



Topic: Government Discussion Document on Proposals
for Supporting Lone Parents
Submission to: Department of Social and Family Affairs
Date: 6 June 2006

Background

Progressing the work of Cherish, established in 1972, **One Family** provides voice, support and action for one-parent families through membership, professional services and campaigning. Our aim is to affect positive change and achieve equality and social inclusion for all one-parent families in Ireland.

We work to achieve our aims through:

Voice we are the national membership organisation of one-parent families, supporting organisations and others concerned with the issues facing one-parent families.

Support we offer a comprehensive range of professional services to one-parent families, to those experiencing a crisis pregnancy and to those working with one-parent families.

Action we campaign with and on behalf of our members to affect positive change for one-parent families.

One Family works with all types and all members of one-parent families, respecting the realities of family life in Ireland.

One Family's Principles

All our policy positions are guided by our core principles:

- The needs of children must be at the centre of all relevant policy developments and the needs of children in one-parent families must be overtly addressed.



- The need to ensure real choice for lone parents in terms of participation in the paid labour market and in terms of their parenting role.
- Recognition that many lone parents are involved in a range of caring roles, including childcare, eldercare and care of family members with disabilities and these roles must be recognised and supported.
- Recognition that individual lone parents have different needs and requirements at different stages of the lifecycle and that supports must be in place to effectively manage transitions in and out of the labour market, as well as to support access to wide-ranging options to pursue viable part-time employment, education and training.
- The need to ensure that actions to move more lone parents into employment do not result in lower income for one-parent families and are geared towards broadening career options and related developmental opportunities.
- The need to work to ensure that planned policy changes and related funding are focused on those most at risk of poverty and social exclusion, ie those on low income and other disadvantaged groups, including families and children living in poverty.

Need for a Coherent Policy Framework

Overall, One Family believes that there is an urgent need to develop and implement a coherent policy framework for one-parent families that reflects the realities of their lives and those of their children.

The key objectives of this framework in our view would be:

- reduced child and family poverty;
- reduced dependence on social welfare;
- increased access to early childhood development and education;
- improved access to services: education and training, childcare, including after school care, health and accommodation;
- innovative and positive engagement with one-parent families in relation to increasing their role in the labour market;
- recognition of the important role that parenting plays in Irish society and development of realistic work life balance options for those parenting alone; and
- coordination of services and supports, including information.



This in turn necessitates the coordination of policy development and implementation across Departments and agencies, as well as, in our view, the active involvement of the target group and of those that represent them.

The Current Situation

In developing policy in relation to one-parent families it is important to be aware of current realities. While statistics and research are patchy, we know the following:

- The majority of one-parent families are widowed, separated or divorced. Nearly one-quarter are single (CSO).
- Births to unmarried women under 20 are only 3% of total births (CSO).
- The majority of lone parents are in the labour market, including those on the OPFP (CSO, DSFA).
- The majority of mothers including lone parents at work are working part-time (CSO).
- One-parent families dependent on social welfare are generally concentrated in low paid, part-time and insecure employment (DSFA).
- One-parent families face some of the highest levels of poverty and deprivation in the country (EU-SILC).
- Lone parents face very significant poverty traps when going into full time employment (EAPN/OPEN research shows that such working arrangements currently result in a lower net income for one-parent families).
- Many developmental opportunities are inaccessible to lone parents because they are only provided and supported on a full-time basis (NESF).
- Lone parents have a higher likelihood of having a child with a disability than couples with children (CSO).
- Progression from CE, and from other initiatives that take into account the needs of lone parents, into mainstream training and education is very low (FAS).
- Participation in skills-based training results in much higher placement rates than participation in employment schemes (ESRI).



- Almost half of lone parents have only primary education (NESF, 1996).
- Most lone parents are not in a financial position to avail of work life balance options that lead to a reduction in income (for example, unpaid parental leave) (DTI, UK).
- A high proportion of lone parents are located in sectors where availability of work/life balance options is low (DTI, UK).
- Available childcare and child development supports, particularly after school care is woefully inadequate in addressing childcare, child development or child poverty issues. (NWCI, CPA, End Child Poverty Coalition).

Before going on to look at our recommendations we look at the issues raised above in the context of the NESF proposal for a developmental welfare state.

Response to the Proposals Contained in the Discussion Document

Introduction

In preparing our response to the proposals we have drawn on:

- our current policy positions and priorities; and
- wide ranging consultations with:
 - our service users;
 - members of our network – **can***;
 - other one-parent family organisations;
 - political parties and individual politicians;
 - other relevant NGOs; and
 - the social partners.

We wish to highlight that our response focuses on those parenting alone rather than on cohabiting couples, although we do recognise that the proposals are an important forward step in supporting new family formation. We would point out that our response is based on the premise that one-parent families are a valid family form which should be respected and supported. While we do not have hard figures on this, our experience indicates that for many parents, parenting alone, for a variety of reasons, may be a long-term and preferred option.



Interestingly, the consultation resulted in the identification of a relatively small number of common issues of concern in the proposals. This means that by addressing these limited number of issues the proposals are likely to be welcomed by one-parent families and supported in their introduction by NGOs, including One Family.

Building on the results of the consultation process our response to the proposals is presented below.

What We Welcome

Overall, One Family welcome the attention the Government and particularly the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Seamus Brennan TD, are giving to addressing the poverty and social exclusion experienced by many one-parent families in Ireland today. We appreciate the positive way in which the Minister and his officials are approaching this very important topic and the willingness of those concerned to listen to our views. We look forward to bringing the recommendations to successful fruition.

We are in agreement with the Minister that the current situation is no longer acceptable. We are thus responding to these proposals with the aim of advising how, in our view, they can be implemented in a way that will best ensure that they are successful in reducing poverty and social exclusion among one-parent families and in providing a wider variety of options and choices to those parenting alone.

Specifically, we welcome the proposal to actively engage with lone parents and to support them to participate in a meaningful way in the paid labour market, in accessing education and training and in a way that recognises their particular childcare needs and responsibilities.

Questions that have Emerged from the Consultation Process

The following are the key questions that have emerged in response to the discussion document:

- Will the proposals reduce poverty among one-parent families dependent on social welfare?
- Can we be sure that the promised supports will be in place?
- Why is a compulsory system being proposed when we are keen to work if such work is financially viable and meaningful and if our children are adequately cared for when we are at work?
- What about young parents in education?



- What if we want to stay at home to mind our children after the age of 7?
- Will the proposals also apply to those parenting alone who have habitual leave to remain, or have separated from a spouse/partner who is here on a work permit?
- What supports will be there to help me bridge the gap between training and employment?

Each of these issues is addressed below.

Response to the Questions that have Emerged

1. Will the proposals reduce poverty among one-parent families dependent on social welfare?

As is well known, poverty levels are particularly high among one-parent families, largely due to high levels of social welfare dependency and barriers experienced in accessing the labour market and particularly in accessing high skilled, well paying jobs, with good career progression opportunities.

Policy changes can affect poverty levels among one-parent families in three ways:

- increasing the level of direct payments to such families;
- improving the prospects of lone parents accessing well paid employment; and
- removing poverty traps that currently create a situation whereby there are no incentives for lone parents to participate in paid employment, particularly full-time employment.

Income Adequacy

The discussion document makes no concrete proposals to raise social welfare payments for one-parent families. We would therefore call for the proposals to be complimented by a number of supporting measures.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE:

- Increase the OPFP/PA to a level equivalent to 30 per cent of gross average industrial earnings and to be maintained at that level.
- Take direct action to address child poverty levels through either significant increases in CDAs or through the introduction of a second tier child benefit payment. Such a payment should be labour market status neutral so as not to create another poverty trap.



- Introduce significant increases in the Back to School allowances with additional funding to support the transition from primary to secondary school.
- Put in place adequate income supports to be put in place to facilitate the transition into employment and to provide those on low incomes and in part-time employment with an incentive to work full-time. This necessitates reforms of FIS administrative systems and a review of FIS's role in supporting small families, particularly one-parent families. Consideration should also be given to the introduction of refundable tax credits.

Improving the prospects of lone parents to access well-paid employment

The extent to which the proposals address this issue depends on the adequacy of the support systems that are put in place, particularly in relation to access to:

- flexible education and training;
- affordable quality childcare, including after school care; and
- housing.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE:

- Extend paid maternity, paternity and parental leave with the objective of achieving a year's paid leave.
- Provide universal state funded early childhood development and education.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive and realistic strategy to address the after school needs of lone parents returning to work or extending their working hours.
- Develop flexible education and training provision, with childcare support which leads to recognised qualifications and which offer a wide variety of time options, part-time, term time etc.
- Review existing grants and other supports available to assist adults returning to education to ensure that they address the particular needs of those parenting alone, for example to take into account the number of children in the family.
- Develop and implement a coordinated range of supports for lone parents when they are engaging with labour market services, including



facilitation, mentoring, provision of pre-development programmes and skills sampling on a customised basis.

- Allocate adequate resources for the development, implementation and evaluation of pilot innovative and relevant models of labour market engagement for lone parents that take into account their parenting roles and responsibilities and are aimed at building up the required supports over time. Such models should be based on sound research on the needs of various subgroups of lone parents.
- For some lone parents labour market participation may only be a very long term aim – for example, those with additional caring needs that make regular employment very difficult, for those with large families, those with very low educational levels and related problems, including literacy and those with health problems. Develop specialised highly flexible initiatives for such parents in the interests of them and their families.
- Fully evaluate such models and innovatory approaches and, where impacts are positive, mainstream them across the system.

Removing poverty traps that create incentives for lone parents to participate in paid employment, particularly full-time employment.

As has been well documented one-parent families face very real difficulties in escaping poverty traps that make it unrealistic for lone parents to participate in employment, particularly full-time employment or employment at income levels above the minimum wage. Rent supplement and the medial card are two of the most significant such traps.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE:

- Put in place a ten year strategy to address the housing needs of one-parent families on low incomes including:
 - the provision of adequate social housing which is accessible to one-parent families;
 - the successful introduction of Rental Allowance Scheme; and
 - the raising of income thresholds for rent supplement and through greater tapering of rent supplement income disregards, including full-time employment.
- Extend the early childcare supplement to age 12, at least for low-income families and maintain the income disregard for all one-parent families below the income threshold.



- Extend the medical card to all children.
- Proof all proposals to ensure that they do not create new poverty traps.

2. What guarantee is there the supports required will be in place?

Much concern was expressed in the consultation process regarding whether the commitments to provide the necessary supports to make the proposals work would be in place. There is, in our view, a need to bring more definitiveness to the proposals in this area.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE:

- Publish the findings of the Implementation Committee and establish a monitoring group, including representatives of one-parent family groups to monitor implementation.
- Give this group responsibility for advising on whether sufficient supports are in place to commence the implementation of the other elements of the final proposals.
- Ensure a real commitment to the provision of such supports through the introduction of a lone-parent guarantee which would guarantee access to a customised programme of supports, including supports when moving on to employment or facing job loss.
- Provide financial incentives for those continuing to parent alone in order to enable them to participate in the engagement process, through the introduction of a participation fund which will support lone parents to access education, training, childcare and other supports and to cover the costs involved in returning to, or moving on, to work.
- Provide easily accessible information on how the proposed reforms will affect lone parents, particularly in relation to CE.
- Set up locally-based advice centres for and run by lone parents to provide information and referral in relation to the engagement process.
- Provide financial incentives for those continuing to parent alone in order to enable them to participate in the engagement process, through the introduction of a participation fund which will support lone parents to access education, training, childcare and other supports and to cover the costs involved in returning to, or moving on, to work.



- Set up locally-based advice centres for and run by lone parents to provide information and referral in relation to the engagement process.
- Incentivise education and training providers to respond adequately to the new proposals through the development, implementation and monitoring of relevant performance measures in consultation with one-parent family groups. Such measures could include:
 - The number of skills based programmes or educational courses provided on a flexible basis;
 - progression rates to higher level qualifications and to better paid and secure employment; and
 - The number of institutions/courses providing childcare facilities or supports.

3. Why Compulsion?

We maintain that a compulsory system requiring lone parents to participate in education, training or employment when their youngest child is 8 is unhelpful and counterproductive for the following reasons:

1. Lone parents who can work want to do so. Why not engage firstly with those most willing and able to respond?
2. Other parents have a right to stay at home and for them and their children to be supported to do so, for example, child benefit and the new early childcare payment are universal and not dependent on participation in paid employment.
3. It is unreasonable to ask parents to participate in such a system when the required complementary supports are not in place.
4. A compulsory system will create real fear among many lone parents who have low educational qualifications, long years of non-participation in paid work, additional caring responsibilities and lack of access to flexible work options.
5. In such circumstances many lone parents may feel compelled to take up low paid, insecure employment rather than pursue more long-term prospects, thus creating a situation where one-parent families become trapped in a viscous circle of poverty.
6. If the system is compulsory, 'hard cases' will emerge. This will lead to the need for facilitators to exercise discretion in their interpretation of



the requirements. Such arrangements will then be open to questions about the fairness of the system.

7. A compulsory system puts pressure on agencies to get claimants off the payment rather than to provide quality and accessible services, services that provide real opportunities for lone parents.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE:

- Introduce a new system on a voluntary basis for lone parents of children of all ages, as the required supports are built up. (Recent research by the ESRI and the Combat Poverty Agency (May 2006) highlights the importance of on-going linkages to the labour market as a way of avoiding persistent poverty among one-parent families in particular.) Engagement would be along the lines spelt out above, including facilitation and support, access to a participation fund etc.
- In tandem with this, carry out research on the factors influencing labour market participation/non-participation by OPFP recipients.
- Review the new system after a certain period, after three to five years. If participation levels are considered by the Implementation Committee to be unacceptably low, the Department could then consider moving to a situation of compulsory participation in the facilitation process only, in order to draw up activation plans and to address individual and group barriers to labour market participation.
- In turn, review this arrangement after a reasonable period of time and if participation is again poor, the issue of compulsory participation in the labour market could be revisited by the Implementation Group, in consultation with other relevant NGOs, and in the light of the availability of the required support services at that time.

What we are proposing therefore is a phased, gradual approach on the part of all of the stakeholders based on incentives rather than penalties, along the lines currently being followed in the UK.

4. What if we want to stay at home to mind our children after the age of 7?

This question is addressed in the recommendations above. However it is important to acknowledge that the principle of the right to stay at home is enshrined in the Constitution and that this principle is perceived by many as



being undermined by these proposals. In particular, a number of our members have expressed concerns about their right to stay at home to educate their children. This could result in a constitutional challenge thus slowing up the reform process.

It is also worthy of note that these proposed changes are occurring at a time when many other European societies are questioning such strategies in terms of the well being of children and of wider society, and at a time when the EU is beginning to address family issues. For instance, the Council of Europe Ministers for Family Affairs recently met and released a press statement that stated, among other things that the Council:

- ‘Shared the opinion that family-friendly measures of a sustainable family policy could be a response to the threat of population decline.
- Drew attention to the fact that improving job security, particularly for young people, and increasing their participation in the labour market should create supportive conditions for having children and thus should also be considered as a factor for safeguarding the demographic future.
- Consider that parenting, though linked to family intimacy, should be designated as a domain of public policy. Measures should be adopted for supporting parenting and creating the conditions necessary for positive parenting. Positive parenting is defined as parental behaviour that is nurturing, empowering and provides a structure or set of boundaries making the full development of the child possible.
- Recognised that employment and family policy are closely linked to each other. Labour markets and family policies should take into consideration the preferences of people for reconciling work and parenthood.
- Consider that public authorities should further improve policies to reconcile family and working life. These should include integrated, accessible and affordable measures and the social and economic acceptance of women in the labour market and the role of men in family life.’ (Press release following the 46th meeting of the Council of Europe Ministers for Family Affairs, 17/05/06.)

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE:

- Develop the proposals in a way that acknowledges and supports the particular parenting role that lone parents play, often in difficult circumstances; and
- Introduce an engagement process that supports a range of positive work/life balances options for lone parents with dependent children of all ages.



5. What about Young Parents in Education?

A number of those consulted by One Family on the proposals are currently in education or had sought to stay in education when pregnant, but had encountered many barriers in their way. Rather than having policies that require a waiting period before such parents can return to education and can meet many conditions of Back-to-Education schemes, we recommend that every effort be made to maintain such young parents in education.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE:

- The Department of Education & Science should produce a policy document on young parents in education based on widespread consultation with the different stakeholders and building on the experience of the Teen Parent Support Programme.
- Extend on a nationwide basis the Teen Parent Support Programme.
- Ensure the provision of guidance and support for all pregnant school children and third level students.
- Provide a payment for young parents requiring it to enable them to stay in education (Such a payment is effectively available under the Youthreach programme).
- Provide childcare services for the children of teen parents while in education.
- Ensure the development of a supportive environment, including the introduction of national guidelines for schools and colleges in supporting pregnant students to stay in education.
- Review the requirements of the Back to Education Allowance scheme to ensure that such requirements do not result in unnecessary delays for young parents wishing to continue their education.

6. Will the proposals also apply to those parenting alone who have habitual leave to remain, or have separated from a spouse/partner from another EU state?

There are growing concerns in relation to how immigration policy is affecting families in Ireland today. The consultation process that we carried out for this review highlighted a number of particular issues that are relevant to policy developments affecting the way the state supports one-parent families. For



instance, lone parents who have habitual leave to remain are required to show evidence of their contribution to the Irish economy.

This is interpreted as participation in education, training or employment, regardless of the age or number of children being parented, or the very real difficulties experienced by such parents in accessing the supports required to engage in paid employment. This situation creates terrible pressure for such parents and is likely to result in situations where neither parenting nor a work role can be fulfilled in a positive way.

Furthermore parents from other EU countries who separate from their partners find themselves in extremely difficult positions. For instance such lone parents can not access child benefit unless they can demonstrate that they have worked for a minimum period of time.

We would ask therefore that the needs of these new communities also be taken into account in developing new supports for lone parents.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE:

- Reconsider current arrangements for those parenting alone with humanitarian leave to remain and for separated partners of those working in Ireland from new EU member states in the interests particularly of the children involved, many of whom are already facing difficulties integrating into Irish society.
- Give consideration to accepting caring for children and participating in local communities and community activities as evidence of involvement in Irish society by such parents, particularly when children are highly dependent.
- Carry out research on the needs of lone parents from new communities.

7. What supports will there be to help me bridge the gap between training and employment?

Many lone parents experience very real difficulties when moving on to employment, even after they have participated in education and training programmes, particularly if they have been out of the labour market for a considerable period of time. Such difficulties relate to practical issues such as childcare, particularly flexible childcare and after school care, lack of flexible work/life options and also to issues in relation to confidence and individual support.



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ARE:

- Develop a range of new initiatives to facilitate the transition of lone parents into work, particularly into career orientated employment, with the active involvement of the social partners and of individual employers. These initiatives could include the provision of mentoring supports and support for the provision of flexible home-based childcare for such parents when in work.
- Pilot such initiatives with the support of various funding programmes, for example the new ESF fund.

For lone parents already at work actions are also required to support such employees to progress within their place of employment. We would recommend that further joint initiatives be implemented by the relevant state agencies and individual employers to support the career development of such employees in the interests of employers and employees alike.

The Need for a Coherent Response

One Family calls for the development of a coherent response to the needs of lone parents and points out that only by addressing a range of issues in a coordinated manner can the objectives of the proposed reforms be achieved.

The recent NESC document on The Developmental Welfare State provides a useful framework for summarising the range of complimentary actions that are required to assist one-parent families to move away from social welfare dependency. See Figure 1 below.



Figure 1 The Developmental Welfare State: Application to One-Parent Families



Role of One Family

One Family have significant experience of the issues involved and would be happy to contribute such experience to the successful implementation of these proposals.

One Family can:

1. Provide advice, training and support in the development of the proposed models of engagement and in their implementation.
2. Provide knowledge on the needs of the client group and on the effectiveness of the services provided.
3. Advocate and field build in the NGO sector in pursuit of these aims, through our strong links with other organisation and networks.
4. Participate in the research, monitoring and evaluation process based on our wide ranging experience in this area.

Concluding Comment

In conclusion, One Family supports the Government's proposals to lift one-parent families out of poverty and to support their participation in the labour market, while at the same time recognising their particular caring responsibilities.

We believe that by moving in a more gradual way the proposals are more likely to achieve their aims and to obtain the co-operation of all involved. We maintain that by putting in place the type of supports and related resources that we have recommended, the proposals will be much better placed to counter arguments that they are primarily a cost cutting exercise. While short-term costs will increase, the long-term benefits will be truly substantial and sustainable for parents and children alike.

Summary of Recommendations

1. REDUCING POVERTY	RECOMMENDATIONS
1.1 Income adequacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the OPFP/PA to a level equivalent to 30 per cent of gross average industrial earnings and to be maintained at that level. • Take direct action to address child poverty levels through either significant increases in CDAs or through the introduction of a second tier child benefit payment. Such a payment should be labour market status neutral so as not to create another poverty trap. • Introduce significant increases in the Back to School allowances with additional funding to support the transition from primary to secondary school. • Put in place adequate income supports to be put in place to facilitate the transition into employment and to provide those on low incomes and in part-time employment with an incentive to work full-time. This necessitates reforms of FIS administrative systems and a review of FIS's role in supporting small families, particularly one-parent families. Consideration should also be given to the introduction of refundable tax credits.
1.2 Access to well-paid employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend paid maternity, paternity and parental leave with the objective of achieving a year's paid leave. • Provide universal state funded early childhood development and education. • Develop and implement a comprehensive and realistic strategy to address the after school needs of lone parents returning to work or extending their working hours. • Develop flexible education and training

	<p>provision, with childcare support which leads to recognised qualifications and which offer a wide variety of time options, part-time, term time etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review existing grants and other supports available to assist adults returning to education to ensure that they address the particular needs of those parenting alone, for example to take into account the number of children in the family. • Develop and implement a coordinated range of supports for lone parents when they are engaging with labour market services, including facilitation, mentoring, provision of pre-development programmes and skills sampling on a customised basis. • Allocate adequate resources for the development, implementation and evaluation of pilot innovative and relevant models of labour market engagement for lone parents that take into account their parenting roles and responsibilities and are aimed at building up the required supports over time. Such models should be based on sound research on the needs of various subgroups of lone parents. • For some lone parents labour market participation may only be a very long term aim – for example, those with additional caring needs that make regular employment very difficult, for those with large families, those with very low educational levels and related problems, including literacy and those with health problems. Develop specialised highly flexible initiatives for such parents in the interests of them and their families. • Fully evaluate such models and innovatory approaches and, where impacts are positive, mainstream them across the system.
1.3 Removing poverty traps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put in place a ten year strategy to address the housing needs of one–parent families on low incomes including:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the provision of adequate social housing which is accessible to one-parent families; b. the successful introduction of Rental Allowance Scheme; and c. the raising of income thresholds for rent supplement and through greater tapering of rent supplement income disregards, including full-time employment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend the early childcare supplement to age 12, at least for low- income families and maintain the income disregard for all one- parent families below the income threshold. • Extend the medical card to all children. • Proof all proposals to ensure that they do not create new poverty traps.
<p>2. GUARANTEEING SUPPORTS WILL BE AVAILABLE</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish the findings of the Implementation Committee and establish a monitoring group, including representatives of one-parent family groups to monitor implementation. • Give this group responsibility for advising on whether sufficient supports are in place to commence the implementation of the other elements of the final proposals. • Ensure a real commitment to the provision of such supports through the introduction of a lone-parent guarantee which would guarantee access to a customised programme of supports, including supports when moving on to employment or facing job loss. • Provide financial incentives for those continuing to parent alone in order to enable them to participate in the engagement process, through the introduction of a participation fund which will support lone parents to access education, training, childcare and will support them to cover the costs involved in returning to, or moving on, to work.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up locally-based advice centres for and run by lone parents to provide information and referral in relation to the engagement process. • Provide easily accessible information on how the proposed reforms will affect lone parents, particularly in relation to CE. • Incentivise education and training providers to respond adequately to the new proposals through the development, implementation and monitoring of relevant performance measures in consultation with one-parent family groups. Such measures could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The number of skills based programmes or educational courses provided on a flexible basis; ○ progression rates to higher level qualifications and to better paid and secure employment; and ○ The number of institutions/courses providing childcare facilities or supports.
3. ALTERNATIVE TO COMPULSION	RECOMMENDATIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a new system on a voluntary basis for lone parents of children of all ages, as the required supports are built up. (Recent research by the ESRI and the Combat Poverty Agency (May 2006) highlights the importance of on-going linkages to the labour market as a way of avoiding persistent poverty among one-parent families in particular.) Engagement would be along the lines spelt out above, including facilitation and support, access to a participation fund etc. • In tandem with this, carry out research on the factors influencing labour market participation/non-participation by OPFP recipients. • Review the new system after a certain period,

	<p>after three to five years. If participation levels are considered by the Implementation Committee to be unacceptably low, the Department could then consider moving to a situation of compulsory participation in the facilitation process only, in order to draw up activation plans and to address individual and group barriers to labour market participation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In turn, review this arrangement after a reasonable period of time and if participation is again poor, the issue of compulsory participation in the labour market could be revisited by the Implementation Group, in consultation with other relevant NGOs, and in the light of the availability of the required support services at that time.
4. RECOGNISING PARENTING ROLES	RECOMMENDATIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the proposals in a way that acknowledges and supports the particular parenting role that lone parents play, often in difficult circumstances; and • Introduce an engagement process that supports a range of positive work/life balances options for lone parents with dependent children of all ages.
5. SUPPORTING YOUNG PARENTS IN EDUCATION	RECOMMENDATIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department of Education & Science should produce a policy document on young parents in education based on widespread consultation with the different stakeholders and building on the experience of the Teen Parent Support Programme • Extend on a nationwide basis the Teen Parent Support Programme; • Ensure the provision of guidance and support for all pregnant school children and third level students;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a payment for young parents requiring it to enable them to stay in education (Such a payment is effectively available under the Youthreach programme); • Provide childcare services for the children of teen parents while in education; • Ensure the development of a supportive environment, including the introduction of national guidelines for schools and colleges in supporting pregnant students to stay in education; and • Review the requirements of the Back to Education Allowance scheme to ensure that such requirements do not result in unnecessary delays for young parents wishing to continue their education.
<p>6. RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF THOSE FROM NEW COMMUNITIES PARENTING ALONE</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconsider current arrangements for those parenting alone with humanitarian leave to remain and for separated partners of those working in Ireland from new EU member states in the interests particularly of the children involved, many of whom are already facing difficulties integrating into Irish society. • Give consideration to accepting caring for children and participating in local communities and community activities as evidence of involvement in Irish society by such parents, particularly when children are highly dependent. • Carry out research on the needs of lone parents from new communities



7. BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT.	RECOMMENDATIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a range of new initiatives to facilitate the transition of lone parents into work, particularly into career orientated employment, with the active involvement of the social partners and of individual employers. These initiatives could include the provision of mentoring supports and support for the provision of flexible home-based childcare for such parents when in work. • Pilot such initiatives with the support of various funding programmes, for example the new ESF fund.

ENDS

<p>This submission is made on behalf of One Family – voice, support and action for one-parent families. Queries should be directed to Candy Murphy, Policy & Campaigns Manager, Tel: 01 662 9212 Fax: 01 662 9096 Email: policy@onefamily.ie</p>
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