to help them return to work. Each client is given a fact sheet in preparation for and in advance of the one-to-one meeting. At the one-to-one meeting, the employment services officer/case worker will go into greater detail as to the employment and training supports available and help the client to prepare a Personal Progression Plan (PPP).

Follow-up meetings are then scheduled to monitor progress against the plan and to adjust it, as circumstances dictate. Clients may also be contacted in the periods between one-to-one meetings to check if the client is following the actions agreed under the PPP.

Ultimately clients who, despite the assistance of their case officer cannot make progress on the pathway into employment/further education, may be directed to, and required to, take up a place on a State employment or training scheme.

**Social Contract – Rights and Responsibilities:** This contract underpins the Intreo approach.

It is a record of the commitments being made by the Intreo service and also of the commitments expected of clients who avail of that service. In other words, a social contract to ensure that all parties understand that with rights to supports from the Department come responsibilities to engage with those services. The commitments expected of clients are that they will:

- Co-operate with the Intreo service in developing a Personal Progression Plan.
- Use this plan to strive to secure employment.
- Attend all meetings requested by the Department.
- Provide all information requested by the Department.
- Clients who register for the service will be expected to sign and honour this Record of Mutual Commitments.
- Failure to honour this commitment can lead to a reduction in, and ultimately a cessation of, payments.

**Employer Engagement:** The Department already offers a suite of services that can assist employers in recruiting staff from the Live Register. These include:

- Job advertising and job-matching services (jobsireland.ie)
- An internship scheme - JobBridge (jobbridge.ie)
- Financial supports for recruiting long-term unemployed people – JobsPlus (jobsplus.ie)
- In-work supports to employees – Part-time Job Incentive scheme and Family Income Supplement
- WorkAbility services, including wage subsidies and grants, for employing people with a disability.