An Evaluation of the Focus Ireland LEAP Programme
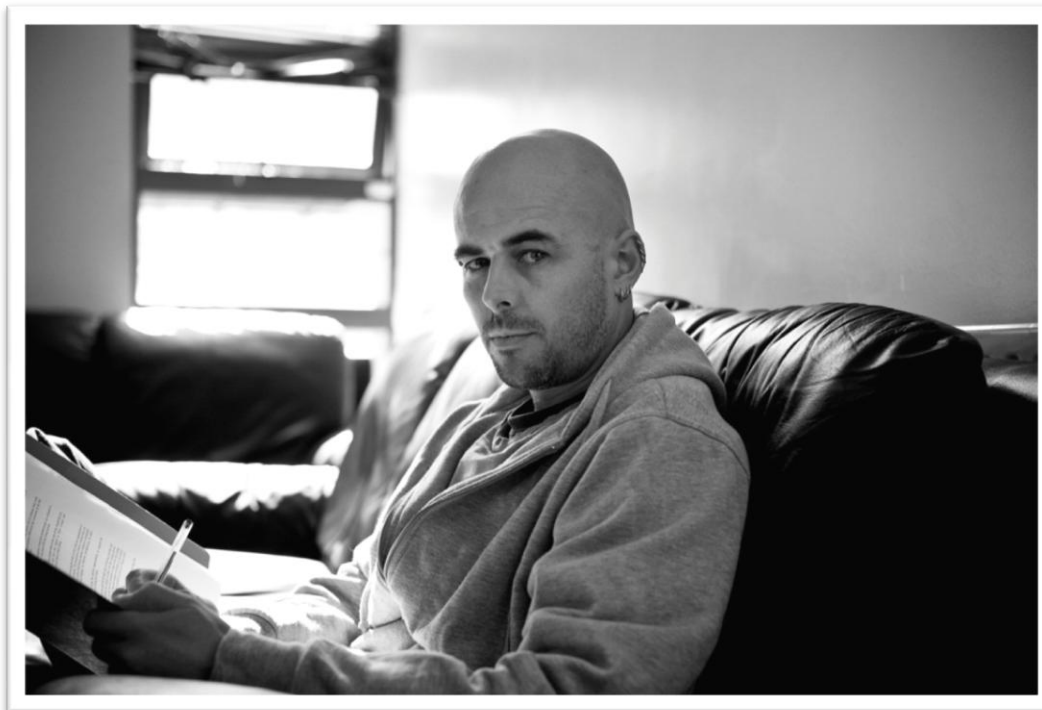
Focus Ireland | Creating homes together

Author: Sandra Velthuis, Whitebarn Consulting

Focus Ireland
9-12 High Street
Dublin 8
Telephone: 01 – 881 5900
Email: info@focusireland.ie
Web: www.focusireland.ie

Sandra Velthuis
Whitebarn Consulting
43 Whitebarn Road
Churchtown
Dublin 14
Telephone: 01 – 296 7694
Mobile: 085 – 167 4425
Email: contact@whitebarn.info
Web: www.whitebarn.info

Acknowledgements

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[1] Learning, Employment And Progression

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1	Executive summary

1.1   Background

Whilst access to learning and work opportunities can play a critical role in tackling homelessness, many people who have experienced homelessness, or who are at risk of homelessness, find it difficult to engage with mainstream labour market supports, even those targeted at the long-term unemployed. In 2010/11, Focus Ireland built on the experience of two of its previous education and training programmes to provide an innovative participant-centred response.

The LEAP programme was established to meet the learning needs of 45 low-skilled and long-term unemployed individuals (primarily aged 18-35) in the Dublin area, who were previously homeless or at risk of homelessness, and who were deemed ready to progress to training and employment, in order to provide them with the skills required for identified labour market opportunities in the food, warehousing and social care sectors.

Focus Ireland subsequently commissioned an external summative evaluation of LEAP. This consisted of the development of an evaluation framework, a review of relevant external literature and internal documentation, extensive consultation with key and secondary stakeholders, data analysis and evidence-informed reporting.

1.2   Context

Evidence from the UK highlights how participation in learning and skills development can transform the lives of homeless people, as well as delivering important benefits for a wide variety of governmental policies. Tailored, personalised programmes delivered by voluntary sector providers, that focus on work readiness and employability have been shown to be especially useful.

Ireland's policy and legal framework recognises the right to educational and employment opportunities for all, and notes that education and training are vital in preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness. The Government acknowledges that accessing and retaining full-time employment is one of the most important routes out of poverty and social exclusion, and accepts that progression to education and training may be more likely outcomes for those most distant from the labour market. It has put in place various labour market initiatives to address rising unemployment during the current economic recession. The need for effective skills development (including literacy) and the supports needed to overcome related barriers, have also been explicitly recognised. The specific needs of homeless people in this regard have been relatively well documented.

The education and training services offered by Focus Ireland are unique, but a range of other providers in the Dublin area offers similar or related services.

1.3 Inputs and outputs

Focus Ireland is a large and experienced organisation with an established infrastructure, which proved significant in terms of its ability to plan, develop and deliver the LEAP programme within the short timeframe available. Whilst satisfaction was expressed with the level of funding provided by the Government under the LMAF, timelines between grant approval and programme delivery were uncomfortably tight.

The LEAP programme was based primarily in the Ballymun Job Centre, which proved very effective. The use of additional nearby premises for some programme functions had more mixed results. Three Focus Ireland staff already working in the organisation oversaw the programme, and three[2] additional staff members were recruited to fill Project Worker positions. The staff experienced a heavy and challenging workload. Eight external tutors were contracted to deliver some of the course modules and 18 speakers delivered short sessions on a voluntary basis.

The design and implementation of the LEAP programme were broadly aligned with the values and protocols contained within relevant quality standard documents. Fifteen participants were recruited onto each of the three courses (food, warehousing and social care). Of these, 67% were male, 62% were in the 18-35 age group and 84% were long-term unemployed. 11% had a history of homelessness and 7% were experiencing homelessness at the start of the programme. Many more were at risk of homelessness due to their socio-economic situation. The selection and recruitment processes for participants were by necessity hurried. Ideally, more time should have been available to undertake comprehensive needs assessments.

A series of quality stand-alone accredited modules for both industry-specific skills and more generic skills development were delivered as part of the LEAP programme. In addition, unaccredited generic skills training modules were delivered. Where feasible, staff adapted original course plans in order to meet arising needs.

Group sessions were generally successful. Average attendance on the three courses was 48%. Although one-to-one support was offered to all participants, many did not avail of this, and as a result there was less emphasis on the development and revisiting of individual support plans than originally anticipated. Education and career advice was provided, but this aspect of the programme was found to need review. Thirteen participants undertook two-week unpaid work experience placements with local employers.

Significant data was collected throughout the course of the programme, which could in future be streamlined and enhanced. In delivering the programme, Focus Ireland worked with a number of external agencies (especially the Ballymun Job Centre), but the range of organisations it engaged with was different to that initially predicted.

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[2] 2.5 full-time equivalent

1.4   Outcomes and impacts

Participants who completed their course experienced an increase in confidence and self-esteem, enhanced interpersonal and social skills, and extended social networks. There was evidence of an improved ability to participate and a broadening of aspirations and life opportunities. 35 participants received a total of 131 accredited awards. For those who completed work placements, the experience was positive. As the majority of participants did not, for a range of reasons, do work experience, this aspect of the programme was found to need review. The completion rate for the LEAP programme was 58%, compared to the initial target and a national average[3] of 80%. Reasons for non-completion varied.

Data on progression routes were incomplete as LEAP staff lost contact with some of the participants over time. At least seven participants successfully secured full-time or part-time employment and there was also some evidence of casual employment. At least three participants went on to further education or training and at least four were undertaking voluntary work. The fragility of people's progression was noted, however, and it was questioned how they would cope in the short- to medium-term without further support. There were a number of unintended outcomes and impacts, including improved health and enhanced active citizenship.

Focus Ireland participated in European research on employability for homeless people during the course of the LEAP programme.

Without doubt, the LEAP programme contributed towards Focus Ireland's vision. The organisation is clearly committed to continuing to fill identified gaps in training and education services for people vulnerable to homelessness, but it should clearly identify the most appropriate client group for any such services in future.

The LEAP programme served as a good example of a practical initiative that addressed specific government priorities for tackling unemployment and homelessness. However, its impact was limited, due to its once-off nature, short duration, small scale and local remit. This in no way implies, however, that it cannot be improved and scaled up in a way that will benefit greater numbers of people over a longer period of time. Any future programme must be longer-term (not least so that the valuable experience built up by the organisation is not lost) and must also more actively seek to learn from, and collaborate with, a greater number of organisations and services.

1.5   Conclusions

In broad terms, Focus Ireland achieved what it set out to do with the LEAP programme and did so in a professional manner. The level of resources invested into LEAP was almost adequate for a programme of this size, although the programme might have benefited from at least one additional staff member. Consideration should also be given in the future to involving volunteers (not just voluntary speakers). Anybody working on the programme in

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[3] All programmes funded under the LMAF

any capacity would need to have the aptitude and attitude to fulfill their role effectively. The staffing structure and allocation of responsibilities would require some reconfiguration in the future. Any future programme should ensure that office space is located at the same location as training and meeting space. The most significant challenges to success were the short timeline for delivery, which led to a reactive working environment, and the fact that the programme ended as soon as funding ceased.

In future, more careful selection procedures and more individual support would be necessary. Education/career guidance and work experience should be integrated more fully into the programme. Greater emphasis should also be given to literacy.

It is almost impossible to calculate what value-for-money was offered or what social value was created by the LEAP programme in the absence of relevant data. If Focus Ireland is committed to re-running LEAP, it should address this issue. It should also explore all possible avenues for resourcing the programme, including social enterprise development.

Focus Ireland should be commended for establishing the LEAP programme. Its committed staff worked hard under difficult circumstances to provide a flexible, varied and nurturing environment assisting participants to access pathways out of long-term unemployment. For those who were ready to engage at the start and ready to disengage at the end, the programme provided an invaluable opportunity to do so. Many others, however, would have benefited from a more thorough initial assessment of their support needs and more intense support and/or longer-term support to achieve the same goal.

Clearly, there is a need for programmes like LEAP, and an enhanced version of the LEAP programme has a crucial role to play within the labour market activation sphere. The lack of sustainable funding for initiatives like LEAP is a major concern. It is important that Focus Ireland works with other organisations in the voluntary, statutory and private sectors so that they might jointly work towards solutions that eliminate social exclusion.

1.6   Recommendations

It is recommended that the Government:

1   Funds an enhanced and longer-term version of the LEAP programme that addresses the employability support needs of people who have been homeless, are currently homeless and are at risk of homelessness.
2   Adopts a social value approach to funding and evaluation of programmes such as LEAP.
3   Makes available information that will facilitate the measurement of social value creation for programmes such as LEAP.

It is recommended that Focus Ireland:

1   Continues the LEAP programme in an amended form that builds on its strengths and addresses its weaknesses.

2   Gives careful consideration to the most appropriate target group for the new programme.
3   Adopts a more outcomes-focused and/or social value-focused approach from the start of the new programme.
4   Collaborates to a greater extent with appropriate actors in the statutory, corporate, community/voluntary and academic sectors in the planning and delivery of the new programme.
5   Strengthens its relationship with statutory funders.
6   Explores the use of additional and/or alternative funding models, such as social enterprise, and other resources, such as volunteers.
7   Shares widely the learning from this evaluation.

2	Introduction and methodology

This chapter briefly introduces the LEAP programme and outlines the methodology that was used for undertaking the evaluation.

2.1 Introduction to the LEAP programme

Focus Ireland is a national voluntary organisation that has been working since 1985 to prevent people becoming homeless, remaining homeless or returning to homelessness. The organisation has long recognised the importance of integration and re-integration into the labour market as a way of ensuring that a person's home is sustained. At the same time, it is aware that people who have experienced homelessness face enormous difficulties in obtaining employment. This was the case even during boom times, and holds true even more during today's unfavourable economic climate.

Whilst access to learning and work opportunities can play a critical role in tackling homelessness, many of those with experience of homelessness, or at risk of homelessness, find it difficult to engage with mainstream labour market supports, even those targeted at the long-term unemployed. Barriers to participation are multi-faceted and can be contextual, institutional, informational, situational and personal/dispositional in nature[4].

Focus Ireland ran an education, training and employment programme called Spokes in Dublin 7 between 2002 and 2009. This programme provided over-16s with low levels of educational attainment and typically negative experiences of formal education with a range of supports. In 2009, Focus Ireland commenced PETE[5] – a foundation education and training programme in Dublin 8 for over-18s residing in emergency accommodation. The organisation found, however, that gaps remained in the availability of appropriate service provision for those who were no longer homeless or who were vulnerable to homelessness.

In early 2010, Focus Ireland successfully tendered for funding under the Government's LMAF. It was one of 55 successful tenders, out of a total of 370. In August 2010, Focus Ireland established the LEAP programme to promote social inclusion through the provision of a targeted yet flexible programme for up to 45 persons in long-term housing who may have been homeless and/or for those who were long-term unemployed and therefore at higher risk of homelessness. LEAP was based in Dublin 11 and consisted of three part-time courses centred on the skills needed to enter the social care sector, the warehousing industry or the food industry. Courses contained FETAC[6] and other accredited modules, and also included life skills development, relevant work experience and one-to-one guidance and

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[4] TSA Consultancy, *Evaluation of the Spokes Programme*, Focus Ireland, 2010
[5] Preparation for Education, Training and Employment
[6] Further Education and Training Awards Council, http://www.fetac.ie

support. The social welfare payments of students were not affected by participating in LEAP. The multiple barriers faced by individuals attempting to access pathways into further education and employment could begin to be addressed through this participant-centred response.

2.2   Purpose of the evaluation

As stated in the *Invitation to tender*, the purpose of this evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the LEAP programme in achieving its stated aims and objectives and to prepare recommendations to inform the future planning/development of this programme. Specifically, its objectives were to (pp. 2-3):

- *"Provide a profile and history of the LEAP programme.*
- *Identify the views of participants, staff, funders and other key stakeholders on the effectiveness of the LEAP programme.*
- *Assess how this programme is meeting the national and local strategic objectives outlined in the Government's homeless strategy 'The Way Home', by building the self-esteem of participants and sustaining pathways out of homelessness and unemployment, towards self-sufficiency, educational attainment and independence.*
- *Highlight the strengths of the programme, and identify existing/potential barriers (practice, policy and resources) that might prevent the progression of participants that are accessing the programme into the labour market.*
- *Assess current funding streams for the programme and future funding opportunities/issues.*
- *Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme in meeting its objectives, and analyse its outcomes/key performance indicators (i.e. 'hard' outcomes – e.g. number of qualification awards received by participants, number of participants moving onto further education or obtaining employment on completion of the programme; and 'soft' outcomes – e.g. increased self-esteem of participants). Measure the extent that the programme has supported people based on participant satisfaction and evidenced-based findings.*
- *Identify evidenced need for the programme at local/regional level.*
- *Assess the cost effectiveness/financial benefit of the programme, comparing programme costs against costs associated with long-term unemployment.*
- *Make recommendations on the future direction of the programme based on the evaluation's findings and conclusions."*

Those with a specific interest in the learning gained from this evaluation are Focus Ireland, the programme's funders and any potential future funders.

2.3   Evaluation methodology

The consultant used a range of research methods in order to complete the evaluation as effectively and efficiently as possible. These were primarily qualitative in nature, although

some quantitative data were also gathered.

The methods used were:

- Review of external literature
- Development of an evaluation framework
- Review of internal documentation
- Key stakeholder consultation
- Secondary stakeholder consultation
- Analysis and reporting.

2.3.1 Literature review

In order to place the LEAP programme in context, the evaluation process began with a literature review of key external documents and websites, both in Ireland, and to a lesser extent the UK (see chapters 3 and 11).

2.3.2 Evaluation framework development

The literature review was followed by the development of an evaluation framework, which provided the structure for the remaining research and which forms the foundation of the main body of this report. As the timeframe from the funding application to service delivery was very tight, little time was spent at the start on planning for monitoring and evaluation of the programme. In the absence of a comprehensive set of indicators to measure success, the consultant retrospectively used available documentation to draft a framework with appropriate indicators and means of gathering the required evidence. The approved framework can be found in section 4.7.

2.3.3 Documentation review

A desk study of relevant internal documentation relating to the LEAP programme formed the next stage of the process (see chapter 11). This included the initial tender, Focus Ireland 2010 Annual Report, operational guidelines, quantitative data from the MIPs[7] database, anonymised data from the client database, certification records, feedback from clients and work experience providers, and a self-evaluation of the LEAP programme completed by Focus Ireland as part of the LMAF funding requirements.

2.3.4 Key stakeholder consultation

It was decided that for the purposes of this evaluation, semi-structured in-depth interviews with a sizeable number of key stakeholders would be conducted. These interviews would provide valuable evidence for the evaluation, by offering a private setting in which very different stakeholders could frankly discuss their views of the programme. A list of key

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[7] MIPs is Focus Ireland's Management Information Processing system

stakeholders was identified, comprising all programme participants, a number of internal stakeholders (that is, key Focus Ireland staff) and a number of external stakeholders (that is, key representatives from external agencies/companies). It was agreed that Focus Ireland's *Ethical guidelines for conducting research involving people at risk of or experiencing homelessness* (2011) would be adhered to at all times and that similar respect would be afforded to other stakeholders.

It was acknowledged that the total number of stakeholders that could be interviewed was constrained by the available budget and timeline for the evaluation. It was decided to set a target for each type of stakeholder group. If there was an insufficient initial response, efforts would be made to reach the target. LEAP participant involvement in the process was acknowledged with the provision of a €20 supermarket voucher.

All potential interviewees were given the choice of either a telephone or a face-to-face interview, with the expectation that telephone interviews would be the preferred method for organisational stakeholders and face-to-face interviews would be the preferred method for programme participants. Schedules of interview questions for each of the three types of stakeholders were prepared. Initial contact with programme participants was via an introductory letter from the consultant, distributed by Focus Ireland staff. Other stakeholders were contacted directly by the consultant using email and telephone. Repeat contacts were made as necessary in order to reach targets set. Interviews were scheduled as appropriate. Extensive written notes were taken during interviews.

Stakeholder group A – LEAP participants

Total (number)	Target (%)	Target (number)	Actual (number)	Target achieved
45	33%[8]	15	15	yes

Stakeholder group B – internal stakeholders[9]

Total (number)	Target (%)	Target (number)	Actual (number)	Target achieved
6	75%	4-5	5	yes

Stakeholder group C – external stakeholders[10]

Total (number)	Target (%)	Target (number)	Actual (number)	Target achieved
9	75%	6-7	5	no[11]

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[8] Although 45 participants started the programme, there was a considerable drop-out rate (see section 7.7), which is why the target was lower for this group.

[9] Key Focus Ireland staff: Service Manager, Project Leader, Team Leader and the three LEAP Project Workers

[10] These comprised a representative from the Department of Education and Skills, four tutors, a representative from The Probation Service, http://probation.ie, a representative from the Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership, http://www.ballymun.org, and two representatives based at the Ballymun Job Centre, http://www.bmunjob.ie.

A number of case studies were developed (see appendix 1), which aim to illustrate the range of experiences of the LEAP participants who were interviewed.

2.3.5 Secondary stakeholder consultation

A number of secondary stakeholders were also identified; namely specialist tutors, course speakers and work experience providers. Emails were sent to the three[12] specialist tutors and 18 course speakers, asking for feedback by email or telephone. Due to their relatively minor involvement in the programme, the response rate was not expected to be high, and a fairly low target was therefore set. It was not deemed necessary to conduct a consultation exercise with the work experience providers, as an internal review of all placements had recently been undertaken (see section 7.6).

Stakeholder group D – secondary stakeholders

Total (number)	Target (%)	Target (number)	Actual (number)	Target achieved
17	33%	5-6	7	yes

During the evaluation process, Focus Ireland was also benefiting from the services of a highly skilled and experienced volunteer who was assisting the organisation to optimise the effectiveness of a number of its programmes. The stakeholder interviews were supplemented by an in-depth discussion with this volunteer.

2.3.6   Analysis and reporting

All gathered data were analysed in accordance with the evaluation framework. In this way, an overview of progress on the programme's goals was provided. This was supplemented by a consideration of costs, benefits and future funding streams. Evidence-based conclusions were drawn and recommendations made. A report was drafted for comment by Focus Ireland, and the final report was then completed and approved.

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[11] Please note, however, that one representative from the Ballymun Job Centre engaged in a telephone interview which was subsequently supplemented with a written document detailing feedback from five mediators who had worked with LEAP participants, thereby providing a rich source of feedback.
[12] A fourth was on maternity leave and therefore unavailable

3	Context

This chapter describes the context in which the LEAP programme was set up and subsequently operated. There exists a vast body of literature on the educational, training and other needs of people who are long-term unemployed and/or who have experienced homelessness. Although it is outside the scope of this report to review all of this literature, particularly relevant policy, research and other information is covered in this chapter. Some key research from the UK that directly underpinned the programme is presented. The national legal, policy and socio-economic contexts within which the programme ran are then examined. The picture is completed by a description of the local and organisational contexts.

3.1 UK context

Luby and Welch (2006) highlighted how participation in learning and skills development can transform the lives of homeless people, at the same time as delivering important policy and financial benefits for a wide variety of governmental policies and programmes. They found that there is an intrinsic value of learning, illustrated by the extent to which individuals engage in learning for pure enjoyment, as well as to develop or improve the skills they needed for work and wider life. Such engagement was also shown to improve mental health and reduce problematic substance misuse or offending. It could help towards bringing an end to homelessness in a number of ways:

• By building confidence and self-esteem, and through these the belief that positive change is possible.
• By giving people structure, purpose and meaning in their lives, all of which are essential first steps to goal-setting and achievement.
• By equipping people with the skills necessary to interact successfully both in work and non-work settings, and thereby improving their chances of ending their social exclusion.
• By tackling boredom and widening social networks, thereby helping individuals to leave behind negative past behaviours and peer influences.
• By improving the ability to access and make use of services, thereby increasing independence and ensuring that wider needs are more likely to be met.
• By improving employability, and thereby their chance of ending financial exclusion.

The report stated that annual costs to the taxpayer of each homeless person could be up to £50,000 per year if the costs of temporary accommodation, unemployment, health services, criminal justice and support were taken into account. It also argued that improvements in the UK's skills base were essential to its sustainable economic growth and it pointed to increased public recognition of the wider social benefits that accrue from investment in skills. A government review in this area concluded that investment in basic skills offered similar value for money to investment in higher level skills – even before the wider social

benefits were taken into account – and therefore gave greatest opportunity for reducing the gap between rich and poor.

There was an explicit recognition that successful engagement of homeless people and other excluded groups required the development of flexible models of learning, including offering a wide range of learning opportunities that build on people's interests and capabilities and that take account of their wider needs. The voluntary sector was seen as playing a pivotal role in engaging with, and delivering learning for, homeless people at the first rung of the educational ladder. In order to do so, a range of barriers would have to be overcome.

Work undertaken by Opinion Leader Research (2006) on behalf of homeless organisation Crisis, directly tackled the issue of barriers to participation and progression of homeless people. They found that over half of the homeless people they interviewed wanted to take part in training/educational activities, either immediately or at some point in the future. Those interviewed stated that they would be encouraged to take part if the following were provided:

- Financial incentives and help with travel costs
- Tutors who understood homeless people's needs
- Courses linked to jobs
- Information about courses available.

Voluntary organisations were found to achieve the highest satisfaction ratings from homeless people in terms of meeting their training/educational needs, because they were aware of their specific needs, had supportive and understanding staff, and offered the most suitable learning environments.

The Off the Streets and into Work[13] *Right Deal for Homeless People* model developed by Fothergill (2008) (see appendix 2) greatly informed the development of the LEAP programme. It demonstrates a tailored, personalised programme for people with multiple barriers to employment, combined with holistic wrap-around support from frontline delivery agencies and is a tool in influencing what future services need to do to support those furthest away from the labour market into suitable and sustainable employment. It was intended to be widely applicable (that is, not just for people who are presently homeless).

The research found that there is a requirement for industry-focused pre-employment training, including employability checklists, advice on selection processes, and pre-employment training or work trials for up to three weeks. However, it also confirmed that for people who are homeless, engaging in learning and skills activities is not just about gaining specific qualifications or short-term work placements. Enabling people to become 'work ready' also involves gaining other vital life skills, including raising confidence and aspirations.

In June 2011, FEANTSA[14] published its *Employability Starter Kit: How to Develop Employability Initiatives in Homelessness Services* (with input from Focus Ireland – see

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[13] This organisation has since merged with Crisis http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/merger-osw.html
[14] European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless

section 8.3). Its primary focus is on 'employability'; that is, the precondition for employment, rather than employment *per se*. It states (p. 4):

"Employability initiatives focus less on direct labour market outcomes and more on outcomes related to improvement of the quality of life of a person. They aim to improve personal skills and competences and support people in reconnecting with the labour market and working life in general. They include different forms of practical training, education and support, such as life skills training, meaningful occupation, volunteering, supported employment and work placements."

3.2   National legal and policy context

3.2.1   Education and employment

Article 45 2 (i) of the *Constitution of Ireland* (1937-2010) reads:

"That the citizens (all of whom, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood) may through their occupations find the means of making reasonable provision for their domestic needs."

In 2007, the Government published its *National Development Plan 2007-2013*; chapter 11 (*Social Inclusion Priority*) is of particular relevance in this context. For people of working age, the Government planned to introduce an active case management approach to support 50,000 people on long-term social welfare into education, training and employment. It recognised that people of working age who are outside the labour market are particularly vulnerable to poverty or social exclusion. Its top priorities were addressing the low literacy levels of the Irish adult population and the large numbers of Irish adults who have not completed upper second-level education. It noted the importance of providing a flexible suite of learner-centred programmes to address the needs of different target groups and of engaging with hard-to-reach groups, including the long-term unemployed, adults with negative school experience and the homeless, through the provision of formal and informal learning opportunities. Community education was stated as having a particular role to play in this regard, as well as the provision of appropriate information through guidance and counselling. It accepted that whilst the result of supports aimed at increasing social and economic participation would sometimes be full-time employment without any further social welfare support, in cases where people were distant from the labour market, other progression options, such as training and education to enhance employability, were a more likely outcome.

The Government subsequently published its *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* (2007), which built on the proposals in the National Development Plan. The plan aimed to eliminate 'consistent poverty' by 2016 and reiterated that accessing and retaining employment has proved to be one of the most important routes out of poverty. Its vision (p. 40) was that:

- *"Every person of working age should be encouraged and supported to participate fully in social, civic and economic life;*

- *Every person of working age should have access to lifelong learning, a sense of personal security in a changing work environment and an opportunity to balance work and family commitments consistent with business needs;*
- *Every person of working age should have an income level to sustain an acceptable standard of living and to enable them to provide for an adequate income in retirement;*
- *Every person of working age on welfare should have access to supports towards progression and inclusion, access to quality work and learning opportunities, encouraging a greater degree of self-reliance and self-sufficiency;*
- *Every person, irrespective of background or gender, should enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from discrimination;*
- *Every family should have access to health and social care, affordable accommodation appropriate to their needs and a well-functioning public transport system;*
- *Every person with caring responsibilities should have access to appropriate supports to enable them to meet these responsibilities in addition to employment and other commitments."*

As the 'Celtic Tiger' was replaced by a deep economic recession, the Government put in place policies and initiatives to tackle rising levels of unemployment. The Social Welfare Act 2010 provided for additional sanctions to be applied to unemployed persons on the live register unreasonably refusing to participate in training, education and employment offered by FÁS or Department of Social Protection facilitators. The €20 million LMAF was announced in March 2010, to support a range of re-skilling and up-skilling programmes, targeting those formerly employed in declining sectors and the low-skilled, with a particular emphasis on under-35s and the long-term unemployed[15]. The LEAP programme was financed under this fund.

The Taoiseach, in the 2011 *Programme for Government* (p. 6) stated that:

"Job creation is central to any recovery strategy. Every person who leaves the dole and goes back to work reduces the deficit by an estimated €20,000, spends on average an additional €15,000 on goods and services and also reduces the risk on the banks mortgage books."

He announced that new labour market policy would include a national priority on literacy and basic workplace skills, various work placement programmes, and a range of initiatives to increase access to higher-level education for the unemployed. The *Jobs Initiative* launched in May 2011 outlined a range of other labour activation measures. In July 2011, it was announced that the state training agency FÁS would be disbanded and replaced by a new education and training authority called SOLAS.

3.2.2 Homelessness

National policy on homelessness is contained in two key documents. *The Way Home: A*

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[15] Defined as unemployed for at least one year

Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013 was launched in 2008. It recognised that education and training are vital in preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness, as they can help to build self-esteem and pathways away from homelessness and unemployment towards self-sufficiency and independence. It suggested that suitable interventions include the development of core life skills that assist in personal development and capacity building, including literacy and numeracy. It also advocated that homeless services should include assessment of education, skills and treatment needs in the general assessment of people who becomes homeless, and should develop close working relationships with relevant bodies so that appropriate referrals are made. It further stated that services that link homeless people, or people at risk of homelessness, with educational/training activities that enhance their skills, qualifications and employment potential shall be prioritised for funding (through FÁS and the Vocational Educational Committees).

The *Homeless Strategy National Implementation Plan* (2009) once again stressed the importance of delivering educational, training and work opportunities for people who are homeless, including the Back to Education Initiative and other adult/further education programmes.

3.3   Emerging national socio-economic context

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs published its fifth report *Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy* in 2007. It recognised that up-skilling those with lower skill levels was particularly problematic, due to low levels of literacy, practical barriers in attending courses and a lack of confidence or knowledge to seek appropriate training. It stated that individuals who do not currently hold a qualification equivalent to NFQ[16] level 4 or 5 (that is, Leaving Certificate equivalent) should be assisted to achieve such an award, through either full-time or part-time study, without incurring tuition costs and with a level of subsistence provided by the State. It also referred to substantial evidence which indicates that certain key generic skills are growing in relative importance in the workplace; namely basic skills (in particular, literacy), people-related skills and conceptual skills. It concluded that, in so far as possible, these skills should be prioritised and embedded into all publicly-funded education and training provision.

In 2007, the Simon Communities of Ireland completed a national report on Ireland for FEANTSA entitled *Multiple barriers, multiple solutions: inclusion into and through employment for people who are homeless in Europe*. It identified a range of barriers to employment for people who are homeless; namely those relating to health, housing, transport, education, services and information, as well as stigmatisation/discrimination, personal barriers and bureaucratic/financial barriers. It noted that FÁS schemes and supports provided by Local Employment Service Networks had benefited many homeless people, but that there remained a gap in the availability of supported, flexible employment options for those who need time and additional assistance to get back to work. It stated that a key challenge is raising awareness amongst employers of the employability of people who are homeless. It also stated (p. 23):

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[16] National Framework of Qualifications, http://www.nfq.ie

"The funding mechanisms put in place to address homelessness in Ireland are spread across a number of different departments and agencies, often making coordination of activity difficult ... the often short-term nature of funding from such sources makes it difficult to generate the desired outcomes. Often a pathway to employment for a person experiencing homelessness involves several years of development, building up life skills, literacy and numeracy capacity, accessing vocational training, work placements for experience before eventually securing a mainstream job. The same type of continuum of care approach being adopted in relation to housing and support needs is therefore necessary in relation to employment needs, and funding should be planned with this in mind. The allocation of statutory funding on an annual basis is highly restrictive in terms of delivering effective interventions and a move to a multi-annual system of funding would be hugely beneficial to addressing barriers to employment."

In 2008, the INOU ran a seminar entitled *Getting It Right: Linking Training and Education to Employment.* The need for a more client-centred approach that integrates unemployed people, trainers, employers and employment services was a key theme of the seminar.

The Economic and Social Research Institute (2009) profiled the growing proportion of the population on the live register, and found that the probability of remaining on the register is associated with a recent history of long-term unemployment, previous participation on the Community Employment scheme, advanced age, number of children, low educational level, literacy/numeracy problems, location in urban areas, lack of personal transport, low rates of recent labour market engagement, spousal earnings and geographic location. This entails substantial financial costs in terms of welfare payments, lost revenue and lost production.

Since the start of 2011, the Department of Social Protection[17] has taken a greater role in providing activation services for the unemployed, as well as its more traditional role in paying benefits, using a new case management system. The Department of Education and Skills has taken responsibility for education and training of the unemployed. A Department of Social Protection (2011) press release about an evaluation of the National Employment Action Plan quoted the report:

"… we need to shift from a provider-driven system, as has been implemented by FÁS as well as other training and education bodies up to the present, to a system that puts the unemployed client at the centre and responds to his or her specific education or training needs."

The National Economic and Social Research Council (2011) published *Supports and Services for Unemployed Jobseekers*. This research report had a number of important findings including:

- It is not just some individuals on the live register who need to be 'activated' but Ireland's entire policy/organisational framework for supporting unemployed jobseekers.
- A significant number of the unemployed are not entitled to Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance because they have a spouse earning, were previously self-

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[17] http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Pages/unemployed.aspx

employed or for other reasons. Therefore, they do not appear on the live register.
- A strong emphasis on training and education as the primary route back to work for the unemployed has had the strongest degree of policy continuity.
- Concerns have grown about the quality and relevance of some of the additional training and educational capacity that was quickly brought on stream.
- The best-practice examples from other countries of lifelong learning, welfare-to-work, activation and other measures, suggest major roles for local government, education/training providers, the social partners, NGOs and for individual responsibility, alongside the intelligent engagement of the State.
- Up-skilling people with low levels of formal educational attainment requires distinct and more innovative policies than up-skilling the already well-educated.

In August 2010, when the LEAP programme commenced, the national Standardised Unemployment Rate was 13.5% (a seasonally adjusted figure of 447,800 on the live register). By August 2011, when the LEAP programmed had ended, the Standardised Unemployment Rate was 14.4% (a seasonally adjusted figure of 449,600 on the live register). The number of long-term claimants on the live register in August 2011 was 191,578 (Central Statistics Office, 2011)[18].

3.4   Dublin context

3.4.1   Policy and coordination

Within the Dublin region, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (formerly the Homeless Agency and prior to that the Homeless Initiative) holds statutory responsibility for homelessness policy and coordinating associated initiatives.

In 1999, the Homeless Initiative published *Putting People First: a good practice handbook for homeless services* (Courtney, 1999). This contains non-mandatory quality standards and performance measures for homeless service providers, and is still in use today.

A key to the door: The Homeless Agency Partnership Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin 2007-2010 stressed that homelessness is costly to the State, both because of direct costs (for example, emergency accommodation and addiction services) and hidden costs (for example, improper use of accident and emergency services, inappropriate use of hospital beds where patients have no other place to go, increased costs to the justice and prison system). Unfortunately, these costs have not been adequately quantified in the Irish case. There is some limited evidence, however, that investment in specialist services provides long-term financial and social benefits. It acknowledged that the required safety net

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[18] The live register is not designed to measure unemployment. It includes part-time workers (those who work up to three days a week), seasonal and casual workers entitled to Jobseekers Benefit or Allowance. Unemployment is measured by the Quarterly National Household Survey and the latest estimated number of persons unemployed as of the first quarter of 2011 was 295,700.

comprises many components, including adult education/literacy services, training/employment services, as well as advice, support and advocacy for tenants at risk of homelessness.

In 2010, the Homeless Agency undertook research entitled *Mapping of Training, Education and Employment Services: Along a continuum of readiness*, to provide the basis for future sectoral training and to be used in conjunction with the Holistic Needs Assessment and support planning processes. It noted that maintaining a home and sustaining independent living could be challenging for people who have been homeless for some time and/or have complex needs. A permanent move-on from homelessness requires that a person's reasons for becoming homeless, as well as the risks of returning to homelessness, are properly addressed. Addressing not only housing need, but also support needs, were therefore stated as being important if homeless people are to build self-esteem, confidence, skill and readiness to engage in meaningful activities, training, education and employment options.

The report noted that when referrals are made, it is often implied that the person's readiness has been addressed, but in reality this is not always the case. Many training, education and employment services working with people who have experienced homelessness cite the reason for non-completion of programmes as a lack of preparation to be able to engage fully in the service. This is disadvantageous for both the service user and the service. It is therefore vital that key workers consider readiness as a core factor when assessing clients' needs and developing support plans in order to effectively support them in building capacity, self-esteem and resilience towards their long-term goals.

It should not be assumed that readiness to engage in one service type (such as adult education) automatically implies readiness to engage in another service type (such as an employment scheme). Furthermore, an individual's capacity to engage fully in a service may change at any given time, depending on personal or external circumstances. Negative triggers may include loss of accommodation, relapse into addiction, changes in relation to the care of children, etc. In addressing an individual's progress towards mainstream training, education and/or employment options, proper consideration must be given to their position on the continuum of readiness.

The report stated that mainstream training, education and employment providers (such as FÁS) and voluntary homeless service providers (such as Focus Ireland) both have a role to play in terms of the delivery of progression routes towards positive outcomes.

A Homeless Agency Training, Education and Employment Network that sought to enhance communication between providers of relevant services was previously active, but this has now been discontinued.

3.4.2   Other providers and related initiatives

This section does not seek to duplicate the Homeless Agency's (2010) mapping exercise. Nonetheless, it briefly details a number of local providers and related initiatives that are relevant in the context of the LEAP programme.

The City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee (CDVEC)[19] runs the Back to Education Initiative, which provides part-time courses for young people and adults who wish to return to learning. These are aimed primarily at those with little or no formal educational qualifications. There are no fees for people holding a medical card or their dependents, or for those with less than upper second level education. A programme may be offered for one to 17 hours per week for up to 33 weeks per year. CDVEC also runs the Foundations Project, which works in partnership with homeless services and other agencies to increase access to education for those who are homeless through a range of supports.

The National Learning Network[20], the training and employment division of the Rehab Group, is Ireland's largest non-governmental training organisation providing accredited training and specialist support to people who are distant from the labour market. It has a number of centres in Dublin, including one in Phibsboro, Dublin 7. This centre offers a range of courses, including a two-year catering with industry course.

Clondalkin Employment and Education Development Services[21] ran a FETAC accredited receptionist skills training course in an area of disadvantage, in which 18 out of the 21 participants gained employment. Some key factors to its success were the involvement of people from the locality, work experience, a contribution towards childcare costs, and a follow-up service whereby the centre kept in touch with participants for three years upon completion of the course (INOU, 2008).

Business in the Community Ireland (BITCI) has been running its Ready For Work programme[22] since 2002. This programme recognises that employment is key to addressing disadvantage and aims to enable people to break out of the cycle of homelessness and move towards independence. Since the start of the programme, the organisation has engaged with almost 400 people experiencing homelessness in Dublin and over 60 businesses have provided work placements or other forms of support. Staff work on an ongoing basis with over 50 homeless services to find participants who are ready and motivated to get back into work or training. Almost 60% of those who complete the Ready For Work placements have started employment.

PACE[23] works exclusively with offenders and ex-offenders, and provides its Training for Employment project in Santry, Dublin 9, for up to 24 individuals at any one time. The project works intensively with both men and women on preparing them for progression into employment, further education or training opportunities. It works in partnership with a wide range of external agencies.

Bridge-to-Workplace[24] is a multi-agency approach that offers employment-based progression options to individuals with a history of problem drug use. The model works on

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[19] http://www.cdvec.ie
[20] http://nln.ie/Home.aspx
[21] http://www.ceeds.ie
[22] http://www.bitc.ie/readyforwork
[23] http://www.paceorganisation.ie/about.php?id=training

[24] http://www.tap.ie/bridge-to-workplace

the principle that multiple and salient issues for clients must be addressed on a multi-lateral basis. Key workers from each agency must be involved with the client at varying levels and stages, according to their field of expertise. Bridge-to-Workplace has shown that positive and sustainable engagement in work experience placements is dependent on the provision of core supports such as training, education, self-development, social skills and supervision. Following a series of interventions where the client works closely with their key worker team, a placement of one day per week for a 20-week duration is arranged. Each work placement takes into account the future employment aspirations of the individual.

3.4.3 Focus Ireland

Like other voluntary sector organisations, Focus Ireland is currently operating in a very challenging environment. In 2010, its statutory funding fell by 5-10%[25] and its fundraising income from public and corporate sources dropped by 14%, whilst at the same time it experienced a 15% increase in demand for its services (Focus Ireland, *Annual Report 2010*, 2011).

Focus Ireland recognises the importance of education and employment as a progression route out of homelessness, and opened its education programme Spokes in 2002. TSA Consultancy completed an evaluation of this programme in 2010. Both providers and service users of this programme viewed it very positively. They felt that it had had a significant impact on clients' quality of life. Particularly valued aspects of the programme included that it: was flexible and client-centred, involved life-skills and confidence building, provided ongoing one-to-one support, had skilled and committed staff who understood the issues around homelessness, and offered opportunities for social interaction as well as client participation. The lack of formal written progression plans was identified as an area for improvement, as this could undermine the organisation's ability to set milestones with clients and review progress. The evaluators also observed that the goals of the Spokes programme were primarily focused on its activities rather than broader overall outcomes. The report made a number of recommendations, including:

- That data collection systems be improved in order to capture outputs, individual progression, and to demonstrate the outcomes of programmes.
- That data be collected to undertake cost-benefit analyses of projects, which could include estimating savings to the State as a result of individuals' participation in pre-education, education, training and employment supports.
- That more integrated service delivery and cross-agency collaboration be explored[26].
- That the potential of the social economy/enterprise sector be explored as a means of providing long-term progression and employment opportunities for clients[27].

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[25] Mostly due to cuts in funding from the Health Service Executive
[26] For example, the Bridge to Workplace or Ballymun Job Centre
[27] For example, Jamie Oliver's Fifteen London restaurant, http://www.fifteen.net or ThamesReach's GROW programme, http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/what-we-do/user-employment/national-grow-programme, both in the UK

In 2009, Focus Ireland established the PETE programme, which is a foundation education and training programme in Dublin 8 for over-18s residing in emergency accommodation.

In 2011, the organisation adopted its *Education and Training Services Policies and Procedures,* which includes a seven-stage progression model (p. 3):

- Stage 1: Engagement with the target group, through referrals or direct application.
- Stage 2: Personalised, comprehensive needs assessment to ensure that the participant's multiple learning needs are identified.
- Stage 3: Individual holistic training, education and employment plan is put in place and the relevant programmes and modules are delivered.
- Stage 4: Provision of the holistic supports required to meet participants' learning needs and overcome the barriers to participation.
- Stage 5: Review of individual progression and further education and/or training requirements.
- Stage 6: Labour market preparation through supported work experience.
- Stage 7: Review of work experience and support to access employment.

4	Evaluation framework

This chapter introduces the model used as the foundation for the evaluation, and describes the various components of that model. The LEAP programme goals and metrics included in Focus Ireland's original tender to the LMAF were not considered sufficient for the purposes of this evaluation. A new evaluation framework was therefore drawn up in consultation with Focus Ireland and this is presented at the end of the chapter.

4.1   Evaluation model

The following model, adapted from Ellis (2005), underpins the approach used by the consultant to evaluate the LEAP programme:

Focus Ireland vision   →   *Overall impact of all programmes*

Aim of LEAP programme   →   WHY WE DID IT   →   *Programme outcomes*

Programme objectives   →   WHAT WE DID   →   *Programme outputs*

↑

Programme inputs
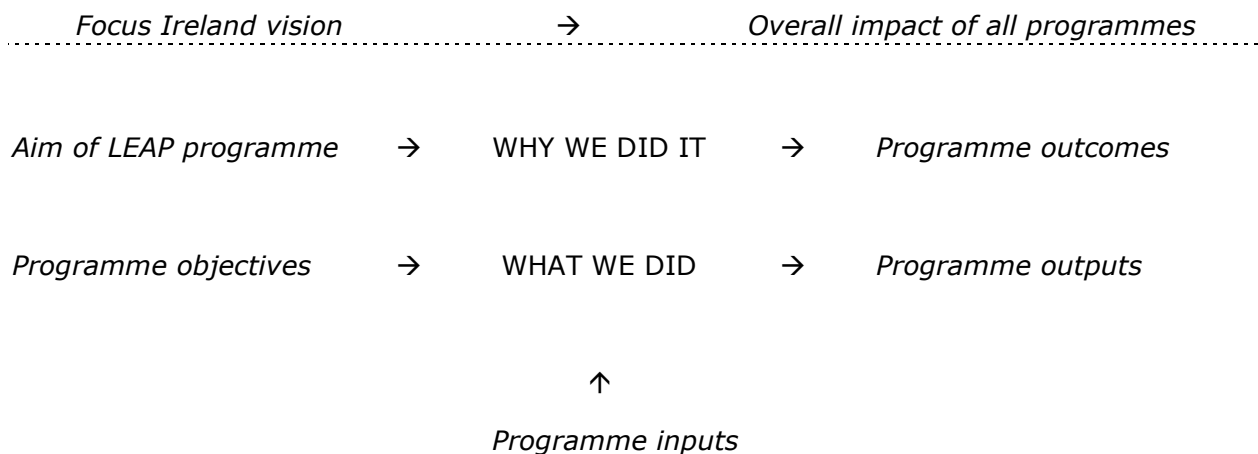
The model can be further simplified as follows:

Inputs   →   Outputs[28]   →   Outcomes   →   Impacts

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[28] Some models separate a description of the activities from the number of 'outputs' generated by these activities. This approach was not considered to be beneficial for the LEAP evaluation and the activities and numbers are therefore amalgamated under 'outputs'.

Chapters 5 to 8 of this report provide an analysis for each of these aspects of the LEAP programme.

4.2 Vision and impacts

Focus Ireland's vision is that *"everyone has a right to a place they can call home"*. Achievement of this long-term vision is predicated on the delivery of a large number of programmes and on working in partnership with a range of other services and organisations. The one-year LEAP programme must be viewed within this context.

4.3 Aims and outcomes

Although not clearly articulated as the overall aim for the LEAP programme, Focus Ireland stated in its tender to the LMAF that LEAP would be (p. 1):

"… designed to meet the learning needs of the low-skilled, long-term unemployed – who would normally experience barriers to established training and education provision – and will provide the accredited and generic skills required for identified labour market opportunities."

In terms of outcomes, Focus Ireland stated (p. 3):

"It is intended that participants will complete their programmes and work experience and progress on to employment or further education and training."

4.4 Objectives and outputs

In the original tender, the following objectives for LEAP were outlined (p. 2):

"The programmes are designed to offer the opportunity for participants to gain practical skills, interpersonal and social skills, increased personal confidence and awareness of labour market opportunity. Specifically the programmes aim to impact positively on participants in areas of self-esteem, ability to learn, ability to participate in structured activity, motivation and planning for the future, coaching and mentoring, identifying work ambitions and opportunities, and aptitudes reflecting on life aspirations and lifestyle choices.

- *Support individual participants to gain confidence, skills and accredited awards to progress to mainstream training and education services and employment.*
- *Provide a training, educational and access to employment programme, to support individuals who are long-term unemployed and who have low education attainment.*
- *Deliver individual and group personal development training and education programmes, on-site in the training and educational facility.*

- *Provide career guidance, coaching and mentoring to maximise employability in the identified sectors.*
- *Work in cooperation with the CDVEC, FÁS, the Homeless Agency Training, Education and Employment Network and Business in the Community to ensure a seamless pathway to mainstream services and employment.*
- *Establish data collection systems that examine the area of unemployment and education profiles of people.*
- *Contribute to research in the area of unemployment and education."*

Furthermore, the tender described how Focus Ireland would deliver, from June 2010, three part-time, vocational up-skilling training and education programmes (up to FETAC level 5) within a lifelong learning framework. The target group would be those living independently in long-term housing who had been homeless, or were vulnerable to becoming homeless, were low-skilled and long-term unemployed but ready to progress to training and education for employment. The three programmes would be provided to 45 participants (15 in each) aged primarily 18 to 35 but open to those over 35. Courses[29] would be designed to meet individual needs so that each learner could achieve their goals at their own pace. Participants would have the opportunity for work experience during or after the completion of their course to maximise their preparation for employment in three specific sectors with labour market opportunities, namely food, warehousing and social care. One-to-one support, advice and guidance would form an integral and continuous part of the courses, including the development of training and education support plans that would be reviewed on a regular basis. The programme would be delivered in the same premises as the PETE programme, utilising existing resources and facilities at 133 Francis Street, Dublin 8. Focus Ireland would adhere to all FETAC requirements and codes of practice within Focus Ireland. Detailed descriptions of the three proposed courses and the possible opportunities for participants' progression routes were provided. Due to the labour market history of this group, the target completion rate was set at 80%.

4.5   Inputs

Inputs are the resources that were invested into the programme and include funding, Focus Ireland's expertise and organisational infrastructure, premises, equipment, career guidance tools, human resources, time, etc.

4.6   Revising the goals and indicators

The consultant considered that the original goals and related activities were not framed sufficiently clearly within the original tender for the purposes of this evaluation, and were

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[29] Although Focus Ireland uses 'programme' to refer both to the overall LEAP programme and the three sub-programmes run as part of LEAP, the consultant uses 'course' to refer to the latter in order to make the differentiation clearer.

limited in terms of indicators of success. In consultation with Focus Ireland, these were reconfigured into a new framework, which is presented below. This framework also seeks to ensure that all objectives for the evaluation, as outlined in section 2.2, are addressed.

4.7   Revised framework

4.7.1   Rationale

The Focus Ireland LEAP programme was established to meet the learning needs of 45 low-skilled and long-term unemployed individuals (primarily aged 18-35) in the Dublin area, who were previously homeless or at risk of homelessness, and who were deemed ready to progress to training and employment, in order to provide them with the skills required for identified labour market opportunities in the food, warehousing and social care sectors.

4.7.2   Inputs

Were the resources invested into the LEAP programme adequate?

Inputs	Indicators	Data collection
Programme funding	Level and nature of funding and satisfaction with this from relevant stakeholders	Internal documentation and stakeholder interviews
Premises, facilities, equipment, tools and similar resources	Nature of resources and satisfaction with these from relevant stakeholders	Internal documentation and stakeholder interviews, supplemented by initial site visit
Human resources	Experience, skills, attitude and availability of LEAP staff, tutors and speakers	Internal documentation and stakeholder interviews
Existing Focus Ireland infrastructure	Nature of organisational supports provided to LEAP programme	Internal documentation and stakeholder interviews

4.7.3 Outputs

Did the activities that were planned for the LEAP programme take place, and in an effective manner?

Outputs	Indicators	Data collection
To provide a quality education and training service in line with *Putting People First* and Focus Ireland codes of practice	Positive stakeholder feedback and evidence of alignment with *Putting People First* and Focus Ireland codes of practice	Stakeholder interviews and review of *Putting People First* and Focus Ireland codes of practice
To select appropriate participants for the LEAP programme	Number of participants and their status (age, gender, location, readiness, etc)	Internal documentation and stakeholder interviews
To provide accredited skills training in line with FETAC requirements	Number and range of courses run and evidence of having met FETAC requirements	Internal documentation and review of FETAC documentation
To provide generic skills training	Number and range of other skills training provided	Internal documentation
To provide relevant education and career guidance	Frequency and nature of guidance provided	Internal documentation and stakeholder interviews
To provide opportunities for work experience	Number and nature of work experience placements arranged	Internal documentation and stakeholder interviews
To provide appropriate group activities	Number and range of group activities	Internal documentation and stakeholder interviews
To provide one-to-one coaching and mentoring, including individual support plans	Frequency and nature of one-to-one support, including evidence of individual support plans	Internal documentation and stakeholder interviews
To gather relevant data	Availability of relevant data	Internal documentation
To work in cooperation with relevant external agencies	Number, range and relevance of agencies engaged with and nature of cooperation	Stakeholder interviews

4.7.4   Outcomes

To what extent did the changes intended to be brought about by the LEAP programme happen?

Outcomes	Indicators	Data collection
Participants gained increased personal confidence and self-esteem	Self-reporting of increased confidence/self-esteem by participants, confirmed by LEAP staff and other relevant stakeholders	Stakeholder interviews
Participants learnt new interpersonal and social skills	Self-reporting of new interpersonal and social skills by participants, confirmed by LEAP staff and other relevant stakeholders	Stakeholder interviews
Participants improved their ability to participate in structured activity and learning	Self-reporting of improved ability to participate by participants, confirmed by LEAP staff and other relevant stakeholders	Stakeholder interviews
Participants identified work (and wider life) aspirations and opportunities	Self-reporting of aspirations and opportunities identified by participants, confirmed by LEAP staff and other relevant stakeholders	Stakeholder interviews
Participants gained accredited awards	Number and nature of awards gained	Internal documentation
Participants gained practical work experience	Extent and nature of work experience completed and positive feedback from relevant stakeholders	Internal documentation and stakeholder interviews
Participants completed the programme	Meeting the completion target of 80% set at the outset of the programme	Internal documentation and stakeholder interviews
Participants progressed on to mainstream education and training or employment	Number of participants entering mainstream education and training or employment and nature of these	Internal documentation and stakeholder interviews

4.7.5　　　Impacts

Did the LEAP programme go some way to achieving Focus Ireland's vision and/or were there any other consequences as a result of the programme?

Impacts	Indicators	Data collection
Contribution to Focus Ireland vision	Evidence from inputs, outputs and outcomes	All methods
Contribution to national and local government priorities	Evidence from inputs, outputs and outcomes	All methods
Contribution to research in the area of education and training as a route to social inclusion	Evidence from inputs, outputs and outcomes and publication of evaluation results	All methods
Other impacts	Evidence from inputs, outputs and outcomes	All methods

| **5** | **Inputs** |

This chapter describes the quantity and quality of internal and external resources that were invested into the LEAP programme and assesses whether these were adequate.

5.1 Programme funding

The LEAP programme was funded entirely through the LMAF, which was initially within the remit of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, but subsequently became the responsibility of the Department of Education and Skills. The total cost for the one-year LEAP programme was €181,281. Confirmation of funding was received later than anticipated, which led to the programme starting later than originally planned. This delay meant that time was a constant pressure for the staff *("… always chasing our tail …")*, and they questioned whether one year was a sufficient period of time to achieve the desired outcomes of the programme.

Notwithstanding this, stakeholders expressed general satisfaction with the financial resources that were invested into the programme. Staff members were grateful that the funders afforded the organisation flexibility in terms of budget allocations (for example, rent was cheaper than originally budgeted for, but forklift licences were more expensive). The *Self-Evaluation Report on the LEAP programme* (2011, p. 23) outlines the expenditure of the programme for the period 1 June 2010 to 30 June 2011, as follows:

Management and Administration: Pay	**Actual Costs**
Salaries	€106,676
Management and Administration: Non-Pay	**Actual Costs**
Administration expenses	€14,345
Training/Education Provision: Pay	**Actual Costs**
Tuition	€33,806
Staff training/development	-
Guidance/mentoring	-
Training/Education Provision: Non-Pay	**Actual Costs**
Overheads (light, heating etc.)	€393
Rental of premises	€10,148
Materials (stationary, books, etc.)	€5,401
Equipment	€1,929
Assessment and certification (costs to certifying bodies)	-
Marketing and advertising	-
Travel and subsistence (staff)	€583
Programme external evaluation	€8,000
Other miscellaneous costs	-
Total Pay	**€140,482**

Total Non-Pay	€40,799
Total Expenditure: Pay and Non-Pay	**€181,281**

Although the funding to deliver this programme was substantial and Focus Ireland was clearly appreciative to have received it, the strategy of having 'all eggs in one basket' resulted in the programme ending as soon as the LMAF scheme ended. The scheme was evaluated by PA Consulting Group (2011) on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills, but there is no certainty whether it will be continued and if so, whether Focus Ireland would be successful the second time round.

5.2 Premises, facilities and equipment

It was initially intended that the LEAP programme would be located at Focus Ireland's premises in Francis Street, Dublin 8. However, when the programme was due to be set up, sufficient space was no longer available at this location and alternative premises therefore had to be found. Staff sourced and rented space, at a favourable rate, in the Ballymun Job Centre, Dublin 11, between October 2010 and June 2011. They had sole use of a large training/computer room and they were also able to make use of communal spaces like small meeting rooms and a canteen/kitchen. No catering kitchen was available, however, and staff therefore arranged occasional use of a kitchen for cookery classes at Axis; an arts centre and community resource centre in Ballymun[30]. No office space was available in the Ballymun Job Centre and therefore LEAP staff offices were based in the Ballymun Enterprise Centre[31]. Use was also made of a purpose built facility in Finglas (FSTS[32]) for warehousing training.

In spite of relatively good public transport access, the location of the LEAP programme in Ballymun posed travel inconveniences and costs for a minority of participants outside the local area. It also meant that the programme was not in the same location as the existing Focus Ireland education and training function in Francis Street (PETE), although this was not identified by Focus Ireland as a major issue. The lease in Ballymun ended before the programme had finished fully, which meant that staff had to relocate to Francis Street but continue to travel to Ballymun in order to meet with clients (where they had no obvious place to do so).

The vast majority of stakeholders were very satisfied with the facilities in the Ballymun Job Centre. They commented on the fact that they had sole use of the training room, that there was sufficient space, and that the equipment was very good, with internet-enabled computers for all participants, a projector, photocopier, etc. Participants and tutors also appreciated refreshments and stationery being supplied. There were good synergies between the Focus Ireland staff and staff working in the Ballymun Job Centre. The separation of the LEAP staff offices in the Ballymun Enterprise Centre caused difficulties,

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[30] http://axis-ballymun.ie
[31] http://www.ballymun.org/test/entcen_home.html
[32] http://forklift-safety.net

however. It was a five-minute drive or fifteen-minute walk between the two premises and a considerable amount of time was taken up travelling between them. It also caused logistical challenges in terms of accessing participant files, internal databases and printers.

The warehouse training facility was complimented, although one of the interviewed participants complained of difficulties travelling there from Ballymun. Use of the Axis kitchen was welcomed, but a number of operational issues were experienced at this venue. For example, the kitchen was too small for the full group and the LEAP programme's access to it was quite restricted. This issue was addressed by dividing the group into two and taking turns to use it when it was available.

5.3   Human resources

5.3.1   Focus Ireland staff

A Team Leader managed the LEAP programme[33] under the supervision of a Project Leader and direction of a Service Manager. These three positions were in place prior to the establishment of the LEAP programme. They jointly commenced planning for the programme as soon as Focus Ireland received the initial news of its funding application being successful. The Team Leader, who was praised repeatedly in interviews conducted for this evaluation, was responsible for ensuring that the programme was delivered in line with agreed guidelines, as well as for staff recruitment, managing staff performance, and coordinating contracts with tutors.

Recruitment for the three Project Worker posts began when confirmation of the funding was received. The staff recruitment process was lengthy, not least because of the need to undertake Garda vetting, and also because one successful applicant, who had initially accepted a job offer, subsequently declined. Despite this, one full-time and one part-time Project Worker started their jobs at the end of August 2010 and a third full-time Project Worker commenced mid-November 2010. Each Project Worker was the designated contact for one of the courses (warehousing, social care and food) and fulfilled a range of other functions, including interviewing potential participants, assessing individual needs, delivering classes, assisting with the preparation of FETAC portfolios, providing one-to-one supports, advocating on behalf of clients, organising field trips, etc. One of the full-time Project Workers had specific responsibility for career guidance, mentoring and developing relationships with employers, training providers and educational institutes. In early 2011, one of the full-time Project Workers left his post in challenging circumstances and was replaced.

It is clear that significant pressures were exerted on the organisation in terms of human resourcing. The workload for the three courses was substantial at certain periods during the year and the project staff sometimes struggled to complete all of their tasks. On occasion, the part-time Project Worker did extra hours, but even this was not always sufficient. Staff felt that the programme generated sufficient work, including administrative support work,

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[33] She also manages the PETE programme – see section 2.1

for three to four employees. No volunteers were involved in the programme.

Personal issues sometimes arose for participants that were not directly related to the programme, but which impacted on their ability to participate. There was no case manager/support worker to deal directly with such arising needs and staff would have liked to have had more time to address such issues. Notwithstanding this, the LEAP staff did what they could when personal issues arose for participants. For example, one participant returned to homelessness whilst engaging in the programme, and a LEAP project worker referred this participant to other Focus Ireland services, as well as continuing to offer day-to-day support.

Furthermore, it became apparent that there was some overlap between the roles of the three Project Workers; specifically, the usefulness of having a separate career guidance post was questioned on numerous occasions (see sections 6.5 and 6.8).

All LEAP staff brought valuable skills and experiences to the programme, although a number of participants commented that due to their young age, they felt that their life experience was arguably limited, and this expressed itself in the way they worked. Their coaching and counselling skills were also questioned by a number of the participants. It was clear, however, that they enjoyed their jobs and were highly committed to their clients (most of whom felt that the staff truly believed in them). A number of participants noted how the staff had gone *"above and beyond the call of duty"* in order to help them and for this they were immensely grateful. On the whole, participants considered the staff to be friendly, enthusiastic, caring and kind. Tutors and speakers also gave very positive feedback about the staff, stating that they were well-organised, flexible, responsive, helpful and empathetic. A number of participants pointed out that they had been disappointed to see their Project Worker leave in early 2011.

Although the majority of participants were complimentary about the staff, a small number reported not getting on with them. By way of illustration, the Project Workers would regularly remind participants to attend sessions by phone and SMS. Some participants interpreted this as a sign of staff interest in them, whereas others felt unnecessarily harangued and believed that staff did not treat them appropriately.

5.3.2   Tutors

Eight external tutors were contracted to deliver some of the courses on the programme. Recruitment was somewhat problematic; given the short timeframe that Focus Ireland had to set up the programme, some decisions were made quickly, and this led to an early turnover of a number of tutors and the appointment of one tutor whose training style was considered inappropriate for the client group. Many participants had a negative experience of schooling and when a minority of the sessions mirrored those experiences, they became extremely dissatisfied. Focus Ireland staff worked hard at resolving any tutor difficulties.

It should be noted that the vast majority of tutors were considered to be very good, with the cookery teacher in particular receiving repeated positive feedback. Communications between most tutors, and between most tutors and Focus Ireland staff, was good. If the

programme is run again in the future, it may be beneficial to have periodic meetings for all tutors.

5.3.3 Speakers

Eighteen speakers were also engaged to deliver one or more one-to-two-hour sessions on the programme on a wide range of topics. All but one of these sessions were on the social care course; the other being a session for participants on the food course. Four were Focus Ireland staff, and the remainder were representatives from external organisations[34]. These were sourced primarily through personal and local contacts. All speakers gave their sessions at no charge. With two exceptions, interviewed participants gave excellent feedback on all of the speakers.

5.4 Focus Ireland infrastructure

Focus Ireland is a large and experienced organisation; this proved to be highly significant in terms of its ability to plan, develop and deliver the LEAP programme within the short timeframe available. Its reputation and established relationships aided the staff in sourcing premises, speakers, work experience placements, etc. Its infrastructure – in terms of governance, internal controls, policies and procedures, as well as shared services for human resources, finance and advocacy – also made a significant contribution. The organisation already had the experience of delivering two education and training programmes, had FETAC accreditation, access to tutors and insurance cover for work experience placements, etc. Crucially, it understood the needs of clients who have been homeless, although its experience of clients who may never have accessed homeless services was arguably more limited.

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[34] Amnesty International, Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force, Barnardos, Dublin Institute of Technology, Exchange House, Foróige, Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute, Irish Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children, National Council for the Blind Ireland, Shine, Trinity College Dublin, URRÚS, Volunteering Ireland, and a social worker

6	Outputs

This chapter describes and quantifies the activities that were delivered as part of the LEAP programme against initial plans. It also assesses whether these were undertaken in an effective manner. An overview of programme content is found in appendix 3.

6.1 Quality education and training service

Focus Ireland sought to provide a safe and secure learning environment for vulnerable people potentially apprehensive about returning to education. They aimed to deliver an informal and flexible programme, within a lifelong learning framework, that met learners' needs at their own pace and stage of 'readiness', using a wide range of methodologies. The *Putting People First* standards for homeless services (see section 3.4.1), *FETAC Approved Quality Assurance Standards*, and its own *Education and Training Services Policies and Procedures* (see section 3.4.3) were used as the quality standards for the LEAP programme.

It was not feasible within the scope of this evaluation to do a full audit of the LEAP programme against the standards contained within these documents. Focus Ireland staff expressed the opinion that all their work was naturally undertaken in accordance with these standards. The consultant found that the design and implementation of the LEAP programme were indeed broadly aligned with the values and protocols contained within the documents. Additionally, stakeholder feedback on the quality of the programme was primarily positive. Where there were question marks over the relative success of particular approaches or the appropriateness of certain actions, these are addressed within the relevant sections of this report.

6.2 Selection process

6.2.1 Promotional phase

Prior to being in a position to select participants, awareness had to be raised about the availability of the courses. When tendering for the funding, it had been Focus Ireland's intention that participants would be drawn from its own client/tenant group and via referrals from relevant external organisations. As the location of the programme was changed (see section 5.2) and was now geographically removed from most of the organisation's own housing stock, the approach had to be adapted slightly. The initial promotional strategy included advertising in long-term accommodation providers, social welfare offices, job centres, the Probation Service and similar avenues, with a particular focus on North Dublin. Although this did generate interest, this was not found to be sufficient. As the starting date

of the first course neared, staff worked tremendously hard to reach out in the local area, even doing leaflet drops around the housing estates of Ballymun. Their efforts paid off and eventually, all three courses were filled, with 15 participants on each.

About half the interviewed participants had been aware that there were three courses available; the remainder did not realise that there had been a choice, possibly because the starting dates for the three courses were staggered[35]. The practical nature of some of the courses was seen as a particularly attractive aspect for referral agencies and for participants themselves. There was some evidence that the Focus Ireland name was potentially off-putting for clients who had never been homeless, but this was limited.

6.2.2 Selection phase

Due to the aforementioned time pressures, the selection process was inevitably conducted within a short timeframe also. The process consisted of the completion of a simple application form and attendance at an informal interview. Focus Ireland was specifically looking for participants who were ready to engage with a programme of this nature, but who would be 'stretched' by it. Some applicants were not considered by staff to be at the required level of readiness, and some deselected themselves when they found out what was involved in participating in the programme. However, the majority of those who applied or were referred gained a place on the programme. No application was declined due to a lack of room on the programme. In broad terms, the 'right' people were selected to participate in the programme, but note the caveats below.

Because the programme concerned education and training, as opposed to housing, staff felt that it would not be necessary to undertake a comprehensive needs assessment and also felt that it might have been off-putting for many prospective participants. In retrospect, and weighing up the feedback from all stakeholders, a more in-depth initial assessment would potentially have served the participants better. More detailed information about literacy level, information technology competency, housing status, criminal justice history, health, and so on, would have ensured that those who were selected were indeed ready to engage, and would have made it easier for staff and tutors to work as effectively as possible with all selected clients. Arguably, greater efforts could also have been expended at this stage on stressing the level of commitment required from participants, with constant reinforcement of this throughout the course. This was particularly true for the warehousing course, in which immature behaviour and a lack of commitment were sources of concern both to other participants and to staff/tutors.

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[35] For example, an individual hearing about the LEAP programme in December 2010 would only have been able to participate in the food course as the other courses had already commenced at this point.

6.2.3   Profile of participants

The participant profile was mixed, which is unsurprising given the wide remit of the programme. A number of different nationalities and ethnicities were represented on the programme. 67%[36] of participants were male; 33% were female. The programme was primarily targeted at the 18-35 age group; 62% [37] fell into this category, with the remaining 38% being aged over 35. 84% were classified as being long-term unemployed, with the remainder being unemployed, inactive in the home or unable to work due to immigration status. One person was on a Community Employment scheme and another individual was in employment at the start of the course. 67% of the participants had an educational attainment that was either at primary or lower secondary level, whereas only 29% had completed upper secondary education, and 4% had received tertiary education. There was a wide range of abilities amongst participants. Many of the participants were vulnerable due to troubled life histories involving physical and mental ill health, leaving the care of the State, addiction, criminality, relationship breakdown, etc. 11% had a history of homelessness and 7% were experiencing homelessness at the start of the programme. More could arguably be regarded as being at risk of homelessness due to their socio-economic situation. The vast majority of participants was therefore at a considerable distance from the labour market.

In the past, the organisation's main focus was on the provision of services to clients currently or previously homeless. In recent years, it has become increasingly strategic in terms of its role in the prevention of homelessness, through initiatives such as LEAP. However, the consultant sensed a lack of clarity about whether staff indeed perceived LEAP participants as 'Focus Ireland clients[38]', or not.

6.3   Accredited skills training

6.3.1   Description

A series of accredited modules for both industry-specific skills and more generic skills development were delivered as part of the LEAP programme (see appendix 3)[39]. These were stand-alone modules; that is, participants were not required to complete all modules as part of their course if, for whatever reason, they were not able to do so. Most were accredited by FETAC. Focus Ireland has been a registered FETAC provider since 2007. For the LEAP programme, its staff and a number of external tutors delivered nine FETAC accredited modules at levels 3 to 5. A number of non-FETAC courses were also delivered; these are not necessarily part of the NFQ (see section 3.3) and are therefore certified by bodies other than FETAC:

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[36] All percentages are presented to the nearest whole number
[37] Not 64.4% as stated in the self-evaluation report
[38] Focus Ireland uses the term 'customers'
[39] Comprising: food course = 144 hours; warehousing course = 168 hours; social care course = 170 hours

- Basic first aid, certified by the Health and Safety Authority of Ireland[40]
- Primary food hygiene, certified by the Environmental Health Officers' Association[41]
- Forklifting (3 types of licence), certified by the RTITB[42]
- Warehousing skills, certified by FSTS
- Manual handling, certified by FSTS
- Driver theory test[43], certified by the Road Safety Authority.

No certification problems were experienced and it can therefore be assumed that the requirements of the various accreditation bodies were duly met. The quality of the training was commended on numerous occasions.

6.3.2   Adaptations

For the most part, the levels of the modules were targeted appropriately. Staff acknowledged, however, that the food and cookery module should have been delivered to at least FETAC level 4. This was the aspect of the course that participants got most enjoyment out of, and in which they desired more practical experience. Although staff facilitated triple the number of cookery hours than were the minimum requirement for this module at FETAC level 3, participants were surprised and disappointed not to have had the opportunity to complete more. Furthermore, a social care course participant pointed out that the minimum requirement for working in a crèche, for example, is FETAC level 5, and more modules should have been delivered at this level on this course.

Additionally, as abilities and skills within the groups varied considerably, it was difficult to meet all participants' needs at all times. Some found modules too easy, others too difficult. Computer classes were a specific challenge for a number of participants. Keyboarding, in particular, is a skill that requires daily practice, which the structure of the course did not allow. Both participants and tutors pointed out, however, that Focus Ireland staff had *"bent over backwards"* to support students in obtaining their certificates.

Where feasible, minor changes were made to original course plans in order to meet arising needs. These are described below.

In response to requests from participants in the social care group, the one-day introductory first aid course was replaced with a three-day FETAC level 5 course in occupational first aid. Furthermore, no first aid training had been planned initially for the warehousing group, but three participants on this course did avail of first aid trtaining.

Attendance (see section 6.7) on the warehousing course was poor (possibly partly because it was spread out over a relatively long a period of time) and as a result, it was not feasible to complete the warehousing skills module to FETAC level 4. This was a source of significant disappointment to some of the participants. Staff instead ensured that

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[40] http://www.hsa.ie/eng
[41] http://www.ehoa.ie/food-safety-training/training-.711.html
[42] http://www.rtitb.co.uk
[43] http://theorytest.ie

participants on this course received training and certification from FSTS.

The decision was made by LEAP staff not to run a therapeutic crisis intervention module, as certification for this is only valid for a six-month period. Instead, an unaccredited module was delivered on behaviour management techniques.

A significant number of participants on the food course had literacy difficulties, which became particularly evident in their computer-based classes. Staff made special arrangements for some participants, in the form of a National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) voice-enabled course with online backup from a NALA tutor. Through this they could attempt exams in computer literacy at FETAC level 3, with the certification being administered through NALA. This support was much appreciated by participants[44]. However, this situation did mean that tutors were arguably not in a position to provide as much time to those participants who did not have literacy problems and who had the capacity to achieve at higher FETAC levels.

This raises an inherent problem of a programme such as LEAP. Although staff clearly went to considerable lengths to be learner-centred, ultimately the programme – especially this component of it – was (largely) pre-defined as part of an application for external funding. Also, in order to ensure quality and standardisation, the content of FETAC and other accredited modules is stipulated in advance, with little room for leeway. To illustrate, a possible consequence of the current format might be participants not taking part in, or only reluctantly taking part in, a FETAC word processing course for which at this stage they see no logical purpose or benefit. In a different format that was truly learner-centred, participants might instead be asked: 'What would you like to learn about computers?' and a support person would use this as a starting point for further skills development, possibly as a precursor to FETAC accreditation. However, such an individualised approach would require a major reconfiguration of the LEAP programme and much greater flexibility from FETAC.

6.4   Generic skills training

Fourteen unaccredited generic skills training modules were delivered (see appendix 3)[45]. Some of these modules, such as time management and communication, were delivered on all three courses, whereas others related specifically to the needs of the participants on the different courses. Literacy support was provided on an ongoing but informal basis. Some staff and tutors felt that the programme might have benefited from a greater formal focus on literacy, by delivering additional literacy classes and/or accessing a nearby literacy tutor.

Staff members were able to adapt some of the course content to reflect participants' needs and interests. For example, on the food course, staff introduced a food and nutrition module to maintain participant motivation. On the social care course, they replaced the self-awareness skills module (which largely duplicated the accredited personal and

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[44] Another example of staff meeting participants' individual needs was the purchase of a special computer screen cover for an individual suffering from epilepsy.
[45] Comprising: food course = 65 hours; warehousing course = 90 hours; social care course = 85 hours

interpersonal skills module) with a research and project skills module, and also invited external speakers to talk on subjects that participants had expressed an interest in. The self-awareness and assertiveness module was removed from the warehousing course in response to participants' requests, but some tutors argued that there should have been a much greater focus on self-development within this group (although they acknowledged that the participants themselves were unlikely to concur with this point of view).

Some participants enjoyed the generic skills component of the courses. To illustrate, some food course participants were delighted at initiatives such as putting together a cookery book. Others, however, did not enjoy this element of the programme. Similarly, some enjoyed discussing personal development issues, whereas others felt this part of the course was far too drawn out and stated that they would have preferred to spend more time gaining practical and accredited skills.

6.5 Education and career advice

It had been the intention that mentoring and advice on education/career options and assistance with CV/interview preparation would be done by a designated Project Worker (who also had responsibility for the food course). Some participants stated that they had indeed received formal guidance of this nature, which they had mostly welcomed. However, the majority did not. Some may have been fearful of the concept. Furthermore, participants on the warehousing and social care courses naturally discussed future opportunities with their own Project Workers and did not necessarily want to attend further sessions with a different Project Worker. There was therefore an overlap of roles (see sections 5.3.1 and 6.8). It is very clear that this aspect of the programme needs to be reviewed (for example, by making it a time-tabled activity).

Staff also organised a trip for the participants to the Choices 2011 Careers Expo in the Aviva Stadium. Furthermore, one tutor organised for someone working in the field of logistics to talk to the warehousing group, and participants on the social care course benefited from hearing the career experiences of a range of professionals who came to speak to them. These initiatives all added significant value to this component of the programme.

6.6 Work experience

LEAP staff contacted other Focus Ireland services within Dublin and other local employers to identify two-week (78 hour) unpaid placements for participants, in order for them to gain relevant work experience. Initial contact was by telephone and email, but it was found that face-to-face meetings with potential employers were particularly helpful in this regard. The process of organising placements proved to be time-consuming. Thirteen placements were organised, which equates to 29% of the original intake of participants or 50% of the number of participants who completed the course (see section 7.7).

Employer	Course
Coffee Shop, Focus Ireland	Social care
Our Lady's Hospice, Harold's Cross	Social care
PETE programme, Focus Ireland	Social care
South Dublin Advice and Information Service, Focus Ireland	Social care
Fegan's Cash and Carry, M50 Business Park	Warehousing
Musgraves, Ballymun	Warehousing
Tesco, Clearwater	Warehousing
O'Brien's Sandwich Bar, Charlestown Shopping Centre	Food
Poppintree Early Education Centre	Food
Supervalu, Ballymun	Food
The Deputy Mayor Restaurant and Pub, Poppintree	Food
The Reco (Ballymun Regional Youth Resource), Ballymun	Food

6.7 Group activities

A wide variety of group activities were undertaken within the programme. As part of the class-based learning referred to in sections 6.3 and 6.4, there were group discussions, brainstorming sessions, role-playing sessions, presentations, workshops and small group sessions. In addition, there were a number of field trips and a Christmas social event. Group discussions were felt to be very useful by tutors and speakers, especially, though not exclusively, within the social care course. There was a positive atmosphere in which people could freely ask questions, articulate their points of view, be challenged, and relate it back to their own lives. All speakers on the social care course were very complimentary about the group of participants, describing them as engaged, interested, participative, receptive, articulate, polite and cooperative. It was clear to speakers that the participants had already acquired useful knowledge by being on the programme.

The number of participants per course at the start of the programme was felt by the stakeholders to be correct. Attendance, however, was quite poor. The MIPs database only recorded attendance details for the period January-June 2011. These show that the average attendance rate was 48%[46]. The peak attendance of 81% was by the food group in March, with a low of 24% by the warehousing group in June. Additionally, there was a high drop-out rate for these courses (see section 7.7).

Group dynamics were excellent on the food and social care courses; the varied mix of people on those courses in terms of gender, age and nationality, was probably partly responsible for this. Group dynamics were less favourable on the warehousing course.

It should be noted that the timetabling of the courses did not suit all participants. It should also be noted that some participants asked for more time to be spent on certain group activities and others for less. This is an inevitable consequence of a programme that has

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[46] Average attendance rate per course: food course = 62%, social care course = 43%, warehousing course = 39%

been largely predefined, is confined to a limited timeframe and sets out to meet the needs of 45 people with different requirements (see also section 6.3).

Furthermore, the consultant noted a continuous tension between what participants said they wanted (usually 'hard skills') and what staff felt they in fact needed (often 'soft skills').

6.8   One-to-one support

An integral component of an individualised programme is some form of one-to-one support. Further to accepted good practice and a recommendation within the Spokes evaluation report (TSA Consultancy, 2010) for greater use of written plans, it was intended that individual support plans would be developed at the start of the programme, to be revisited on an ongoing basis throughout its duration. For some participants, these plans were completed, but this did not happen for all. Project Workers continually stressed to participants that they were available for one-to-one sessions, but participants could choose whether or not to avail of this facility. Some participants felt ill at ease about the notion of one-to-one sessions, and were unsure about the role of the Project Workers in this context. This was compounded by confusion over the role of the Project Worker with specific responsibility for career guidance/mentoring (see section 6.5).

Staff noted that they met participants for one-to-one sessions an average of every 5-6 weeks, undertaking approximately 4-10 sessions per month, but this varied considerably over the course of the year. MIPs data for the period January-June 2011 show that an average of 249 'individual contacts' (interventions) were made on behalf of clients each month. Staff reported difficulties in meeting participants on a formal basis, either because participants refused to participate in sessions or would arrange sessions but not turn up for them. Participants frequently had to leave immediately after their group sessions finished in order to fulfill other commitments, and may not have been available to attend a one-to-one session on a day when none of their modules were being delivered. Client files were stored in the Ballymun Enterprise Centre, so even if staff managed to hold brief, informal sessions with participants to check how they were managing, they often did not have their individualised support plans with them.

Notwithstanding all of the above, most stakeholders felt that there had been a good balance between one-to-one sessions and group work on the LEAP programme.

It is also important to note that one-to-one support from other sources played a crucial role for at least two of the participants interviewed by the consultant. A former key worker in Focus Ireland and a mediator in the Ballymun Job Centre were clearly committed to their respective clients. They played a pivotal role in these clients accessing the LEAP programme, being supported through it, and progressing beyond it, which should not be underestimated.

6.9 Data collection

Various data were collected throughout the duration of the programme, ranging from financial data, to data about courses and certification, and data relating to stakeholders.

Staff gathered informal feedback from the participants and other stakeholders throughout the year and where possible, used this information to adapt the programme. They also undertook more formalised evaluation processes, including telephoning all work experience providers for their feedback on placements, completing a self-evaluation on behalf of the funder, and undertaking mid- and end-term anonymous questionnaire surveys of participants, supplemented by group discussions that were facilitated by the Team Leader. The views of participants to a great extent echoed what the consultant found subsequently in this evaluation (*Student Feedback: Focus Ireland's LEAP programme 2010-2011*, p. 13):

"Student feedback for all three courses was largely positive both at the half way and final points. The overarching themes appear to be that students generally enjoyed the courses, approved of the teaching methods, found staff and tutors supportive and feel that their confidence has been enhanced and that their prospects for future employment or further training have improved. There were some recommendations for improvements focusing mainly on timetabling, that is, the numbers of hours and how they were spread out and the balance of time on certain subjects."

The consultant feels that client and management data would have benefited from being streamlined to a far greater extent. In this way, it would have been clearer who had experienced homelessness, had attended classes, had support plans in place, was awarded certificates, etc, making it easier to infer correlations and draw conclusions from these. The consultant urges Focus Ireland to consider using more informative outcomes-focused evaluation tools in future, such as the Outcomes Star[47], which was specifically developed for homeless services.

6.10   Cooperation with external agencies

It was intended at the outset that the LEAP programme would work in cooperation with a number of partners, namely FÁS, CDVEC, the BITCI Ready For Work programme and the Homeless Agency's Training, Education and Employment Network. For a number of reasons, this did not happen as planned, including the relocation of the programme from central Dublin to Ballymun and the disbandment of the Training, Education and Employment Network.

However, there was cooperation between the LEAP programme and a number of other external organisations, namely NALA, the Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership, the Ballymun Enterprise Centre, the Probation Service in the locality, the FSTS training facility, the organisations from which speakers were sourced, and the employers that facilitated work experience placements. A particularly strong and positive working relationship developed with the Ballymun Job Centre and its associated Jesuit University Support and

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[47] http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk

Training service[48].

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[48] http://www.justballymun.org

7	Outcomes

This chapter assesses the extent to which the changes that the programme intended to bring about actually happened. It discusses both longer-term outcomes (such as entering the labour force or moving on to further education), as well as intermediary outcomes (such as increased self-esteem and the acquisition of new skills).

7.1   Confidence and self-esteem

Lowered confidence and reduced self-esteem are natural consequences of social exclusion. LEAP participants clearly suffered from social exclusion. It would be fair to conclude that those participants who completed their course experienced an increase in confidence and self-esteem, which was especially evident within the social care group. It was clear to staff and tutors that many participants were understandably nervous at the start of the programme, but as time went on they relaxed, allowed their true personalities to emerge, and expressed delight when they overcame perceived obstacles and achieved goals. The work experience component (see section 7.6) played a particularly important role in this context, as participants were made to feel that they had something of value to contribute. Staff described witnessing a *"huge growth"* in personal development over the course of the programme. One speaker, who previously knew one of the participants, noticed a remarkable improvement in that participant's confidence, skills and social interaction.

Participants themselves noted the difference as well. Without prompting, one participant described his self-esteem as *"less than 1"* when he first accessed the services at Ballymun Job Centre. The job centre assisted him in various ways, including helping him to access the LEAP programme. At the start of his course, he described himself as being *"at 7"* and at the end he was *"at 8 to 9"*. Another stated: *"It made me believe in myself again"*.

7.2   Interpersonal and social skills

Closely related to an increase in self-esteem, was an improvement in interpersonal and social skills. Staff noted an enhanced physical appearance (grooming, etc) amongst some participants as time went on. They also noted an improvement in communication skills amongst many participants, such as their ability to talk in a group or to make their own telephone calls. One participant reported how she had been shy at the start of the course but now considered herself *"quite assertiveness and chatty"*. On a very practical level, some learnt for the first time how to communicate online, using email and the internet. On a more abstract level, participants' self-awareness was raised, and their perceptions to people around them was altered. For example:

"Previously I was just a people pleaser; the course changed that … I still like having a laugh, but I am no longer just a clown."

"I suss people out a lot more now."

"You learn things about yourself that you never realised! … I learnt I was quite racist … I am definitely nicer to foreign people now."

The LEAP programme increased social interaction for people who may have been quite isolated at many different levels. It provided an opportunity to meet new people and extend social networks. One participant particularly valued being able to meet people who were not all using drugs. Friendships were forged. Furthermore, the programme afforded participants a sense of belonging and team spirit; this was particularly true for the food course.

7.3   Ability to participate

Some participants stated that the LEAP programme gave them a new opportunity to sort out their lives. Having somewhere meaningful to go on certain days gave a clear structure to their week. *"It gave me a kick up the arse."* As a result, their lives stabilised to a certain extent, which gave some of them the opportunity to begin addressing other issues. For example, a Probation Officer noted how her client, who was a LEAP participant, had not re-offended and appeared to be getting on with his life normally.

A number of participants reported a change in their perceptions of education and training, and stated that they had a much more serious and positive attitude towards these now. However, this was not universal, as evidenced by the poor attendance rates (see section 6.7). Notwithstanding this, for those who were committed to the programme, insight and knowledge were gained. One participant said that her course made her realise that she did not previously know things that she had thought she did. Another described being pleasantly surprised from time to time that she now *"knew stuff"* that she had learnt on the course. She also pointed to her own improved literacy, which she attributed to having to do so much reading and writing every week.

As stated in section 6.3.2, the computer classes proved challenging for many participants. However, tutors noticed that the need for supervision decreased as the course progressed, suggesting that most participants did improve their skills in this area. One participant reported having started with no computer knowledge/experience, but she gained a distinction, which encouraged her to purchase her own computer. Others also reported using computers more. Another participant stated that he still found using computers exceptionally hard, but that he wanted to persevere: *"I do want to do it and it's the course that done it."*

7.4   Aspirations and opportunities

"It was like I was living in my house with the lights off; the course gave me a bit of light."

"It really helped me a lot and I am in a better place than I was six months ago."

The consultant gathered numerous examples of a broadened and more positive outlook on life by participants. Most felt that the staff had made them both reassess their potential and clarify the wide range of opportunities available to them. One initially felt too old for further education but did eventually pursue this route. Another was adamant at the start that she wanted to follow a career in drugs counselling, and although she may still do this, she said that she will firstly explore the wider social care field. A number of others were already discussing their longer-term education and career goals.

Regardless of whether they intended to find, or were able to find, paid employment immediately, there was a sense of improved employability amongst many of the participants. They had acquired skills and certificates, had CVs and references, knew how to respond to job advertisements, and in some cases, had practical work experience (see sections 6.6 and 7.6).

7.5   Accredited awards

Although unaccredited skills development is arguably equally or more important in terms of general personal development, gaining accredited awards was a very important outcome for many participants. This was especially the case for certificates that were necessary to enter certain industry sectors (for example, the forklift licences for the warehousing industry or the food hygiene certificate for the food industry). The number and range of certificates that were awarded to LEAP participants were as follows:

Award	Number awarded
FETAC level 3 Food and cookery	9
FETAC level 3 Living in a diverse society	8
FETAC level 3 Personal and interpersonal skills	7
FETAC level 3 Preparation for work	16
FETAC level 3 Self-advocacy	6
FETAC level 4 Information technology	27
FETAC level 4 Maths	3
FETAC level 5 Occupational first aid	8
FETAC level 5 Word processing	8
Basic first aid	4
Primary food hygiene	14
Forklifting (3 types of licence)	8
Warehousing skills	6
Manual handling	6
Driver theory test	1
TOTAL	**131**

131 certificates were awarded to 35 participants, equating to an average of almost four certificates per person. However, of the 45 participants who commenced the LEAP programme, 10 left the programme with no certificates. There were no significant differences between the numbers of certificates awarded per course, with 46 each going to participants on the warehousing and social care courses, and 39 to those on the food course.

In August 2011, staff organised a graduation ceremony for LEAP participants in Ballymun to mark the end of the programme and to give official recognition for their awards[49]. This was attended by around 25 participants, many of whom brought their families. Participants and staff alike described it as *"a fantastic day"*.

7.6   Practical work experience

The work experience placement was one of the most useful aspects of the programme. The placements completed by LEAP participants were outlined in section 6.6. They were undertaken in working environments that had direct relevance to the associated courses. Of those participants who were interviewed as part of this evaluation process, all but one found their placement an enjoyable experience and many wished the placement had been longer. The person who did not have a positive experience did not return to the work placement for the second week. Another participant, on the other hand, was allowed to do a third week with her placement provider.

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[49] http://www.focusireland.ie/index.php/our-work-in-the-media/press-releases/186-aug-5th-2011-focus-ireland-education-awards-in-ballymun

Staff commented that those who did work experience returned with greater energy and self-esteem (see section 7.1). On the whole, employer feedback on the placements was positive. Some participants took a while to settle in and there were a small number of absence-related issues. However, most employers commented that the participants had an excellent attitude and worked well. In terms of further outcomes, three employers mentioned that there was a possibility of casual work for the participants (and potentially more work in the future); one employer gave a reference; one said he would pass the participant's CV to other employers; and one stated that he would be happy to retain the participant in a voluntary capacity.

Unfortunately, the majority of participants did not do work experience as part of the programme. Reasons for this varied. Some had already stopped attending their course by the time the placements were held. One participant had sourced temporary employment during the course and, understandably, did not want to lose wages doing an unpaid placement. At least two participants had difficulties relating to Garda vetting and criminal records. Others did not agree with the concept of working for free. The biggest barrier appeared to be making arrangements to be available for a two-week period, particularly in terms of the cost and logistics of organising childcare.

Although staff tried to facilitate people's interests and needs, participants did not get a choice of placement. There was a sense, perhaps erroneous, that staff allocated placements on a preferential basis to certain participants. One participant was very upset at not having been given a placement and felt that this was a punishment for poor attendance.

It is recommended that in future, participants should be provided with greater clarity about the work experience component of the programme. Ideally, the work placements should be longer, occur earlier within the timetable of the course, and be woven more deeply into the fabric of the programme (for example, one day a week throughout the duration of the course, or some other suitable configuration).

7.7 Programme completion

It would be unrealistic to expect a 100% completion rate for a programme of this nature. The target identified in the original tender was 80%. The final average completion rate for all programmes funded under the LMAF was just over 80% (PA Consulting Group, 2011). This figure is for all types of programmes, most of which are not targeted at people who are as distant from the labour market as LEAP participants were.

26 of the 45 participants that started the LEAP programme fully completed their course, which equates to a completion rate of 58%, falling a considerable way short of the initial target. The warehousing course experienced the greatest rate of non-completion; fewest participants left the food course. Drop-off was gradual, although MIPs data show that it was most intense in the months of February and April, when six and five participants left respectively. Although two left early to take up employment, the remainder left in an unplanned manner. Nine of those who left early, however, did so with one or more certified awards (see section 7.5).

It was difficult to ascertain definitively the reasons why people disengaged from the programme, as data on this were not readily available. Although all 45 individuals who had started the programme were invited to participate in the evaluation, the majority of those that did had in fact completed most of the programme, if not necessarily all of it. One participant who had not, was attacked and robbed during the period he was on his course. The perpetrators were from the Ballymun area and he reported being too afraid to go back (he lived in a different part of the city). Some stakeholders suggested that people might have dropped out due to experiencing literacy difficulties. Others suggested that those who were undertaking the course as part of probationary requirements might have left as soon as these requirements had been met. It is most likely, however, that people simply lost interest, for a host of individual reasons.

Some staff felt that with more careful course planning and timetabling, completion rates could be enhanced. It was suggested, for example, that shorter and more intense courses of around four months' duration could be run. In this way, the organisation could run one course at a time, allowing staff adequate time to undertake comprehensive assessments, coordinate and deliver classes, and provide one-to-one support. However, it should be pointed out that any programmes with definitive start and end dates do not allow ready re-engagement of those that have left the programme early for whatever reason.

It is important to note the tremendous sense of achievement felt by those participants who did complete the programme.

7.8 Progression routes

This evaluation could only provide a limited snapshot of progression routes. As Focus Ireland lost contact with most participants when the programme ended, their progression routes may not have been known. Tracking progression over a longer period of time would ultimately be more meaningful. The intended progression routes anticipated for each of the three courses[50] were not necessarily followed. For example, there was no evidence that any participants entered the BITCI Ready for Work programme or Fáilte Ireland training. Notwithstanding, there was evidence of move-on, as outlined below.

7.8.1 Employment

MIPs data show that 18 participants applied for jobs during the months January-June 2011 and that five successfully secured employment. Data gathered by the LEAP staff show that one participant gained part-time employment in March as an accommodation assistant. An interview in September confirmed that she had subsequently found work as a kitchen assistant in a crèche. The consultant also found that two participants on the warehousing course had found employment; one full-time and one part-time, with the promise of full-time employment by December 2011. The latter had secured his job at the employer where he had undertaken his work experience placement. There was also evidence of some casual

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[50] As laid out in appendix 3

employment. Others were actively seeking employment after the course had ended.

7.8.2   Further education and training

Nine participants applied for various further education and training options during the programme[51]. It was confirmed as part of the evaluation process that one participant was attending Trinity College Dublin as a full-time mature student studying social care. Another had started a FETAC level 5 Diploma in Applied Social Studies in Coláiste Dhúlaigh. One of the participants, who had not completed his warehousing training, was now doing a FÁS FETAC level 5 course in information technology and had accessed – with the assistance of the Ballymun Job Centre – a Technical Employment Support Grant to gain his forklift licences. Furthermore, the participant who was already on a Community Employment scheme at the start of the programme, managed to transfer her place to a different organisation during her time on the programme. She was gaining relevant experience and training in the field she was planning to pursue. She described LEAP as: *"a good course for preparing you for college."*

7.8.3   Volunteering

Although it was not referred to as a progression route in the original plans for LEAP, research has shown that voluntary work can be an important step-up for unemployed people in their quest for paid employment, as well as providing a range of other benefits for the individuals themselves, the organisations they are involved with, and the wider community. Volunteering Ireland[52] delivered a talk to the social care group, which sparked significant interest in community involvement. The consultant found that two participants were volunteering with Care Local, one with the Rediscovery Centre, and one with the Finglas Youth Resource Centre.

7.8.4   Other progression considerations

It is important that success is not viewed solely in terms of having found a job, started a course, or commenced volunteering. Progression is a staged, though not necessarily linear, process. Many of the LEAP participants had complex needs, and as such, it would be expected that their journey might take longer. Any distance that they travel must be perceived as significant. In the words of one participant:

"I knew I wasn't ready to go [back] to work … but it showed me I was ready to do a course … if I hadn't been on the course, who knows what might have happened? … I was broken and now I am on the mend again … My life is back in order. I feel like I can be normal again."

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[51] Of these, two did the NALA online IT course described in section 6.3.2
[52] Since merged with another organisation and now known as Volunteer Ireland, http://www.volunteer.ie

The question does arise, however; where next for those who still need support? A number of participants reported feeling *stuck"* or *"lost"* now that the LEAP programme had ended and were clearly not ready to disengage with the service. Staff had told all participants that they could contact Focus Ireland if they needed help, but once the service was no longer physically located in Ballymun, participants were less likely to do this.

The consultant had a strong sense of the fragility of people's progression and how they would cope in the short- to medium-term without further support. Examples of this included: accommodation difficulties, problems in arranging childcare, possibilities of drug relapses, and concerns about sourcing funding for further education. Whilst their distance from the labour market might have shortened as a result of having participated on the LEAP programme, many still had unmet needs.

8	Impacts

This chapter assesses whether the LEAP programme went some way to achieving Focus Ireland's vision, whether it contributed to government priorities, and whether it made a contribution to research. It also considers if there were any other consequences as a result of the programme that would not have necessarily occurred without the programme being in place. Due to the short-term nature of the intervention and the relatively small number of people involved, the extent of the programme's impact was not expected to be major from the outset of the evaluation.

8.1 Contribution to Focus Ireland's vision

As stated previously, Focus Ireland's vision is that *"everyone has a right to a place they can call home"* (section 4.2). The organisation is increasingly focusing its activities on the prevention of homelessness, and as highlighted in chapter 3, education and training have been shown to be key preventative measures in this regard. Having delivered this programme for the first time, Focus Ireland's belief has been strengthened that there is a gap in training and education services for people vulnerable to homelessness. It considers itself in a strong position to deliver such services and feels that it has learnt valuable lessons about what works and which aspects of the LEAP programme would need to be adapted. In its self-evaluation report (p. 40) of LEAP, it stated:

"Focus Ireland would be very keen to continue providing this valuable service in the future. It is the organisation's view that a one-year funding contract is not sufficient to enable a programme like LEAP to develop sufficiently, and to realise its full potential as a labour market intervention and a response to social exclusion. Given the resources, time and effort that went into developing the LEAP programme, it would be beneficial for the LMAF model to be extended over a longer period of time."

However, Focus Ireland needs to give further consideration to the broad client group that the organisation is contemplating working with. Whilst there is a natural affinity with clients who have a history of homelessness and for whom a programme such as LEAP will help prevent a return to homelessness, the 'at risk of homelessness' group is less well-defined. The 'long-term unemployed' is a potentially enormous and diverse subset of the population, some of whom may be at risk of homelessness, but not all of whom are. The consultant urges Focus Ireland to reflect carefully on this issue and to consider what strategies might be most appropriate and manageable for achieving its organisational vision.

8.2   Contribution to national and local government priorities

The LEAP programme is a good example of a practical initiative that addressed specific government priorities for tackling unemployment and homelessness, as identified in chapter 3. In line with national and local policy, its life-long learning strategy focused on those most distanced from the labour market, using a flexible and supportive approach that built confidence and developed skills (including important basic skills), striving for pathways out of homelessness and/or towards sustained socio-economic inclusion.

However, its impact was limited due to its short duration, small scale and local nature. Its scope was constrained. It was only a one-year programme and only 45 places were available in one part of Dublin. Attendance was poor and this was compounded by a higher than expected drop-out rate. It should be reiterated that LEAP targeted those who would normally experience barriers to established training and education provision and Focus Ireland should be commended for not 'cherry picking' clients in order to guarantee high success rates. However, questions can be raised about the actual 'readiness' of some of the individuals selected to participate in the programme. Although it did not appear to have been an issue on this occasion, in any project in which places are limited, the result of giving one person a place means that someone else (who may have been more 'ready') does not receive a place.

These challenges do not mean, however, that the LEAP programme cannot be improved and scaled up in a way that will benefit greater numbers of people over a longer period of time. Most stakeholders strongly expressed the opinion that the programme should be re-run, and two external stakeholders stated that there was a clear gap in the market for initiatives such as LEAP that they could refer their clients to. Any future programme must be longer-term (not least so that the valuable experience built up by the organisation is not lost). In order to optimise on limited resources, any future programme must also more actively seek to learn from, and collaborate with, a greater number of organisations and services, including (but not limited to) those outlined in section 3.4.2.

8.3   Contribution to research

Focus Ireland is a member of FEANTSA, an umbrella group for not-for-profit organisations fighting against homelessness in Europe. During the course of the LEAP programme, Focus Ireland was able to learn from and contribute to European research on training and employment services for homeless people. In 2011, FEANTSA published its *Employability Starter Kit: How to Develop Employability Initiatives in Homelessness Services*, and the LEAP programme is amongst case studies featured within the kit.

Homeless organisations directly impact on the lives of individuals. Furthermore, they do so in an environment of scarce resources. In their goal to directly improve the quality of life of these individuals, whilst at the same time advocating for them and finding solutions to underlying issues, the organisations naturally try new ways of addressing and supporting their clients' needs. The impact of new initiatives may be positive, neutral or negative. It is

vital that organisations objectively assess the results of their work and share any lessons learnt with others also working in the field. It is within this context that the consultant recommends that Focus Ireland disseminates widely the learning from this evaluation. The organisation has already committed to publicising this report on its website, within its *Advocacy News* newsletter and on the FEANTSA website, as well as forwarding it to relevant Government officials and key stakeholders in the homeless and further education sectors.

8.4 Other impacts

There were a number of other changes as a result of the programme. Some of these were quite direct and immediate and might therefore be more appropriately termed 'outcomes' as opposed to 'impacts'. For example, one woman was identified by staff, and then subsequently diagnosed, as having dyslexia, which enabled her to access appropriate supports. MIPs data show that another participant secured long-term accommodation whilst engaging in the course, although it is not clear whether this can be directly attributed to being on the programme. Contributing to the programme was a very positive experience for tutors and speakers also. Similarly, an unintended but excellent relationship was established between Focus Ireland and the Ballymun Job Centre, because the LEAP programme provided an opportunity for these two organisations to jointly address common goals.

It is relatively simple to measure FETAC certificates awarded, further education entered, or jobs found. However, these measures can oversimplify the situation, thereby omitting more nuanced impacts. As a result of their great distance from the labour market (due to factors of age, addiction, etc), for some LEAP participants, the likelihood of sourcing employment at this time of severe economic crisis (or even at any other time in the future) is low. However, this does not mean that the programme was worthless to them or to wider society. For example, the food course will not necessarily lead to paid employment in the catering industry, but the consultant found direct evidence that it improved at least three participants' understanding of nutrition and food hygiene, and led to greater and more healthy cooking within the home setting. To illustrate:

"I pay far more attention to food labels now when I am out shopping … I never used to eat cereals but I do now and I really feel the benefit of it."

In this indirect way, the programme impacted on other government priorities such as public health. Similarly, the participants who are now volunteering for the first time in their communities can be seen to impact on the Government's active citizenship agenda.

The potentially negative impact of not having the programme in place was not measured in this evaluation. Neither did this evaluation measure the wider impact of the LEAP programme on participants' families, friends and acquaintances, which is potentially substantial and long-term.

9	Analysis and conclusions

This chapter analyses whether the goals that Focus Ireland set for the LEAP programme were met and assesses what barriers may have prevented complete 'success'. It considers the costs of the programme versus the benefits, and looks at how the programme might be financed in the future, before drawing some final conclusions.

9.1 Mission accomplished?

In broad terms, Focus Ireland achieved what it set out to do with LEAP. It established an innovative programme to meet the learning needs of 45 low-skilled and long-term unemployed individuals in the Dublin area who were previously homeless or at risk of homelessness, and who were deemed ready to progress to training and employment, in order to provide them with the skills required for identified labour market opportunities in the food, warehousing and social care sectors. It managed to do so in an impressively short timeframe, particularly given that the organisation had no previous experience of warehousing and little experience of the food industry. Its existing infrastructure was significant in this regard.

The level of resources invested into LEAP was almost adequate for a programme of this size, although the programme would have benefited from at least one additional staff member. Consideration should also be given in the future to involving volunteers (not just voluntary speakers). A lesson learnt is that anybody working on the programme in any capacity must have the aptitude and attitude to fulfill their role effectively, and appropriate recruitment, supervision and training are key in this regard. The staffing structure and allocation of responsibilities would require some reconfiguration in the future. The premises at the Ballymun Job Centre were good, but any future programme should ensure that office space is located at the same location as training and meeting space. The most significant challenges to success were the short timeline for delivery, which led to a reactive working environment, and the fact that the programme ended as soon as funding ceased.

The age profile of participants was somewhat older than originally planned, and although the vast majority were long-term unemployed and low-skilled, this was not the case for all participants. In hindsight, not all 45 selected participants were ready to engage in the programme as formatted, which suggests that more careful selection procedures and/or even more ongoing individual support would be necessary. A far more in-depth needs assessment should be undertaken at the start of the programme, and written support and progress plans should be maintained as a matter of course for all participants. It follows therefore, that one-to-one sessions should be held on a regular basis with all participants and the need for such sessions should be communicated even more clearly from the start. Education and career guidance should form part of these individual sessions and should not be separated out. These sessions must be timetabled. Group work is an integral part of the

programme, but ways must be found of optimising on the individualised, flexible, holistic approach.

The training provided was of a high quality and staff members were as supportive and flexible as possible, in terms of coordinating and delivering it, subject to constraints of time and certifying bodies' regulations. Greater emphasis should have been given to literacy, as this emerged as an obvious barrier for many participants. There was a good balance of accredited and non-accredited modules providing the opportunity for the development of both 'hard' and 'soft' skills. Field trips and external speakers added significant value. The work experience placements were a key component and should be lengthened and more fully integrated into the programme.

The LEAP programme undoubtedly made a difference to the participants, both directly and indirectly. Some of this change is difficult to measure, however. There was evidence of personal development, through heightened self-esteem, improved appearance, enhanced social skills, new friendships, improved capacity to learn, and widened aspirations, etc. FETAC and other certificates were awarded and the world of work was experienced directly through placements. 100% completion rates cannot be expected on any programme, least of all a programme such as this, which engaged with individuals with a multitude of needs and who were therefore at a significant remove from the labour market. However, programme completion rates were nevertheless disappointing and not all participants received maximum benefit from the programme through low attendance, etc. There was evidence of progression into employment, further education/training and volunteering, but not for all participants. Without further tracking, the longer-term outcomes of the programme may never be known.

It is clear that the programme started to address key areas of Government policy, national and local, but the scale and short duration of the programme meant that this impact was quite minimal. The experience of delivering LEAP has evidenced for Focus Ireland the need for programmes of this nature and it naturally considers itself a key future player in this field. In order to do, it has a duty to share its knowledge and experience widely, both within Ireland and further afield; one that it accepts willingly.

9.2 Cost-benefit considerations

It was not possible within the scope of this evaluation to measure social value creation. Tan (2008) compared eight different integrated cost approaches to measuring social value creation that included Cost-Benefit Analysis and Social Return On Investment. Each of these requires methodologies and the availability of data that did not coincide directly with the agreed framework for this evaluation. This does not preclude Focus Ireland from considering using any such methodologies in the future.

The consultant can therefore only provide approximate and incomplete estimates, and stresses that the figures below must be treated with extreme caution. The Government invested €181,281 into the LEAP programme. This figure excludes the indirect contribution that Focus Ireland made through its infrastructural inputs (see section 5.4). On a *per capita*

basis, this equates to €4,028 for each of the 45 participants, or €6,972 per participant if only those who completed the programme are considered. This can be compared to an average cost of completion of €2,903 for the entire LMAF (PA Consulting Group, 2011). However, it should be reiterated that other programmes funded under the LMAF involved participants from a whole array of labour market backgrounds, whereas the LEAP participants were considerably more distant from the labour market and therefore required far greater supports.

The consultant was asked to compare programme costs against costs associated with long-term unemployment (see section 2.2). It is almost impossible to do so in the absence of good quality data. Wildly varying figures abound within the public discourse about cost savings to the State if an unemployed person leaves the live register. As referenced in section 3.2.1, the Government has stated that this equates to an average saving of €20,000 in social welfare payments and tax, with further financial benefits relating to additional expenditure by the newly employed person. However, when questioned by the consultant on the validity of such figures, a Research Professor at the Economic and Social Research Institute remarked:

"I am afraid there is not a great deal of useful information available. On the costs of unemployment, we have the direct costs of Jobseeker's payments, but that takes no account of lost earnings, productivity, taxes, etc … I am not aware of any robust estimates for savings from exits from unemployment. It clearly depends on the destination – the savings are greater if an individual goes into employment rather than education, but the savings on the latter depends on the duration in employment."

Thus, whilst it could be implied that the seven people that found employment 'saved' the State €140,000 and therefore 'paid for' 77% of the LEAP programme, these figures are neither accurate nor meaningful. They give no consideration, for example, to wages earned, the number of hours worked per week, or the length of time employment has been sustained. They also clearly underestimate the significant other benefits that accrued from the programme, that have not been costed. Although there may be a (short-sighted) temptation to do so, the success of the programme should not be measured solely by the number of people who found employment upon completion of the programme.

9.3   Future funding considerations

The current funding climate in Ireland is challenging. Statutory funding and funding from individual donors is down, as already experienced by Focus Ireland (see section 3.4.3). Although statutory funding strategies cannot be predicted, it is possible that initiatives that promote employment might continue to be prioritised. If Focus Ireland is committed to re-running LEAP in some shape, the organisation should build positive relationships with the complete range of potential statutory funders, both at national and local level. It should also investigate all further potential sources of support, such as those listed on The Wheel's Fundingpoint[53] and the European Union schemes highlighted by FEANTSA (2011), as well as

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[53] http://www.wheel.ie/funding/take-free-tour-fundingpoint

its current and future corporate sponsors and fundraising partners.

Regardless of the possible funding streams Focus Ireland might access, it is becoming increasingly important for organisations to demonstrate to funders the outcomes and impacts of their initiatives, and it is on these that the organisation should focus its energies.

It must also recognise that it cannot and should not try to address these major social problems alone. It should actively seek collaboration partners and consider joint ventures, in order to achieve common goals. These might include statutory, corporate and academic partners, as well as other community and voluntary organisations.

Finally, Focus Ireland should consider exploring alternative funding models such as social enterprise, as previously recommended by TSA Consultancy (see section 3.4.3). Social enterprises balance social purpose with financial viability. The food industry lends itself particularly well to social enterprise, although there are many other examples of successful social enterprises. In this way, Focus Ireland could offer on-the-job training, as well providing a range of other supports to individuals, for however long they required those supports. Social finance might be sourced to get such an enterprise off the ground[54].

9.4   Concluding remarks

Focus Ireland should be commended for establishing the LEAP programme. Its committed staff worked hard under difficult circumstances (especially the short timeframe) to provide a flexible, varied and nurturing environment assisting participants to access pathways out of long-term unemployment. For those who were ready to engage at the start and ready to disengage at the end, the programme provided an invaluable opportunity to do so. Many others, however, would have benefited from a more thorough initial assessment of their support needs and more intense support and/or longer-term support to achieve the same goal, as emphasised within the *Right Deal for Homeless People* model and the continuum of care approach (chapter 3).

Clearly, there is a need for programmes like LEAP, and an enhanced version of the LEAP programme has a crucial role to play within the labour market activation sphere. As the economic crisis worsens and unemployment continues to rise, the lack of sustainable funding for initiatives like LEAP is a major concern. It is important that Focus Ireland works with other organisations in the voluntary, statutory and private sectors so that they might jointly work towards solutions that eliminate social exclusion.

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[54] For example, from Clann Credo, www.clanncredo.ie

10	**Recommendations**

> This chapter provides the consultant's recommendations, based on the evidence presented in the preceding chapters. These include recommendations for Government as well as recommendations for Focus Ireland itself.

10.1 For Government

Recommendations for Focus Ireland cannot be made in isolation. It is important to also consider the wider context within which the LEAP programme was set up and operated, focusing especially on the responsibilities of the State.

Research has shown, and it has been acknowledged in national and local policy, that a range of approaches is needed in order to tackle the problems of unemployment and social exclusion; one size does not fit all. For those with multiple needs, pathways towards employability and employment have been shown to be longer and to require specialist interventions, which some voluntary organisations are well-positioned to provide, in partnership with the State and other actors.

However, in order to do so effectively, such programmes must be resourced in a sustainable manner. Thus, the emphasis should not solely be on the level of expenditure, but also on the length of time required to achieve positive outcomes. It is unreasonable to expect that short-term funding schemes, which do not allow for proper planning and delivery, will offer long-term solutions to complex problems. It is also unreasonable to expect that the success or otherwise of programmes can be judged solely using blunt measures such as the number of FETAC awards gained or numbers entering employment, without knowing if, what and how social change was effected and/or social value was generated. It is essential that the wider impact of programmes (for example, improved mental/physical health, enhanced social cohesion, reduced inequalities) is acknowledged, measured and tracked over longer periods of time. In order to do so effectively, the Government must ensure that high quality data on, for example, costs of unemployment, prison and healthcare, are gathered and made publicly available.

Therefore, it is recommended that the Government:

1   Funds an enhanced and longer-term version of the LEAP programme that addresses the employability support needs of people who have been homeless, are currently homeless and are at risk of homelessness.

2   Adopts a social value approach to funding and evaluation of programmes such as LEAP.

3   Makes available information that will facilitate the measurement of social value creation for programmes such as LEAP.

10.2   For Focus Ireland

Further to the recommendations for Government listed above and the detailed information contained within this report, it is recommended that Focus Ireland:

1   Continues the LEAP programme in an amended form that builds on its strengths and addresses its weaknesses.

2   Gives careful consideration to the most appropriate target group for the new programme.

3   Adopts a more outcomes-focused and/or social value-focused approach from the start of the new programme.

4   Collaborates to a greater extent with appropriate actors in the statutory, corporate, community/voluntary and academic sectors in the planning and delivery of the new programme.

5   Strengthens its relationship with statutory funders.

6   Explores the use of additional and/or alternative funding models, such as social enterprise, and other resources, such as volunteers.

7   Shares widely the learning from this evaluation.

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Appendix 1: Case studies[55]

Julia

*"I wish I could have done this ten years ago. I feel like I have wasted so much time …
They [LEAP staff, tutors, speakers] made me look at my potential."*

Julia is in her late-40s and has three children aged 27, 25 and six. She arrived in Ireland
from Rwanda a decade ago. She lived in Limerick for a number of years before moving to
Ballymun. She has been accessing the services of the Ballymun Job Centre since 2006.
She previously completed various courses in catering, homecare skills and computers (up to
FETAC level 5). She also worked in the catering industry for a few years, but was let go. A
mediator at the job centre referred her to the LEAP programme. She was hesitant at first,
feeling herself too old for further education and unsure about potential employment
opportunities upon completion. However, she joined the social care course where she
showed great commitment and aptitude. She loved the course, especially her work
experience with the PETE programme at Focus Ireland. She gained seven FETAC awards
and applied to Trinity College Dublin for further study. She was offered a place, subject to
passing an English language exam. Despite good everyday English, she unfortunately did
not pass this exam. However, she has now commenced a FETAC level 5 Diploma in Applied
Social Studies in Coláiste Dhúlaigh. She is also volunteering with Care Local's Plate Pals
scheme in the Claremont Nursing Home. She has some ongoing concerns over her private
rented accommodation and childcare arrangements.

Sarah

"I feel a bit stuck now."

Sarah is in her late-40s and lives in Ballymun. She previously worked in a shop in the city
centre. With the support of the Ballymun Job Centre, she had accessed a course in
communications but did not enjoy it. The job centre then referred her to the social care
course on the LEAP programme. It was an area of work/study she had never considered.
Although she found it challenging, especially the role-plays and the presentations, she did
very well. She undertook her work experience at Focus Ireland's Coffee Shop in Temple
Bar, which went well. She had never used a computer before, yet gained a distinction in
her FETAC module and now regularly uses a computer. LEAP staff felt she was capable of
doing further education, but she does not want to do this; she would like a job. She has
applied for a place on a Community Employment scheme as a childcare assistant, but is
unsure whether her FETAC qualifications are sufficient for this. Like Julia, she is
volunteering with Care Local's Plate Pals scheme in the Claremont Nursing Home.

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[55] All names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

Barry

"It broadened your mind."

Barry is from Ballymun. He is in his mid-40s and has struggled with substance misuse since his teens. Although stabilised on methadone, his prolonged drug use has affected both his physical and mental health. He has previously experienced homelessness but is now back living in the family home. Although he has worked in the armed forces, printing industry, as a cleaner, and as a painter and decorator, he has also experienced long periods of unemployment and has been unemployed for the past seven years. He has been with the Ballymun Job Centre for a long time and has started many courses and a Community Employment scheme. The food course on the LEAP programme is the first type of education/training that he has completed since primary school. He enjoyed the course very much; it gave his life a sense of purpose and boosted his self-confidence. He received a FETAC qualification in food and cookery and is now doing more cooking at home for himself and his mother. He is also volunteering on a bicycle repair scheme at the Rediscovery Centre and continues to link in with the Ballymun Job Centre.

John

"I got a lot out of it … I enjoyed it overall."

John is in his mid-20s and lives in Ballymun with his girlfriend, stepdaughter and son. He left school at the age of 16. He started working as a bricklayer when he was only 13 years old, and did this for around 10 years until the downturn in the construction industry caused him to be unemployed. Although he had previously trained as a veterinary assistant, he had not been able to secure work. The Ballymun Job Centre referred him to the warehousing course on the LEAP programme. He was disappointed that so many of his fellow participants did not seem to be committed to the programme, which meant that none of them were able to secure FETAC level 5 certification in warehousing skills. He was pleased to have gained first aid and other training, as these enabled him to build up his CV. He did a two-week placement in the warehouse of Musgraves. A month later, the company contacted him and asked him if he was interested in attending an interview. He was successful and has now started employment there, initially 30 hours per week, rising to 40 hours per week during the Christmas period.

Appendix 2: The OSW Right Deal for Homeless People Model

The OSW Right Deal Model
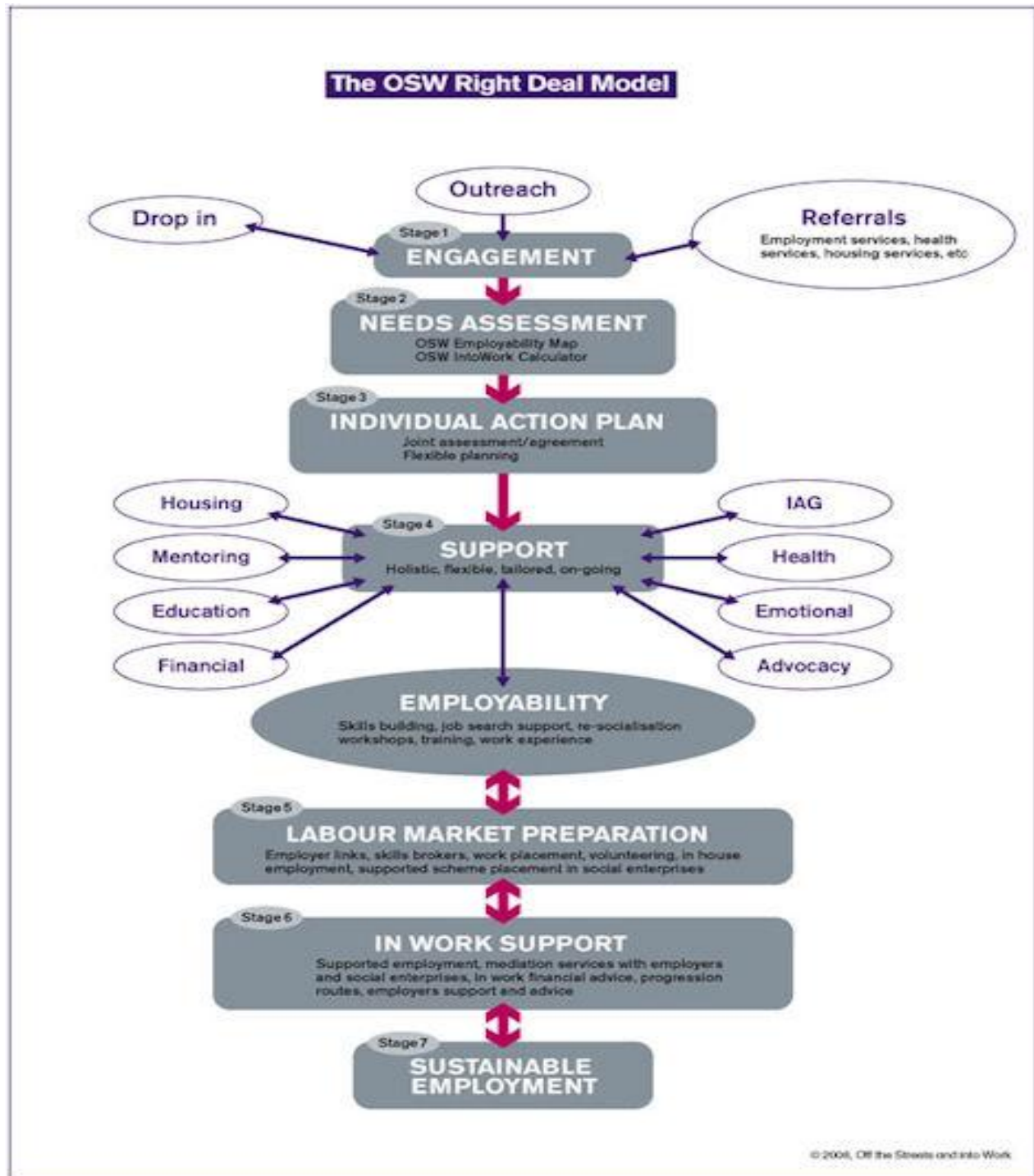
Appendix 3: LEAP programme content[56]

Food course

This course centred on the skills needed to enter the food industry, including life-skills and relevant work experience. Intended progression was employment in the food industry, Fáilte Ireland training or the BITCI Ready for Work programme. Supports included career guidance and mentoring, one-to-one support plans, literacy and numeracy.

Module	Duration (hours)	Qualification
Orientation	1	
Time management	2	
Communication	6	
Goal setting and motivation	6	
Information technology skills	30	FETAC level 4
Word processing	30	FETAC level 5
Self-awareness and stress management	20	
Primary food hygiene	8	EHO Certificate in Food Safety
Conflict management	2	
Food and cookery	35	FETAC level 3
Basic first aid	8	Basic First Aid
Food and nutrition	16	
Preparation for work	33	FETAC level 3
Hazard identification and risk control	12	
Work experience	78	
Total Hours	**287**	

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[56] Adapted from Focus Ireland, *Self-Evaluation Report on the LEAP programme*, August 2011.

Warehousing course

This course centred on the skills needed to enter the warehousing industry, including life-skills and relevant work experience. Intended progression was employment in the manufacturing industry, FÁS training or the BITCI Ready for Work programme. Supports included career guidance and mentoring, one-to-one support plans, literacy and numeracy.

Module	Duration (hours)	Qualification
Orientation	1	
Time management	2	
Communication	6	
Goal setting and motivation	6	
Information technology skills	30	FETAC level 4
Word processing	30	FETAC level 5
Stress management	8	
Conflict management	10	
Warehouse skills	40	
Forklift licences	42	Reach Truck, Counter Balance and Ride-on Power Pallet licences
Manual handling	5	
Preparation for work	32	FETAC level 3
Hazard identification and risk control	12	
Driver theory test	8	Driver theory certificate
Maths	26	FETAC level 4
Work experience	78	
Total	**336**	

Social care course

This course centred on the skills needed to enter the social care sector, including life-skills and relevant work experience. Intended progression routes were employment in the social care sector, further training or the BITCI Ready for Work programme. Supports included career guidance and mentoring, one-to-one support plans, literacy, numeracy and study skills.

Module	Duration (hours)	Qualification
Orientation	1	
Time management	4	
Communication	16	
Goal setting and motivation	8	
Information technology skills	30	FETAC level 4
Word processing	30	FETAC level 5
Stress management	8	
Conflict management	8	
Introduction to social care	60	
Occupational first aid	24	FETAC level 5
Behaviour management techniques	8	
Preparation for work	30	FETAC level 3
Living in a diverse society	16	FETAC level 3
Personal and interpersonal skills	20	FETAC level 3
Self-advocacy	20	FETAC level 3
Addiction training	10	
Confidentiality	2	
Research and project skills	20	
Work experience	78	
Total	**333**	